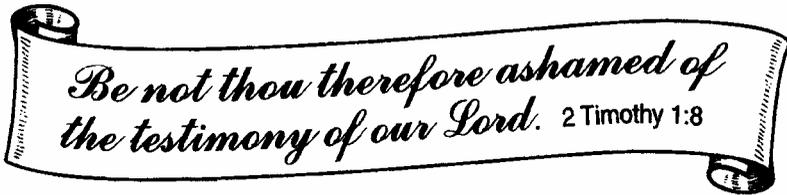


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"Dost Not Thou Fear God?"

While two men were being crucified for their transgressions, they joined the onlookers in mocking the Sinless One hanging between them. But before many hours had passed, one of the two rebuked his companion with these words: "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" (Luke 23:40). What causes men to fear God, and how will the fear of God affect us?

Recompense for wrongdoing promotes the fear of God. Permissive licentiousness, lack of justice upon evildoers, and unrestrained self-will in societies today are propelling many into an anti-God mindset. But when children, students, church members, and citizens discover that disobedience (and especially willful disobedience) carries a painful price, the fear of God is nurtured. The penitent thief acknowledged, "We indeed justly [are condemned to suffering]."

Living demonstrations of godliness promote the fear of God. While He hung on the cross, Christ's quiet defenselessness, patient suffering, genuine forgiveness, and vital connection with God all preached voluminous sermons to the thief beside Him. There is a desperate need for this kind of shoe-leather Christianity in every home, school, church, and nation today.

If we would teach ourselves and others the fear of God, we cannot afford to be halfhearted, two-faced, easily provoked, inconsistent, self-serving examples.

Sober thinking about death and destiny promotes the fear of God. As the hours crept by, the thief apparently thought upon these realities. At best, his life was soon to end. His opportunity to repent of his sins was very limited. Would he ignore eternal sufferings and forever endure them, or would he penitently call on the King beside him for mercy and enjoy pardon forever? Thank God, he thought soberly and chose wisely.

"By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil" (Proverbs 16-6). Just as the burning sensations in our fingertips cause us to fear a hot stove, so faith in the written Word of God causes us to fear God's wrath on sin. Yet we can still use the stove and we can still serve God with appreciation—instead of shaking with fear—because we have gained a great respect for the benefits and the power of each.

We may rightly question if anyone can be too afraid of sin. By nature we find sin to be an appealing, tantalizing, promising curiosity. But God warns

us repeatedly to beware lest sin deceive us and slay us. No price is too high to pay to make sure we do not become stained with sin.

"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). A proper fear of God will keep us from looking at filthy pictures, from reading romance novels and other corruption, from listening to country music, from companying with sinners, from using careless speech, from being dishonest, and suchlike. We will not do these things publicly or secretly because we know "thou God seest me" (Genesis 16:13), and He will judge all sin severely. Also, God will help us to "hate every false way."

We are responsible as parents, teachers, and church leaders not only to teach proper behavior but also to emphasize accountability to God for personal choices. If this truth is embraced with genuine faith, the need for correction will be reduced. (Of course, innocent children should be taught this as a principle that applies to man kind in general rather than applied to them prematurely. And we need to hold them accountable to ourselves, rather than to God, for their behavior).

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). The whole catalog of sins will lose their appeal when we fear God. This will translate into discretion in our social relationships, our speech, our private thoughts, our work ethic, our manner of dress and carriage, the use of our time, our worship of God, our appeals to the unsaved, and every area of our lives. No better foundation can be found for Christ-like conduct than the fear of God.

Dost thou fear God? Thy children will be blessed after thee.



DISCERNING BETWEEN ENTREATY AND COMMAND

On a recent Sunday morning, our adult Sunday school class was interrupted by the teacher's two-year old son. Having apparently escaped from his mother, he came toddling up the center aisle toward his father. The class marked his progress with glances of mild amusement and chagrin and a mounting interest in the outcome of the situation.

As the little boy approached the podium, his father calmly bent down and whispered a few words. The youngster promptly turned around and began the return trip back the aisle in search of his mother. There was no fussing, no hesitation, no struggle-just obedience. Was it an entreaty or a command?

