

Discipline, Respect and Obedience

Guest post by Ted Olson.

Many of us parents have a traditional view of discipline, respect, and obedience. That is, children must be taught to obey and to respect their elders. Discipline measures vary, but range from time-outs to spanking.

Many of us grew up in homes where kids were to be seen and not heard. While our physical needs were usually taken care of, our emotional and spiritual needs were trampled. It was lights out because *"I said so!"* and *"Let's go, hurry up!"* It was *"Sit still for Pete's sake!"* and, *"Stop crying, before I really give you something to cry about."*

What was all this saying? It was saying that us kids were not important. That we were not good enough, fast enough, or smart enough. That what we were doing when our parents commanded, *"Let's go!"* was of little importance. That our feelings and desires were secondary.

As parents we love our kids. We want what's best for them. But we suffer under the influence of cultural practices, traditions, and expectations. We raise our kids how we were raised. We never question it, dooming us to repeat the same harmful patterns.

When we have the courage to look beneath the surface, however, we find that this kind of parenting is driven by thinking that needs to be re-examined:

Fear – many of us discipline and demand obedience because we're worried what others will think. *My goodness, can't this guy control his kids?* Discipline for this reason is worthless. It will do nothing but make kids feel like dirt for being kids. Kids are enthusiastic, inquisitive, curious, excited. The list is long. Can they be expected to sit still in church? I still can't. When we make what others think the most important factor in our parenting, we sacrifice our relationship with our children.

Control – we also discipline for control. We demand respect not so much to teach, but because we enjoy the control. We take pleasure in it. It puffs us up. We love it when our children do what we say just like when a dog comes when called. Yeah! We did this parenting thing right! But this desire for control is toxic. Our children are not dogs, or prisoners of war. They are fellow human beings, and they rely on us to model healthy relationships, not a family-sized dictatorship.

Superiority – we assume because we're bigger, faster, and smarter that we must always be right. Kids simply can't compete with our wisdom and experience, so they should be summarily dismissed. Yet kids can speak profound truths into our lives, if we're only willing

to listen. They constantly remind us what's important, and what our priorities should be. *Daddy, why do you work so much? Daddy, can we play?* They remind us that people and relationships are critical, a fact we adults are all too quick to forget.

Trust – some of us demand obedience because we do not trust that children will be respectful unless they're made to be. We doubt the natural learning process. We abandon good modeling, relying instead on heavy-handed discipline to teach respect. But if we respect our kids – if we honor their wishes, needs, and desires daily, include them in family decisions, allow them the freedom to express who they are rather than what we want or expect – they'll know respect on a much deeper level.

Misunderstanding – as parents, we live in an adult world burdened with adult thoughts. It's a rational world. Our kids live in a magical world of wonder, discovery, joy, and curiosity. Yet we use rationality when we communicate. *"Honey, you had your turn last week, so now it's your sister's."* We might as well speak gibberish! Kids don't speak "rational" – they speak emotion, passion, feelings, desires, and tactile pleasures – and this is wonderful! If we take the time to understand our kids' hearts, we will discover who they are. We'll be in a much better position, as partners, to help them on their journey in this thing called life. Rather than punish our children for the way they express their emotions, which is often the only way they know how, (or the only way they feel they can be heard), we can discover our own misunderstandings about our kids. We can meet them where they're at – not where we expect them to be.

We don't need to demand respect or obedience. We need to exemplify it. Despite what popular opinion states, respect and obedience are not taught. With the right heart and mind, it can be modeled. Then it will be earned. Kids are too smart. They know the real thing when they see it. And it doesn't look like what most of us are doing.