

## Sanctification, Teens, And Self-Control

Considering the End : Adolescent Invincibility Disorder Syndrome

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This sermon is directed mostly toward our teenagers and young adults, but secondarily at parents too because they are responsible to God for being the first stage for training their children to be in His kingdom.

I want to give you some things to consider within the pressing urgency of the times. My theme is largely a warning against the irresponsibility of being complacent in a certain area. Now why? It is because, unlike human parents, God will not carelessly allow us to escape our responsibilities. God is always merciful, and in terms of punishment and discipline, He never gives us what we deserve for our carelessness and disobedience.

But make no mistake about this one thing: Whether young adult, or parent, our irresponsibility will catch up with us. There is no escaping it. The more responsible we are, the less irresponsibility is going to catch up with us.

I Corinthians 7:14 shows that God sanctifies young people as a result of their parents' sanctification. This simply means that God puts you young people into a special category for positive attention that other young people in this world do not receive. It is one of the greatest gifts our Creator can bestow upon anybody, let alone a child.

In order to bring one to his senses, God has resources and timing beyond what we might even dream. He will use fear and pain in order to stop us short of the end result of our careless, unbelieving, unconcerned drifting because He loves us far more than our parents love us. And just assuredly as we parents can lose *our* sanctification, you young people can lose *your* sanctification that has come upon you as a result of your parents' calling.

Young people, life is serious business. It is not all fun and games. The sooner you learn this the better off you are going to be. I am calling upon you parents to interpret this sermon for your children and make it more practical for them than I can do in this one setting.

**II Peter 3:3-7** Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that

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by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

I know that it is hard for young people to grasp some of the things I am going to say because of the lack of experience, but this world that you are living in is not normal even for this world. In six thousand years of human history only one other time equates to what you are living through. This time is what Peter mentioned in this very brief paragraph, and that this period leading up to the flood of Noah is very similar to what you are living through right now.

I want you to recall that out of the horrible mess before the flood, only eight people survived in terms of the number of those who will be spared from the horrible deaths *this* time. It will not be quite as bad. In other words, there are more who are going to be spared alive, but only because of God's promise, His purpose, and the existence of the Church. That is a key factor that Jesus specifically mentions. He said, "for the elect's sake, things will be cut short."

**Daniel 12:4** But you, O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

What Daniel wrote was going to be sealed from understanding until the time of the end. At the time of end, it is as though the book is opened up, and knowledge can be understood. What can we glean from this verse?

The circumstances under which we must live our lives have changed so much in the past fifty to sixty years that it is enough to make me shake my head almost in disbelief, even though I have lived through it myself.

Television, computers, and jet airplanes were just barely out of the womb, as it were, sixty years ago. The first nuclear bombs had just been detonated. There was little or no air-conditioning in homes, or in automobiles for that matter. There was no permanent-press clothing, no cassette tapes, no CDs, MP3s, or cell phones. Every American home did not even have a telephone. Movies cost fifteen cents to go to. Gasoline was about thirty cents a gallon, if you could get it, because it was rationed during World War II.

I was still in elementary school at that time. Most movies being produced were still in black and white. No automobiles were being made for sale to the public because of the war. The Baby Boomers were just beginning to be born.

Technology is not my major concern, even though it factors into what has made the times the way they are so different from anything else that preceded it.

Notice how God, in this verse, describes the times we live in. He said, "At the time of the end, many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

I gave you a little bit of a run-down of some of the knowledge increase that has taken place. These are technical things, but I think this also implies that knowledge of the Bible, knowledge of God's way, and knowledge of God's purpose will also be increased. What I really want to focus on right here is that He says, "men shall run to and fro." You can see that. People are traveling all over the place.

That phrase can be taken either literally, indicating real time movement from one place to another by foot, by horse, by vehicle, or it can be applied as something going on entirely in one's mind. It is as though the pressures of external events are causing one to race from one thought to another. It is as though the mind is confused or hurriedly seeking answers because of great perplexity, the excitement of pleasures, or fearfully contemplating escape from danger.

You know full well that when you are physically constantly busy, moving about at work or play, your body gets tired. Well, if your mind is racing without peaceful rest, it can create such stress on the body that it gets tired as if one was actually physically working to make it tired. God is describing an information-jammed, stressful wearying, enervating time where questions are many and answers are few. Fright is ever edging upward because people are realizing the stakes of the time that they live in.

