



HOW TO RAISE A HEARTACHE

By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son makes a glad father, But a foolish son is the grief of his mother. --Prov. 10:1

My son, keep your father's command, And do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; Tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you; When you sleep they will keep you; And when you awake, they will speak with you. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life. To keep you from the evil woman, From the flattering tongue of the seductress."--Prov. 6:20-24

Though I have been a father for many years and a grandfather for a few years, I still do not claim to be an expert in the art of child-rearing. I am still learning. I do believe that children are getting better. My little angelic grandchildren do not really need as many spankings and their parents did. Now this is not purely a personal judgement on my part. I have talked with other grandparents and they are seeing the same thing in their cases as well.

Seriously, I am concerned about the quality of rearing that children are receiving. I am concerned about the anguish of heart of many parents over the conduct of their children. I am aware that this may be inspite of the training given by the parents. I am also aware that sometimes it is because of the training (or lack of it) given by the parents. I have sat up nights with distraught parents trying to comfort them and make some kind of sense out of the waywardness of their child. (The only thing sadder to me is for such parents to not be concerned at all). Often, as far as it is humanly possible to judge, the parents had done everything that good parents should to guide their children in the proper direction. At times, I have sat as parents angonized, "What went wrong?" Many times there was no fault of the parents that i could see. At other times, I could have told them and often had told them in sermons, in articles, in conversations and in classes -- but it seems hardly profitable now to ad to their heartache by saying, "I told you so". So, I hold my tongue and try to help them pick up the pieces.

Hence, these words are not directed to parents who have already done their work (good or bad) of child-rearing. It is directed to those parents who still have the bulk of this grave task still facing them. The advice in this

article has no guarantee of success in every case because even children are free agents with the power to choose between good and evil. But, I do believe that the Bible teaches some vital principles that have to do with child-rearing that need to be taught and practiced by those who love the Lord and will prevent many of the heartaches that come to parents. The things I will say are from experience and observation over the years, but also based upon the teachings of the Scriptures.

If you want to raise your child to be a heartache then follow these rules:

1. Constantly criticize his symbols of authority. Don't let it be enough to allow your child to have free reigns at home to do as he pleases, if any other authority tries to restrain him, let your child know that you will be his automatic ally in his conflict with that symbol of authority. Every chance you get throw in some critical remark about someone in authority so that your child's big ears will be able to soak it up.

While we need to teach our children that there is no authority that transcends the authority of God, we need to teach them that authority at all levels (including school personel, baby sitters, Bible class teachers, church leaders, grandparents, etc.) must be respected to have an orderly society and to please God as Christians. While you, in your maturity may be able to distinguish between the man and the position of authority that he represents, very few children are able to make the distinction. Hence, criticism of a policeman's conduct becomes criticism of law in his mind. Criticism of a teacher is criticism of school discipline in his mind. Criticism of elders, preachers, or Bible class teachers is criticism of divine government in his mind. The person represents the principle to most children. Granted that ocassionally some people in positions of authority over your child may abuse their positions, making it necessary for you to point out that while such abuse is wrong - it still should be the general rule that you praise rather than criticize those whose position of authority should be respected by your child. Even in those cases of abuse, it is, in my judgement, better to take it up with the persons involved without the knowledge or participation of your child, if at all possible. It is sad that about all some children hear about their school, their country (government), the church is criticism of work done by the personnel of these institutions.

How can we expect them to grow up to respect them?

2. Let modern society take the blame for his conduct. Let your child know that you "understand" that he would not have acted the way that he did had it not been for the corrupt society into which you so thoughtlessly caused him to be born. Let him know that he is being consantly victimized by others. Allow him to constantly console himself in the notion that he deserves a better shake in life than society has handed him. Always express your sympathy to him when he complains that "it is just not fair". Let him know that you believe that it is impossible (or nearly so) to rear a child right in the kind of world we have today. Then he can grow up believing, really believing, that whatever happens to him and what ever he does is just a product of the times in which he is living -- rather than the product of his own making. He can then go through life

blaming his wife for domestic problems, blaming the church for his spiritual problems, blaming the government for many of his failures and blaming you for the rest of his woes for having raised him the way you did.

