

Sanctification and the Teens

Our Children are Accountable Too

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This sermon is directed mostly toward our teenagers, but secondarily at their parents who are responsible to God for being the first stage of training for them to be in His kingdom. The sermon is largely a warning against being complacent, because God will not allow us to escape our responsibility. It matters not whether you're a teen, or whether you're an adult, because we all have responsibilities and God expects us to carry them out.

I want you to understand at the very beginning that I am giving this because I'm a husband, I'm a father, I'm a grandfather, and I am a great-grandfather, and a minister, and I love you; and secondly, because I Corinthians 7: 14 shows that you are sanctified by God *because* of your parents calling, and I don't want you to *lose* what is undoubtedly the greatest gift you have been given in your life to this time. You may not see it that way, but as a minister I *do* see it that way, and I want to pass onto you a bit of wisdom I think that I ought to be able to give to you.

Now just as assuredly that we parents can lose our sanctification, you children can lose *your* sanctification that has come upon you as a result of your parents' calling. Life is serious business. It is not all fun and games, and I am calling upon you parents to interpret this for your children and to make it practical.

We're going to begin in II Peter 3: 3-4.

II Peter 3:3-4 Know this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts. And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

I know that this is hard for teens to grasp because of their lack of experience, but the world you are living in is not normal even for this world. In six thousand years of human history, only one other time equates what you are living through, and that is the time that Peter mentions within the context of this paragraph, and that is the period of time leading up to the flood of Noah. Out of that horrible mess, kids, ...I want you think about this, ...only *eight* people were saved alive. In terms of the number of those who will be spared from horrible deaths, it won't be quite so bad this time around, but only because of God's purpose, God's promise, and the existence of the Church.

I want you to go from here back to the Old Testament to Daniel 12: 4.

Daniel 12: 4 But you, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge

shall be increased.

One of the signs of the end time is what is described here: "Many running to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." I think it's pretty easy to see that many *are* running to and fro. We just flew out here to Phoenix. The airplane was full. When we left the Charlotte airport, it was full of people. When we got to Phoenix, it was full of people milling around, going here and there within the terminal, waiting for somebody to come in, or to get on an airplane. I know that this is just a microcosm of what is going on all over the world.

It says there that "knowledge shall be increased." This is *also* self-evident. Anywhere you look, the technological knowledge that the world you are living in right now has, did not exist, except in a very early form even fifty years ago. Fifty years ago television was just coming on the scene. It had been invented by the late thirties, but it was only a laboratory item until about the late forties and early fifties when it began to hit the stores. Radio is much different now from what it was then, and so are many, many others things as well. So we're dealing with things that are *evident* even to somebody who did not live through the entirety of that period—that people are running to and fro, and also that knowledge has increased. Of course this knowledge has to include *biblical* knowledge as well, and that has to come in the mix.

There is something else about this verse I want you to think of seriously. That is, this phrase "*to and fro*" is not to be limited to people literally going from one place to another. Indeed it does mean that, but the words in Hebrew that make up this little phrase can also indicate something that is going on entirely invisible within a person's mind. In other words, the minds of people are casting back and forth as though they are in midst of a puzzle, a mystery, an enigma that they can't figure out; or they are all stressed, and their minds are flashing back and forth because of all the stress that is on them.

So "*to and fro*" includes things that are obvious, and things that are not quite so obvious as well. But whether it is in the mind, or actually taking place, it is part of the terminology God uses to describe what is happening in this world. The pressure of events can be described as "*to and fro*" as well. Great perplexity or excitement have the possibility of pleasures, or maybe even fear, that one will not be able to escape the dangers that are on the horizon. You are living in unusual times to say the least. It is so unusual that Jeremiah 30:1-7 describes it this way. Listen to these words young people, because they apply to this time.

Jeremiah 30:1-3 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus speaks the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write you all the words that I have spoken unto you in a book. For, lo, the days come says the LORD that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

This has not happened yet. We are in the time that is immediately *before* the captivity a second time of the children of Israel and of Judah.

