

questions: Do you cheerfully obey your parents in doing all they ask of you?² Do you respect them in your actions, attitudes, and manner of conversation? Can you receive a "no" as willingly as a "yes"? Do you do extra little things that you know will bring them joy, or do you fill their days with grief because of your selfish attitudes? Do you do your chores in a sloppy, half-hearted way, or do you "forget" them until mom gives up and does them herself?³ Do you argue, pout, and throw yourself around when you can't have your own way?⁴ Are you rude and sarcastic—refusing to be corrected?⁵ Do you mock your parents behind their back?⁶ Do you resent spending time with your younger brothers and sisters—helping mom with them, playing with them, teaching them? Do you sometimes lie—by telling only "part of the story"?⁷ Do you raise your hands at your youth group to praise God before men⁸—but grumble and consider it a "supreme sacrifice" whenever you're asked to lift your hands to help around the house—or do you insist on being paid for it? Do you call yourself a Christian?

WHAT ABOUT MOM AND DAD?

I have unfortunately come across this problem with teen-agers before, and it is a very sad one. However, as I see it, they are not the only ones who sometimes find it hard to be a Christian at home. I think this problem can extend out to every member of the family.

A very wise man who's been a Christian some 60 odd years once said to me, "I can always tell how spiritual a man is by the way he treats his wife." Husbands, are you kind, courteous, and patient—or do you growl and snap at the slightest provocation?⁹ Do people at church see you as a real "spiritual giant"—while at home your family is starving for godly guidance, encouragement, and example?¹⁰ Do you exasperate your children, causing them to lose heart, instead of bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?¹¹ Do you share God's Word with others, but neglect to live it at home—ignoring family worship and Bible Study?¹²

And what about us wives—do we whine, nag, and manipulate to get our own way?¹³ Are we totally honest about everything, or do we keep things from our husbands—telling them "little white" lies?¹⁴ Do we consider it more spiritual to serve on church committees than to serve our family—cooking, cleaning, washing, and caring—making a real home for them?¹⁵ Do we (even in "small" ways) show a lack of respect for our husband's authority to our children—teaching them

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| 2) Col. 3:20 | 9) 1 Pet. 3:7; Col. 3:19; |
| 3) Col. 3:23-25 | 1 Cor. 13:4 |
| 4) Phil. 2:14-15 | 10) Eph. 5:25-30 |
| 5) Proverbs 15:5, 10, 31-32; 29:1; | 11) Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21 |
| Psalm 50:16-17 | 12) Deut. 4:9-10; Isaiah 38:19 |
| 6) Proverbs 30:17; Lev. 20:9; Mark 7:10 | 13) 1 Pet. 3:1-5 |
| 7) Rev. 22:15 | 14) Rev. 21:27; Proverbs 28:13 |
| 8) Matt. 6:5 | 15) Proverbs 31:10-31 |

rebellion and deceitfulness and thus invalidating the Word of God?¹⁶

SMILE . . . YOU'RE ON CANDID CAMERA

If someone hid a secret camera in your home for a day, then showed the film the following Sunday at church, would you be ashamed for them to see the way you really treated each other when no one else was around? Do you go out of your way to serve or to be served?¹⁷ Do you do the things you know will please, whether you are asked to or not? Do you quickly say you're sorry—and really mean it—when you are wrong?¹⁸ Are you a godly example of Jesus to your children, showing them by your actions as well as your words what it means to love God—or do they see you at your worst . . . maybe even taking it out on them when you get in a bad mood?

