

The Chapel Project



CLEARCREEK
CHAPEL

Extreme Parent Transformation

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*S*avoring the *S*upremacy of *G*od
*S*tudying the *W*ord of *G*od
*S*haping the *P*eople of *G*od
*S*preaching the *G*ospel of *G*od

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Radical Transformation

Romans 12:1-2

Russ Kennedy

Introduction So what's up with this?



By MIKE SCHNEIDER, Associated Press Writer ENTERPRISE, Fla. - The dishes, garbage and dirty laundry would pile up for days when Cat and Harlan Barnard's teenage children refused to do their chores. So the Barnards went on strike, moving out of their house and into a domed tent set up in their front driveway. The parents refuse to cook, clean or drive for their children — Benjamin, 17, and Kit, 12 — until they shape up.

"We've tried reverse psychology, upside down psychology, spiral psychology and nothing has motivated them for any length of time," said Cat Barnard, 45, as she sat in a lawn chair at an umbrella-covered table.



The strike took Benjamin and Kit by surprise. They came home from school Monday to find their mother outside with handwritten signs that read "Parents on Strike" and "Seeking Cooperation and Respect!" Cat Barnard, a stay-at-home mom, and her 56-year-old husband, a government social services worker, decided their children needed to learn about empathy and responsibility.

The Barnards unsuccessfully tried smiley-face charts and withholding allowances to get their children to do chores. They even sought help from a psychologist. The tipping point may have been when Benjamin didn't offer to help his sweating, struggling mother work on the lawn Sunday, even though she should have been recovering from oral surgery.

While for many this story strikes us as odd or even funny, many parents resonate with the dilemma the Barnards found themselves in. They are the parents, yet oddly, they are the ones out on the street. Here is a home; here are some parents in real need of an extreme makeover.

On Thursday, January 6 at 9:00PM you can watch a popular show call Extreme Makeover. You can witness the all-new and exciting makeovers of Michael, a 38-year-old deputy sheriff from Huntington Beach, CA, and Tess, a 44-year-old human resources manager from Orlando, FL.



Michael, a Los Angeles Police deputy sheriff and former U.S. national couples figure skater, has endured both physical and emotional pain as a result of his years of police work and pursuing his Olympic dreams. Michael was an alternate in the 1992 U.S. Olympic team and once ranked third in the nation, but his eleven years as a national figure skater took a major toll on his body. Nowadays he's skating solo and chasing criminals, which has resulted in numerous broken bones -- such as his nose, which has been fractured five times. His ex-fiancée recently broke off their engagement just days before their wedding, leaving Mi-

chael heartbroken. While doing time at the makeover mansion, his ex-fiancée surprises him with a phone call and delivers some stunning news. Michael turns to the Extreme Team to give him the chance to mend his broken down body and spirit and to score a perfect 10 once again.

Michael's procedures include a nose job, lower eyelid lift, chin implant, ears pinned back, liposuction of the abdomen, love handles and chin, removal of skin cancer, tattoo removal, Botox on forehead and frown lines, LASIK eye surgery, 1 extraction, 10 upper and 4 lower da Vinci porcelain veneers, and Zoom whitening.



And, further, Michael Thurmond has an Extreme Team Exercise Tip for You: When you are working on reshaping a body part (rear end, legs, tummy) visualize how you want them to look. Believe it or not, your mind has a powerful effect on your body!

Well, if only we could go on a reality TV show and drag our kids with us and come out with an extreme makeover. If only visualizing the way we want to be as parents or our kids to turn out as would make it happen.

But, you know, many, many families are in need of an extreme makeover, a radical transformation. So we set aside each January for our Family Enrichment Conference. During the morning and evening services we address the challenges and changes facing our families.

Our Difficult Challenges

Any way you look at it, parents today face many difficult challenges.

Our Present Situation

In many ways, our present situation is different from earlier generations. At the heart of what makes it different is the technology we are surrounded with. That technology challenges us as parents in several ways.

It brings more rapid change and the sense of dislocation and unease that comes with it. Fashions and fads change faster than we can possibly keep up with. Last week's greatest hit or most watched movie or video are simply melting away on the video rental shelf. Yesterday's sci-fi is today's remote control or PDA. We are watching our world and our sons and daughters change at a frightening rate.

It makes the influence of others more accessible and more attractive than ever before. Media in all its forms is having a powerful affect on you as parents and particularly on your sons and daughters. I want you to hear me (and all the other speakers as well). If you attempt to isolate your children from those influences, you are failing to equip them to deal with all the forms of media when they are out on their own. And make no mistake parents; a great deal of what you think about parenting is powerfully and persuasively presented to you through everyone from Dr. Phil to Dr. Dobson.

It presents temptations and vicarious experiences of sin to your sons and daughters in ways and at times most parents have difficulty wrestling with.

It has accelerated the casting off restraints and in your face expressions of folly. What we are seeing is that younger and younger children are sinning in ways that most of us would have not even known existed, much less how to do at that age. From my first administrative teaching job in a school to the last one spanning 16 years, I saw elementary kids beginning to act in ways that we would have associated with junior high kids. I saw high school age kids who were almost hardened criminals as sophomores and juniors.

In many ways, our present situation is like those of our parents and their parents before them all the way back to Adam and Eve.

We are faced with our own love for ease, comfort and peace at any price. We simply don't want to be bothered by the background din of our children's troubles. Many parents begin with wanting children, have them and treat them as prized possessions. Then grow to feel like they are aliens from another planet.

We are sometimes child-centered parents. The world of your lives is in orbit around your children. All that matters is their happiness, well-being and contentment. Their urges and wants become your leashes. Their complaints or criticisms can ruin your days. They manipulate and manage you to get what they want. And perversely, you prize this and promote this as good parenting.

We are faced with the stark reality of sin. We do things that are wrong. Our children express attitudes and actions that are simply wrong. Adam and Eve woke up one morning to face the horror of a son who had murdered his brother. And on and on it goes. We may not have that. But we can face rebellion, fornication, drunkenness, drug addiction, laziness, folly, irresponsibility – and we are just looking in the mirror.

Some Prevalent Symptoms

So, many of you are thinking to yourself, “This does not describe me or my family at all. After all, my kids are in Christian School or are being home schooled. I have read everything I can get my hands on about parenting. I'm OK.” Well, I hope so. But let me see if I can ask some questions that point to symptoms of parenting troubles.

Do you regularly feel angry or frustrated with your son or daughter? Notice I said, *regularly*. Is there a habitual or thematic anger in your relationship with your sons or daughters?

Do you ever find yourself yelling at or with your son or daughter? Maybe it isn't the volume but the tone? The edgy sarcasm passed off as witty comments. Or do you find yourself simply avoiding them? You see what they are doing and wearing or listening to or engaged in or watching and you simply turn away?

Do you ever hear yourself saying, “You make me feel sad when you...”? Or the classic, “When I was growing up we would never have...”? Or maybe as a Christian, “I did everything I was supposed to and look how you...”

Does this ever happen in your home? You walk into your teenager's room and the pause button is quickly hit or the screen is blanked? Something is put away or slipped into a pocket?

The Prescribed Solutions

We certainly have no shortage of prescribed solutions. There is a massive industry in parent advice, both Christian and non-Christian. I have made a point in preparation for this series, to peruse many of the most popular web sites aimed at helping parents. Here is what I find.

There is little moral basis for the parenting guidelines or advice. The startling thing in even a lot of religious, and dare I say, even Christian parenting books, is the use of the Bible without the authority of the Bible. In other words, the Bible is not approached as having an authoritative, much less sufficient, final word on parenting.

Most of the deeply insightful advice used to be the passed-on common sense of prior generations. I don't care where you look, the whole self-help industry in both the secular and religious worlds are simply various forms of advice, some of it common sense, some of it silly and some of it foolish and destructive.

Parenting is mostly about what my children become. It is entirely pragmatic. My job as a parent is to produce a certain kind of child. What that product is supposed to be will be defined by my philosophy of life, my religion. At the end of the day, it will be shaped by my own heart trusts and treasures.

Parenting is mostly about technique. It is mostly about the how-to of what I do as a parent. My own observation is that much of it are techniques to overcome our own character failures that are being transmitted to and mimicked by our children.

Parenting advice is dominated by the psychologies of the day. The more I read in all areas, the more I am struck by the fact, and I mean fact, that the psychologies are presenting alternative spiritualities. They tell parents what their children ought to be like, what they ought to prize and aim for, and the techniques to achieve those aims.

I can go on and on. We need an authoritative, sufficient Word on parenting from the Designer of families whose commands and counsel make up wisdom. Then we need to take the precepts and principles from God's Word, marry them to our present life situations and develop practical steps of action for parenting that pleases God.

But that is not where we start. If we do what I am talking about above, we may merely become moralists, behaviorists or even worse, Pharisees. In other words, extreme parent transformation does not begin with external, measurable, behaviors. It must begin in the heart. Radical transformation is not an extreme makeover. It is deep and difficult and decisive heart change.

Our Biblical Direction

Now we need to turn to the Bible for direction and answers. If we are going to be transformed as parents, Romans 12:1-2 starts and shapes us in our pursuit. If you are going to make progress along the way, then you must understand two essential truths.

Just as we you must not go around Romans 12:1-2 to get to the rest of the book, you must not go around it to try to be different as a parent (or in any other realm of life). Further, we must not sever Romans 12:1-1 from Romans 1-11. So there is a danger in picking up these two verses by themselves. The danger is that we will try to be changed in our parenting without the gospel.

Romans 1-11 are about the gospel, about the good news of the redeeming work of God in Christ. The good news first tells us about our sin, where it comes from and how it spirals downward. It warns us of its consequences in depravity, despair and death. It shows us the awfulness of our sin. Then the gospel gives us the good news that Christ delivers us from our sinful condition and our sinful practice. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, we have been set free from sin so that we are no longer its subjects, under its dominion, rule or power. The gospel also tells us the good news that God planned our salvation in such a way that all His people would actually possess what was promised and possible. Finally, the gospel also tells us the good news that this wonderful salvation brings us into an unbreakable and inseparable relationship with God.

Now, if this is what the gospel, the good news tells us, then how are we going to live it out in the day-to-day mess? How do we move from an explanation of the gospel to application of the gospel? Well, we do it through two radical steps that put us on the path of pleasing God.

A Sacrificial Presentation of our Bodies (v.1)

Paul couches this in terms of an appeal or an exhortation. What he calls for should weigh heavy on us because where he grounds it. Because of or through God's multiplied mercies to us, we ought to respond by presenting our bodies to God. This is a decisive act – there is an initial dedication at our salvation that is constantly renewed in holy and God-pleasing sacrifices day by day. Having presented yourself to God, be standing before God as a living sacrifice.

That we are to present ourselves, our bodies as living sacrifices gathers up the Old Testament story of Isaac and the death and resurrection of Jesus as its root themes. At the end of the day, what is being called for here is for us to be willing to live as a sacrifice – to die to our own agenda and live to serve God and His kingdom. Further, this living sacrifice is to be holy and acceptable to God – it is to meet His standards and requirements.

This is so very important. God defines parenting radically different from the way the world does. Parenting in the Bible is not about what is produced, but in faithfulness to what God requires. Doing all that God requires guarantees you nothing except that you have pleased God. But failure to please God in our own character and conduct as parents then contributes to, but does not cause, the sinfulness of our children. In order to keep on pleasing God even when it doesn't seem to be

working requires a decisive commitment of ourselves to God. It will be hard. It will mean sacrifice, not in the common way we think of it, but in ways that God will use to expose our own heart. In other words, you must present yourself to God as a living sacrifice so that you will be holy and pleasing to God in your parenting.

We are to do this because this is how true rational or spiritual worship and service of God is defined. Worship is not just a Sunday event; it is the moment by moment stream of believing God in an obeying way – living obediently by grace.

A Transforming Renewal of our Minds (v.2)

Understand this: the gospel comes to us as an agent of change. It requires that we turn from self to our Savior, from worshipping and serving and being mastered by our idols to worshipping, serving and being mastered by God. The gospel is about how Christ through His death, resurrection and Spirit changes us from self-absorbed sinners to God-besotted saints, that is, how the gospel conforms us to Christ. So there must be an obedience of faith in the gospel that is grounded in a commitment to change.

While it is easy to treat verses 1 and 2 as though they are parallel, verse 2 serves to expand on the “holy and acceptable to God” qualification of the living sacrifice. The body is presented worthily to God because the inward man has been radically transformed by a renewed mind and an exercised discernment. So, we do not have step 1 and step 2. We have the whole (v.1) of which (v.2) is the core.

Now let us look at this a bit more closely.

The imperative here is *A SINGLE COMMAND* stated through two words: not conformed but transformed. We are not to be shaped by the world’s mold – its vision or values. This means that we must not conform to the idols of our own past – the world of our flesh and pre-salvation life. We must be undergoing a radical *metamorphosis* – a radical change into what God has designed and destined us for in Christ. There is a pattern of this age that seeks to master us and shape us. And there is the pattern of Christ whom we serve and by whom we are shaped.

This radical transformation is first, *AN INWARD ONE*. It has to do with rebuilding and renewing our minds. Paul elsewhere talks of bringing every thought captive to obedience of Christ. This inward mind renewal has two major aspects:

- The replacement of error with truth – the identifying of where we believe lies, myths and philosophies and replacing them with truth, doctrine and a Person, the Lord Jesus. This is our formal, “I believe in an obeying way” life statements. This is where we tend to be poured into the world’s mold, where our thinking about parenting is mostly shaped by what the world says and what it values and treasures.
- The renewal of our inner conversations – our “self-talk”. There is a constant inner stream of words by which we anticipate, experience and interpret life. This self-talk is either pleasing or displeasing to God – self-oriented or God-others oriented. It includes fantasies, inner debate, moral weighing, warnings from conscience. It is often unobserved and rarely

closely analyzed. It is how what we believe informs our wills and shapes affections. It interacts with our wants and desires, either reinforcing them or reacting against them.

What is being called for here is a radical change in our thinking – its content and stream that leads to a radical change in our behavior.

The renewal of mind that transforms us both *VIEW*s and also *VALUE*s God's will. It *discerns* God's will and *delights* in God's will and *does* God's will. We are not here talking about subjective leading in decision-making. We are talking about wisdom – knowing God's Word, bringing to bear on our situation to illuminate it, interpret it and indicate the path of righteousness in it.

Now it is imperative for me to say this: you must not only view, discern or know what God's will is, you must also value, delight or want God's will. Many, many people clearly know what God's Word says about life situations, but do not want or prize God's will. Remember, our choices and emotions flow out of what we think and what we want. So to *discern* God's will means that we *delight* in God's will as good, acceptable and perfect.

Conclusion Does this surprise you? It shouldn't. Permanent, radical transformation in your parenting can only happen along the trajectory of Biblical truth.

You do what you do and feel the way you do, you behave and experience emotions, because of what is going on in your inner man, your heart. Your heart, according to the Bible, is the center of your beliefs and your wants. What you actually believe drives your wants. The two of these are the source of your choices and your emotions.

Trying to change your emotions or your actions directly may bring short term relief, but will not produce lasting change. Real lasting change will come as you repent at the heart level. Real lasting transformation comes when your thoughts and wants are changed.

God's Word defines beliefs, wants, choices and emotions that are pleasing to God. In other words, Biblical parenting will involve both the inner and outer person. Idolatrous wants must be repented of as well as the angry words those wants produce must be changed into gracious, edifying words.

So let me challenge you to change – to seeking out what God says and bowing to Him and His Word. Keep on presenting yourself to God to a dying kind of life. Don't let the world pour you into its mold. Examine everything you believe and want, poised to change them. Heed carefully the commands and counsel of God's Word. Join us each Sunday evening as we work out practical wisdom under God's Word for God pleasing parenting.

It Takes a Village

Hebrews 3:12-13

Russ Kennedy

Introduction How could this be? Listen to these excerpts from the news:

(MSN/NBC) On April 20, 1999 two high school students in Littleton, Colorado went on a shooting spree in the "safe" confines of a suburban high school. Both of the young men involved in this tragedy had undergone "counseling" and "anger Management counseling" during the previous year. The leader was on antidepressants. Their marching into school one day and massacring their school mates should have been predicted and prevented.

(CBS/AP) A woman accused of drowning her three children cried and wiped her eyes Thursday as a judge read the first-degree murder charges against her and told her she could be eligible for the death penalty. Amanda L. Hamm, 27, did not enter a plea. Neither did her boyfriend, Maurice Lagrone Jr., 28, who is also charged in the case. The children drowned Sept. 2 when the car they were in plunged into Clinton Lake. Hamm and Lagrone are each charged with nine counts of first-degree murder. Authorities have not said what they believe happened that day at the lake or why they believe Hamm's children were intentionally killed.

It was a cold day in Chicago. Three elementary age boys are playing together. Suddenly the youngest boy falls out of the window. Several stories up. He plunges to his death. To everyone's shock and dismay, the police investigation uncovers that the other two boys threw him out of the window. How could this happen? Where were their parents? Could the cold blooded murder of a playmate be attributed to some horrendous failure in parenting?

What is to be done? The reactions to these terrible events cover the whole spectrum. Words flow across pages, fill books, articles and web sites. People wring their hands, make some noise and then go on with life. Because of such extreme failure in parenting, there must be some extreme change in parenting.

How will we respond? How will we rise up as a culture, as a community of people living as neighbors? Where will parents turn they are in trouble? Did all the counseling prevent the Columbine massacre? How did Andrea Yates end up drowning her children when she was in a religious community of loving friends and neighbors? How does she come to the point that she thinks her drowning those kids was a way of protecting them from danger?

Whose voice will give us answers?

Contemporary Thinking on Community

Examining the Village's Voice

A number of years ago, Hilary Clinton brought into the popular idiom at well know African proverb. She entitled her vision of parenting and child-rearing, *It Takes a Village*. Mrs. Clinton articulated a powerful and winsome presentation that took the proverb and used it as a metaphor for her statist vision.

Its Attractive Presentation

“Imagine a country in which nearly all children between the ages of three and five attend preschool in sparkling classrooms, with teachers recruited and trained as child care professionals. Imagine a country that conceives of child care as a program to 'welcome' children into the larger community and 'awaken' their potential for learning and growing.” H. Clinton, *It Takes a Village*.

Or consider this:

“Children are like the tiny figures at the center of the nesting dolls for which Russian folk artists are famous. The children are cradled in the family, which is primarily responsible for their passage from infancy to adulthood. But around the family are the larger settings of neighborhood, school, church, workplace, community, culture, economy, society, nation, and world, which affect children directly or through the well-being of their families.” *Op. cit.*

Now, this all sounds well and good. In fact, I would argue that some of what she is observing is not a radically new vision, but rather the nature of the way things are. She is seeing, in the midst of fallenness, the outlines of God's design.

But all is not well in the village. Many unbelievers saw through her dream and recognized it for the nightmare it really is.

