

PARENTAL ABDICATION

Without a doubt, parents can be too stern and severe with their children. Paul referred to this possibility when he warned, “Fathers, provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged” (Col. 3:21; cf. Eph. 6:4a). Some of the most pitiable people in the world are those whose personalities have been warped by ultra-strict, extra-harsh, unnecessarily-restrictive parental despotism. Parents must be aware of the danger of abusing their children in this way.

Perhaps the aforementioned danger is not the gravest one faced by parents and children currently, however. While the authority God has given parents over their children may be abused by being too severely exercised, it is no less an abuse of that authority when parents refuse to discipline and guide their children. The more I hear and observe the attitudes of some Christian parents concerning the discipline and training of their children, the more concerned I become about this matter. It simply does not square with the teaching of God’s Word that when children become 12–14 years old (sometimes much younger) they should be allowed to make all of their own decisions without any parental “interference.”

The excuse we have heard Christian mothers offering for their 15–17 year old daughters going to the beach or the public swimming pool in their scanty swim suits is pitiful: “I don’t want her to wear it, but I can’t stop her.” Why can’t you? Because somewhere in that child’s life, probably several years ago, you (and her father?) abdicated your God-ordained parental authority and that child started “calling the shots.” Another equally lame excuse for allowing an adolescent to attend a dance is, “He (she) is not a Christian yet, so it doesn’t matter.” How will such parents explain to the child their rationale for encouraging dancing before he or she is baptized, but discouraging it afterward? Would these parents do the same concerning drinking, smoking, or a dozen other sinful behaviors? Make no mistake—a child can **always** tell when it has gained control in a home, whether he or she is 2 or 12 years old!

As an imperfect parent myself, I want to plead for a return to sanity in this concern. God’s Word teaches expressly that parents, especially fathers, are responsible for the spiritual training of their children (Eph. 6:4b). Children are going to want to do things that they should not do, things that will harm them, either physically or spiritually (or both). Shall we restrain the three year old from playing in a busy street, but laugh at

him when he hits us or kicks us in rebellion? Where did we learn such? Certainly, it was not from God's Word. As long as parents are still feeding, clothing, and otherwise providing for their children, it is only right that parents continue to exercise authority over them conducive to their own spiritual well-being. Paul taught that children are to honor this authority, just as he taught that parents are to exercise it: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Eph. 6:1).

— Dub McClish
Denton, TX