

Young People and Ethics - Why and How?

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Introduction

God is interested in the lives of young people. Notice the following passage: “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). This passage makes it clear that the Bible was authored with the young in mind. Young and old alike can understand God’s word and become wise in matters that pertain to salvation. God has provided a perfect book, one that contains all of the necessary ethical principles needed to make man complete (2 Peter 1:3-4). Holy writ will supply us with all that is necessary to live the Christian life:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Regardless of age these holy principles will guide men and women, boys and girls into righteous behavior.

Recent events make it very clear that many young people in America are completely void of the ethical principles found in God’s word. From coast to coast young people (and some are very young) are committing horrendous and senseless crimes. In Littleton, Colorado two male students went on a killing spree inside a large high school. With guns and bombs they murdered twelve of their fellow-students and wounded many more. In a state of shock America was asking, “How could teenagers slaughter their peers in a school and then commit suicide?” In the state of Florida a thirteen-year-old boy shot his math teacher with a gun in the doorway of a classroom. In bewilderment, our society was again asking, “How could a child of this age be capable of cold-blooded murder?” On the eastern seaboard a pregnant teenager secretly gave birth to her baby in the ladies restroom while attending the school prom. After giving birth she disposes of the baby in the trash and immediately returns to the dance as though nothing happened. The baby died. Again in shock and amazement, we all wondered, “How could a teenager treat a human life with such callousness? How could she not care for the innocent life of her baby?” These three incidents could be multiplied many times over. They are, however, a commentary on the sorry state of American morals. Decency is absent in the minds of many in our nation today. Something is very wrong with the perception of right and wrong in the minds of young people.

The escalation of immoral behavior among America's youth underscores the need to teach Biblical ethics. Teenage pregnancy is rising annually. More than one million teenage girls become pregnant each year; over eighty percent are not married. One survey showed that thirty-nine percent of ninth graders, forty-six percent of tenth graders, fifty-nine percent of eleventh graders and sixty-seven percent of twelfth grade students are sexually active. It showed that by the time they graduate from college ninety percent of young people have become sexually active. One out of five teenagers has a drinking problem; eight million drink weekly. Suicide has become the third leading cause of death among adolescents. Escalating cases of cheating, drugs, pornography, robbery, lying, and abortion underscore the monumental problem before us. Children in this country are growing up in one of the most violent and crime-ridden countries in the world. A lack of stability in the home contributes to these problems which are spiraling out of control.

Let us not forget that young people in the church are facing these same influences of our society. They are being exposed to more ungodliness as each year passes. Parents who are not aware of these trends must wake up immediately. They must get busy doing the job God has given them. Fathers are responsible for being the number one teacher of Biblical ethics to their children (Ephesians 6:4). Naturally, mothers would want to play a major role in assisting to instill fundamental values from God's word in the hearts of their little ones. If the home does not do its part, what chance do our young people have of getting to heaven?

Young People Face Important Decisions In Life

Parents must do their part in teaching their children, but ultimately it will come down to young people making personal decisions for themselves. Parents cannot follow their children around to school and to the homes of friends constantly making decisions for them. A parent can make many decisions for their children, but sooner or later the burden shifts to the child because God has made us free moral agents.

It is an important responsibility. Our decisions should be based upon the information found in God's word. All people make significant decisions every day. When God first made Adam and Eve, they were young in the sense that they had little personal experience in making decisions. They knew enough to understand that there was one tree that God had specifically commanded them not to eat (Genesis 2:16-17). God had told them, "In the day that ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die" (v.17). One day they made a decision to disregard God's word. Their decision to sin affected them for the rest of their lives. There was no taking that decision back once the deed was done.

Ethics is associated with making decisions. The teenager that becomes pregnant did not have an accident, but rather she made a decision to be sexually active (except in cases of rape). She has made a moral and ethical decision. The killing of classmates and teachers was no mishap, rather it was a deliberate decision to become vengeful and take the innocent lives of others. The teenager that gets drunk or high on drugs does so because he/she decides to do it. God allows mankind, even the young to decide whether to do right or to behave sinfully (even if they happen to be naïve). God allows man to make personal choices. In the long ago Joshua challenged the Israelites by stating, "...choose you this day whom ye will serve..." (Josh.24:15). They had a choice to either serve

Jehovah God or to pursue the objects that men had declared deities (idols). They were challenged to make an important decision. Likewise, we are capable of choosing the direction we wished to follow.

