

Are you sure your good boy is really good?

Rev. John Belden

I know there are people out there who believe their child is good. They might even claim their child does everything they ask. But a child's compliant behavior may not be what it seems.

It may simply mean that he has never been confronted with the spiritual nature of God's law. Confronting your child with your house rules is not the same thing. God's law has a way of provoking sin into action.

According to the Bible, we are all like glasses of water with sediment resting at the bottom. As long as the glass is not jarred or shaken, the muck at the bottom will stay at the bottom. And the water will appear to be clean. But shake the jar and what has been there all along will begin to rise. Likewise, apply God's law to the heart and you will see what is really in a person.

The apostle Paul had this experience. He never would have known the true depth of his sin "except through the law" (Rom. 7:7). Likewise, your children may never truly know the depth of their sin except through the law.

It wasn't until the law came home to Paul's heart and stirred up his latent sin that he realized he wasn't really good. He always obeyed outwardly. But it was an inward command that aroused his sin: "For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet'" (Rom. 7:7). This command went deeper and triggered a rebellious reaction from his sin.

Listen to how he describes it. "But sin, taking the opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil" (Rom. 7:8). In other words, the sin that was lying in Paul all along was aroused to action when God's law confronted it. He goes on to say, "I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died" (Roman 7:9).

This means that when the commandment "thou shalt not covet" was pressed to Paul's heart by the Holy Spirit, it shook up his glass and caused the sediment of sin to rise up in defiance. It revealed the pollution of what he thought was a pure heart. He thought he was "alive once" (I'm okay, I'm not bad), but when

"the commandment came, sin revived and [he] died." At that point he realized he was spiritually dead.

You will see your child's true nature most clearly in his response to the commandments of God. And I'm not talking about outward conformity to these commandments. I'm referring to the commandments applied in their full spiritual strictness. Remind him that God's law doesn't just condemn the act of adultery, but the sexual lust of the heart (Matt. 5:28), not just stealing, but coveting, and not merely murder, but being angry without cause.

And it proves nothing if you merely "make" a child obey outwardly. A child without a sinful nature would not have to be "made" to do anything good. It would come naturally. He would be serving God right now as you read. And he wouldn't just be doing it outwardly.

As long as your "good" child doesn't get too close to God's law applied to the heart, his life may seem as pure as a glass of spring water. But expect him to obey God's commands from the heart, and you will see what is really inside him. Tell him that if he loves Jesus he will obey (John 14:15). Cross his will with God's will. Then watch the sediment rise.

Children desperately need to see their sin. Help them see it now. Use God's law to show them that they are rebels. Shake up the glass of water. Let the law goad their dormant sin into active rebellion.

Then show them the antidote. Show them the Savior who freely cleanses souls. This is the best time, while they are tender and they bend easily. Don't wait until they are hardened into adulthood and set in their ways. Then you may discover the hard way that your good boy wasn't really so good after all.

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