

The Power of Apologetics

Helping Your Children Handle Their Doubts



Chap Bettis

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Chap Bettis

www.theapollosproject.com

Please email any corrections, typos, grammatical, and style suggestions to chap@chaphettis.com.

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Contents

Preface	3
Doubting the Truthfulness of Christianity	4
Your Child Will Have Doubts	5
Doubts at a Young Age	6
What is Your Strategy?.....	7
Jesus Prepares His Disciples	8
Research and Inoculation	9
Inoculating To Prevent the Change of Mind.....	11
Applying to Our Children	12
The Power of Apologetics.....	13
Vital Questions To Be Answered.....	14
How Can We Speak to Their Doubts?	15
More Systematic and Comprehensive.....	15
Practical Suggestions	17
Doubting the Goodness of Christianity	18
Solomon Inoculated His Son	19
The Nature of Temptation.....	20
Issues to Anticipate and Equip.....	21
Doubting the Goodness of Purity.....	21
Doubting God's Commands for Singleness and Marriage ..	22
Conclusion	25

Preface

This short booklet is part of a larger work aimed at equipping parents to pass on their faith to their children. Statistics indicate that up to 7 out of 10 young people growing up in a Christian home will not follow Jesus as adults. This is unacceptable. These short booklets seek to identify eight biblical factors that contribute to a successful hand off of the gospel from one generation to another. These factors include:

1. The Power of Example
2. The Power of Prayer
3. The Power of the Word
4. The Power of Communication
5. The Power of the Gospel
6. The Power of Apologetics
7. The Power of Purpose
8. The Power of Friends

It is my prayer that this little booklet can assist you in passing on your faith to your children. For more booklets, visit www.theapollosproject.com or contact me at chap@chapbettis.com.

Chapter 1

Doubting the Truthfulness of Christianity

I still remember sitting in my church sanctuary as a young person. Members of the church were singing hymns. And as I sang a familiar song, my mind wandered. "How do we know that God really exists? How do we know we are not just singing to an empty room?" By my senior year in high school, I was honoring the Lord with my heart, but my head was filled with questions.

A year earlier there was that Sunday School lesson where the text said, "Some people believe that Jesus didn't really die on the cross but merely passed out. Isn't that silly?" "No," I thought to myself. "I'm willing to be persuaded as to why it is silly but it is not silly on the surface."

In addition, as I had grown older and become aware of adult interactions, I started observing hypocrisy in my church. Some people seemed sincere. For others, this was just a religious social club. And at times, they were a religious social club behaving badly. Maybe it was the two pastors they asked to resign for trivial reasons. I asked myself, "Why are some 'Christian' people acting so badly, and

other non-Christian people I know are acting better. If Jesus really makes a difference in people's lives, shouldn't they be different?" By the time I graduated from high school my faith was wavering.

Your Child Will Have Doubts

I was not the first Christian who grew up in a Christian home to wrestle with doubt. Nor will I be the last. Paul seems to reference such a time for Timothy when he says, "*As for you, continue what you have learned and have become convinced of.*" (2 Timothy 3:14) Timothy, who grew up in a Christian home, learned the faith from his mother and grandmother. But in this passage there is something else. Timothy became convinced of his faith. Timothy's walk seemed to have two stages: a learning time and a time of becoming convinced. Is there in this passage, perhaps, the suggestion of a time of questioning during which Timothy's faith became an adult faith?

Many children who grow up in Christian homes make sincere professions of faith at a young age. But sometime in their teen or college years, they begin asking themselves "Do I really believe this?" "Is this really true?" "Am I going to follow the Lord on my own, or am I going to reject Christianity?" That twofold pattern aptly describes my own experience as well as a number of second-generation Christians with whom I have talked. As children, we made true professions of faith. But later on, in the high school or college years, there was a time when the faith became our own. We were not following because we had to. We were following because we were convinced.

For me, that time of convincing was in college. When I went to college my attitude would have been one open to Jesus but closed to the church. I had seen too much hypocrisy! But in college, I eagerly devoured books like *Know Why You Believe, More Than a Carpenter*, and *Who Moved the Stone?* In fact, my greatest education was taking place outside of the classroom. These books helped give me answers to the nagging questions I had.