Every ethical decision has a direct bearing on our lives. People fail to realize that once man commits a sin, it cannot be taken back. Adam and Eve could not take back the eating of the forbidden fruit. It was a deed that was done. It is true that God can forgive sins, but it is also true that damage caused by sin is often irreversible. If you commit the act of murder it cannot be undone. If a young lady chooses to be sexually active and becomes pregnant, it cannot be reversed. Abortion cannot undo the act of fornication. If a person becomes drunk, the damage caused by the alcohol is final. The worst consequence of all is sin will cause our soul to be lost (Matthew 25:30-46; Romans 6:23). As we have stated, God can forgive the sin if the proper scriptural steps are followed, but the fact of a pregnancy or a murder or even a lie cannot be undone.

Certain Influences Affect Decisions Young People Make

Man makes decisions based upon the influences that are around him. Eve partook of the forbidden fruit because Satan influenced her thinking (Genesis 3:1-6). If Satan had not spoken to the woman she may have never eaten of the fruit. If Eve had not presented the fruit to Adam, it is possible that he would have left it alone. The influence of Eve is undeniable. The evil influences of the wives of Solomon had a direct impact upon his thinking for he began to practice paganism by worshipping their idols. The names of some of the idols were Chemosh, Astoreth, Molech and Milcom. It was his wives that led him down the wrong spiritual road (1 Kings 11:1-8). His actions were an abomination to the Lord. Solomon sank deeply into sin because he surrounded himself with the wrong people. If Solomon had married one faithful Jewish woman, it is likely that he would have never exalted these idols in his heart. The reason God forbade the Hebrews from marrying those from heathen nations was because their hearts would be turned away from serving the one true God (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Do not fail to understand the point being made, influences play a big part in the decline of ethical behavior. Television, movies and music are the three biggest influences in America today. For the past forty years these three major forms of media are responsible for establishing most of the ethical standards in this country. Television has become a wasteland for ethics of any value. Programs viewed today are doing far more damage to the morals of this country than they are good. By the time a person has graduated from high school most young folks have watched twenty-two thousand hours of television. Add to that the time young people spend watching worldly movies and listening to music saturated with offensive themes and you can start to understand why the new generation lacks moral value. Think of all the immoral behavior that is portrayed each day on television and you will see what is shaping the thinking of young people in America. What kind of purity in ethics can young people have after thousands of hours of viewing illicit activity? The thoughts presented in the music they hear is as bad as the movies. Sin has been glamorized, popularized and sensationalized by the movie, music and television industry. God is absolutely right when He says bad company will corrupt good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). Virtuous ethics in America have been ruined by the big three. With the entrance of the internet on the scene, we can add a fourth member to this corrupting panel of strong influences.

Youth in the church are being affected by the same immoral sources. Many parents are oblivious to the vulgar messages popular songs convey as their children use them for entertainment. Television programs, music, movies and websites need to be continuously monitored by parents. Young people are not dependable judges of what is right and wrong or of what they should not be watching. God intended for children to have parental oversight. He knows that someone needs to lovingly safeguard the young from evil influences. Parents must be on constant alert for things that are inappropriate. Your children could be watching something that is very harmful to them. The PG or "parental guidance" designation on some movies should advise parents that there is a need for them to screen what their kids watch.