“This then is the paradox of Ms Clinton's book: she extols the family, the village and the Russian folk doll, but at every turn she seeks to replace the layers that surround our children with a one-to-one relationship between them and government. For all the lip service she pays to traditional families and communities, her ultimate faith seems to reside only in government. In effect, since she's even chosen a life in government--first as a spouse and now as a legislator in her own right--we might say she trusts only herself to tell us how to raise children. Maybe that's the point of the whole exercise, because what this book is really telling us is one simple thing: it takes Hillary Clinton to raise a child.” Review of *It Takes a Village*.

One even responded with, "It takes a village to raise a village idiot." Cooper Wiseman.

Its Philosophical Roots

The philosophical roots, for many like Mrs. Clinton, are in the idea of government as our mother and father, our protector and our provider. The effect is to take the very limited role God has assigned government and expand to be the all omnipotent hand. Government becomes god. The village then is not uncles and aunts, loving neighbors, friends and families. The village is the power of the chief and the witch doctor to compel communal ownership.

Now it is almost trite in Christian circles to attack the ever increasing and dominating role of government in our lives. This problem is energized by two inescapable realities. Sinners are in government. Government enables the power and control some sinners crave. The result is that government tends to attract the kind of sinners who crave power and control. Since sinners tend to be in rebellion against the restrictions God places, then that causes them to expand the role of government to exceed the restrictions God has placed on it.

Its Practical Results

What practical consequences can we see from this worldly view of the village?

There is the ever increasing intrusion of government into the culture – its home, business, religious life. This is everywhere in laws, regulations, taxes, fees and government certifications of vocations.

There is an ever increasing dependence upon government to shield people from the consequences of their choices. This is so evident in the welfare system and Social Security system.

There is an ever increasing disregard, disobedience and denial of even the legitimate role of government. This is a result of the impact of law on depravity. The solution to moral failure is not the implementation of new and better laws, but rather moral reformation in the heart and character.

Sadly, what I have just described becomes the functional model for a lot of parenting. Parents assert ever increasing rules, regulations, control with an increasing dependence on the parents for everything with the result of ever increasing of disregard, disrespect and disobedience to parents.

Evaluating the Christian Responses

So how do Christians tend to respond? Here is an example from a poem by Glenn Conjurske.

It Takes A Village

It takes a village (so we're told), to raise a child today.
It takes a village (we reply), to steal his heart away,
To purge old-fashioned do's and don'ts from his enlightened mind,
To leave old fashioned Ma and Pa a hundred years behind.

It takes a village, verily, to teach some mother's son,
To steal and gamble, smoke and swear, and vandalize for fun.
His mother didn't teach him that! His father? No, not he.
It takes a village to corrupt, a village, verily.

It takes a village, this we know, to teach the maidens sweet,
To dress and act, to look and talk, like women of the street.
It takes a village, not a doubt, to teach a maiden mild,
To save the monkeys, owls, and whales, and kill her unborn child.

It takes a village public school, some subtle classroom chats,
To teach the little boys and girls to act like alley cats.
To teach them of the birds and bees, without morality,
To teach them what to do, and how, and tell them they are free.

It takes a village, yes indeed, to brainwash all the youth,
With notions and with fallacies, In place of sense and truth.
Abortion rights! The right to die! The rights of animals!
Creative spelling! Unisex! The rights of criminals!

It takes a village, well we know, to turn their minds away,
To stand for fancied "children's rights", and parents' rights deny.
To honor human nature less, And trees and rivers more.
To sacrifice to Mother Earth, and Father God ignore.

"It takes a village," so they say, but something more they mean.
United Nations. Washington. The liberal machine.
Society. The "Brave New World." The socialistic scheme.
The global ideology. The New World Order dream!

Glenn Conjurske

I want to take a moment to classify the responses,

Integration – Adopt with Adjustments

There is a kind of Christian response that integrates this socialistic, statist view of parenting and child-rearing, making adjustments only where it is blatantly unbiblical. We are not much exposed to it, but an even cursory search of the Web and popular religious media demonstrates this.

Individualism – Oppose with Opposite

Many Christians respond with a sort of rugged, retrograde individualism. They will not be dependent nor accountable to anyone. They are going to engage the culture and involve themselves as Christians in it, but they will do so alone and largely separate from other believers in our parenting. They will do it largely on their own.

Isolationism – Retreat into Refuges

The opposite extreme turns homes into retreats and refuges. People shield themselves and their children from most influence from the outside. While they may take counsel from the church's ordained leadership, they will generally parent as they see fit.

Usually, people simply function on one of the above, but don't say it. Even in writing it out like this, it rubs. Our problem is that we do allow the world to pour us into its mold – sometimes by adopting it and sometimes by reacting just in the opposite direction.

Biblical Thinking on Community

What then does the Bible teach us about parenting together? Does the Bible support one of the above reactions? Do we simply reject the idea of corporate responsibility in parenting? Do we hand over our parenting to the church for it to do what we will not or cannot?

Its Canonical Development

How does the Bible develop this theme? I see it in four major steps in the Scripture.

Grounded in the Trinity

God is a community. One of the basic insights from the doctrine of the Trinity is the idea of personhood and community. God is three persons in one essence. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet one God. There is an interaction, relationship and role subordination among the persons yet an essential equality and unity in God's essence.

The idea of a community where individual persons work together in relationships toward shared goals is grounded in the nature of God. Human community is derived from this truth. We are imaging and reproducing what God is in His very essence.

It is not surprising then that God has designed people to live in the context of relationships defined as community. What is significant though is that God is the ultimate environment of all community. He is also the determiner of the extent and limitations of each sphere.

Illustrated in Redemptive History

This is clearly worked out in the Bible itself. From the Garden of Eden through to the return from exile, God's people do not live in isolation. They

Genesis 1

are to live in community. It is punishment for Cain to be exiled to wandering. Man lives in clans and in cities almost from the beginning.

As the Bible unfolds, God rejects rebellious communities, such as Babel. He recognizes the patriarchal households and clans as communities in which righteousness is cultivated or sin is exacerbated. Then, in establishing Israel as a nation, God also emphasizes the need and the dangers of community. But the overarching thrust is for believing Jews to walk with God, not in isolation, but together as God's people.

The trajectory through redemptive history is to continually define the need for community until we arrive at the New Covenant community of the gathered church. Here is a community of people who may not be geographical neighbors, but who are to live as a believing covenanted community within the larger culture around them. This believing community was to gather for teaching, worship, accountability, mission and so on. But it was to exist as a network of dependent relationships supporting one another for holiness and strengthening one another for an evangelistic engagement with the culture, the community in which it existed.

So, the community of the church is an expression of the Godhead, an extension of our in heaven status and an expectation of true believers. As we see it in the New Testament, it was to be a community within the culture engaged with it, not a compound with walls around it to keep the culture out. It is to be a loving neighborhood believers committed to one another for each other's good and God's glory. In a moment, we will examine one paragraph out of a huge cluster of paragraphs, that will shape and sharpen us for parenting in community.

Culminated in Eternity

Revelation 21

What God launched in the Garden, He brings to full and final expression in eternity future. The vision of Revelation 20 and following is that of a new heavens and new earth where God's redeemed people rule, live and work. But they do so as a perfect community of the redeemed. The bride is a city. So the idea of a network of relationships for righteousness is not only a matter for time, but a great expectation in eternity as well.

Its Practical Design

Hebrews 3:12-13

But let us take up this important text in Hebrews. Tonight, we will take up its companion text later in Hebrews and work out detailed, practical steps of action to implement in our own church community, parenting for righteousness.

The Heart Problem

(v.12)

The Bible warns that *OUR PROBLEM IS A HEART PROBLEM*. Parenting issues are heart issues. Our problem in parenting is not our children, our situation, our upbringing and so on. Our problem is how we respond from our heart in the midst of these things. God uses all of the situational stuff to expose our hearts. You parent from the heart. So the question is: are your beliefs and wants shaped by the Scriptures?

The Bible also warns us that *OUR PROBLEM IS ONE OF FAITH AND UNBELIEF*. Hebrews is developing idea that disobedience is a fruit of disbelief. Look at Hebrews 3:18-19. They could not enter because of disobedience (v.18) arising from unbelief (v.19). Their unbelieving hearts were exposed by the wilderness, by the challenges of entering Canaan and by the situations God brought them into. That they were unbelieving is evident from their complaining, their hankering to return to Egypt, their rejection of the difficulties God brought them, their rebellion against their leadership and their failure cross the Jordon and enter the promised land. So, your parenting issues will arise from a heart that does not believe what God says. You will know that because of disobedience. You will know it because of anger, frustrations, hopelessness, fear. You will express it in words and ways with your children that do not please God. And while your behavior and feelings must change, they must be changed first at the heart level.

The Bible warns us that *PERSISTENT HEART UNBELIEF IS EVIDENCE OF NO RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD*. If we are unwilling or unable to address the issues of the heart, to believe God in an obeying way, it exposes us being, yes, unbelievers. Being a Christian begins with an initial act of belief in God and bowing to Him. But being a Christian means that you are continuing to repent by believing and bowing to God.

The Bible warns us to *PAY ATTENTION TO THIS FACT*. We must consciously focus on whether we are believing God in an obeying way. We must listen to what we are thinking, what we believe and want. The flow of words in our heart must be heard, examined, repented of and replaced when necessary. Most Christian parenting needs to turn from a primary emphasis on the outward to a primary emphasis on the inward.

The Biblical Prescription

(v.13)

So, what does this have to do with “it takes a village?” What does this have to do with living in the midst of community as Christians? Verse 13 gives us the Biblical prescription. We are to watch and warn one another.

Look at several key words that make up this prescription. What I am about to say is going to be unpacked in view of parenting. But parenting is one sphere, one category, one area of our lives in which we need one another, we need the counsel and correction of living in community.

WE ARE TO EXHORT ONE ANOTHER. This word conveys the sense of helping people move forward, often with encouragement. We hear the word “coaching” used a lot today. It is the kind of engagement with one another that recognizes “we are all needing help and we are all helpers.” P. Tripp The ministry is not one of condemnation, judgment, imputing motives, criticism and so on. It is a humble, “Can I be of help?” as well as, “I need your help and insight.” This ministry of exhortation with one another in the context of church/community relationships is the antidote and the prescription for the disease of unbelief. Therefore, it is a one anothering in love, encouragement, insight, wisdom and experience. It is not the application of my way as the only way, but being an instrument of seeing – of seeing themselves and see-

ing what God says and then working it out together. It is not a ministry of giving lists of do's and don'ts – it is the privilege of thinking through Scripture and situations so that God's wisdom emerges.

WE ARE TO DO IT EVERY DAY. Here is the really challenging thing. We are to do this any time we can say it is “Today”. Is this spiritual nagging? No, but it is an expression of spiritual love and concern. Again, we tend to think of church as this periodic event with the people who are there. You need to change that thinking. You are the church. This body of people are a gathered church. Your life is intricately woven into the lives of everyone here *whether you realize it or not*. I am convinced that we need each other much more than we think and certainly than we do. Parenting is one of the most challenging things you can do. You need the regular, yes if possible, daily exhortation of people who love you and you love who are in the midst of the mess with you.

WE ARE TO DO IT BECAUSE OF SIN'S DECEITFULNESS. Every day exhortation is needed because sin fools us. Sin deceives us. We are easily deceived by our sin. We need each other as God's means of seeing ourselves so that we are not snookered by sin. Parenting is particularly vulnerable to sin's deceptions because our children can easily become our idols.

So let me ask. Have you, in the last 6 months, had serious conversations with anyone else in this church in relationship to parenting or child-rearing? We have many mature, seasoned saints here. We have many young parents just beginning the journey. We parents who have done well over the years and some who have seen the consequences of unbiblical parenting. Let's watch over and warn one another so that we will not be deceived by sin, we will be encouraged to believe God and exhorted with practical steps for daily obedience.

In conclusion, let's highlight some lessons.

Conclusion

We must have a Biblical view of parenting that includes serious interaction with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Again, the village is your church, your network of Christ-treasuring, Bible loving, holy living relationships. Do you have them?

We must humble ourselves to be helped and have the courage to be a helper. This is not about a judgmental declaration, but about a loving discussion. This is a way of carrying out a love, know, speak and do engagement with people.

We need all the means of grace so that we will live by faith. May God give us the grace to see and feel our own need for each other.

Does it take a village? No, it takes a church – a loving community of committed people who purpose to learn God's Word, love God and His people, to live by faith and lean on one another.

Parenting in Community

Hebrews 10:24-25

Russ Kennedy & Greg Cook

NOTE: This talk was done as joint presentation by the Pastor Russ and Pastor Greg.

Introduction

Greg

I served on a leadership board at another church. I can remember very vividly one discussion that we were having about a single mother and her rebellious teenage daughter who were members of that church. The daughter was disruptive and disrespectful, both in the youth Sunday School class as well as the youth meetings on Sunday evening. It had gotten so bad, that the teachers were asking that she be removed from the classes until she could prove herself able to participate in a constructive manner. The teachers complained that they couldn't teach and that she was adversely affecting the rest of the class members. The mother was pleading that this was the only godly influence in her daughter's life and couldn't we please help her with her daughter. It was brought to the board to decide what to do with her daughter.

The discussion was lively, but not moving toward any kind of conclusion. I suggested to the rest of the men that it was our responsibility, as her church family and leadership, to help her parent her daughter. She was a single mom, poor, working two jobs to try to make ends meet, and living in an area of town that none of us were willing to live in ourselves. I said that we needed to come along side this mother and help her learn to parent and we needed to be like a father to this young girl.

One of the other men brought the whole discussion to an abrupt conclusion by quickly proclaiming that parenting was a personal and private matter that was not the business of anyone other than the family, much less the business of the church. He prevailed and the rest of the men agreed. It was decided that the daughter would be forbidden to be a part of the youth group until she was able to be a positive contribution to it.

Was that a true reflection of what the Scriptures teach about our gathered community of believers? I hope that after this morning's message you recognize that the conclusion decided by that board was inconsistent with Biblical teachings. Tonight Russ and I would like to address the Biblical principles of our gathered community as it pertains to rearing children and give some practical applications of those principles.

The privileges that shape our thinking about being a gathered community:

We have a confident entrance into heavenly realities (v.19-20).

We have a compassionate High Priest over God's household (v.21).

The responsibilities and warnings that orient our being a gathered community:

We should draw near with a true heart and a holy conduct (v.22) with the danger that we drift from God and decline in godliness.

We should publicly and practically maintain our confession of faith (v.23) with the danger that we deny union with Christ and the congregation through our attitudes or actions.

We should watch and warn over each other's lives (v.24-25) with the danger that we become uncaring, distant and alienated from one another.

This third responsibility is our primary focus as we think together about parenting in community. Remember three essential truths must be believed and embraced if we are to please God in this area of parenting. (These were taught in the prior lesson on Sunday Morning.)

God is a community who is a Father and a parent within that community.

God's people have been taught to be engaged with and accountable to one another within the framework appropriate for their place in redemptive history.

God has established the gathered church as the His local kingdom community where believers are to watch and warn over one another.

So, how do we parent together as a community of believers?

Building Relationships – Knowing One Another

Its Biblical Foundation

The phrase, "let us consider one another" means that we are to know one another well. I see this because *one another* here is the receiver of the action of consider. This construction has been used before in the epistle. In Hebrews 3:1, we are to "consider" or to "fix our thoughts on Jesus." Same word. Same structure. If we are to consider by focusing our thoughts and attentions on Jesus in such a way that we learn of Him and know Him and cultivate a relationship with Him, is that not what is in view here? In Hebrews 3:1, consider Jesus; in Hebrews 10:24, consider one another.

So we must know one another. What is actually commanded here is a focusing of our attention on one another that grows and develops our relationships and our knowledge that is like the way we are to develop our relationship with Jesus.

Its Practical Application

Here are some practical steps in getting to know one another for the sake of our parenting.

Expand your circle of friendships

Most of us have a circle of friends. We have commonalities that draw us to each other. We have shared experiences, children of similar ages, situations that are similar, personalities that complement each other, etc, etc, etc. We have chosen our particular circle because it is comfortable and doesn't take a lot of work. But it is that comfort of familiarity that may be depriving all of us of the ministry that we need from each other. In 2 Corinthians 1, we suffer and are comforted by God so that we can comfort others with the same comfort we received. There are people in the Chapel who have the comfort that you need, but you don't know them well enough to receive that comfort. There are people in the Chapel that need your comfort, and you don't know them well enough to have the opportunity to give that comfort.

Why not make a list of the people that are in your current circle of friends. Then, go through the Chapel directory and make another list of people that you want to include in your circle of friends. Make specific plans to include them. This doesn't have to be formal or costly. By making the details clear at the beginning about what is going to happen and who is responsible for what, these initial approaches should be more relaxed and easier to initiate. Make a goal for expanding your circle of friends this year, and then plan on how to make it happen.

Learn the art of godly listening

The only way we are going to get to know each other better is by developing the discipline of being good, godly listeners to our circle of friends. There is no way that we can know other people in the way that this text requires without listening to them in a God-honoring way.

Be present – this involves both outwardly and inwardly.

First of all, we should be present, both outwardly and inwardly. By outwardly I mean what your body "says"; what we refer to as body language. You should be facing the speaker, not turned sideways or with your back to them. You shouldn't have your arms folded across your chest, or be pushed back in your chair. You need to lean forward slightly with a relaxed posture. And you should have good eye contact. Don't look around the room, or acknowledge the presence of other people. Don't stare out the window, or look at other objects close at hand. Focus on that person, giving them your undivided attention.

By inwardly I mean what you are saying and thinking to yourself while the other person is talking. Are you thinking and planning what you are going to say next? Are you hoping that they will hurry up and get finished so you can talk? Are you thinking about something totally different? Are your thoughts far, far away? Are you thinking that this is not important and you are just trying your best to be polite? Or, are you concentrating on what the other person is saying, feeling, and trying to get across to you? Are you trying to enter their world and understand it from their point of view?

Don't interrupt

Next, we should make it our practice not to interrupt. We interrupt by telling a story that is better than the other person's story. We interrupt by finishing their sentences for them. We interrupt by breaking in and telling them that we understand, or that we already know what they are going to say. Godly listening doesn't interrupt.

Give appropriate feedback

Appropriate feedback involves nodding your head, having short comments in appropriate places like "Wow", "Really?" "Hum" "Is that right" "Tell me more". You get the picture. It indicates to the person that you really are listening and are tracking with them. There is nothing more frustrating than having someone looking at you with a blank stare saying or doing nothing at all.

Ask clarifying questions

Even though we all use the English language, we each bring a different background of experiences with us attached to those words. So the use of words by one person with their set of definitions attached does not mean that the receiving person has the same definition or understanding of those words. Each person believes they have communicated and received the same information, but in reality it has not been transmitted and received in the same way with the same understanding and interpretation. In order to really understand what someone is saying, questions must be asked for clarification.

Practice godly love and humility while being a listener.

We also have the ability to attach motives to words that may or may not be what the speaker intended. Practicing what 1 Corinthians 13 teaches about love means that we give the other person the benefit of the doubt. If your interpretation of their comments has a negative connotation to you, then you need to clarify with questions framed in humility, that is, giving the benefit of the doubt to that person, in order to see if your interpretation is correct. You assume that your interpretation was incorrect until proven otherwise.

