

The Heart of Parenthood **(Christ in Our Homes)**

There is, a holiday that goes almost unnoticed in American circles. In the States, this holiday is on the second Sunday of June. In Mexico, it falls on April 30 regardless of the day of the week. The day is, of course, Children's Day. In fact, one of the things I love about the Spanish culture has to do with our love for children. When the Spanish celebrate a child's birthday, it often takes the whole day to do it. It's true that different cultures of the world celebrate their children in different ways. For example, the Japanese make a very big thing about Entrance Day, the day when children commence their education. They celebrate entrance to kindergarten and even up into college. Hispanics, in turn, often place much attention on that all important day in the life of a girl, **Quinceañera**.

Now, these are good and wonderful practices that need to be encouraged in a godly manner. Our children are our most important asset, and when God blesses us with them, they represent our highest calling. Believers, understand just how high that calling is for both Mom and Dad. In the words of the Apostle John, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" 3 John 1:4.

I understand that most of our students in this class are probably not planning to have more children. You are, however, what we call influencers. One or two words, inserted at the proper time and can make an eternal difference.

Today's Lesson Goal: WE DO NOT ALWAYS WIN. SATAN'S #1 TOOL IS TO ACCUSE US.

Our goal today is to understand Satan's # 2 Tool. We are in a great battle for our children. Satan is not only the enemy of our souls, but also the enemy of our children. When it comes to parenting, Satan has a favorite device. He tries to **negotiate** with us. He gains great ground by tempting us to make small concessions. These small concessions then compound, they add up, and before long we have lost our children to his ways.

Today's Lesson Outline: We will talk about two subjects today as time permits.

First, we'll talk about Israel's Children leaving the only home they knew, and then,

Secondly, we'll talk about our own homes, and our children.

I. Let's Talk About Israel's Children:

We'll look at Exodus 7:1-3 and then pick out a few verses in chapters 8-10.

Turn with me, quickly to Exodus 7:1-3 where we are, of course, talking about the famous plagues of Egypt. For those who know the story, Moses is about to lead Israel out of her bondage in Egypt and back to the promised land. He and Aaron are in the process of convincing Pharaoh to first give Israel permission to go a few days journey into the wilderness to worship their God. Pharaoh will have none of this, as he fully understands that this is just the first step in their movement from Egypt. Pharaoh is about to lose his cash crop, his prize cow, as it were.

Keep the big picture in mind. God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and as painful as it is to say, I believe God is once again, in a very pronounced way, hardening the hearts of Christ rejectors who have had the luxury of rejecting His gospel and His Christ for centuries.

Egypt is the Bible's ultimate symbol of the world, a world which would always place God's people in bondage to it. What interests us is Pharaoh because he does a fine job of illustrating Satan's tactics. As Moses and Aaron engage Pharaoh and the plagues begin to play out, we are focused on Pharaoh's responses. After the rod becoming a serpent, the water turning to blood, the frogs, and the lice, Pharaoh's heart is hardened. So, *just as Satan did with Eve*, and just as he does with *all of us*, Satan seeks to negotiate with Moses through Pharaoh by offering three subtle and related compromises.

A. In Exodus 8:25 we encounter his first offer for a compromise:

"Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God in the land."" (Exodus 8:25, NKJV)

He says in so many words, *"Do you want to worship God, just worship Him right here!"* Moses says in so many words: *"That's not going to happen!"* and in the next verses he offers at least two reasons.

First, Moses points out that the way of worship for God's people was an abomination to the Egyptians. Don't misunderstand! The world loves to worship! But it wants to worship its gods in its own way, and, the world prefers your company.

Please understand, when we worship in God's way, it will always be an offense to the world. If it is not an offense to the world it is not biblical worship. The world hates the truth. The world is offended by the truth. Just as those Egyptians would be offended

by bloody animal sacrifices, even so, the world is offended by the bloody Cross of Christ and His demands for absolute morality. There is no neutral ground here.

