

Growing Up

Moving Toward Maturity and Responsibility

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Here in Charlotte, North Carolina, this past week, high school graduations took place, signaling that school is out for just about everyone. I imagine that wherever you are in the country school is out, and graduations are about to, or have already occurred.

With school out those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer are beginning for millions of children, and teenagers all across the United States. For the rest of us, however, we will just continue to slog away. Maybe we will get a week or two of vacation.

Think about it, though... Two and a half to three months almost of FREE TIME! Would not that be wonderful? Just to say that our work is past for this year, and we have the next 70 or 80 days before we have to buckle down, and get serious again about our work.

I know that some of the older kids will be going to summer jobs, and that is very good. That is something that allows a person to expand his skills, put a little money in his pocket and get an idea of adulthood and responsibility.

And others have all this free time. Free time is good, too, if it is properly spent. And the key is, "properly spent," of course. A well known saying is, "youth is wasted on the young," but it could easily be modified to say, "free time is wasted on the young."

I can think of a hundred things that I could do with 70 or 80 days of free time. My "honey-do" list would shorten appreciably, I am sure.

Of course, the proper use of time takes years to master. It is a sign of maturity when a person can organize his time responsibly, completing the most important tasks first and not procrastinate! That is something that many of us adults, even elderly, have not mastered yet. It is something that takes a whole lifetime to learn. But, it is something that a mature person does.

However, in our culture "maturity" is a type of bad word. In fact, most of the time it is applied to senior citizens, not others whom we would normally consider to be adults.

The icons of the day (of our culture)—the people who are out there and getting all the buzz—are those who have extended their youth, sometimes by decades, to be cool, hip,

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wild, or rebellious long after they should have begun acting like adults.

Just think of some of the people who are in the news most frequently, especially in the entertainment and sports worlds. Think of people like J-Lo who has just had her third marriage because she cannot act like an adult to choose a good guy for herself.

Think of Jack Nicholson (what is he, in his 70s?) still acting like a teenager in many respects. How about Madonna? How about Mick Jagger? 60 years old and still prancing around a stage like a teenager. What about Michael Jackson? He lives on a ranch that has children's toys and an amusement park built on it just for him and all his child friends. What about Janet Jackson, his sister?

We could go on and on. We could name a lot of people, and immediately you would think of their immaturity.

In fact adulthood in our culture has become a matter of age, not of maturity. A person is considered to be an adult at age 18 or 21 when one is able to vote or to purchase alcohol. It has become a matter of legality, not responsibility.

It used to be that a person (not all that long ago) who graduated from high school, understood that life had begun in earnest; that he needed to buckle down because his lazy, hazy, crazy days of childhood were over. He needed to either get a job or further his education. And, top on his list of the adult things that he would do as soon as he got his feet under him was to find a spouse, have a family and become a responsible member of his community. That was only a few decades ago when the trajectory of life was that way for just about everyone.

People who I know, sitting here in this room, remember that indeed that is the way that it was. Of course, there were always people who were wild and rebellious. Those types of people have always existed in any given time.

But, in the United States it was not too long ago when this was the general way that everybody grew up.

Today, we do not even expect college graduates to do this!—to have the same type of maturity.

I am speaking in generalities. The youth in the church of God have a different problem because there are not a great many choices, as far as mates go. We are small, and we are scattered. And that makes finding a mate and having a family more difficult. And so,

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it is obvious that marriage ages have gone up. But, I still think that we would expect our young people to be able to find a job, or further their education, or do those other adult activities that do not have to do with finding a mate.

Now, notice this paragraph off of "*YouthRights.org*, 'Age Lines: How to Define "Adults" and "Youth" (<http://www.youthrights.org/articles/agelines.html>).'"

I want to give you a few statistics to show you the way in which the culture has been moving as far as raising the age of adult behaviors. Quoting from the article:

"The ultimate confirmation of one's adulthood is to marry and become a parent oneself. According to a recent survey from the University of Chicago, the average American feels that people should get married at age 25.7, have children at age 26.2, and that adulthood begins at age 26...It appears that society's emphasis on attending college has socially (if not legally) extended adolescence."