If we are going to "consider one another" – if we are going to get to know each other as this text instructs, then we must make a conscientious effort to expand our circle of friends, and get to know each other better by practicing godly listening.

Overcoming Inertia - Motivating One Another

Its Biblical Foundation

The word here is to stimulate, to provoke, to stir up. We can think of prodding someone along. The idea of these two is captured by our translations. We need to care for one another by knowing each other so well that we can motivate and stir one another up. The Bible has more motivational material than imperatives or instructions. This usually comes as a surprise to people. What we learn from this is that simple instruction may bring people to know what they ought to do, but it does not necessarily bring the grace to believe it and desire it. In other words, part of what it takes to give grace is working hard at the motivational aspects.

Now, a word of caution. Biblical motivating is not worldly manipulation. Worldly manipulation plays on a person's weaknesses, vulnerabilities and so on often using deceit at some level to move people. Even guilt can be used the wrong way to get people to do the opposite what they are doing without true repentance. Studying 1st and 2nd Corinthians and Galatians will be a great help in seeing how Paul motivates all kinds of Christians to godly faith and conduct.

Its Practical Application

This is a real challenge for us. How can we Biblically motivate one another?

Ask questions that help us engage hearts

One way we can motivate is to ask questions that help us engage our hearts and the hearts of those with whom we are talking. What kind of questions should we ask and what should we be asking about? Those are good questions. We could spend several hours discussing this, but let me give some general thoughts.

We need to be listening for words that characterize emotions. Such words as "I'm scared." "I'm angry." "I'm discouraged." "I'm sad." These little clues should be explored with questions.

We also need to be listening for words that interpret life. Such words as "God must be angry with me." "God just isn't hearing my prayers." "I guess I deserve kids like this." These words need to be explored with questions.

And we need to be listening for words that express what the person is saying to themselves. Such words as "I feel like quitting." "I'm tired of being the only one who does anything." "I'm such a failure." These words need to be explored with questions.

All of this goes back to being a godly listener. Is this relationship just a social interaction with other believers, or is this a relationship brought about by God in order to be used of God for the mutual ministry of growth and change to each other? Your mindset will determine how you listen and respond to the opportunities God brings into this body of believers here at the Chapel.

Help people to be motivated biblically

And we need to motivate our brothers and sisters biblically. This involves understanding what we ought to trust and treasure.

As Russ said, we don't want to get involved in manipulation. We want to motivate in ways that Christ and Paul motivated. We have been teaching about the heart from this pulpit and in classes for a number of years. Last Sunday we talked about changing our hearts. We need to get to know what we believe to be true about God and about parenting. We need to see what it is that we want from parenting and from our children. And as we allow other believers to help us see what we believe and what we want, then they can help us when we stray by believing the lies of this world's philosophy and helping us to see what it is we want and desire more than we want God. All of these elements are interrelated. We must know each other and allow others to know us intimately enough to be able to motivate in a biblical manner.

How do we motivate biblically? We do so by providing structure. We help our brother by helping him see how to specifically apply the changes in thoughts and desires that are necessary in concrete ways in his life. We also provide guidance. When he doesn't know the wheres, the whens, and the hows of change, we are there to help. We also provide encouragement. We know him well enough to know those times of temptation and weakness and will provide encouragement during those times. We will also provide warning when disobedience and rebellion rear their ugly heads. We will remind him of the harvest that will come from what is sown.

Motivating one another involves questions that engage the heart and Biblical motivation born out of the knowledge gained from those questions expressed through love and concern for that brother or sister.

Cultivating Righteousness – Having Biblical Objectives

Its Biblical Foundation

To what end are we to study people in order to know how to stir them up. What is it that we are trying to motivate people to do? We are to study and know people well in order to stir them up and motivate to love and good works. We want to be pushing people in their loving and in their serving. We want to know what hot buttons in people's lives stir up the grace of God in them so that they are energized to deeds of sacrificial love for one another.

Notice that two categories are given here: toward love and good deeds. This is an amazing exhortation for parenting. We are to stir up people to truly love their children and to do what is pleasing to God for their children. In other words, we are to help each other be on the alert for being shaped by our culture in these areas. We must help one another see where we have a way of engaging our sons and daughters that is love as defined by the world and not by the Scripture. A key example of this is in spanking, or the use of the rod. Proverbs clearly says that if we do not spank our children we do not love them (Proverbs 13:24). True love then is not the withholding of correction, but the administration of Biblical discipline. When we do not discipline, we are not expressing true, godly love. Contrary to what the world teaches, the Bible teaches us that we are assured of our relationship with God and experience His love through His chastening of us (Hebrews

12). So, here is one area of motivating towards love in parenting that has very practical ramifications.

Its Practical Application

What kinds of practical steps can we implement so that we are moving toward Biblically defined objectives?

Talk much with each other about what the Bible commands

It is such a comfort to know that the Creator of all the universe has an owner's manual for rearing human beings. The problem that most of us have is that we have not read and studied the manual adequately in order to be able to know the Biblically defined objectives for our child rearing. Most of us were ill-equipped to be parents. And all of us are walking on the same road of parenting. Our situations and kids are not unique. You are not the first, nor will you be the last, to face the issues that you are facing. Just knowing that other parents have been through issues and understands the temptations and delights that we are experiencing is encouragement all its own. To see that God provided for them and see what others learned that His Word said about issues brings energy and the ability to love our children and be pleasing to God in our child rearing.

We must use our times of getting to know each other as times of talking about what the Bible commands for us as parents as well as for our children. We must encourage each other with the Scriptures and their application to our parenting. The encouragement that comes through sharing what God has done in our lives with us as parents and with our children can be just what is needed to help others on their way.

Be sure that you deal with the issues in your own child-rearing

I am going to be talking about developing trusting relationships during the next point. But for now, I want us to be reminded that when we talk with each other about what the Bible commands and how we have experienced those commands, there are two temptations. The first involves someone taking it upon themselves to be the parenting patrol. And the second involves being open to someone coming to us with concerns for us as parents or for our children.

We have the teaching on the log and the speck found in Matthew 7 for our guide in these issues. We are a community of believers that are charged with the responsibility to stir up and encourage each other. But that is sometimes greatly misunderstood and misused. We have a responsibility to help each other along in our parenting and that will involve talking to each other about issues that we observe. The temptation is to get defensive when we are approached and to ignore what the other person is saying by looking at all of their faults and failures. If we are going to obey this text in Hebrews, then we need to be sensitive to each other and be willing to take a close look at our lives when someone has the courage to approach us about issues they believe need to be addressed. At the same time, we need to be careful that we have looked at ourselves in the mirror of the Word of God before we make blanket

statements about other parents and their children. We have a tendency to observe the child of another believe and make the comment that my kid will never be like that. Or that you would never allow your child be say or do that. My brothers and sisters, we need to be very careful in how we judge. As we learned last week, there are no guarantees to the final product. Let us be open to the loving concern of others and look at those telephone poles in our eyes before we try to get that tiny speck out of the other person's eye.

Maintaining Contact – Faithfully Meeting Together

Its Biblical Foundation

We learn to know each other well enough to motivate one another to love and good works in gathering together to encourage one another.

- Not forsaking – We must not abandon our gathering together. There is first a forsaking of it in our attitude. We do not value being together as God's people. Then we forsake it in our action. We bit by bit become less and less engaged in the life of God's people *together*.
- But encouraging – The word here is also translated *exhorting* in some contexts. The point is that we are to actively engage in helping one another along in the process of growing in grace. Whether it is encouraging or exhorting, it pictures people actively engaged in one another's lives.

What *gathering together* does the Author have in mind? Even a brief look at the book of Acts depicts a church life quite different from ours today. There is an emphasis on daily and weekly. There is a definite rhythm of one-on-one, small group and then corporate gathering. It certainly means the regular and faithful participation in the gatherings of the church. Note that I did not say *attendance*. Simply being here is not the point. You must be actively participating in the gathering: simply showing up is not what God has in mind.

Finally, he brings some real perspective. As we come upon the end of the eschatological age, we must do this more. We must gather more, consider more, encourage more and be more faithful. And yet, it is just the opposite of what is happening. It is the pain and persecution and suffering that comes upon us in the last days that frames the expectation that we will do this even more.

Its Practical Application

There are the public gatherings of the community of believers and the private gatherings of the community of believers. Each have different and distinct purposes.

Must be active in the gathered meetings of the church

Here at the Chapel, we are trying to have a planned purpose, vision, and mission for each of our public gatherings of this community of believers. We have decided that those purposes, visions, and missions can best be accomplished by meeting together as one body for certain times and meeting separately by age groups for others.

9:15 Bible Education Hour

We have divided the children, the youth, and the adults during the 9:15 Bible Education Hour on Sunday mornings in order to accomplish the purposes that we have determined are crucial to our lives together.

For the adults, our vision is to see the minds, affections, and wills of God's people transformed by His Word so that He is magnified by their obeying faith in every sphere of life. We are working on that through the Chapel Starters classes, the Heart of the Chapel classes, Searching the Scriptures classes, and the Issues and Answers classes.

For the youth, our vision is to inspire, instruct, and influence the youth of Clearcreek Chapel for the glory of Christ by the grace of God. We are working on that through the Clearcreek Chapel Youth Ministry as it is taught at the 9:15 hour.

For the children, our vision is to see the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of the children of The Chapel transformed by the Word of God so that God is magnified by their faith in every aspect of their lives. We are working on that through Scripture Scholars classes.

AM Services

The Sunday AM service is dedicated to corporate worship for the entire family as we teach and model worship of the One Who is worthy of all praise. The children leave for their age-appropriate study in Leaning Lambs. The youth and adults are participating together in the systematic book by book exposition of the Scriptures.

PM Services

The Sunday PM service is, again, a time of corporate worship. The adult time is dedicated to more of a topical or issue specific time of teaching. The youth have their Sunday Morning Enhancement and On the Media during that time. And the children have their Scripture Sowers classes.

Flocks

Flocks are designed for the Chapel family to set aside a specific time to get to know each other better in order to foster a not forsaking – but encouraging ministry like we are talking about tonight. It is only a beginning to facilitate the meeting together that we see in this passage.

It is imperative that the entire Chapel family participate as fully as possible in our corporate meeting together so that this vital ministry of not forsaking, but encouraging can have its foundation on the Word of God.

One other comment before I continue. We have chosen to separate parents from children for certain times of ministry for specific purposes. There may be some here who do not believe that it is right for the community of believers to have a ministry to their children. Some believe that it is only the parents responsibility to teach, and others believe they should always be present when their children are being taught by others. I would like to challenge that way of thinking.

Hebrews 3:12-13 teaches that each and every one of us has the great ability to fall away from the living God because of an evil unbelieving heart and that we can be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Therefore, it is possible for all of us to not see our children or ourselves clearly. Having others involved in ministering to our children gives the opportunity for someone else to bring the truth of the Word of God, not only to our children, but to us, in ways that we may be blind to. Also, allowing our children to interact with other believers helps them see the grace and love of Christ in the lives of other believers that God may use to make Him more attractive to our children and in ways that help and enlighten them to the wonderful life of faith and obedience. If your concerns are about what is being taught, then see those who are teaching for clarification. If your concerns are that you are the only one who should be teaching your children, let me encourage you to not keep your children from being involved in this ministry of people actively involved in each other's lives.

Get beyond the superficial

But the corporate meeting together is not sufficient for this call to encourage each other. There must be the private meeting together that gets beyond the superficial.

I think that we attempt to fool ourselves by believing that we really know other people. If I asked you if you really knew one of your friends, you would probably say, "Yes, of course I know them. They're my friend. Duh!" But may I challenge you that you don't know them in a way that will lead to growth and change in their life or in yours? Sure, you know their birthday and about their family, and what food they like, and what activities they enjoy, yahdah yahdah yahdah. But, do you know what they are struggling with right now? Do you know where they are tempted? Do you know where they are in their relationship with God? Do you know what they really want in life? Do you know what regrets they have? Do you know what they really believe to be true about God and the situation in which they find themselves? Do you know what they fear the most? Do you know what their heartaches are? Do you really know this person in such a way that you can be used of God to help them grow and change for God's glory? If you answered yes, then you are one of the few. But I suspect that very few of us can answer yes, we really do know someone in such a way that our relationship is a vital avenue that God uses for growth and change. We keep relationships on the superficial for what we believe to be good reasons and we are going to cover superficiality later in this message.

We talked earlier about learning the godly art of listening and then asking questions that engage the heart. But in order to be able to ask those heart-engaging questions, we need to build trust between us. Change happens in the context of trusting relationships. Earlier I asked you to make a list of the people in your that are in your current circle of friends. Now ask yourself a question as you look down that list: which of those relationships goes beyond the superficial level? With whom do you talk about your temptations and struggles? With whom do you share insights that you have learned? With whom

do you have a relationship in which you keep each other accountable for your thoughts and actions?

We all engage in surface talk, and that is a necessary part of relationships. But we must get beyond these surface relationships and develop relationships that will cultivate growth and change in our lives. We keep our interactions at a superficial level for a variety of reasons. But most, if not all, of those reasons stem from pride. We don't want someone else knowing that we struggle and sin. We are deeply concerned about what people think of us. And we have a fear of what the other person will do with the private information we reveal. How many other people will they tell, or can they be trusted to keep it to themselves? What spin will they put on it if they do tell others? What are other people going to think about me after they find out? How many people will ultimately know this insider information? And will it be told in the right context for the right reasons? So the building of trust should be something that is high on the list of priorities in building our relationships.

Conclusion Let's draw this to a close and make some summary statements. I don't believe there is one of us who obeys these two verses in Hebrews 10 as we should. We all need to make some changes.

The main point of tonight's message is that we do not parent alone. God has given us this community of believers to help each of us parent children for His glory.

We must work hard at developing more than superficial relationships within our church family.

We must know others in such a way that we can motivate them to love and good deeds for their children and for each other.

We must be open and ready to receive as well as give counsel.

We must be faithful to the public and private gathering of the saints here at the Chapel.

It is hard to obey these verses because the time is drawing short. That Day is drawing near and we must be even more determined to encourage and stir each other up.

Rabid Rebels

Hebrews 3:15

Russ Kennedy

Introduction Do you know this family?

"'All happy families resemble one another; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own fashion,' Tolstoy wrote. So it is with the uniquely unhappy Osbourne clan -- in their lives, in their MTV series and now in their lucrative deal that has Hollywood abuzz," writes Dan Ackman for *The Wall Street Journal*. In the first two seasons, this voyeuristic look into what is manifestly a dysfunctional family drew viewers by the millions. Their vain and vile family interactions were passed off as virtual-reality and extolled as humor.



What perverse pleasure could possibly be derived from a weekly intake of MTV's spoof and slam on family? What stands out about the Osbournes is how sad, pathetic and pitiful they are. As parents, they are shockingly inept. As children, they are riotous and rebellious. As people, they are so self-absorbed that momentary acts of ordinary kindness are extolled as extraordinary.

Is what we find on this show so different from what happens in many households? Is part of the humor in the show that people tend to see themselves, hear themselves yet can pass it off as extreme, exaggerated?

Have you ever heard of this disorder: Oppositional Defiant Disorder? I am going to quote directly from *Children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder*, booklet No. 72, put out by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. What I am about to quote extensively represents the most conservative and reasonable discussion of ODD I could find.

All children are oppositional from time to time, particularly when tired, hungry, stressed or upset. They may argue, talk back, disobey, and defy parents, teachers, and other adults. Oppositional behavior is often a normal part of development for two to three year olds and early adolescents. However, openly uncooperative and hostile behavior becomes a serious concern when it is so frequent and consistent that it stands out when compared with other children of the same age and developmental level and when it affects the child's social, family, and academic life.

In children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), there is an ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, and hostile behavior toward authority figures that seriously interferes with the youngster's day to day functioning. Symptoms of ODD may include:

- frequent temper tantrums
- excessive arguing with adults

- active defiance and refusal to comply with adult requests and rules
- deliberate attempts to annoy or upset people
- blaming others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
- often being touchy or easily annoyed by others
- frequent anger and resentment
- mean and hateful talking when upset
- seeking revenge

The symptoms are usually seen in multiple settings, but may be more noticeable at home or at school. Five to fifteen percent of all school-age children have ODD. The causes of ODD are unknown, but many parents report that their child with ODD was more rigid and demanding than the child's siblings from an early age. Biological and environmental factors may have a role.

A child presenting with ODD symptoms should have a comprehensive evaluation. It is important to look for other disorders which may be present; such as, attention-deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorder) and anxiety disorders. It may be difficult to improve the symptoms of ODD without treating the coexisting disorder. Some children with ODD may go on to develop [what is called] *Conduct Disorder*.¹

Treatment of ODD may include: Parent Training Programs to help manage the child's behavior, Individual Psychotherapy to develop more effective anger management, Family Psychotherapy to improve communication, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy to assist problem solving and decrease negativity, and Social Skills Training to increase flexibility and improve frustration tolerance with peers.

A child with ODD can be very difficult for parents. These parents need support and understanding. Parents can help their child with ODD in the following ways:

- Always build on the positives, give the child praise and positive reinforcement when he shows flexibility or cooperation.
- Take a time-out or break if you are about to make the conflict with your child worse, not better. This is good modeling for your child. Support your child if he decides to take a time-out to prevent overreacting.
- Pick your battles. Since the child with ODD has trouble avoiding power struggles, prioritize the things you want your child to do. If you give your child a time-out in his room for misbehavior, don't add time for arguing. Say "your time will start when you go to your room."
- Set up reasonable, age appropriate limits with consequences that can be enforced consistently.
- Maintain interests other than your child with ODD, so that managing your child doesn't take all your time and energy. Try to work with and obtain support from the other adults (teachers, coaches, and spouse) dealing with your child.

¹ See appendix to this sermon for their presentation of Conduct Disorder.

- Manage your own stress with exercise and relaxation. Use respite care as needed.

Many children with ODD will respond to the positive parenting techniques. Parents may ask their pediatrician or family physician to refer them to a child and adolescent psychiatrist, who can diagnose and treat ODD and any coexisting psychiatric condition.

So, doesn't this sound like garden variety defiance and disobedience? If we go on and read their pamphlet on *Conduct Disorder* (see page 37), what is being described are rabid rebels. Here are young people who will defy authority and disobey with impunity.

What does the Bible have to say about this? Let's then start with a simple definition that will help us think Biblically about rebellion.

A Definition

Rebellion is inward and outward defiance and disobedience to authority.

A Warning to the Rebellious

Proverbs 17:11

I want to begin by looking at this one proverb. It is highlighted by the fact that it is one of few verses in the Scripture that actually uses the word.

Its Characteristic

Sinful people pursue rebellion.

This is an important truth that we must affirm. Rebellion is not the natural or inconsequential phase of a person's life. The terrible twos and the tripped out teens are not merely life stages that most people go through. They are periods when sin can dominate and control a child or a teenager so that they will rebel against authority.

