

# “AND” VERSUS “OR” PARENTING

by Amber Tatum

It hit me as I listened from another room. Call it an epiphany or just belated comprehension, but as I listened, I realized that my husband and I had become “and” parents.

What I heard seemed sweet on the surface. My husband was asking our youngest child to be a good girl for Momma, a wonderful concept of supportive and cooperative parenting. But then came the “and.” “Be a good girl for Momma, *and* I’ll bring you a treat.”

Seriously? A treat for basic good behavior? As I thought about that, I realized just how much we had bought into the concept of “and” parenting:

- “Be good tonight at church services, *and* we might go to get ice cream.”
- “Don’t hit your brother, *and* you can play on the Wii.”
- “Let him have a turn, *and* you can pick the movie for tonight.”
- “Clean up your room, *and* you can read for an extra 20 minutes tonight.”

Now, I am all for rewarding your children. Rewards are powerful motivators and are a biblical concept when used properly. After all, Christ is the One who told us, “Come to me ... *and* I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28 ESV, emphasis added).

But there is a vast difference

between rewards and bribes, and as I contemplated the situation, I realized that we were bribing common courtesy and respect. The forebears on both sides of our family would be appalled! My husband and I are both from long lines of “or” parents:

- “Sit still and listen, *or* you’ll wish you could.”
- “Play nice with your brother, *or* spend some quality time alone in your room.”
- “Clean up your room, *or* I’ll come through with the magic vanishing trash bag.”
- “Respect your mother, *or* ...”

For those of you feeling sorry for us or thinking that we had terrible parents, don’t! My husband and I are both blessed to have godly, Christian parents with whom we have meaningful, enjoyable friendships now that we are adults. But they were definitely “or” parents in our childhood, and they followed through with the consequences.

As I continued to think about this concept, I realized that not only were we deviating from how we were raised, but we were also going against the basic principles of parenting as presented by our heavenly Father. We

wholeheartedly believed that “children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Psalm 127:3), but we were failing in driving out the folly that is bound up in the heart of a child (Proverbs 22:15). I was afraid that we were in danger of following in Eli’s example of knowing things weren’t as they should be, yet not restraining our children (1 Samuel 3:13).

How did this happen? I would like to blame society or say that things are just different now than when we were kids. But basic good behavior and respect don’t change with society and time. The truth is we had become lazy. Parenting is not for wimps. Deuteronomy 6 (which my “or” father calls the best parenting manual ever written) paints a picture of constant teaching and continual reminding of immutable truths:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie



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down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

The blessings of following this concept of steadfast teaching are much greater than the promises of “and” parenting. Instead of temporary satisfaction, there is eternal reward. Instead of temporal blessings, there is spiritual

life. Proverbs 20:11 tells us that “Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright.” Proverbs 29:15 adds, “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” Purity, uprightness and wisdom far outweigh ice cream, Wii time and movies on the list of what I want to give my children.

I ask you to join me as I resolve to be an “or” parent from now on. It will

be an adjustment. My children may not understand it now, but I pray that, as I strive to follow God’s way instead of my own, one day my children will rise up and call me blessed for having been an “or” parent. My children deserve it! □

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