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# Command and Counsel

## Romans 7, Proverbs

**Introduction** Tonight is the time when I am going to try to address the consternation that Russ and I have caused by our passing comments about the process of child rearing as opposed to the product of child rearing, and the issue of protecting our children from our culture. There is no way that I can possibly cover this topic in great detail in the time I have allotted for this message. But it is my goal to cover it sufficiently for you to have material for thought and meditation. Any questions that remain after this message and the 3 that will follow should be written down and asked during the open forum the last Sunday night of this Conference.

I am not going to give specific answers to specific questions that you are probably wrestling with, but I intend to give you the principles that you need, to come to your own conclusions with wisdom and Biblical guidance. If you are having trouble coming to a decision, then ask your Elders and make it a topic of discussion at Flock.

Let me also make this clear at the beginning. Some have come to the incorrect conclusion that we are picking on home schooling families. We are not. We are thankful for parents who are willing to sacrifice and serve their children in this capacity. You may also think that I am giving examples of specific people here at the Chapel. That will not be the case. I have 10 years of counseling history here at the Chapel to a wide spectrum of Christians in our geographic area. With that many situations from which to choose. I would not knowingly use one of you for an example without your permission. So please, do not think that I am picking on you, or pointing you out publicly tonight. That is not the case.

## The Process and the Product

There can be some misunderstanding about what we mean when we talk about the process of parenting and the product of parenting. Most, if not all, Christian parents are concerned about their children being God-honoring children who grow up to be God-honoring adults. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that concern. But, there is the belief that if we parent in certain ways, then we are going to get God-honoring children. In fact, there are those who believe, in the privacy of their own hearts, that God owes them godly children if they obey Him in child rearing. The belief that we parent for the product of godly children gives us the right and we also believe that it is valid to judge whether parents are good or bad by how their children turn out. Success in parenting is measured by the godliness of their children – the product. Therefore, most parents have as their goal the regulating of the behavior of their children. They don't want their children to be involved in any kind of behavior that would be considered bad. Now, don't hear me saying that this is wrong in and of itself. What parent wants rebels for children? What I am saying is how important is having godly children to you, and why is it so important. What happens so often is this goal of godly children drives parents to a constant search for creative ways to control behavior. What I hope to explain from Scripture is that there is a time to control behavior, and there is a time to decrease, and

even stop, controlling behavior. In addition, I want us to examine our mindset about producing godly children and how that comes about.

In the early years, we **should** be commanding and demanding certain behaviors and working on immediate obedience and respect for authority. We **should** be protecting our children from the negative influences of our culture. We **must** be teaching them that there are consequences for poor choices and wrong behavior. That's why the Bible makes it very clear that we are to spank our children. They learn the vital link that there are painful consequences to rebellion and disobedience through that pain of spanking. There is only so much reasoning that we can do with a 2 or 3 year old. We shouldn't be taking a great amount of time reasoning with those young children. They need to obey the first time without complaint, delay, or excuse! So if any of you are thinking that we are condemning protecting our young children from culture, we are not. Are we inferring that we shouldn't control the TV, video games, music, and DVDs of our young children? Absolutely not! But the time for controlling behavior should be decreasing as the years go by. Protecting our children from our culture should also be decreasing as the years go by.

The reason Russ and I have been making comments about protecting our children from our culture and the process vs. the product is to have each of us look at our parenting. The standard of whether we are good or poor parents is **not** tied to how our children turn out. Whether we like it or not, we cannot control their outcome. Godly parenting is tied to the process we use as we parent. Many times we are guilty of attempting to control our children's behavior by inflicting fear, instilling guilt, and controlling by manipulation. We have the false belief that this **will** yield the desired product. But as we are going to see shortly, that is not the process that God has ordained for parenting. The product, how our children turn out, is ultimately God's work and concern. When we believe that we can produce a godly child by the process we use, we are guilty of trying to produce what only God can produce. Only God can change the heart. May I challenge you to honestly evaluate whether you are more concerned about how your children turn out, than you are about the process of parenting them, no matter how they turn out. And may I also challenge you to set aside your judgment of parents by their children. You probably don't know how those parents are rearing their children before God.

## Two Typical Parental Processes

Let's talk about the process of parenting. If you have been around the Chapel for any length of time, you have been introduced to the concept of going down slope on one side or the other. Parenting is no exception. There appear to be two responses that parents have to the influence our cultural can have on their children. Now, let me warn you that I am going to be using the extremes of sliding down slope in these examples. So fasten your seat belts and put on your crash helmets.