Rebellion, that is, defiance and disobedience, will be pursued by children, teens and adults as an expression of their sinfulness. The word pursuit here shows that it is an active work not a passive one. Rebellion is not something that overcomes us or that we get caught up in. It is a active rejection of God or the authorities God has placed in our lives that works itself out in inward desires and outward behaviors and emotions.

Rebellious people will tend to pursue other rebellious people. They will tend to either seek out or associate with others who are rebellious, or to create a "culture" of rebellion to attract others into it. A close study of rebellions in the Scriptures bears this out. From Lucifer to Korah to Absalom, they drew others into an orbit, a culture, a band of the rebellious. Rarely will rebels be willing to stand alone. And perversely, while rejecting authority over them, will assert a dominating and domineering authority over others, allowing no dissent.

Its Consequence

Hardship punishes the rebellious.

The rebellious are here warned as to how God responds to them. He sends "a cruel messenger" against them. In Israel's history, their rebellion against God in sin and idolatry was consistently punished by God bringing cruel, wicked nations

against them. So the warning here was carried out in Israel's own history. Those nations were God's servants, His messengers to get Israel's attention, to break their pride and presumption, to humble them under His mighty hand.

In principle, God will bring what is necessary against the rebellious to break them. He will bring some strong and painful measure against them to break their wills, humble their hearts and restrain their sin. Be warned. You cannot rebel against the authority that God has placed over you without painful consequence. Children and teens, you may be defiant of your parents and disobedient to them, but you will not get away with it.

An Example of the Rebellious

1 Samuel 15:22-23

While Saul is not a teenager, here is one of the clearest Biblical analysis of rebellion. It is particularly helpful because of the connections that Samuel makes as he examines the defiance and disobedience of Saul.

What is going on here that leads up to these two verses? Saul, the King of Israel, has been commanded by God to attack and utterly destroy the Amalakites, one of the heathen nations still living in Canaan. He was to utterly destroy them and all their livestock. He won the battle, capturing their king and their people. He did not kill the king as ordered. He did not destroy the best of the livestock. He destroyed the worthless and despised, keeping the best. He disobeyed God in not carrying out his orders. He defied God in thinking, presumptuously, that God would overlook the keeping of the livestock because of the sacrifice of the rest. He then erects a monument to himself. When Samuel, the prophet/preacher from God confronts Saul, he blames the people for what was done and tries to argue that what they kept, they planned to sacrifice to God.

God's Challenge

(v.22)

Saul's rebellion is confronted by challenging two attitudes that Saul has. These two attitudes, or beliefs, are the roots of rebellion, whether Saul's or others.

They believe that God delights in religious observance more than obedience. Saul thinks that since God requires sacrifice for worship, God will be pleased with the sacrifice and will overlook the fact that Saul disobeyed. Here is a common feature of the way disobedient people think. Something is offered in place of obedience. It shows up in statements like, "I know that I... but look at what I did for you..."

They believe that God is not committed to our hearing and heeding what He says. He makes the same mistake that Eve made. God is not really serious about His Word. He will overlook our disobedience. We can frame this in many, many ways. One of the most common is in an appeal to the love and grace of God. Unfortunately many parents are not serious about what they say and overlook the defiance and disobedience of their sons and daughters, think that is love.

The radical transformation then is to repent of believing that we can offer God something better than our loving obedience and that He is not serious

about what He says. We must teach ourselves this about God. We must teach our children and our teens this about God and authority in general. Since we are having a great many adults being converted out a rebellious sub-cultures, we will need to teach it to new Christians as well.

Rebellion's Character

(v.23)

Saul's defiance and disobedience is characterized two ways. By comparison it is placed into two categories of sin. It is called rebellion and presumption. Now let us think about these for a moment.

As rebellion, their defiance and disobedience is compared to witchcraft. (the word, divination, here) Ultimately, rebellion by people reflects the rebellion by Lucifer. Lucifer was the highest cherub in heaven. He was created by God and was to serve God. Through rise of pride in his heart, he led a rebellion against God attempting to have the place of ultimate authority like God. He and his angelic followers were defeated, cast out of heaven and have been instrumental in human affairs since the fall of Adam and Eve. So rebellion against authority is Satanic. I am not saying that rebellious sons and daughters are demon possessed (no matter what you may think at times). But defying and disobeying God's ordained authorities is Satan-like. It is what he did. Rebels then are Satan's image bearers.

As presumption, their defiance and disobedience is compared to iniquity and idolatry. He is attempting to define what is right and wrong for himself, making himself the god of his world. He becomes his own law giver. His presumption is that he has the right to change what God required. He presumed to know more than God, to be able to interpret what God says in a way that justified his disobedience. Rebellious sons and daughters will do the same thing. They will twist God's Word and your own commands to justify themselves. They will reject God's Word and authority, your word and authority and substitute their own. They will have a functional idolatry where someone else other than God or God's ordained authority is believed and wanted.

Saul's Consequence

(v.23-31)

I want to consider something that has occurred earlier in our text. Verses 17-21 tell us something very important about the way disobedient and defiant people, your sons and daughters, will respond in the midst of their sin.

They try to get the most out of the situation for themselves. It is uncanny how rebellious teens will expect to have their cars, their stereos, their clothes, and their "spoil". In their folly, they will insist that they have the right to their stuff even when it is gained by disobedience and defiance.

They are self-centered. Life will be about them, about their wants, needs, desires, beliefs, friends, stuff. Saul's erecting monuments to himself shows his desire to be noticed and recognized. Expect the same sort of themes to run through rebellious sons and daughters as well.

They blame others for their troubles. They will not accept responsibility for themselves and their actions. Several times in this chapter, Saul blames the people - they were threatening him, they took the best, they intended to sacrifice. He is just going along, making the best of it. Your rebellious sons and daughters will do the same. They will refuse to be responsible for their choices.

They are argumentative and self-justifying. Look at how Saul responds to Samuel. He argues that he has obeyed. He then argues that the people did it. He then argues that it is OK anyway. Finally, Samuel basically has tell him to shut up and listen to what God says.

What is the consequence for defiance and disobedience? Samuel says that Saul is rejected by God. God will remove him from the kingship. He will lose his place, position, power and preeminence.

Now look carefully at how Saul responds to his punishment and how it is so typical.

They pretend to repent. (v.24-26) He says that he is sorry and that he has sinned. What we have here is vain regret, worldly sorrow, not godly repentance. You will often find that rebellious sons and daughters will appear to be sorry, particularly when faced with consequences.

They attempt to avoid punishment. (v.27-29) He goes so far as to grab Samuel, tearing his clothes. He first pleads and then demands that his being sorry undo the consequences. He then demands it in his desperation. God's response is to *make his consequence more severe*. Listen to me loved ones – many, many times parents and children believe that being sorry means that the punishment or consequences should not happen. This is not necessarily true. And, when a rebellious son or daughter attempts to avoid their consequence, even more severe consequences should follow. The reason for this is to drive folly from the heart and teach wisdom. One of the symptoms of folly is the inability or unwillingness to see the relationship between choices and consequences.

They try to avoid the shame of sin and its consequences. (v.30-31) When you read this, it sounds like he is now truly repentant. But look at his motivation. He is concerned with losing face with the elders and the people! He doesn't want to be embarrassed! Listen, sin ought to shame us and ought to embarrasses us. Attempting to avoid the shame is a sign of a lack of repentance. Your sons and daughters need to be taught and to learn the proper place of shame. If you sin, if you rebel, if you are defiant and disobedient, you need the humbling power of being shamed. I know this goes against the prevailing culture of child rearing. I am not advocating embarrassing a son or daughter for an accident or an inadequacy. But one who is defiant and openly disobedient should accept the shame and embarrassment that ought to accompany being humbly repentant. Shaming the defiant and disobedient is good for them!

Scary, isn't it? This describes me in my rebellious teenage years. I am deeply ashamed of some the things I said to my parents and did as a defiant and disobedient young man. This is an accurate assessment of many teens I have worked with as school headmaster, counselor and pastor. So, where do we go from here?

An Analysis of the Rebellious Hebrews 3:8, 15; Psalm 95

Briefly, let's consider two verses from Hebrews. The author of Hebrews warns God's people about the kind of rebellion illustrated by Israel when they refused to enter the land (Hebrews 3:8;15). This text quotes Psalm 95. When we go back to the Psalm, we find a stunning insight into the nature of rebellion.

Call to Worship

(v.1-5)

There is a call to joy and delight in the LORD, who is a great God. He is worthy of our reverence and our worship. This call frames our life – we are to delight in a great God. Our response to the greatness of God and to the grandness of God is to be delight and joy.

Call to Submission

(v.6-7)

There is a call to submit to God, who is over us and who cares for us. The second response to this kind of God is to submit, to bow and obey. Because God has created us and has cared for us, we ought to bow to Him. Trusting and obeying Him arises as an expression of our delight and joy in Him.

Warning to the Rebellious

(v.8-11)

But then comes the thunderous warning – hear His voice and do not harden your hearts. Hebrews takes this stanza in the Psalm and calls what the people of Israel did, rebellion. It was the “day of rebellion.” Rather than a people who rejoiced in their great God, who bowed gladly to Him in trust and obedience, they rejected His Word, disobeyed His commands, rejected the consequences and were loathed by God.

Now listen to me. Some you parents and some of you sons and daughters are now at a point where your heart is churning. Your thoughts and wants are being challenged. You do not like this description of you. It has pegged you as parent or you as a child or teen.

What God is calling for here is a rejoicing in God that causes you to submit gladly to Him and to those He has placed over you. You must hear His Word and take heed to your heart and obey Him. Do not provoke God. Do not test Him. Submit to Him. Submit to your parents. Turn away from the sins of defiance and disobedience. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God.

Let me summarize this, in conclusion.

Conclusion

So here is what you are dealing with in rebellious children, teens and adults.

- Rebellion is inward and outward defiance and disobedience to authority.
- Sinful people pursue rebellion.
- Hardship punishes the rebellious.
- They believe that God delights in religious observance more than obedience.
- They believe that God is not committed to our hearing and heeding what He says.
- As rebellion, their defiance and disobedience is compared to witchcraft.
- As presumption, their defiance and disobedience is compared to iniquity and idolatry.
- They try to get the most out of the situation for themselves.
- They are self-centered
- They blame others for their troubles
- They are argumentative and self-justifying.
- They pretend to repent.
- They attempt to avoid punishment.
- They try to avoid the shame of sin and its consequences.

How can you deal with it? How will you not contribute to it in your own parenting?

- By modeling for your family a joyful submission to those in authority over you.
- By watching over your own life for attitudes and actions of defiance and disobedience.
- By parenting in such a way that models the parenting of God.
- By not provoking your children to wrath.

In our study this evening, Pastor Greg will give you a Biblical overview of a model for parenting and many, many wise and practical helps to be pleasing to God.

Some of you teens need to repent before God and restore your relationship with your parents. And some of you parents need to repent of the kind of parenting that has contributed to your sons and daughters rebellion. May we look to God, our perfect heavenly Father and His perfectly obedient Son for our hope and help. May God give us that grace, today.

CONDUCT DISORDER

No. 33 (Updated 1/00)

"Conduct disorder" is a complicated group of behavioral and emotional problems in youngsters. Children and adolescents with this disorder have great difficulty following rules and behaving in a socially acceptable way. They are often viewed by other children, adults and social agencies as "bad" or delinquent, rather than mentally ill.

Children or adolescents with conduct disorder may exhibit some of the following behaviors:

Aggression to people and animals

- bullies, threatens or intimidates others
- often initiates physical fights
- has used a weapon that could cause serious physical harm to others (e.g. a bat, brick, broken bottle, knife or gun)
- is physically cruel to people or animals
- steals from a victim while confronting them (e.g. assault)
- forces someone into sexual activity

Destruction of Property

- deliberately engaged in fire setting with the intention to cause damage
- deliberately destroys other's property

Deceitfulness, lying, or stealing

- has broken into someone else's building, house, or car
- lies to obtain goods, or favors or to avoid obligations
- steals items without confronting a victim (e.g. shoplifting, but without breaking and entering)

Serious violations of rules

- often stays out at night despite parental objections
- runs away from home
- often truant from school

Children who exhibit these behaviors should receive a comprehensive evaluation. Many children with a conduct disorder may have coexisting conditions such as mood disorders, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse, ADHD, learning problems, or thought disorders which can also be treated. Research shows that youngsters with conduct disorder are likely to have ongoing problems if they and their families do not receive early and comprehensive treatment. Without treatment, many youngsters with conduct disorder are unable to adapt to the demands of adulthood and continue to have problems with relationships and holding a job. They often break laws or behave in an antisocial manner.

Many factors may contribute to a child developing conduct disorder, including brain damage, child abuse, genetic vulnerability, school failure, and traumatic life experiences.

Treatment of children with conduct disorder can be complex and challenging. Treatment can be provided in a variety of different settings depending on the severity of the behaviors. Adding to the challenge of treatment are the child's uncooperative attitude, fear and distrust of adults. In developing a comprehensive treatment plan, a child and adolescent psychiatrist may use information from the child, family, teachers, and other medical specialties to understand the causes of the disorder.

Behavior therapy and psychotherapy are usually necessary to help the child appropriately express and control anger. Special education may be needed for youngsters with learning disabilities. Parents often need expert assistance in devising and carrying out special management and educational programs in the home and at school. Treatment may also include medication in some youngsters, such as those with difficulty paying attention, impulse problems, or those with depression.

Treatment is rarely brief since establishing new attitudes and behavior patterns takes time. However, early treatment offers a child a better chance for considerable improvement and hope for a more successful future.

Command and Counsel

Romans 7; Proverbs

Greg Cook

Introduction Tonight is the time when I am going to try to address the consternation that Russ and I have caused by our passing comments about the process of child rearing as opposed to the product of child rearing, and the issue of protecting our children from our culture. There is no way that I can possibly cover this topic in great detail in the time I have allotted for this message. But it is my goal to cover it sufficiently for you to have material for thought and meditation. Any questions that remain after this message and the 3 that will follow should be written down and asked during the open forum the last Sunday night of this Conference.

I am not going to give specific answers to specific questions that you are probably wrestling with, but I intend to give you the principles that you need, to come to your own conclusions with wisdom and Biblical guidance. If you are having trouble coming to a decision, then ask your Elders and make it a topic of discussion at Flock.

Let me also make this clear at the beginning. Some have come to the incorrect conclusion that we are picking on home schooling families. We are not. We are thankful for parents who are willing to sacrifice and serve their children in this capacity. You may also think that I am giving examples of specific people here at the Chapel. That will not be the case. I have 10 years of counseling history here at the Chapel to a wide spectrum of Christians in our geographic area. With that many situations from which to choose. I would not knowingly use one of you for an example without your permission. So please, do not think that I am picking on you, or pointing you out publicly tonight. That is not the case.

The Process and the Product

There can be some misunderstanding about what we mean when we talk about the process of parenting and the product of parenting. Most, if not all, Christian parents are concerned about their children being God-honoring children who grow up to be God-honoring adults. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that concern. But, there is the belief that if we parent in certain ways, then we are going to get God-honoring children. In fact, there are those who believe, in the privacy of their own hearts, that God owes them godly children if they obey Him in child rearing. The belief that we parent for the product of godly children gives us the right and we also believe that it is valid to judge whether parents are good or bad by how their children turn out. Success in parenting is measured by the godliness of their children – the product. Therefore, most parents have as their goal the regulating of the behavior of their children. They don't want their children to be involved in any kind of behavior that would be considered bad. Now, don't hear me saying that this is wrong in and of itself. What parent wants rebels for children? What I am saying is how important is having godly children to you, and why is it so important. What happens so often is this goal of

godly children drives parents to a constant search for creative ways to control behavior. What I hope to explain from Scripture is that there is a time to control behavior, and there is a time to decrease, and even stop, controlling behavior. In addition, I want us to examine our mindset about producing godly children and how that comes about.

In the early years, we **should** be commanding and demanding certain behaviors and working on immediate obedience and respect for authority. We **should** be protecting our children from the negative influences of our culture. We **must** be teaching them that there are consequences for poor choices and wrong behavior. That's why the Bible makes it very clear that we are to spank our children. They learn the vital link that there are painful consequences to rebellion and disobedience through that pain of spanking. There is only so much reasoning that we can do with a 2 or 3 year old. We shouldn't be taking a great amount of time reasoning with those young children. They need to obey the first time without complaint, delay, or excuse! So if any of you are thinking that we are condemning protecting our young children from culture, we are not. Are we inferring that we shouldn't control the TV, video games, music, and DVDs of our young children? Absolutely not! But the time for controlling behavior should be decreasing as the years go by. Protecting our children from our culture should also be decreasing as the years go by.

The reason Russ and I have been making comments about protecting our children from our culture and the process vs. the product is to have each of us look at our parenting. The standard of whether we are good or poor parents is **not** tied to how our children turn out. Whether we like it or not, we cannot control their outcome. Godly parenting is tied to the process we use as we parent. Many times we are guilty of attempting to control our children's behavior by inflicting fear, instilling guilt, and controlling by manipulation. We have the false belief that this **will** yield the desired product. But as we are going to see shortly, that is not the process that God has ordained for parenting. The product, how our children turn out, is ultimately God's work and concern. When we believe that we can produce a godly child by the process we use, we are guilty of trying to produce what only God can produce. Only God can change the heart. May I challenge you to honestly evaluate whether you are more concerned about how your children turn out, than you are about the process of parenting them, no matter how they turn out. And may I also challenge you to set aside your judgment of parents by their children. You probably don't know how those parents are rearing their children before God.

Two Typical Parental Processes

Let's talk about the process of parenting. If you have been around the Chapel for any length of time, you have been introduced to the concept of going down slope on one side or the other. Parenting is no exception. There appear to be two responses that parents have to the influence our cultural can have on their children. Now, let me warn you that I am going to be using the extremes of sliding down slope in these examples. So fasten your seat belts and put on your crash helmets.

The Protectionism, Isolationism, Legalism Slope

First, there is the protectionism/isolationism/legalism approach. Let's look at the Abraham family. They dress very conservatively. The girls do not wear makeup or jewelry. Their skirts are below their knees. The boys are dressed in nice slacks and shirts with collars. Everyone is carrying a book. The Abrahams have decided that there is nothing worth watching on TV, and they wouldn't even be to think about cable TV. There are certain videos and DVDs that are occasionally allowed. And the acceptable music list includes classical and conservative Christian music. The children have been taught and have agreed not to date, but to only have a courtship that involves the parents of both the boy and girl. They are home schooled. Mr. Abraham made sure that he worked for a Christian company which attempts to employ only Christians. Most of the social interactions of the Abraham family are with other church and home school families. The Abraham parents have decided that the best way to deal with the negative influence of our culture is to have very little interaction with that culture. They would support their position with the Scripture found in 2 Corinthians 6:17, "Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing"

How should we evaluate this from a Scriptural point of view? I believe there are several issues that we should address. First of all, this seems so right. Our children don't know what an attractive influence to sin our culture has. They don't have the experience that we have. They don't have the discernment necessary to overcome. It is only right that I keep that from them until they are ready and strong enough to not be tempted.