Secondly, Moses made it clear that God's people may only worship God according to His commands and instructions! Satan does not want to see you *and your children* worshipping the living God in the way God prescribes! That is an abomination to him and it is offensive to our flesh.

B. As the story unfolds, Pharaoh will soon try to negotiate the second time in 8:28.

Notice that Pharaoh makes two requests:

“So, Pharaoh said, “I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Intercede for me.”” (Exodus 8:28, NKJV)

1., Don't go very far, and 2., entreat or intercede for me! It is as though Pharaoh is saying “Let's find some middle ground here where we can all be happy!”

Some Christians, listening to Pharaoh, might be tempted to say, *“Oh, look! Pharaoh wants to worship God too! He is repenting! Maybe he's a Christian! Who's to judge? Let's be more loving and open minded!”* We are so afraid of pointing out false teachers today that most of our children can't tell a biblical church from an apostate church! They are just as happy in either place.

The world says, if you must worship separately, you must not go very far. And, in fact, the world wants you to intreat for them. On the surface, this seems innocent enough.

We are flattered with our National Cathedral, our National Day of Prayer, our One nation under God slogan, our Christmas celebrations, and a whole raft of similar events and activities which smack of spirituality. Don't you be fooled. Apostasy behaves equally as a lamb and as a lion. Those who see her as the lamb will be consumed by her as the lion. The truth is, worldlings like a modicum of spirituality, so called, and many Christians love to imagine we are a spiritual nation.

To keep our big picture perspective, keep in mind that this was always Israel's problem throughout history! She was always *joining* her worship with false teachers! When we do this, we lose our children. It's a wonderful thing when we hear families line up with that grand Old Testament warrior, Joshua:

“And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15, NKJV)

Now, the point is, folks, God is calling every father and every mother, and every child to make a clear and open choice!

C. Pharaoh’s third compromise follows in Exodus 10:24:

Pharoah tries one more time to salvage something from this losing cause.

“Then Pharaoh called to Moses and said, “Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you.” (Exodus 10:24, NKJV)

It *appears* that where originally Pharaoh was only planning to let the men go, he is now willing to let the families go as well, only the flocks and herds had to be left behind. I think Pharaoh wanted this for good reason. He knew that Israel would find it hard to part with their possessions. He most likely thought that they would return to the comforts of Egypt. In the words of the Lord Jesus, *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* Matthew 6:21

If you were to ask *“Jim, what truth do you think God wants us to see here in verse 24?”* Let me make just one point. Many Christians are leaving their flocks and herds in Egypt while seeking to march toward the Promised land. They are so occupied with Egyptian *houses and occupations* and Egyptian education and Egyptian *culture* that that they have nothing left for God. They are enmeshed.

Again, our children are the ones who pay for our values. On the one hand, we cannot afford to raise their children in a Christian school while er are, at the same time, saving money so that we can send their child to some Egyptian university where his faith will be undermined. We live in a world which loves its *possessions* and glorifies *stature*. Do not leave your children...*or...* your flocks in Egypt.

Now, I want to point to a most important lesson here. These Israelites, fleeing Egypt, were not doing so merely to have a better life for themselves. They were paying this price for the sake of their children. If the facts were known, a great number of their children had already been lost to the ways of Egypt. This was do or die. Had they not departed there would be no Old Testament scriptures as we know them. *In one more generation*, there would have most likely been no

return. There are some modern parallels here that I will leave for your own meditation, but, I do want to underscore one thing. It represents the heart of this message and the heart of parenthood.

American believers are not Israel. However, we *are* in bondage to our own Egypt as Israel was to hers. There is no area of the believer's life and practices which has not been placed in subjection to Pharaoh. Choose your own talking point as you will but understand that Pharaoh wants your child. He thinks he owns your child. Whether we are talking about science, medicine, elementary or higher education, religion and worship, commerce, politics, entertainment, the institutions of God, or any other biblical issue, please know that the time has come for a new exodus, a new departure from Egypt.