### The Protectionism, Isolationism, Legalism Slope

First, there is the protectionism/isolationism/legalism approach. Let's look at the Abraham family. They dress very conservatively. The girls do not wear makeup or jewelry. Their skirts are below their knees. The boys are dressed in nice slacks and shirts with

collars. Everyone is carrying a book. The Abrahams have decided that there is nothing worth watching on TV, and they wouldn't even be thinking about cable TV. There are certain videos and DVDs that are occasionally allowed. And the acceptable music list includes classical and conservative Christian music. The children have been taught and have agreed not to date, but to only have a courtship that involves the parents of both the boy and girl. They are home schooled. Mr. Abraham made sure that he worked for a Christian company which attempts to employ only Christians. Most of the social interactions of the Abraham family are with other church and home school families. The Abraham parents have decided that the best way to deal with the negative influence of our culture is to have very little interaction with that culture. They would support their position with the Scripture found in 2 Corinthians 6:17, "Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing"

How should we evaluate this from a Scriptural point of view? I believe there are several issues that we should address. First of all, this seems so right. Our children don't know what an attractive influence to sin our culture has. They don't have the experience that we have. They don't have the discernment necessary to overcome. It is only right that I keep that from them until they are ready and strong enough to not be tempted.

But, when I begin to evaluate this approach from a biblical stance, it becomes clear that it is down slope on one side. Here are the issues that we must come to grips with (I give credit to Paul Tripp and his book *Age of Opportunity* for some of these items.):

- First of all there is the belief that somehow Colossians 2:20-23 does not apply here. <Read>
- Next, there is a very subtle denial of the doctrine of creation that declares that everything that God made was good. We neglect to make the distinction that it is man that has fashioned those good things into evil. What are we teaching about God?
- It also teaches that the core struggle with evil is from without. It is my culture that makes me sin. The real core issue is the heart. That is where sin comes from.
- It also gives the appearance that the war with sin can be won just by avoiding certain things.
- It can also tend to promote a dangerous self-righteousness that equates keeping a list with being godly. This is really teaching our children to be good Pharisees.
- But in more practical terms, what we do by producing rules and regulations is actually making the problem even worse. A look at Romans 7 shows how law actually stirs the desires even more than they already are. Look at Romans 7:7-12. <Read>. Because of the sin nature, our children can react just the opposite from what we are attempting to control. Their sinful desires can be stirred even more!
- Another issue that we must face is that they are going to be exposed to culture sometime somewhere. It could be at another child's house. It could be anywhere. And as our children get older, they are going to have the opportunity to be exposed more and more to the culture. If you protect and isolate your children from the culture, when and how and from whom are they going to learn wisdom and discernment?

- And this can be the environment for a quiet rebel. There may be quiet acquiescence, either because of fear for consequences, or for their outward appearance to regulations that produces the results they desire. But there can be a sinful heart that is just waiting for the time when the commands are removed and they can follow their heart desires. Witness the college freshman who was the epitome of spirituality at home and church and who is now exploring every possible avenue for sin available. Parents are asking themselves what happened? Where did we go wrong?
- And lastly, the Scriptures teach that believers are to be light and salt to the world. Where do we teach that and what impact can we have if we are isolated from the world?

### The No Involvement, No Counsel, No Guidance Slope

Then there is the no involvement/no counsel/no guidance approach which is going down the other side of the slope. Let's look at the Lot family. The girls and boys have jewelry, tattoos, and piercings all over their bodies. One of the girls dresses in total black, with jet black hair streaked in blazing red and with a ghastly white face. The boy has a nose piercing with a chain connecting it to his multi-pierced ear. His tongue has a dumbbell, his lips and eyebrows have multiple rings. Each of them have their i-pod and earphones on constantly listening to the latest rapper extolling the virtues of suicide. If you visited the Lot family home, if the kids were home, they would be in front of the TV watching MTV for hours at a time. It's tough to get the entire family to a church service since the kids have so many other activities they do with their public school friends. The Lot family has decided that the best way to interact with the culture is to go with the flow. After all, the parents reason, that's what they did when growing up and they didn't turn out too bad. My kids will be OK, just like I am. They would support their position with the Scriptural teaching of "being in the world, but not of the world".

How should we evaluate this from a Scriptural point of view? There are several issues that we should address:

- First, the Scriptures teach that there is nothing that does not have a moral basis. There is nothing that is neutral. So this approach is not harmless. It also produces a independence from parental influence. Someone is going to influence our children. Who will that be?
- It also fosters a lack of regard for parental instruction and counsel.
- This approach teaches that there really isn't a right way to deal with culture.
- It also teaches that God is not concerned, since there really isn't anything that wrong with the culture, per se.

### The Third Way

I think that there are parents sitting here who can relate to both approaches. But I believe that both approaches are down slope. We need to see the third way which is the result of good

biblical thinking. We need to teach our children what culture is and the nature of its power and influence, and form a biblical plan for living within that culture.

## Scriptural Principles

Let's look at the Scriptures to see some principles for parenting in response to our culture.