Truth be told, many people are delaying adulthood these days. Many who have completed college, and have gotten a job are working to play (if you know what I mean). They go to work to make money so that they have the ability to go out and make the club circuit, or participate in sports activities, or whatever. All they want to do is play. They do not want to settle down, have a family, and become a responsible member of the community. They just want to keep playing.

For these folks adulthood seems to be at 30 years old—not 26, not 21, not 18, but 30! That seems to be the concurrent dividing age between adolescence—consider that! Adolescence—and adulthood. Thirty years old!

This next paragraph that I am going to read is from the Carnegie Corporation of New York in a publication titled, "Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century:"

"While young people are undergoing pubertal changes on average two years earlier than they did a century ago, marriage and the possibility of attaining fully adult status are occurring later. Indeed, the second half of the 20th century has seen the widest separation ever between the timing of sexual maturation and the formal assumption of adult roles and responsibilities."

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What they are saying is that the gap between becoming sexually mature and the time one begins to act like an adult has widened appreciably over the last 50 years.

Statistically they usually do this by taking the average age of puberty and comparing that to the average age of first marriage, or the age of the first birth of a child. Sometimes they might use other things like the average age of first steady job, or something else along that line of adult behavior.

But, the ones that I found had to do with sexual maturity and first marriage, or first baby.

Here is something from the US census; comparing census information from 1950, and 2000. These show that the age of first marriage has risen dramatically over the past 50 years. Listen to these figures:

The age of men at first marriage rose 4 years during this 50 year period from 22.8 years in 1950 to 26.8 years in 2000; while for women their age at first marriage rose almost 5 years over that same period—4.8 years—from 20.3 years to 25.1 years.

So today, a man gets first married at almost 27 years old, and a woman has just turned about 25 for her first.

A CNN.com article, titled, "From CNN.com, "CDC: Women waiting longer to have first child:"

"The average age at which American women are having their first child has climbed to an all-time high of 25.1..."

This information regards first child. The previous one was for first marriage. It is the same age, believe it or not. Continuing:

The rise reflects a drop in teen births and an increase in the number of women who are putting off motherhood until their 30s and 40s. The age of first-time American moms has risen steadily during the past three decades, from an average of 21.4 in 1970.

So, that is just under 4 years in 30 years time.

It is very clear from these statistics that young people are delaying the onset of

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adulthood, as measured by these traditional adult behaviors. This epidemic of immaturity, one might call it, though is worldwide. It is not just affecting America. It is affecting just about every developed nation on earth. It is especially true in the nations of Europe, Japan, China, Australia, India, and many others; just name any developed country of the world, and the ages of these adult behaviors are increasing significantly.

Here is another little bit from an article titled, "The Silent Partner in Family Decline" By Henrik Hansen. (The silent partner, there, is government, because this is a anti-government intrusion website.)

What they are showing is Denmark as an example of the way government has started to ruin the family. However, I pulled out these statistics because they fit here, with my sermon.

Denmark is an advanced socially conscious welfare state. This is the trajectory that we could see America, and Canada, and others going because we have a lot of the same laws, and values in our government. But, listen to this. This is what has happened to Denmark over the past 30 years or so:

Fewer people are getting married and when they do marry it is later in life. 88 percent of 30-year old women were married in 1970. In 2002 the number was 47 percent. [about half] The average age of first marriage has risen for women from 22.8 years old in 1970 [very similar to the American figure] to 30.3 years old in 2002 [that is almost a whole 8 years]. For men it has risen from 25.1 years in 1970 to 32.8 years in 2002...

Women are getting older before they become mothers. The average age of women giving birth in 2002 was 29.9 years, which had increased from 26.7 years in 1970. The average age of first time mothers was 23.7 years in 1970, in 1996 it was 27.7 years.

Everything is getting later, and later in life. People are delaying their maturity; their adulthood. I think these statistics speak for themselves.

