

“NO TRASH TALK ... JUST THE TRUTH!”

1/24/16

Christian parents today seem to be begging for more detailed programs, step-by-step methodologies, and meticulous instructions ... on how to raise their kids. And many times, they seem to be looking everywhere ... *except to God's word!* If you hadn't noticed, the 'parenting gurus' of today are more than happy to oblige!

If you walk through a book store today ... and go to the parenting section (even at Christian book stores), you'll find a myriad of books for parenting *God's way!* There are *Christian* methods for everything, like:

- How to feed your infant or toddler...
- How not to let anyone 'rock' your infant, otherwise they'll not want to go to bed when they're older (and, I'm not kidding!)...
- Dos and Don'ts for governing preschoolers' social lives ... and similar rules for every stage of life up to marriage...
- And, there are even books on '*Christian* methods of toilet-training' for toddlers!

'Shows you what I know; I didn't even know there was a specifically *Christian* way to toilet-train! But, there it is on the bookshelves... Quite frankly, some of this *Christian* advice is far from being distinctively *Christian* at all—some of it being just bad advice...

So, why do we—as Christian parents—want to make parenting (verb) so complex? Well, I think here's at least one answer: *We're afraid...*

As followers of Christ, we're not supposed to live out of fear! Yet so many parents *fear* that they'll 'mess up' raising their child (with catastrophic results)! Remember what I said two weeks ago: *Parenting is supposed to be a joy, not a burden!* God's word consistently says (Psalm 127:3): "Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a real blessing." Scripture *never* portrays parenting as an obstacle course with deadly pitfalls! As parents, *we just need to discover our kid's greatest need ... and concentrate on that!* If we can do that, we can work toward *meeting their greatest need* (instead of expending energy latching onto *other 'Christian' parenting methods!*)

The Apostle Paul explains 'the greatest need', by the way, in *this* way (Rom. 5:12): "Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it. As a result, death has spread to the whole human race because everyone has sinned." Paul goes on to explain what we've inherited as humans (Rom. 5:18a & 19a): "So then ... the one sin condemned all people..." (meaning we inherited the *guilt* of sin) ... "And ... all people were made sinners as the result of the disobedience of one man... (meaning we inherited the *corruption* of sin). This is known as 'The Doctrine of Original Sin' or '*total depravity.*' *When you hear those phrases or terms, it our greatest need being talked about...* And, according to God's word, *no one is exempt ...* including our kids who are human, too... Going way back to the Old Testament, King David understood this reality, when he wrote Psalm 51. Just listen...

I recognize my faults; I am always conscious of my sins. ⁴I have sinned against you— only against you— and done what you consider evil. So you are right in judging me; you are justified in condemning me. ⁵I have been evil from the day I was born; from the time I was conceived, I have been sinful. – Psalm 51:3-5 (TEV)

We love to think of our kids as ‘innocent,’ don’t we? Well, they’ve had very little life experience and are naïve about many things, so in that sense it’s true. But, regarding a capacity for sin, *they’re the same as us!* John MacArthur helps us come to grips with this concept by saying: “...just recognize that your children are a miniature version of you.” We’re all born into ‘original sin,’ because of the affect of the Fall (Adam & Eve). So know beyond a doubt parents, that children *do not go bad* because of something you do; in fact, they’re born sinful ... just like you and me! “No trash talk ... just the truth!”

Now, I could spend a great deal of time talking about crazy parenting methods—some even called ‘*Christian*,’ but we haven’t the time today. Instead, I want to speak briefly to some popular ideas that’re *not the answer to our kid’s greatest need*, then move to the *real* answer... So first, let me say this:

BEHAVIORISM IS NOT THE ANSWER! Certainly both *manners & discipline* are necessary aspects of proper parenting. But, teaching these things is *no solution* to the problem of ‘original sin’ (being born sinful/having a bent toward things *not* of God)! Teaching *manners* is important, yes ... but *it doesn’t solve the problem of original sin*—our human condition from birth. Tacking on *punishment* for wrongdoing *won’t solve the problem of original sin*, either...

My relatives are all from the south—both my parents being from the Greensboro, North Carolina, area of the country. This didn’t make sense to us when we were kids (because we’d been raised in Wisconsin), but when we went south we soon noticed that kids there spoke to adults in a different way than we did. Any time they were spoken to (and that’s the only time they were supposed to speak to adults), their response was ‘Yes, Sir’ or ‘No Ma’am!’

But, what I also noticed was this: behind their parents backs, those same kids could be some of the most ill-behaved, unruly kids (even in church), especially when amongst peers and no adults were around. And, if you’ve ever been a teacher or a youth worker you know what I’m talking about when I say this: *The parents, many times, seemed blissfully unaware of their child’s true character!* Many hadn’t a clue...