I want to go through some of the scriptures in Jeremiah 30 because I want to emphasize something within it.

**Jeremiah 30:4-7** And these are the words that the LOORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus says the LOORD, We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask you now and see whether a man does travail with child? Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? [They are scared to death!] Alas! For that day is great, so that **none** is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.

The time of the end is the time of Jacob's trouble, and we believe that we are living at the edge of the time of the end. The pressures of living in this world are mounting because God is drawing the entire world toward a conclusion—a major turn in the plan He is working out.

There is nothing we can do about the times because the time table of events is in His powerful and capable hands, and nobody can turn Him aside. We can, however, change our attitude about what is going on in order to take the best advantage of it. The choice is up to you. You cannot honestly blame anybody but yourself if you waste the knowledge God has given you. He has given knowledge of what He is about to do, and what He has mercifully made available to your understanding, because He called your parents.

There are two subjects God illustrates in these verses we just read. The first is the uniqueness of the times. Did you notice that in verse 7 God said, "There is none like it?" That is how unique it is. In six thousand years of man's history there has never been a time like the one you are living through right now. Besides that, have you ever heard of a man giving birth to a baby? That is pretty unique. But again, it illustrates how unique the times are in which you are living. A practical application of this means that even the times of Noah preceding the flood cannot fully compare to what we have entered into.

The second thing I want to draw your attention to that is strongly illustrated in these verses is fear—dread. This is where the "to and the fro" of Daniel 12 comes back into the picture. The outlook for this time, besides being unique, is absolute terror.

I once read an article discussing what happens psychologically when people are frightened. What do they think about? What do they desire? What is important to them at a time like this? The single most important thing, according to this article, was "escape" from the situation. Self-preservation is what is crowding everything else out of the mind.

Kids, there is no thought of fun. That tells you something about the relative importance of fun. It is not worth very much really.

Today, if one takes a cursory look at the general American scene, one can easily reach the conclusion that the most important thing in the world is sex. This article pointed out that at a time of great fear, the single **least** important thing in life is sex. The article stated it is absolutely the last thing that comes to mind.

Ignorance of how AIDS is caused and how to combat it appears to be largely responsible for the immature person's problems. I think that we have an AIDS problem right in the church. No, it is not the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome of the sexually promiscuous, but ***Adolescent Invincibility Disorder Syndrome***. Young people often give every impression that they are ignorant of the end result of their actions in the present.

The immature give the impression that they think they are immortal. But ignorance should not be a problem to you young people unless, in your determination to have a good time, you (figuratively anyway) stick your head in a bucket and ignore what is going on around you. Please kids, do not ignore it. Life is serious—more serious that it has even been in the history of mankind. It is getting to be where it is a "life and death" situation almost at any moment. So do not just blow the things off without doing something positive about it.

One of the changes that have taken place within the last sixty years or so is that adolescence begins much earlier now. Did you ever read in the newspapers what kids in middle school are doing? It is mind-boggling! But adolescence begins much earlier now than it did in the period before that. But interestingly, according to the psychologists, it also ***ends*** much later. In other words, the maturing process seems to be slowing down on the one end and speeding up on the other. In other words, adolescence begins and ends over a much broader period of time than it used to.

Coupled with this is that irresponsibility is a major hallmark of our time, and the adolescent gives the impression that he is immune to disaster, that he is impervious to harm; he is indestructible, immortal, and invisible.

The following is one piece of evidence I can give you.

Charlotte is a typical American medium-sized city. It does not have the huge population of a New York City, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, or whatever. It does not carry with it the reputation for violence that those cities have. But there is not a week that goes by without it hitting the television news or newspapers reporting of one or more teenagers being killed, or killing someone by doing something stupid. Usually it is with an automobile.

For the most part these are not bad kids at all. They are not gang-related incidents I am talking about, and for the most part they are not even drug-related incidents. These are just careless, foolish kids who are essentially unaware of the dangerous circumstances into which they put themselves, and then play with their life. And like I said, so many of

them happen in an automobile.

When they are in the automobile they get to talking back and forth, and they are distracted from the driving. The more kids that are in the car, the more likely this is going to happen. They drift off to the side of the road. They over-correct, and the car turns over, or they turn sharply back into somebody coming from the other direction. That happens so often you can expect it at least once a month. That is what I mean about being foolish.

Young people, when you are driving a car, you are driving. It is your responsibility to make sure you do not hit anybody else, and that you preserve your own life and the life of the others who are in the car with you.

