

## chapter one

# The Scriptures and Your Children

**H**ave you ever stopped to ask yourself what it is you are trying to accomplish as a parent? What exactly is your objective? Since you are a Christian parent, there is only one ultimate answer to this question—and that answer is found in the Bible. The supreme objective you should have for your children is the same objective the apostle Paul had for his spiritual children—that they be conformed to (gradually changed into) the image of Christ.

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you. (Gal. 4:19)

The Bible describes this “Christlikeness” in a variety of ways. Terms such as “perfect” or “complete,” “sanctification,” and “the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (to name a few) are employed by Paul (and other New Testament authors) to communicate a heartfelt desire to see those under his spiritual care attain the goal of Christian *maturity*.

And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. (Col. 1:28)

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a *mature man*, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are *no longer to be children*, tossed here and there

by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, *we are to grow up* in all [aspects] into Him, who is the head, [even] Christ. (Eph. 4:13–15)

How wonderful! Your objective (that which you are attempting to accomplish) as a parent has already been laid out for you in the Bible. You don't have to wonder what your child should become. You know what your child is supposed to look like when you're finished training him. He is to look like Jesus Christ.

## The Key Ingredients

There are at least three essential ingredients necessary to produce the Christlike maturity you are to be endeavoring to produce in your children. They are the *Spirit*, the *Scriptures*, and *time*. *First* it is necessary for a person to be changed into the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit. This gradual transformation takes place on the inside of a person—in his heart. The Holy Spirit indwells only those individuals who have, by God's grace, trusted in the atoning work of Christ who died on the cross as a substitute for (to pay the penalty for) their sins (Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21). You, too, must depend on God's Spirit to help you become the kind of parent the Bible requires of you.

The *second* maturity-producing resource is the Bible. Now the interesting thing to note is that the Scriptures are necessary to help your child realize the basics of salvation, such as his sinful condition and his need to trust in Christ's substitutionary death on the cross. You see, no one can become a Christian without the Bible (Rom. 10:13–17). The Spirit works through the Word to bring conviction and ultimately regeneration (1 Peter 1:23). Because the Scriptures are able (have the power) to make your children wise about salvation, it is essential that you begin using the Scriptures with your children at an early age.

And that from *childhood* you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that *leads to salvation through faith* which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 3:15)

Charles Spurgeon, in his book *Come Ye Children: A Book for Parents and Teachers on the Christian Training of Children*, addresses the term "from a child":

The expression, “from a child,” might be better understood if we read it, “from a very child;” or, as the Revised Version has it, “from a babe.” It does not mean a well-grown child, or youth, but a child just rising out of infancy. From a very child Timothy had known the sacred writings. This expression is, no doubt, used to show that we cannot begin too early to imbue the minds of our children with Scriptural knowledge. Babes receive impressions long before we are aware of the fact. During the first months of a child’s life it learns more than we imagine. It soon learns the love of its mother, and its own dependence; and if the mother be wise, it learns the meaning of obedience and the necessity of yielding its will to a higher will. This may be the key-note of its whole future life. If it learn obedience and submission early, it may save a thousand tears from the child’s eyes, and as many from the mother’s heart. A special vantage-ground is lost when even babyhood is left uncultured.

The Holy Scriptures may be learned by children as soon as they are capable of understanding anything.<sup>1</sup>

Just in case you’re wondering whether little children really can learn the Scriptures, allow me to recount for you a couple of episodes from personal experience.

I was lying on my bed one afternoon, waiting for my wife to finish dressing, when she asked me to bring her something she needed. Sophia, our then two-year-old daughter, was standing between us as I sighed grudgingly in response to Kim’s request for my assistance. Immediately, my little girl, who of course couldn’t yet read, said ever so sweetly, “Daddy, you should ‘do all things without complaining or arguing.’”