But, when I begin to evaluate this approach from a biblical stance, it becomes clear that it is down slope on one side. Here are the issues that we must come to grips with (I give credit to Paul Tripp and his book *Age of Opportunity* for some of these items.):

- First of all there is the belief that somehow Colossians 2:20-23 does not apply here. <Read>
- Next, there is a very subtle denial of the doctrine of creation that declares that everything that God made was good. We neglect to make the distinction that it is man that has fashioned those good things into evil. What are we teaching about God?
- It also teaches that the core struggle with evil is from without. It is my culture that makes me sin. The real core issue is the heart. That is where sin comes from.
- It also gives the appearance that the war with sin can be won just by avoiding certain things.
- It can also tend to promote a dangerous self-righteousness that equates keeping a list with being godly. This is really teaching our children to be good Pharisees.

- But in more practical terms, what we do by producing rules and regulations is actually making the problem even worse. A look at Romans 7 shows how law actually stirs the desires even more than they already are. Look at Romans 7:7-12. <Read>. Because of the sin nature, our children can react just the opposite from what we are attempting to control. Their sinful desires can be stirred even more!
- Another issue that we must face is that they are going to be exposed to culture sometime somewhere. It could be at another child's house. It could be anywhere. And as our children get older, they are going to have the opportunity to be exposed more and more to the culture. If you protect and isolate your children from the culture, when and how and from whom are they going to learn wisdom and discernment?
- And this can be the environment for a quiet rebel. There may be quiet acquiescence, either because of fear for consequences, or for their outward appearance to regulations that produces the results they desire. But there can be a sinful heart that is just waiting for the time when the commands are removed and they can follow their heart desires. Witness the college freshman who was the epitome of spirituality at home and church and who is now exploring every possible avenue for sin available. Parents are asking themselves what happened? Where did we go wrong?
- And lastly, the Scriptures teach that believers are to be light and salt to the world. Where do we teach that and what impact can we have if we are isolated from the world?

The No Involvement, No Counsel, No Guidance Slope

Then there is the no involvement/no counsel/no guidance approach which is going down the other side of the slope. Let's look at the Lot family. The girls and boys have jewelry, tattoos, and piercings all over their bodies. One of the girls dresses in total black, with jet black hair streaked in blazing red and with a ghastly white face. The boy has a nose piercing with a chain connecting it to his multi-pierced ear. His tongue has a dumbbell, his lips and eyebrows have multiple rings. Each of them have their i-pod and earphones on constantly listening to the latest rapper extolling the virtues of suicide. If you visited the Lot family home, if the kids were home, they would be in front of the TV watching MTV for hours at a time. It's tough to get the entire family to a church service since the kids have so many other activities they do with their public school friends. The Lot family has decided that the best way to interact with the culture is to go with the flow. After all, the parents reason, that's what they did when growing up and they didn't turn out too bad. My kids will be OK, just like I am. They would support their position with the Scriptural teaching of "being in the world, but not of the world".

How should we evaluate this from a Scriptural point of view? There are several issues that we should address:

- First, the Scriptures teach that there is nothing that does not have a moral basis. There is nothing that is neutral. So this approach is not harmless. It also

produces a independence from parental influence. Someone is going to influence our children. Who will that be?

- It also fosters a lack of regard for parental instruction and counsel.
- This approach teaches that there really isn't a right way to deal with culture.
- It also teaches that God is not concerned, since there really isn't anything that wrong with the culture, per se.

The Third Way

I think that there are parents sitting here who can relate to both approaches. But I believe that both approaches are down slope. We need to see the third way which is the result of good biblical thinking. We need to teach our children what culture is and the nature of its power and influence, and form a biblical plan for living within that culture.

Scriptural Principles

Let's look at the Scriptures to see some principles for parenting in response to our culture.

God dealing with the children of Israel

I don't have time to take a tour of the entire Old Testament. But allow your mind to recall how the Lord dealt with the children of Israel. When He brought them out of Egypt, He was very careful to lay down the boundaries and to give immediate rebuke when those boundaries were crossed. For example, look at Exodus 19. <survey the high points> God gave very specific instructions and warnings to the people. Now turn to Exodus 32. During the chapters between 19 and 32, Moses gives us insight into what God told him while he was on the mountain top. But in the first couple of verses he tells what happened while he was with God. <read 1-6>. <read 21-29>. God gave instructions with warnings for disobedience and then carried it through immediately. This happened throughout their wonderings.

But when time passes and the Israelites possess their land and get kings, then God no longer deals with their sin directly and immediately, He sends prophets to counsel and instruct. He changes His mode of dealing with the people.

The Proverbs

We can look at verses like Proverbs 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17. We see that there is a direct and immediate expectation of obedience and discipline. But we also see Solomon taking his son and showing him graphically about the immoral woman in Proverbs 5 and 7. He is instructing his son to stay far from the immoral woman and not to even go near her door. It's as if he has taken his son out to the immoral woman's neighborhood and, with his arm around his son's shoulder, he points to this woman and instructs him, giving him the truth about this culture.

Ephesians 6:4

Parents are to command and punish (discipline), as well as counsel (instruction of the Lord) their children. The warning is that parents can provoke their children to anger. That anger is aroused when parents command and punish when they should be counseling.

The Third Way

As we see from Scripture, we need to use the culture around us as an opportunity to teach our children wisdom and godly discernment. We experience culture with them. We want to teach our children that avoidance is not a cure, though it can be used of God to limit the damage of sin in their lives. Solomon showed his son that – don't even go near her house.

How do we use culture to impart wisdom and teach discernment? That is the hard work of parenting. We begin by keeping them from the evil; by teaching them to obey; by punishing for rebellion and disobedience. But that gradually changes to less protection; less punishing; and less commanding. We must evaluate each child to discern the appropriate time to begin allowing exposure to the culture in order to teach wisdom and discernment. Each child is different. We can't make blanket statements like at age 13 we're going to allow them to have some interaction with the opposite sex. Some kids will be ready before then, and some after. You can't rear all of your children the same way.

I hope that by now you have begun to evaluate your approach to culture and your children. The rules-and-regulations approach that focuses on keeping your child "out of trouble" will ultimately fail because it does not deal with the heart. The hands off approach will also fail because it does not counsel the heart and impart godly wisdom and discernment. There is the third way which calls for pasturing our children and their hearts. Paul Tripp says, "The parent who has a pastoral model of parenting will do more than hand down regulations and enforce punishments when the regulations are broken. Pastoring parents will befriend their teen. They will probe and examine. They will engage their child in provocative discussions. They will be unwilling to live with distance, avoidance, and non-answers. They will not let the teenager set the agenda for the relationship. In times of trouble, they will have discussions rather than cross-examinations. They will not be there simply to prove the child wrong and to announce punishment. They will seek to expose the true thoughts and motives of their teenager's heart by asking heart-disclosing questions. They will help their teenager to look at himself in the accurate mirror of the Word which is able to expose and judge the heart. And they will do all of this in a spirit of humble, gentle, kind, forgiving, forbearing, and patient love."(*Age of Opportunity*, pp. 111-112)

Let's face it. This is a war for the hearts of our children. Keeping the culture out there, and keeping our children as far from it as possible is not dealing with their hearts. Taking a hands off approach and allowing our children to wallow in the cesspool of culture without counsel and guidance is not dealing with their hearts, either. Wouldn't it be better to have the opportunity to come along side and help your child deal with the culture in a God-honoring way, than for them to deal with it without you?

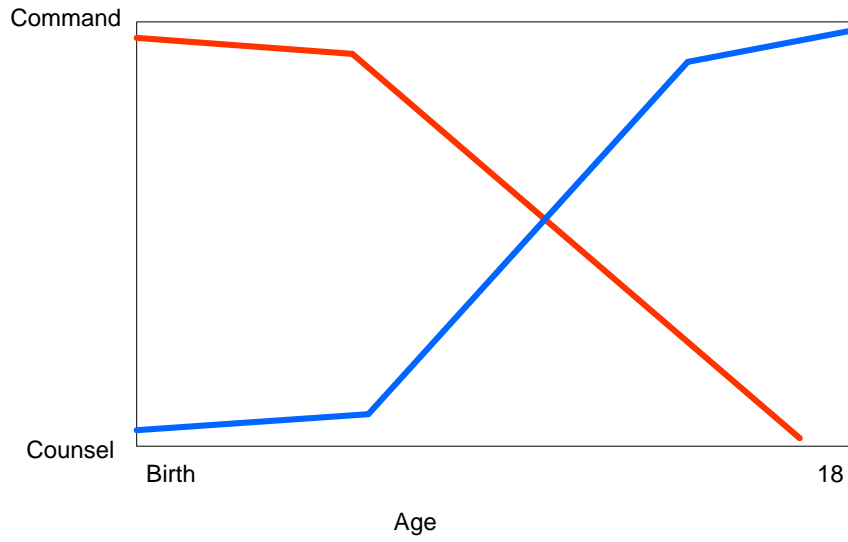
And this third way also involves allowing your children to make their own decisions, even when you know that they are making foolish decisions. And then, allow them to suffer the consequences of that foolish decision. Remember, we are counseling, not handing down directives from on high. God deals with us by allowing us to be very foolish, and then allowing us to reap the harvest that the foolishness produces. We must do the same with our children. But as Paul Tripp said, we are pasturing our children.

But Pastor Greg, are you saying that if my child is making a foolish decision, I shouldn't step in and keep him from making that decision? Depending on the child and his relationship with the Lord, yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. The Proverbs give good evidence for that. And your interference could be keeping that child from experiencing God's discipline. But I am also saying that you are there to pick up the pieces when it's all over. What better time to be able to counsel and teach than when the heart is tender. Or, what better time to observe a rebellious and foolish heart than when it is all over.

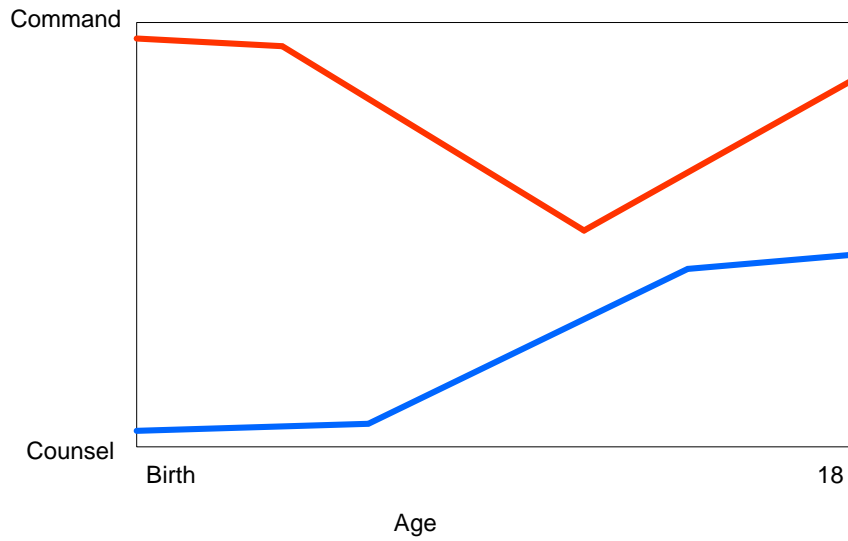
No matter how much you may want it, and no matter how hard you try, you cannot control the outcome of your child. You cannot change his heart. You cannot make him be godly. You can't save his soul. You can't convict him of sin and produce godly repentance. All of these things are God's work, not yours. This is why the process of child rearing is the standard for parental success, not the type of child that ultimately leaves home. This means increasing independence. This means potentially having situations that you would rather not have. This means you may be embarrassed and experience shame. But remember, it is not only the heart of your child that God is after, but yours, as well. What idols are you serving in your parenting? Are you wanting comfort, respect, appreciation, control, success? Or are you concerned about parenting the third way, no matter how embarrassing? What is your standard for successful parenting – the process or the product?

A Graphical Representation

Parenting – Command vs. Counsel



Parenting – Command vs. Counsel



Conclusion I have not said anything about the questions that are probably burning in your minds right now. I have said nothing about home schooling vs. Christian schools vs. public schools. Neither have I said anything about the dating vs. courtship vs. betrothal issues. I do not believe that you can make a Scriptural defense for any of those positions. These are issues that every Christian family faces. What is the right answer? There is no one right answer for everyone. The one right answer that covers these issues is that there is no Scriptural mandate for any of these choices. Each family makes those decision for themselves. What is involved in these decisions is for parents to examine their own hearts for idols. And then answering what is the way that would be best for us to counsel each child toward wisdom, godly discernment, and being salt and light to his world?

So, examine your heart. What are you desiring and how much are you desiring it.

Examine your standard for success and for judging other parents. The standard is not how your child turns out. A rebellious child is not always due to poor parenting. It is the process that parents use that is the standard.

Pray much. If you are a parent and you haven't been to your knees in total humility for your own frailty, then you need to examine your heart again.

Seek the help of this community of believers who love you and love God. We made this point last week. We are here to help each other parent our children.

May God give us joy in this glorious ministry of parenting for His glory!

Not in MY House!

Matthew 5:5

Russ Kennedy

Introduction A current running ad for the National Football League depicts a huge professional football player in your face that is, in the camera, in your living room, a menacing scowl on his face, his lips curled in disdain, his eyes glaring, his shoulders bunched up and his helmet swinging club-like from his ham fist by the face mask. He screams, “Not in MY house”. This home field mantra has so fired up some players that the last two seasons have been marked by some of the most violent hits ever seen. While this is sport (supposedly), this kind of talk and attitude has filtered down now into college and high school sports. There is a defense of honor and place that borders on the maniacal and fuels unnecessary violent hits in hockey, football and soccer.

The upsurge of violence in our schools and on our streets has filled the news over the last decade. There is no mistaking that the level of viciousness and aggressiveness has escalated at an alarming rate. Parents are confronted with angry, aggressive and even dangerous, teens. From crude and profane lyrics in popular music to graphic video games, we are immersed in a cesspool of degrading depravity that is sucking our culture down into paganism.

This is not something isolated in the “world out there”. Many Christian schools are dealing with a level of anger, aggressiveness and violence rarely seen even in government schools 20 years ago. Christian parents are sometimes bewildered by the sullen seething silence of their teens. Churches are faced with and are dealing with growing abuse in homes. There is an alarming rise in teen siblings assaulting one another. And some parents face the humiliation of being intimidated and even beaten by their teens.

This morning, we want to take a look at the roots and results of violence in our homes and in our culture. My research over the last several weeks has, at times, been horrifying. I was stunned by the level of brutality, blood and gore that is de-rigueur for many, many video games. I am sure that I will shock many of you. I will be careful to be appropriate for all who are sitting here this morning. I intend to aim this message at all of you. I will probably offend many of you. I will challenge some fundamental assumptions about what we think is OK. I pray that all of you will be awakened to think more carefully about this issue. I pray God’s grace will help each of you to take the precepts and principles of God’s Word and evaluate yourself, your heart and your conduct, and rethink about these things.

Violence in our Culture

Let's begin with a brief look at the violence in our culture.

Examples in the News

It is almost trite to list news story after news story demonstrating the rising tide of violence, particularly in certain sub-cultures. The American Medical Association says, "When studying factors relating to violence, including poverty, racial discrimination, substance abuse, inadequate schools, joblessness, and family dissolution-they found that exposure to violent media was a factor in half of the 10,000 homicides committed each year."

Illustrations of what is going abound. The AP reported on Jason Bautista, 20, and Matthew Montejo, 15, who choked and dismembered their mother. They dumped her body and placed her head and hands in their bedroom closet. Jason said he got the idea from the HBO TV show "The Sopranos." Interviews with teen sniper suspect, Lee Malvo, reveal the he was a big video game player. His uncle claimed it helped him be a better shot. His favorite game was *Halo*. One of the skills he learned playing Halo was how to shoot long range. Rapper 50 Cent told Fox News, in March, 2003, "Where I'm from, the price of life is cheap...For \$5,000, you can get somebody killed."

Studies in Television

Think about these statistics in relation to television.

- 1) Number of violent acts the average American child sees on TV by age 18: 200,000
- 2) Number of murders witnessed by children on television by the age 18: 16,000
- 3) Percentage of youth violence directly attributable to TV viewing: 10
- 4) Percentage of Hollywood executives who believe there is a link between TV violence and real violence: 80
- 5) Percentage of children polled who said they felt "upset" or "scared" by violence on television: 91
- 6) Percent increase in network news coverage of homicide between 1993 and 1996: 721
- 7) Percent reduction in the American homicide rate between 1993 and 1996: 20
- 8) Percent increase in number of violent scenes per hour on 10 major channels from 1992 to 1994: 41
- 9) Percentage of programs that show the long-term consequences of violence: 16
- 10) Percentage of violent programs that emphasize an anti-violence theme: 4

RealVision

While television is at best only a contributing factor, and possibly, a minor one at that, there is a correlation between these statistics and statistics on violence. Television and movies as largely passive media, are functioning like literature. It reflects on one hand the growing appetite for violence while at the same time feeding and fueling that same appetite.

Virtual through Video Games

Modern technology has also introduced to an increasingly popular form of media, video games. Now, if you grew up with Pong and Atari, you have to make a serious adjustment in your thinking about video games. Video games range from harmless fun, to educational, to simulations, to interactive mind teasing strategy,

to the violent or erotic blood splattered gore of slasher movies. Just as we should not condemn any media as evil in and of itself, I should not be heard to say all video games are evil.

Do you recognize these pictures? They are the covers from some of the most popular video games on the market right now, every one of them rated M, that is, suitable only for 17 years or older. Yet, on one site, over half the reviews were from teens 15 or younger! Think BMX is a game about bicycles? If you insist.

Lets take a look at a couple of them as examples of the kind of violence, I believe, the Scriptures condemn.

Grand Theft Auto (Rated M) - Like it's immediate predecessor, Vice City, San Andreas strives to provide a wide, deep foundation for its freeform criminal game play by setting the story in a slightly exaggerated representation of a familiar (if not glorified) American subculture. As Vice City seemed inspired by Miami Vice, and the pastel decked, "me generation" ideals of the early 1980s, San Andreas is set in a time and place suggested by films like *Boyz N the Hood*, *Menace II Society*, or *Colors*, where riots eventually brought a whole city to a halt and awakened new consciousness across the country.

Frankly, this friendly review gives a very different impression from what actually goes on in the multiple editions of *Grand Theft Auto*. Here is what you actually do, taken from EGM Strategy Guide for Grand Theft Auto III: Vice City. There are tips given to players by the game company. There were lots of obscene remarks, but I will edit them out:

“The female dancer here will slink to the beat in a sultry display of polygonal porn that’s sure to have you ***** the screen.” Next, “You don’t have to use the chainsaw to kill this guy, but it’s oh so much fun, especially since he’s so slow. Switch to your handgun or fists while running to catch up with him, then either plug him full of lead or flip fast to the chainsaw and cut him up good. Now all you have to do is escape the fuzz, who just happened to notice you killing people in broad daylight.” Further on, “Run to the car and shoot 3 or 4 cops on the way.” Later on, we are advised, “You should be able to see the passenger from here. Snipe him down, then quickly switch your aim to one of the truck’s tires and take it out. Now all you have to do is gun down the lame truck and it’s driver with it; the Uzi is perfect for that...” For more innocent fun, “Now that you’ve taken over the adult-movie studio, it’s time to find some decent adult movie stars. Go and pick up Candy **** from the pink blip on your radar. She’ll get out of the limo and talk to you, but her pimp shows up right behind her.”