Know further, that if we, as parents, do not make decided stands for the truth right here and now, if we do not invoke the name of Jehovah Christ and if we do not resist the oppression of Egypt, the future for our children and their offspring is grim. Our dear mothers and fathers, represent the front lines. They are our only hope. We need to understand that it is *far from enough* to agree with the things I just said. **There must be forthright and proactive planning and action such as has never been required of us before.** Just as the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, I want us to begin thinking of all the godly things we must do if you are to lay the foundations for the generation to come. We have done enough whining. The time has come to act.

We are now approaching the second half of our message, but before we return to modern times I want to leave you with one reminder. God was not only with Moses and Aaron during this great contest. He was with every Israelite who obeyed Him, every parent. He was their shelter. He was their protection. He was their light. The Bible tells us, for example, that while the plague of darkness covered all of Egypt, the Israelites were spared. In biblical terms, Moses records:

*“So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel **had light in their dwellings.**” (Exodus 10:22–23, NKJV)*

II. Secondly, we want to talk about our own homes, and our children.

Let's talk about light in our own dwellings. Let's talk about our homes.

To this point, I've talked to you as a pastor and a teacher, but I want to change directions and talk with you as a parent, as a Dad. We need to make these truths

practical. We need to work on applying them in homes. So, I thought we would do just that. Remember, we are talking about raising our children. You may be saying, “Jim, what are some tips you can give me along the way that will help me leave this service and share these principles. After all, I am aware of what Egypt is trying to do. I know Pharoah wants our children.”

You are **not** qualified in yourself to resist the influences of Egypt or to be a good parent, but God will equip and assist you as you seek to grow in this area. Don't let Satan discourage you because of your past failures. We can begin at any time to increase the light in our dwellings during these days when the judging hand of God is coming down upon our nation, and our children will benefit as a result. The situation is never hopeless.

So, let's talk about those physical houses we call our homes. Each time you drive up to your house, each time you leave your home, remember how each aspect of the house in which you live represents a different spiritual principle. When you go home to your actual house, I hope you will think on these things as I am only offering food for thought today.

A. Your home has a foundation beneath it. (Act 16:31)

A wise man builds his house upon a rock. His home is safe and sure because it is based on the **foundation of Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Word of God**. Every room between the floor and the roof depends on that very foundation. The scriptures must be the absolute and final word in your home, and Jesus Christ must be central. There is an old saying that is found on the dining room walls of many homes which reads like this:

“Christ is the head of this home, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation.”

a. We all know that our Lord wants to be the head of both our marriages and our homes, and God is there to help us make this happen. Our Bible is chock full of wonderful parenting information, so my first recommendation is that godly moms and dads need to stay close to the book. Remember, you must put the oxygen mask on first, before you can help your child.

b. Then, when it comes to child rearing, there simply is no better book than Proverbs. Some parents I know read a chapter in Proverbs every single day, in addition to any other Bible reading they do. Whatever circumstance you face in parenting, be assured that the Bible addresses *that very issue* in a far better manner than modern parenting

books. You can and will find help from your daily exposure to the ultimate book on parenting, God's Word.

B. Your home has a roof on top of it.

Roofs are, first, and foremost, symbols of *shelter and protection*.

Roofs remind us that *God is the source of our protection*. He is the One upon whom we rely and He is the one to whom we go daily. If we do not rely on those daily petitions for each of our family members and pray, as it were, for God's protection and the nurturing of their souls, we have missed the most important duty of the parent. We are not "home alone". We do not merely follow a creed; we worship a God who cares about our family life and who protects us with His overshadowing wings. Jesus Christ wants to be *actively engaged in our family life*. But listen!

Now, we reflect the character of God when we provide shelter and protection for our children – both physically, emotionally, and spiritually in this age when Satan begins targeting your child in the cradle.