Young People Must Prepare Themselves To Make Proper Choices

How can we ensure that we will make the right choices? First of all, remember God. The Bible says, "Remember, now thy Creator in the days of thy youth..." (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Do not forget your Creator and that it is in Him we live, move and have our very being (Acts 17:28). He is a holy God and we are alive today to please Him, not our peers (Galatians 1:10). The book of Ecclesiastes ends with these words, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (v.13). It does not say, "fear God and try to do what everyone around you is doing." It says, "Keep His commandments." Be obedient to Him all of the time. You will eventually stand before Him in judgment on the last day (v.14). If you have committed sins by making the wrong ethical decisions, you will be eternally punished in a burning hell if they are not forgiven (Matthew 25:41, 46). By being alert and careful each day, you can make good decisions in your life and God will gladly reward you with a blessed home in heaven (Matthew 25:14-30). . Secondly, appreciate and respect the sanctity of life. You have been very blessed by the Lord to have life on this earth. Do not take it for granted. It is a great privilege to bear the image of God in our person (Genesis 1:26-27). Every human is made in His image. Life is a special gift from God, treat it as such. If you are a Christian, your life is especially blessed. Realize that you belong to God and that all that you do should be done to glorify Him: "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). A great price was paid for you—the precious blood of the Son of God (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Next, study more about your Creator, become familiar with His ways, endeavor to know of His likes and dislikes (John 17:3; 2 Tim. 2:15). Come to completely trust God and His word to lead you in all things that are good: "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). You will have no regrets in eternity if you will do this. Remember, the Lord loves you and wants only the best for your future (John 10:10).

In the next place, maintain Christian friends. This will enhance your chance immensely to stay on God's road to heaven. Earlier we mentioned that bad company will corrupt good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). It is obvious why a parent would not want their child to be associated with juvenile delinquents. Corrupt friendships do not brighten your future. Having the wrong friends will hurt us spiritually and socially. Solomon was a very wise man, but he ruined his relationship with God

because he did not keep good company. God became angry and upset with Solomon. He began to sin because he encircled himself with people whose minds were corrupt. The evil influence of his wives devastated Solomon's spiritual strength. Many people have made this same mistake by keeping the wrong company. God is never mocked; you can be sure there will be no exceptions to His rule of evil companions (1 Corinthians 15:33). Cast your lot with those that will help you to stay faithful to the Lord.

There are Christians in prison today because they maintained friendships with people of low morals and poor character. Drug addicts got their start by hanging out with the wrong company. Alcoholics began their self-destructive lifestyle because their friends like to drink. Unwed mothers are in their unfortunate situation because they dated immoral men. Investigate these things for yourself and see if this is not true. You cannot rise above the friends that you keep. In the book of Psalms we are told, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (Psalm 1:1). Your close friends should be those that are faithful to attend worship assemblies. Christian friends will reprove and rebuke you when they detect you going astray (Galatians 2:11-14). Friends that live righteously will help us get to heaven.

Next, young people should seek counsel and advice from people that are firmly grounded in the truth of the Bible. There are difficult things in life with which all of us need help. For important or difficult decisions you should go to your parents for advice. If you prefer others then try the elders, or the preacher, or a trusted brother or sister in Christ. If you are a young lady then perhaps you could seek counsel from sober minded women in the church. God has provided us a spiritual family (the church) for bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1).

Finally, young people will be able to make good ethical choices in life if they will give a certain amount of time each day to reading their Bibles and praying. You cannot do God's will without receiving God's help. You need His counsel constantly; you can only get this through studying the Bible (Matthew 5:6; 1 Timothy 4:13). God's providential help can be accessed through prayer (Philippians 4:6-7). You have no greater friend and ally than the Lord. He tells us to come to him for help: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). He desires to help us with the needs that we have in life. Exactly how He accomplishes this is not known to us (Deuteronomy 29:29). However, the assurance that He will do what He knows is best is certainly comforting.

Conclusion

In the book of Hebrews we are told of faithful servants of God that successfully walked the road of life (Hebrews 11). They faced a world similar to ours. They had hardships; they were tempted; they faced disappointment; they made important decisions and they succeeded because they chose the way of truth. Others have wrecked and ruined their lives because they did not take the same course in life. There are two paths in life that every one must tread. You may take the broad way that the majority travels and be lost. Or you can take the narrow and difficult way that Jesus chose and be saved (Matthew 7:13-14). Be wise and choose the latter, it is the only way to the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).