



How to Teach Virtue

One of the goals of education in the early days of this country was to instill a sense of virtue in the young. At that time, most Americans were devoutly Christian. Virtually every family owned a Bible and attended a church. So the concern with rearing virtuous young men and women was the subject of many sermons and tracts.

The American Heritage dictionary defines virtue as “moral excellence and righteousness, goodness,” “chastity, especially in a woman.” “Righteousness” and “chastity” are words only heard in church these days. But back in the early days of the Republic they were commonly used, especially in schools where inculcation of virtue was an important part of education.

I found the 1829 edition of an excellent little book on how to teach virtue, originally published in 1815. The author, L.M. Stretch, collected examples of virtuous individuals from the Bible and the classics of ancient Rome and Greece in order to provide dramatic illustrations of the meaning of virtue. The book, [*The Beauties of History; Or, Pictures of Virtue and Vice, Drawn from Real Life; Designed for the Instruction and Entertainment of Youth*](#), was the kind of instructional manual that could be used by a teacher in a school. In those days, private academies were more numerous than common schools. On page 45, the author describes “The Character of a Good Son.” It reads:



The good and dutiful Son is one who honoureth his parents, by paying them the utmost deference and respect; by a reverential awe and veneration of them; a filial affection for their persons, and a tender regard for their safety and preservation; a constant and cheerful attention to their advice, and a ready and implicit obedience to their commands. As he becometh every day more sensible of his obligation to them, he grows more willing and solicitous to repay them. He employs his youth to support their age; his abundance to relieve their wants; his knowledge and strength to supply their infirmities and decay. He is more careful of his character and reputation in the world, because theirs depend upon it. Ever anxious for their welfare, and attentive to their happiness, he endeavours by every method in his power, to prolong their days, so that his own will be long in the land. He rests assured, that God will not only bless obedient children here, but will reward them with the blessing of heaven, where it shall be well with him for ever; where we shall all join; son and father, daughter and mother, wife and husband, servant and master; all the relations and connections of this life, to honour one great parent, protector, lord, and master of us all.

The idea of honoring your parents, of course, is taken from the Ten Commandments, which today cannot be posted or read in a public school. The public schools do not teach children to honor their parents but rather to reject their Biblical values in favor of nihilistic humanism. The only means of education today that could possibly produce the kind of virtuous son described by the writer in 1815 is



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homeschooling, where the connection between child and parent is strong, based on mutual respect and a lifelong attachment based on love and knowledge. When homeschooling parents obey God, their children are likely to do the same.

The public school deliberately turns child against parent, creates a conflict in values, and often leads the child into anti-social behavior. The two sons who dishonored their parents and murdered their fellow students at Columbine were the very opposite of what the author in 1815 wrote of.

In 1815 humanity was just barely entering the mechanical age with the invention of the steam engine. The nation was still largely agricultural in its economy. In its culture, dependence on Biblical truths created a social and moral stability that permitted individual Americans to live and work in harmony with their concepts of virtue.

On the subject of “chastity” the author wrote:

There is no charm in the female sex that can supply the place of virtue. Without innocence, beauty is unlovely, and quality contemptible; good-breeding degenerates into wantonness, and wit into impudence. . . .

Chastity must needs be a divine quality, since even the enemies thereof esteem it, and the most debauched respect them less who yield, than those who hold out. Respect waits upon desire, and neglect follows possession.

The best preservative of female honour is female delicacy; modesty is the handmaid of virtue, appointed to tend, to dress, and serve her: it is, as it were, a kind of armour, which this sex should always bear, both to adorn and to defend them; and when that is laid aside they are neither beautiful nor safe. . . .

In a word, be but truly virtuous, and you will find admirers enough.

There isn't a public school in America where the above words could be spoken by a principal at assembly. Even the word “abstinence” is fought tooth and nail by humanists who believe in sexual freedom. In other words, total and wanton debauchery is the implicit philosophy of sex education in the public schools. That is why they give out condoms to students, and that is why the idea of abstinence is mocked.

Of course, our popular culture encourages wanton sexual behavior through music, movies, pornography on the Internet, and Hollywood's anti-Biblical morality. Young women today dress in anything but modest clothing. Their magazines stress the need to look sexually inviting, with ads for shampoos, cosmetics, and scanty dress that encourage them to remake themselves so that they will be sexually attractive to the opposite sex. No restraint of any kind is expressed in their pages. And certainly parental restraint is a thing of the past dark ages. The “New Morality,” which has been preached by *Seventeen* magazine since the 1970s or earlier, is the moral relativism of humanism that pervades public education and the popular media. Chastity is considered an ancient word that has no relevance in our advanced, computerized civilization. Yet, there can be no virtuous female without chastity.

For example, the April 2012 issue of *Seventeen* has its usual article on birth control methods. It advises its impressionable readers in its typical big-sister mode: “Whether you're having sex, just thinking about it, or pretty sure you want to wait, this info will help (and surprise!) you. Birth control methods are like jeans: You may need to try a few on before finding a perfect fit.”

Back in the '70s, most girls wanted to get married. Today they just want to have sex. The result is that *Seventeen* estimates that 750,000 teenagers will become pregnant in 2012. In fact, May is the National



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Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month. It's almost as if the magazine was published by Planned Parenthood. Teenage girls are just consumers being urged by slick ads to shop 'til they drop. The May issue has such brain-enhancing articles as: "The Perfect Prom," "Get Flat Abs," "Party Moves Guys Can't Resist," "I Was a Teen Bride," and "I was Paralyzed by a Drunk Driver." Plus vapid interviews with teenage idols. It would appear, from scanning this widely circulated periodical, that most American teenage girls never use their brains for anything but choosing the color of their nail polish.

Even their vocabulary has been reduced to email chat. Everything is cute, fun, cool, or hot. *Teen Vogue* advises its readers: "Girls always find something wrong with their bodies, but you have to just accept it and work with what you've got." That's all that matters: being attractive to guys who have as much respect for such girls as they do for the local stripper.

The question is: can a girl find real happiness without virtue? Virtue requires respecting oneself and expecting to find a young man who prizes virtue. You can only find such individuals among practicing Christians, faithful Jews, and homeschoolers. Teenage girls who read the Bible and belong to Bible study groups obvious know the difference between virtue and vice.

Back in October 1971, 41 years ago, *Seventeen* advised its readers: "In this confusing era of the New Morality every girl must ultimately make up her own mind about what value she's going to place on sexual intimacy. Outside the church, there is no single, dominating moral code to set guidelines. Thus every girl has to make up own mind and work out her own standards."

An astounding admission: outside the church there is no moral code. In other words, outside the Bible there is only moral anarchy or moral nihilism. And therefore, each teenage girl must become a moral philosopher without the help of any adult.

The homeschool movement is doing a great deal to fill this moral vacuum. That's why it is growing. When the average American realizes that there is a need for moral guidance and that its only source is the God of the Bible, life for the teenage girl will once more become rational and purposeful. They will begin to realize that their brains are more important than their abs.



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