

## **Don't Settle for Good Behavior**

By Dale Simpson, Ph.D.

One of the important responsibilities of being a Christian parent is to help teach children proper and moral behavior. Whether we are using a “timeout” technique, sitting a child in a chair for a period of time, or taking some of their allowance away, the obvious goal for most parents is to get good behavior from their child.

These methods, when done consistently and appropriately, will get good results for outward behavior. But good behavior in a particular situation is not enough for the Christian parent. Our goal for our children is that they would have self-directed good behavior (self-control). This finds them acting properly regardless of whether or not the authority figure is watching. This comes over time as the child internalizes the values for good behavior and their ability to choose right or wrong.

We want our children to internalize a set of principles and a set of controls that they can use regardless of who is watching. An example is when we are driving down the highway and everyone seems to be speeding until the police officer pulls in front. Everyone slows down until the officer pulls off the side of the road and then people return to their normal speeding behavior. This is not self-control but simply control from the outside. We call this external locus of control vs. internal locus of control.

In the eighteen years we have to teach our children, we want to prepare them for a life of internal control. Interestingly, Jesus ran into this with many of the Pharisees. These men were very moral on the outside and some of them prided themselves on how good their behavior was. Jesus saw through that, calling them white washed tombs: beautiful marble on the outside that housed spiritually dead men.

Don't settle just for good behavior because you have to, but ask yourself how much have you internalized your moral compass and the Way of the Cross no matter who is watching. Also, ask yourself “Where are my children on this journey?” Of course, younger children are still growing through the ability to understand abstract things such as right and wrong. Don't judge your children too harshly (almost all children go through periods of lying- in part because they are learning at 4 or 5 that there are real things and pretend/not real things). Lying sometimes is playing with this difference. Lying in an older child is often a different thing- yet we still need to act calmly and clearly without hysteria.

We will talk more about how to accomplish internal control vs. external control. For the next few weeks, think of your own behavior as well as your child's. This month, let's ask ourselves about what undergirds our good behavior. Is it self-control or just a desire not to get caught?

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