

Rearing Children without God? Standing Tall As Christian Parents in an Immoral Society**Esther J. Kibor, PhD**

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the significance of standing tall as Christian parents in an immoral society; a topic that was prompted by a statement written by the Atheists of Kenya entitled, ‘Rearing children without God’[1]. Basing discussions on library readings, descriptive survey and reflective experiences, the author tries to answer why Christian parents ought to stand tall and be moral in a decaying society. In the process, the paper answers two important questions; first, how Christian parents should live in an immoral society without being part of it. Further the question, how this Christian living touches or impacts on their children’s lives will be answered. Second, what biblical justification do Christian parents have for being moral within the context of an immoral society?

Keywords: Christian, Moral, Immoral.

INTRODUCTION

Of great concern to all parents is the immorality of our current society that children are being raised. This state of affairs is evidenced by decaying moral values and other immoral actions that have become commonplace to the extent that they seem or are acceptable and no one care to distinguish between what being moral and immoral actually mean.

From an ethical perspective, morality, whose base word is moral can be defined as “an act [which is] in accord with accepted rules of conduct,” so that a moral person is the one who holds a set of reflected beliefs on what is good and/or evil; what is commanded and forbidden from God’s perspective[2].

“As a social enterprise”, [3] morality is a code of conduct that governs human relationships. Being Christian then is living a Godly life and following the teachings of Christ as given in the Bible after embracing Christ as one’s personal Savior.

This paper analyzes the significance of standing tall as Christian parents in an immoral society; a topic that was prompted by a statement written by the so-called Atheists of Kenya entitled, *Rearing children without God* [1]. Basing discussions on library readings, descriptive survey and reflective experiences, the author tries to answer why Christian parents ought to stand tall and be moral in a decaying society. In the process, two important questions shall be answered; first, how Christian parents should live in an immoral society without being part of it. In the process the question, how this Christian living touch or impact on their children’s lives, will be answered. Second, what biblical and rational justification do Christian parents have for being moral within the context of an immoral society?

When Jesus prayed for believers in John chapter seventeen, he purposely requested the creator of all human beings for four things with regard to all believers. This prayer is well captured by Bruce Milne [4] as follows:

- That they may be protected in a world that not only hates them but also one that they do not belong (vv. 11-12, 15). Praying for protection in all aspects of life is crucial to Christian parents because there are conflicts all the time and the evil one is a ‘roaring lion that seeks to devour’ (1 Peter 5:8).
- That they may be united in the context of their witness (v.11). This unity, patterned after triune God, is a fellowship that expresses the power of God’s name that protects and gives them power over the evil one.
- That they may be delighted and may experience the full measure of the very joy of Christ (v. 13).
- That they may be dedicated to the claim and call of the father in a world that is threatening. God has a purpose for them to fulfill in this world.

In this fourfold prayer, Jesus asks that believers may be sanctified by the truth. To sanctify is to be separate – living a holy life in separation from sin and dedicating lives to the way of righteousness. This dedication is a mission of light confronting darkness. Truth on the other hand refers to that quality of being

true or sincere. However, in this passage of John seventeen it refers to the truth of the Gospel; the truth of God's word that parents must embrace to be able to guide their children.

Why Christian parents ought to stand tall and be moral in a decaying society.

Christian parents, with any other human beings all over the world, are social beings by nature and creation. They cannot live on their own. They have been created to be in need of the company of others. These others include family members, relatives, friends, peers, work mates and church members. These too could be Christian or not. Socializing and discussing issues of great importance with all these people will shape their lives to be the kind of people they should be; more so when Christian values are at the base of all aspects of their lives.

One reason why Christian parents ought to stand tall and be moral in a decaying society is to combat the spread of competing negative values, which are contrary to Christian values. These competing negative values confront growing up children from all corners and aspects of their lives. They include values taught by dominant worldviews such as naturalism, secular humanism, atheistic existentialism, pantheism, new age movement and others, which spread their values in subtle ways. Unlike the Christian and biblical values, the New Age movement upholds "spirituality without religion in that it places great value on the individual person" [5]. This individual or person has to create his/her own reality. Salvation for the new age person is gained through new consciousness that is within the self; this kind of salvation unlike what we have in the Christian faith, upholds a belief in the equality of all religions whose truths are relative [6].

The followers of Pantheism on one hand believe that God and the world is one, everything in the world is God, hence identifies God with nature. In subtle ways, this identification in various forms of pantheism is atheistic because it seriously advocates God's immanence and vehemently rejects the biblical teaching concerning His transcendence. Further, it denies the personal character of God, which the Bible clearly teaches through His personal attributes and the incarnation [2], when God became man in Jesus Christ to redeem the world.

