

THE ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF CHRISTIAN YOUTH

Remember that you are to obey your parents in the Lord.

“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” (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Is that old-fashioned rhetoric from an old-fashioned book, inspired by an old-fashioned God, or are the commands to obey and honor parents intended for today’s world. It depends on who you ask.

Dateline: Malvern, Pennsylvania, late December 2009. True story. Anthony made an immature decision to take his friend for a ride in the family car. He did not know that a car is actually a deadly one-thousand-kilogram steel missile at almost any speed. Against parental advice, he accelerated to a high speed on the expressway, lost control, jumped a curb, rammed through fence, hit a tree, flipped the car on its side, and killed his twelve-year-old passenger. Anthony’s lawyer said later at Anthony’s hearing: “He’s a fifteen-year-old boy and he looks real scared.” Well, sir, he should look scared. He disobeyed his Mama, violated the law of his state, destroyed public property, demolished a car, and took the life of a child. Somewhere along the pathway of his short life, he missed the Lord’s instruction about parental authority. Of course he knew what he was doing was wrong, but he had no idea how very wrong it was.

An adult eagle encourages his eaglet to leave the nest. He even takes the little one on his back and flies with him. When the eaglet is about four months old, his parents leave him to fly or die.

Many animals become independent of their parents a lot sooner than that. Baby ducks swim soon after hatching. A few days after their birth, little goats are butting heads and puppies are bear-hugging one another and rolling around in the floor growling. The little frog never sees a parent.

What about human children? Little Erich’s feet and legs won’t support his body weight until he is almost a year old. Even after he starts to walk, his legs are wobbly. During those first days of learning to walk, Erich is on the floor or ground more than he is on his feet. He is quick to cry when he is hungry, cold, or soils his diaper. He thinks the whole universe—even God Himself—exists for him, and should cater to his wants.

Look at Erich when he has been on the planet five years, The little duck that pecked his way out of the egg and started running toward the pond five years ago is entering old age. Erich is at kindergarten crying for Mama.

Let’s make a long story short. Erich is not going to be fully responsible until he is in his late teens—maybe in his early twenties. By then the eagle, born on the day of Erich’s birth, has entered old age, and all the ducks, dogs, cats, and goats have long gone back to the earth. And Erich is just about ready to launch his career.

Why do animals live and die before Erich even begins his adult life? Why is he so slow? Erich’s creator, the almighty God, gave him exceptional parents because Erich is an exceptional creature. God has much work for him to do, and every aspect of that work, whether a farmer, preacher, pilot, doctor, or lawyer, will involve daily moral judgments. And Erich, whether or not he is a Christian, is made in God’s image. God wants to give him every opportunity to be trained. The little duck, one minute old, acts according to the basic instincts, and he has no further responsibility.

Remember that your creator knows what is best for you.

“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” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

At age 17, Phyllis was one of the top girls in her high school. She was first alto in the school chorus; she was active in extra-curricular activities; she was cheerful; her grades were above average; and she was attractive. It was obvious to those who knew her that she should represent the school as the most beautiful girl.

But that was not obvious to Phyllis. In order to win that contest, she had to compete in a beauty contest. Competition was in three parts: evening wear competition, sportswear competition, and bathing suit competition. Phyllis didn't mind the evening wear and sportswear competitions, but she would not dress in beachwear and parade in front of an audience.

Phyllis's teachers and classmates were disappointed. If she would not enter the bathing suit competition she had no chance of winning, and they could not change her mind.

But Phyllis was taking her cue from Joseph, a 17-year-old lad who grew up in Palestine many centuries before. Phyllis's mother and father had told her that story from the book of Genesis many times when she was a little girl. As a teenager, she read it often and loved it.

The judges met briefly after all the girls had walked. Then they reentered the auditorium and the head judge announced the third- and second-place winner to a cheering audience. Then the judge said, “And the first-place winner of this event and queen of this school: Phyllis Smith! The audience stood and applauded. As the crown was placed on her head, Phyllis's mind went back to the time when Joseph lived in Egypt. He worked for the pharaoh and served the Lord.

Oh, you remember Joseph. Most of the time he was just an ordinary lad, although within the family circle, he did have a problem. He was his father's eleventh son, but he was his mother's first. And his father loved his mother more than he loved the other three mothers of his children. That was his first problem. Polygamy was not so unusual in those days when men had left God's plan of only one woman for a man.

Joseph's second problem was rather unusual. He was a dreamer. And his dreams were offensive to his brothers: sheaves of grain bowing down to his sheaf; the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to his star. Even though God was revealing the future through those dreams, Joseph's brothers hated him for them; they called him “the dreamer.” So while tending their sheep one day they saw the dreamer coming to check on their welfare.

With no concern for doing what was right, they sold Joseph to their slave-trading cousins, the Ishmaelite. Joseph's next stop: Egypt.

Joseph had been trained to be godly. He quickly rose to a place of respect in Potiphar's house. His organizational skills, his youth, and his dedication to Potiphar proved to be great attractions for his master's wife. He refused her advance again and again. Finally, in deep disgust and anger, Potiphar's wife accused him of attempted rape, and Joseph was cast into prison.

How could a young man refuse such advances? And if he could, why would he do so at the cost of going to prison? It doesn't make sense, does it?

Yes! It does make sense. Joseph knew he was a product of his creator, and that his creator knew how the creatures should function. Joseph chose God's way.

