

THE FIRST TOOL

CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE!

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Have you ever told your kids, "Watch your attitude!" or "You've really got an attitude today"? We usually make a remark like this out of frustration with their rebellion to our authority. They're signaling us through their body language of their own anger at being told what to do. Our response to authority is visible to others. Just watch a sports event! Even at a T-ball game, parents can lose it themselves.

OUR ATTITUDES ARE VERY REVEALING

In Christian matters, our attitude toward the Bible is a big thing. We need to watch our own attitude toward the Bible's authority and that of others who teach us. What we believe about the Bible determines our attitude toward it. Our attitudes are very revealing. I once taught a high school Sunday school class who so resented my teaching from the Bible that the tension was almost tangible. They had been lured into coming with an outreach program that delivered stirring music and relevant discussion topics but omitted biblical authority. Their resistance to biblical commands showed up in their muscular tension and on their faces. What is your attitude when you read the Bible? Have you noticed your children's resentment toward scriptural commands? Perhaps an attitude check is in order!

There is an attitude toward the Bible that stems from a right belief about its origin and authority. Look above at II Timothy 3:16-17. The whole Bible is inspired by God. A good way to illustrate that to your kids is to have them hold their hand a few inches in front of their mouth. Now take a deep breath; exhale. Feel that carbon dioxide mixture hit your hand? In a mysterious way, the Bible is like this—God-breathed. That means that God is the source of the ideas and words of the Bible even though men wrote it who had their own personalities, cultures, experiences, and talents. How this was done without making the writers into robots is a great mystery! Peter said that the Bible did not originate from any person's own interpretation of events, “but holy men of God spoke *as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (II Peter 1:20-21). Therefore, the Bible is the only written word of God, is without error, and is sufficient for us to deal with life and God. Seek to believe it even though how it came about is mysterious. You can't force your pre-teens or teens to believe this, but you can instruct them. If you believe these things it will affect how you approach the scriptures yourself and will be a model for them. Your attitude will impact theirs.

APPEAL TO TEEN'S OWN EXPERIENCES TO CONFIRM BIBLE TRUTH

Creation, and God's governing of it, reveal God's wisdom and power, but His word is necessary to communicate the role of Jesus Christ in our salvation. The beauty of a butterfly points us to God, but that beauty can't explain the atonement of Christ or the sufficiency of His death. So the scriptures are necessary. They are without error since God mysteriously authored them, and they are sufficient for salvation, what to believe, and how to live. We, and even our teens, must heed the Word. Jesus illustrates this by telling of the rich man in hell appealing to Abraham to warn his five brothers of hell's torments. Abraham refuses:

Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said. 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'" But he said to him, 'if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead' (Luke 16:29-31).

So check your own attitude toward heeding the Bible, and don't hesitate to remind your teen of these basic principles.

One way of doing this is to use his own experiences and feelings to help him understand authority. Does he own a dog or a horse? Does he groom or train or discipline him? You could say, "Then you have authority over him--to direct his behavior and even to give him commands and rule over him. You could use a leash, spurs, a bit, or a rider's whip to 'encourage' him to do what you say. It would be your rod or instrument representing your authority over him. My collie, Jake, needs a leash on him to quiet him down in the evening. Otherwise, he will bark at any sound --the wind, a raccoon, a neighbor's dog! But, once the leash is on, there is no need to even hold it. He quiets right down. It is the "rod" representing my "right" to tell him to stop barking.

God has decided to use His written word as His rod of authority over us to tell us how to live and what to believe. He has a right to command us because He created us. He can choose to command us by using the written word because, after all, He is God! The Bible is God's rod or staff. He uses it to nudge us along or correct us when we go off in a wrong direction. If you gently jerked the leash or bridle, you could correct or reprove your pet to teach him something. What would you want his attitude to be toward you? How would you feel when he kicked you or snarled at you?" God doesn't jerk our neck off either! He is patient, but neither does He ignore our wrong behavior or rebellious attitude.

Now remember, in these spiritual matters, you are a coach, not a professor. You can teach the principle about the inerrancy of the Bible, but the attitude thing is more of a coaching effort. Remind them, require it, model it, pray for it. There is that mystery about God's activity through the Holy Spirit to bring an attitude change. Our duty is to notice it, expose it, pray about it. Depend on grace; don't shirk your duty; pray for patience and kindness.

