



2024 ACBC Annual Conference – Fort Worth, TX

Counseling Difficult Teens and Their Parents

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Introduction

I. Thinking Biblically about the Difficult Teen

A. The root problem in a difficult teen is his sin, not his circumstances or unmet “needs.”

1. Teenage rebellion is _____. Isa. 1:2; Mal. 1:6; Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Exod. 20:12; Eph 6:1

2. Rebellious behavior arises from a _____ heart. Rom. 1, Matt. 15 // Mark 7; 2 Tim 3:1-5; etc.

B. Why does teenage rebellion seem to happen in the families of many Christian leaders? Possible “heat” factors that can contribute:

- Satan might attack Christian leaders’ homes with added force.
- Some Christian leaders might not demonstrate domestic godliness.
- Some Christian leaders might speak cynically about the church and other Christians and leaders.
- Some Christian leaders are workaholics who neglect their parental ministry to their children.
- Higher expectations from family members or church members.
- A teen’s might respond wrongly to what he perceives as mistreatment by the church leaders or members against his dad or his parents.
- Where there is greater light, there might be greater exposure of sin, and greater hatred of that light among those who love darkness and hate the light. (John 3:19-21)

C. A teen is responsible to love and please God by _____ his parents.

The phrase, “my son,” appears 23x in Proverbs



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Godly teens in Scripture: Joseph (Gen 37); Samuel (1 Sam 3); David (1 Sam 17); Naaman's unnamed Israelite servant girl (2 Kings 5:1–3); Josiah (2 Kings 22; 2 Chron 34); Daniel (Dan 1); Mary (Luke 1–2); Jesus (Luke 2:40–52); Timothy (2 Tim 1:5; 3:14–15)

Applying Colossians 3:1–25 in Counseling Christian Teenagers

Verses 1-4 – Grasp the centrality of an active, meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ.

- True change begins with a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Union with Christ in his death, resurrection, and return.
- Growth occurs as you set your hearts and minds on Christ—your affections, desires, beliefs, motives.

Verses 5-11 – Put to death your remaining sin because of your new life.

- Put to death your sexual sin (v.5)
- Put to death your greed (v.5)
- Because these practices merit God's wrath (v.6) and are part of your old life (v.7)
- Put to death your anger and your sinful speech (v.8)
- Put to death your lying (v.9a)
- Because these practices are part of your old life (v.9b), not the new life God has given you (v.10)
- And this is true of every believer regardless of background, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc. (v.11), and I would argue regardless of your age or family status.

Verses 12-17 – Replace your old attitudes and practices with new, Christlike graces.

- Remember your identity in Christ (v.12a, 13b): you are chosen, holy (= set apart as God's possession), loved, and forgiven
- In your relationships with your parents, siblings, and friends, Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience (v.12b); forbearance and forgiveness (v.13); love (v.14); peace, gratitude (v.15).
- Participate actively in your church's ministries of teaching and worship (v.16)
- Be completely devoted to Christ (v.17)

Verses 18-21 – Understand your specific role within your home

- Obey your parents (v.20)

Verses 22-25 – Work diligently and wholeheartedly in your work world, which involves:

- ☐ Your household chores (obey your parents)
- ☐ Your schoolwork (obey your teachers). Learn what you should learn; do the assigned homework.
- ☐ If applicable: Your part-time employment (obey your boss)

D. A teen might have factors in his life that should elicit _____ (without denying his depravity or responsibility) and might mitigate the same degree of responsibility.

- Parental influence
- Sibling influence
- Peer influence
- Physical disabilities
- Physical changes
- Lies of the world
- Genetic predispositions?



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E. A crucial theological point to apply: Don't _____ a rebellious teen (or any other rebellious person) is truly saved, and don't _____ him he is, despite his past or present profession of faith.

- Matt. 7:13-27
- Matt. 13:1-23
- John 10:25-30
- Col. 1:21-23
- Heb. 3:12-14

II. Biblically Counseling These Parents

A. Help parents grasp that their highest _____ in life is knowing and being known (Gal 4:8-9) by God and enjoying God's unsearchable riches (Eph 3:8) in Christ.

Luke 10:20, However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

B. Help parents realize that God is working all things, including their teenager's problems, together for their _____, to make them like _____.

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

How might God use teenage rebellion to make the parent more like Jesus? The Seven E's: [11](#)

- 1) God lovingly uses your troubles to *enhance* your relationship with him (*Psalms*; 2 *Chron* 28:22 and 33:12). Christians facing hardship often become more God-conscious and turn to God.
- 2) God lovingly uses your trouble to help you *experience* Christ's sufferings (*Phil* 3:10; *Matt* 23:37; *Luke* 13:34-35; 19:41; *John* 1:10-11; 16:32; *Acts* 9:4-5; *Romans* 9:1-3; 10:1). Our sufferings are light compared to those of our Suffering Savior
- 3) God lovingly uses your hardships to *expose* your remaining sin (*Deut* 8:1-3; *John* 15). God uses trials to boil away dross in us, including our blind-spot sins.
- 4) God lovingly uses your troubles to *engage* you in the body of Christ (*Rom* 12:15; 1 *Cor* 12:14-26, esp. 12:26). Suffering can draw us closer to others, make us more dependent, etc.
- 5) God lovingly uses your troubles to *exhibit* Christ's work in you (*Matt* 5:13-16). Hardships give us an opportunity to reflect Jesus to others.
- 6) God lovingly uses your troubles to *equip* you for wiser, more compassionate ministry (2 *Cor* 1:3-4). God comforts us in our hardships so we can comfort others.



