

## The Curse of Obedient Children

### I. They're not really obedient, they're just good pretenders.

- How do you tell if your kids are pretenders?
  - **We all need to pay better attention.**
    - Sometimes this is a result of the parents not paying a lick of attention, and sometimes it's due to the fact that the parent doesn't see anything wrong with their behavior.
    - Consider Eli. His sons were both priests, but they were known to the people of Israel as being "*worthless men.*" They lied and cheated and committed adultery with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. But apparently Eli wasn't paying enough attention, because he didn't know about it until he was told by the people in I Samuel 2:22.
    - Don't take your child's obedience for granted. Inspect what you expect. Pay attention.
  - **We need to start asking better questions.**
    - Pretenders are liars, and liars always let something slip or can't keep their lies straight. If we're paying attention and asking good questions, eventually something will come out.
    - We have the Lord's promise that our sin will find us out, but I've actually watched children slip up in their lies and betray the truth, but their parents weren't really focusing on what was going on and the kid almost got away with the lie.
    - Even God asked questions. Sure, He knew the answers, but He asked them because the individual answering always reveals his own heart to himself as he answers.
  - **We need to hold our kids to high biblical standards.**
    - This point is specifically for the parents who tolerate disobedience in their children or whose standards are unbiblically low. It's much easier for a child with those parents to pretend to obey than it would be if the parent had the same expectations for their child as God does.
    - Holding kids to higher biblical standards may also take the form of increased accountability.

### II. They do the right things, but they they don't do them the right way.

- *Partial* obeyers are often very genuine about doing the rights things. The problem is that they're not doing the right things the right ways.
- Most young children fit into this category at some point in their lives.
- And it's often the same parents who don't pay attention or who don't ask good questions or who don't have high biblical expectations for their kids that allow partial obedience from their children.
- In the same way the children need to confess and repent of their lies or partial obedience (which is full disobedience), the parents also need to take responsibility for not being careful, watchful, and loving enough to keep their kids genuinely accountable.
- Most parents who pay attention, ask good questions, and maintain high biblical standards in their homes, usually discover the deception or partial obedience before it goes too far.
- Deuteronomy 6; Psalm 78; Ephesians 6

### III. They do the right things in the right ways, but they're not born again.

- Don't assume you know your kids are saved and try to convince them of it at every turn.
- Second, participate in Evangelism Parenting.
- Third, make sure your kids actually understand what it means to have a relationship with God. Too many of us sell our kids a bill of goods when it comes to being born again. We misrepresent it, and it ends up basically coming across like they can live however they want and still get to heaven. We must do our best to clearly represent the truth concerning how one is born again and how that new life affects them.
- Fourth, pray for you children. Both of my kids have made a profession of faith, but I still regularly pray that God would draw my kids to Him and that they would see how badly they need Him.
- Fifth, when it starts to become more biblically obvious that your kids aren't born again, make a habit of calling them to repentance.
- Lord willing, God will use you in your kids' lives to show them their need of a Savior and King as my mom was used in my life to help me see that I wasn't truly a follower of Christ.

### IV. They do the right things in the right ways, but they do them for the wrong reasons.

- **They obey out of ignorance.**
  - If the obedience is nothing more than blind actions done for the sake of doing them, the obedience is incomplete.
  - Proverbs 19:2; Romans 10:3
  - Ignorant obedience isn't obedience because it's ignoring the fact that God requires obedience motivated by faith *in Him*. That obedience isn't ignorant because it's focusing on the most important aspect of obedience.
  - One of the best ways to determine if your child obeys out of ignorance is to ask probing questions.
  - Ignorance of their motivation is inherently dangerous because none of us *accidentally* glorifies God. That means that the ignorance of their motivation is actually a fruit of one of the other categories we're about to describe.
- **They obey simply to please you.**
  - Some children like their parents so much that they just really, really want to please them. However, we must remember that there are only two choices on the shelf — worshipping God or worshipping self.
  - We parents actually encourage this in our kids when we demand the impossible obedience of doing what I say for *my* reasons. When we make ourselves the reason our kids do right, we're teaching our kids how to commit idolatry. Even if they do the right thing in the right way for my reasons . . . they're not actually obeying God.
  - If you had a kid who thought the world of you and obeyed all the time, and they grow up into a kid who no longer thinks the world of you, and they no longer obey, then you can bet on the fact that your child's obedience in their younger years was not motivated by a Christ-honoring purpose, but was simply them fulfilling their own desires by pleasing you. But now that they no longer desire to please you, they satisfy themselves in their disobedience. Either way, it's about their own self-satisfaction.
  - The single best way to discover if your child obeys simply because they want to make you happy is to *ask*. Listen to what they say when they reveal their deeper purposes.
  - Proverbs 20:5

- **They obey out of fear.**
  - This is the child who does right simply because they don't want to get into trouble.
  - Because it's motivated by their own pleasure and desires, it's idolatry.
  - Often we parents often encourage our children's idolatry. Overly harsh parents, angry parents, abusive parents, and manipulative parents all push their kids toward idolatry.
  - With nearly every other child that the best way to discover why your kid does what he does is to talk with him, ask him good questions, and draw out his heart.
    - Unfortunately, this category is much more difficult.
    - As uncomfortable as it may be, your kid may be frightened of you.
    - That means that they're probably afraid to admit to you that they're afraid of you.
  - How might we start addressing this problem? Well, for now, let's remove the element of their being afraid of you. Obviously, you need to confess and repent of how you've been motivating your kids. And we need to stop trying to manipulate them with fear — if that's what we've been doing.
  - But even if they are just afraid of legitimate consequences, you can help them the same way you parent the kids who are ignorant and the kids who obey just to please you. The issue is that they are serving *self* and likely don't know *why* God wants them to obey.
  - So, we need to teach our kids how to biblically obey.
  - But from the earliest ages we need to motivate our kids' obedience by actually telling them why they should do what they do.
  - Their obedience should have nothing to do with the fact that you've told them a hundred times, or that they're getting on your last nerve, or that they're going to make you look bad, or that no one will want to play with them if they act that way, or any of the other pragmatic, selfish, and sinful motivations we place in front of our kids.
- **They obey because they like to obey.**
  - This child is doing what he or she wants to do with no thought to what God wants them to do. But that's nothing more than pharisaism.
  - Being genuine Christians, they're filled with the Spirit, and that means that — no doubt — some of their obedience is truly motivated by the right reasons, but that doesn't mean we should assume all of their obedience is.
  - We need to be diligent to draw out the intentions of their kid's hearts. We need to help our kids understand why they do what they do. They won't naturally figure it out on their own, but it's too dangerous to leave uncovered.
  - Therefore, we need to pay close attention, hold them to high biblical expectations, and we need to engage in quality, thought-provoking conversations where we engage with the heart-level purposes.
  - And — when we find that our kids are doing the right things in the right ways for the wrong reasons (and therefore displeasing the Lord) — we need to teach them what true obedience is.
    - Romans 14:23b, "*whatever is not from faith is sin.*"
    - We should teach our kids that the grandest motivation for our obedience is that we want to make God happy.
    - That's the only motivation that matters. (I Corinthians 10:31)
    - Our kids need to believe that their obedience needs to be motivated by God's glory. They need to trust that God knows what's best. They need to have faith that their highest purpose in life is to please God because whatever is not from faith is sin.