
Rabid Rebels

Hebrews 3:15

Russ Kennedy

Introduction Do you know this family?

"'All happy families resemble one another; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own fashion,' Tolstoy wrote. So it is with the uniquely unhappy Osbourne clan -- in their lives, in their MTV series and now in their lucrative deal that has Hollywood abuzz," writes Dan Ackman for *The Wall Street Journal*. In the first two seasons, this voyeuristic look into what is manifestly a dysfunctional family drew viewers by the millions. Their vain and vile family interactions were passed off as virtual-reality and extolled as humor.



What perverse pleasure could possibly be derived from a weekly intake of MTV's spoof and slam on family? What stands out about the Osbournes is how sad, pathetic and pitiful they are. As parents, they are shockingly inept. As children, they are riotous and rebellious. As people, they are so self-absorbed that momentary acts of ordinary kindness are extolled as extraordinary.

Is what we find on this show so different from what happens in many households? Is part of the humor in the show that people tend to see themselves, hear themselves yet can pass it off as extreme, exaggerated?

Have you ever heard of this disorder: Oppositional Defiant Disorder? I am going to quote directly from *Children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder*, booklet No. 72, put out by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. What I am about to quote extensively represents the most conservative and reasonable discussion of ODD I could find.

All children are oppositional from time to time, particularly when tired, hungry, stressed or upset. They may argue, talk back, disobey, and defy parents, teachers, and other adults. Oppositional behavior is often a normal part of development for two to three year olds and early adolescents. However, openly uncooperative and hostile behavior becomes a serious concern when it is so frequent and consistent that it stands out when compared with other children of the same age and developmental level and when it affects the child's social, family, and academic life.

In children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), there is an ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, and hostile behavior toward authority figures that seriously interferes with the youngster's day to day functioning. Symptoms of ODD may include:

- frequent temper tantrums
- excessive arguing with adults

- active defiance and refusal to comply with adult requests and rules
- deliberate attempts to annoy or upset people
- blaming others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior
- often being touchy or easily annoyed by others
- frequent anger and resentment
- mean and hateful talking when upset
- seeking revenge

The symptoms are usually seen in multiple settings, but may be more noticeable at home or at school. Five to fifteen percent of all school-age children have ODD. The causes of ODD are unknown, but many parents report that their child with ODD was more rigid and demanding than the child's siblings from an early age. Biological and environmental factors may have a role.

A child presenting with ODD symptoms should have a comprehensive evaluation. It is important to look for other disorders which may be present; such as, attention-deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorder) and anxiety disorders. It may be difficult to improve the symptoms of ODD without treating the coexisting disorder. Some children with ODD may go on to develop [what is called] *Conduct Disorder*.¹

Treatment of ODD may include: Parent Training Programs to help manage the child's behavior, Individual Psychotherapy to develop more effective anger management, Family Psychotherapy to improve communication, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy to assist problem solving and decrease negativity, and Social Skills Training to increase flexibility and improve frustration tolerance with peers.

A child with ODD can be very difficult for parents. These parents need support and understanding. Parents can help their child with ODD in the following ways:

- Always build on the positives, give the child praise and positive reinforcement when he shows flexibility or cooperation.
- Take a time-out or break if you are about to make the conflict with your child worse, not better. This is good modeling for your child. Support your child if he decides to take a time-out to prevent overreacting.
- Pick your battles. Since the child with ODD has trouble avoiding power struggles, prioritize the things you want your child to do. If you give your child a time-out in his room for misbehavior, don't add time for arguing. Say "your time will start when you go to your room."
- Set up reasonable, age appropriate limits with consequences that can be enforced consistently.
- Maintain interests other than your child with ODD, so that managing your child doesn't take all your time and energy. Try to work with and obtain support from the other adults (teachers, coaches, and spouse) dealing with your child.

¹ See appendix to this sermon for their presentation of Conduct Disorder.

- Manage your own stress with exercise and relaxation. Use respite care as needed.

Many children with ODD will respond to the positive parenting techniques. Parents may ask their pediatrician or family physician to refer them to a child and adolescent psychiatrist, who can diagnose and treat ODD and any coexisting psychiatric condition.

So, doesn't this sound like garden variety defiance and disobedience? If we go on and read their pamphlet on *Conduct Disorder* (see page 37), what is being described are rabid rebels. Here are young people who will defy authority and disobey with impunity.

What does the Bible have to say about this? Let's then start with a simple definition that will help us think Biblically about rebellion.

A Definition

Rebellion is inward and outward defiance and disobedience to authority.

A Warning to the Rebellious

Proverbs 17:11

I want to begin by looking at this one proverb. It is highlighted by the fact that it is one of few verses in the Scripture that actually uses the word.

Its Characteristic

Sinful people pursue rebellion.