The ebb and flow of life offers instantaneous short-lived thrills that create life-long heartaches. That same ebb and flow offers circumstances that help us build foundations that will stand the rigors of life's earthquakes and volcanoes. The choice is ours, and Joseph made the correct selection. He refused to take the path of least resistance and God rewarded him with a place in the Egyptian government.

Allegiance to God always pays. Phyllis knew that allegiance to God always pays. Joseph taught her. Now you can learn from both of them.

Remember your creator in the days of your youth.

Remember that life is as a vapor. “For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

He thought he was going to live forever. At age 17, he was a licensed driver. But on that Saturday night, on a wet highway, his car skidded sideways at a high speed. The passenger’s door hit a tree. The car wrapped around the tree. The front and rear fenders almost came together. Robert died instantly. At his funeral, the preacher kept saying, “He was so young. Why did he have to die?”

He died because he thought he couldn’t. At 17, John was immune to death. Old people die; young people don’t. John probably thought as most young people do. He thought he would never die.

King David had a boy like that. Absalom was rebellious. He decided he wanted to be king, so he moved to Jerusalem and won the hearts of the people (cf. 2 Samuel 15:1ff). Absalom sent spies throughout Israel to find the weak places in his father’s kingdom. When Absalom started to attack Jerusalem, King David fled. Absalom must have known his father would not want to defend his army against his own son. Absalom’s carriage was on a slippery path, but he didn’t know it. He was young and foolish.

King David finally took a stand for the sake of his people. When he sent out Joab, his field commander, he issued these orders: “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.”

Joab didn’t hear the orders. When one of his Joab’s men reported that Absalom’s mule had run under the fork of a tree and hanged Absalom, Joab rushed to the scene and thrust three spears through Absalom’s heart and he died.

A messenger rushed to David with the news. “Is the young man safe?” David inquired.

The messenger’s answer was curt: “May the enemies of my lord the king . . . be like that young man.”

David’s heart was broken when he received the news: “O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if I had only died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 18:29-33).

Absalom thought he had his father’s kingdom in his hands, so he risked his very life to fully possess it. What a foolish young man. Not only was he defying his own father, but he was also defying God.

Young people, you dream, and you must. Nothing can be accomplished without first dreaming of it. But avoid setting your goals without counting the cost. Seek the advice of wise Christians and proceed cautiously. Life seems endless, but earthly life is a vapor that might disappear at any instant.

Remember to conduct yourself in a mannerly fashion.

“So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision” (2 Samuel 3:15).

Hannah had no children and she was greatly stressed. She begged God again and again. At last she promised God if he would give her a son, she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life. God answered her prayer and Samuel was born.

When Samuel was yet a young lad, Hannah took him to Eli, priest at Shiloh, and left him in God’s service. Samuel grew in God’s way, dedicated and respectful in his service.

A few years had passed when Samuel heard a voice in the night. Thinking the voice was Eli's, he went into the priest's room. Eli had not called him. Samuel heard the voice twice more. Eli then told him to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:9).

The Lord told Samuel that he was going to judge Eli's house because of the wickedness of his sons. Samuel respected and loved Eli so very much that he wanted to withhold the news. But Eli encouraged him, and he gently told Eli the words of the Lord.

When the energies of youth are coupled with the wisdom of age, great things can be accomplished. Some of my best times have been served with university students taking the gospel from house to house. Their theology has not always been mature, their methods have not always been the best, but their minds have remained open to instruction and their energy and stamina have been superb.

Timothy was a young preacher in Asia Minor—Paul's convert and friend. "Let no one despise your youth," Paul told him, "but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). And so far as we know, Timothy lived up to that.

Remember that wrong is wrong no matter who command it or how many are doing it.

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest man on earth, or so everyone thought. His kingdom was exceedingly large and all his subjects groveled at his feet. So when his artisans devised an image of him—a golden image 30 meters high—the king gathered all the officials of the kingdom and made a great feast. At an prearranged time in the ceremonies, a herald cried aloud, "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" (Daniel 3:4-6).

The message was clear, so when the instruments played, everyone fell to the ground, that is, everyone but the three young Hebrew men Nebuchadnezzar had brought from Jerusalem. They stood upright.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were arrested immediately and brought before the king himself. When the charges were read, Nebuchadnezzar was furious. How dare they! He told them he would give them one more chance to fall down and worship him, and if they refused they would immediately be cast into the furnace.

They were determined to do God's will. They replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

The king was good for his word. Immediately the men were whisked away and thrown into the furnace. Then something strange happened. They began to walk around in the fire. Stranger than

that, a fourth man walked with them. Nebuchadnezzar was frightened. He had them brought out and praised Jehovah as the most high God.

Young people especially want the acceptance and praise of others. Older teens and adults often prey on these needs. Both boys and girls submit to older sexual partners just to keep from being different. Some are drawn into illegal drug usage and drug trafficking. For a few small euros, weak ones allow themselves to be carried away into an activity that will affect the rest of their lives.

Young person, here is one of the joys of being a Christian. You have a Father who doesn't permit that kind of activity, and I'm not speaking of the father who lives in your house. I am speaking of the one who lives in your heart! He doesn't want you to engage in illegal sexual activity, thievery, drugs, and the like. For your own protection he has forbidden you to so engage. So you can tell your friends, "My Father will not allow me to do that." And you can feel good about saying so.

Conclusion

God's way of righteousness and his kingdom are of utmost importance. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). There will be discomforts at times. That's all a part of growing up—a part of living in a sin-filled world. But remember Paul's words: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Here is one more scripture worthy of your consideration: "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:24-25).

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May the lord bless you