

Question: To keep our children from feeling religion is being crammed down their throats shouldn't we allow them to decide for themselves what they believe about God?

There are certain critical times when a child's understanding of right and wrong is developing. During this time, a child's view of God begins to solidify. To enable them to make any kind of choice about God or spirituality, we must provide them with critical, moral and spiritual information about faith in God and Jesus. To deny them this information so they can "decide for themselves" usually guarantees they will decide on nothing at all. This can leave them vulnerable to almost any religious hoaxer who may come along.

Instead of leaving our children vulnerable to all kinds of uninformed and misleading ideas about God, why not teach them to be seekers of truth in all matters, including spiritual information about God and Christ. When it comes to matters of God and spirituality, we all should have some "truth" convictions that guide us. If our spiritual practices are not based on what we believe to be true, then certainly it does not matter what we believe or even if we believe nothing. We do not need to be arrogant and self-righteous to hold definite truth convictions. We can still acknowledge that as humans we may be wrong in our convictions. We can remain open to examining our convictions in a continuing search for truth.

Teaching our children to be truth-seekers is not a way of cramming our religion down their throats. Teaching them truths about faith in God and in Jesus Christ is a way to teach them to think for themselves instead of borrowing a faith from their parents, friends or teachers. This means teaching our children not to accept or reject what parents or anyone else might say just because they say it but to examine all things with the searchlight of truth. But being truth-seekers should also mean humbly recognizing their own fallibility and need for reliable information as they develop a faith of their own. Jesus said that we should "know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Therefore, instead of teaching our children nothing for fear of denying their freedom to decide, I believe Jesus would encourage us to arm our children with instruction and training that will give them genuine freedom as "truth-seekers."

Guided by these principles, we do not deny our children's freedom to choose for themselves; but we

empower them to make good and wise choices. The wisdom of the biblical Proverbs says: “Buy truth, and do not sell *it*, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Proverbs 23:23).

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