

THE PROBLEM WITH PARENTING

I. THE PROBLEM WITH PARENTS

Matthew 7:3-5 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

PAUL TRIPP (*Age of Opportunity*, 18) – “It is my experience that when parents begin to recognize, own, confess, and turn from their own wrong heart attitudes and the wrong actions that flow from them, the result is a marked difference in their relationship to their (*child*) and in the way they view the struggles of the (*childhood*) years. When we look with concerned eyes toward the (*childhood*) years, we need to look not only at our children, but also at ourselves. Parents who are humbly willing to change, position themselves to be God’s instruments of change.”

Children don’t create our sins; they reveal the sins that were already there. Effective parenting begins with identifying and correcting the sins that keep us from effectiveness.

Some Common Sins of Parents

1. Anger (harsh, unkind, critical, impatient) – We crave something and don’t get it, our interest in not the child’s best but our thwarted desires.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

2. Uncharitable judgment – We can feel like our children are out to get us and read the motives behind their actions as against us.

3. Unforgiveness and bitterness – “Why don’t they change?” “I’m sick and tired of this!” “Why do you put me through this?”

4. Laziness (idols of ease and comfort) – Parenting is hard work, we want rest, we don’t want our agendas messed up, we compromise convictions for our own comfort and convenience rather than for our children’s good.

5. Selfishness – Parenting is selfless work that requires servant leadership; you lay down your life for another.

6. Materialism – Time spent on job, acquiring, enjoying and maintaining possessions, etc.

7. Pride

- Wanting to be recognized and appreciated as a good parent by others – fear that your children may embarrass you.
- Wanting to be respected and appreciated by your children – “Look at all I’ve done for you.”
- Unwillingness to admit wrong in your actions or wisdom.

8. Self-righteousness – “What’s the matter with you!?!?”

9. Self-pity – “Why do I have to go through this?”

10. Fear of man – We don’t want our child’s disapproval; we compromise to avoid conflict.

11. Disobedience

12. Fear and unbelief – Lack of trust in God for your child.

II. THE PROBLEM WITH CHILDREN

The problem with children is twofold: they are sinners and they are immature.

A. They Are Sinners

WILLIAM FARLEY (*Gospel Powered Parenting*, 149) – “The heart of the problem is a problem heart.”

Children are born with an ingrained lust to defy and disobey God and His delegated authorities – the sin nature. Even the regenerate child has to deal with the problem of remaining or indwelling sin.

Genesis 8:21 The intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.

Psalms 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Psalms 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

Romans 3:10-12 As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

JOHN MACARTHUR JR. (*Successful Christian Parenting*, 29) – “Every child comes into the world with an insatiable capacity for evil. Even before birth, the human heart is already programmed for sin and selfishness. Humanity’s relentless penchant for every kind of depravity is such that, given free reign, every boy has the potential to become a monster.”

Some Common Sins of Children

Every child sins in a variety of ways. This should not surprise and shock us. It should not be taken personally: they are not out to get you, they are just doing what is natural.

1. Rebellion – The basic orientation of all children (all like sheep have gone astray); the desire to live independent of authority; to be their own master.
2. Pride - Self willed, self absorbed, demanding, sullen.
3. Stubbornness (another expression of pride) – Refusal to obey, refusal to repent, willingness to take repeated punishment rather than relent.
4. Selfishness – Not sharing; bossy.
5. Anger – When desires and cravings are thwarted, one of the earliest sins to manifest is temper tantrums.
6. Covetousness/Envy – Grabbing toys; “I want that NOW!!!”
7. Laziness/Idleness – Sloppy work; Incomplete work
8. Dishonesty (lies and deceptions) – Outright lies, “Oh I thought you said...”
9. Complaining – I don’t like this, I want, I hate...
10. Self-righteousness – I can and do keep the rules, this is often the compliant, “good” child. The danger here is more grave than most parents recognize.

B. They Are Immature

Also, remember that your children are immature and foolish and need to be instructed and disciplined so they can gain wisdom. It is important that we distinguish sinfulness from childishness.

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

DAVID AND SALLY MICHAEL (*A Vision for Ministry to Children and Their Parents*, 7) – “In addition to sharing the fallen, sinful nature that all humans have, children are also less developed in their physical and emotional capacities than adults are. They are in the process of growing up.”

They don't know how to deal with the temptations and emotions raging in their hearts and heads. They aren't nuanced in their thinking. Self-control is an acquired skill.

III. THE SOLUTION

In order to solve the problem of parenting we must graciously deal with the heart through the gospel. This is true for both ourselves and our children.