My question to you young people is: What are you going to do about your life?

You stand in a unique position when compared to other young people on this earth. The average person on earth is illiterate, undernourished, and has a life expectancy of 45 to 50 years. I want you to think for just a moment about what you have been freely given.

Maybe if you lived in the Sahel of South Africa instead of here in the United States or Canada—maybe you do know the drift of the world that you live in—those kids over there are virtually without a choice. But the reality is, you do not live in the Sahel. You live in the Western world. You are not ignorant. You are not undernourished, and your life span is about 70 years.

You might be foolish and careless, but you still have options the overwhelming majority of young people in this world do not have.

Now here comes the scary part: **You will be held responsible for it.** Let me repeat that. **You will be held responsible for it!** It is a gift that God made **to you** because Abraham was faithful, and even others besides him.

Like I said in my first sermon ["The Handwriting is On the Wall"], this Book is the greatest gift God could give any people, and there is no place on earth that has this Book available in the way that Americans have it. The only one that even begins to compare to the United States and Canada is England.

Those kids in other parts of the world are virtually without a choice. They are going to grow up in their poverty, grow up hungry, and die from AIDS, or whatever, before they even hit the age of fifty in most cases.

There are choices to be made from these responsibilities that come as a result of God's freely given gifts. You are unique, having the most important of all options given to young people anywhere on this planet. One of the most important understandings revealed to the church of God directly involves you—an option no other people on earth have.

**I Corinthians 7:14** For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy [sanctified].

Satan has deceived the whole world, and all of mankind is cut off from God; but not your parents, and not you. You may try to persuade yourself that this world, by its very nature, gives a person no chance of making good, in which there is nothing left but the fatalistic acceptance of defeat. But such is not the case with you.

This verse means that God, in His mercy to you as a child of even one converted parent, permits you to be influenced by the truth of God to a degree other children are denied at this time. What He is saying is, "The door is open, kids." You have the opportunity to believe God. You have the opportunity to cast your lot with Him and to be spared the horror of having to face the terror of a world in absolute horrific turmoil.

I think that the majority of you believe as your parents do, as much as your age and understanding permit, that the Church of the Great God is a part of God's church. But some of you, though, are careless. Some are hostile, and maybe even attending against their will. You may feel that this church cramps your style, and you would rather be elsewhere having fun. But for whatever your reason is for being here, I still want you to think seriously about your future, because unless you act, your future is going to be every bit as clouded as those kids in the Sahel. We have to choose. You have to choose.

Perhaps, above all, I do not want you to be careless about losing your sanctification. Consider this: Can your parents lose their sanctification because they do not pay attention to God, and their life ends in the lake of fire? You know the answer to that. Well, what makes you think you are any different? Is it just because you are younger? You can lose your sanctification unless you are willing to do something. First thing is that you have to be willing to believe God.

Consider something else: Do you realize that you have the power to do this? It is within your grasp. Again, life is serious business.

Do you know what it is that stops people most of the time from believing God? Fear! It is because they are afraid it is going to cost them something, and that is right. It is true. It *is* going to cost you something, and that is what holds people back. It is going to cost them their life!

But wow! There is that wonderful payoff on the other end. Do you ever consider the end? You see? That is what young people lack. They lack the consideration of end results. I want you to understand you have the power to control this if you are willing to exercise it.

Now Paul wrote the book of Titus, a fellow minister, and he gave this advice to Titus:

**Titus 2:1** But speak you the things which become sound doctrine...

Here is what Paul considered good instruction in regard to sound doctrine:

**Titus 2:2-6** ...that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becomes holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.

The overall intent of these instructions to a church pastor is an exhortation for the various age groups to hold a sense of duty in regard to conduct. None of the instructions given here should be ignored simply because they are not directly addressed to you, or your sex, or your age group.

It says that girls should be discreet and modest. This does not mean that a fellow is allowed to be indiscreet and immodest because he is not mentioned in that regard. I mention this because that is a tricky way the human mind works. "Well, he is saying that to the girls." No, it is instruction to both.

What is God telling us here through Paul to Titus so that we can apply this practically? Overall here, God is telling us to be sane. He is telling us to exercise self-control. He is telling us to curb our passions. He is telling us to aim at self-mastery.



I want you to go to Proverbs. Remember, the last thing I said was to aim at self-mastery.