SOME EXCUSES

I think everyone has a tendency to rationalize their ungodly actions at home because—"They know I'm pressured by final exams," or "I had a terrible day at work," or "The washing machine broke down again!" We would never have the nerve to take our frustrations out on our friends the same way we do on our family. We know if we did, they probably wouldn't stay our friends for long! It's really hard to understand how we can be so insensitive to the very people who have loved us and sacrificed the most for us. Why are we so quick to see their shortcomings—and so very slow to forgive, forget, and go on with them in tenderness and lovingkindness?¹⁹

Of course, when you live with others, their faults are more readily exposed—but then, so are yours. This just makes it all the more necessary to continually walk in the Spirit—with plenty of grace, forbearance, and mercy towards one another.²⁰ The home is a true testing ground and a real place of potential spiritual growth. We are constantly being sandpapered by those around us—the rough edges and snags becoming smoothed and polished. God uses us in this way with each other. If we see it in this light, we have a real opportunity to become more and more like Jesus. If we are self-righteous, stubborn, and constantly demanding our "rights"—we will not only be a grief to God, but a real source of misery to those who have to live with us.²¹

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

If you have been falling short of the calling of God in your home—failing to be a constant example of Jesus—you need to fall on your knees before God and ask His

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| 16) Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; | 19) Col. 3:12-14 |
| Titus 2:3-5 | 20) Gal. 5:22-26 |
| 17) Mark 10:43-45 | 21) Eph. 4:30-32 |
| 18) Proverbs 16:18; 26:12 | |

forgiveness. Your home has been a refuge for your flesh far too long.²² Do not take this matter lightly, for you have mocked God by living in such a disgraceful manner—bringing shame to the holy name of Jesus. You must repent immediately!²³

Once you have ceased your rebellion and again become right with God, you need to go to each person you have offended, and with your whole heart, ask them to forgive you for the hurt you have caused them. Don't leave anyone out . . . from the youngest to the oldest. You must especially ask forgiveness of those who are not Christians—or how will they ever see in you the humble spirit and contrite heart of a true believer?²⁴ Perhaps you may want to call a family meeting and speak to everyone at once. However you decide to do it—do it quickly. Your rebellion toward God has been evident to all, and amends must be made. If you consider yourself a Christian, you must not delay in setting everything right. If you hesitate, you not only deceive yourself, but you make those around you see that serving God is a waste of time, since it has borne no real or lasting fruit in your life. You will remain a hypocrite in the eyes of your family, and in the eyes of God, unless you set your heart and mind to this matter immediately and determine to prove Jesus is real not only by the things you say, but by the way that you live!²⁵

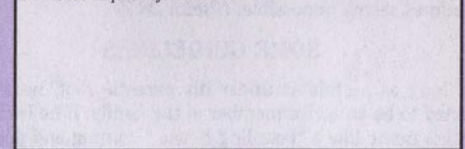
"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent."

—Rev. 3:19

- 22) Gal. 5:13, 19-21
23) Rom. 2:5-8

- 24) Isaiah 66:2
25) James 1:22; 4:6-8;
Rev. 2:5

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BEING A CHRISTIAN AT HOME



By Melody Green

"Dear Melody,

"You are a very real Christian source and authority for my 16-year-old daughter, and I am very grateful . . . but (here it comes) I feel there are areas in which parents (this parent anyway) need your support and help. You do well in many areas of teaching—and so does the local church. But in the area of 'practicing love in your own home,' both the local church and the teen ministry aren't doing so well. The ministry to teens usually includes teaching on sex, dating, soul winning, honesty, problem parents, alcohol, etc. One really doesn't see many tracts called, 'Parents—Things We Throw Away?' or books titled, 'Do Yourself A Favor, Love Your Parents.'

"It seems that our 16-year-old likes to be responsible for either of our two cars, but not for washing the dishes or cleaning the tub or setting the table. Sure, if we pay her to clean the house, she will vacuum—but not very well. She feels she must love our neighbor, but not her nine-year-old sister. We find she speaks respectfully to those in church, but not to us. After all, dad isn't even a Christian—and all mom does is lecture! There seems to be an 11th commandment, 'Thou shalt work hard every place . . . except at home.'