Atheistic existentialism on the other hand, focuses on "the absolute denial of God's existence," while others are practical in the sense that they live lives as though there is no God. Still others live in wickedness and are indifferent to Biblical claims of God [2]. These attitudes rub on young growing up children in quite subtle ways through their peers in institutions of learning, the community and the society. Christian parents need to be alert and discuss openly

such issues with their children. They should not fear or feel inadequate in handling faith issues especially with their educated children if they themselves have not gone far in school. Further, parents should understand that they "share [their] child rearing with other social institutions" as Wester Hoff [7] clearly observes.

Secular humanism which began in Europe during the middle ages and reached its height in the renaissance and enlightenment periods, comes with a mixed blessing with its aim on what belongs to the present age and is worldly with no reference to God or the supernatural. Man and his achievements become life goals at the expense of man's creator. From a Christian perspective, secular humanism exchanges the truth of God for a lie, and as Romans 1: 25 points out, those who hold to this view 'worship and serve the creature rather than the creator' [8]. With this kind of ism, people are shaped to "live, think and work in ways" that are not motivated and guided by Godly Christian values but rather secular worldly ways; the thought of what is Godly and eternal being far from the picture. MacDonald [9] views naturalism as materialistic as it refers to "all that there is in the universe of matter and energy". Yet, this is not the whole thing that Christian parents should look forward to in bring up their children in Godly and biblical ways.

In addition to upholding the Christian faith, parents need to understand the teachings of these various worldviews to direct their children's thinking and guide them to establish a Christian mindset. This is done by adopting a Christian worldview as one strategy for holding and sustaining the Christian identity. Naugle [10] rightly states that there is a definite Christian view of things. This view was portrayed in the life of Jesus Christ whose conception of the universe was grounded in the Old Testament scriptures, which he came to fulfill (Matt. 5: 17) and totally differentiated from the humanistic perspectives of the time and other worldly worldviews.

Generally, "A worldview is a set of assumptions or beliefs about reality that affect how we think and how we live," [11]. Paul Hiebert defines it as the "fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives" [12]. While James Sire sees it a "commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions. These assumptions may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides a foundation on which we must move and have our being" [5].

From these definitions, we can conclude that a worldview is a framework of thought that people use to

make sense of fundamental issues of life. People look at reality and give meaning to it based on what they observe and believe. However, the Christian worldview as Cosgrove observes, “is not a static creed that we memorize but a living belief system that we enter into with our whole lives” [11]. This living belief system is the heart of the Gospel and this is what Christian parents need in order to bring up their children not only in an immoral society but also in a society with conflicting ideas and ways of seeing things.

In the guidance of their children, Christian parents need to understand that a living God has created the world we live in in an orderly manner; the result of sin as given in Genesis chapter three is the beginning of all social evils; be they immorality, crimes, corruption, terrorism, negative ethnicity and social deviance. This calls on Christian parents to teach their children on the implications of this social evils and the importance of coexistence especially in a pluralistic society. The Christian faith together with the Word of God that is believed should be the Christian parents’ standard in all aspects of life.

Another reason for standing tall and being moral in an immoral society is for the Christian parents to live an exemplary life; being models to their children. Without proper and genuine modeling and guidance, it can contribute to some extent to the vices mentioned above and other evil issues. This calls for self-examination by the Christian parents on daily basis in order to portray the correct standard for children to observe and emulate.

How Christian parents should live in an immoral society without being part of it.

The Bible is the only source of guidance for Christian living for the believer, the one who has chosen to exemplify Christ in life and deed. The Bible teaches about love and how to maintain loving relationships from a Godly perspective.

Through the use of two metaphors, the Bible calls on Christians to be salt and light in a tasteless and dark society respectively with regard to immorality (Matt. 5: 13-16). Christian parents need to reflect on their twofold calling in the society, that of being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. “There is no way a Christian can live a purely private life The righteousness of the life the Christian lives will attract attention.” The Christian is in no way ‘poor in spirit’, desolate because of sin, “meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, all in isolation” [13]. Since others will observe him or her, there is need to live as a witness and a model, always standing tall for Christ. Living this way will leave a positive stamp on the immoral world.

An illustration of one old man who happens to be a very strong Christian shall suffice. This old man

required his ten-acre farm to be cultivated. However, the owner of the tractor decided to come on an early Sunday morning to cultivate. However, the old man stopped him from doing so since it was a day of worship. He told him, “There are six days to work in a week, why choose Sunday to cultivate my farm?” Without answering, the owner of the tractor turned and left. For almost three weeks everyone in the village had cultivated, harrowed, and planted. There was no rain. By the end of the third week, the old man’s farm was prepared and planted. That very night it rained for three consecutive days. The old man held to his faith and God rewarded him by holding the rains for three good weeks. We need such people who will stand firm for their Lord.