### God dealing with the children of Israel

I don't have time to take a tour of the entire Old Testament. But allow your mind to recall how the Lord dealt with the children of Israel. When He brought them out of Egypt, He was very careful to lay down the boundaries and to give immediate rebuke when those boundaries were crossed. For example, look at Exodus 19. <survey the high points> God gave very specific instructions and warnings to the people. Now turn to Exodus 32. During the chapters between 19 and 32, Moses gives us insight into what God told him while he was on the mountain top. But in the first couple of verses he tells what happened while he was with God. <read 1-6>. <read 21-29>. God gave instructions with warnings for disobedience and then carried it through immediately. This happened throughout their wanderings.

But when time passes and the Israelites possess their land and get kings, then God no longer deals with their sin directly and immediately, He sends prophets to counsel and instruct. He changes His mode of dealing with the people.

### The Proverbs

We can look at verses like Proverbs 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17. We see that there is a direct and immediate expectation of obedience and discipline. But we also see Solomon taking his son and showing him graphically about the immoral woman in Proverbs 5 and 7. He is instructing his son to stay far from the immoral woman and not to even go near her door. It's as if he has taken his son out to the immoral woman's neighborhood and, with his arm around his son's shoulder, he points to this woman and instructs him, giving him the truth about this culture.

### Ephesians 6:4

Parents are to command and punish (discipline), as well as counsel (instruction of the Lord) their children. The warning is that parents can provoke their children to anger. That anger is aroused when parents command and punish when they should be counseling.

### The Third Way

As we see from Scripture, we need to use the culture around us as an opportunity to teach our children wisdom and godly discernment. We experience culture with them. We want to teach our children that avoidance is not a cure, though it can be used of God to limit the damage of sin in their lives. Solomon showed his son that – don't even go near her house.

How do we use culture to impart wisdom and teach discernment? That is the hard work of parenting. We begin by keeping them from the evil; by teaching them to obey; by punishing for rebellion and disobedience. But that gradually changes to less protection; less punishing; and less commanding. We must evaluate each child to discern the appropriate time to begin allowing exposure to the culture in order to teach wisdom and discernment. Each child is different. We can't make blanket statements like at age 13 we're going to allow them to have some interaction with the opposite sex. Some kids will be ready before then, and some after. You can't rear all of your children the same way.

I hope that by now you have begun to evaluate your approach to culture and your children. The rules-and-regulations approach that focuses on keeping your child "out of trouble" will ultimately fail because it does not deal with the heart. The hands off approach will also fail because it does not counsel the heart and impart godly wisdom and discernment. There is the third way which calls for pasturing our children and their hearts. Paul Tripp says, "The parent who has a pastoral model of parenting will do more than hand down regulations and enforce punishments when the regulations are broken. Pastoring parents will befriend their teen. They will probe and examine. They will engage their child in provocative discussions. They will be unwilling to live with distance, avoidance, and non-answers. They will not let the teenager set the agenda for the relationship. In times of trouble, they will have discussions rather than cross-examinations. They will not be there simply to prove the child wrong and to announce punishment. They will seek to expose the true thoughts and motives of their teenager's heart by asking heart-disclosing questions. They will help their teenager to look at himself in the accurate mirror of the Word which is able to expose and judge the heart. And they will do all of this in a spirit of humble, gentle, kind, forgiving, forbearing, and patient love." (*Age of Opportunity*, pp. 111-112)

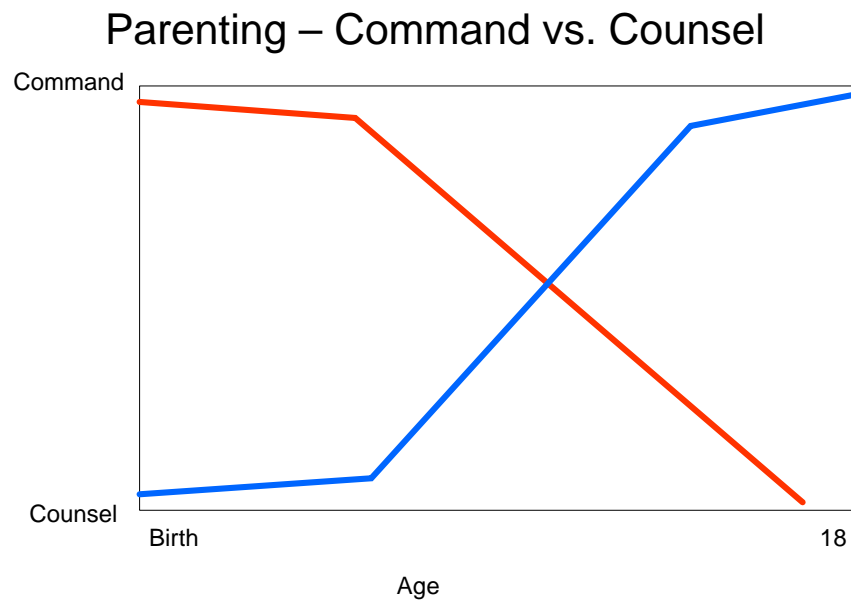
Let's face it. This is a war for the hearts of our children. Keeping the culture out there, and keeping our children as far from it as possible is not dealing with their hearts. Taking a hands off approach and allowing our children to wallow in the cesspool of culture without counsel and guidance is not dealing with their hearts, either. Wouldn't it be better to have the opportunity to come along side and help your child deal with the culture in a God-honoring way, than for them to deal with it without you?

