

Don't Assume Your Children Understand

How well are you as a parent fulfilling your responsibility of teaching your children about God's way?

By Gerald E. Weston

Two Church members were discussing how much their children really got out of Church services and Bible studies. One said to the other: "Don't kid yourself. Your children hear more than you think. Take mine, for example. Recently our minister was talking in Bible study about Jesus returning on a white horse. I didn't think my 3 year old was listening at all, but that night in her prayers she implored God to 'please help Jesus not fall off His horse when He returns!'"

Humorous? Yes. But just how much *do* your children pick up from sermons? Do they really have one ear open while hunched over their drawing tablets? Does the story of David lodge in the recesses of their subconscious somewhere among the tales in their storybooks? Does the meaning of the Holy Days register over the notes passed between smiling teens?

For many years I thought so. I



heard all the humorous stories told by parents who had overheard their offspring commenting on minor points covered in sermons. Certainly if the kids picked up on these smaller matters, the major lessons were sinking in. I figured by the sheer number of hours spent in Church services, the average Church youth had to know volumes more than a young person lacking such exposure.

One father of six expressed this same view when he said: "If my kids

mess up, it won't be because they didn't know better. They've been sitting in services all their lives. I've made sure of that. If they leave, it won't be my fault."

But does this line of reasoning square with the facts?

You may be surprised.

I was. I was surprised the first time I organized a game of charades with a group of Church teens and found that not a single one out of 25 remembered ever hearing about the "valley of dry bones." I was surprised during last year's Feast of Tabernacles when the first four teens who were asked at a Bible baseball game didn't know what it meant to "afflict your soul."

Yes, I have been surprised — perhaps shocked would be more accurate — about what our children *don't*

know.

Recently I gave a test to all the teens in my two churches. The results astounded many parents. Most parents were at least mildly embarrassed.

The questions on the exam were not unreasonable. One 19 year old who had come to services for only one year proved this by scoring 90 percent. That was, by the way, the only 90 percent score and was the highest.

Most teens didn't do that well. In one church every teen present had

attended services since the age of 2 or under. One managed to get 40 percent right. All the others scored 20 percent or less! In the other church the scores were somewhat higher, but the average was still well below 50 percent. And I don't believe we can blithely assume these poor results are merely an isolated example.

A clear instruction

Through Moses, God said: "Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons . . . that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deut. 4:9-10).

Moses specifically instructed the Israelites to teach their children the commandments that were given at Mt. Sinai.

After repeating the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, God again emphasized the crucial importance of teaching them to our children: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt *teach them diligently* unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6-7).

Merely teaching the Ten Commandments would be a good start for those who have neglected that responsibility, but God does not let us off that easy. "And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you?" (verse 20). This clearly states that the testimonies, statutes and judgments are to be taught. Why else would your son ask you about them?

It is clear from these verses that parents are to teach their children, from a positive perspective, the reasons for keeping God's commandments, statutes and judgments. In addition, we are to show how God has personally intervened and blessed us, and that keeping His commandments is for our good (verses 21-25).

God is very specific about certain things He wants us to teach our children. The history and meaning of the

Feasts is clearly obligatory (Ex. 12:26-27). You may, like many parents, be resting confidently, thinking your kids know all about them. Don't be too sure. Unless you have actively, and recently, discussed the history and meaning of these days with them, you may be in for a rude awakening.

More importantly, many parents may be in for a surprise when they realize just how important it is to diligently teach their children. Do we fail to grasp how urgent it is to keep this command of God, and what God thinks of those who don't?

There are sins of omission as well as sins of commission. When we fail to obey a direct command from God, it is pure and simple rebellion.

Saul's bitter lesson

Notice the example of Saul and how he rebelled against God. Can you find a parallel in it for yourself?

God, through Samuel, commanded Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites (I Sam. 15:3). But what did Saul do? "But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly" (verse 9).

Saul reported to Samuel that he had carried out God's instructions. But Samuel was unimpressed. His reply was swift and biting: "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" (verse 14).

Saul had disobeyed a direct command from God. His act amounted to open rebellion. The result? Samuel told him: "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (verse 23).

Is it possible that you, without realizing it, have fallen into the same trap as Saul? Have you rebelled against God by neglecting to keep one of the clearest commands of the Bible, "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children"?

Some have been afraid they will "turn their children off" if they diligently teach them. They reason

that such teaching is just not the thing to do nowadays. They don't know how to reach or communicate with their kids. Just as Saul was afraid of the people and thought he had a better way of doing things, some today are afraid also. Just like Saul, they rationalize that their way is best.

But the facts are clear: The ignorance of God's laws among our youths cries out louder than the Amalekite sheep!

It's time for parents to stand up and be counted. It's time for parents to patiently, lovingly obey God's command, not out of a spirit of duty alone, but because they eagerly desire to lead the next generation in the right way of life.

Of course, there is always the danger of going overboard in anything, and this subject is no exception. Some *have* "turned off" their offspring by the harsh approach they take in teaching God's ways. There is a right and a wrong way to teach. But God's command is that parents teach their children!

So why not grade your own performance — right now if possible? Give your children the accompanying test. Then grade the test according to the instructions. Remember, however, the score your children get is really yours. If they score poorly, don't blame them. The responsibility is on your shoulders — God put it there! □

TEST YOURSELF BY TESTING YOUR TEENS

- 1) List the seven annual Feasts of God in order.
- 2) List the Ten Commandments in order.
- 3) Who was Jacob's grandfather?
- 4) Who was Jacob's son who was sold into slavery?
- 5) List the first five books of the Bible.
- 6) List the first five books of the New Testament.
- 7) Name one significant event that took place on the first Passover.
- 8) Name one significant event that took place on a Passover during the New Testament.
- 9) What does it mean to "afflict your soul"?
- 10) What does the Last Great Day picture?

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