

## Ministering to Our Children by the Spirit in Love

After the christening of his baby brother in church, a three-year-old boy sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong.

Finally, the boy replied: "The preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys."

This little boy is not the only one confused about what it means to have a Christian home. Many of us are not Christians in the way we parent our children. We are really Pharisees. Our parenting is a matter of giving laws, orders, and commandments. (For more on this see [Parenting by Grace](#).) This is just another type of law-giving, rather than relating in Christian love.

Of course, we must hold our children accountable, we must correct them, and discipline them. But if this is the core of our parenting, then we are relating to our children as Pharisees, rather than Christians living in the gospel. The book of Galatians shows us the effect of relating to people through the law.

### The Effect of Law-giving in Relationships

Paul's previous relationship with the Galatians: *You welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.... I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.* Galatians 4:14-15b.

- The effect of law-giving on this relationship: *What has happened to all your joy?... Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them.* Galatians 4:15a-17.
- Law-giving and Peter's relationships: *Before certain men came from James, Peter used to eat with the Gentile brothers. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.* Galatians 2:12-13.

Law-giving in relationships robs us of joy, alienates, separates, and creates hypocrisy. This is just as true in parenting as it is in other relationships.

### Comparing Law-giving and Love-Relating

From Paul Miller "Ministry in the Spirit in Love": *Let me give you a story between me and one of my daughters, which will give you a feel of what this translates to. She had come home from youth group about 9:30, and she had her jobs to do. We have a list of jobs and rules on the side of the refrigerator that we developed over a few years because all our teenagers are lawyers. They would argue, "But, you didn't say exactly that." One of the rules is that they have to do jobs that take about 12 to 15 minutes a day. They usually whine for about 10 minutes prior to doing them, and then they do them in about five minutes. My daughter came home and she was angry with me that she had to do her jobs. I don't think I even said anything, but she was angry with me. She was sweeping the kitchen floor, and she was fuming at me. This is not unusual, but this time she was especially angry. I knew the reason she was angry with me was because I was making her do these jobs. She was going on and on about this jobs list. The thought that was going through my head was, "Courtney, we agreed on this together. These jobs don't take that long. We all have to do them." I even got into what community life was like. I was thinking about loving Courtney, and I was aware of my tendency to give Courtney the law. I said, "Courtney, let's sit down and talk about it." She said, "I don't want to talk about it." It just made her angrier. So, I kept thinking that I have got to understand Courtney. I was learning to love. I was praying as I asked her to sit down with me. Finally I said, "Courtney, just sit down and let's talk about it." We sat down, but I wasn't sure what to do. I have a friend that says a good thing to do is always ask three questions. I was learning that love was questioning, and I didn't always know what to do. I said, "Courtney, what is wrong?" What is bothering you?" Courtney started telling me this story about something that happened in youth group. Someone had really put her down in youth group. She wasn't mad at all about having to do the jobs, it was just the next thing along. As we sat and talked, I realized that I was going through an identical situation. I took out my journal and read her a couple of pages, and we talked about it for 15 or 20 minutes. Then, we both went and did the jobs together. That simple little story especially stuck with me because it was one of the first times in my relationship with Courtney that I waited and I didn't give her the law.*

	Law-Relating	Love
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Data	Courtney is mad about doing her jobs.	Courtney is mad about doing her jobs.
Response	"Courtney, we've agreed on doing this. It only takes 15 minutes. I'll even help you."	To myself: "Is something else bothering her?" To Courtney: "Is anything wrong? What is going on?"
Way of Relating	Nice, but demanding. Responding to Courtney based on what she clearly said!	Questions, seek to understand. Compassion doesn't judge because it is unsure of itself. It seeks to understand.
Spirit's Role	None, He is not needed. No one to keep in step with because all is clear. (Gal. 4:10)	I need to constantly feel the touch of the Spirit and hear His voice. (Gal. 5:16-18) "I wonder what is wrong? What should I say?" Praying, waiting, listening, then Wow!
Result	Biting and devouring which leads to separation. (Gal. 5:15)	Closeness (Gal. 4:14-15)
Final Emotion	Joy is gone. (Gal. 4:15)	Joy! (Gal. 5:22)
Relating to Others	I go to another family member. "Boy, is she driving me crazy." This leads to more division.	Move towards the person who disagrees (Gal. 1-6). The whole book of Galatians is a movement toward the church.
Feel of Activity	Clear, confident, quick.	Messy, slow, uncertain.
Feeling of Safety	Good.	Risky.
Movement of Time	Initially, very quick. Long haul, very slow.	Initially, very slow. Long haul, very quick.
Heart Cry	"I'm the head of the house."	"Abba, Father." The cry of the confused and vulnerable. (Gal. 4:6)