This is an important truth that we must affirm. Rebellion is not the natural or inconsequential phase of a person's life. The terrible twos and the tripped out teens are not merely life stages that most people go through. They are periods when sin can dominate and control a child or a teenager so that they will rebel against authority.

Rebellion, that is, defiance and disobedience, will be pursued by children, teens and adults as an expression of their sinfulness. The word pursuit here shows that it is an active work not a passive one. Rebellion is not something that overcomes us or that we get caught up in. It is a active rejection of God or the authorities God has placed in our lives that works itself out in inward desires and outward behaviors and emotions.

Rebellious people will tend to pursue other rebellious people. They will tend to either seek out or associate with others who are rebellious, or to create a "culture" of rebellion to attract others into it. A close study of rebellions in the Scriptures bears this out. From Lucifer to Korah to Absalom, they drew others into an orbit, a culture, a band of the rebellious. Rarely will rebels be willing to stand alone. And perversely, while rejecting authority over them, will assert a dominating and domineering authority over others, allowing no dissent.

Its Consequence

Hardship punishes the rebellious.

The rebellious are here warned as to how God responds to them. He sends "a cruel messenger" against them. In Israel's history, their rebellion against God in sin and idolatry was consistently punished by God bringing cruel, wicked nations

against them. So the warning here was carried out in Israel's own history. Those nations were God's servants, His messengers to get Israel's attention, to break their pride and presumption, to humble them under His mighty hand.

In principle, God will bring what is necessary against the rebellious to break them. He will bring some strong and painful measure against them to break their wills, humble their hearts and restrain their sin. Be warned. You cannot rebel against the authority that God has placed over you without painful consequence. Children and teens, you may be defiant of your parents and disobedient to them, but you will not get away with it.

An Example of the Rebellious

1 Samuel 15:22-23

While Saul is not a teenager, here is one of the clearest Biblical analysis of rebellion. It is particularly helpful because of the connections that Samuel makes as he examines the defiance and disobedience of Saul.

What is going on here that leads up to these two verses? Saul, the King of Israel, has been commanded by God to attack and utterly destroy the Amalakites, one of the heathen nations still living in Canaan. He was to utterly destroy them and all their livestock. He won the battle, capturing their king and their people. He did not kill the king as ordered. He did not destroy the best of the livestock. He destroyed the worthless and despised, keeping the best. He disobeyed God in not carrying out his orders. He defied God in thinking, presumptuously, that God would overlook the keeping of the livestock because of the sacrifice of the rest. He then erects a monument to himself. When Samuel, the prophet/preacher from God confronts Saul, he blames the people for what was done and tries to argue that what they kept, they planned to sacrifice to God.

God's Challenge

(v.22)

Saul's rebellion is confronted by challenging two attitudes that Saul has. These two attitudes, or beliefs, are the roots of rebellion, whether Saul's or others.

They believe that God delights in religious observance more than obedience. Saul thinks that since God requires sacrifice for worship, God will be pleased with the sacrifice and will overlook the fact that Saul disobeyed. Here is a common feature of the way disobedient people think. Something is offered in place of obedience. It shows up in statements like, "I know that I... but look at what I did for you..."

They believe that God is not committed to our hearing and heeding what He says. He makes the same mistake that Eve made. God is not really serious about His Word. He will overlook our disobedience. We can frame this in many, many ways. One of the most common is in an appeal to the love and grace of God. Unfortunately many parents are not serious about what they say and overlook the defiance and disobedience of their sons and daughters, think that is love.

The radical transformation then is to repent of believing that we can offer God something better than our loving obedience and that He is not serious

about what He says. We must teach ourselves this about God. We must teach our children and our teens this about God and authority in general. Since we are having a great many adults being converted out a rebellious sub-cultures, we will need to teach it to new Christians as well.

Rebellion's Character

(v.23)

Saul's defiance and disobedience is characterized two ways. By comparison it is placed into two categories of sin. It is called rebellion and presumption. Now let us think about these for a moment.

As rebellion, their defiance and disobedience is compared to witchcraft. (the word, divination, here) Ultimately, rebellion by people reflects the rebellion by Lucifer. Lucifer was the highest cherub in heaven. He was created by God and was to serve God. Through rise of pride in his heart, he led a rebellion against God attempting to have the place of ultimate authority like God. He and his angelic followers were defeated, cast out of heaven and have been instrumental in human affairs since the fall of Adam and Eve. So rebellion against authority is Satanic. I am not saying that rebellious sons and daughters are demon possessed (no matter what you may think at times). But defying and disobeying God's ordained authorities is Satan-like. It is what he did. Rebels then are Satan's image bearers.

