

Confessions of a Controlling Parent

I remember well living through the 1960s. Anti-establishment had risen to a new high or should we say, fallen to a new low? Being reared in a Christian home with an emphasis in biblical values, moral stringency, and evangelical outlook made me feel quite out of place in an ever-increasing valueless, “do-you-own-thing” culture. My rebellion was ever restricted. The main reason during my period of backsliding as a teen that I didn’t get into as much trouble as I could have was not because of my volitional choices but because I didn’t have the chance. We had rules. We had penalties for breaking the rules. We had rewards for keeping the rules.

I sought an avenue of escape in my adolescence. The sixties were also a time when the Cold War was at its peak and the fear of Communism so gripped our hearts that we even had a major class in entitled, “Americanism verses Communism.” We were taught to value our freedoms. In my youthful thinking, I believed this ideology would bode well with an all-American dad to aid me in my escape from authority. My plan of attack came in the form of a plea. The plea was “Dad, I feel imprisoned, a slave in this house. I need to be in a democracy in my own home. I need to be free.” Why, this sounded like a line from J. Edger Hoover’s, “Masters of Deceit” or from my old college professor, John Stormer’s “None Dare Call It Treason.” Well, my dad didn’t flinch. He declared that his household was not a democracy. He did not apologize for his dictatorship.

The years went by. His son, who is now your pastor, got married, brought four kids into the world and it just seems like yesterday they were under our roof, declaring their yearning to be free and I gave virtually the same speech my dad gave me. I assured my adolescents that I felt their “pain” and that they would have to be grown to fully enjoy their world of democratic freedom, but until then they were living in a military state. I did assure them I would attempt to rule with a benign spirit, but they were not yet free to make their own decisions. Can you believe it; I was even accused of being a controlling parent. I wear the badge proudly. I was indeed a controlling parent. Now as three of our four kids are grown and married and the fourth, not far behind his siblings – I have no apology for being a “controlling parent.” Before I launch into my defense, I want to make it perfectly clear that my dear wife and I did allow (to a degree) freedoms for our kids to make their own decisions in many areas. Even though we suffered when we observed them making the wrong decisions and were in pain to see their consequences, all along they were in well-restricted parameters, governed by Mom and Dad. I encourage all the parents I have the privilege to pastor to also be controlling parents. Why should we be controlling parents and what is the benefit?

1. Controlling parents are setting standards that will establish a righteous demarcation.

O. Hobart Mowrer received his PHD from Johns Hopkins University and was a professor at Harvard, Yale and University of Illinois (Urbana). He was one time president of The American Physiological Association. Although not considered a friend of Christianity, in an exasperated attempt to find an anchor in a loose society, he wrote an article that he said brought him more controversy than anything he had ever written. He said, “For several decades, we psychologists have looked upon the whole matter of sin and moral accountability as a great incubus and acclaimed our liberation from sin as epoch making. But at length, we have discovered that to be free from sin, that is, to have the excuse of being sick rather than being sinful, is to court the danger of also becoming lost. This danger is, I believe, betokened by the widespread interest in existentialism, which we are presently witnessing. In becoming amoral ethically, neutral and free, we have cut the very roots of our being, lost our deepest sense of selfhood and identity and, with neurotics themselves, we find ourselves asking, ‘Who am I? What is my deepest destiny? What does living really mean?’” Then he concluded his article by quoting Anna Russell’s psychiatric folk song, ““At three I had a feeling of ambivalence toward my brothers, and so it follows naturally, I poisoned all my lovers. But now I am happy I have learned the lesson this has

taught, everything I do that's wrong is someone else's fault."

The world itself tells us that there must be a confrontation of sin and a raising of a standard. If we do not set a standard, our kids have no righteous reference point on their horizon. There must be absolutes or we will absolutely corrupt and become like the nation of Israel in apostasy of whom it was said, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

2. Controlling parents are putting a shield of protection around their children.

Sometimes the accusations against a hands-on parent are "You are shielding your kids." This is precisely the point. Why would we not want to shield our children against the wiles of the Devil? You don't have to lift the sewer lid to see if it stinks!

If a parent saw their child dart toward the street full of traffic, they would immediately reach out grab their hand very tightly and not let go until assurance was made the child's descent into the street had been stopped. By the same token, if a parent realizes the danger of alcoholic beverages, attending places of question, or bad company, the parent would be negligent not to attempt to place them into a restricted environment to protect the children from the evils that come with the territory. We are being like our Lord who shields His people: "For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield". (Psalms 5:12). "For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psalms 84:11).

3. Controlling parents are proving love to their children.

On more than one occasion I have witnessed children accusing their parent of not loving them because of the felling of entrapment by controlling parents. Sometimes love must be tough. A complacent parent that sits idly by while the child goes into a wrong direction is not showing love. It takes courage on the parent's part to choose being a parent over being a buddy to their kids. You've got time after they have grown (if necessary) to be their buddy. Right now, during the growing phase of your children, they need to know their limits and boundaries. In the long run, rules and restrictions give kids contentment. I Timothy 6:6 says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." The kids may not be at the contented stage yet; therefore, this is when it is vitally important that you stay the course until the job is done. As a rule young people will test the very boundaries they don't want moved. It gives them security. Remember how the children of Israel complained, "And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread" (Numbers 21:5). The people griped that they had been brought up from Egypt to die in the wilderness. They were not yet recognizing that God had delivered them from slavery and the wilderness was a purifying method. He was feeding them manna from heaven until they could be established on the earth!

God says to the parent about to cave in: "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Proverbs 19:18). The tendency is to let up in mercy. God says, stay with it until the will is broken: "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die" (Proverbs 23:13). If we have mercy for our offspring, we will be willing to discomfort them so they may in turn give comfort to their future spouses, children and society.

- Pastor Pope -

[Back to Pastor's Word](#)