This results, I think, in a large part from the youth culture that was spawned in the 1950s and 60s. There has been since that time (and before, but not to the same degree) this quest for perpetual youth—as if the irresponsibility of youth is the highest achievement of mankind! That is, if we would only stay young, we would be so much better off. As the quip runs, "We do not need a fountain of youth, we need a fountain of smart!"

Today I will address the youth of the church of God. (I have been, if you had not noticed!) And I want to address them about their number one job: To grow up into responsible, productive adults. In other words, their prime responsibility during this age of youth is to become mature.

Adults: Please do not tune me out. There are several reasons for this. While I may speak to young people, this idea of becoming mature applies to all of us spiritually—in spades! It is our prime job too! "Be ye, therefore, perfect..." He is basically saying, "Become spiritually mature like your Father in heaven is perfect."

And also, please do not tune out, especially if you have children, because as we will see, growing to maturity is a cooperative process. Parents need to teach their children, and the children need their parents to show them the way. And so, please listen because it is important to all of us to learn this process of maturity.

God has tasked us to becoming spiritually mature, which is becoming perfect and complete. We could say that it is coming to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. And if we properly bring our children to maturity, and then they too will begin this same process that we are going through now.

Let us see first in the Bible—just to make sure that we nail this down—the Bible's defined age of accountability. Starting in Exodus, we are going to go through several verses with not much comment because they speak for themselves. And it is good that we see this with our own eyes to see just how frequently it comes up here. This is in the middle of the making of the tabernacle, and the instructions to Moses about these things:

Exodus 30:12-14 "When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the LOORD, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when *you* number them. "This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel *is* twenty gerahs). The half-shekel *shall be* an offering to the LOORD. "Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to the LOORD.

So, the number there is twenty years old.

Now turn to Numbers 1—these are scriptures that I read in my Pentecost sermon, and

we will read them again quickly.

Numbers 1:1-3 Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first *day* of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, "from twenty years old and above—all who *are able to go to war* in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

Here we have again a repetition of the twenty year olds as being those who are responsible.

This next one is in the middle of God pronouncing a curse upon all those Israelites who had believed the false spies.

Numbers 14:26-33 And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "How long *shall I bear with* this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. "Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: 'The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. 'Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. 'But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. 'But *as for you*, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. 'And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness.

And then He tells them that they will be doing this for 40 years.

Again, it is 20 years old and above; and it is the ones under twenty that would go into the land, and He calls them "little ones."

And so, obviously, what He is saying here is that from twenty years old and above, each person was accountable for his decisions. And, evidently, the decision of just about

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everyone in the whole camp of Israel from twenty years old and above, except for Joshua, and Caleb, was that they were going to disbelieve the good report, and believe the false report. God made them responsible for that. He considered that an adult decision, and thus, the curse.

This is something that David did during his administration:

I Chronicles 23:24-28 These *were* the sons of Levi by their fathers' houses—the heads of the fathers' *houses* as they were counted individually by the number of their names, who did the work for the service of the house of the LOORD, from the age of twenty years and above. For David said, "The LOORD God of Israel has given rest to His people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem forever"; and also to the Levites, "They shall no longer carry the tabernacle, or any of the articles for its service." For by the last words of David the Levites *were* numbered from twenty years old and above; because their duty *was* to help the sons of Aaron in the service of the house of the LOORD, in the courts and in the chambers, in the purifying of all holy things and the work of the service of the house of God,

So, the Levites were counted and pressed into service at 20 years old. Remember, in the counts before, the Levites were left out, because they were a separate tribe, and they had a separate job. And so, in this count, it is shown that they were counted the same way, although their duties were different.

And finally, in Ezra 3:8 is a very similar thing:

Ezra 3:8 Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began *work* and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LOORD.

Here we have again from the beginning of the Old Testament times under Moses until the time of Ezra, the age of accountability was 20 years old. We see this in various situations—in the ransom offering, the census, the curse (on those who were expected to make responsible adult decisions), going to war, and doing the work of the temple. All of these things, you had to be 20 years old to do.