Now remember, what I am describing to you here in words is being portrayed on the screen in state-of-the-art graphics. And Grand Theft Auto can barely make the top ten list in violent games!

Think these are appropriate for 13 year olds? They have a T – Teen rating.

Wacked! (Rated T – Teen) Here is a game that is reportedly for younger teens. It has a definite cartoonish look. However, listen to the description from the Xbox web site. [Wacked! Has] “Bizarre, yet appealing characters. Players meet a variety of contestants, each with their own quirky personality and unique traits, including Otto, the emaciated, narcoleptic dude who lets his recliner do all the work; and Lucy, whose sinfully attractive body is surpassed only by her cunning ability to use it.” While I could not download the clips from the game, there was one that was so lewd I couldn’t have shown it anyway.

I am not even going to attempt to deal with RAP and HipHop in all their sub-forms (better, sub-species). I looked at lyrics from a dozen of the most popular CD’s. These included 50 Cent, Eminem, Jay-Z, Black Eyed Peas, Lil Flip, Ja Rule and several songs from Linkn Park. The words ranged from idiotic nonsense to long strings of profanity to some of the most vile, verbal porn. If you parents want to read the lyrics of your teen’s music, go to www.allthelyrics.com.

So, do I have your attention? Let’s turn to the Scriptures and see what the Bible has to say about this issue of violence.

Violence in the Scriptures

As we come to the Scriptures, I want to be sure you understand something. When we are talking about the problem of violence, we are not talking about either the legitimate use of violence in the military or self-defense of person or property. We are addressing the problems that we have reviewed and the contributing factors to them.

Now, let’s turn to the Scriptures and listen to God’s Word on this topic.

When it Dominates

In a Culture

Genesis 6:5-13

The dominating force in the culture before the Flood was open, unrestrained wickedness in thought and deed. There are two terrible effects: the culture is corrupted and the world is filled with violence.

God marks out the violence of its culture as one of the primary reasons a universal destruction was necessary. The corruption and violence was so widespread, that the only solution was to utterly wipe it out and start over with a godly family.

In Individuals

Genesis 49:5-7

Simeon and Levi, two of the sons of Jacob and heads of the tribes of Israel, are characterized as being violent men. The evidence of being violent is in their killing of men and their hamstringing of oxen. Murder and cruelty are two symptoms of violence dominating a person.

The source of their violence is identified. They are angry men. Their anger is fierce, cruel and implacable. As a result, Jacob warns about entering into their council, their group or band. Do not associate with them or become a part of their fellowship. Anger and violence are contagious and corrupting. He also

says that the solution is to break up their association and scatter them throughout the tribes.

In Enemies

2 Samuel 22:2-5, 49

This text is representative of a cluster of texts where enemies are violent. Since this song of praise is offered up in response to David's being delivered from the hand of Saul, the violence he is being saved from is that of Saul. David's response to Saul's many attempts to kill him was grounded in his seeing God as his defense and deliverer. This is foundational to our not being violent people.

God's Perspective

The Scriptures are descriptive and detailed on God's perspective on violence.

No Justification for Violence

Job 16:16-17

Job protests that he has no violence in his hand, even though he is suffering greatly. Even though he is full of grief and darkness, he is not a violent man. Therefore, his prayer for vindication is pure. Much of the violence, particularly in music today, is justified as an expression of the darkness, hopelessness and suffering they are experiencing. Their violent music is a call for vindication and justice in our world. This is a lie. Vindication and justice are not brought about by resorting to a call for immoral violence.

The Garb of Violence

Psalms 73:6-9

This interesting verse describes a category of people who are all dressed up in pride and violence. Pride is their bling-bling. Violence is their outer garment. They are fool of folly. They are smart alecks, scoffers and venomous in their speech. They threaten others – "Not in my house!" They argue against God. And in wonderful turn of phrase, "their tongue struts through the earth." There is a very definite persona here. This is not what God's people are to be like. There is nothing godly here to emulate.

The Outworking of Violence

Psalms 7:14-16

These important verses warn what will be the end of those who plan evil, plot mischief and promote violence. What they plan, plot and promote returns on them. They fall into their own pit. Their violence falls on their own heads. We see this over and over again in the RAP music world. Here are people planning evil and promoting violence. And they are physically attacked, shot and killed. God warned them that this would be the case.

We need to think about this as we approach life as Christians. Do we engage in the fantasies of violence? Do we imagine physical harm to people we hate? Do we list to music or participate in games that promote violence as a good thing?

God's Response to the Violent

Psalms 11:5-7

God hates the man who loves violence. There is no way to avoid this pointed statement. The imprecatory prayer of verse 6 is grounded in the character of God who hates the wicked and violent (v.5) and loves the righteous and up-

right (v.7). While eternal condemnation awaits the wicked and violent, the righteous and upright shall see His face.

How to Avoid the Ways of the Violent

Psalm 17:3-5

This stanza in this Psalm guides in how to deal with this issue. We commit ourselves to being examined and tested by God (v.3). We open our hearts to His probing and we purpose to be pleasing to Him, regardless. Then, by the use of God's Word, here represented by the "word of your lips", we avoid the ways of the violent (v.4). The Word of God is how we know what their ways are, what those ways involve and what they will result in. The Word of God then gives us grace to not get on that path. Notice that it is not just violent people who are to be avoided. Their ways are also to be avoided.

Our Responsibility

Proverbs 3:31-32; 24:1-2

This is one of the rare proverbs that is an imperative. There are two parallel commands (v.31) and the cause (v.32). Verse 32 gives us the motivation for obeying the commands. God abominates the devious and He is the confidant of the upright.

You are not to envy a man of violence. You should not admire them. You should not hold them up as someone to emulate. You should not desire either the skill of their violence or what their violence gets them. Media often presents violent people through music, video, films and games with the effect that you think it is "cool" or "tough".

You are also not to choose ANY of his ways. The idea of ways in the Psalms and Proverbs points to how character and conduct become themes in a persons life. It is the "way" they are. The way they are in their hearts works itself out in the way they dress, act and walk. The anger, rebellion and aggression shows up in the external. It has to. So, we are not to choose those thematic ways either. Watch how they walk, dress, carry themselves. Watch how they talk. Look at their attitudes toward God, women, marriage and authority. Do not choose their ways.

What does this mean in the real world? Time to step on toes. Let me challenge you to think about each of the following areas and see if they fit just this text, much less most of the ones we have discussed.

Music – What do you listen to? What do you allow in your home?

Movies – Do you get a thrill out of the slasher movies? What about some of the so-called "action" movies?

Sports – Do you watch boxing or WWF? Why? Are these sports innately violent? How do you react to a really hard hit in football?

I am asking these questions in order for you to hear your heart. Does your heart love those things? Does your heart grate at having them challenged? Or are you poised for practical purity at all points. Listen to Hebrews 5:14, "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."

A Special Warning to Teens

Proverbs 19:26

A son who is violent towards parents is a shame and a reproach. What is there more to say about this? You are a disgrace if you intimidate or threaten your parents in any way. If you have done this, immediately after this service, you need to repent of your sin. You need to go to your parents and ask their forgiveness. And you need to look carefully at your heart and your life to deal with those things that would bring you to such a disgraceful sin.

The Qualification for Leadership

1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7

Finally, it is significant that in the qualifications for an elder, this issue is brought up. An elder must be not violent, but gentle. He must not be quarrelsome nor quick tempered. These qualities are to be aimed at by all Christian men. This is not a higher standard. It is expected thought that men who will bear office as pastor/elders will meet these qualifications. So, is your life filled with those things that promote meekness, gentleness, forbearance and longsuffering? Or do the movies you watch, the music you hear and the games you play promote the opposite?

Violence in our Homes

I think at this point, many of you are beginning to think through some things in your homes and in your parenting. The great challenge for us is how to handle the pervasive violence coming through media.

Let me reinforce something here. We do not believe that exposure to violence *causes* your sons and daughters to be violent. It may orient, provoke, stir up, create and appetite for violence. But anger and frustration and rebellion are the heart issues that use violence as an expression.

Through Television and Movies

Statistics are astonishing. A child who watches 3 hours of TV a day will be exposed over a year to over 3,000 murders, either by seeing the murder take place or by some direct viewing of the result of the murder. Studies have shown a direct correlation between violent acting out and acts in schools and the amount and kind of TV watching. Movies, whether you attend them or rent, need to discernment as well. With the technologies we have today, movie makers have an ability to vividly portray extraordinarily gruesome acts.

Through Music and Videos

Now, I want to challenge teens in particular, but many of you adults as well. We read the verse from Proverbs 24:1-2. You should not envy nor desire to with evil people, people whose heart devise violence and whose lips talk trouble. If this is not a description of the whole genre of RAP music, then I don't know what is. A lot of goth, heavy metal, head-banger music has the same message: life stinks, get out of my face, and death is the best. I gave you some of the shocking words (they are not lyrics in the proper sense of the term) of the music some of you and your sons and daughters are listening to. Make no mistake. Words have power.

Through Video Games

Here is the most dangerous contributor to violence in our sons and daughters. Here are the reasons you need to think through this carefully.

It is Active and Participatory

With TV, movies, video and to some degree, music, you are a passive participant. You are not doing what they are doing. You are seeing it and observing it. You are at best, a voyeur. But with video games you are an active participant. You are doing what the game does. The most popular violent games are all, without exception, first person games. You are the shooter. Further, the ads and reviews tout a games “immersion” factor. Immersion is how realistic is the environment and the action. The point is to immerse the gamer into the action so that his world is seamless with the world of the game. Thank about that.

It is Vicarious Violence

All of us would agree that fornication and adultery is sin. Most, if not all of us, would agree that hitting, striking, maiming, murdering, blowing up, dismembering, disarticulating other is sin. (Now, I am not talking about legitimate violence in war!) We would all agree that stealing, pillaging, defacing, destroying others property is sin.

Would you not agree that pornography is sin? Would you not agree that a video game that simulated sex was sin? That virtual, vicarious fornication is wrong?? Why then would you say that virtual vicarious shooting, maiming, murdering violence is also not sin? If vicarious sex is wrong, isn't vicarious violence?

What about multi-player games where you are actually hunting down and shooting one another? Do we need to re-think laser tag and paint ball?

It is Addictive and Hypnotic

Finally, these games are addictive and hypnotic. Some of you live to play these things You spend hours and hours playing them. Where is your stewardship of time before God? Some of you know that if you try to stop playing these games, you are going to have withdrawal like reactions.

I'll say this to you. No matter how good the music, the video, the game, if it dominates you, you need to examine it carefully. Paul says that he would not be mastered by anything. And neither should we.

Parents, I am not counseling you to remove all video games from your home. But, I believe you have a responsibility for the content of all the media, whether television, internet, music, videos or games. You should be aware of what they are seeing and playing. You should teach discernment and give reasons. Certain things just simply need to be outlawed in your home as wicked. You don't allow X rated videos or cable movies – why would allow you allow M games? And know this, many of the lower rated games have cheat codes that actually change the level of violence and nudity to an M level.

Conclusion I want to close this morning with three simple calls:

A CALL NOT TO TAKE THIS MESSAGE LIGHTLY. It will be easy for many of you to hear this as a legalistic, over-reaction to a small segment of our sinful culture. Praise God if none of this is in your life or in your home. Praise God if you and your sons and daughters have open and free consciences with each other and before the face of God. But I am sure many of you do not. You know that your heart is inclined to anger and violence. You know you love the thump of the music, the splatter of the blood, the death on the screen. Consider your ways. Consider your God.

A CALL TO COME TO CHRIST WHO IS MEEK AND GENTLE AND FULL OF MERCY. His mighty transforming grace will take angry, violent, aggressive hearts and gentle them for His great glory. I pray that many of you have seen a side of yourselves that is dark and deadly. I pray you are appalled and stunned before God. So, in the midst of humble self exposure, run to Jesus – run to Him for forgiveness, cleansing and a changed heart.

A CALL TO BE HERE TONIGHT FOR PASTOR DEVON'S MESSAGE. Much of what I have done is exposed the sin, what we ought to put off. He will highlight graces, what we are to put on.

Yes, not in my house! None of these wicked things!

Meekness: Power Under Control in a World that Prizes Power out of Control

Colossians 3:12; 2 Corinthians 10:1

Dr. Devon Berry

We are continuing this evening in the Extreme Parent Transformation series during our annual Family Enrichment Conference. This morning Pastor Russ spoke to the biblical view of violence, how it effects us, our culture, and how God responds to it. This evening we are going to further expand upon this theme by not only examining the influence of media violence on youth culture today but also considering the biblical response to this phenomena.

I want to start this evening by giving you a quick run down of what is “popular” in youth culture today, especially in the areas of movies, video games, and music. Let me read to you a description of a recent DVD release:

Movies: Man on Fire: A man whose ideals have been shattered for the last time is out for violent justice in this thriller. Creasy (Denzel Washington) is a former United State intelligence agent-turned-mercenary who has seen too much of the violence and corruption in the world and has become jaded and withdrawn. Creasy is hired to act as a bodyguard for Lupita (nicknamed "Pita", played by (Dakota Fanning), a ten-year-old girl whose wealthy family (a Mexican father and American mother) currently lives in Mexico City, where kidnapping has become a near epidemic. While watching over Pita, Creasy becomes fond of the girl, and finds himself regaining some of his faith in humanity. But things take an ugly turn when Pita is abducted by gunmen who shoot Creasy and leave him to die in the streets. Enraged beyond reason, Creasy recovers and sets out to find the men responsible for kidnapping Pita, no matter who he has to kill along the way... And kill he does, complete with cutting off body parts and stuffing body cavities with explosives. In the end, however, and interestingly, he gives his life for another effectively functioning as a savior figure.

Video Games:

Russ covered this area thoroughly this morning. He spoke extensively about Grand Theft Auto. This was the second highest selling game this past fall (2.05 mill). It was second only to Halo 2. On the slide you can see the stated goal of this game and some of its newest features.

Music – To be honest, the lyrics of what is top 20 in the US today would make even the most brazen of us blush. Although the lyrics tend to focus on sex and sexuality, there is a certain sense of violence about them as they forcefully strip away any sacredness associated with intimacy and any dignity associated with the female body...making it that much easier to see sex as an activity done to an object.

Welcome to youth culture. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. We could spend weeks looking more closely at what is actually being consumed by the typical youth

in the US. Many of us would be amazed. Many of your children would not...If we think of the above media creations as examples of what youth are being exposed to, a good follow-up question might be, "How much of this type of media are youth in the US being exposed to today? How much of this type of media are the youth of ccym being exposed to today? And, does it really matter? Does what is viewed on the screen really have the ability to alter the hearts, minds, and behavior of our children?"

Media Consumption in the US

On average, kids spend about 20 or more hours each week watching TV

Average child will see 8,000 murders before finishing grade school or approximately 10,000 rapes, assaults, and murders each year.

79% of children play computer or video games on a regular basis

Children between ages of 7 and 17 play video games for an average of 8 hours/week

In 2000, 70% of the 118 video games rated "M" (mature) for violence were marketed directly to children below the age of 17. What does "M" mean? "M" means, "[the video game has] content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence and/or strong language." I venture to guess that some of you are allowing your under 17 children to play games that even the secular media warns against. Why?

Media Consumption in ccym

N = 21, 50% female, 50% male

52% youth watch 1-2 hours of TV on school days (M-H), 29% watch 2 or more

43% youth watch 2-4 hours of TV on weekends (F-Su), 48% watch 4 or more

57% youth watch 0-2 hours of movies on school days, 43% watch 2 or more

43% youth watch 2-4 hours of movies on weekends, 23% watch 4 or more

76% youth play video games 0-2 hours on school days, 24% play 2 or more

72% youth play video games 0-4 hours on weekends, 28% play 4 or more

Briefly comment

Is Media Consumption Linked to Violence and Aggression?

APA, AAP, & AMA have all concluded that the scientific evidence shows a cause-effect relationship between television violence and aggression among children and youth.

1. Children imitate the violence they see (see nursery)
2. Watching TV violence leads to more aggressive behavior
3. TV glamorizes violence, makes it appear fun and effective, consistently gives message that violence is normal and "okay." Several multiyear studies have found that exposure to TV violence (even low doses) results in more aggressive and violent behavior in young adulthood, makes chil-

dren less sensitive toward the effect of violence on victims and the suffering it causes.

Many/most social scientist assume that violent video games will have an even greater impact. The most recent research shows (Walsh for review of 35 studies):

1. Exposure to violent video games increases physiological arousal (as compared to non-violent video games): HR, B/P, adrenaline, testosterone, particularly for more hostile/aggressive children
2. Exposure to violent video (as compared to non-violent video games) games increases aggressive thoughts (hostile attribution bias)
3. Exposure to violent games (as compared to non-violent video games) increases aggressive emotions (moody and aggressive)
4. Exposure to violent games (as compared to non-violent video games) increases aggressive actions. (See graph, not just hostile children are effected)
5. Exposure to violent games decreases positive prosocial (i.e., helping) actions.

My child doesn't have a hostile personality...(see bar graph at slide).

So we live in a society that consistently exposes us to violent and aggressive scenes. We live in a society that prizes and glamorizes the strong man when he uses his physical strength to overpower and destroy obstacles, people, and institutions. Our heroes are often heroes because they use violence and aggression to solve their problems, to eliminate their hardships, and defuse their trials. And we also live in a day and age where media violence and aggression appear to negatively influence our children's behavior.

So, is controlling your child's level of exposure to violent and aggressive media the whole story? Is it enough to simply not watch TV? Are violent video games really the problem? Or, is our youth culture's preoccupation with violence really evidence of something else? Can it be explained in some other way? We'll return to that question. For now, I want to transition in to discussing meekness. That may seem like a strange direction to take. Think of it this way: If the ungodly are depicted by the media to respond to hardship and difficulty through raw power and control, violence, and aggression; then how, in contrast, do the godly respond to hardship and difficulty?

How does the Scripture depict godly men and women responding in the midst of difficulty and hardship?

Meekness versus Violence and Aggression as a Response to Difficulty in Life

The biblical character quality of meekness is depicted in godly men and women throughout the whole of the Old and New Testaments. A lack of meekness is also depicted throughout Scriptures in both godly and ungodly persons. Often when persons lack meekness they turn to other uses of power to deal with difficulty in their

life – but before we go any further in making that connection, let's discuss meekness by considering its mandate, its meaning, and its models. Turn to Colossians 3...