Jeremiah 30:4-7 And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus says the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask you now, and see whether a man does travail with child? Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! For that day is great, so that *none nonés like it*: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble: but he shall be saved out of it.

The pressures of living in this world are mounting, because God is drawing the entire world toward the conclusion of the plan that He is working out. There is nothing we can do about those operations, because the timetable of events is in His powerful and capable hands, and nobody can turn Him aside. We can, however, change our attitude about what is going on in order to take good advantage of it. The choice is up to you, and you cannot honestly blame anybody but yourself if you waste your knowledge of what God has mercifully made available to your understanding because He has called your parents.

Did you notice how God illustrated the uniqueness of the times that we live in? Have you ever heard of a man giving birth to a child? That would really be unique. That's how different the times you are living in right now are, even from the time before the flood. There is no other time period that can compare to what you are living into, that we have entered into over the last fifty years or so.

By way of illustration, here in the United States of America, our nation is not merely in drought, but forty percent of it is in *severe* drought, including Charlotte, where we just came from. Never in the history that people have been keeping records in the United States of America has so much forest land burned in one year. Check out the first chapter of the book of Joel. Meanwhile, in Europe, and most specifically in Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, over a trillion dollars of damage has been done by unprecedented floods. Southern Russia is also experiencing major flood damage. Terrorism, and counter-terrorism continues unabated in the Middle East. In Africa, almost a whole continent is gradually dying from a combination of desertification, and in Central and Southern Africa from dissemination from AIDS.

Yesterday we heard a statistic which to me is mind-boggling. Every day in Africa six thousand children die from drinking contaminated water. This is just *one* continent, and just the *children* [who are dying] from drinking contaminated water. Ignorance of AIDS, the cause of AIDS, and how to combat it appears to be largely responsible for those people's problems with it.

But we also have an AIDS problem right inside the Church. No, it's not the Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome, but the Adolescent *Invincibility* Disorder Syndrome, and ignorance should not be a problem unless you, young people, in your determination to have a good time, stick your head figuratively in a bucket and ignore what is going on around you; or worse yet, be aware of what is going on around you, and wittingly, willingly choose not to do anything positive about it.

One of the changes that has taken place in the last fifty years is that adolescence begins much

earlier now than it did then, and it ends much later than it did then. Irresponsibility is a major hallmark of immaturity, and irresponsibility is a hallmark of our time. The adolescent thinks that he is immune to disaster, impervious to harm, indestructible, immortal, and invisible.

The city of Charlotte is a typical medium-sized city with roughly one and a half million people. It doesn't have the huge population of a New York, or Chicago, or Los Angeles, and it doesn't have the reputation for violence either. But there is not a week that goes by without the news media reporting of one or more teenagers being killed, or killing someone, doing something stupid. For the most part these are not bad kids. They are not gang-related incidents that I'm talking about, and for the most part they aren't even drug related. They are *careless* and *foolish* kids who are essentially unaware of the dangerous circumstances they put themselves and others in, and they pay with their lives.

When we got into Phoenix yesterday, we almost immediately heard on the radio of an accident that took place during the lunch period of Canyon High School, I believe it was, where three kids were in a pickup truck coming back to campus from eating lunch at a Burger King restaurant. You guessed it. One of those kids is dead because they were going too fast. The other two, I guess, went to the hospital.

My question to you is, "What are you going to do about your life?" You stand in a unique position when compared to the young people in this world. I want you to consider that the average person on earth is illiterate, undernourished, and has a life expectancy of only 45 to 50 years. So maybe if you lived in the Sahel (the southern edge of the Sahara Desert) of Africa instead of the United States or Canada, and you knew the drift of the world and where it is headed, you would still be virtually choiceless.

But the fact is, you don't live there. You live in the Western world. You are not ignorant. You are not undernourished, and your life span is in excess of seventy. Now you might be foolish and careless, but you *still* have options most of the kids in the world do not have. You have access to all of the technology, and to libraries, and your life is virtually carefree by comparison, but there are still choices that *must* be made. And I repeat, ...*must* be made. They cannot be avoided, because you are unique in having the most important of all options given to young people anywhere on this planet.