As presumption, their defiance and disobedience is compared to iniquity and idolatry. He is attempting to define what is right and wrong for himself, making himself the god of his world. He becomes his own law giver. His presumption is that he has the right to change what God required. He presumed to know more than God, to be able to interpret what God says in a way that justified his disobedience. Rebellious sons and daughters will do the same thing. They will twist God's Word and your own commands to justify themselves. They will reject God's Word and authority, your word and authority and substitute their own. They will have a functional idolatry where someone else other than God or God's ordained authority is believed and wanted.

Saul's Consequence

(v.23-31)

I want to consider something that has occurred earlier in our text. Verses 17-21 tell us something very important about the way disobedient and defiant people, your sons and daughters, will respond in the midst of their sin.

They try to get the most out of the situation for themselves. It is uncanny how rebellious teens will expect to have their cars, their stereos, their clothes, and their "spoil". In their folly, they will insist that they have the right to their stuff even when it is gained by disobedience and defiance.

They are self-centered. Life will be about them, about their wants, needs, desires, beliefs, friends, stuff. Saul's erecting monuments to himself shows his desire to be noticed and recognized. Expect the same sort of themes to run through rebellious sons and daughters as well.

They blame others for their troubles. They will not accept responsibility for themselves and their actions. Several times in this chapter, Saul blames the people - they were threatening him, they took the best, they intended to sacrifice. He is just going along, making the best of it. Your rebellious sons and daughters will do the same. They will refuse to be responsible for their choices.

They are argumentative and self-justifying. Look at how Saul responds to Samuel. He argues that he has obeyed. He then argues that the people did it. He then argues that it is OK anyway. Finally, Samuel basically has tell him to shut up and listen to what God says.

What is the consequence for defiance and disobedience? Samuel says that Saul is rejected by God. God will remove him from the kingship. He will lose his place, position, power and preeminence.

Now look carefully at how Saul responds to his punishment and how it is so typical.

They pretend to repent. (v.24-26) He says that he is sorry and that he has sinned. What we have here is vain regret, worldly sorrow, not godly repentance. You will often find that rebellious sons and daughters will appear to be sorry, particularly when faced with consequences.

They attempt to avoid punishment. (v.27-29) He goes so far as to grab Samuel, tearing his clothes. He first pleads and then demands that his being sorry undo the consequences. He then demands it in his desperation. God's response is to *make his consequence more severe*. Listen to me loved ones – many, many times parents and children believe that being sorry means that the punishment or consequences should not happen. This is not necessarily true. And, when a rebellious son or daughter attempts to avoid their consequence, even more severe consequences should follow. The reason for this is to drive folly from the heart and teach wisdom. One of the symptoms of folly is the inability or unwillingness to see the relationship between choices and consequences.

They try to avoid the shame of sin and its consequences. (v.30-31) When you read this, it sounds like he is now truly repentant. But look at his motivation. He is concerned with losing face with the elders and the people! He doesn't want to be embarrassed! Listen, sin ought to shame us and ought to embarrasses us. Attempting to avoid the shame is a sign of a lack of repentance. Your sons and daughters need to be taught and to learn the proper place of shame. If you sin, if you rebel, if you are defiant and disobedient, you need the humbling power of being shamed. I know this goes against the prevailing culture of child rearing. I am not advocating embarrassing a son or daughter for an accident or an inadequacy. But one who is defiant and openly disobedient should accept the shame and embarrassment that ought to accompany being humbly repentant. Shaming the defiant and disobedient is good for them!

Scary, isn't it? This describes me in my rebellious teenage years. I am deeply ashamed of some the things I said to my parents and did as a defiant and disobedient young man. This is an accurate assessment of many teens I have worked with as school headmaster, counselor and pastor. So, where do we go from here?

An Analysis of the Rebellious Hebrews 3:8, 15; Psalm 95

Briefly, let's consider two verses from Hebrews. The author of Hebrews warns God's people about the kind of rebellion illustrated by Israel when they refused to enter the land (Hebrews 3:8;15). This text quotes Psalm 95. When we go back to the Psalm, we find a stunning insight into the nature of rebellion.

Call to Worship

(v.1-5)

There is a call to joy and delight in the LORD, who is a great God. He is worthy of our reverence and our worship. This call frames our life – we are to delight in a great God. Our response to the greatness of God and to the grandness of God is to be delight and joy.

Call to Submission

(v.6-7)

There is a call to submit to God, who is over us and who cares for us. The second response to this kind of God is to submit, to bow and obey. Because God has created us and has cared for us, we ought to bow to Him. Trusting and obeying Him arises as an expression of our delight and joy in Him.

Warning to the Rebellious

(v.8-11)

But then comes the thunderous warning – hear His voice and do not harden your hearts. Hebrews takes this stanza in the Psalm and calls what the people of Israel did, rebellion. It was the “day of rebellion.” Rather than a people who rejoiced in their great God, who bowed gladly to Him in trust and obedience, they rejected His Word, disobeyed His commands, rejected the consequences and were loathed by God.

