

The Heart of the Matter

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Force combined with constant monitoring can impose compliance upon a small child under most circumstances. However, compulsory obedience is a pitiful victory that will be short lived if the child's motivation does not mature into cheerful obedience. How do you gain cheerful obedience?

Solomon made the direct appeal that every father must make to each of his children if he will attain a God-honoring relationship with his children. "My son, give me thine heart" (Pr. 23:26).

If you win the heart of your child, you've virtually won it all. It is as receiving the master key that unlocks the front door and all subsequent doors to life's issues. Your son then will be open to all that you would teach. Your daughter will acquiesce to your most challenging guidance, even when she cannot understand the wisdom of your words.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Pr. 4:23). Solomon did not leave his son to singlehandedly guard his heart. Instead, Solomon wanted to guide his son into godly manhood by petitioning his son's heart.

A child's heart cannot be taken by force. Your daughter can harden her heart against you or conversely she can trust you in love. Solomon praised his father David's efforts. "He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words" (Pr. 4:4). David did not ask only for compliant behavior (i.e., "eyeservice") nor lip service (Eph. 6:5-6). "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Mt. 15:8). Obedient behavior is a shallow success over which many parents rejoice. David wanted Solomon to let his "heart" retain David's words. When your daughter receives your words in her heart, her obedience will follow naturally. Solomon, when speaking of his commands and his wife's law, took the same direct approach with his son. "Bind them continually upon thine heart" (Pr. 6:21); and, "write them upon the table of thine heart" (Pr. 7:3).

Children are driven by two divergent forces. Every infant is born under the curse of death as "children of disobedience" and "wrath" (Eph. 2:2-3). "[T]he imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Ge. 8:21). The carnal nature of a child will cause him to rebel against his Creator and you as his procreator. Thankfully, God also imparted to little ones the need for love, comfort, safety, physical nurturing, and teaching. As a toddler whimpers with his arms stretched up high reaching for his daddy, it is apparent that the father holds exclusive rights. As a child grows older, the child's longing to bond with his dad slowly fades. Eventually, your son must make a concerted decision to yield his heart to you if your meaningful leadership will continue.

Children who apply their hearts to foolishness and sin will bring a world of unimaginable grief upon their parents (Pr. 17:21, 25). Although there are exceptions, an autopsy of the aftermath often shows that Dad did not properly attempt to capture his child's heart. Frequently, Dad carelessly allowed his child to become acquainted with the allures of this world (through secular

entertainment, etc.) and to be introduced to corrupt peers via unregulated friendships (Ge. 34:1-2; Pr. 13:20; 1Co. 15:33). In response, the son let his “heart envy sinners” (Pr. 23:17) instead of giving his heart to his father.

We need to help one another as the outside voices of influence. John the Baptist turned “the heart of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:6; cf., Lk. 1:16-17). By this article, I hope that I “shall turn the heart of the fathers [in every church] to the children.”

Loving fathers will diligently teach the precious Christian faith and lifestyle to their children. Hateful fathers will not (Pr. 13:24).

“My son, give me thine heart,” (Pr. 23:26). Have you ever humbly made this direct appeal? Children can make this choice. Your daughter’s decision to give you her heart or your son’s decision can last until their safe transition into godly adulthood when they in turn establish their home upon the Rock (Mt. 7:24).

Anyone who “loveth father or mother more than” Jesus Christ “is not worthy of” Him (Mt. 10:37). I’m not advocating a deified view of fathers, but I am expressly advancing a biblical love and loyalty due to Christian fathers as commanded by the full counsel of God’s Word.

In support of you, my brothers,

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