

Old-Fashioned Parents and Jet-Age Teenagers

The family car was all ready to go. The seventeen-year-old driver was behind the wheel, listening with impatience to his father's last instructions concerning speed, time for getting home, and places to avoid. Finally he said goodbye and the car was off. But as they went, the seventeen-year-old said to his companion, "Dad's still living in the dark ages."

This remark calls attention to a problem which is old, and yet is more acute at this present time than it has ever been before. More than three thousand years ago a father asked a heavenly visitor the question, "How shall we order the child?" (Judges 13:12). The generation gap has been a problem for years. In conversation, in cartoons, in magazine articles, etc.—one comes across repeated complaints like these: "You just can't reason with teenagers; they want their own way; they won't listen to advice; you can't talk sensibly with them." On the other hand, teenagers sometimes complain that parents are arbitrary and unsympathetic and that they are trying to force their children to follow the same pattern in which they grew up. Teens claim that times have changed, and they want to work out better ways of doing things.

It is true that in many ways times have changed. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were no automobiles, no airplanes, and no radios or televisions. Electricity was not in general use, for the methods of transmitting high-voltage current had not been discovered. Telephones were few, and generally used only locally, for the small independent companies that operated the local lines did not connect together. Farm crops were harvested with much hand work, and today's mass production techniques in industry were still in the future.

The achievements of men have changed, but the Word of God has never changed, and it never will. Jesus says, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). The principles of the Bible have stood the test of centuries, and they are still valid. The Bible contains a number of principles which apply to the controversy between parents and teenagers. Many are from the Book of Proverbs, written by Solomon, but inspired by the Holy Spirit.

1. Instructions to Parents

First: Careful and purposeful child-training is needed. The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). This is much more than a command to use the rod of correction. "Train up" means careful teaching and guidance. It corresponds to the instruction in Ephesians 6:4, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The best teaching has always been a consistent example. The alert parent will find many opportunities to clinch a lesson. A boy of six, for example, was rejoicing in his newly learned ability to read. He happened to discover that the family's maid could not do this. He ran into his father's study, crying, "Daddy, did you know the maid can't read, and she's ever so much older than I am?" His father picked up a book and opened

it. "Here," he said. "Can you read this?" The little boy stood dumbfounded. The book was written in Chinese. In telling the story many years later, he added, "Whenever I am tempted to despise the ignorance of someone else, I remember my father's lesson: I cannot read Chinese."

Second: Begin child-training early. The Bible says, "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Proverbs 19:18). One who trains a dog must insist on obedience, or his training will be unsuccessful. Training a child is much the same, but with this difference: While we train the dog so that he may please us, we train the child to know what is best for his own good and happiness. For this reason the training of a child is so very important. Children do not belong to us. God only lends them to us, and He can take them back at any time.

Third: Don't be so busy that you have no time for the companionship and training of your children. It is true that these are busy days. Children are perceptive. If the family is struggling against difficult odds to make ends meet, they will realize it, and cooperate. But if they sense that the parents are more interested in making money than they are in their own children, the children are likely to become bitter about it. One of the most common complaints made by teenagers in writing to counselors is that their parents are too much concerned with making money to be companions to them.

Fourth: Keep a cheerful attitude and maintain a sense of humor. We do not mean to encourage foolish jesting, which is condemned in the Bible, but the wise man said (Proverbs 17:22), "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones." The child whose parents are able to laugh in the face of irritations and disappointments has a priceless heritage. When the one-year-old pulls the cupboard door open and gets plastered with molasses, a cleaning job is called for—but it will go better all around if mother can laugh a little at the sticky-faced child.

Finally: Be honest with your children. If you make a promise, keep it faithfully. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12). One is reminded of a quick-tempered mother who promised her boy a piece of candy for being quiet. When he reminded her, she snapped, "Didn't I promise you the candy for keeping still?" She said, "The longer you keep still, the sooner you'll get it!" Parents should never deal with a child on such an illogical basis.

2. Instructions to Teenagers

First: Remember that you must account for the way in which you spend your youth. Just as truly as parents need to remember that children are only lent from God, so young people need to remember that youth, that priceless, irreplaceable gift, is only given conditionally, and must be accounted for. Young folks often say, "I want to live my life my own way." But the Bible says, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Ecclesiastes 11:9). Whatever you sow, you will have to reap some day.

Second: Give respectful consideration to what your parents say. Proverbs 1:8 says, “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.” You may feel that you know better than they. It is possible that you do. But remember this: they have been over the road that you are traveling, and they have brought you up to be what you are. You can learn from them, even if only to avoid some of the mistakes they may have made. Treat them with respect and consider their advice carefully.

Third: Consider your company with care. The Bible says, “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, . . . walk not thou in the way with them” (Proverbs 1:10, 11, 15). It is important that you choose your company from those who are not infected with the spirit of wanting something without earning it by honest work. Some say, “Only dull people work hard. Smart ones find easier ways to get a livelihood.” Sometimes people envy the worker who through greater skill and acceptance of more responsibility, is better paid than they are. But don’t forget that the skill required years of work to acquire, and responsibility is entrusted only to those who have demonstrated an ability to handle it well. God told Adam that he must eat his bread in the sweat of his face, and this has never been changed.

Fourth: Young people (both boys and girls) should consider the Bible’s standard for ideal womanhood. This is most beautifully set forth in Proverbs 31:10-31. Open your Bible to that passage, and notice the qualities which are recommended for ideal womanhood (and many of these are just as needful for the men):

(1) Loyalty (verse 11). The Scripture implies that loyalty and trustworthiness are of more value than wealth.

(2) Skill in homemaking (verses 13, 19, 22, 27). Many girls today make light of domestic knowledge. They are constantly being urged to try to make themselves physically attractive in order to secure the attention of the opposite sex. But without skill in homemaking and the graces of good character, it will be difficult to maintain a happy home.

(3) Carefulness and orderliness (verse 27). Orderly habits can be cultivated. Lack of order in the home has disgusted many a good husband and caused his affection for his wife to cool. We should also add that a slovenly and disorderly husband adds to the burden of his wife’s duties and can scarcely help but lessen her respect for him.

(4) Generosity (verse 20). This is the crown of womanliness as well as of Christian character.

(5) Wisdom and kindness in speech (verse 26). A sharp tongue spoils an otherwise admirable person.

(6) Verse 30 says that “favor,” by which we mean “social prestige,” is deceitful. It usually leads to envy and excess in display. A wise young person will not be anxious to secure it. The same verse also says that beauty is vain. The Bible holds high regard for beauty when worn as a crown for virtue

(as its statements concerning the beauty of Rebekah and Rachel clearly show), but beauty alone is of no value. Our commercial and educational systems today often tend to encourage and exploit beauty of body at the expense of beauty of character.

The qualities named above do not change, and so to summarize the whole matter, we would simply say that **things** have changed very much since our parents were teenagers, **people** have changed very little, and **God** has not changed at all. We do many things differently from the way they were done in the days of our parents, but the principles and qualities which bring happiness and peace and satisfaction in life have never changed. The principles that brought success and happiness to our parents will do the same for us.

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