**Proverbs 16:32** He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city.

Ruling one's spirit involves self-discipline. Self-discipline is willing yourself to do the right; willing the self to achieve, regardless of feelings. It may not be glamorous, but it is the stuff of success.

We all have to understand that youth is a time of danger because youth has a strong tendency to be short-sighted, lacking vision, vastly over-confident that one knows all that there is to be needed to know. The killer in this dangerous success-destroying mix is focused primarily on the moment in order that one can get to the fun.

A shortsighted person is always reckless and lacking in discipline. This is because he sees no reason why he should think soberly and hold himself in unless the reason to hold himself in is immediately in front of him, like the cop, when the shortsighted one is going over the speed limit. The reckless simply have not discovered all that can go wrong in a split second because they have a careless tendency not to count the cost of doing something until after they get hurt. The world is filled with unbelieving gamblers refusing to take advantage of the wisdom of the wisest being in the whole world.

We are going to look at Revelation 3:8-11.

**Revelation 3:8-11** I know your works: behold, I have set before you an open door: and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength, and have kept my word and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie: behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to test them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown.

All of you young people who have been attending services for a good while know that God has offered the Philadelphian protection from the worst of the trouble that is sure to happen. This is an extremely valuable piece of knowledge backed by God's absolute promise. I have a question: What makes you think that you will be there? Or maybe I

ought to ask this question: Do you even think about it? That is an important question too.

Let us ask another question: Does God say that all the Philadelphians are in one group, and so everybody in that group receives this promise simply because they are fellowshiping with that group? Not at all. I do not see a promise anywhere in which it says that someone has a free ride just because he is attending church with a group. Do you begin to see where I am going with this? God is going to judge us individually, and kids, it is not just your parents who are being judged. Are you aware that your parents do not have a free ride?

Kids, I know that you know it, but remember, there is a price to success, and in many cases it does not come cheaply. It is reality. It cannot be avoided.

Now what if a church member, a Christian, does not yield? What if he is not willing to pay the price to actually be a Philadelphian? Is God going to take him anyway?

I will give you a logical and clear answer. You know very well He will not, because He would then be rewarding him for being lazy, and foolish besides. God does not do that. This is the real world. God does not judge like that.

God does not judge like human governments who give people welfare and pays them, in many cases, for being lazy. Some people really do need welfare, but there are a lot of them who do not need it, but they work the system and get paid for being lazy. You do not get away with that with God. The message to the Laodiceans proves that conclusively.

The price that has to be paid appears in verse 11. **They must hold fast!** Of course it assumes that they have the right thing, and that they are doing the right thing already when He says that they have to hold fast to what they have.

Now, what if they lose their discipline and their vision, their godly attitudes, and their character and slips backwards? It can happen, because one chooses to let it happen by really disbelieving God.

Success always demands a payment, and the payment cannot be escaped.

Kids, there ain't no free lunch!

Where does this put you? You are unconverted, and very possibly just drifting while at

the same time not being cut off from access to God. You possess tremendous knowledge, and are doing nothing. Maybe you are not being outright disobedient; but maybe you are. Maybe you are uncooperative and even nasty in your attitude toward your parents. Where does this leave you?

I am talking to you about reality. It would do you well to rethink your position and drop your complacent recklessness because you have very much to be accountable for. "To whom much is given, the much more is required," Jesus said. The Giver is God. He has given it, and He has pronounced this rule of judgment, and He does not lie.

This world's Christianity has given the world a fuzzy view of God. It is unbalanced, emphasizing His mercy at the expense of His justice. I am afraid many are taken in by this thinking of God in human terms. But God is not a man, and His judgments are not carelessly and casually given. Many of God's perspectives on things are revealed in His law, and His laws are given to achieve both social order, as well as to prepare people for being in His image and in His kingdom.

Now young people, I want you to hold onto your hats because we are going to look at a law of God that is hair-raising in its implication, and it is aimed right at you. Parents do not escape this as well, because part of the burden falls on them.

Go to Exodus 21. If you know where we are in the book, you know that Jesus Christ just pronounced the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai. What we are going to look at here is a specific refinement of the Fifth Commandment.

**Exodus 21:12-13** He that smites a man so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God delivers him into his hand: then I will appoint you a place whither he shall flee.

God is showing there is a difference between out-right murder and manslaughter.

**Exodus 21:14** But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile; you shall take him from my altar, that he may die.