Several weeks later (days after my daughter’s third birthday), the three of us were in a restaurant waiting for our food. The waitress had just brought a coloring place mat and some crayons for Sophia to entertain herself with while our food was being prepared. I was seated across the booth from the girls watching my little artist desecrate the place mat with her scribbles and scrawlings. At this point, I went into teacher mode. The wise counselor (who should have known a

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1 Charles Spurgeon, *Come Ye Children: A Book for Parents and Teachers on the Christian Training of Children* (available on CD from Ages Software, 1-800-279-4307), 66.

three-year-old is not developmentally able to do so) began trying to teach his daughter how to color *inside the lines*. I picked up a crayon and, beginning at the top of the paper, proceeded to color as neatly as I could upside down. Little by little, I encroached my way down the sheet until my large paw was crowding out her petite hand. Picture this: my forearm is resting across the entire length of the place mat, my hand is at its bottom, and Sophia has no place to color. At that moment, she looked up and said, “Daddy, the Bible says, ‘Do not forget to do good and to share.’”

Not only did my daughter know the Scriptures at a young age, but she was able to effectively minister them to her college-educated father. If my two-year-old daughter can benefit from learning the Scriptures, so can your children.

Since the bulk of this book has to do with the practical use of the Bible, please permit me to ask you a few tough questions about the extent to which you minister the Word to your children.

- How well do you know the Scriptures yourself?
- How often do you refer to the Bible in the course of normal conversation with your children?
- How adept are you at *teaching* and relating the Scriptures to them in everyday life?
- How effectively do you use the Scriptures to *reprove* (convict) them of their sin? (Do you reprove in such a way that causes them to revere God’s Word or to disdain it?)
- How consistently do you use the Bible when you *correct* them?
- How do you use the Bible to *train* your children in *righteousness* to help them to do better in the future?

You see, it’s simply not possible to bring up your children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) without the continuous use of God’s Word. It is “the rod *and reproof*” that “give wisdom” (Prov. 29:15). It is your job, Christian parent, to both *know and use* the Scriptures as God intended.

## The Sufficiency of Scripture

The Scriptures provide all you need for life and godliness (2 Peter

1:3). They also provide all you need to bring up your children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” For thousands of years, Christian parents have depended on the Bible as their source for child training.<sup>2</sup> Down through the centuries, men and women have believed that God would not ask them to do anything without giving them the resources to accomplish the task—especially a task as difficult as raising godly children. They believed it when Paul told them that the Scriptures were given “in order to make the man from God adequate, and to equip him fully for every good task” (2 Tim. 3:17, CCNT).

Do *you* believe that? I mean, do you really believe God has given you within the pages of your Bible resources adequate for dealing with every contingency you face both in life and as a parent? That’s really what this verse teaches. Of course, the Bible doesn’t purport to be adequate for dealing with medical problems, teaching your children how to multiply fractions, roller skate, hit a baseball, and suchlike, but it does claim to be sufficient when it comes to changing people into the image of Jesus Christ. “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul” (Ps. 19:7).

## The Fourfold Use of the Scriptures

When the Bible speaks of the Scriptures being profitable, it means that they are *useful*. “All Scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] *profitable* [*lit.* useful] for *doctrine*, for *reproof*, for *correction*, for *instruction* in *righteousness*” (2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV). Since the Scriptures have been given for these distinct purposes, you must become proficient in all four of these applications. The process of biblical child training involves using all four of these distinct activities. You see, biblical parenting is not only a responsibility; it’s also a skill that must be developed. This brings us to the *third* resource necessary to produce Christian maturity in your child—time.

It takes time to develop parenting skills. It takes time to drop whatever you may be doing and pick up your Bible to teach, convict, correct, or instruct your children—time that you would perhaps

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2 For over nineteen centuries, the church of Jesus Christ did not have the “benefit” of clinical psychology to assist them with parenting. Yet for centuries, Christian parents were still able to obey God’s command to “bring up” their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

prefer to spend doing something else. And most of all, it takes time for children to grow up.