We can take from this that in God's eyes, a 20 year old should be able to make decisions independent of his parents, work responsibly and start his own family.

Let us try to pin down maturity. We are not going to spend a great deal of time on this. There is a very simple definition of maturity in I Corinthians 13:11. And, what I find most interesting about this definition is that it is found in the context of the Love Chapter. That will make a difference when we begin to think about it.

I Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

How simple! When one reaches maturity, he or she quits acting like a child.

Let us bring in the context here. This is the Love Chapter. Why did Paul put together maturity and love? Think about it. We may be able to deduce from this that Paul wants us to understand the link here.

How do they link together? Think about a child. A child is essentially a selfish creature. From its first days it has to be fed, clothed, cleaned up, guarded, taught, and countless other activities. The center of attention is the child. And the child learns to expect these things.

And so from a child's perspective of himself—everything is for him. He is generally not expected to do things for himself or to do things for others. He is especially usually not asked to sacrifice for himself or for others.

And we have learned that sacrifice is the essence of love—being able to do without for one's self in order to be able to allow someone else to have something, or to do something, or to understand something, or learn something.

Love, however, is outgoing. Mr. Armstrong taught us that. Love is outgoing concern for other people. But, children are selfish. Children, when they (as it says here) speak, they speak about themselves, and the things that they want to do, and the things that interest them. Those are the things that they understand. They do not understand things beyond themselves because everything is about the child. When they think, they think of themselves and the things that they want to do. They think of their interests. They do not give a whit about anybody else, hardly.

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But, when they become adults, things change. They have other responsibilities. They must begin to show love to other people. They must begin to show respect for other people.

An adult's life differentiated from a child's life is essentially dedicated to producing things for and pleasing other people, particularly, his spouse, his children, and guess who...? God. That is why it is in the midst of the love chapter.

When one is a kid, when one is immature, all he thinks about is himself. But, when one becomes mature, he becomes **other**-centered. This is the biblical definition of maturity. And there are many people of advanced age who do not meet this definition. They are still thinking about number one. They are still speaking only of number one. All they understand is how things will affect number one.

So, as children our speech, understanding, ideas, actions, and everything else revolves around self. But as adults, we put these self-centered behaviors away to concentrate on things that really matter to life: providing food, clothing, and shelter, and instruction for spouse and children, and we should become serious about our relationship with God.

That is why in the church of God baptism is only for those who are able to make a responsible decision because it requires that maturity to be serious enough to take that responsibility of treating the relationship with God in the proper way.

Let us go back to the Old Testament, to Ecclesiastes 11 because I want you to see here that Solomon says essentially the same thing. He adds a bit more to it. His advice is a bit more practical, but it is essentially the same thing.

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth *are* vanity.

He does not pull any punches there. Childhood and youth are variously translated as worthless, useless, futile, a breath, a passing of the wind.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them":

Youth is the time for cheer, frivolity, for doing things that one wants to do. Solomon does not seem to have any problem with those things. And neither do I. You should have fun when you are young, because maturity, in some respects, is a drag! I do not want to pull any punches either. Responsibility is hard, but necessary.

Of course, if you do it right, as we will see as we go along here, even though responsibility is tough, and boring, there are great rewards to it; things that you could never get from having a good time all the time.

But, Solomon basically says here, "Go ahead! Live it up! This is your time! But..." (There is always a big but!) "know that for all these, God will bring you into judgment."

The "but" here is, that you are accountable for what you do while you are living it up.

Now I have a sermon on that if you want to go back and hear it, simply called "Accountability." I go into this verse (this section) into greater detail.

"But know," he says, "that everything you do is being watched." Just because you are a child does not mean that God ignores you for the first 20 years of your life. You are just as precious to him as any adult is. Understand that God is watching you. The things you do are known to Him, and they are sin if you cross the line. And, there are consequences for those sins. That is what it says there that God will bring you into judgment.

