

Are your expectations too low?

Rev. John Belden

When a culture grows depraved, it usually doesn't take much to call forth praise. I see this in the way we tend to expect so little from our children.

For example, in our day, all a young person has to do to achieve saint status is not do drugs. That's it. I often hear parents rejoice, "I got a good one: he doesn't do drugs." If you're really blessed, your son or daughter may even go to college and get a good job. This is more than most parents hope for.

But it's dangerous for Christian parents to have the same low expectations as the world. The danger is raising a child who thinks it's okay to gain the whole world but lose his soul.

And it can happen so easily. Your child does well in school. He gets used to being praised. He will tolerate being outwardly moral as long as it serves his purposes. The problem is, he hasn't been reconciled to God.

This was the experience of the apostle Paul. If there was ever a "good kid" it was he. He was a model Jewish boy (Acts 26:4-5). He probably didn't give his parents a day's trouble. When he grew up, he was an outwardly "blameless" man (Phil. 3:5-6). He went to the best college Jewish boys could attend ("at the feet of Gamaliel", Acts 22:3). He was one of those who "had his head on straight." He even went to church! He did all the right religious things (Acts 22:3).

But Paul was self-righteous. He was like most of the religious Jews of that day who believed they would get to heaven by their own goodness (Rom. 10:1-3). He stumbled at the idea of needing a Messiah to die for his sin (I Cor. 1:23).

Paul's sin would tolerate him being a proud religious Jew as long as it served sin's purposes. But it would not tolerate God telling his heart what to do. Despite all Paul's so-called "goodness", he realized that without the perfect righteousness of Christ, he would have no chance of standing in the judgement.

I know some of you Christian parents may be thinking, "But my son turned out okay. He may not be a Christian or go to church, but he's got his head on

straight. My daughter has grown up to be a good girl. She went to college. She has a good job and doesn't do drugs."

Do you think that because of all these your child is okay? I admit that these are good things. But are they enough? Jesus said, "what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" (Matt.16:26). The answer is NOTHING!

Think about the implications for a moment. Your child may finish college, get a job, marry, and raise a family. He may buy a large house and fancy car, be respected by his peers, and live a decent life. But Jesus says he will end up with zero profit unless he sees his goodness as filthy rags and believes the gospel.

In fact, it may even be worse when the child is "good" and doesn't get into trouble. If he is self-righteous, he may be further from God than the kids who do get into trouble. After all, Jesus said to the self-righteous people of His day, "Assuredly I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31).

Why? Because they knew they were bad people; they would admit they needed to be saved. Therefore, the "tax collectors and harlots believed" (v.32). Ask yourself this question: could Jesus say the same thing today to your "good" kid who doesn't steal or do drugs? "Assuredly I say to you that drug addicts and thieves will enter the kingdom of God before you."

Most Christian parents today are thrilled simply because their child doesn't do drugs. Why would you settle for so little? Maybe the real problem is your own relationship with God. Maybe you're simply passing on what you think is most important. Maybe that's why your expectations are so low.

John Belden is the pastor of Neon Reformed Presbyterian Church in Neon,
Kentucky. For more information, please visit our web site at
<http://www.neonrpc.org>.