To entreat means to implore or request. An entreaty seeks to influence someone while honoring his authority or responsibility. For example, the Bible tells us to entreat an elder as a father, but God judged Eli for extending such deference to his unruly sons.

To command is to require authoritatively. It includes more than merely issuing orders. When Abraham commanded his children, he exercised authority over and took responsibility for them. In the case of the Sunday school teacher, we do not know for sure that he issued an order, but it was obvious that he was in command.

When should we command our children, and when should we entreat them? Can parents use entreaty and still be in command? Thankfully we do not need to rely on secular theories or our own ideas for these answers. We have the Bible and many real-life models all around us—older parents with faithful children as their credentials.

"Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Our children will grow up by default, but "bring[ing] them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" does not happen on its own. A small child will naturally be irreverent in church. To change this requires more than entreaty or wishful thinking. If at age two, a youngster is still squirming and fussing his way through the services, his parents obviously are not in command. Their bringing up is not keeping pace with his growing up.

As children grow beyond the infant stage, conflict with their parents is inevitable. This conflict can be prolonged and frequent, or it can be temporary and less frequent, depending on how parents relate to it. While the intensity varies with children, the cause of conflict is the same—Adam. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5).

The concept that tolerance, dialogue, and positive reinforcement are preferable to discipline is a theory that threatens us. Parents with such a concept are careful not to be too hard on their children, attempting to gently nudge them in the right direction without crossing their path or initiating a showdown. They may even make a request or a suggestion so that the child cannot technically disobey. "Let's start to pick the toys up, shall we?" This is not a proper use of entreaty. It is not Biblical or workable. It does not establish who is in authority—the parent or the child. This unresolved issue of authority causes the conflict to drag on and creates between them a growing tension.

We need to understand our children's depravity and expect confrontations.

These can be used to establish our God-given authority and bring the child into submission. "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Proverbs 19:18). When children know the rules and are disciplined with love, they are free and happy. The air is clear, and mutual respect and affection can flourish.

This is an atmosphere in which entreaty is effective. In fact, it is natural. It provides the parents an opportunity to express confidence in the child's cooperation. It gives the child an opportunity to express his willingness to please. Where obedience is the norm, parents might even switch between entreaty and command unconsciously. "Clear the table" or "Would you clear the table, please?" has the same result.

In the early years, we should focus on commanding proper behavior. As our children begin to understand the difference between right and wrong, and begin to choose right, the external control can gradually cede to reasoning and entreaty. We should notice their developing maturity and reward them with more opportunities to demonstrate it—gradually releasing the reins. It will not work the other way around. Parents who coddle and entreat their children through the early years will waste the teenage years trying to control the sad results. Only by God's grace and diligent, heart-breaking effort will the negligence of their earlier years be reversed.

What about conversion? Do parents still need to command their children after they become Christians? Certainly. But the change at work in the heart of the child should begin to transform his relationship with his parents. Parental direction is now aided by Holy Spirit teaching and control. Parents are able to command less and expect more. They can progress from allowing and disallowing toward entreaty based on principle and conscience. In some ways, all prior training is a means to this end.

In another way, however, conversion is only a milepost along the road to the larger goal of producing godly, mature adults. This goal is not reached at fourteen, sixteen, or even eighteen years of age. Our youth need parents that are beside them, discussing decisions, providing stability, and, yes, commanding them when they are weak. They need parents who help them to say no when they might otherwise capitulate to worldly pressure. We must not relinquish this guidance to their peers or relegate it to the church.

Commanding our children takes more than just technique. For the faith to be successfully passed along, it must be demonstrated. Our children are in a unique position to know how seriously we take our religion—how much it possesses us. More faith was learned on that trip up and down Mount Moriah than Isaac could have verbally been taught in a lifetime. Whether

entreating or commanding, we need to be worthy examples—parents of the order of Abraham.

Brother J.M.



Forgive As we're Forgiven.