"It is very difficult for me, as a parent, to get help at the local church when they see my daughter as 'perfect.' And it is also very difficult to even get prayer support when the reply is, 'Be thankful she's not on drugs, or out running around.' I am grateful she isn't doing these things, but it is hard to share the love of Jesus if we aren't proving it at home.

"Our daughter is a very good girl, but she isn't very loving to her family, and I feel that is where we really must practice the love Jesus has given us. I feel it is



wrong to moan and groan over having to wash dishes or vacuum or hang up clothing. And I've noticed among Christian teens it is a sport to slander their parents' character, with tales of who's the most severe, unreasonable, and strict. I caught her in this sport. She admitted it, but never apologized. She will say the words, 'I'm sorry,' but not with her heart—and this is a very serious spiritual condition.

"Any attempt on my part to bring her to a repentant heart only brings the retort, 'Will you stop lecturing me!' But I hurt for my child and for myself. I want so much to get close to her and love her—but right now this doesn't seem possible. And until it is, I pray a lot for wisdom and courage, and for her eyes to be opened to the love this parent has for her.

"Thank you for hearing me out.

"I love you people,"

(Name kept anonymous)

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

—Phil. 2:3-4

I responded to this letter shortly after receiving it, but the thought of answering it openly has always been in the back of my mind. I feel that the problem expressed by this mother is shared by many, and even goes beyond just "problem teen-agers." I think it applies to all of us in one way or another—and that each of us can learn something from this mother's dilemma.

"You always hurt the ones you love," are the words to an old song. I used to nod my head in agreement . . . that is until I became a Christian. Now I know that those words are simply not

A WORD TO PARENTS . . .

"For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them."

—1 Samuel 3:13

This word of the Lord was given to Eli the priest, who was an unfaithful father. Eli honored his sons above God (1 Samuel 2:29) because he allowed them to openly sin—without taking any effective actions to correct them. We are commanded in the Bible to diligently discipline our children if we really love them. (Proverbs 13:24) To allow them to sin and walk in rebellion goes directly against everything the Bible teaches. Yet why is it so many Christian parents have such a hard time obeying God when it comes to this?

I think part of the problem is that parents tend to look at their children's sin—instead of their own. They throw up their hands in exasperation and say, "Well, if he wants to live that way, it's his choice." This is true to an extent—but I think many parents shun their biblical responsibilities with older children because the task sometimes seems impossible. (Psalm 28:7)

SOME GUIDELINES

As long as a child is under his parents' roof, he should be expected to be an active member of the family. If he is allowed to treat his home like a "boarding house," coming and going as he pleases with no duties or chores, how will he ever learn godly discipline and responsibility?

He should also be expected to comply with the "rules of the house." If none are set up—they should be! They don't necessarily have to be written out, but they need to be communicated and understood. If these standards are not met, there should be consequences to be paid—which also need to be understood. Yelling and tirades of accusations are definitely out—instead, what is needed are swift and direct penalties in accordance to the disobedience. You must be fair and reasonable, always disciplining in love and

true. They should be changed to, "You always hurt the ones you love less than you love yourself!" As I look back to all the times I've hurt those closest to me, I can honestly say that most of it was due to pure selfishness on my part. I wanted what I wanted—and I figured that those who loved me most were the most likely to continue loving me, no matter how I acted. They were committed to a relationship with me—they'd never say "get lost." Why, they understood my "moods" and knew "I really didn't mean to be such a jerk."