One of the most important understandings revealed to the Church of God directly involves you, and it gives you an option that no other young people in this world have. In I Corinthians 7:14 it says, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; *else* were your children *unclean*; but now they are holy (meaning *set apart*)." All of mankind is cut off from God, but not your parents, and not you.

Now you may try to persuade yourself that this world is one which by nature does not give a person a chance for making good, that it's one in which there is nothing but the fatalistic acceptance of defeat. I'm here to tell you that such is not the case with *you*, because God says *you are clean*. That means He holds you to be clean. It does not mean *sinless*, but you're still *legally clean* in His sight. You are therefore acceptable in His presence, and you have the opportunity to have true success in life as a result of this. You have the opportunity to believe God, to cast your lot with Him, and to be spared the horror of having to face the terror that is in

this world—a terror of a level of absolute terrific turmoil that we are not very far from.

I believe the majority of you believe as your parents do, (and that as much as your age and your understanding permits) that this is part of God's True Church. Some of you though are hostile, and may even be attending against your will, and you may feel this Church cramps your style, that you would rather be elsewhere having fun. But whatever your reason for being here, I still want you to think seriously about your future because your future may be just as clouded as those kids in the Sahel.

Now perhaps above all, I don't want you to be careless about your sanctification. Let me ask you something, and I want you to answer this to yourself, and I know that you know the answer to it. Can your parents lose *their* sanctification because they don't pay attention to God, and thus go into the Lake of Fire? Now you know the answer to this is "yes." They can lose their sanctification. Now what makes *you* think different rules apply to *you*? I want you to understand a very simple principle: Law plays no favorites. Law doesn't care whether you're male or female, whether you're thirteen, nineteen, or ninety-three. I'll give a simple example: If a ninety-three year old male jumps off the 80th floor of the Empire State Building, which direction will he go? Now what if a 16-year old girl does the same thing? Do you get the drift? The law of gravity doesn't play any favorites at all. We have to remember that.

Law doesn't care what your race is, what your sex is, or what your age is, and so if parents who are sanctified break the laws of God persistently, what's going to happen? They're going to lose their sanctification. If a seventeen year old, or an eighteen year old does the same thing, even though their parents are sanctified and the children are held to be clean because of God's judgment on that, you can lose yours too.

Titus 2:1-6 But speak you the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity [or love], in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becomes holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things: That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children. To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.

I want you to look at these verses in an over-all sense. The over-all intent of these instructions to a church pastor is an exhortation for the various age groups to hold to a sense of duty in regard to their conduct. But what is important in an overall sense is that none of the instructions given here should be ignored simply because they are not addressed directly to you, to your sex, or to your age group. Let me give you an example. If it says "girls should be discreet and modest," does it mean then, because it's addressed to girls, that a fellow may be as indiscreet and immodest as he wants because he's a guy? Do you get the drift? Simply because the fellows are not mentioned in regard to that does not excuse them from being discreet and modest as well. In an overall sense here, God is telling all of us—parents, young people, male,

female, whatever—to be sane, sober-thinking, serious about our responsibilities, exercising self-control, curbing our passions, and that we are to aim at self-mastery.

There is a proverb that teaches: "He that rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city." Ruling one's spirit involves self-discipline. Self-discipline is willing yourself to do the right, regardless of feelings. It may not be glamorous, but young people, I hope you will take this from me—it is the *stuff* of life.

All of us have to understand that youth is a time of danger, because youth has a strong tendency and a long history of being shortsighted, lacking vision, and over-confident. A short-sighted person is always reckless and lacking in discipline because he sees no reason why he should think soberly and hold himself in unless the reason is immediately in front of him.

Think about that young man who was killed yesterday on his way back to school during the lunch hour. He was short-sighted. He was speeding in a place where he had no business speeding, but they were hurrying to get back, and because of that carelessness he ends up dead. Now suppose, on the way back to the school, something happened to make him slow down, regardless of him being short-sighted, if that something that made him slow down happened to be a cop. You see, it would have been right in front of him, and the chances are very great, that because the warning was right there, right then, he would have slowed down, and he would be alive.