Meekness: Its Mandate

Colossians 3:1-2, 5-6, 8-10, 12: Here we see meekness (may be translated as humility or gentleness) as a quality we are commanded to put on – in contrast to those we are to put off. The opening of the chapter lays out the motivation, and the entire passage continually points us to our new life in Christ as the means/power through which this exchange, this change, must occur. Now turn to Galatians 5

Galatians 5:16-25: In many of your translations you will see the word meekness translated as “gentleness” and in other places it is translated as “humility.” It is through these various translations of the same Greek word (*prautes*) that we begin to see some of the core descriptive characteristics of the person who is possessed by meekness, which we'll be discussing in a moment. In this passage we see meekness being depicted as a fruit of the Spirit, even as we see it being commanded in Colossians 3. Similar to Colossians 3 we see the fruits of the Spirit being set over and against the works of the flesh. Note two observations: 1) The Scripture never disconnects the state of our inner man (heart) with how we behave, live, desire, believe, and pursue (vv.19,22). Lives characterized by inward or outward hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, and rivalries, are lives associated with the flesh. Meekness, humility, and gentleness, alternatively, are associated with the Spirit. 2) Note that in the end analysis, fruit of the flesh versus fruit of the Spirit is not a question of how “holy” an individual can be, but rather of who they belong to. Those who belong to Christ Jesus “have crucified” the sinful nature and therefore live in the Spirit and continually strive to stay in line with the Spirit. Christ's work precedes and empowers our work through the Holy Spirit. So we see that meekness is an outward manifestation of an inward work. That work is Christ's work and is implemented in our lives through the Holy Spirit even as we seek to “keep in step with the Spirit.” We are meek because Christ is meek. True meekness is not learned behavior, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

So meekness is not only commanded of us in Colossians, but is set forth as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. And this is just the beginning, there are many other passages that call us to meekness and there are many godly men in Scripture who exercised meekness as an example for us (Ephesians 4:1,2; I Corinthians 6:7; Matthew 11:29, Numbers 12:3, etc.). But what is, exactly, meekness? Would we know it if we saw it?

Meekness: Its Meaning

We generally think of meek persons in contemporary American society as Webster defines it, “deficient in spirit and courage.” This is unfortunate as the word has come to mean almost the exact opposite of what it meant during the time in which the New Testament was written. When used in during New Testament times, the word meekness was often used by kings to describe them selves in the same context they described themselves as mighty. Now would any king want to be known as deficient in spirit and courage? No. In fact, meekness was used by

the Greeks to describe wild animals that had been tamed – such animals had not lost their strength, but had learned to control their destructive instincts. It was also used of medicine in that the proper dosage can be helpful, but an overdose can kill. Summed up simply, meekness is not powerlessness, but power under control.

This idea of power under control can be further expanded upon by considering the likely source text for Matthew 5:5 where Christ states, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Turn with me to Psalm 37 and let’s read verses 5 – 11. Let’s note first, v. 11, “But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.” It is almost identical to Matthew 5:5. And then the parallel between verses 9 and 11, in both cases, those who “wait” and those who are “meek” will inherit the land. In verses 5-8 we can note some of the characteristics of the meek:

- (v.5a) They commit their way to the Lord – they admit that they are need of the Lord’s help in their lives
- (v.5b) They trust God. They believe promises, that God will do good unto them regardless of the apparent circumstances or those who oppose them.
- (v.7a) They wait patiently for the Lord. They are still, quiet, and confident that the Lord will be faithful.
- (v.7b – 8) They do not fret, become angry, or wrathful when the wicked prosper.
- Elsewhere, James helps us to see that the meek are teachable (1:19-21), and that meekness is associated with biblical wisdom (James 3:13, 17) in that it is gentle, peaceable, and open to reason.

Through looking more closely at meekness, we can arrive at the following picture of meekness and further understanding of this statement of power under control. Meekness is not passive resignation or reluctant submission – It is the humble refrain from an inordinate exercise of power in one’s life situation because it is recognized that the good, sovereign, and wise God intends me good. The meek quietly, confidently, gently, trust in, and wait upon the Lord in the midst of opposition, trial, and suffering. They are not weak., rather they are strong, because they know their God to be strong. They do not lash out at God or the world, they use power to restrain themselves, and glorify God. They believe His promises and therefore have hope. Godless people cannot afford meekness, they have no hope. They have only themselves.

While these words are helpful, they take on deeper and clearer meaning when they are animated by real persons who are exemplified the quality of meekness.

Meekness: Its Models

Although there are many examples, such as Abraham’s treatment of Lot when dividing the land (Genesis 13), Joseph’s treatment of his brothers when they came to buy grain from him (Genesis 37), and David’s sparing of Saul when he found him asleep and an easy target (I Samuel 26), let’s briefly consider just two individuals who demonstrated meekness, Moses and Christ.

Moses

Turn to Numbers 12. Numbers 12:3 tells us, “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.” We are told this about Moses in the context of Miriam and Aaron opposing Moses supposedly because he has married a Cushite woman. Moses says not a word in his own defense. He waits patiently on his God. And God comes to his defense by rebuking Miriam and Aaron. Why does the author note that Moses was meek in the midst of this event? Because Moses clearly refrained from anger, from wrath, and patiently waited upon the Lord for vindication. Moses acted as a man who trusts God, a man who believed in God’s intention to good to Him, a man who was willing to maintain control over his power, and therefore he was called meek. (Also keep in mind, Moses then intercedes on Miriam’s behalf).

Christ

In the life of Christ we see many pictures of a perfect meekness. Paul confirms that Christ was meek in 2 Corinthians (10:1) when he appeals to the Corinthians “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” Consider Christ in the garden just shortly before the crucifixion as Judas leads the High Priest and the mob to Jesus. Let’s read Matthew 26:47-54. Here you see perfect meekness contrasted starkly with the absence of meekness. Christ demonstrates power under control while Peter attempts, by his own power, to take matter into his own hands. Peter acts as we often do – the Lord is not moving quick enough, not in the direction we desire, we stop trusting, we stop believing that He is good and sovereign and that His grace is sufficient, and we take matters into our own hand. We exercise our power with godless intent. We are unwilling to do the hard work of remaining patient and still, under his sometimes difficult and trial-some will.

And then there is the perfect act of meekness in Christ’s cross work. Absolute power under absolute control. In humility, Christ suffered silently with the full knowledge that He would prevail. When we need encouragement or guidance in our meekness, Christ’s work on the cross is the touchstone.

Note that in both the cases referenced here, these were not weak or powerless men who did not act powerfully and decisively when it was required of them. Moses leads the Exodus, Christ overturns the tables of the moneychangers in the temple and publicly condemns the Pharisees. However, they were men who: trusted God and His promises, had committed their way to Him with abandon, waited patiently for the Lord, and did not become wrathful or angry when the wicked prospered. They were men with incredible power (in the case of Christ, sovereign power!) – and that power was under control.

So consider for a moment. If the software industry was making a video game about a great leader who was disrespected and challenged by those closest to him, how do you anticipate we would see him respond? Does Master Chief ever give up and simply accept the rule of others over him? If Hollywood made about a movie about a man who was thought to be the coming King who would overthrow the current government and free a people, but instead

was falsely accused, betrayed by his own followers, tortured, and then made to suffer a violent death...how would that man be depicted? Would he not, if he was going to go down, at least go down fighting...maybe like Russell Crow in *The Gladiator*? We should face this truth – many in our society, and maybe many of us, would have thought that *The Passion* was a much better movie if Christ would have come off of that cross and made a graphic display of what sovereign vindication looked like.

Does our society prize the responses of Moses and Christ in these situations? NO, most certainly not. Rather, turn to our media to see the type of response that makes us cheer, draws us to the edge of our seat, causes us to exclaim loudly. We love to see the bad guy pummeled, pulverized, destroyed! We rejoice in the reckless exercise of raw power in vindication. We are mesmerized by the hero or heroin who will not accept circumstances they consider difficult or trial-some, who take matters in to their own hands, who ACT instead of waiting. They are godless and hopeless and therefore must rely on their own power. We are not a society familiar with, or eager to be associated with, meekness. Our society consistently feeds on multimedia depictions of people who know nothing of meekness.

Conclusion

So, what does this mean for the family? Your or your child's relationship to media?

First we must realize that children are foolish, naïve, lack training, can be easily swayed, and are prone to forget and despise instruction (Proverbs 1-9, 22:6,15; 29:15). Second, children are not morally neutral, they are sinners who are tempted by sin. Therefore, lacking discernment and judgment, children are easily drawn to evil. Third, media is not an electronic or digital beam that somehow appears behind multiple screens in our home. Media is a message, created by a person. Media, therefore, competes with the other messages in our lives. Fourth, when our children feast on a steady diet of movies (which often depict violence and aggression as the effectual and heroic response when difficulty comes) and video games (which allow us simply dispense with any sense of meekness and use our "powers" to radically alter our situation through superhuman violence) they will indeed be influenced. They will begin to view difficulty in their lives not as an opportunity to demonstrate a patient trust in a sovereign and good God that results in the restraining of the excessive use of force to alter circumstances to a more preferable state, but rather, as an indicator that aggression and violence is necessary to eliminate hardship. This is power out of control. The messages that we consistently listen to and set before ourselves will train us (I Timothy 4). If this is difficult for you to believe, although this message is clear throughout all of the Old and New Testaments, come with me to nursery some Sunday morning... And also consider the large and growing body of solid research that clearly demonstrates the relationship between viewed violence and child behavior. The secular world would have no problem supporting the statement that what children watch effects how children behave. Fifth, what are your children worshipping? Idolizing? Talking about all the time? Hurrying to do? Upset if their not allowed to do? Is your kid obsessed with media? If so, then beware, for they will come to imitate the thing they love. Sixth, violence and aggression arises not from media.

Music, movies, and video games are not the cause of violence and aggression. They are simply the occasions, the influences, the environmental factors that give voice and expression to real evil and sin existing in every human's heart. Violence and aggression arises from a heart that does not believe and does not bow. The only cure for this is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Burning your son's Xbox is not the solution. Emptying the shelves of the entertainment center of every DVD ever owned will not remedy the root problem. While these steps may be wise and necessary in some cases, it is ultimately only a white-washing of the latrine. What remains inside is still vile.

So how are parents to go about living and parenting in a way that encourages their children toward meekness and discourages their children from aggression and violence?

1. Preach and teach the Gospel to your children!
2. Practice meekness. Although the shaping influence of media is great in your child's life, it is not nearly as great as yours.
3. Not disengagement, but discernment. Media can provide incredible opportunities for you to aid your youngster in developing discernment. The influence and presence of media will only continue to grow in your son's or daughter's life. Teach them to be wise consumers. How do you reduce the risk presented to children who live in a home with a pool? You teach them to swim. And how are you doing at that? In the ccym survey it was found that 33% of parents are making decisions about media with their children. 38% are making decisions for their children. And 28% are uninvolved. Ccym's On the Media is designed...
4. Be involved. Know what your children are watching. Know what your children are playing. Communicate with your children on these issues. Realize that your message, and the Scripture's message is in competition with the media's message. Keep in mind that your children are not naturally inclined toward good. 33% of the youth reported watching or playing media when away from home that would be unallowable at home.
5. Lastly, wisely and judiciously set limits on your children and their media intake. Particularly as your children are young and lack discernment, set clear guidelines and enforce them. As they age, move into the role of counselor/advisor and use media choices as an opportunity to decipher media messages and heart tendencies. Point them to Christ.

Resources

<http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/86/020986.html> Piper on meekness

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/sg2200.htm> MacArthur on meekness

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/> Meekness

<http://www.gouranga.com/> Grand Theft Auto (video game)

<http://www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas/> Grand Theft Auto

<http://www.allthelyrics.com/> Music Lyrics

<http://top40-charts.com/> Top 40 music and lyrics

<http://www.tvturnoff.org/images/facts&figs/factsheets/FactsFigs.pdf> TV Turnoff

<http://www.truelies.org/> True Lies (Media watch organization)

<http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/violence.html> APA on violence

<http://culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/conf2001/papers/walsh.html> Walsh and the National Institute on the Media

<http://www.apa.org/science/psa/sb-anderson.html> APA, Anderson, on violence

<http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/tv.htm> University of Michigan, children and TV violence

<http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/video.htm> University of Michigan, children and video game violence

Proverbs for Parenting

Proverbs - Selected texts

Greg Cook

Introduction This is the final message of this 2005 Family Enrichment Conference. I don't know about you, but it has gone by way too fast! And there has been way too much to digest and meditate on. It has made some of us uneasy. It has, at times, disturbed our comfortable beliefs about child rearing. And that was the purpose. It has been the aim of this series to bring into focus the need for extreme parent transformation. We have deliberately brought into our sights the culture in which we live and its affects on our parenting. We have considered the place that heart transformation has as the initial radical change that should be undertaken by parents. We have explored the necessity of parenting in the midst of the believing community here at the Chapel. We have a responsibility to help each other parent. We were abruptly brought face to face with rebellion and how we need to have a balance between commanding our children and counseling them as they progress through their years with us. And last week, we examined pride as it expresses itself in violence and viciousness among children, teens, and adults along with the cultural influences toward those behaviors and heart attitudes.

It is my intent, in this final message, to bring in three of the leading experts in child rearing and compare their philosophies and techniques to what we find in the book of Proverbs. Those experts are: Dr. Benjamin Spock, Dr. Phil McGraw, and Dr. Laurence Steinberg. My sources are their books. Dr. Spock's book titled, Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care, is in its 8th edition and advertises that it is fully revised and expanded for the 21st century. It is subtitled "The One Essential Parenting Book". Dr. Phil's book is titled Family First. It's subtitle is, "Your Step-by Step Plan for Creating a Phenomenal Family". Dr. Steinberg is the Distinguished University Professor and Laura H. Carnell Professor of Psychology at Temple University and a former president of the Society for Research on Adolescence. He is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and is considered one of the most distinguished psychologists in the United States. He has been doing research on children and families for over 30 years. His book is titled The 10 Basic Principles of Good Parenting.

I chose the books that I did after doing some perusing of the shelves of some familiar stores to see what was on their shelves. I chose the books I did because they were on nearly every bookshelf in every store in which I went. For more research, I also did some surfing of the internet several times. I was surprised at how much was on the web for parenting. Last night, I decided that I would do some surfing to find out some of the specifics of the anti-spanking laws. That search ended all of my internet surfing for this message. I searched for sites that had the specifics on the Minnesota laws on Google.com, and chose one site that promised in-depth details on Minnesota spanking. I clicked and up came a porn site on spanking. My anti-virus software began going crazy and it began counting the viruses that were coming in. I couldn't get the internet connection unplugged fast enough! I learned that there is at least one dis-

advantage of high-speed internet connections. So, when I get to the point about spanking later, I do not have any of the details that I thought I would get. So much for that!

As I began to look through the books, listen to what each of them promises in the opening pages:

From Dr. Spock's book:

“Since *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care* was first published in 1945, generations of parents have raised their children “by the book”. The book gave parents sensible, expert advice. Beyond that, it gave them the voice of Dr. Benjamin Spock: warm, straightforward, and reassuring, a voice that made it seem as though the doctor were in the room talking to you. That voice talked to parents through seven editions of *Baby and Child Care*. The challenge for this eighth edition – the first since Dr. Spock's death in 1998 – is to keep that voice alive. Dr. Spock invented the modern parenting book and was a master pediatrician and writer. It would be foolish to imagine what I can do – and what I hope this new edition accomplishes – is to shine fresh light on an old treasure, so that another generation can find the information and encouragement they need as they go about life's most important task and most compelling adventure.” (pages *xi and xii*)

From Dr. Phil:

What I intend to do in *Family First* is tell you with great precision what you need to stop doing and what you need to start doing to lead your family with such a pure purpose and power that the competing messages and influences are drowned out. I plan to help you define success for your specific child or children and then take the steps to create and claim it for you and yours. Your children are the stars in your crown and it is time for them to shine; it is okay for them to shine and, if you do your job, shine they will. (page *xiv*)

From Dr. Steinberg:

This book is different from other books on parenting because it is based on the science of good parenting, on literally thousands of well-designed research studies – research that is just as credible as the research that scientists use to test new drugs, design safer automobiles, and construct sturdier buildings. Unlike most other parenting books on the market, this one is not based on one person's opinion, or someone's experiences in raising a couple of children, or the observations somebody made over the course of working with a few dozen families in a clinical practice. The advice contained in this book is based on what scientists who study parenting have learned from decades of systematic research involving hundreds of thousands of families.. What I've done is to synthesize and communicate what the experts have learned in a language that non-experts can understand. I've boiled this knowledge down into ten basic principles.

Raising children is not typically something we think of as especially scientific. It may surprise you to learn, though, that there is a science of effective parenting and that there is an awful lot more systematic research on parenting than on any other aspects of life where we routinely rely on science to guide us. In fact, child psychologists and other experts have been studying parenting for about seventy-

five years, and it is one of the most well-researched areas in the entire field of social science. (pages 1-2)

From Proverbs 1.2-7: (NLT)

²The purpose of these proverbs is to teach people wisdom and discipline, and to help them understand wise sayings. ³Through these proverbs, people will receive instruction in discipline, good conduct, and doing what is right, just, and fair. ⁴These proverbs will make the simpleminded clever. They will give knowledge and purpose to young people.

⁵Let those who are wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser. And let those who understand receive guidance ⁶by exploring the depth of meaning in these proverbs, parables, wise sayings, and riddles.

⁷Fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Only fools despise wisdom and discipline.

How does all of that sound to you? I would think, based on the promises of these popular books, that we would be doing serious damage in our parenting if we didn't use these experts and the science that goes with it in our parenting! It is only reasonable that the average parent who is frustrated and at wits end would turn to these sources for counsel and help.

But the question is – do these experts square with what the Scriptures teach? And if the Scriptures are different (which you already presume to be true), is the Bible out of touch with our culture and the nuclear family of this 21st century? Is it old wisdom for a by-gone day that had no comprehension of what we would be facing today? Should we throw out the Bible in the name of expert science? Or, are we going to believe the Scriptures and use them as our guide for the process of parenting, even going so far as to go against the experts of today?

Now, it is going to be impossible for us to look up and read all of the verses to which I am going to refer in Proverbs and still get through the material I have prepared in a reasonable amount of time. So may I make a suggestion; just list the verses that I have on the screen in your notes and look them up later. I will give a summary of what the verses say most of the time. At other times I will read them from the ESV or from the NLT. Let's pause and pray to ask God for grace to hear and evaluate what His Word says. <Pray>

The Battle for Hearts

In the first message of this Conference, Russ outlined from Romans 12 verses 1 and 2 that the transformation that must take place must begin in the hearts of parents.

The Hearts of Parents

“God defines parenting radically different from the way the world does. Remember what Dr. Phil promised, “Your children are the stars in your crown and it is time for them to shine; it is okay for them to shine and, if you do your job, shine they will.” Parenting in the Bible is not about what is produced, but in faithfulness to what God requires. Doing all that God requires guarantees you nothing except that you have pleased God. But failure to please God in our own character

and conduct as parents then contributes to, but does not cause, the sinfulness of our children. In order to keep on pleasing God even when it doesn't seem to be working requires a decisive commitment of ourselves to God. It will be hard. It will mean sacrifice, not in the common way we think of it, but in ways that God will use to expose our own hearts. In other words, you must present yourself to God as a living sacrifice so that you will be holy and pleasing to God in your parenting.

