

Over-Honoring Children

Martin G. Collins

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Western civilization (especially the U.S.) has a problem with child worship. Everywhere we go, there are signs of an unhealthy obsession between parent and child. Of course, as parents and grandparents we like to do a little bragging, and that's understandable.

We plaster our cars with stickers like: “Proud Mom of an Honor Role Student”; “Proud Parent of a Great Kid”; “Proud Parent of Awesome Kids” (these are all on Amazon; you can buy them); and yes, sadly, even one that says: “Proud Parent of a Child who Hates Trump.” There’s a “sterling” example of a parent teaching his child, family, and community to disrespect the President of the United States. And you can be sure that child does not honor and respect his parents either.

We carry their school pictures around in our wallets, and whip them out whenever we see an opportunity. It’s fun to be a proud parent. It’s good to be involved—at least to a point.

But those who are immersed in this society cross lines that should not be crossed. They become obsessed. Everything else gets pushed into the background while their children become the center of their world. They hover over them, monitoring every move they make. They shower them with all the toys and clothes they need to be with the in-crowd at school, which makes them completely selfish. They break their necks to throw the best birthday parties, so they’ll be sure to stay popular.

Their parents can’t stand to see them unhappy. They neglect discipline and try to placate them with bribes and pleading.

What does God say He will do to an idolatrous people?

Isaiah 3:4-5 I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. The people will be oppressed, every one by another and every one by his neighbor; the child will be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable.

This passage has both a literal and a figurative meaning. I am just going with the surface meaning today in this commentary.

Mom’s day is ruined if they give her an insolent attitude in the morning. Mom rushes to correct her own behavior if they scream, “I hate you!” or “You’re so unfair!” She stops being a parent and becomes a slave to the little brats. And they are brats by now, but their parents are too blind to see it as they pin up their pictures and obsess over their triumphs and failures.

If parents in God’s church have split loyalties, having one foot in the world and one foot in the church, often their child or children are their first love, with spouse and God trailing far behind. The day comes when they literally can’t imagine life without them. They think this proves that they are such good, caring parents, but they are wrong.

Isaiah 3:12 As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.

As I mentioned earlier, our leaders are children. What happened? They were idolized as small children to begin with, in most cases.

When God commands us to love Him first with all that we are, He's not telling us to neglect our children. He is also trying to help us. God intentionally designed us with a core need to worship and bond with Him specifically. No one else can satisfy us like Him. If we obey His commands and put Him first, we will have this core need met and the rest of our lives will remain in proper balance.

But if we ignore Him and leave this need unsatisfied, our drive to worship will begin searching for a new target. For this nation, it has been the children in many cases. Humans will never be without a god or gods. We must have them! This is why every culture that has ever existed ends up with some kind of religious beliefs. Even the atheists are worshipping something: money, people, careers, children. But whenever that something is not our Creator, all kinds of degenerate side effects arise. When we worship each other (as we do with our entertainers, athletes, and stars), we ruin each other.

God specifically designed humans to worship Him only. We become warped if WE start receiving the worship. We become proud, rude, greedy, condescending and unpleasant.

When we give worship to God, we become humble, kind, and gracious. When He tells us to do something, it is for our health, safety, protection, and our future. When He tells us to avoid something, it is because that thing can hurt us in far more ways than we ever realize. We can look at this society and see what the idolizing of children has done to the whole society. In fact, some people so idolize their children that their children don't even know what sex they are. How sad.

When we worship human beings, we damage both them and us. When we worship our children, we end up with very unhealthy family relationships. Our children grow up stunted—either incompetent to function in life and utterly codependent, or hostile and desperate to get away from our smothering influence. We end up miserable as well.

In teaching our children to honor their parents we must NOT set an example by overly-honoring them. We have to be very careful of this.

Notice the very direct question God asks the priest Eli. In His condemnation of Eli, God makes it very clear that we are not to honor our children more than Him.

I Samuel 2:27-30 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Did I not clearly reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before Me? And did I not give to the house of your father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire? Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?' Therefore the LORD God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the LORD says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor [lit., "make a heavy weight"—meaning, giving a lot of power and authority to], and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed [lit., "made light of", or, "cast off," "shrugged off."].'

I Samuel 2:34 Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them.

What restrained Eli from taking vigorous action to maintain God's honor was his unwillingness to lose for his sons the lucrative office of the priesthood. He was willing to rebuke them, he was grieved at their wrongs, but he was not willing to give up the wealth and plenty that flowed into his house from the offerings of Israel.

Eli was not willing to follow through with his threats and discipline his sons himself because they had been his idols which superseded God!

The day comes when deficient parents get tired of crisis phone calls and bail outs. They start resenting their kids for not having the self-reliance that they worked so hard at NOT teaching them.

Or else, they end up heartbroken and wondering why their kids suddenly moved to the other side of the world and now refuse to return their phone calls. More importantly, they've spent a large part of their lives being spiritually stagnant, pushing God to the bottom of their priority list and only calling on Him in some moment of crisis.

There is nothing sweet about saying "My child is my life." Such a shocking statement should sound alarms in our minds. For us to view any human being as our life, hope, or any other core essential is a sign that our priorities are way off balance.

God tells us we should be loving HIM with all our heart, mind, body and strength. He never says that about humans. He tells us to love people as we do ourselves, and He makes this our second priority.

By the time we give ALL of ourselves to God, we will have a limited amount left for others, and this is as it should be. God is the one who fulfills our needs for total love and acceptance. He is the One Who we should be getting our sense of identity from. That's not to say that we shouldn't be doing everything we can to love one another and take care of one another and to serve one another.

While we certainly want to appreciate the gifts He has given us, we want to make sure we haven't started valuing them more than their Giver.