This is what straight-forward ‘behaviorism’ will get you; you are basically doing little more than training hypocrites. Though we didn’t always say ‘Yes, Sir’ or ‘No Ma’am,’ we *saw through this* ... even as kids! *Behaviorism is not the answer to your child’s greatest need!* And add this to your list, too...

ISOLATIONISM IS NOT THE ANSWER! Building a cocoon around your children does not = success in parenting! Now having said that, let me clarify:

It is essential for Christian parents to provide some kind of *insulation* for their kids, but not *isolation*; there's a difference. For instance, it'd be reckless parenting to allow your children to surf the Web unsupervised, listen to whatever music they want to listen to, or watch T.V. or movies without any parental oversight. However, without allowing some life experiences, how would we ever be able to fulfill our biblical parental duties of teaching 'discernment' to our kids? Let me give you an example from my own childhood...

Growing up, I had a mother who had the habit of spelling things, in speaking to my father, that she didn't really want to be a family topic but a private one. What she didn't realize, I guess, is that many times we were within earshot ... and *we could spell!*

She'd speak to my father, who was downstairs by the laundry, and she'd say something like: "Honey, when you come back up, there's some clothes in the dryer; could you please bring me my 'B.R.A.'s' and I'll hang them in the bathroom?" Mom, we're teenagers already; we can spell!

But then, when it came to certain topics in the home, we just didn't talk about those things ... out loud (and I still haven't figured out how you're supposed to talk about them if it's not 'out loud'). Anyway, certain topics like "S.E.X." were considered taboo; and, for a time at least, I think my parents thought that they were preserving our innocence by simply not talking about such things—isolating us from the reality of certain topics.

I got news for all the parents here ... and grandparents ... and aunts & uncles, and so forth: Isolating your children from the truth—the way you want them to know it (hopefully, God's truth on topics)—only results in them finding out about these things from some other source! And, I did ... and so did my brothers & sisters ... and it wasn't always in a healthy way. If my parents would have just taken the time to sit us down and talk to us, teaching us *discernment* along the way, it would have been better! So, *isolationism is not the answer to our kid's greatest need* ... and finally,

SELF-ESTEEMISM IS NOT THE ANSWER! A popular philosophy in parenting says that parents should do everything possible to bolster their child's self-esteem. If this was the case, most psychological/emotional problems would be solved ... *according to the experts!*

Folks, what this line of thinking does, however, is it *target parents* ... discounting the child's spiritual condition. In other words, if something is wrong with the kid, it's because the parents didn't do all they were supposed to do in raising that kid—to give them healthy self-esteem.

I was shocked to find out that a family member was in counseling one time ... and *all their problems were the parents fault!* What's wrong with this? There's no accountability on the part of the adult child who was being counseled...

... and no acknowledgement of the reality of 'original sin' in the counseled person either—that we are in fact born depraved, vulnerable to sin. *Self-esteemism is based on an unbiblical perspective*. It's diametrically opposed to the truth of human depravity (original sin); in fact, **scripture commends self-control as a fruit of the Spirit**, having nothing positive to say about self-esteem, self-love, or any other variety of self-centeredness. *Self-esteemism is not the answer to your child's greatest need ... BUT this is...*

REGENERATION! The only remedy for the inborn depravity (Original Sin) of our kids is this: REGENERATION (biblically called being 'born again' or 'new birth')! Jesus said to Nicodemus (Jn. 3:6-7): "A person is born physically of human parents, but is born spiritually of the Spirit. Do not be surprised because I tell you that you must all be born again."

Scripture describes the *unregenerate—those who haven't yet experienced regeneration*—like this (Eph. 2:3): "Actually all of us ... lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds. In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger." Like it or not, this is an fitting description of our kids, too—until they allow Christ into their lives and are born again of the Spirit!

Parents: your top-priority job *as a parent* ... is to be an evangelist to your kids! (Remember Deuteronomy 6!) Teach your children the ways of God; teach them about God's grace; show them their need for a Savior; and *point them to Jesus* ... when no one else will; *he is the only one who can meet their greatest need* (depravity)!

Know this: Regeneration (being 'born again') is not something you can do for them; 'new birth' is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our main job is to point them to Jesus Christ ... with our words and, more importantly, *with our lives*! How are we behaving around our kids? As parents, we're responsible to exalt Christ in our homes—to *point our kids toward Jesus as the One & only Savior...*

So, why do we make parenting so complicated? Because, *usually out of fear*, we focus our energies on things like self-image, managing external behavior, protecting our kids from outside influences, or other approaches that deal with symptoms rather than the cause! We need to quit listening to the world and listen to God's word—focusing our energies on *pointing them toward Christ*! That's the greatest gift—as a parent—we can give them! That's the answer ... to their greatest need!

But, Rom, how do we begin this task? Well, stay tuned to next week's episode of "Parenting is a Verb" and it'll take us directly there...