How we forgive, the Master said,
Decides how we're forgiven,
Not just by other men, of course,
But by the God of heaven.
A simple standard set by Him
Whose law cannot be altered,
And yet, profound, unreachable.
Have you, with me, here faltered?
O, how shall we as mortal men
Attain to that high calling,
When our old nature from within,
Is bound to keep us falling?
But hearken, wait, the Lord of all,
The mighty King of glory,
Will come and dwell within to help.
How that will change the story!
For now His strength, available,
To work within and through us,
Brings immortality to aid
With victory to renew us.

F. F. S.



CLOSING THE GENERATION GAP.

The term generation gap suggests a distance or a separation between generations. It also indicates a wide difference in character or attitude. A generation gap is evident when young people are out of step with older ones, and older ones are out of touch with their young people. As a result, the young people do not think, act, or look like the previous generation.

On the other hand, it is beautiful to see the young and the old, connected by a harmonious yoke of mutual conviction, pulling together for the cause of truth. It is a powerful witness for Christ when youth stand firmly beside their parents and spiritual leaders in conviction and practice.

Society expects a generation gap. "Teen culture" is accepted as the norm in society. There seems to be no embarrassment for a respectable father or grandfather to introduce a long-haired, slovenly clothed youngster as his son or grandson. With one glance, you recognize a typical teen with wires dangling from his ears, chains from his pockets, and a few too many folds from his clothes. The older generation reasons, "We were young too one time," "He needs to fit in," or "He will only be young once."

Another generation gap builder we may even hear among us: "You can't put an old head on young shoulders." Parents or leaders who have this attitude can be sure that youth will rise no higher than their expectations. The Bible holds youth and adults to the same standard. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (I Timothy 4:12). By default, a generation gap will grow, but the following steppingstones can help close it.

The older should have a burden that the younger keep the faith. "Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have skewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come" (Psalm 71:18). The older should be living testimonies to the younger of God's strength for victory. Can we expect youth to be victorious in this perverse age if their elders are failing to display God's strength? Older ones should publicly pray for the youth, and at times attend an instruction class to show their concern and support.

Older ones should also be burdened that the rising generation catch the vision of maintaining Biblical nonconformity to the world. Insisting on a consistent standard for both youth and adults will help close the generation gap. A generation gap is evident when the younger and the older in the congregation are poles apart in their appearance. Allowing a double standard in such areas as dress will widen the generation gap, as well as eventually lower the standard.

The older should take the initiative in relating to the younger. This begins with shaking children's hands and calling them by their names. If the younger sense an interest from the older, a steppingstone is placed in the generation gap. As this interest and interchange continues through the years, the older and the younger will naturally enter into spiritual conversations, hereby placing another important stone in the generation gap. It is a worthwhile investment for the older to visit with the younger after church services, entering into their interests and encouraging them spiritually.

The older should express appreciation and confidence in the younger as he is worthy. In an unflattering way, he may commend a youth whom he senses is struggling. Paul commended and recommended Timothy to the Corinthian church. "For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:17).

While the older ones share a large responsibility in closing the generation gap, the youth also fill a part. A generation gap may be caused by misconceptions of youth:

"Older folks do not understand how we think." "They are out of touch with today's world." These attitudes indicate that a generation gap is present. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Every older person was a young person not so many years ago, facing young people's challenges. They understand very well, in fact, sometimes better from the standpoint of experience. If youth acquire and accept the experience and wisdom of their elders, they will save themselves much trial and error, as well as many years of reaping from pursuing an unwise path. Youth who humbly accept direction usually look back with appreciation for the help that they received.

Youth should also do their part in closing the generation gap by making themselves available for older ones to visit with them. Some congregations ask their youth to sit near the front of the auditorium. This practice encourages the older and the younger to mingle after the service. A mass exodus of the youth immediately after the service may indicate a generation gap.

Youth who wholeheartedly involve themselves in congregational activities will have less reason to feel a generation gap. Many youth have discovered the blessing of sharing in evangelistic efforts with an older brother. Distributing literature, supporting street meetings, or visiting in the community are all worthwhile activities for the older and the younger to

engage in as a team.