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- 7) God lovingly uses your troubles to *elevate* your longing for Christ's return (*1 Peter 1:3-9, 13; Jas 1:12; 5:11; Rev*). Earthly hardships create a proper dissatisfaction with this fallen world, and a longing for the new heaven and earth and for all the eternal blessings God promises.

C. Help parents carefully distinguish _____ responsibilities from their teen's responsibilities.

Four biblical counseling principles for parents about their child (*Isa 1:2; Mal 1:6; Gen 3:1-6; Ezek 18:1-3; Proverbs; 1 Sam-2 Chron stories; Rom 1:30; Eph 6:1; 2 Tim 3:1-5; etc.*):

- [1] You are not responsible for the child's spiritual condition
- [2] The child's spiritual condition is an issue between him and God
- [3] You are responsible to God for your parenting activity.
- [4] Your parental godliness or ungodliness can influence your child.

III. Helping Parents Deal With Their Difficult Teen

A. Parents, know and carry out your biblical parenting _____, depending on God's _____ and power, even in the face of teenage rebellion.

Five fundamental duties:

1. Provide physical and relational care
2. Instruct
3. Discipline
4. Model Christlikeness
5. Pray

B. Parents, make _____ appeals

C. Parents, define, communicate, and uphold a standard of basic, expected conduct that is _____ for *all* family members in the family community, including _____ for violations.

1. Key biblical principle: Choices have consequences

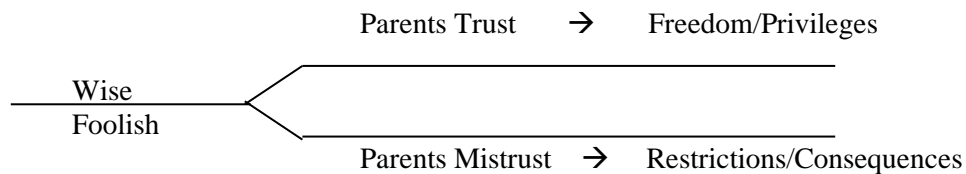
The biblical concept of “_____” (OT Israel; NT Church) involves privileges and responsibilities.



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2 Thessalonians 3:6–15

2. The Restriction v. Privileges Paths



3. Enforcing Consequences

For average offenses, use a behavior agreement with rewards and consequences.^{[\[2\]](#)}

For severe offenses, or patterns of disobedience, there might need to be removal from the home. The teen faces a serious choice. Either way, the choice belongs to the teen:

- Option #1: Repent and obey his parents, and stay home. “This is our strong desire because we love you and we want your best, for you to be all that God wants you to be.”
- Option #2: Refuse to obey, and be declared incorrigible if he is a minor, or be required to leave if he is no longer a minor. “I love you, son/daughter. I care about you, and I really want God’s best for you. But if you refuse to live by our rules, then you will no longer be allowed to stay here. It’s your choice. If you choose to move out, that will sadden us, but this is your choice. We hope you don’t make a wrong choice.” (The principle of Deuteronomy 13:6–11; 21:18–21)

Objections?

- a. “But, what if he turns away from the Lord, never repents, and dies lost?”

Response:

- b. “But, what if he must live on the street, turns to drugs or prostitution, or kills himself?”

Response:



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Recommended Books (beyond basic books on parenting and discipline):

- ☐ Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jim Newheiser, with Dr. Laura Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices: Help and Hope for Hurting Parents* (Harvest House, 2005)
- ☐ Rick Horne, *Get Outta My Face! How to Reach Angry, Unmotivated Teens with Biblical Counsel* (Shepherd Press, 2009)
- ☐ Rick Horne, *Get Offa My Case: Godly Parenting of an Angry Teen* (Shepherd Press, 2012)
- ☐ Barbara Miller Juliani. *Dealing with Your Rebellious Teenager: Help for Worried Parents* (minibook, New Growth Press, 2018)
- ☐ C. John Miller and Barbara Miller Juliani. *Come Back, Barbara, Third Edition: A Father's Pursuit of a Prodigal Daughter* (P&R, 2020)

^[1] Robert D. Jones, *When Trouble Shows Up: Seeing God's Transforming Love* (New Growth Press, 2013), in which I unpack and apply these seven themes to various counseling situations.

^[2] For further resources on behavior agreements (or “contracts”) see Jay E. Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*, chap. 8, pp. 103-125; Wayne Mack, *Homework Manual for Biblical Living*, vol. 2, p. 83; Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, p. 137.