And this third way also involves allowing your children to make their own decisions, even when you know that they are making foolish decisions. And then, allow them to suffer the consequences of that foolish decision. Remember, we are counseling, not handing down directives from on high. God deals with us by allowing us to be very foolish, and then allowing us to reap the harvest that the foolishness produces. We must do the same with our children. But as Paul Tripp said, we are pasturing our children.

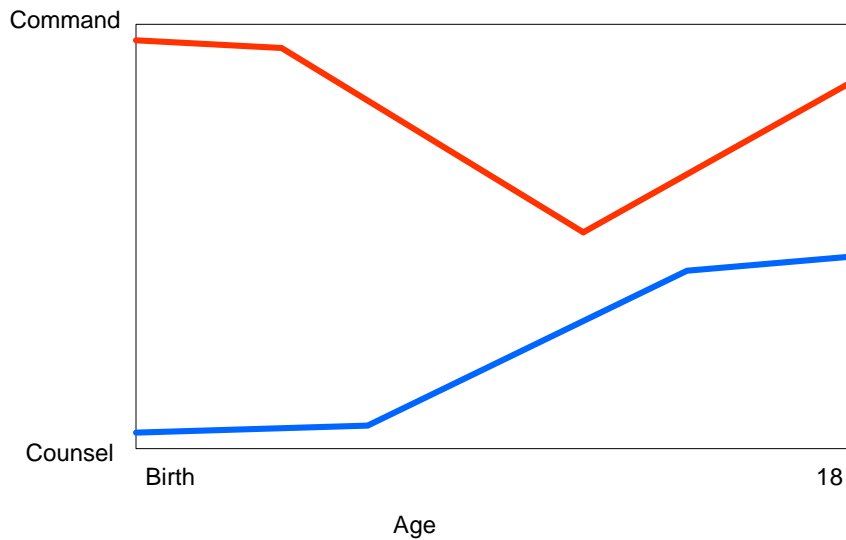
But Pastor Greg, are you saying that if my child is making a foolish decision, I shouldn't step in and keep him from making that decision? Depending on the child and his relationship with the Lord, yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. The Proverbs give good evidence for that. And your interference could be keeping that child from experiencing God's discipline. But I am also saying that you are there to pick up the pieces when it's all over. What better time to be able to counsel and teach than when the heart is tender. Or, what better time to observe a rebellious and foolish heart than when it is all over.

No matter how much you may want it, and no matter how hard you try, you cannot control the outcome of your child. You cannot change his heart. You cannot make him be godly. You can't save his soul. You can't convict him of sin and produce godly repentance. All of these things are God's work, not yours. This is why the process of child rearing is the standard for parental success, not the type of child that ultimately leaves home. This means increasing independence. This means potentially having situations that you would rather not have. This means you may be embarrassed and experience shame. But remember, it is not only the heart of your child that God is after, but yours, as well. What idols are you serving in your parenting? Are you wanting comfort, respect, appreciation, control, success? Or are you concerned about parenting the third way, no matter how embarrassing? What is your standard for successful parenting – the process or the product?

## A Graphical Representation



## Parenting – Command vs. Counsel



I have not said anything about the questions that are probably burning in your minds right now. I have said nothing about home schooling vs. Christian schools vs. public schools. Neither have I said anything about the dating vs. courtship vs. betrothal issues. I do not believe that you can make a Scriptural defense for any of those positions. These are issues that every Christian family faces. What is the right answer? There is no one right answer for everyone. The one right answer that covers these issues is that there is no Scriptural mandate for any of these choices. Each family makes those decision for themselves. What is involved in these decisions is for parents to examine their own hearts for idols. And then answering what is the way that would be best for us to counsel each child toward wisdom, godly discernment, and being salt and light to his world?

### Conclusion

So, examine your heart. What are you desiring and how much are you desiring it.

Examine your standard for success and for judging other parents. The standard is not how your child turns out. A rebellious child is not always due to poor parenting. It is the process that parents use that is the standard.

Pray much. If you are a parent and you haven't been to your knees in total humility for your own frailty, then you need to examine your heart again.

Seek the help of this community of believers who love you and love God. We made this point last week. We are here to help each other parent our children.

May God give us joy in this glorious ministry of parenting for His glory!