Kids, are you ready for this next verse?

**Exodus 21:15-16** And he that smites his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death. And he that steals a man and sells him, or if he be

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found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

Now kids, it is time to **really** pay attention. Maybe you have never hit your father or your mother, but verse 17 says:

**Exodus 21:17** And he that **curses** his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.

That is pretty strict. This is an order from our Creator. This is not a man's law. This is from our Creator. And so, maltreatment of a parent through striking or cursing is placed on a par with murder and kidnapping, and it is punished in the same way—death.

Young people, there are going to be no rebels in the place of safety, or the Kingdom of God. Men may overlook and reject God's judgment, but do you think that God, who is perfect in memory, perfect in wisdom, perfect in judgment as to what is best in every circumstance for all concerned, will overlook one of His own laws? Do not gamble, because that just will not happen. Young people, life is serious.

Look yet closer at this. The word "curse," here means, "to belittle." Maybe it does not mean as strong as you might have thought that it means, that it just means to belittle your parents, or to make light of them. "Oh, they are old fogies. They are just out of it."

Now wait a minute! What kind of respect is that showing your parents? It means, "to be contemptuous of."

Maybe you have heard of Hammurabi's code. Hammurabi's code was written somewhat before the Ten Commandments. Hammurabi's code says that punishment for cursing a parent is to have one's hand cut off. I bring this up because I want you to see that in God's order of things the standard is exceedingly higher. He expects a lot more from His creation than Hammurabi did, and there is good reason, because much of one's success in life hinges upon a child's response to his parents.

In 1671 in the United States of America the Puritans put to death a 16-year old who struck one of his parents. That was back when things were a lot more conservative. Well, things have changed. Permissiveness is the order of the times now, virtually ensuring the production of irresponsibility. Children have to be held accountable.

We are going to go to Matthew 5 to see what Jesus had to say about the spirit of

murder.

**Matthew 5:21** You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

As James Beaubelle said in his sermonette ["Coveting"], Jesus was the one who gave these commandments. Now, here He is, appearing before man in flesh and blood—the same One who gave the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai—and He says:

**Matthew 5:22** But I say unto you, That whosoever is **angry** with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: [We are reaching into the heart, the intent behind what is said and what is done.] And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [a word that means something similar to "idiot"], shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be in danger of hell fire.

To call your parents an idiot would be contemptuous. It is thinking light of them, not showing the respect God says they should be given. So cursing is placed on a par with murder because it proceeds from the same attitude, and is punishable by death because the majesty and office of God is violated in the person of the parent.

I will make that real simple for you. It is as though the parent is God Himself. Parents are the representative of and the types of God, and thus the Fifth Commandment is broken. Now in terms of the penalty, God shows, then, it is just as wrong to curse parents as it is to curse God Himself.

Let us go to the book of Leviticus. The book of Leviticus is sometimes referred to as the "holiness" book. It is telling you how to be holy, how to be clean, how to be pure, how to be sanctified before God.

**Leviticus 19:1-3** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, You shall be holy; for I, the LORD your God am holy. You shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.

My bible has a little mark beside the word "fear," that refers you to the margin. It says in the margin: "You shall **reverence** your father and your mother." That makes it

exceedingly clear. Reverence is usually something that is reserved for God. It reinforces what I just said why smiting or cursing a parent is so serious. Smiting or cursing a parent is so serious because the office and majesty of God is cursed by cursing the parent.

There always has to be a practical reason for this, and here it is: You parents have an awesomely high calling just in being a parent. That calling is to be respected by the children, because the reverence that is given to you precedes the reverence God expects to come to Him when the relationship with Him is introduced into the child's life. That is why the standard is so high.

To me, this next one is frightening.

**Proverbs 20:20** Whoso curses his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.

This ought to be a very sobering verse for any young person who has some measure of respect for God's seriousness about a child's responsibility toward his parents. I want you first to notice the word "obscure." Modern translations render "obscure" as "deep pitch" or "complete." It indicates "utterly dark." Now if you are trying to make your way through an area that is strewn with deep holes to fall into, as well as projections that are sticking up out of the ground to trip you, as long as you have a lamp to shed light you can make your way even though it is dangerous. But if your lamp is put out and extinguished in the blackest of darkness, how are you going to see where you are going?