Salt was used in the ancient world as a preservative for foodstuff and as a flavor to bring some taste to some cooked food. In the same way, being salt of the earth, requires Christians to be “an influence for good in society”. The Christians’ presence will have an effect on delaying moral and spiritual decay by teaching the correct doctrines to their growing up children and them themselves being models of what they believe and teach their offspring’s.

Christians are a light of the world, a world that by implication is covered by darkness. Light in this context refers to the Christians’ good deeds [13]. For example, being a hardworking person who does not steal from their employer by being lazy on the job, or by giving in to greed and miserliness. These people are honest, transparent, and genuine in their deeds and dealings, not those who rob to benefit themselves at the expense of the poor or the marginalized. Neither do they step on others’ feet (toes) in order to benefit themselves. In being light in the world, these Christian parents set an example in life by being hardworking taking only what belongs to them. In so doing, they will teach their children to be responsible in life and to enjoy and observe the importance of hard work. Human responsibility as John Stott [14] describes is to “secure the other person’s rights” that is, learning to forgo our rights, in following the model of Christ Jesus.

According to Kamaara [3] and rightly so, Jesus Christ lived in a society that was no different from ours because people were corrupt, hypocritical, lawless, cruel and harsh in their day-to-day contacts. In following the example of Christ, Christian parents need to “correct this situation by rebuking hypocrisy, initiating civil obedience, and condemning cruel leadership” tactfully. This kind of rebuke and condemnation calls for wisdom in following the Holy Spirit’s lead. The Holy Spirit in John 16:8 convicts “the world of guilt in regard to sin (requiring men to believe – the need for a changed life) and righteousness (that is brought about by Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross) and judgment” (God’s justice and the defeat of the evil one).

Again, how Christian parents need to live in an immoral society without being part of it is to understand what it means to be created in the image of God and what this image implies in their own personal lives (Gen. 9: 6). Being created in the image of God as Anthony Hoekema [15] states is “the most distinctive feature of the biblical understanding of human kind.” Genesis 1: 26 – 28 teaches on the uniqueness of human being’s creation. Unlike the creation of non-human creatures that are created according to their own kind (1:21, 24 – 25), human beings have been created in the image of God and “after His likeness” (vv. 26 – 27), which Hoekema [15] truly sees as “the highest and richest revelation” given by God himself. This creation of man, he further reiterates, “is in a class of its own for God said, ‘Let us make man in our image and after our likeness’”. This is an expression that is used of man’s creation alone in the Bible.

The Christians’ moral duty is to love their neighbors as they love themselves. Christian parents are not exempted from this duty. The responsibility to love must begin with the individual in the home and extend outward to the community and the society. If this maxim of love were to be followed to the letter, people would coexist with one another peacefully and the world would be more secure than it currently is. The existence of vices would be reduced to minimal. For example, there would be no stealing of livestock as is seen among the warring communities of Pokot and Marakwet or the Pokot and Tugen of Kenya. Children and women would experience no harm and rape as we read in the newspaper reports. There would be no destruction of people’s property as experienced in the 2007/2008 post-election in Kenya. The Ten Commandments depict two kinds of relationships; Exodus chapter twenty verses 1-4 show a vertical relationship between human beings and God their heavenly father; verses 6 to 20 focuses on the horizontal relationship between human beings. How man relates horizontally with fellow human beings should be a reflection of this vertical relationship with God.

How does this Christian living touch or affect their children’s lives?

In answer to this question, it should be noted that there is no formula for rearing Godly children. It only requires prayer, great wisdom obtained from the Bible and inculcation of godly values in a meaningful and transparent manner. No parent is perfect for we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3: 23). We make mistakes in the process of parenting. It is through the grace of God that we are able to do what is right and gently overcome our mistakes.

First of all, Christian living impacts on children’s lives when parents purposely make the Word of God their standard in life and in their parenting because God’s Word has rich instructions concerning training of children (Proverbs 22:6). Many children

have given testimonies of the great influences that they have received from their parents.

Secondly, Christian parents need to develop a loving relationship with God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Parents need to understand that they cannot pass to their children what they themselves do not have. The foundation of their marriage and the base of their effective parenting is their love for God, first, as individuals, then as couples in need of Godly parenting. These parents should always be ready to explain the significance of their Christian faith to the children on all occasions, whether day or night (Deut. 6:4-9) and they should be able to take them through the journey of Christian living.