Verse 10 tells us, then, to remove sorrow from your heart.

Sorrow is a poor translation—a very poor translation. The word can mean that, but in this context it means "provocation." Remove provocation from your heart. What Solomon is trying to get across to us is that what we need to remove from our hearts when we are young is rashness, impetuosity, highly emotional reactions, and those other things that provoke us to do things that we should not do. That is what he is getting at.

We think of sorrow as grief—not having a very good time. He is not saying that.

He is saying, "remove from your heart the things that are going to make you act so that God would bring you into judgment." Do not be stupid. Remove those impetuous, emotion-filled reactions from you he says.

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And the second thing he says is, "put away evil from your flesh." Put away your sins. Remember, God is watching.

So, his advice comes in verse 1 of chapter 12. He says to turn to God early when life is good, when you are young, and strong, hale and hardy, because if you wait some of the problems may be too tough.

He talks about (if you would go through and read the rest of the chapter 12) old people and the problems that they have. They have physical problems that distract them from the spiritual things that a young person could master. He says to turn to God early before you have these additional problems to worry about; when you are strong and can face them, and you will be much better off for it in the long run. It makes things a lot easier and a lot better.

We are going to be in Proverbs quite a bit. I want to touch on accountability for a moment more.

Proverbs 20:11 Even a child is known by his deeds, Whether what he does *is* pure and right.

Proverbs 24:12 If you say, "Surely we did not know this," Does not He who weighs the hearts consider *it*? He who keeps your soul, does He *not* know *it*? And will He *not* render to *each* man according to his deeds?

Like I said, these two proverbs address accountability. The first one specifically is addressed to children. Even a child is known... even a child builds a reputation whether he does good things or bad things.

Understand that even God registers whether a person is a good boy or girl, or a brat!

Now in the second verse (24:12) God takes a person's ignorance into account—whether he should have known something was right or wrong. But, youth is no excuse if we have been taught the right things. Hopefully in the church of God we have been taught the right thing, and so youth could not be an excuse, we cannot get out on the ignorance clause. God will punish disobedience. Kids will not get away with sin. We need to understand that early, because if we do then we will start to think ahead and try to understand the consequences of our actions, and that is so important to do.

Most kids do not think beyond the next few minutes. But, it is important to stretch that

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perspective out to years, because there are so many things that can "bite" us when we are kids, especially in this culture.

We are going to talk about a few rules that Paul lays down in Ephesians 6, first for the children, then for the parents. Remember, I said that this is a cooperative effort.

Ephesians 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers [It probably should be "parents"], do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

First Rule: *Children Obey Your Parents*

That should go without saying! But, it does not. Children obey your parents. Paul said that this is the right thing to do. And then talks about the 5th commandment. Why does he say that this is the right thing to do? Because the 5th commandment says that you, as a child who obeys his parents, will have a happier, fuller and longer life.

Many a lad and lass have rebelled against their parents, and paid the price with death or some sort of diminished capacity. It does not take much to think of an example or two of things that have happened to kids who rebelled against their parents. Maybe it was something to do with drugs, or alcohol, fast cars, fast women, and beyond that, disease.

How many kids have gotten drunk at a party somewhere and had to get home, but never made it?

How many kids have gotten "high" and lost their brains?

How many kids have gotten so enamored with fast driving—of racing on the streets—and ended up maimed or dead?

How many have gotten involved with the opposite sex, and ended up paying for it for the rest of their lives with a very bad sexually transmitted disease, a child that they were not ready for, or something else? Many things can happen from that sort of thing.

Those things (done with or without a rebellious attitude) can really affect an entire lifetime! It will put you "behind the eight ball" for the rest of your days. That is why I say

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that we have got to start getting our perspective a bit longer (seeing the obvious conclusion of a matter).

Paul says here that you will ultimately be thankful that you took this course of action of obeying your parents.

Proverbs 23:22-25 Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy the truth, and do not sell *it*, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding. The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, And he who begets a wise *child* will delight in him. Let your father and your mother be glad, And let her who bore you rejoice.

