



MONDAY'S MEAL

SUSTAINABLE NOURISHMENT *for the* LONG DISTANCE RUN

Loyalty

by Douglas Wilson

Monday's Meal is a service of The Oaks Classical and Christian Academy. Each meal is selected specifically to feed and nourish parents for the long distance run. If you found it helpful, consider passing it along.

**"...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds..."
Hebrews 10:24**

When it comes to teaching cultural standards, the task confronting parents is not to make the children conform, but rather to bring the children to love the standards being taught to them. But this cannot happen without loyalty, and loyalty has a genesis all its own. It is not enough for parents to have a high view of their responsibilities coupled with a strict set of standards. More often than not, this by itself simply creates rebellious children. Such "high standards" in the home are nothing more than the pressure cooker lid, screwed down tight. The devil and Adam supply the necessary heat, and after about fifteen years, the pastor has quite a mess in the kitchen to clean up.

Jesus taught us emphatically about the dangers of cleaning the outside of the cup while leaving the inside full of self-indulgence (Mt. 23:25). In our circumstances, what could the outside of the cup include? The list could contain Christian education, whether at home or in school, no R-rated movies, hormone-free chicken, bread baking, having your hair in a bun, no rock and roll, vitamins for Jesus, or any number of other things. My point here is not to get into the pros and cons of the particular things on this list, and so I will not say whether or not I wear my hair in a bun.

Obviously, the point is not to object in any way to a particular set of cultural decision in a given home. All parents must make such decisions, and all families live with the results of them. Rather, the point is that they are not a substitute for the spiritual graces, i.e., the fruit of the Spirit. Put another way, when it comes to child-rearing, there is no substitute for grace, humility, sacrifice, kindness, shrewdness, love, tenderness, justice, and humor. The loyalty of children to parents is the fruit of the graces, and not of the externals. This is why some parents have a comprehensive "worldview" package all worked out for the kids only to have the kids reject the whole shebang. Other parents do far less teaching, but what teaching they do is gladly received. Perhaps such parents should have taught more, but still, it is better to have all of a smaller portion gratefully received than to have all of a larger portion ungratefully thrown to the floor.

Say a father maintains that he has a biblical worldview, but others who know him would say that he is simply dogmatic and opinionated. Because he has a *biblical* worldview (in his opinion) he is therefore free to cudgel the kids with it at every opportunity. If they don't like it, they probably have a spiritual problem. After a time, this grows up into a full-blown rebelliousness, with the father assuming that the children are rejecting "the things of God." But loyalty is a function of gratitude, and gratitude is a function of *grace*. Grace, unlike movie standards, is not a fungible commodity. Grace and peace can be multiplied to us through the ministry of Word and sacrament, as God pleases, but we cannot go buy grace as though it were a bag of flour. But we *can* simply adopt certain external badges of our worldview commitments. We can subscribe to the right magazines, including this one, we can kill our television, we can move to the country, we can attend all the right conferences, we can drink the right beer, and we can join a church where everyone else is doing the same things we are. We can fit right in there, and when the family melts down, everyone wonders how that happened because the now-melted family "did all the right things."

Grace is obtained through the established means of grace—hearing the Word, coming to the Lord's table—and the attitude that receives God's offers in the Word and sacrament with a blessed result is the attitude of humility, repentance, tenderness, lowliness of mind, and faith. These things aren't child-rearing *techniques*, but they are the only things that make godly child-rearing possible. In short, we need Christ and not our own to-do list. And when we have Christ, He works through us to accomplish *His* to-do list (Eph. 2:8-10). The good works God prepared beforehand for us to do certainly include bringing up children before Him. But child-rearing as the result of such grace is child-rearing characterized throughout by the extension of grace. When we have received grace, and know that we have, the infallible indicator of this reception is the fact that we *extend* grace. We pray in the Lord's Prayer that God would treat us as we treat—fill in the blank. We are in effect asking God to take our treatment of our debtors as our working definition of grace, and to please use that definition on us the next time we need it. Now, are our children our debtors or not? How do we treat them? All parents discipline. The thing that distinguishes them is what they discipline for and how they do it. And all discipline brings correction, admonishment, and so forth. It doesn't seem pleasant at the time, but rather painful (Heb. 12:11). But if we have learned the nature of grace, we can see that discipline can be either gracious or selfish. Gracious discipline requires something of a child as a gift to him. Selfish discipline requires something of a child as a gift to the one disciplining.

Bringing it back full circle, let us assume a discussion between a parent and child about a certain objectionable movie the child wants to see. The parent says *no*. We still do not know if the parent is wise. Is he *giving* with this decision? Or *taking*?