

Lesson Three

Train With the Law and the Gospel

Worship

Read responsively Psalm 119:169-176.

Leader: May my cry come before you, O LORD;

Group: give me understanding according to your word.

L: May my supplication come before you;

G: deliver me according to your promise.

L: May my lips overflow with praise,

G: for you teach me your decrees.

L: May my tongue sing of your word,

G: for all your commands are righteous.

L: May your hand be ready to help me,

G: for I have chosen your precepts.

L: I long for your salvation, O LORD,

G: and your law is my delight.

L: Let me live that I may praise you,

G: and may your laws sustain me.

L: I have strayed like a lost sheep.

G: Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as in everything we do, how we influence our children is a matter of the heart. If we show love to our children, they will know that whatever we do for them will help them and not harm them. Today, help us understand how to influence our children using your law and your gospel. Help us apply the law when necessary. Help us always lead our children to Christ as their Lord and Savior and as the one whom they want to serve the most. Amen.

Introduction

1. What is the difference between the law and the gospel?

The international distress signal SOS is a good memory hook. The law shows our sin; the gospel shows our Savior. The law reminds us of our sinful nature; the gospel reminds us that God loves us so much he sent his one and only Son to be our Savior from sin.

The purpose of this question is to get the class thinking about the attitude they display when they work to influence their children, and especially when they must discipline them. Are they simply dressing their children down with the law? Or are they interested in true Christian discipline that is ultimately concerned about a child's faith in the gospel?

Studying God's Word

Influencing children with the law

2. Describe what it means to try to influence children by using the law.

It means having concern for right and wrong and using God's law to effect a change in a child's behavior.

3. What is the advantage of influencing using the law? The disadvantage?

Advantage: The law may bring quick results.

Disadvantage: Children obey but only out of fear of possible punishment. The law does not change hearts.

4. Has it ever been necessary for you to use only the law to discipline your children? Describe the circumstances.

Parents are not just the spiritual leaders in their household. They also are the "government," that is, they must keep order and teach their children the right things to do. There are times when a rebellious child needs the "club" of the law to bring him or her into line with God's commandments.

Yet we dare never leave them wondering about their status before God. When the law has exposed their sin, we must also remind our children that God has forgiven them in Christ.

Influencing children with the gospel

5. Read Luke 18:11,12. How is a life motivated by the gospel different from a life motivated by the law?

The Pharisee was motivated only by the law and by rewards attached to keeping the law. The gospel fostered a spirit of humility and love for God in the heart of the tax collector and consecrated him to serve God and his neighbor motivated by the Savior's love.

Parents who teach their children about the love of God at home and in Sunday school will find that it is much easier to weave the gospel into their work of discipline.

6. What does gospel motivation look like?

Law motivation is easy to recognize. Think of the times you have used these statements: "I want you to behave because . . ." or "You'll pay the price some day for what you have done," or even, "Do you think that's what God wants his children to do?" Why do we want them to behave? To avoid personal embarrassment? Because a reward or prize was linked to their good behavior?

Gospel motivation is harder to spot. It is often obvious only when the parent encourages a child with the message of forgiveness after the child has recognized the wrong and expressed that fact. In the middle of an altercation, it is difficult to teach your children about sin, God's judgment, and his salvation in Jesus. That's why it is so important that you teach your children about God's salvation on a regular basis outside of the point of discipline, although teaching may be required at the point of discipline also.

We must be careful lest we "use" the gospel for our own purposes. Our main work as parents is to teach the gospel to our children. It is not just a tool for discipline, but God's gracious gift of salvation in Christ Jesus, which assures them of eternal life. Through home devotions and Bible reading, we ground children in the truth that will bless them now and give them eternal life in heaven.

More on true Christian service

7. What is a “good work”?

A good work is a fruit of faith; it is what a believing child of God does out of respect and love for God.

