

# **Should Parents Be Concerned With Selfish Traits in Their Children?**

**Dub McClish**

## **Introduction**

The traits of rudeness, disobedience and uncooperativeness are all problems of attitude, whether in children or adults. They all relate to one basic attitude problem—selfishness. Such traits are both anti-social and anti-scriptural.

## **Parents Should Be Concerned**

Yes, in answer to the question of our title, parents should be concerned about these selfish traits. However, it may be observed that these traits must be considered somewhat "natural" in very young children. After all, as infants, children are the most selfish creatures imaginable. It is of no concern to them to awaken their parents at 1:00 a.m. for feeding or again at 3:00 a.m. for a diaper change. We do not expect them to stop crying and go back to sleep and not to awaken us again tomorrow night. Such good manners, obedience and cooperation are not within the capabilities of the very young and informed parents rightly expect such traits in their infants.

As a child develops, godly parents will understand that one of their major responsibilities toward the child is to help him mature out of his selfishness. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Pro. 22:15). The lessons of courteous behavior, obedience and cooperation will be learned in direct proportion to the harnessing of selfishness in the child. It may be further observed that the more one continues to mature spiritually, even in adult years, the more he will grow out of selfishness.

Because of Bible doctrine, parents should be concerned about these matters. God's word teaches that the spiritually mature person is kind, unselfish, humble and behaves himself in a "seemly" (well-mannered) way (1 Cor. 13:4-5). Children are commanded to obey their parents in the Lord because it is right (Eph. 6:1). Disobedience to parents is twice listed as wrong—terribly wrong—behavior in children (Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2). A murmuring and complaining spirit are certain symptoms of uncooperativeness and such is intolerable to God (Phi. 2:14; Jude 16).

Since the pattern of personality that pleases God does not include rudeness, rebellion and refusal to cooperate, it must follow that right-thinking parents will want to help their

children grow out of these traits. They do not harmonize with civilized behavior, and they contradict the normal social graces. God wants us to live in such a way that our lives will "adorn the doctrine of God" (Tit. 2:10). No one will be attracted to the Gospel by a life that is uncouth and rebellious. Even the uncouth and rebellious do not generally appreciate these characteristics in others.

### **Overcoming These Traits**

There are several powerful tools at our disposal to help our children overcome these infantile traits. The example of godly parents must not be underestimated. Many children, even in Christian homes, have such poor models to follow in their parents that it is almost impossible for them to overcome their selfishness. Rude, boorish, ill-mannered, harsh, and unkind parents have little hope of teaching their children to be courteous and kind. How can a parent who ignores speed limits and ridicules "cops" for doing their job or constantly criticizes faithful elders and preachers before his children, possibly create an obedient attitude toward that parent's authority in those children? Parents ought to be models of cooperation and helpfulness toward one another, the Lord's people, their neighbors, the school system, indeed, toward all men in all good things, for such example will not be lost on the child.

A child's associates in his own peer group may either help or hinder the attempts of parents to train their children out of destructive personality patterns. "Evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33) in children, as in other age groups. Parents should be concerned with the behavior of their children's friends, as well as with that of their children.

### **The Discipline Factor**

Generally, the most important factor in rearing children to be properly behaved is loving, consistent discipline. This involves proper parental example, as already mentioned. It involves nurturing one's children in the "chastening and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). This requires both the guidance and teaching they need in righteousness as well as the correction this requires when they misbehave.

The fabric of American society is unraveling, and a principal factor is the general loss of respect for duly constituted authority. The increasing rate of crime is directly related to disrespect for civil law and order. Religion is in utter chaos because the only true authority in religion is utterly disdained. Disrespect for authority is a growing cancer even in the church of the Lord, eating away at its very vital parts. It is manifested in rebellion against godly elders

and the denial of their God-given authority. It is manifested in an increasing intolerance for straight-forward Bible preaching. It may be clearly seen in congregations and schools where an emphasis on Biblical authority for practice and teaching are minimized, if not ignored. Public school teachers and administrators are sometimes terrorized by unruly students.

But what has all of this to do with parental concern over rudeness, disobedience, and uncooperativeness in their children? Simply this: these matters all relate to a common root – disrespect for authority. If children do not learn proper respect for authority in the home atmosphere, it will be difficult for them to ever learn it! Such respect should be lovingly taught, so as not to unnecessarily provoke wrath or rebellion in the child (Eph. 6:4). However, “love” should never be used to excuse lack of discipline or correction. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Pro. 13:24). The proper type of chastening produces respect: “Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence...” (Heb. 12:9).

It is extremely important that parents be consistent in training and correcting their children. It is not useless, but harmful, to threaten a child with a spanking for a given behavior and then, when the child tests that parental limit, to merely **threaten again**, instead of carrying out the threat. Such “parental delinquency\*” teaches the child he need not respect or obey his parents. Consistency is also required in dealing fairly and equally with all children in the family alike. Parental favoritism and special privilege for one child over others is devastating to discipline and respect. Further, parents should be consistent from case to case with their children. Rude or disrespectful behavior is harshly punished one day but is ignored or actually laughed at the next in some homes. Such inconsistency only breeds confusion and disrespect. There should also be consistency between parents. Mother must not work against father (nor vice versa) in disciplinary efforts.

The first opportunity children have to learn respect for authority is in their home and toward their parents. Parents represent God to their children in their very early years until parents can transfer that respect and devotion to God through teaching and guidance. If there is no parental respect in the child, it is most likely that there will be no respect for God when the child becomes an adult.

## Conclusion

Parents must not wait until their children are teenagers to begin teaching the need for respect and selflessness. The rude, disrespectful, and selfish traits must be attacked at an early age. When a mother laughs at her three-year old who has just kicked her in the shins in a fit of rebellious rage, they are both to be pitied. The mother, if she does not awaken to her folly, will cry many bitter tears over that child in years to come. The child, unrestrained by his parents, will reap the painful fruits of an undisciplined life. “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Prov. 29:15).

[**Note:** I wrote this MS for and it was published in the October 1984 edition of *Spiritual Sword*, ed. Thomas B. Warren.]

**Attribution:** From *thescripturecache.com*; Dub McClish, owner and administrator.