Recommendation: It is *not enough* to say that our home is built on the foundation of God's Word. We keep the scriptures first and foremost in our homes by keeping the Bible first, and foremost in our hearts and minds. God has not abandoned you during these stressful child rearing years. This brings us to another matter. (Deuteronomy 11:18-23)

C. Your home has walls between the foundation and the roof.

Walls serve many purposes.

1. Walls provide structure. Structure is very important! When we speak of structure it does not take long to understand how successful Pharoah has been. A generation ago, our homes were quite different. God is a God of order. He orders the planets, and years, and months, weeks and days. He provides seasons and festivals. He orders the roles of men and women and children. He does not enslave us as Pharoah would, but He does give us order because He wants us to benefit from it. We find stability and security in order even while we complain about it. Rising and retiring at regular times, grooming consistently, doing our laundry regularly, and all those other things we do contribute to this structure. Hanging up the towel after the shower, taking out the garbage regularly, and all of these little habits combine to make us disciplined, structured people that God can use. Back in the day, we ate family meals at regular times, and Sunday dinner was always special. We got up and went to bed on a regular schedule. We were not allowed

to talk on the phone during meals. We bathed, did the laundry, and mowed the grass at regular intervals. Our holidays and family traditions cemented us together as a unit. We were family.

This is not to suggest that one is righteous who does these things and one is disobedient who does not. I am simply reminding you that your child needs order. Even your dog needs order. Why then, is structure so important? Well, those walls rest upon the foundation and hold up the roof. They give God an opportunity to work in your home.

2. Walls provide occasion to minister. They give you and me, as parents, opportunities to commune and fellowship with our children. Do you know why God put together this whole Passover scheme? Do you remember what the Lord told Israel as she departed? We read:

“Now the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.”” (Exodus 10:1–2, NKJV)

He did it for their sons and daughters. And God, my friend, has given you the tools you need to rescue your own children from this wicked and perverse generation. (Philippians 2:15). Our responsibility, as parents, is to create opportunities for family discussion and interaction in a natural and normal way as the circumstances of our lives provide us with that opportunity. When we eat meals together and when we spend our spare time together, we provide those opportunities. This is no small matter. We are commanded over and over and over again, to teach our children, both formally and informally, in season and out of season. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

3. Walls also protect us all from the outside world.

Those walls are an announcement to the outside world that says, “This is who we are. You may come this far, and no further, without an invitation.” Those walls protect us from the outside world and, along with doors and windows, set the terms of our engagement with the world. Our home is our sacred refuge. It is where we bond. It is more than a mere staging area until our child can enter the government educational system.

We make light of the Amish these days with their arguments over buttons or hooks and steel wheels or rubber tires. There is, however, one area where the Amish have made their point. It has to do with their refusal to allow electricity

into their homes. And, in this respect, they are often misunderstood. The Amish see the entrance of electricity into their homes as the intrusion of the world and all it has to offer. They want to nip it in the bud! They are not to be faulted for that. Just look around your house! And, to go a step further, look how far the automobile has taken us! This may come as a shock to you, but I highly doubt there will be either electricity or automobiles in the Millennium! I suspect the Amish will win that argument in the end. Setting that discussion aside, please notice:

The Amish have, however, made a sad mistake. Many Amish have made their culture their protection from the world, instead of the scriptures. You see, unless the child is changed, the world will find a way. The reason why God gives us the protection of our homes is so that we may focus on our first duty – bringing our children into a saving and living relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, you ask, “About those walls, Jim, are you telling me I can’t keep the world out of my home even if I want to?” Of course, you can. I know of many important things you can do right now to keep the world out of the home. Consider just one:

Keep your home so full that the world cannot find a comfortable place to sit when it does visit. A story may help me make my point.

Years ago, I was visiting a family that we had known for some time. We took a stroll with our hosts and upon returning looked into the front room window only to observe their teenage daughter dancing wildly on the dining room table. This gave occasion for the parents to discuss the rebellion their child was going through and to seek some counsel. And that is where I got myself into some serious trouble.