PAUL TRIPP ("Changing Hearts, Changing Lives" Seminar) – The key to change is seeing yourself as the problem, getting to the heart and receiving the grace to change provided at the cross."

TEDD TRIPP (*Shepherding A Child's Heart*, 22) – "All behavior is linked to some attitude of heart. Therefore, discipline must address attitudes of heart. This understanding does marvelous things for discipline. It makes the heart the issue, not just the behavior. It focuses correction on deeper things than changed behavior. The point of confrontation is what is occurring in the heart. Your concern is to unmask your child's sin, helping him to understand how it reflects a heart that has strayed. That leads to the Cross of Christ. It underscores the need for a Savior. It provides opportunities to show the glories of God who sent His son to change hearts and free people enslaved by sin."

A. Graciously

You are a fellow sinner and can relate to your child as such without lessening your authority in his life. Your own experiences and example in dealing with sin and trusting in the gospel will be invaluable in helping your child.

B. Deal With The Heart

Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Luke 6:43-45 "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

TEDD TRIPP (*Shepherding A Child's Heart*, 15) – "The central focus of parenting is the Gospel. You need to direct not simply the behavior of your children, but the attitudes of their hearts. You need to show them not just the 'what' of their sin and failure, but the 'why'. Your children desperately need to understand not only the external 'what' they did wrong, but also the internal 'why' they did it. You must help them see that God works from the inside out. Therefore, your

parenting goal cannot simply be well-behaved children. Your children must also understand why they sin and how to know internal change.”

The Threefold Process of Change

1. Identify and put to death (put off) sinful behavior and its roots

This can be done for all ages in age-appropriate ways. Once a child is old enough to understand and repeat your instructions, he is old enough to grasp this concept.

Ephesians 4:22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

The key question here is not just what have they done - that is usually fairly obvious - but why are they doing it. What idol (craving, lust, desire, treasure, fear) is ruling in their heart?

An idol is anything that rules our heart other than God - something that we want or trust in more than God.

KEN SANDE (*The Peacemaker*, 88) – “An idol is not simply a statue of wood, stone, or metal; it is anything we love and pursue in place of God, and can also be referred to as a ‘false god’ or a ‘functional god’. In biblical terms, an idol is something other than God that we set our hearts on, that motivates us, that master’s or rules us, or that we serve.”

JOHN CALVIN – “The human heart is a factory of idols...everyone of us is, from his mother’s womb, expert in inventing idols.”

Changing the heart is the key to lasting change. It is the heart where sin brews and eventually emerges in behavior; therefore, we must work back from behavior to the heart if we are going to see lasting change. Attempting to control a child’s behavior through strict discipline will not do anything to change the real source of the problem. We can’t help anyone long term by changing their behavior but only by changing the roots of their behavior.

PAUL TRIPP ("Changing Hearts, Changing Lives" Seminar) – “The Bible says that the heart is active: it causes, directs, shapes, and shepherds our behavior...People and situations never make you do what you do, it is your hearts reaction to these things.”

2. Identify and inculcate (put on) godly behavior and its roots

Ephesians 4:23-24 to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

It is not enough to simply focus on what we are not going to do but to discover what God would have us do and what heart attitudes need to be developed to produce that behavior. This requires

teaching your child the positive character qualities – obeying, humility, sharing, cheerfulness, etc.

3. Appropriate the grace to change available through the cross.

This grace includes the gift of regeneration. However, even a child who is not yet regenerate can appropriate God's common grace to respond to his parent's correction.

Note: Be careful of accepting alternative solutions to your child's sin problem

Modern psychology has proposed numerous conditions and disorders that seek to explain a child's sinful behavior. We must beware of accepting this "wisdom of the world" contrary to the Bible's clear teaching on sin and its remedy.

JOHN MACARTHUR JR. (*Successful Christian Parenting*, 87) – "To attach a clinical name to chronic misbehavior and use it as an excuse for sinful behavior is a serious mistake. Disobedience is sinful, regardless of what factors shape the child's natural aptitude."

C. Through The Gospel

The goal of child rearing is to bring your child into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ through the gospel. It is through the gospel that our children will receive forgiveness from the penalty of sin and strength against the power of sin.

TEDD TRIPP (*Shepherding A Child's Heart*, 145) – "The central focus of child-rearing is to bring children to a sober assessment of themselves as sinners. They must understand the mercy of God who offered Christ as a sacrifice for sinners. How is this accomplished? You must address the heart as the fountain of behavior and the conscience as the God-given judge of right and wrong. The cross of Christ must be the central focus of your childrearing... The focal point of your discipline and correction must be your children seeing their utter inability to do the things which God requires unless they know the help and strength of God."