

Discipline, Dignity and the Creflo Dollar Scandal

Don't rush to judge Creflo Dollar. But don't rush to judge his teenage daughter, either.

Did Atlanta megachurch pastor Creflo Dollar physically abuse his 15-year-old daughter last week, or was she just being sassy and disrespectful when she called 911 to ask for police protection?

None of us can make that judgment call. But it disturbs me that so many Christians are eager to rally around Dollar before hearing all sides of the story.

"Ministers in positions of leadership—as models to the saints—should never use vicious fighting, hateful language, painful violence or any form of abuse in the home, whether it is directed toward a spouse or a child."

The embarrassing report hit the news last Friday, after Fayette County police arrested the 50-year-old preacher on charges of simple battery, cruelty to children and family violence. Police reports said Dollar's daughter alleged that her father punched her and threatened to choke her during an argument. They also claimed there was a mark on her neck.

By Sunday, Dollar was out on bail and in the pulpit, announcing to a packed house at his World Changers Church International that "all is well in the Dollar household." He said the whole situation was overblown, and that the mark on his daughter's neck was a scar from a skin disorder.

"A family conversation with our youngest daughter got emotional. Things escalated from there," Dollar said, downplaying the incident and insisting that the devil was trying to discredit his ministry.

Because I raised four girls, I want to give the Rev. Dollar the benefit of the doubt. I know teenagers can be disrespectful, and that sometimes parents can lose their cool—especially in a case like this, when Dollar's daughter was allegedly insisting on attending a party at 1 a.m. ("You will attend that party over my dead body," is probably what I would have told one of my own daughters if I had been in a similar situation.)

But what disturbs me is the text of the 911 call that came from the Dollar home that night. The daughter told the dispatcher:

"I just got into an altercation with my father. He punched me and threatened to choke me. This is not the first time that this has happened. I feel threatened by being in this house. I don't know what can be done. But I'm scared. I'm shaking. I don't know what to do."

I've listened to the 911 recording. If I got a similar call from any teenager, I would be concerned. This girl was scared. She said she felt threatened. So are we just supposed to dismiss her comments as crafty lies? Did she make all this up just because she wanted to go to a party and her father wouldn't let her?

The courts will have to hear the case—it's not for us to decide. I agree with the Rev. Dollar's staunchest defenders that we should pray for him, his wife, Taffi, and the family as they walk through this difficult trial.

But in all the rush to protect a preacher from a tarnished reputation, we should also be willing to hear the cry of a child. Many of us have had family squabbles in our homes, and in some of those heated arguments there may have been screams, threats, hurt feelings and maybe some bruised wrists. But have your children ever called 911 to have you arrested?

The Bible says clearly that a minister should manage his

household well, “keeping his children under control with all dignity” (1 Tim. 3:4, NASB). The Greek word for *dignity* can also mean *honor*. This doesn’t mean children of ministers have to be perfect, or that a minister is disqualified if his kids rebel.

But it does require that ministers in positions of leadership—as models to the saints—should never use vicious fighting, hateful language, painful violence or any form of abuse in the home, whether it is directed toward a spouse or a child.

In his statement to his church on Sunday, Dollar admitted that raising kids can be tough. “Like all of us who are parents, there are times when discipline and training our children can become very intense. I would never approach one of my children to intentionally inflict bodily harm. I love her with all my heart.”

I hope Dollar said those last words directly to his daughter. I also hope that if she called 911 out of spite she will apologize to her dad and to the congregation for the mischief she caused. On the other hand, if she truly felt endangered in her own home, I pray the Rev. Dollar will have the decency to address the problem and step out of ministry to seek healing. No ministry, no matter how big or successful, is worth sacrificing a family.

J. LEE GRADY *is the former editor of Charisma and the director of The Mordecai Project. You can follow him on Twitter at leegrady.*