“We are to do this because this is how true rational or spiritual worship and service of God is defined. Worship is not just a Sunday event; it is the moment by moment stream of believing God in an obeying way – living obediently by grace.

“This radical transformation is first, *AN INWARD ONE*. It has to do with rebuilding and renewing our minds. What is being called for here is a radical change in our thinking – its content and stream that leads to a radical change in our behavior. The renewal of mind that transforms us both *VIEWS* and also *VALUES* God's will. It *discerns* God's will and *delights* in God's will and *does* God's will. We are talking about wisdom – knowing God's Word, bringing to bear on our situation to illuminate it, interpret it and indicate the path of righteousness in it. Many, many people clearly know what God's Word says about life situations, but do not want or prize God's will. Remember, our choices and emotions flow out of what we think and what we want. So to *discern* God's will means that we *delight* in God's will as good, acceptable and perfect.”

So there is a battle for the hearts of parents.

The Hearts of Children

But there is also a battle for the hearts of our children. Listen to how Dr. Phil describes our children:

“We like to think of our own children as angels filled with love and good intentions. In many respects, I think you can explain the unsocialized nature of children very succinctly: Children can be selfish and power seeking. Like many adults, they seek pleasure and avoid pain. That may sound pessimistic, but it is not. Your children aren't evil or bad if they behave this way, they're just waiting for you to do your job and socialize them properly. If you don't, your children can become tyrannical and demanding because they're not mature enough to handle the power surrendered to them inside a complex family. You also need to realize that your child is capable of lying, cheating, bullying, and stealing. That doesn't mean they do or even will do those things, but they're capable of them.” (page 236)

Here is what the Proverbs say:

4.23 - Guard your heart because it affects everything that you do.

23.26 – O my son, give me your heart.

22.15 – A youngster's heart is filled with foolishness

17.3 – the Lord tests the heart

23.19 – Keep your heart on the right course.

27.19 – As a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the person.

Do we have a problem of socialization, or do we have a problem with a heart that is sinful from the beginning? As one person quipped, vipers in diapers. Our children have sinful hearts from day one.

The Battle Never Ends

And this battle for hearts is never over. There are the calls from Wisdom and Folly each and every day. Proverbs 8.1-21 describes Wisdom and Understanding calling out from the hilltop, the crossroads, at the entrance to the city, and at the city gates. They raise their voices to all people. And Proverbs 9.13-18 records Folly sitting in her doorway on the heights overlooking the city calling out to all who will listen. Which one will our hearts go after at this moment? Which one will our hearts go after at the next deciding opportunity? This battle for hearts has not seen ultimate victory and won't until we get to glory. We all struggle. Is it any wonder that our children never seem to really get it?

The Goal of Child Rearing

Let's turn our attention to the goal of child rearing. Listen to Dr. Phil once again:

"It is time that as parents we say, 'Hey, I do not surrender, I do not give up. I will not be intimidated by all the forces tugging on my children and family. I will not accept that disconnected children are just 'how it is' these days. I do not accept the epidemics of oral sex, drugs and alcohol in the middle and upper schools. I do not accept a child that appears 'deaf' when I say, 'Pick up your toys and don't hit your sister in the head anymore.' I will not continue to parent out of fear that my kids won't like me if I require more from them behaviorally, academically and spiritually as I teach them that relationship-building is important in life. I will not feel guilty and go into debt trying to keep them in designer clothes and toys from preschool on up! I am not charged with being their friend. I am charged with being their parent, their protector, their teacher and their leader. I will 'rise above my raisin', if necessary, to break any family legacy that may be contaminating how I lead my family and deal with my children. Give me the specific tools, guidance and techniques and I will work to socialize my children in a way so that they become immune to the many seductive promises of instant gratification, false realities and provocative lifestyles of today's fast-paced world. I will not let the television or Internet 'baby sit' them as I communicate only through e-mails, pagers and cell phones. I will instead plug in the old-fashioned way and prepare them to deal with the distractions that assault them and blur their vision of self. I will create the pride, unity and loyalty and 'team spirit' that is so critical to a phenomenal family.'" (pages *xiv and xv*).

"A successful parent helps children find their unique gifts and talents." (page 142)

"Two main goals: socialization and authenticity. ... Socialization is learning to be a responsible citizen, leaning how to work in harmony with other people, developing intimate and trusting relationships, and learning to pay attention. ... Authenticity is teaching them who they are, that life ultimately rewards the pursuit

of authenticity, allowing your child to set personal goals within the framework of the goals you set for them, and clearing a path that encourages self-discovery.” (pages 149-154)

And now to Proverbs:

1.8-9 – 8Listen, my child, to what your father teaches you. Don’t neglect your mother’s teaching. 9What you learn from them will crown you with grace and clothe you with honor.

4.1-13 – My children, listen to me. Listen to your father’s instruction. Pay attention and grow wise, for I am giving you good guidance. Don’t turn away from my teaching. 3For I, too, was once my father’s son, tenderly loved by my mother as an only child.

4My father told me, “Take my words to heart. Follow my instructions and you will live. 5Learn to be wise, and develop good judgment. Don’t forget or turn away from my words. 6Don’t turn your back on wisdom, for she will protect you. Love her, and she will guard you. 7Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do! And whatever else you do, get good judgment. 8If you prize wisdom, she will exalt you. Embrace her and she will honor you. 9She will place a lovely wreath on your head; she will present you with a beautiful crown.”

10My child, listen to me and do as I say, and you will have a long, good life. 11I will teach you wisdom’s ways and lead you in straight paths. 12If you live a life guided by wisdom, you won’t limp or stumble as you run. 13Carry out my instructions; don’t forsake them. Guard them, for they will lead you to a fulfilled life.

23.22-23 – ²²Listen to your father, who gave you life, and don’t despise your mother’s experience when she is old. ²³Get the truth and don’t ever sell it; also get wisdom, discipline, and discernment.

27.11 – How happy I will be if you turn out to be wise.

The Methods of Child Rearing

In one of the messages we talked about going from a almost completely command-centered approach to our children rearing with little counsel to a completely counsel-centered approach to child rearing as the child progressively got older. Let’s look at how the experts say we should be rearing our children.

First from Dr. Steinberg:

“There are only three basic ways to get your child to change his behavior when he’s done something you disapprove of: punish him, reward him for some desirable alternative behavior, or explain why what he did was wrong and tell him how you’d like him to behave the next time.” (page 143).

“If you had to choose between two equally effective medications, one of which has terrible side effects and one of which does not, I assume you’d choose the one without the bad side effects.

“If you are choosing between two equally effective forms of punishment, I hope you will use the same logic. Two different types of punishment can be equivalent in their short-term effectiveness but have markedly different side effects.

“Of all the forms of punishment that parents use, the one with the worst side effects is physical punishment. Physical punishment is no more effective than other types of punishment – in fact, in many situations it is less effective – and it has been proven to have a harmful effect on children’s development. That’s why you should never spank, hit, slap, or otherwise physically punish your child.

“When I say *never*, I mean *never*. No matter how angry you are. No matter what your child has done. No matter how frustrated, annoyed, desperate, or fed up you are. In the long run, when you use physical punishment, you are creating more problems than you are solving.

“The main side effect of physical punishment is excessive aggression. Children who are spanked, hit, or slapped are more prone to fighting with other children. They are more likely to be bullies and more likely to use aggression to solve disputes with others. Who can blame them? Their parents have taught them that hitting someone is an acceptable way to solve a problem.

“Excessive aggression is a serious enough problem in its own right, but it also leads to other, equally serious difficulties. Children who are overly aggressive are more likely to be rejected by their classmates, to get into trouble in school, and to develop early conduct problems. All of these place a child at risk for academic difficulty, forming friendships with antisocial peers, and delinquency. Spanking your child will increase the likelihood of all of these problems.” (pages 148-149).

“If you need to punish your child, do so by telling him that you’re disappointed in how he has behaved, putting him on a time-out (if he is young), or depriving him of something he wants or enjoys (if he is older). These work just as well as physical punishment, but they do not have adverse side effects.

“Let me repeat myself, just to make sure you get my point. Never spank, hit, slap, or otherwise physically punish your child. The link between physical punishment and children’s aggression has been scientifically documented in hundreds, if not thousands, of research studies.

“Physical punishment is bad for children.” (page 150).

It is these scientific research studies that have been used as evidence to have laws passed in 10 European countries and the state of Minnesota. In these places it is against the law to spank your child. I do not know the severity of the crime or its punishment (I told you the reason at the beginning), but it is against the law to spank your child. Oakland, California has been having hearings on a “no spank zone”, but a law has not been passed yet. The backers of this kind of legislation make it very clear that their agenda is to get legislation passed worldwide.

And Dr. Spock:

“Nearly every two-year old has a tantrum from time to time; some healthy children have lots of them. Sometimes a parent can see a tantrum brewing and head it off by distracting a child, offering a well-timed snack, or leaving a situation

that is just too stimulating. At other times, the tantrum blows up in an instant. All you can do is wait for the storm to blow over.

“During a tantrum, it’s helpful to stay nearby so that your child doesn’t feel alone. At the same time, it’s best not to get angry at your child, threaten punishment, plead for calm, or try too hard to make everything better. Any of these responses just tends to make tantrums occur more often and last longer. Afterward, it’s best to move on to a positive activity and put the upset in the past. A quick word of praise along the lines of “Nice job pulling yourself together” can let your child salvage some self-esteem and learn to recover faster the next time. Remind to praise yourself, too, for staying calm and rational – not easily done when your two-year-old is having a melt down.” (pages 158-159)

And lastly, from Dr. Phil:

“I believe that it is important to avoid confrontation with your children as much as you possibly can. Having head-to-head confrontations, delivering ultimatums and essentially throwing down the gauntlet breed conflict, power struggle and resentment. Therefore, I think it is usually good to try to figure out the best possible alternative and come up with a jointly sponsored plan that both of you but into and can be excited about. Avoid confrontation as much as possible, but if and when you have one, as a parent, *you must not lose*.” (pages 213-214)

“More than thirty years ago, psychology professor David Premack accurately described something mothers have known for generations. He found that high probability (enjoyable) behaviors can serve as currency for low probability (unenjoyable) behaviors. Simply put, if they have to, children will do things they don’t particularly want to do, such as homework, in order to get to do things they do want to do, such as watch television or play with their toys.

“This became known as the Premack principle. It is a simple but powerful truth that you children will perform those need-to-do behaviors with a high degree of consistency and efficiency if you establish and *enforce a consistent rule* that they must follow before they get to do what they want to do.” Page 217)

“I probably recommend time-outs more often than any other single behavioral management technique because when properly done, they are highly effective.” (page 219)

Training in the Early Years

I have divided this portion of the presentation of Proverbs into three parts – the early years, the transition years, and the later years. I am doing that to go along with the presentation that I did on Sunday evening, January 16th. Obviously, I could have given many more examples of the three experts and how they divided parenting up between age groups. And all three of them employed some of the principles that we find in Proverbs. After all, God’s principles are wise, and it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to observe what works. But the important point about the samples that I have given show the philosophical backgrounds and pre-suppositions that these men bring to the table.

So let me begin with the early years of child rearing according to Proverbs. If you were here on Sunday evening 2 weeks ago, I presented the point that parenting is a balance between commanding our children and counseling them. Commanding involves spanking and making commands that are expected to be obeyed without complaint, delay, or excuse. And counseling involves discussion and pastoring in order to get to the heart of the child to bring about repentance and change. There isn't any magical age when these two approaches cross over, but the one final point is that commanding does come to an end.

Listen now to the Proverbs for this commanding approach:

20.30 – Physical punishment cleanses away evil; such discipline purifies the heart.

22.15 – Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

10.13 – Fools will be punished with a rod

13.24 – If you refuse to discipline your children, it proves you don't love them; if you love your children, you will be prompt to discipline them.

19.18 – Discipline your children while there is hope. If you don't, you will ruin their lives.

23.13-14 – Don't fail to correct your children. They won't die if you spank them. ¹⁴Physical discipline may well save them from death.

26.7 – Guide a horse with a whip, a donkey with a bridle, and a fool with a rod to his back!

29.15 – To discipline and reprimand a child produces wisdom,

Transitioning in the Middle Years

During this transition time, which comes during the middle years, we are commanding less and less and counseling more and more. We can see this is some of the extended portions of Proverbs the best:

1.10-19 – **My child, if sinners entice you, turn your back on them!** ¹¹They may say, "Come and join us. Let's hide and kill someone! Let's ambush the innocent! ¹²Let's swallow them alive as the grave swallows its victims. Though they are in the prime of life, they will go down into the pit of death. ¹³And the loot we'll get! We'll fill our houses with all kinds of things! ¹⁴Come on, throw in your lot with us; we'll split our loot with you."

¹⁵**Don't go along with them, my child! Stay far away from their paths.** ¹⁶They rush to commit crimes. They hurry to commit murder. ¹⁷When a bird sees a trap being set, it stays away. ¹⁸But not these people! They set an ambush for themselves; they booby-trap their own lives! ¹⁹Such is the fate of all who are greedy for gain. It ends up robbing them of life.

2.1-22 – My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for under-

standing, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways. So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

29.19 – 19For a servant, mere words are not enough—discipline is needed. For the words may be understood, but they are not heeded.

Counseling in the Later Years

And during this later years, our commanding mode should be dwindling continually as we allow our children to make decisions of their own. We counsel and instruct. We make less and less decisions and allow them to make more and more. We even allow them to make foolish decisions and to suffer the consequences for those decisions, using them as teaching and counseling opportunities. Our goal is to have independent children who are wise, discerning, and able to live life pleasing to God without our commands. Again, some of the extended portions of Proverbs express this well. For instance, in Proverbs 7 we see Solomon taking his son out into the culture and counseling him about the truths and the lies that are all around him.

7.1-27 – ? 1Follow my advice, my son; always treasure my commands. 2Obey them and live! Guard my teachings as your most precious possession.£ 3Tie them on your fingers as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart.? 4Love wisdom like a sister; make insight a beloved member of your family. 5Let them hold you back from an affair with an immoral woman, from listening to the flattery of an adulterous woman.? 6I was looking out the window of my house one day 7and saw a simpleminded young man who lacked common sense. 8He was crossing the street near the house of an immoral woman. He was strolling down the path by her house 9at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in. 10The woman approached him, dressed seductively and sly of heart. 11She was the brash, rebellious type who never stays at home. 12She is often seen in the streets and markets,

soliciting at every corner.? 13She threw her arms around him and kissed him, and with a brazen look she said, 14“I’ve offered my sacrifices and just finished my vows. 15It’s you I was looking for! I came out to find you, and here you are! 16My bed is spread with colored sheets of finest linen imported from Egypt. 17I’ve perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. 18Come, let’s drink our fill of love until morning. Let’s enjoy each other’s caresses, 19for my husband is not home. He’s away on a long trip. 20He has taken a wallet full of money with him, and he won’t return until later in the month.”? 21So she seduced him with her pretty speech. With her flattery she enticed him. 22He followed her at once, like an ox going to the slaughter or like a trapped stag, 23awaiting the arrow that would pierce its heart. He was like a bird flying into a snare, little knowing it would cost him his life.? 24Listen to me, my sons, and pay attention to my words. 25Don’t let your hearts stray away toward her. Don’t wander down her wayward path. 26For she has been the ruin of many; numerous men have been her victims. 27Her house is the road to the grave.£ Her bedroom is the den of death.

9.8-9 – So don’t bother rebuking mockers; they will only hate you. But the wise, when rebuked, will love you all the more. 9Teach the wise, and they will be wiser. Teach the righteous, and they will learn more.

16.21—The wise are known for their understanding, and instruction is appreciated if it’s well presented.

16.23 – From a wise mind comes wise speech; the words of the wise are persuasive.

19.19 – Short-tempered people must pay their own penalty. If you rescue them once, you will have to do it again.

19.20 – Get all the advice and instruction you can, and be wise the rest of your life.

This is perhaps the most challenging of times for us as parents. We don’t want our children to make mistakes and pay consequences. We don’t want them to embarrass us. We don’t want them to fail. But, as we have said all during this conference, God calls us to be faithful to the process of child rearing. The results are His area of concern.

The Results of Child Rearing

Which leads us to what those results can be. I don’t believe that there is a parent sitting in front of me this morning who wants to have children that are described as fools, violent, disobedient, and the host of other terms that are used in the Scriptures. But God has not given us any guarantee that our children will turn out to be good if we follow His plan for child rearing, just as He doesn’t guarantee that if we don’t, the child will turn out to be bad. We cannot do anything about changing our children’s hearts. Changing hearts is God’s business. So Proverbs describes the two results that can come about: heartaches and joy.

Heartaches

- 1.7 – A fool despises wisdom and discipline
- 15.5 – A fool despises his parent's discipline
- 15.20 – Foolish children despise their mother.
- 15.21 – Foolishness brings joy to those who have no sense
- 15.32 – If you reject criticism, you only have yourself to blame
- 16.27 – A worthless man hunts for evil
- 17.11 – An evil man seeks rebellion
- 17.21 – It is painful to be the parent of a fool; there is no joy for the father of a rebel.
- 19.3 – People ruin their lives by their own foolishness
- 19.27 – If you stop listening to instruction, you have turned your back on knowledge.
- 20.3 – Fools insist on quarreling
- 29.15 – A mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child

Joys

- 10.1 and 15.20 – A wise son brings joy to his father
- 15.21 – A man of understanding stays on the right path
- 23.15-16 – My child, how I will rejoice if you become wise. 16 Yes, my heart will thrill when you speak what is right and just.
- 23.24-25 – The father of godly children has cause for joy. What a pleasure it is to have wise children. 25 So give your parents joy! May she who gave you birth be happy.
- 29.3 – The man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father
- 29.17 – Discipline your children, and they will give you happiness and peace of mind.

Conclusion I would like to try and summarize this Conference with a series of questions. There is no way that you can write all of these questions down, so just contemplate them as they come up:

Do you have a God-honoring goal for rearing your children?

Do you love ease more than obeying God?

Do you live through your children?

Are your children the source of your success and the star in your crown?

Do you define success in terms of the outcome of how your children turn out?

What outcomes are acceptable and which aren't?

Do you have a child-centered home?

Do you model Christ before your children?

Does your life reflect wisdom and discernment?

Can you say to your children, "Observe my ways"?

Do you trust God with your children, or do you believe you can do a better job with techniques developed by the experts?

Do you keep your children so busy so that there isn't any time for them to get into any trouble?

Do all infractions of the rules receive the same response, without any distinctions?

Do your children reap the harvest of foolish choices?

Are you helping your children see the culture through the lens of Scripture and being pleasing God?

Are you using the culture to help your children develop discernment and wisdom?

Will your children be prepared to face this culture and be light and salt to this dark world?

Are you evaluating your parenting to see where you need an extreme parent transformation?