Now listen to me. Some you parents and some of you sons and daughters are now at a point where your heart is churning. Your thoughts and wants are being challenged. You do not like this description of you. It has pegged you as parent or you as a child or teen.

What God is calling for here is a rejoicing in God that causes you to submit gladly to Him and to those He has placed over you. You must hear His Word and take heed to your heart and obey Him. Do not provoke God. Do not test Him. Submit to Him. submit to your parents. Turn away from the sins of defiance and disobedience. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God.

Let me summarize this, in conclusion.

Conclusion

So here is what you are dealing with in rebellious children, teens and adults.

- Rebellion is inward and outward defiance and disobedience to authority.
- Sinful people pursue rebellion.
- Hardship punishes the rebellious.
- They believe that God delights in religious observance more than obedience.
- They believe that God is not committed to our hearing and heeding what He says.
- As rebellion, their defiance and disobedience is compared to witchcraft.
- As presumption, their defiance and disobedience is compared to iniquity and idolatry.
- They try to get the most out of the situation for themselves.
- They are self-centered
- They blame others for their troubles
- They are argumentative and self-justifying.
- They pretend to repent.
- They attempt to avoid punishment.
- They try to avoid the shame of sin and its consequences.

How can you deal with it? How will you not contribute to it in your own parenting?

- By modeling for your family a joyful submission to those in authority over you.
- By watching over your own life for attitudes and actions of defiance and disobedience.
- By parenting in such a way that models the parenting of God.
- By not provoking your children to wrath.

In our study this evening, Pastor Greg will give you a Biblical overview of a model for parenting and many, many wise and practical helps to be pleasing to God.

Some of you teens need to repent before God and restore your relationship with your parents. And some of you parents need to repent of the kind of parenting that has contributed to your sons and daughters rebellion. May we look to God, our perfect heavenly Father and His perfectly obedient Son for our hope and help. May God give us that grace, today.

CONDUCT DISORDER

No. 33 (Updated 1/00)

"Conduct disorder" is a complicated group of behavioral and emotional problems in youngsters. Children and adolescents with this disorder have great difficulty following rules and behaving in a socially acceptable way. They are often viewed by other children, adults and social agencies as "bad" or delinquent, rather than mentally ill.

Children or adolescents with conduct disorder may exhibit some of the following behaviors:

Aggression to people and animals

- bullies, threatens or intimidates others
- often initiates physical fights
- has used a weapon that could cause serious physical harm to others (e.g. a bat, brick, broken bottle, knife or gun)
- is physically cruel to people or animals
- steals from a victim while confronting them (e.g. assault)
- forces someone into sexual activity

Destruction of Property

- deliberately engaged in fire setting with the intention to cause damage
- deliberately destroys other's property

Deceitfulness, lying, or stealing

- has broken into someone else's building, house, or car
- lies to obtain goods, or favors or to avoid obligations
- steals items without confronting a victim (e.g. shoplifting, but without breaking and entering)

Serious violations of rules

- often stays out at night despite parental objections
- runs away from home
- often truant from school

Children who exhibit these behaviors should receive a comprehensive evaluation. Many children with a conduct disorder may have coexisting conditions such as mood disorders, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse, ADHD, learning problems, or thought disorders which can also be treated. Research shows that youngsters with conduct disorder are likely to have ongoing problems if they and their families do not receive early and comprehensive treatment. Without treatment, many youngsters with conduct disorder are unable to adapt to the demands of adulthood and continue to have problems with relationships and holding a job. They often break laws or behave in an antisocial manner.

Many factors may contribute to a child developing conduct disorder, including brain damage, child abuse, genetic vulnerability, school failure, and traumatic life experiences.

Treatment of children with conduct disorder can be complex and challenging. Treatment can be provided in a variety of different settings depending on the severity of the behaviors. Adding to the challenge of treatment are the child's uncooperative attitude, fear and distrust of adults. In developing a comprehensive treatment plan, a child and adolescent psychiatrist may use information from the child, family, teachers, and other medical specialties to understand the causes of the disorder.

Behavior therapy and psychotherapy are usually necessary to help the child appropriately express and control anger. Special education may be needed for youngsters with learning disabilities. Parents often need expert assistance in devising and carrying out special management and educational programs in the home and at school. Treatment may also include medication in some youngsters, such as those with difficulty paying attention, impulse problems, or those with depression.

Treatment is rarely brief since establishing new attitudes and behavior patterns takes time. However, early treatment offers a child a better chance for considerable improvement and hope for a more successful future.

Command and Counsel

Greg Cook

Introduction