Youth should see family visitation as a valuable opportunity to benefit from older folks' experience and insight. Youth who show interest in and ask questions of the older ones will likely feel the generation gap closing. We have an excellent example of twelve-year-old Jesus doing just this: "And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). Many times youth gain a fresh vision for their place in God's program by visiting with older ones and benefiting from their insights.

May youth and aged alike bridge the generation gap by pulling together for the good of God's kingdom. "That ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27).

Brother J.G.



Youth and the Play Mentality.

Youth is a time of vigor, energy, and action. While energy and zest can be used for good, it can potentially be intemperate or imbalanced. Many around us pursue the mirage of satisfaction projected by the glamour of play and sports. Society idolizes sports and recreation. Living for the thrill and fun of action and entertainment appeals to man's carnal nature and the natural zest of life.

Play is amusement, fun, sports, recreation, or diversion. It is not to be taken seriously but done as in sport, in make-believe, or in pretence for fun. We understand that play is an integral and important part of childhood development. However, as a child moves into the mid-teen years, play and its appeal should taper off.

A mentality is an attitude or outlook. It is the way we think or the concepts we hold. The play mentality is the concept that life is frivolous and we are here to have a good time. Responsibility and accountability are disdained. "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

We state in our Rules and Discipline, "Members shall not indulge in the world's methods of pleasure seeking ... drama ... organized contesting ball

teams, dancing, card parties ... and suchlike." We do not spell out all the details of what our members can do, but state a few specific things they should not do. We appeal to our fathers, mothers, and youth to use these few examples to identify other similar wrong practices that violate principle. By identifying a few wrong practices, our standard encourages personal discernment in the many practices which we may enjoy.

Play can become a god. The natural man believes that the pleasure of play is satisfying and desirable. However, lasting pleasure comes from involvement and delight in the activities that please God. "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

A youth's greatest satisfaction and potential lies in pursuing godliness. Many, however, follow the natural inclination to love the world and seek excitement to satisfy a void in their lives that can be filled only by God. Although some natural satisfaction can be found in play activity and excitement, it is only for the moment. To maintain the thrill of such pleasure requires greater involvement, sharper competition, and rigorously developed skills. Men are glorified rather than God.

Play, sports, and leisure lure many away from the deeper, true satisfaction of life. Some of the largest gatherings today are to watch men play. "The house was full of men and women.... and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport" (Judges 16:27). There was likely only one righteous person that died in that assembly.

Social interchange is an attraction of play. Social interchange is desirable and beneficial but must always be conducted in a way and surrounded by activity that builds character and love for God and the church. The greatest benefit and pleasantness of social interchange occurs when it is secondary to some greater purpose. For example, a greater purpose is served when youth sing for the sick, help an older member in the congregation, volunteer in a mission or relief project, or witness in evangelism work.

Our youth's social interchange should occur primarily in church and family visiting. If our youth feel that it is dry and boring to travel with the family, they will be ill prepared to soberly evaluate courtship and solid values for home building. The play mentality is disruptive to values that provide solid, beneficial social interchange.

False worship often includes play. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play" (Exodus 32:6). Mixing relig-

ion and play will degenerate to the lowest common denominator. Religion and prayer do not automatically sanctify activities that are questionable or borderline. Play activities before or after worship hinder and erase the benefit of worship. The fleshly pleasure and play fervor deaden one to the quiet voice of the Spirit and distract one from worship.

Play is not focused on the real, useful, sober issues of life. Plays, skits, and drama are hypocritical in their nature and do not build upon the real and true values of life. The livelier and more entertaining level of life is, in reality, deceptively void of satisfaction and rest.

The play mentality even affects one's speech. Individuals will say unkind or off-color remarks and use questionable terminology with the excuse, "I wasn't serious" or "I was just joking" or "It was only in fun." "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof.... For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:36).

The play spirit invariably detracts from a spiritual focus and develops into a passion that destroys spiritual life and, eventually, morality. Play patterns in Mennonite history reveal that an increase of play runs parallel with a loss of spiritual life. Many in Mennonite high schools believed that play was only open-minded involvement in social activities and fun, but it led to preoccupation with competitive sports.

Christian youth have a greater calling. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.... Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.... Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all" (1 Timothy 4:12-15).

