



The consistent parent and teacher

Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

James 3:12-13

What would you think if you saw a grape vine producing figs, or raspberry bushes with apples hanging on them? Wouldn't you be confused?

This is the point that James, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is making here. If our children or students hear contradictory words in our speech, or witness that our behavior is not in agreement with our talk, or see conflicting actions in our lives, what are they to think? We will confuse them. James writes earlier in chapter 3 of our tongue:

"Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

(James 3:9-10)

What is a child to think if he is told that sitting still and listening during the church service is very important because that is how God speaks to us, and yet the same child hears his parents negatively critiquing the sermon and criticizing the pastor while traveling home after the service? Which is true: what his parents told him before church or what he heard after the service? One thing was heard about how we should live, but another was absorbed regarding how life actually is lived. One thing was "taught" but another was "caught."

We can severely confuse our young children by our contradictory words or actions. Teens readily detect our inconsistencies; it is as if they have built-in radars for such inconsistencies! What is taught and what is "caught" in the following examples?

- The elementary school teacher who informs her students that she will conduct a desk neatness inspection because neatness and organization are important traits for successful living, but she cannot find the notepad in her own messy desk drawer in order to write down the names of students who must stay in during recess to clean their untidy desks.
- The high school teacher who just completed teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan and the importance of denying ourselves to show love, care, and concern for others; but he steps around the girl who dropped her books and notebook binder in the doorway as she was leaving class and is embarrassedly trying to pick up her papers that flew all over the hallway.
- The father who has strongly disciplined his son for talking behind his back after his son told some friends about a mistake that his dad had made; but this same son hears his father freely criticizes country and church leadership decisions.
- The parents who tell their children that personal prayer and reading sound religious books are very important, but the children never see their parents in personal prayer and Bible study.
- The teacher who stresses with her students that Sunday and church worship are the most important events of the week, but her students regularly see and hear her more excited about Saturday's activities than Sunday's worship.

Do you see the problem? If we, as our children's and students' most influential role models, send inconsistent and conflicting signals, what will this produce? How safe would our driving be if conflicting signs were posted, or traffic lines and stop signs could be disregarded whenever the driver decided to do so? In a world of increasing public sin and open temptation, we must provide consistent, faithful examples for our children and teens. Know that inconsistent parents or teachers will consistently have problems with their children's or students' behavior. Our talk and walk must be consistent.

How did Jesus distinguish the wise from the foolish builder in the closing application of His Sermon on the Mount?

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock."

(Matt. 7:24)

The wise builder was consistent. What such a man hears in church or reads at the family table is lived out in his daily life. He lived consistently. He was sincere and true. Such examples will stand, even when storms shall rage against them. But *"everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand"* (Matt. 7:26). What he heard and professed was not lived out in real life. He lived an inconsistent life. He was hypocritical and double-tongued. Such examples will end in ruin.

Dear parent or teacher, be a wise builder. Be consistent and faithful. Set a clear example. In so doing, by God's grace, the house of your hopes and prayers for your children or students will stand, despite the storms that may come against it. Do not be foolish by living inconsistently in talk and walk. By doing so you build on sand. If God does not miraculously prevent it, all you build will collapse.

"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."

(James 3:13)

Are you a consistent parent, a faithful teacher?

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