This proverb has two aspects to it. There is the physical, which I kind of just described, and then there is a spiritual one. You know from John 1 that this world is considered to be in utter darkness. A lamp, you see, puts forth light, and it is a symbol of truth; therefore, God is instructing us that if we disrespect our parents to the point of cursing them, He is going to withdraw the guidance and direction of His truth.

God is not saying in this proverb that He is going to put one to death. Instead, in this case, He is saying that the penalty for cursing parents is that one will receive no guidance from Him, no prosperity, no posterity, and therefore no future. It is just going to be delayed. But you see, the delay is going to be preceded by an awful lot of pain. There will be holes to fall into and projections to trip over.

And so, God is saying, *"Why would want to do any such thing like that when I am here to*

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*give you help? If you will just believe Me, I will light the path for you. I will clear the way before you. Certainly there are going to be hard times, but I am going to clear it in such a way that you will be able to succeed, and as you succeed you are going to learn things that are going to be very helpful for My kingdom."*

So what do we want? Do we want success with God, or do we want to try for success without God? That is the issue.

**Proverbs 20:11** Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.

This proverb is telling us that there is no hiding for a child with the excuse, "I am just a kid." The proverb is saying that character counts regardless of age. Even a child's character is recognizable, and traits of childhood tend to stick right all the way through life. Now where does that leave you?

I have mentioned before a comment made by Muriel Beadle on the importance of early childhood development. In her book, "A Child's Mind," she took issue with Proverbs 22:6, saying that from her experience with children, it *should* read: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will be **unable** to depart from it." That is pretty insightful. She is saying that mistakes ingrained in a young child's thinking are so hard to overcome when he is old.

Do you parents wonder why you have such a hard time overcoming? It is because those character traits you learned earlier in your life have been written in stone almost—on your heart—and getting them cut out and having new ones cut in is a miracle of creation.

Oh, how the past comes up and slap us on the side of the head!

Kids, you do not have to go through that if you are smart, if you are wise. You can begin the turn at any time.

I went through Deuteronomy 6:4-9 the other day. In those verses God lays the parental responsibility bare. Parents are commanded to teach, formally and informally, by example, by conduct, by attitude, and decision-making.

Parents, do your children know that you are praying and studying? Do they really know that you are patterning your life after the behavior of their model Jesus Christ?

Young people, what if your parents are not doing their job? Where does that leave you? Are you going to go to God and justify yourself like almost everybody else in the world today seems to be doing by claiming that they cannot help the way they are because they are victims of what their parents did?

Well, young people, there is a measure of justification in that claim because there are some things you cannot be blamed for. However, you have got to remember that this justification only holds good for a period of time, and then the responsibility becomes yours fully because there is an age of accountability.

Like I said earlier, there is no escaping. A price has to be paid. It is far better to pay it when you are young than it is to wait till you are old; and growth that produces real change in one's character, in one's heart, seems sometimes almost impossible to make.

We are going to look at some verses in Ezekiel, chapter 18.

**Ezekiel 18:4** Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die.

**Ezekiel 18:14** Now, lo, if he beget a son that sees all his father's sins which he has done, and considers, and does not such like;

**Ezekiel 18:18** As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity.

**Ezekiel 18:20** The soul that sins, it shall die,. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

In these verses is the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament statement, "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive those things done in one's body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad."

But what Ezekiel explains is that the sins of the father are not going to be held against the son, nor are the sins of the son to be accounted to the father. Everybody stands alone before God eventually.



If you parents really love your children you are going to take them in hand and use the child-rearing instructions that are given in the Bible so that you give them the best chance possible for them to make the right choices at the right time in their life. You will hold them accountable, making them responsible, forming and shaping them. It is going to require a good bit of your time in order to do that, but they are perhaps the major responsibility any parent is ever given. It is not something to be just brushed aside: "Well, everybody has kids."

As I indicated in my first message, childrearing (or the lack thereof) is destroying the United States of America. It is destroying the country.

Each person is accountable for his own actions. One of the qualities of law is that law always acts or reacts in the same way. A law does not change in relation to you because you happen to be a female rather than a male, or whether you are young or old. "The wages of sin is death," regardless of race, age, or gender.

Do you know what it says in Malachi 4:5-6 about Elijah coming, and he is going to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers? And then God says, "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." This means, "utterly destroy it." That is how important childrearing is. That is how important it is to make the right choices.