The hardest testing ground for our Christianity is right in our own homes—with our parents, our brothers and sisters, our husbands and wives, and our children. If we can't prove our Christianity there, we can't prove it anywhere! If we won't go the extra mile for those we literally share our lives with, who are we trying to kid when we knock ourselves out by being "super spiri-

remembering not to provoke your child to anger (Eph. 6:4)—but you must be firm. You have to let them know that their bad attitudes, rudeness, refusals to help, etc., simply cannot and will not be tolerated. (Proverbs 29:15,17) Remember, your son can't take the car unless you give him the keys . . . no matter how much he fusses. God will give you guidelines for the balance between love and discipline if you diligently seek Him—but whatever you do, don't neglect to discipline for fear that your children won't love you. (Matt. 10:37) Fear the Lord, not your kids. (Deut. 8:5) If you act obediently, your children will rise up and bless you—maybe not tomorrow, but in the end they will rejoice that you really loved them enough to care about their souls. (Proverbs 31:28)

THE RIGHT BALANCE

Many parents go to extremes—either they are too heavy-handed and oppressive or they let their kids sin without doing much about it. Both extremes are wrong—and they both show selfishness and lack of love on the part of the parents. It takes time and patience to discipline properly—this will mean discipline for the parents too! If you permit your kids to act in ways that violate their own consciences—in ways that they know are wrong—then you are allowing them to harden their hearts against God. Ignoring their sin is just programming them for apostasy! How will they ever obey God in the big things, if they won't even obey you in the small? Yes, there comes a time when they have to make their own choices, but as long as you have a hand in their life, it is utter rebellion on your part to allow such behavior to go on. (1 Samuel 15:22-23) It is not merely a suggestion that you should raise up your children in the right way—but a command. (Proverbs 22:6) Why do so many parents see discipline as an option? Many times it's the parents' rebellion to God in this area that's inspiring their children's rebellion—both to God, and to them. The answer is not easy—but you have to start somewhere.

Sassy, rebellious teens should not be treated as if "nothing is wrong." Refusing to confront the issue may bring a momentary peace, but it will not uproot the sin from their heart. Immediate action is necessary. Sometimes previous plans need to be canceled or activities missed because of sin or lack of a repentant heart. Special privileges and allowances are also things that can be temporarily stopped or modified if necessary. Remember, the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and it's

tual" at the Bible Study? You may be fooling your friends at church, but at home, in the eyes of those who know you best, you are nothing but a **religious hypocrite**—following in the footsteps of the Pharisees.¹ Real Christian love should start at home with those closest to you—and spread out to others from there. If on Judgement Day, God called your family as witnesses to your sincerity and example of serving Jesus—how do you think they would rate you?

SOME QUESTIONS FOR TEENS

You may be a teen-ager living at home like the girl described in this letter. Let me ask you a few simple

1) Matt. 23:27-28

more loving for your children to experience a little chastisement now, than to suffer eternally because no one cared enough to see that they didn't become hardened to the voice of the Lord. Teen-agers need a tremendous amount of prayer, love, and counsel, but they also need guidelines. In their hearts they are looking for someone to pull the reins in on them—their souls are crying out for it. They don't need you to be their "buddy" when they are in rebellion. They need the parent that God gave them to set up godly boundaries and to be diligent to see that they stay within them. (Proverbs 22:15)

YOUR MISSION IN LIFE

The most important job you have is raising your children in the ways of the Lord. You can't worry about what your children or others may say. You have to be obedient to God. You have to be right in His eyes. True love corrects, reproves, and disciplines. (Proverbs 13:24) Are you willing to stand by and let your kids go to hell because it's easier than trying to deal with them in a godly way? (Proverbs 23:13-14) You have to face it—they may not have years ahead to "sow their wild oats"—they may be in a fatal accident tomorrow. If that were to happen, would you have the peace of knowing that you did all you could towards the salvation of their souls?

Many Christian parents assume their kids are Christians because they "went forward" when they were five—or because they are involved with the church youth group. This can be very dangerous. If your child is not showing forth real fruit of salvation—there probably isn't any! Be sure you have a realistic view of your child's state with the Lord.

If you see that you have fallen short of your responsibility as a parent, you must seek God's forgiveness for your lack of obedience and determine to be the parent the Bible talks about. (Deut. 32:46; 1 Chron. 28:9) Do it now—while there is still time. (Proverbs 19:18)