

“Punishment Doesn’t Help”

Journalist Betsy Flagler writes the syndicated “Parent to Parent” column that asks readers to write in with parenting problems and then tries to get expert help to those troubles. A mother in California recently wrote in that her first-grader has been pushing and hitting, has been kicked out of the library, and all attempts to take away privileges and toys to discipline him have failed. “His problem seems to be a lack of self-control,” she writes. Flagler’s response well illustrates the psychology of today that destroys children rather than helping them.

She notes that “instead of thinking you must control your child’s behavior, help your child learn to control himself. Set limits, give reminders, be his advocate.” Okay, that all sound great. What happens, however, when little Johnny breaks the limits and won’t listen to reminders? Some might think that it would be the time to discipline Johnny. Oh, no! We must not do that! “External controls such as taking a bike away do not teach self-control,” says child expert Jane Nelsen (who of course has written a book on child rearing). Ms. Nelsen goes on to analyze why the child pushes and hits others and notes that discipline is not the answer. “It’s a crazy idea that to help children do better, first we have to make them feel worse ... A misbehaving child is a discouraged child. Punishment doesn’t help him feel he belongs.”

A Dallas school teacher, June Humphreys, says misbehavior comes because kids can’t communicate their feelings, and punishment just stifles that all the more. “Instead, these children need to be taught vocabulary to use to express feelings at the first sign of discomfort.”

Amazing stuff; isn’t it? One hundred years ago parents knew how to handle children who hit and kicked others. Now, in our sophisticated age, we “know better” than to discipline like grandma and grandpa did, but kids are more unruly than ever. All these experts write book after book on childrearing, but everyone seems to have forgotten The Expert’s book on childrearing, the Bible.

The Bible notes that these parents who are so worried that Johnny will feel “left out” or “that he doesn’t belong” actually hate their child: “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Prov 13:24). A parent who is more concerned with the child’s immediate feelings than long-range character growth is a parent who is failing that child!

Further, the experts can say all they want about punishment not being helpful, but God says, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Prov 22:15). Talking and learning communication skills aren’t the issue; selfishness is. Johnny doesn’t have a communication problem - he is very good at letting everyone know that he wants his way now. Instead of being paralyzed with a fear that for even a moment Johnny might not feel great about himself, Johnny must learn that if he acts badly he will feel bad - because he should feel bad about acting badly! “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted” (2 Cor 7:10).

Today we have far too much analysis of why children misbehave and not nearly enough decisive action to stop it. There is too much concern about Johnny’s self-esteem and not nearly enough interest in his actions and making wrong behavior extremely unpleasant and undesirable. May God bless every parent to seek His wisdom and not the foolishness expressed in columns like “Parent to Parent!”

- by Mark Roberts

Positive Isn’t Always

The other day I heard someone pray that another person would receive positive medical test results. However, when we are looking for cancer we don’t want a positive result - that would mean we have cancer. You see, sometimes positive isn’t good.

The Zig Ziglar, Dale Carnegie, and Norman Vincent Peale crowd has yet to grasp this reality. We hear about “positive preaching” and “positive mental attitude,” as if perception can trump reality. Pleas for balanced preaching are generally nothing more than a cry to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.

What is positive and what is negative? Positive is supposed to build people up while negative tears them down. Perpetually ‘happy’ preaching, however, works a most evil result upon its audience.

People who need to hear rebuke (not want hear, but need hear) never do. Would Peter's Pentecost audience have been cut to the heart if he had blasted them with happy talk instead of telling them, "You are the men" (to paraphrase with help from another negativist, the prophet Nathan)?

Positive preaching refrains from rocking the boat, which is, of course, perceived to be the greatest risk to church growth. A sinking boat, however, does not always rock before its plunges. Could it be that all this positive preaching is like the band playing on the deck of the Titanic?

- by J. S. Smith

How Are You Different?

As the children of God, we are to be different from people of this world (Romans 12:2). We'd like to challenge you to do a little personal evaluation and see if **YOU** are really different. For example, are you different in the way you:

- ↪ **Dress** -- Too many Christians allow the fashion trends of a godless society to dictate how they dress. When God's children can be seen wearing swimming suits, shorts, halters and the like, how can we say that we are different from the world?
- ↪ **Talk** -- We've heard Christians using swear words, telling dirty jokes, and using other forms of coarse speech. Usually those who do so are seldom found speaking the precious "word of truth". How are we different?
- ↪ **Act** -- When the people of God go to all the same places and do all the same things that the people of the world do, how can they claim to be different? Many, if not most, of the movies shown today are unfit for viewing by the faithful child of God. Television is full of all sorts of ungodliness. Yet Christians are watching it all and imitating the sinful things they see. It ought not to be so. Smoking, social drinking, dancing, sexual immorality and a host of other sinful deeds are all too prevalent among those who call themselves Christians.
- ↪ **Serve God** -- All of this really boils down to a lack of willingness to humbly submit to God. The majority of people in the world like to give lip service to God, yet they proceed to do as they please. Some Christians are not far behind. They serve God only when it pleases them and only when it serves their purpose - not God's purpose.

Christian, how are you different? If you are living like God expects you to live, it will become obvious. Others will "*think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot*" (1 Peter 4:4).

- by Greg Gwin