

Chapter

1

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

So, you are the father or mother of a child who depends on you for support, protection, and most of all guidance. All parents must realize that the physical ability to have children does not automatically qualify them for the task of properly training children. Therefore, what do you do now? This chapter outlines the dilemma most parents face in raising their children.

Being a parent today is a difficult and often bewildering challenge. There are so many conflicting theories about child training that even the reputed “experts” disagree with each other. Everyone has his own opinion on how children should be raised. Prior to the late 1940s, this confusion did not exist. Old-fashioned child training methods were passed down from generation to generation.

But, in 1945 the new psychological approach became popularized by Dr. Benjamin Spock's book *Baby and Child Care*. This book sold nearly one million copies the first year, and over fifty million by the time the author died in 1998. This means that more than one-third of all parents over the past fifty years have had this book; and many of them have followed its advice religiously. Dr. Spock taught parents not to inhibit (restrain) a child, but to give him freedom to be himself; and not to use physical punishment (chastisement) in disciplining a child, but lovingly reason with him instead. A steady stream of books and magazine articles have carried that message of behavioral psychology forward to the present day.

To add to the parents' confusion about proper child training has been the religious teaching on love that equates Christian grace and love with tolerance of even wrongdoing (permissiveness). We need to examine the issue of Christian love from the Biblical viewpoint to determine its proper use in child training. First, let's see what Biblical love **is not**:

- ✿ It is not love to raise a child who lacks self-discipline and is therefore guided by his or her lusts for attention, food or drink, sex, play and entertainment, wandering, loafing, or seeking to gain something for nothing. Which of these lusts have hampered your own life? Do you wish you would have been better trained in self-discipline?
- ✿ It is not love to train a child not to be responsible for his own actions and not to accept the consequences of those actions. What has it cost you as an adult to have blamed others or justified yourself for your own mistakes and failures? Would you have progressed further and sooner in your life had you been trained to be more responsible as a child?

One of the benefits of this book will be the clarification of how parents can demonstrate true Christian love to their children by a

balanced and responsible exercise of their authority. It will be demonstrated that when overly-permissive parents tolerate wrong behavior while raising their children, the results will be tragic. Distinction between the **attributes** of love and the **practice** of love needs to be understood, and then kept in mind throughout our study:

- ✿ Christian parents desire to emulate the attributes of Christian love expressed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and Philippians 2:1-4—patient, kind, not easily provoked, merciful, and humble. However, these attributes in no way nullify the equally important attributes of righteousness and justice. For example, a righteous government cannot apply the attributes of patience, kindness, or mercy to lawbreakers. In the practice of proper government, justice cannot be served by tolerating criminal activity. Governments must uphold righteous law for a stable condition to exist within a nation.
- ✿ Likewise, parents are to provide for and comfort their children; but they are also required to set and enforce righteous standards for them. Christian love in parenting is exercised when parents combine the righteousness of setting legitimate standards for their children with the justice of fairly punishing for disobedience. It is in a child's best interest to learn right from wrong as well as to develop self-control over his self-centered nature. Loving parents will therefore train a child for his own benefit. This training process will require personal sacrifice on the parents' part, and that is even further demonstration of true Christian love in practice.

John 15:13. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

When righteousness and justice are practiced according to God's principles in the training of children, there will be a balance for the parents' responsive love, and incorrect and

unsuccessful extremes will be avoided. Parents can be firm in setting and enforcing righteous standards without being tyrannical or abusive. They can sacrificially give of themselves on their children's behalf without giving in to the demands of an immature child.

WARNING: Let's face the truth: most parents do not evade training their children properly because they "love" them so much. Rather, it is because we parents from previously untrained generations are self-centered, lazy, and lack the character to handle conflict with our children. We are tempted to stand by and allow our children to raise themselves rather than sacrifice our time or our emotions to truly love them. Perhaps committing yourself to truly loving your children **before** reading this book is your first step to successful child training.

You can begin to see why knowing how to train children is a challenge today. We have the remnants of old-fashioned child training combined with the new humanistic behavioral psychology methods and a wishy-washy, lukewarm tolerance of all things. To top off these opinions, we have a multitude of Christian books on child rearing that give a wide range of **personal** advice and opinions. Many of these books lean heavily on the theories of behavioral psychology rather than on the principles set forth in the Bible. Others intermingle elements of psychology with Bible verses and/or the false religious concepts of love, thus adding to the general confusion. A few even attack specific Bible verses in an attempt to justify their personal positions!

It is no surprise that there is mass confusion about child rearing. About the only thing the reputed "experts" do agree upon is that "there is no set pattern for training children." In other words, they say there is no one, right way to parent. Many of these "experts" have taken the position that using any physical discipline constitutes child abuse. This has caused conscientious parents to question

their right to discipline their own children. With advice like this, it is no wonder that the past several generations of parents have turned to their own understanding for their best guess on child training.

These parents develop a system of child training consisting of a mixture of the confused information available. It probably contains some behavior modification, some non-Biblical love, and the use of force when all else fails. This system will produce great instability for both children and parents, as the parents overcompensate from one extreme to the other. As a result, the parents exist between ineffectiveness and guilt while their children exist between frustration and anger.

Without any clear system, parents will default to the trial-and-error method—the hope that the second child will benefit from the mistakes made with the first, that the third will benefit from the mistakes made with the second, and so forth. Some parents believe they can be successful by simply avoiding the mistakes they think their own parents made. The question for all parents who are raising their children on their own opinions is this: how do you know when your system is correct?

As a parent, you have only one chance with each child. You spend a major part of your life raising a child, and all that effort can seem painfully wasted unless there are positive results. Are you satisfied that you know how to handle that one chance to the benefit of each child? Have you considered the cost to your children and to yourself if you fail to train them properly? These are awesome questions that every parent must face.

What is the answer? Is there a system for child training that can end all of this confusion? Is there one that you can know for sure is correct and that can be used to obtain the right results? Yes! This book sets forth the system for child training given in the Bible—a system you can use with confidence in becoming a successful parent.