What I'm getting at here is that youth has a tendency not to think ahead of the possibilities that his acts are putting him in danger of being hurt by. The reckless, the foolish, simply have not discovered all that can go wrong, because they have a careless tendency not to count the cost of doing something until after they get hurt. That's why this advice is in Titus 2:1-6.

Let's go back to the book of Revelation, and we'll pick up chapter 3, verses 9 and 10. This is something that I think you are all familiar with. This is part of the message to the Philadelphia Church.

Revelation 3:9-10 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

I read that because all of you young people know that God has offered this Philadelphia group protection from the worst of the problems that are coming on this world, things that are sure to happen. That's an extremely valuable piece of knowledge that is backed by God's absolute promise.

Another question: What is it that puts the Philadelphian into the position where he is able to be a recipient of this promise? God gives the answer. He says, "Because you have kept the word of My patience." Young people have a tendency not to be patient. The Philadelphian thinks ahead of the possibilities, and he disciplines himself to be patient with life, and wait for God to provide

whatever it is. That's really going to pay off for the Philadelphian.

Let's ask another question: What makes you think that you will be there? Does God say that all the Philadelphians are in any one group? No, He doesn't say that. Does everybody in that group receive the promise simply because they are attending services? No. I don't see a promise anywhere in which it says that you have a free ride because of mom and dad. You can be sure that your parents don't have a free ride. What I am getting at here is that there is a price to be paid for this protection. It doesn't come willy-nilly. It comes because the Philadelphians are laying down their lives day by day, patiently doing it.

What if one doesn't yield to actually become a Philadelphian? Is God going to take him anyway? Now you know very well that He won't. Now why? Because that would be rewarding him for being lazy and foolish. God doesn't judge like that. The message to the Laodicean proves that conclusively. There is a distinctive difference between those two groups. One patiently does the will of God. The other said he doesn't need it. Where does that put you?

Well, because you are sanctified, it puts you in pretty much the same position as your parents. But you are unconverted, and possibly you are drifting, ...not being cut off from access to God, and at the same time possessing tremendous knowledge that other young people in the world don't have, and doing nothing, or being outright disobedient, uncooperative, and maybe downright nasty with your parents. It would do you well to rethink your position and drop any complacent recklessness, because you have very much to be held accountable for. "To whom much is given, much is also required." Jesus didn't say that this only applies to converted parents.

I give this warning partly because this world's Christianity has given the world a faulty unbalanced portrayal of God by emphasizing His mercy at the expense of His justice. I am afraid that many are taken in by this thinking of God in human terms. But God is not man, and His judgments are high above man's. Many of God's perspectives are revealed in His law, and His laws are given to achieve some social order as well as to prepare people to be in His image and living in His kingdom. We're going to look at one set of laws covering family relationships, and a child's attitude and conduct toward his parents.

We're going to go back to the book of Exodus, chapter 21, verses 12 through 17. I want you to understand this is God's law, not Ritenbaugh's. It's His law that He gave to Israel.

Exodus 21:12-17 He that smites a man so that he die, shall be surely put to death.

There it is—the death penalty.

Exodus 21:13-17 And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand [meaning it's something that happens accidentally]; then I will appoint you a place whither he shall flee. But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile; you shall take him from my altar, that he may die. *And he that smites his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.* And he that steals a man

[kidnapping] and sells him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death. And he that curses his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.

It doesn't have to go all the way to murder. Maltreatment of a parent through striking or cursing is placed on a par with murder and kidnapping, and is punished in the same way—capital punishment: death. There are going to be no rebels in the place of safety.

Men may overlook and reject God's judgments, but do you think that God will overlook His own law? I don't think so. Do you know what curse means? It means something that is not as strong as you might think it is. It simply means *to belittle*. Have any of you young people belittled your parents? Almost all of us do going through life. It means "to make light of." It means "to be contemptuous of."

