

Fathering “by the Book”

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Comedian Bill Cosby once said,

If the new American father feels bewildered and even defeated, let him take comfort from the fact that whatever he does in any fathering situation has a fifty percent chance of being right.

I’m sure (or at least I hope) Mr. Cosby was only kidding. Perhaps he meant to say that whatever you do as a father will either be right or wrong. If that is what he meant, I agree. But if he meant to say that the *best* you can do as a father facing difficult child-raising issues is to flip a coin (so to speak), he could not be more wrong.

To actually flip a coin in such important matters would be callous and foolhardy, to say the least. But many well-meaning fathers employ a method that is no more reliable. They review the findings of the psychological community and base their parenting strategies on what they learn from parenting magazines or psychological journals. Because these are the “experts” (it is assumed), their instructions are reliable. But are they?



Well, not exactly. More often than most people know, the “experts” disagree with each other. Since the 1960s, psychology has devolved into nearly 150 different branches of opinion regarding everything from child-rearing to the treatment of mental illnesses. One “authoritative” and “scientific” conclusion contradicts another, only to be contradicted itself by yet another. The resulting “expert counsel” is a mass of confusion and disagreement.

The truth is, relying on these “experts” is far *less* certain than flipping a coin. True, every new opinion is either right or wrong. But the sheer number of different and ever-changing opinions means most of them *cannot* be right. What comes up *heads* today (in the opinion of the “experts”) will likely be *tails* tomorrow.

If you’re comfortable with all of this as a father, by all means grab the nearest psychological journal or modern parenting magazine. Or, you may choose to rely on your “gut feelings”—your “fathering instincts.” After all, if God gave you children, He also gave you the insight and

ability to raise them properly on your own—right? Again, not exactly. You need direction. And God has provided it. There is only one source where you can find all the right answers concerning fathering (as well as sin, salvation, and everything else important in life). That singular and final authority is the Word of God—the Bible—a book of truth that stands in authoritative judgment of all “expert opinions” and “gut feelings”.

You see, the Bible does not need to be (nor *can* it be) corrected or improved by new “findings.” The Word of God always has and still does give us “all things that pertain to life and godliness,” (2 Pet. 1:3). It is a body of doctrine that has been “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). “The grass withers and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever” (1 Pet. 1:24-25).

Add to this the fact that the Bible tells us, *over and over*, to be distrustful of human wisdom, whether our own or that of the “experts.” “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Prov. 16:25). “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God” (1 Cor. 3:19). Concerning so many of today’s “experts,” people who either ignore or think they have improved upon the wisdom of God in the Bible, Paul would say, “Claiming to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22).

By raising our children in moral, ethical, and spiritual ways that ignore or contradict Scripture, *we* sin, and we teach *them* to sin. We teach them to view and respond to God’s Word as nothing more than a collection of antiquated and irrelevant sayings. As a result, “God says . . .” will carry no more weight of authority for them than “Confucius says . . .” or “Oprah says . . .”

Fathers, I encourage you—no, I *implore* you—to diligently, intentionally, consistently, and boldly reject any “wisdom” that is not consistent with God’s Word. Given the natural and prevailing human tendency *toward* error and *away from* truth, to go on trusting yourself or the “experts” over the Bible is worse than playing heads or tails.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4