I told our friends, I can only report on what I have seen. Since I have been in your home I have not seen or heard of any evidence that you are filling your home with spiritual things. I see no Bibles or Christian books. I see no verses or plaques on your walls. I hear no Christian music or find magazines or see any evidence that this home is Christian in any way.

Now, attracting our children to the things of Christ are very much like putting food on the table. On the one hand, if we do not give him new experiences he will not grow. On the other hand, if we cram food down his throat with our preaching and pontificating, he will rebel. **What then, is the secret? In a word, it is in saturating your home life with positive opportunities for growth.**

Christian friend, if you do not fill your home with the things of Christ, you create a **vacuum** for the world to enter. Christians, for example, who would never let their child skip school, often think nothing of letting them skip church activities. Christians who involve their children in sports and pay whatever it takes for uniforms and transportation, often cannot afford to send that same child to Bible camp.

Does your child see Christian literature on the table? Are there good missionary stories in your bookcase? Are there godly DVD's appropriate to his age and growth in your media cabinet? Have you fortified him against the errors of evolution? Do you limit his screen time to provide a balance in your home? Does he hear Christian music in the morning? Will he leave your home one day with memories of the Bible verses and sayings he found here and there in your home? Did he see Joshua 24:14 near the door of your home?

When we fill our walls with godly things, we make it very difficult for the world to enter.

D. Your Home Has a Yard and a Neighborhood.

What about when our children step outside of those walls? Let's talk about the outside world for just a minute. God pays attention to our child rearing, both inside and outside of the home. God said of Abraham:

"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." Genesis 18:19

When your children step out from between those walls, draw lines in the sand. Set the limits as to how far your child can go. Let me give you an illustration.

When I was a child, we lived on a busy city avenue. When we first moved into the house I was encouraged not to play in the front yard, or at least not to go beyond the sidewalk. As I matured, I was allowed to cross the street with my brother or sister. The day finally came when I was allowed to cross that street at will. In fact, I was instructed to cross the street many times in order to pick up some item at the store.

That's what I mean by drawing lines *in the sand*. You see, lines drawn in the sand are meant to wash away. When they no longer meet their purpose, we draw new lines. By the time I graduated from high school, there weren't any lines anymore. My parents simply trusted me to do what was right – and I did. Now, there are two mistakes we can make when drawing those lines.

1. First, we can forget to draw the lines, or worse yet, let our children talk us out of them. Remember, every child will insist that he is mature enough to cross the street.

2. Secondly, we can go to the other extreme. We can forget to remove the lines at the right time. And frankly, Mom and Dad, more parents fail here than anywhere else. We refuse to learn from the scriptures and from the Jewish people. While it is the stuff of another study, would you remember that by the time your child is twelve or thirteen, you need to shift gears and change your whole approach to child rearing. In biblical terminology, you need to adopt your child. This transition is a two-step process.

a. First it starts with you and a change of attitude on your part. This is where you begin seeing a child as an equal in your home and business. You do not relinquish your authority, but you begin to assign it.

b. Then it continues with your child. You begin assuming he will do the right thing. You stop dangling privileges in front of him as rewards. Instead, you vest him with privileges and authority to carry out his duties, and you lay responsibility and authority (not just work) upon him. You value his input and seek it out.

I told you earlier that we can learn something from the Amish, even though they miss some important points. We can also learn from our Jewish friends. Have you ever seen an old school Jewish boy burning the rubber off his tires? You likely won't because he doesn't have anything to prove. His manhood has already been credentialed. He is a full, card carrying member of the family. He has nothing left to prove. Instead, he has his family's name and reputation and success to protect. He knows where he fits. He knows he is valued. He has purpose in life.

- Child rearing is like driver's training. First there is the classroom. Then, there is the road training. That's where mom leaves the car and let's dad take the child out by himself. Finally, there is the day when the child drives solo. You hand him the keys because you trust him.