I don't know whether you've ever heard of Hammurabi. He was an ancient king. Archeologists have dug up things that pertain to the laws of the land that he ruled over. Hammurabi's punishment for a youngster who cursed his parents was to cut off his hands. Maybe you think this is really harsh, but do you know that the records show that in 1671, in what became the United States of America, the Puritans put a teenager to death because he cursed his parent. You live in an age when permissiveness is the order of the times now, but it hasn't always been that way.

In the book of Matthew, as Jesus was giving the Sermon on the Mount He said:

Matthew 5:21-22 You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council.

Do you know what "Raca" means? It means empty-headed; moron. You see, that's cursing. It's belittling. It is speaking contemptuously of. The person who says this shall be in danger of the council.

Matthew 5:22 But whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Think of what I just said about what the word "curse" means. It means to belittle. It means to speak contemptuously of. Jesus is saying there that He agrees with Exodus 21:12-17. For a child to speak contemptuously of, to consider his parents as being foolish, puts him in danger of the death penalty.

Again, I tell you, this is not John Ritenbaugh's law. This is God's law, and it is Jesus Christ, our Savior, saying that He agrees with it. He's going to be the God who judges. Cursing is placed on

a par with murder, and there is a reason why, and that is because it proceeds with this same attitude of heart, and is punishable by death. I want you to think of this now in relation to parents. The majesty and office of God is violated in the person of the parent, because God holds the parent as His representative and of types of Him, and thus the Fifth Commandment is broken, and the wages of sin is death. It's that simple. In terms of the penalty, it is just as wrong to curse parents as it is to curse God.

Let me show you something else out of the law of God. This is in Leviticus 19: 1-3.

Leviticus 19:1-3 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, You shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy. You shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.

When they translated the word "fear" there, they softened it somewhat. But if you look in the margin, as my Bible points you to the margin, it says, "You shall *revere* your parents." That's a stronger word. It is a word that is normally reserved for God. We *revere* God, but God gives direction here to us to *revere* our parents. Parents have an awesomely high calling, and that calling is to be respected by the children, because that reverence that God expects precedes the reverence God expects to come to Him when that relationship with God is introduced. That reverence for parents is to get us ready to reverence God.

We're going to go now to the book of Proverbs, in chapter 20, verse 20, and kids, this is a frightening verse!

Proverbs 20:20 Whoso curses his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.

This verse ought to give any person who has some measure of respect for God's seriousness about a child's responsibility towards his parents pause to think about things. I want you to think first about the word "obscure." I don't know what translation you are using, but modern translations often choose to render "obscure" as *pitch* or *complete*. That would read then, "His lamp shall be put out in *pitch* darkness (or in *complete* darkness)." Therefore it means in an area where there is no possibility of seeing anything. Utter blindness. God's warning indicates *utterly dark*. Now if your lamp is snuffed out, extinguished in the blackness of darkness, how are you going to see where you are going? God is getting at something here.

A lamp puts forth light, and light is a symbol in the Bible of truth. Therefore, God is in reality speaking of having correct guidance and direction. He is saying that if children curse their parents, *maybe* the death penalty is not executed, but following right on the heels of this is that God says He will remove the guidance that He would ordinarily make available to you.

This proverb is then saying that God will not necessarily put one to death. Instead He is saying that the penalty for cursing parents is that one will receive no guidance from Him. But it goes

on. Therefore no prosperity, no posterity, and therefore no future. Believe me, this comes very close to the wandering-stars punishment that is reserved for demons—to be able to see, desire greatly, but to be able to do nothing about it.

Proverbs 20:11 Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.

This proverb is telling us that there is no hiding for a child with the excuse that "I am just a kid." It is saying that character counts regardless of age, because even a child's character is recognizable, and traits of childhood tend to stick all the way through life. I want you to think about this because this too is very interesting.

I want to shift the emphasis here to the parents for just a little bit. In the past I think that I have mentioned a comment that was made by Muriel Beadle on the importance of early childhood development I got this from her book titled "*A Child's Mind*." She took issue with Proverbs 22: 6 — "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Listen to Muriel Beadle's version of that proverb:

"Parents, train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will be *unable* to depart from it."

Muriel Beadle is a child psychologist. She has an awful lot of clinical experience in dealing with children and their parents. It is her considered opinion th