A Voice From The Wilderness

Self Government

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." Prov. 16:32.

In this article I will be sharing practical ways we can learn to **govern self** and begin training and teaching our children to be responsible, dependable and most importantly how to govern themselves under Christ.

One afternoon as I was driving home with a lady that I had walked a piece of country property with, our conversation turned to why I had brought my family from the suburbs to this quiet mountain setting in Montana. I explained to her that we had dedicated ourselves to learn to walk with God, to have a Christianity that was revealed in the marriage and be able to reach our own children with the Gospel. I shared with her the decision that my wife, Alane, and I had made to give ourselves to our children, with a commitment to them as our first evangelistic outreach. She said, "You sound like you really enjoy working with your children?"

Then she began to open her heart about the struggles she was facing with her seven year old. She said, "I feel like all I do is constant parenting. I'm always entertaining him, but I can't keep us." I asked her what kind of responsibilities and household duties he had? She said, "I can't get him to do anything! How do you get your kids to do things?" I began showing her that as our children saw us giving of ourselves and our time for them, they were ready and willing to take up their responsibilities in the home. Then I explained to her how our "self-government" program came to be and how it operates in our home. I shared with her that by working closely with the children, clearly outlining requirements for the home duties, showing them how it was to be done and then consistently following through with those expectations, that together our children were capable of managing home duties, including meals, quite well at ages 11, 9 & 6. And that through this practical training in home duties the children were learning the lessons of how self can be brought under the control of Christ as their will comes in collision with necessary duties and the instruction of their parents.

When we pulled in my driveway, she asked if she could meet the family. As we walked to the top of the stairs to enter the living room, one of the children passed by us with a cheerful greeting - dust rag and polish in hand. Just then another child stepped over to where the list of duties was, greeted the lady, looked at the list, and then

began wiping the base-boards. The lady reached over to the list and said, "May I look at this?" As she picked it up she read: "breakfast chores, vacuum, clean bathrooms, organize cupboards, weed upper garden, wipe base-boards and one surprise for mother." Than at the bottom of the list it said, "Incentive: If duties are well done - a swim in the pond." The lady looked at me and said, "This is amazing, I'm not sure my kid would know what a base-board was let alone get him to clean it! Is this what you meant by your "self-government" program? They're actually enjoying themselves."

We spent the next 30-40 minutes discussing the Spiritual and temporal blessings that come into the home when we are willing to give ourselves to one another as husbands and wives and then truly give ourselves to bringing practical Christianity to our children. Before she left she said, "I've been trying to find the words to express what I sense here, it's more than just happy children doing their chores, there is a peace and a calm here that I want in my home."

Self government is learning to be governed by Christ

Friends, self-government is learning to be governed by Christ. When Christ is governing me then I am, through Christ, governing self. But when I choose not to connect myself with Him or to disconnect sometime through the day, then self is governing me. If we are learning "self-government," we are learning to be governed by principle, governed by the dictates of sanctified reason and conscience. Too often we choose, yes, choose, to be governed by our impulses, emotions and feelings, or just habits that we have acquired and learned to excuse.

We were at the table of some friends and were noticing how well their four-year-old son was eating some of the less appealing green vegetables. While the children were taking care of the dishes, the father was commenting on how pleased he was to see his son learning to make choices on principle at such an early age. He explained to us that he had simply shared with his son that those vegetables were good for him, and ever since that time, even though those vegetables were not a particular favorite, his son would say, "I eat these because they are good for me and I want to be healthy." Oh friends, that we could be that simple and faithful to our heavenly Father, not just in our eating, although that is very important, but when He calls to us to rise in the morning, to "watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." God is calling to us to learn to be governed by His principles, not arbitrarily, but because He wants to restore us fully to His likeness.

The Bible is full of examples of those who have learned to **govern self**, and also those who have failed and were **governed by self**. Remember the day Joseph was taken as a slave? We are told that for a time he was given up to "uncontrolled grief and terror." *Patriarchs and Prophets 213.* But then, prompted by the Holy Spirit, Joseph resolved to serve God with an undivided heart. You see, Joseph made a choice. He used his governing power, the power of decision, the power of choice, to place himself and all his circumstances under God's control. He was yielding himself to God to be fully governed by Him. That day he learned a lesson that many of us are continually struggling with. How to keep our governing power, the power of choice, subjected to the will of God and His governing principles. Friends, for these reasons he was just as faithful as a slave and prisoner as he was as a monarch on the throne. Joseph understood "self-government."

But what about Samson? Samson followed impulse and inclination. What he wanted, he wanted **now**! He consulted inclination ahead of principle, with the result that he was blinded, and became a slave to his enemies, the enemies he thought could not conquer him. Are we going to find ourselves in bondage to sins or impulse, passion and appetites, only to find out too late that our spiritual eyes have been put out, blinded by these enemies? Friends, let us deal with ourselves. Are we more life Joseph, living by principle, consulting duty and conscience, or are we more like Samson, consulting impulse and inclination?

I would like to share with you how God began opening our eyes in a more practical way to our need of a "self-government" program in our home. We had been teaching and training our children from a very early age the importance of developing proper habits, such as their quiet time with God in the morning (through various means depending on their ages), making their beds, doing dishes, personal hygiene and other household duties. One morning Alane called me down to the girl's bed-

room. She had found them sitting quietly on their beds and asked them why they weren't dressed yet? They said, "Mother you didn't tell us to get dressed."