- Now this requires wisdom. Learn to draw the lines, and learn when to move the lines. In my own opinion, Moms do a better job in the classroom, and Dads do a better job with behind the wheel training – but that is not always the case. In any case, I can give you two admonitions:

1. Draw those disciplinary lines tightly when your children are younger, because, once loosened you can never go back. And remember, wherever you draw those lines, your children will push them further out. The time he is allowed to spend in his room, the

devices he is allowed to take in his room, the games he is allowed to play, and all those kinds of privileges, once given, are difficult to manage.

2. Secondly, don't be lazy! Remove those lines sooner than later. Trust is the best form of discipline. When you know in your heart that your parents assume you will do what is right, it is very hard to do wrong. Let me give you an example:

In our home we had five children, but the grass grew in spite of us all. The grass just kept on growing. Finally, I couldn't stand to see it so long and I would end up mowing it. It wasn't my job. I just did it. I didn't feel like I had to do it. I just did it.

Then, one day, I heard my mother talking about me to someone else. She told them how proud she was that I did such a good job mowing that grass without ever being asked. I wish I had never heard her say that, because after that, I knew that she trusted me to do it. I didn't want to disappoint my parents. In fact it made me feel good to know that they were blessed by my work. And by the way, I came to love yard work.

Now, there are two views you can have about God. You can obey Him because you fear him, or you can obey Him because you love Him and don't want to disappoint Him. You can only decide that in your heart. However, if you obey God because you know He trusts you to obey Him; if you obey Him because you want to please Him you will reap a lifetime of joy.

And here is the most important point of all. The way your child sees you as a parent will do very much to shape his view of God as His heavenly Father. Earthly parents forget this. The Bible says that sometimes they discipline their children just because it is for their own benefit. Godly parents discipline their child for his own benefit.

(As time allows – then jump to the conclusion)

Now, we can go on and on with this discussion we can talk about every room in your home and the lessons which it teaches:

E. We can talk about the Kitchen and the Dining Room

Many of life's lessons were first learned *informally* at the kitchen table. Each child requires a different response.

Kitchens create a loving environment and all those wonderful cooking and baking fragrances. Many life lessons have been taught with a mom and her daughter (or son) cooking or cleaning together.

Like recipes, every child has his own bent and needs his own parenting, measured out... wet and dry...sweet and savory, acid, salt, and so forth. Let your child bloom, according to her, or his bent...

“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6, NKJV)

F. We can talk about the Living Room

- Family skills
- Social skills
- Personal skills

G. We can talk about the Bedroom

First lessons in trusting – Night hours – What time I am afraid (Psalms 56:3)

Quiet times – Make provision & assume

Wise discipline –

Life’s delicate matters -

H. We can talk about the Garden

We were taught to nurture and we were nurtured.. *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.”* (Proverbs 1:7, NKJV)

Illus: Shiloh Thompson...growth takes a long time

Realities of life...Weeding/ planting/ sowing and reaping... *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”* (Galatians 6:7–8, NKJV)

I. We can talk about the Garage or Shop

Love for work, creating things, work-slothful man...12:27 *“The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, But diligence is man’s precious possession.”* (Proverbs 12:27, NKJV)

Every child needs to succeed in some skill. Skills enrich... dangers.

What do you think? How would you do it? Can you do this for me?

Conclusion:

When you drive up to your home, take a good look at it. Does it need some repairs you have been overlooking?

Paint illus.

Your home is your first church, your first schoolroom or classroom, your first playground. Everything about your home points to a spiritual truth, a tool God wants you to employ in the training of your children and grandchildren.

In the end, we each make our own decisions about following the Lord, but Mom and Dad, God has given us many tools for our toolbox – many things to help us tip the scales in favor of true spiritual success in child training.

By God's grace, let's determine that our little home – be it humble or grandiose, whether we own it or whether we rent it, - will reflect the true spiritual values God intends. Let us pray that the Lord will find us faithful in performing the most important task to which anyone can be called – nurturing our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.