No Christian has ever had an ideal society in which to live and rear children. This is a sinful world. It was sinful in the first century. Christians were told to "become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life..."(Phil. 3:15-16). It was not an impossible task then and it is not now. Parents who were Christians were told to "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord"(Eph. 6:4) in a world filled with ungodliness. (Eph. 4:17-5:14). Our children must understand that they are going have to live godly inspite of society and quit blaming their moral, ethical, or spiritual behavior with it's consequences of such upon society.

3. Do not teach your child how to properly use his or her body. Mother's do not teach your child the effect that nakedness or near nakedness has on the opposite sex. Nor the seductive power of "body language" (See Prov. 6:24-25). In fact, when they become of age they will learn the effect and use it to the fullest if you don't teach them the danger involved.

One is simply burying his head in the sand if he does not recognize that the sex drive is strong in young people after they reach maturity. One way to protect it to ultimately be used properly in the marriage relationship is to protect the sense of modesty and shame connected with the body. One cannot allow that sense of shame to be destroyed without weakening the restraints necessary reserve to the body for a husband or a wife. It disturbs me to see parents allow their children (even while very young) to get into the habit of going nearly naked. Though it may be harmless enough in small children -- habits can be formed early. It disturbs me further to see parents of teen-agers actually encourage their children to publicly display their bodies in scanty attire (often setting the example for them) or else ignore and/or defend them in their actions. If the attire is justified by many in the name of sports and/or recreation, it is still immodest. Still worse they become quite upset and even hostile in their defense of their child's right to such immodesty without any thing being said by anyone trying to reason with them about the dangers they are exposing themselves to. These same folks seldom offer any real guidance to their children about how to conduct themselves in dating - except "don't get in trouble and cause us embarrassment". Young people need some teaching by their parents as to how to keep from kindling the fire that might eventually burn them. Teach your child to "flee fornication" - that includes actions that lead to fornication if it is allowed to run its full and natural course.

Not every young person who "gets in trouble" is a bad person. Not every one has been neglected in parental guidance. Not every young fornicator gets caught and has to pay the temporal consequences and shame of their actions. Those who escape such consequences are just as much sinners as the others. They are given a far better chance when they have are taught from very early childhood to respect that their bodies are given to them of God to be used properly and to become the of the Holy Spirit when they become Christians (I

Cor. 6:12-20) and to eventually become the cherished possession of a loving husband or wife (I Cor. 7:2-4). Such modest behavior will probably make one an "odd ball" in modern society, but we have an idea that will help prepare one for that heavenly society anticipated by Christians.

4. Let him know that you think happiness and success in life depends on outward circumstances. This has all kinds of potential for heartache. It could cause your child to become a ruthless, ambitious, selfish, driving, social climbing, work-a-holic --thinking that "moving on up is the key to happiness and success. Or it could cause him to become a worthless bum -- thinking that poverty and/or becoming a social drop-out will bring him happiness and make him a better person.

We need to impress upon our children by precept and example that one's relationship to God is the only thing that can bring eternal happiness and success and that one's station in this life has little to do with it all. If one is right with God, he can learn contentment and happiness regardless to outward conditions (Phil. 4:4ff).

If children constantly hear us equating success with some external condition (A good job, a good house, social acceptance, a vacation home, or even by denying themselves of these things and "escaping the rat race" by going back to "old ways") they will likely grow up believing it and reacting accordingly.

We must make a determined effort to teach WHATEVER (external) state one is in that he can be happy and content - but even then that happiness in this life is not our real goal, but eternal happiness with the Lord in the next life.

5. Wait until he is grown to teach him how to live righteously and godly. Let him do what "a Christian should not do" while is young and "not a member of the church" and then when he becomes of age try to put the brakes on his behavior. If anyone questions you about his conduct be sure to answer, "Now, he knows that when he obeys the gospel he can not do those things any more".

Don't be too surprized when he learns that lesson well and will not obey the gospel because he has learned to love his conduct that you have allowed him to practice "until he becomes a member".

May we ever pray to God for the wisdom to rear our children as we should.

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Mailing Address: 3004 Brakefield Drive, Fultondale, AL 35068

Editor: Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

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