

Teaching Children Respect

Some years back, the Louisiana legislature passed a so-called "respect bill" requiring elementary school children to address their teachers as "sir" or "ma'am." Proponents of the new law hoped it will catch on throughout the state. In the following years, the law would extend to high school students.

Louisiana lawmakers were quite surprised by the ridicule and opposition they have faced after the law was passed. A state senator who sponsored the bill saw the law as a positive, symbolic message. He believed good manners in classrooms can help teach values that have been lost.

The Louisiana law made national headlines with many people mocking the legislators who passed it. Obviously the law did not catch on in most places outside the Deep South where "yes, sir" used to be as common as "ya'll come."

A more recent poll of veteran schoolteachers, most of whom have taught more than ten years, noted the decline in respect and morals. Eighty-one percent of these teachers say that today's students are less respectful of authority than those they first taught. Seventy-three percent say students are now less ethical or moral, and sixty-five percent say today's students are less responsible than a generation ago.

Some have noted that the respect bill was an attempt at a "quick fix" for the moral crisis among young people today. One writer noted that "symbols" can't address deeper problems. A spokesman for the Freedom Forum noted that the law "can only be helpful as one part of a larger, substantive effort to help [children] learn what it is to be good citizens and good people." In a similar vein, others have hoped that reinstating prayer and Bible reading in public schools or posting the Ten Commandments in public places will bring the country back to Christian values and higher morals."

What does the Bible teach us about the use of symbols and the reality that lies behind them? Will restoring the symbols really bring back values that have been lost?

The Bible teaches the value of both symbols and the truths behind the symbols. One can't be divorced from the other. For example, consider what the Bible says about the symbols of the bread and cup in the Communion service. The Bible commands the church to observe Communion with its symbolism. Jesus said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:25). But Jesus continued by speaking to the heart experience that must

go with the observance of Communion. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself" (11:28, 29).

The Bible points out that our hearts need to be changed. What is in the heart eventually comes out. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness ... all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). Disrespectful speech and actions reflect a disrespectful heart.

Where does the real solution to the problems of violence and other crimes in the schools, disrespect for authority, and immorality among youth lie? Parents and the churches must instill the principles of the Bible, God's Word, into the lives of young people. When the parents, church, and school work together, young children can be trained to respect authority, the rights of others, and be polite to everyone. For these values to continue in the lives of youth and adults, they will need changed hearts, controlled by Jesus Christ.

How can we train children in this secular and sinful society where Christian values are openly ridiculed? It is going to take courage on the part of parents to come out from the secular society, rejecting its materialistic, anti-God, anti-moral absence of values. But we know that with God all things are possible. The Bible says, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

The Bible also promises the godly parent, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

You will need to surrender your life and your child training to the control of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Bible. You will need the encouragement and support of a faithful Christian church that believes and obeys the Bible. Take courage. You are not alone. May God give you the strength and wisdom to do what is right.

~Roger Berry