Proverbs 19:8 He who gets wisdom loves his own soul [He loves his own life—himself. If you apply wisdom you will end up living.]; He who keeps understanding will find good.

Proverbs 4:1-13 Hear, *my* children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to know understanding; For I give you good doctrine [good instruction: This is going to be helpful for you]: Do not forsake my law. When I was my father's son, Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *Therefore* get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you." Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, And the years of your life will be many. I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble. Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; Keep her, for she *is* your life.

Wise up! That is what Solomon is saying here! If you do, and make the smart decision to do what is right; to obey your parents; to proceed cautiously with wisdom; you are going to have a great life. That is exactly what he is saying!

Sure, there are things that could happen that may be out of your control, but over all, you are going to have a good life if you listen to these words, especially the words of

your parents.

The second Rule that Paul says there in Ephesians 6 is, "parents do not provoke your children (it says here) "to wrath." But, this provocation could be to many things—anger, irritation, and resentment. He is telling us not to be so overbearing that you drive the child to rebellion. The child throws up his hands and says, "I have had enough! I am out of here!" and who knows what will happen next.

A kid, jumping into a car angry, who knows what ditch he will land in, or whatever might happen?

The balance, Paul says, is to raise them God's way. That is what he says. "Bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord." We are supposed to train our children like He trains us, with both rewards, and punishments done in love and patience. Yet, with the highest of standards and expectations. I do not want to go into a child rearing tangent here, but what I am trying to say is that the child's road to maturity is a cooperative effort between the child and the parent, just as God cooperates with us to help us to put on the image of Jesus Christ.

He does not just hand us the Bible and say, "Go at it!" He is intimately involved in every step of the way.

I have mentioned this in my own child reading sermons (from a couple of years ago) that parents need to be very involved with their children. They need to know what they are doing. They need to know what they have been saying. They need to know what they are thinking. They need to know what their interests are. They need to be with them in doing their interests. They need to talk to them a lot.

That is what God does with us. He knows us inside out! He knows what pleases us. He knows what ticks us off. He knows where we want to go. He knows how we think we should get there. And, He knows better. That is why He says, "Obey **Me!**" It is just as we tell our kids, "I know that you want to do such and such, but, listen, I have been around a long time, I know how this works out. Wait."

We do that all the time with our kids. We are always telling them "No, no, no. You are going about this all wrong." Or, however it is going.

We are helping them to grow up. We are helping them to see the right way. That is why I said that this has to be a cooperative effort.

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The Bible warns us against expecting a child to develop anything good on his own. Solomon tells us what happens when a child is left to himself. He says:

Proverbs 29:15 The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left *to himself* brings shame to his mother.

The end result of a child rearing himself is shame. There is going to be some bad result at the end that is going to cause the parents shame, and a cause a boat-load of trouble for that kid. That is why single parent families are at such a disadvantage in this regard. They already are missing one parent that could help round out their education, and bring them to maturity. One parent can only do so much by herself, or himself. That is why a close extended family, or a close church congregation can be of great help to bring those children along.

Enough of the abstract. Let us get a bit practical in these last 15 minutes or so.

We are going to be in Proverbs, primarily, so we should be able to get to these scriptures fairly quickly. I want you to think about today in terms of what Solomon says here:

Proverbs 30:11-14 *There is a generation that curses its father, And does not bless its mother. There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness. There is a generation—oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, And whose fangs are like knives, To devour the poor from off the earth, And the needy from among men.*

Does that not sound like the "me generation" to you? A generation who believes that everything in the entire world is for them and for them to do?

Our culture emphasizes the generation gap. The younger generation is lauded to high heaven as being the best thing. And it fills them—you may not understand this—but, children who are given all this attention are filled with pride, and disdain for their parents.

The buzz word over the last several decades in education has been "self-esteem."

This world's educational system, entertainment systems, and just about everything that

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affects our children, has been pumping this self-esteem thing into them for years until they believe that they are the only important thing on this planet.