There is no such thing as instant maturity. There is no pill you can give them, no school you can send them to, no wiffle dust you can sprinkle over them that will quickly transform their rebellious little hearts into obedient ones and bring them to maturity. Maturity takes time.<sup>3</sup>

## Progressive Sanctification

Another term for the process whereby Christians are transformed into the image of Christ is called *progressive sanctification*. It is called “progressive” because it occurs continuously throughout our lives rather than instantaneously (at one point in time). The Holy Spirit is the Principle Agent who sanctifies, working in the hearts of all true believers to make them more like Christ. But He does so by *means* of the Word. A person simply cannot change in ways pleasing to God apart from the Word. The Holy Spirit must have His most effective weapon (the Sword of the Spirit) if He is to so change you and your children. Like regeneration, sanctification is an act of God.<sup>4</sup> But unlike regeneration, it is an act of God that requires your cooperation. The single most important way you can cooperate with Him is by getting the Bible into your heart. Then, as a parent, you must cooperate with His work in your child’s life by getting the Bible into his heart.

I’ve met an astounding number of Christians who believe they can grow in grace apart from regular and continuous time in the Word (i.e., Bible reading, study, memorization, meditation, and active listening to Bible preaching and teaching). At the risk of overstating my argument, let me say it this way: It doesn’t much matter how much time you spend in prayer or fasting, in fellowship with other Christians, in ministering or in witnessing to others; if you’re not spending time in God’s Word (or to be more accurate—if God’s Word does not richly dwell in you), you are, in essence, handcuffing (functionally impeding the work of) the Holy Spirit. Oh, it’s not that He is unable

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3 If I were to add a fourth element to the essential elements of change for children, especially as they grow older, it would be the local church.

4 Regeneration is the instantaneous change in man’s governing disposition (nature) that occurs as the Spirit of God gives new life to those who truly believe in Jesus Christ.

to work if you don't cooperate. It's that He has not promised to work apart from the Bible.

That the Holy Spirit operates through the Bible is . . . confirmed in that what the Bible is said to do, the Spirit is likewise said to do. For example, each of the four functions of Scripture (listed below) is said to be performed also by the Holy Spirit (in the verses added):

1. "Teaching": compare 1 John 2:27 (the "anointing" represents the Holy Spirit).
2. "Conviction": compare John 16:7-11.
3. "Correction": compare Galatians 6:1; 5:22, 23.
4. "Disciplined training in righteousness": compare Galatians 5:16-18; Romans 6-8.

In each case, the Spirit works by means of the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

A further indication of the Spirit's working by means of the Word can be seen by comparing the language of two parallel passages of Scripture. In Ephesians 5:18, we are commanded, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation [that will lead to the disintegration of your life], but be filled with the Spirit." This verse is followed by a series of general instructions and directives addressed to specific individuals. These instructions and directives flow out of the initial command to be spirit-filled. These same directions can be found almost verbatim in the book of Colossians (3:16ff.), where they are not associated with the Spirit but with the Word. "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you." (The chart on page 8 will help you do your own verse-by-verse analysis of these two passages.) In addition to demonstrating the close relationship between the Spirit and the Word, the similarity between these two passages also provides insight into the means whereby He fills us. To the degree that a person allows the Word of God to fill his heart, the Spirit fills his life.

So if you want your children to be saved, sanctified, and Spirit-filled, you must invest the time (up front) to train them with the Scriptures. Remember, the Spirit's fruit does not grow overnight but rather develops gradually as it is nourished with the Word of God. As we shall see in the pages that follow, according to the Bible it's

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5 Adams, *How to Help People Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

your job to impress deeply upon the hearts of your children the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make them wise about salvation through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians	Colossians
<p><b>5:18</b> “Be filled with the Spirit.”</p> <p><b>5:19, 20</b> “be speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;”</p> <p><b>5:22</b> “Wives, [be subject] to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”</p> <p><b>5:25</b> “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her;”</p> <p><b>6:1</b> “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”</p>	<p><b>3:16</b> “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.”</p> <p><b>3:16, 17</b> “teaching and admonishing one another with psalms [and] hymns [and] spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”</p> <p><b>3:18</b> “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”</p> <p><b>3:19</b> “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.”</p> <p><b>3:20</b> “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.”</p>



<b>Ephesians</b>	<b>Colossians</b>
<p><b>6:4</b> “And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”</p> <p><b>6:5-8</b> “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.”</p> <p><b>6:9</b> “And, masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”</p>	<p><b>3:21</b> “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.”</p> <p><b>3:22-24</b> “Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who [merely] please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”</p> <p><b>4:1</b> “Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”</p>