Now what if the Elijah comes, see, and the Elijah does his job well? He really puts it right on the line, and a good witness is made to the whole nation? What if the young people do not turn their hearts to their fathers? Where does that leave them? It leaves them in the middle of an ocean without a ship.

**Proverbs 29:18** Where there is no vision the people perish: but he that keeps the law, happy is he.

Vision—having well-formed goals—is an absolute necessity to anyone who is going to go anywhere. In this particular case the word, "vision," here, can also be translated, "revelation." "Where there is no revelation the people perish." The use of the Hebrew term translated that way indicates "divine" guidance. That is what a revelation is. So if you reform this proverb into modern English, it will say: "Without divine guidance the people cast off restraint." Here we come back to self-control.

So how do you get a leg up on developing self-control?

You have got to have the right goals—goals that you believe in, goals that you are confident can be achieved—and then you will discipline [restrain] yourself to make sure you make every effort to achieve that goal.

If there is the divine guidance, which God is offering to you, the right goals can be established, and because God is in the picture the other things will begin to fall into place. **He** gives the strength for us to be able to restrain ourselves from just following human nature. Instead we will make the decisions that may involve a great deal of self-sacrifice to make sure we succeed in achieving those goals and in glorifying Him.

Because of your parents' calling, which is God's grace to you as well as to them, you have access to divine guidance. And what does God say follows? Happiness. Is not that what you want? Fun? I mean **REAL** fun that God approves of—a sense of well-being that He produces in us. The verse is telling us that it takes a special kind of vision to keep God's laws and to produce the kind of prosperity that God wants us to have.

Turn back to the book of Hebrews.

**Hebrews 11:7** By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear [out of deep respect, of reverence] prepared an ark to the saving of his house: by the which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

**Hebrews 11:13-16** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, [Here is what sets the people of faith off. It sanctifies them. They allow their minds to be persuaded by the evidence that God presents to them.] and embraced them, [They made it part of their life.] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country: And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he has prepared for them a city.

We will take a hint from these two great men of faith. They believed God, and they were delivered by God. They believed God, and they produced success in their life. In one case it saved the man's life. It not only saved the man's life, but also his wife's, and the lives of his three sons and his three daughters-in-law as well. Everybody else—maybe billions of people—perished in that flood, but Noah and his family were spared because

they believed.

Do you think it was easy to build that ark in the face of scorn and ridicule when it apparently had never even rained before? The Bible gives that indication. Can you imagine how stupid that looked to the people around Noah? "What is that thing you are doing?" "What do you call it?"

We may look dumb doing what we do, even in keeping the Feast of Tabernacles, keeping the Sabbath, and tithing. But those who believe God, in the end, are alive. They are successful. It is that simple.

Let us turn to Ecclesiastes 8, and we will finish with the following series of scriptures. The book of Ecclesiastes was written from a carnal point of view, but it was written by an exceedingly wise man who had a godly father, and he reached an awful lot of right conclusions in what he wrote. I just want to read a couple of them to you. Turn to Ecclesiastes 8:11-12. This is excellent advice.

**Ecclesiastes 8:11-12** Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. [His conclusion:] Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him.

Here is straightforward and clear counsel from one very wise man's experience. He says, "Do not be lulled into thinking you can get away with something because you carelessly judged that others are getting away with whatever *it* is."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote the following brief words, but they have deep meaning. He said:

Though the mills of God grind slowly,  
Yet they grind exceeding small.  
Though with patience He stands waiting,  
With exactness He grinds all.

Everybody comes under God's judgment. Nobody escapes. God is working, working, working, working to move us into the position where we will make the right choices. We have to do it. He cannot do it for us. It is our responsibility to make the right choices.

How do you know that **they** are getting away with it? You do not. It is vain to think that you know what is going on in other peoples' lives. It is vain to think that they are living happily ever after and somehow they are getting away with it. You do not know what God is working out in their lives, and to think that they are getting away with it is foolish. Nobody does. That is what Longfellow was saying.

Turn to Ecclesiastes 12. I cannot end on anything better than this. I keep kind of making myself a promise that some day I am going to spend the whole Feast of Tabernacles on the book of Ecclesiastes, but I never get around to it. But, it is tremendous for the Feast.

**Ecclesiastes 12:9-14** And moreover, because the preacher [Solomon] was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he gave good heed and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. [The words may come at us in a carnal setting, but they are still truth.] The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies [something you can count on], which are given from one shepherd. [That shepherd is Jesus Christ.] And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole [duty of] man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.