Solomon seems to say, "Do you know where all this self-esteem is going to wind up?"

God does not pump self-esteem into us. He does just the opposite. He pricks us with pins all the time.

Ronald Reagan was a great example of this. Among the presidents over my lifetime at least, he was the humblest one of all. And do you know what? He accomplished the most! Whereas, William Jefferson Clinton, who is the most egotistical of all the presidents, accomplished nothing! He tore just about everything down. Whereas Reagan wanted to build up. Clinton was, in effect, a destroyer. We will see that in a few minutes. Not specifically about him, but his way of approaching things—from a very egotistical point of view. I am not trying to speak politically at all. I am just talking about the character that we can see that is brought out through the people themselves.

On the other hand, talking about the way things are handled in this generation gap mentality, the culture mocks parents all the time. Turn on any sitcom, and the parents are out of touch. The parents are about as cool as mismatched socks. There is nothing about parents that kids would want to emulate. They are always tripping over themselves, and making stupid mistakes at work, getting into ridiculous situations that their kids have to pull them out of, because the kids are smart, and the parents are dumb.

This reminds me of II Timothy 3, and Paul's description of people being without natural affection, and disobedient to parents.

Notice where it ends up! Right here in verse 14 of Proverbs chapter 30, "a generation whose teeth *are like* swords," and "to devour the poor from off the earth..."

Do you know what those are word pictures for?

Violence; blood-thirsty violence and oppression! That is what Solomon says this self-esteem filled me generation is going to end up. Violence—have you ever heard of Columbine (High School Massacre in Colorado)?—and oppressive—have you ever seen some of our college campuses? Have you ever read anything about what happens on college campuses? They are the most oppressive institutions on the earth.

Do you know that free speech is not allowed on campus? Do you know that white,

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conservative men have almost no chance at all on a college campus? They have to keep their heads down, and their mouths shut if they want get through their four years—because the speech codes, the hate codes, and all the things that public college campuses are doing these days are oppressing these people.

This is just an example of where this way of life ends up.

Can not we see these things happening today? I can. So, I think that the lesson here is "learn your place in society." Kids would do best to learn that they are kids, and that they are to be working toward maturity.

Proverbs 27:8 Like a bird that wanders from its nest /s a man who wanders from his place.

I do not know if you understand or not what he means here, but he says that when you get out of your place, you are in danger. You are encroaching into areas where you have no idea what may come around the corner.

So, "the best thing to do," Solomon says, "is to stay where you are."

Think of this in terms of age: A person who is a youth is going to grow up. He is going to get older. The place will change for you. And that is why in those intervening years one should be working toward maturity, because pretty soon you will have a new place in society, and you will have to be ready for it. Do not jump the gun. Do not get out of your place.

Another point here:

I do not know if you are aware of this or not, but it is interesting:

Proverbs 28:24 Whoever robs his father or his mother, And says, "*It is no transgression,*" The same *is* companion to a destroyer.

The gist of this is that this is a condemnation of those young people who take advantage of their parents—of all the things that a parent would do for a child. This does not necessarily mean that you rob them at gun point (although it can). There are ways that children rob their parents of many things, not just material possessions.

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I know now that there are a lot of young people who get out of college and move back in with mom and dad, and sponge off them for a couple more years. Their parents just paid 80,000 for their education, and now they are coming back in and living free of charge in their old bedroom. That is stealing from one's parents!

A lot of parents allow or tolerate it from either misplaced concern for their children, or because the children dictate to them, and have dictated to them for years.

The very second chapter of this book (Genesis) says that a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall make a place for himself.

So, my idea here is that children and young people need to be aware of how they take advantage of their parents, because once you get to a certain age, you should be self-sufficient. That is part of becoming mature.

There are different situations happening. I do not want to judge anyone. That is not my point here. I want to talk specifically to the youth. There is a time to leave your parents. There is a time to strike out on your own.