COACH YOUR TEEN TO SPOT WRONG ATTITUDES TO PROTECT THEMSELVES

We should also be on guard for wrong views and attitudes in others that might lead to a twisting of biblical truth. Our kids need this skill too. That is why this skill of examining our own and others' attitude toward scripture is important. For instance, many Roman Catholics accept the Bible as God-given truth, but insist that it is incomplete without the official interpretation of the church. So they combine the Bible with the tradition of the Church. The Bible alone is not enough to determine what they believe. That is why they consider the Pope to always be right when he speaks officially. Others might just impose cultural traditions, making what is acceptable with others the standard instead of adhering to the biblical one. So watch the approach to the Bible of those who teach your kids; their teachers can undo what you're modeling at home. But the teens can be taught how to be on guard without being overly protected or overly suspicious of everyone. Or to look down at others from a pinnacle of pride. That is the coach's responsibility--to teach recognition of the attitudes in others while guarding against pride, suspicion, or self-righteousness.

Some Protestants' attitudes are dangerous too. Many look at the Bible as basically a human book written by good people who made many mistakes and were influenced by the knowledge and culture of their times. They do not think of the Bible as God's "rod" of authority over them. Instead, they talk about the Bible as a GUIDE to religious experience and blend it with poetry, quality literature, science, or psychology. It is not that science, psychology, literature, or the arts cannot teach or enrich our lives. They do! But, they do not have the authority to tell us how to live or what to believe! Others believe that the Bible can *become* God's word to you through a unique spiritual experience. In this case, its authority is diminished. It is not truth in itself, but instead, truth "to me."

Coach your teen into recognizing this. If they understand objective truth versus "truth to me," that will go a long way toward protecting them. Ask them, "What might a person say or do that would be a clue to you that they looked at the Bible as "truth to me" instead of Truth? I did this kind of "coaching" best around the kitchen sink or in the car coming home from school or sports. Give them a hint like, "Maybe your teacher thinks art and literature enriches our lives. I agree. But, how are they different from the Bible? Do they have a "right" to tell us what to believe or how to act?" Remember you are coaching, so don't give all the answers. Sometimes posing the question starts the ball rolling. They might not respond much, but they might think about it later.

There is a third influence we should guard against. Some people do not believe the Bible is complete, ending with Revelation, and so add their own visions and ideas. The Mormons and Christian Scientists are examples of this but it creeps into others as well. The ideas they've added often become more important than the rest of scripture or influence what they think the Bible is saying. A fourth departure is made when a person or group accepts that the Bible is without error, but does not apply it to their lives as if their Creator were telling them how to act and what to believe. Sometimes they take it lightly or emphasize one part of it while ignoring another. They need to be reminded of the right of their Creator to give them commands.

Train your teen to use his skill for examining attitudes *in himself first*, then in those whose guidance he seeks or who influences him in other ways. Teach him to ask subtle questions, if necessary, to find out what they believe about the Bible. For instance, "Do you believe God created all things?" Or "Do you really think God is speaking to us today through visions or mediums?" It would have been helpful for me to know these things about my English teachers in high school as we interpreted British literature, often written by Christians. But, watching for attitudes is still the main thing here, Coach.

OVER THE KITCHEN SINK

The following discussion questions might be helpful, but remember, Coach, these don't have to be formally discussed. Don't forget the kitchen sink plan! A lot can be accomplished over that sink. And only one or two questions at a time!

1. How is your attitude toward the Bible? Do you look at it as telling you what to do and believe?
2. If you see an "I don't care" attitude in yourself or others, what is that telling you about their or your belief about the Bible?
3. Tell what clue the following comments give about the person's belief about the Bible:

"No one tells me what to do!"

The Bible is a good book but so is _____."

"No old book can teach me anything."

"What I learn in the arts and sciences is just as important as the Bible."

"Only those specially trained can understand the Bible so I rely on them."

4. Give the meaning of inerrancy, sufficiency, and authority as they relate to the Bible.
5. Discuss easy ways to daily remind yourself that God is your Creator.
6. Do you agree that since He made you, God has a right to tell you what to believe and how to act?
7. Read Genesis 27 thinking about the inadequate responses to God's Word by this family. Discuss the following quote:

While Isaac and Esau believed God's Word was not authoritative, that indeed it could safely be ignored and set aside, Rebekah and Jacob believed it was not sufficient, that is, that God did not have the power and wisdom to carry out what he himself had promised! ...So Isaac, Rebekah, Esau and Jacob all failed to respond adequately to the Word of God, and all paid a fearful price. ...All of this

should make us examine ourselves and how we respond to the Word of God. Do we associate ourselves on this matter with Isaac and Esau by seeking to set aside God's Word in favour of our own desires? Or are we more like Rebekah and Jacob by failing to trust the Word of God while professing to desire and revere it? (Roger Ellsworth, *Be Patient God Hasn't Finished With Me Yet!*, (Evangelical Press, sales@evangelicalpress.org, 2003), p.32-33.

THE BIBLE TELL US WHAT TO BELIEVE AND HOW TO LIVE.