Thirdly, parents need to understand that the greatest problem that children have, like any other human being, is the need for salvation through a relationship in Jesus Christ; Christ died also for children on the cross. The fact that children are born into Christian homes cannot be taken for granted. They need to be guided to think about the new birth in Christ and be led to mature in things Christianity. Christian parents should not assume that church attendance is equal to regeneration in Christ. Recently, a young person was discovered to have been involved in social evils since his second year in high school, yet currently being in university has been the leader of the youth group in his church. His double life has completely been hidden from the parent’s who thought their son was a Christian. Nothing to do with Christianity can be faked. It will somehow come out into the open at the right time.

Fourthly, parents must be committed to the scriptures, consistent in life and on the same page in relating with their children. This relationship must begin when the child is in the womb and increase when they are at tender age into teen age. When our children were young, they knew when we had our personal devotions, hence could not disturb us. If they needed anything, they would whisper and immediately leave. These same children could not sleep at night without us having our family devotions. In addition, today, they have emulated the same principles in their residential areas.

Fifthly, parents must protect their children through teaching the truth to them so that they can recognize falsehood when they come across it through influences in life. Parents must recognize that it is their God given responsibility to protect the minds of and to train their children. This protection and training must be done in family devotions and worship time when the Word is read aloud, explained and applied to everyday life. In addition, the children must be involved in leading these devotions once they know how to read and write.

Sixthly, Christian living affects children's lives when parents make it their duty to bestow blessings on their children daily. Speaking messages of value need to be incorporated into the family life and regular devotional time. This follows the example of Christ in Mark 10:13-16, which calls on parents to take time, tenderly touch the children and speak gently with them. While communication between parent and child is key, there is need to focus on understanding between them.

Seventhly, Christian living touches children's lives when parents train them instead of provoking as Ephesians 6:1-4 warns parents not to do. While this passage commands young children to obey parents, it also expects the teenagers and all other young people to respect their parents. However, if parents are not careful in their own Christian lives, they can easily provoke children to anger through various ways. For example, showing favoritism, discouraging them, neglecting them, being hypocritical about them, degrading them, over disciplining them, not loving them, and trying to make them be what they themselves failed to achieve. Instead of focusing on these negative ways of dealing with children, this passage positively calls on parents to discipline, chasten and instruct their children in acceptable and contextual ways, which continually affirm their love to them.

Finally and still related to the above, parents are to nurture their children to bring about the required life transformation or change. Nurturing infers that parents need to administer discipline, correcting any misbehavior with the ultimate goal of training the children's hearts [16]. There is need to "inspire and fill them with hope and courage"(p.85); rebuke any misbehavior; provide correction where necessary, as this will give insight on instructing within a framework of understanding life.

What biblical justification do Christian parents have for being moral in an immoral society?

In Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 as indicated above, when God guided the Israelites out of Egypt, He commanded them as a community to teach their children all that He had done for them. It was His desire that each generation passes on to the next the commands He had given to them. Each generation is to instill God's Word in the next, to avoid or lessen immorality in society. Parents are not only responsible to their children's lives, but also their standing tall is an assignment from God to impart Godly values and truths into their children's lives.

Secondly, Psalm 127: 3 states that "children are a gift from God and He cares about how they are raised. This raising is accompanied with clear instructions from God, the giver of the gifts. When God gives gifts, he also gives clear instructions about their use as Proverbs 23: 13-14 states.

Ephesians 6: 4 states that parents, with the lead of the fathers, should not "exasperate their children instead they should bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." This passage calls on parents in their authority to act reasonably toward their children, not to label their children or use vulgar language on or around them. The parents' authority should not be irritating. Instead, as Stott [14] states, parents, especially fathers, should be self-controlled, gentle and patient educators of their children. Parents should not embitter or discourage their children either in speech and actions (cf. Col. 3: 21); for a child's personality is delicate. Since children are immature with little or no experience in matters of life, parents should avoid attitudes, which provoke them to resentment and anger. For example, by being harsh, cruel, and playing favorites, and humiliating and suppressing them. Psalms 34: 11 reiterates the importance of children listening to their parents' teaching concerning the fear of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Standing tall for the Christian faith as has been discussed above calls on Christian parents to be vigilant in upholding their Christianity in a decaying world. There is need to seriously examine ones' life in light of God's word and know what we believe in and above all, understand the teachings of the scriptures so as to pass them on to the growing up children in the right manner. Whatever we model before our children, they will grow up believing and holding on to it. There is need also to have a Christian mindset in all aspects of life, be they ethics, morals and worldviews which are alive in secular realms in comparison with the Christian faith. Christian parents should also understand that other social institutions compete with them in inculcating biblical values in their children's lives.

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