

Grace and Teenagers – *Rom 6:1-14*

Parenting in the Promises #6

Introduction – We live in world of lies and presumptions about teenagers and the years of adolescence. Number one in myths about teens is that it is their nature to rebel against their parents. Our youth-worship culture joins with the media and pulp-novel mentality in promoting this lie. The modern evangelical church caters to the folly of youth rather than commanding the respect of elders. Instead, in light of the promises, we need to think biblically about this time of life and how we might best shepherd them as parents and as the church.

No Gaps in Generations (Psalm 127:3-5, Mal 2:15) – These individuals are not autonomous beings, but members of covenant households who are to mature in their faith and understanding of the promises and obligations laid upon them. The goal is faithful, godly offspring, standing at our side against the darkness and walking in the light. There is no planned generation-gap in covenant succession. The next generation joins in the victorious spread of Christ's gospel and His call to disciple the nations – they are to join with us. Therefore, boring testimonies should be commonplace for our young people. Except there is nothing boring if their testimony includes growing up in faithfulness against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:10-13).

Natural Rebels? (Rom 6:1-2) – No one in the Covenant of Grace is exempt from obedience to God, including teenagers. There is no genetic or psychological reason that justifies sin. Paul teaches here that you do not have to sin in order to grow in grace.

Identify Them By Their Baptism (Rom 6:3-10) – Our baptismal cooperation agreement exists in the context of our belief that God has given promises to us regarding our children, regardless of our belief about when to apply the water. Therefore, we teach our children early, based on those promises, to believe them for themselves, and reckon their faith as theirs early on, certainly also watching for more and more fruit as they grow with us in the covenant. This is why it is our practice to baptize infants or professing children at an early age and then to admit them to the Table as covenant members.

Grab Them By Their Baptism (Rom 6:11-14) – Having been baptized into Christ's death, your children are on a trajectory with you (v5, 8). But, like us, it comes in fits and waves. When they are tempted to disobey Christ, like any other disciple, Paul calls us to grab them and say, "hey, you're baptized, you can't do that." They are to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to Christ (v11). Paul then begins to work out this grace into our daily lives. By grace we are reckoned dead to our sins, and by grace we believe and act as though we believe ourselves to be in Christ.

The Only Difference for Teenagers – The problem is not that teenagers go through a crisis of faith (do I really believe I'm saved, or, do I really love this as my own) and no one else ever does. The difference is that it is becoming a self-conscious crisis for the first time (or first times) in their lives. Having grown up in a Christian home, the Christian teen, like any other teen, now has more knowledge, imagination, strength, and a host of new temptations. One result of this is that your teenager needs a father and a mother more than ever before even though he or she looks more self-sufficient.

Loving Teenagers – Keeping in mind that they are to stand with us in the gate, we must avoid the temptation to promote a generation-gap mentality and instead cultivate a covenant community culture. So what is the second greatest commandment? And who is your neighbor? The answer is the teenager living in your home, who often appears to be less lovable than when he was a cute, little toddler. 1 Tim 5:8 teaches us that the commandments of God are even more important in the home. Loving them should be a response of our obedience to the Lord, and not how we are "feeling" toward them. Therefore....

Forgiveness (Col 3:13) – We already applied this verse to the context of our homes, so why am I returning? Because your teenagers appear more responsible (and sometimes its only an appearance). Because of this, their sins (along with their stumbling attempts to be adults, their new clumsinesses and shortcomings) somehow seem more personally offensive. You must still discipline for sin, but you must even more than before make sure you are not taking it personally. For instance, it is true that they should respect their parents – but not necessarily because you have some inalienable right to it.

Affection – Pour it on and do not wait for them to ask for it. It will be different now, but all the more reason you must pour it on in appropriate ways. They are young enough to be insecure but old enough to hide it from you.

Their Song, Their Story (Deut 32:7-12) – First, let your testimony be to your teenagers what God was doing, is doing, and will do with His people – and show them how they are a part of that story. Teenagers are often consumed with their own story, driven by their own desires and struggling with their growing, distinct identity. While we want to encourage that (their ownership of their faith and their Lord), they desperately need to see the larger story and how theirs is simply a part of that story – a glorious and good story. Second, this fatherly picture of God towards His people shows us how we should act towards our growing children. We will be teaching, as Christ is, the necessity of taking responsibility. This should be done in an atmosphere, as Christ does for us, of willingness to sacrifice for them. They are the next verse in the Song of Victory, the Song of the Covenant, the Song of Christ. Sing to them this song.