When young people become Christians, they should develop deeper and more meaningful interests. They should cultivate a growing interest in listening and learning from the conversations of fathers and grandfathers. By keeping our visits constructive and practical, we as parents draw our children's interest from the play mentality to the deeper and more practical values.

Our upper teenager's play should be focused on the enjoyment that can be provided for the younger siblings. The older children grow, the more quiet and constructive play should become so that skills developed can translate into logical and practical uses in adulthood. Boisterous, intense play activity will leave youth with a vacuum of mind and heart. Youth gathering for play after worship services or in frequent and large gatherings for social exchange is not acceptable.

There is no need for youth to reap a harvest of wild oats. "A child [youth] left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Proverbs 29:15). When the goal of youth is to keep a healthy spiritual focus and find true joy in life, they find that play falls by the way as they love and support Christ and the church.

Brother Kevin.



Keys to Healthy Interpersonal Relationships (Part 4)

Free Forgiveness

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). We understand free forgiveness when we perceive what Jesus has done for us.

We are constrained to forgive. The patience, forbearance, and love of God that forgave our debts constrains us to extend these same graces to others. Our desire to retain God's forgiveness also constrains us to forgive. Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). If we refuse to forgive, we forfeit our salvation. An unforgiving heart will rob us of peace and sap our vitality—undermining our emotional, mental, and spiritual stability. Our carnal nature craves revenge, but the Spirit of God enables us to forgive.

We are commanded to forgive. Peter came to Jesus one day and asked, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). Jesus was saying, "stop counting and start forgiving."

Harboring an unforgiving spirit is like laying a stone wall. Each incident is a cold rock on which the next issue rests until row after row of evidence is laid against the one who did the wrong. In the course of time a wall is built so wide and high it seems impossible to dismantle. In contrast, forgiveness lays aside each offense as it comes. Forgiveness is the beautiful element of Christian life that tears down barriers and clears the path for renewed relationships.

We are commissioned to forgive the penitent.

"So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (2 Corinthians 2:7). Too often, we base forgiveness upon proof of change rather than following Jesus' pattern. He forgives us first and then gives us oppor-

tunity to prove that we indeed are serious about changing our selfish life.

We are committed to forgive. Forgiveness is a conscious choice. It is easier to forgive when we determine how we want to respond before an offense comes. Freely forgiving is always in our best interest. The heart is free when we choose to release another who has wronged us. Although we may not fully forget, the pain of the offence is removed. Forgiveness defies the natural inclination to retaliate and is indisputable evidence of supernatural power in the believer's life.

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25).
Brother Mark.



PRAYER POINT

*"The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much"*

Pray for the head of Government, President or Prime Minister
and other government leaders that
the religious freedom we enjoy would continue.

Pray that God would grant grace and healing
according to His will for the afflicted.

Thank God for Christian mothers who
faithfully fill their responsibilities.



Obedience and Sacrifice

King Saul gave sacrifice one day.
He'd failed to do the right
Required of him, and Samuel said,
"The Lord hath no delight . . .
In sacrifice. But to obey
Is what He'd have from you."
No sacrifice availed: he'd failed
In what God bid him do.

The rich young ruler came one day
To see what he must do
To gain eternal life, he'd been
Obedient through and through.
But Christ said, "Go, sell all you have,
For life to qualify."
Obedience was not enough,
But sacrifice—quite high.

Obedience or sacrifice
Which calls to us today?
What lesson can we learn from them
To help us walk God's way?

'Tis both we need: God does not take
The one without the other;
For He commands obedience
And sacrifice together.

Obey God's Word, and you will find
That sacrifice pursues:
For self cannot be on the throne
And holiness diffuse.

The things of life are temporal
And must be used as tools.
Our will and whim must all be kept
Under God's holy rules.

The heart must do God's holy will
And pay at any cost
The price to walk within His way
Or be forever lost.

Yet sacrifice is not a drudge
If God rules in our heart:
For love obeys and love will give
From out a Christian heart.

Lord, may our motives to obey
Be glory to Your Name,
That what we give in sacrifice
Will only do the same.

— *SisterDebbie.*

