

Parental Abdication

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Without a doubt parents can be too stern and severe with their children. Paul referred to this possibility when he warned, “Fathers, provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged” (Col. 3:21; cf. Eph. 6:4a). Some of the most pitiable people in the world are those whose personalities have been warped by ultra-strict, extra-harsh, unnecessarily restrictive parental despotism. Parents must be aware of the danger of harming their children in this way.

Perhaps the aforementioned danger is not the gravest one faced by parents and children currently, however. While parents may abuse the authority God has given them over their children by exercising it too severely, it is no less an abuse of that authority when parents refuse to discipline and guide their children. The more I hear and observe the attitudes of some Christian parents concerning the discipline and training of their children, the more concerned I become about this matter. It simply does not square with the teaching of God’s Word that when children become 12–14 years old (sometimes much younger) they should be allowed to make all of their own decisions without any parental “interference.”

The excuse I have heard Christian mothers offering for their 15–17-year-old daughters going to the beach or the public swimming pool in their scanty swimsuits is pitiful: “I don’t want her to wear it, but I can’t stop her.” Why can’t you? Because somewhere in that child’s life, probably several years ago, it is likely that you (and her father) abdicated your God-ordained parental authority and that child started “calling the shots.” Make no mistake—a child can **always** tell when he or she has gained control of a home, whether the child is 2 or 12 years old.

This lack of parental discipline in American homes in general has become the source of grave social and moral problems in the nation. School teachers are often victims of verbal and/or physical attack and abuse. Concerning student discipline, school officials are paralyzed by the fear of suit-happy parents who have allowed little Mary and Johnny to have, do, and say anything they pleased all their lives. Liberal social planners have influenced legislation and public opinion that practically criminalizes the switching/paddling of children that previous uncounted generations somehow survived to become model citizens.

As an imperfect parent myself, I want to plead for a return to sanity in this concern. God’s Word teaches expressly that parents, especially fathers, are responsible for the spiritual training of their children (Eph. 6:4b). Children are going to want to do things that they should not do,

things that will harm them, either physically or spiritually (or both). Shall we restrain the three-year-old from playing in a busy street, but laugh at him when he hits or kicks Daddy or Mommy in a temper tantrum? Where did we learn such? Certainly, not from God's Word. As long as parents are still feeding, clothing, and otherwise providing for their children, it is only right that parents continue to exercise authority over them conducive to their own physical and spiritual well-being. Paul taught that children are to honor this authority, just as he taught that parents are to exercise it: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Eph. 6:1).

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