8. What careful distinction must both Christian children and adults understand about good works?

Good works flow from faith in Christ Jesus, and good works will never gain them eternal life or forgiveness for their sins. Good works are fruits of faith. James teaches us that faith without works is dead (James 2:17), and we need to keep that in mind. But we must also remember the words of the apostle Paul, who says that a person is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28).

Note the hymn stanza:

Salvation unto us has come
By God's free grace and favor.
Good works cannot avert our doom;
They help and save us never. (CW 390:1)

9. Read 2 Timothy 3:15-17. What does Paul indicate about the use of God's Word in influencing children?

The use of the Scriptures makes our children wise for salvation and gives them zeal to serve the Lord. It also trains children in the way God wants them to live.

10. Read 1 Timothy 6:11. What does the Lord want all his people, children included, to do? (Note: The first part of chapter 6 deals with teaching false doctrines, controversies and quarrels, and the love of money.)

The final words of that verse give us a wonderful outline for godly living: “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.”

11. In light of 1 Timothy 6:11, think again of a legalistic (law-based) method of discipline versus one that centers on the gospel and the child's salvation. How can teaching children to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” be done in a wrong and legalistic way? in a good, gospel-centered way?

Legalistic: among other things, includes the idea of bribery, trickery, comparison with other children, a mere use of the law with all its damning power without the intent of following up with the gospel, scolding, commanding, threatening, and influencing for the selfish interests of the adult.

Gospel-centered: among other things, includes modeling God-pleasing ways for children in word and action, teaching God's Word to the children in its truth and purity, reminding the children of biblical men and women who followed what the Lord required of them out of love for him because of his love for them, praying with the children, having devotions with them, being with them every Sunday in worship and Bible study.

12. Study Romans 7:22,23. What is the war that the apostle Paul is waging? Do you think your children are fighting this war? How does this fact influence parental discipline? What are the weapons that believing children and adults can use in this war?

Paul is experiencing the war waged between the new man God has created in him through the gospel and his sinful old man.

Christian children are fighting this war also. When Christian parents realize this, they see their children as new creations who want to do the right thing, but who have temporarily given in to Satan's ways. This tempers what parents say to their children during discipline.

The chief weapon we have is God's Word. We want children to learn Bible lessons, memory work that reminds them of the grace that is theirs through faith in Christ Jesus, and hymns and prayers that will be of assistance and help in times of trial and doubt. Children have great blessings in adults who understand the battle going on inside them, who influence their children based on God's Word, and who are concerned about their children's life of faith.

13. As we have seen, there is a legalistic type of parental influence that uses the threats and incentives of the law. Yet there is such a thing as a *scriptural* way of encouragement based on good deeds. Based on Matthew 25:32-40, what is God's promise to us for the good deeds we have done in our lives?

As Jesus teaches his disciples about the end times, he reminds us that "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Jesus here promises a reward of grace to those who, inspired by his love for them, have served their neighbor.

Note: Today's society is child-centric. Children have learned that their needs may be more important than the needs of others. They are taught to determine what value something holds for them before they do it. Instead of serving their elders, they expect to be served by them. May the love of Christ and serving him abound in our children's lives as they learn about Christ's life of selfless love and as they see that love reflected by their parents.

Summary

Parents influence their children best through daily exposure to God's Word. There they hear God's law and God's gospel. They see examples of judgment over sin and of blessing to those who follow God's laws out of love for their Savior.

When parents must discipline their children, they have an opportunity to show their children God's law and gospel in action. They rebuke and curb wrong behavior while always giving their children the encouragement that comes from God's forgiveness.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us the wisdom that only you can give. Give us insights into how we should influence our children. Enable us to see moments when we can say something to them that will help their life of faith. Help us prepare for times when discipline is necessary. Give us humble hearts by reminding us that we too have a sinful nature that needs rebuke and that we commit sins that need forgiveness. Above all, bless our work of influencing our children even when we do it less than perfectly. Amen.