Notice that the child that takes advantage of his parents—essentially stealing from them in whatever way—will turn out no good. It says that the same is a companion to a destroyer. It is something to think about. This is, in a way, echoed in the New Testament in I Timothy 5:8, speaking primarily about taking care of widows, but I want you to get the principle out of this:

I Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

I Timothy 5:16 If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

What I am trying to get at here in terms of I Timothy 5 is that the children should be taking care of the parents. It is part of the sign of maturity.

Sure, parents are supposed to be able to give an inheritance to their grandchildren according to the proverbs. But, a child, once he grows to adulthood, should be able to return the favor for the twenty some odd years of sustenance and help provided by his

parents.

We will read several verses here in Proverbs. Remember, this is all about coming to maturity.

Proverbs 14:29 *He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly.*

Proverbs 20:29 *The glory of young men is their strength, And the splendor of old men is their gray head.*

Proverbs 22:15 *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him.*

What I am getting at here are those three terms that came up: Impulsiveness, strength, and foolishness. All of these attributes are pointed at the young. A child is known by his foolishness. And it is discipline, the proverb says—child training—that works it out of him.

Now, this foolishness comes in the form of impulsiveness—actions without thought or concern for consequences. And, a child will also depend upon his strength, rather than wisdom: "Aw! I can do that!" (Run, run, run, run...jump...splat!) Whereas, a person who is older would say, "No, that jump is a little bit too far."

The rash youth is a character these days in movies, and television. It is a mark of immaturity. God says that a person should rather be wise. They should not be impulsive. They should think about these things and be prudent.

So, the point here is to learn to think things through.

You can just jot this down: Haggai 1, verses 4 through 7:

Haggai 1:7 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!

Consider means to take notice of the path you are treading. Where does it end?

This is an important one:

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Proverbs 23:19-21 Hear, my son, and be wise; And guide your heart in the way. Do not mix with winebibbers, *Or* with gluttonous eaters of meat; For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe a *man* with rags.

Proverbs 24:21-22 My son, fear the LOORD and the king; Do not associate with those given to change; For their calamity will rise suddenly, And who knows the ruin those two can bring?

He is talking about revolutionaries, and rebellious people. People who are seeking change in government, change in the way that things are done. Those types of people are the ones to stay away from.

Proverbs 1:10-11 My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait to *shed* blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause;

Proverbs 1:16-19 For their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed blood. Surely, in vain the net is spread In the sight of any bird; But they lie in wait for their *own* blood, They lurk secretly for their *own* lives. So *are* the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.

Solomon advises young people not to mix with partiers, rebels, and with law breakers in these three sections. In other words, watch the crowd you run with. They will pull you down to their level. You will not be able to live through things unaffected. It is going to diminish your conscience at the very least. You will run into trouble. And so, make friends with those who will pull you up instead, rather than pull you down.

Proverbs 12:26 The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 15:24 The way of life *winds* upward for the wise, That he may turn away from hell below.

So, choose your friends wisely.

And finally, (you might want to write these things down) Proverbs 24:27, Proverbs

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27:23, and Ecclesiastes 11:1-6. These verses are all about diligence, prioritizing, living within your means, and working hard. These are all attributes of a mature person.

A child wants to play, but an adult knows that he has responsibilities, and he does them willingly, and without complaint, because he understands that plenty, and satisfaction come only through hard work.

So, work hard, and reap the benefits. That is the lesson here. Work hard, and reap the benefits.

Proverbs 22:29 Do you see a man *who* excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown *men*.

So, if you do what you do, and you do it well, there is going to be reward.

So, in this society of perpetual children, the church of God has a chance in its children, and young people, and its members to stand out as a shining example of maturity and wisdom. The comparison will be shocking!

There are great benefits to maturity, many of which we saw today. For instance, we will have happiness, long life, plenty, honor, and satisfaction.

And, more important than that, we will have God's commendation because it is His aim to bring us to maturity.

I am going to read Ephesians 4, verses 11 through 15 and speak about these from a spiritual point of view:

Ephesians 4:11-15 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [mature] man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