While the children were dressing Alane and I discussed our beginning of "self-government." I said, "We tell the children to get up, have their prayers, have their quiet time, get dressed, what to wear, make their beds, drink their water, and so on. I'm concerned that we may also be training them to have to be told what to do before they will do it. What we are teaching them to do is very important. Many people are not even training their children in these areas, but honey, I also want our children to learn to govern themselves in these areas, so we do not have to tell them what to do."

Do not misunderstand me; our children do need close guidance and instruction, but they also need to begin learning when very young, how to make right choices to govern themselves. That very morning we sat down with our children and had what we call a family council to discuss this problem with them and get their input as to how we should begin our "self-government" program. Since our children were too young to read, we all agreed that the duties for the first part of the day would be illustrated by pictures and put on our bulletin board. When they got up in the morning it would be their responsibility to come and look at the pictures and begin to see the importance of their own decisions. There were simple pictures, such as a bed, a water glass, a table to set, books to get for family worship, Bible, prayers and so on. Then we began working with them in other choices also. For example, since they were still young and not the best judges of taste and colors in clothing, Alane would give them two or three choices of outfits that were attractive and let them choose from those. Instead of just letting the children flounder for ideas for personal recreation time, we give them choices that are wholesome and enjoyable and let them choose.

Parents, one of the best lessons we can learn and train our children to act upon, is how to persevere. Have we learned how to stay with a task until it is finished? What are we teaching our children by precept and example? Consider these words from *Fundamentals of Christian Education 32-33:*

"Many children for want of words of encouragement, and a little assistance in their efforts, become disheartened and change from one thing to another. And they fail to make a success of anything they engage in, for they have not been taught to persevere under discouraging circumstances. Thus the entire lifetime of many proves a failure, because they did not have correct discipline when young. The education received in childhood and youth affects their entire business career in mature life, and their religious experience bears a corresponding stamp."

Children have energy for what they set their will to do.

Did you notice these words, "They have not been taught to persevere under discouraging circumstances."

When our son had just turned five years old, our family took our first major backpacking trip with another family in Oregon. It was an eight-mile hike, almost all of which was up hill. Wanting to be like everyone else, my son carried his little pack weighing four pounds. When we were about two-thirds of the way up, some of his initial enthusiasm began to wane and my wife became concerned - maybe we were being too hard on him, maybe this hike was too exhausting for his age. She said, "Honey, maybe you should carry him for awhile."

I assured her of his ability and energy, "He just needs some encouragement; let's put him out front as the leader." And there he did fine for some time, but at length he weakened in his attitude two more times. I reassured Alane that he would make it. "Remember the Waldenses' children; he is learning to persevere." When we were about a half-mile from our campsite, we stopped to eat the lunch we had packed. Most of us dropped our packs and slumped to the ground thankful for a refreshing break. But guess what my son was doing. Yes, that is right; he dropped his pack and was running with boundless energy, exploring the new area, coming to sit only long enough to eat.

Friends, children have energy for what they set their will to do. Have you ever noticed a child who seems to have no lack of energy playing outside, but when he is asked to go for a walk, if he does not want to go, after a short distance he says, "Carry me, Daddy; I'm too tired." Tiredness is not the problem. We need to recognize that

the real problem is the child is use to being governed by impulse and has not learned to persevere in things that cross his will.

The world today says children have short attention spans. While it is quite often true, could it be that we are helping to shorten that attention span by allowing our children to go from one thing to another, not learning to stay with a task until it is finished and finished right? *Fundamentals of Christian Education 32 says,*

"Children frequently begin a piece of work with enthusiasm, but becoming perplexed or wearied with it they wish to change and take hold of something new. Thus they make take hold of several things, meet with a little discouragement, and give them up; and so they pass from one thing to another, perfecting nothing. Parents should not allow the love of change to control their children."

There are simple yet very practical ways to help our children develop their attention span while training them in "self-government." For example, when our children color a picture there are several lessons that can be taught all at once. They should be careful to stay within the lines and color in one direction for discipline and hand-eye coordination. Care should be given to real colors that are representative of real life. The child needs to finish the picture and not be allowed to do the last half in a sloppy manner because he is tired of it. This example is simple, but with much potential for character formation. It helps our children learn to be self-governed and to experience the satisfaction of faithfulness in the little things and in a task thoroughly and properly completed.

Another simple example for helping establish this principle in ourselves and in our children is in learning to do one activity at a time and, when it is finished, put it away before the next one begins. My son knows that if he gets the Legos out they will all have to be properly put away before he does anything else. This rule helps him learn to govern himself, because he knows that there is more work involved in putting away the Legos than in just using his truck. A child who knows Mother will put things away and that he or she can run from one thing to the next has little opportunity to develop "self-government" and will carry the sad lack of such training into his business career and his religious experience.

Dear friends, it is very important that we realize how much self-government or the lack of it is affecting ourselves and our children. This important principle applies to every one of us in all areas of our lives - work, recreation, education, or the spiritual aspect. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way that he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." But parents, we ourselves being governed by Christ before we can consistently train our children in the right way.

To truly have "self" subdued and governed instead of its governing us is the greatest battle we face. It can be won only as we are willing to be fully surrendered to the will of God in every situation where self wants to govern us through the day. I ask you not to become disheartened by the challenge and I also ask you, along with myself, to covenant with God to allow Him to show us any areas of our lives where self is governing us.

Let us also determine that we will use our governing power, the power of choice to be fully surrendered in our personal lives, our marriages and families. Then our "self-government" will demonstrate that Christ is governing us.

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