

How to Raise a Pagan Kid in a Christian Home

Every imperfect and normal family wants their kids to turn out right. So, we establish goals for character development and try to create an environment where our kids can mature. Church, school, sports teams, family relationships... each of these provides a context where our kids can learn to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Unfortunately, our “good” objectives might have absolutely nothing to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we inadvertently end up raising pagans instead of Christians.

Too many times, (Christian) parents have it as their goal to make their kids good and moral. It is as if the entire purpose of their family’s spiritual life is to shape their children into law-abiding citizens who stay out of trouble. The only problem with this goal is that it runs in stark contrast to what the Bible teaches. The gospel is not about making bad people moral, but about making dead people alive. If we teach morality without the transforming power of the gospel and the necessity of a life fully surrendered to God’s will, then we are raising moral pagans.

We end up teaching the wrong thing because we have the wrong objectives.

This sentiment was stirred in me afresh when I read an interview with VeggieTales creator Phil Vischer. He was reflecting on how the “Christian message” he was trying to teach wasn’t Christianity at all...

"I looked back at the previous 10 years and realized I had spent 10 years trying to convince kids to behave Christianly without actually teaching them Christianity. And that was a pretty serious conviction. You can say, "Hey kids, be more forgiving because the Bible says so," or "Hey kids, be more kind because the Bible says so!" But that isn't Christianity, it's morality..."

"And that was such a huge shift for me from the American Christian ideal. We're drinking a cocktail that's a mix of the Protestant work ethic, the American dream, and the gospel. And we've intertwined them so completely that we can't tell them apart anymore. Our gospel has become a gospel of following your dreams and being good so God will make all your dreams come true. It's the Oprah god."

So what is your objective?

Do you teach your kids "be good because the Bible tells you to" or do you teach your kids that they will never be good without Christ's offer of grace? There is a huge difference. One leads to moralism; the other leads to brokenness. One leads to self-righteousness; the other leads to a life that realizes that Christ is everything and that nothing else matters.

I want my kids to be good. We all do. But as our kids grow up, the truth of the gospel can easily get lost somewhere between salvation (where we know we need Jesus) and living life (where we tend to say "I've got this"). My experience is that the vast majority of parents are encouraging moral behavior in their kids so that God will bless their (usually self-centered) pursuits. It's the American Dream plus Jesus. And it produces good, moral pagans.

Consider the key objectives you have for your kids. Seriously, take a minute to think about what would deem you a successful parent. If your goals are focused on your kids' behavior,

their happiness, or their accomplishments (but don't include a dependence upon Christ and a submission to His will and work), then you might want to make some adjustments.

Because the world has enough pagans. Even plenty of really nice ones. What we need is kids who fully grasp the reality that they have nothing to offer, but who intimately know a God who has everything they need.

*I have added a follow-up post that offer some suggestions of How to Guide Your Kid to a Faith That Lasts. I hope it's helpful!

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