It is common for those growing up in a Christian home to have a time of wrestling with doubts. Many have questions like:

How do I know there is a God?

How do I know that Jesus really existed and is not just a made up legend?

Why do Christians act so sinfully at times and other people who are not Christian don't seem to act that way?

Is there really only one way to heaven? Are all those sincere Hindus and Muslims really wrong?

Will a loving God send nice people to hell?

Tom Bisset, in his book, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, argues that the number one reason children walk away from their faith is that they have troubling, unanswered questions.

Doubts are more likely to plague those who grow up in a Christian home because they have never had an adult conversion experience. The Christian life is the only life they have ever known. Because they have not experienced a powerful conversion from the emptiness of sin, they are left to wonder if Christianity is really true.

In addition, while they have had a childlike faith, now they are growing and maturing, becoming adults in their own right. They are putting away childish things. The question is, "Will they also put away their childhood faith?" Ask any adult who grew up in a Christian home and the overwhelming majority will describe a time they experienced serious doubts.

Doubts at a Young Age

When are our children having these doubts? Is it during college? High school? No, our children are having these doubts at an even earlier age. One study found that 40% of those who left the church had their first questions in middle school, 43% in high school and the

rest in college.¹ What that means is that doubts are stalking 40% of our children when they are 12 or 13. For many, college was not the *cause* of walking away but merely the *chance* to walk away. For almost half of the students, the uncertainty had started in middle school!

Perhaps most disturbing is that many children will not communicate those thoughts with us. I know I did not. Junior high and high school students are questioning even while they are sitting in the pews. Even while they participate in our church services and youth programs, doubts are plaguing them like a low-level fever. They are annoying, slightly debilitating, but not enough to bring to the surface. Left alone, for many children, this low-level fever can eventually turn into a raging illness that overwhelms their spiritual defenses.

The young people in our homes and sitting beside us in church need to know the reasons for the faith. And they need to know them sooner rather than later.

What is Your Strategy?

Given that your child will have doubts and that they will not communicate them to you, and those thoughts can be devastating to their faith, the question is: "How will you prepare your children to handle those doubts?"

Unfortunately, some families and churches discourage expressing doubt. Any young person (or adult) who asks questions is told, "Just accept it on faith," or "Don't ask questions like that."

Many Christians parents are afraid to admit that their children will have questions or that they, themselves, have doubts. Are we worried that there are no answers to these questions? Don't we know that we are to be merciful to those who doubt (Jude 1:22)? Are we afraid that if we push too hard, Christianity will fall like a house of straw? Rest assured, Christianity cannot be blown down by the

¹ Ken Ham and Britt Beamer, *Already Gone* (Green Forest, AZ; Master Books, 2009), p. 32.

wolves. No, Christianity is like a house of bricks that has stood strong for 2000 years no matter who attempts to tear it down.

Peter instructs us all to "always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have," (1 Peter 3:15-16). There is no way we can give an answer unless there are answers. Rest assured, there are solutions to all the questions your children (and you) might have. There really is no new question.

A healthy home and a healthy church will stand confidently expecting questions. Asking questions is part of the maturing process. When questions come up, we communicate a quiet confidence that we can find the answers. Even more, we will express excitement that our children are thoughtful enough to even ask those hard questions. Rather than being feared, this time of questioning is to be expected. It reveals that the child is growing into an adult (Luke 2:52, 1 Corinthians 13:11).

But can we do more? Must we react only? Or can we proactively prepare them for doubts? How much better to prepare than repair! There is hope. There is a way that we can prepare our children to withstand the attacks that come from within and without. Let's learn from the master teacher.

Jesus Prepares His Disciples

For three years, Jesus had been working with his followers, training and teaching them. However, he would be leaving them soon. He knew his disciples did not realize what awaited them. Their hopes for an earthly kingdom would be devastated by his coming death. They would be grief-struck and leaderless. Their heads would be filled with doubt. Satan would attack mercilessly. Furthermore, the twelve were naive to the human opposition that awaited them.

Jesus strategy was simple. See if you can pick it out from the following selection of verses which record Jesus' words to his disciples days before he died:

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers (Luke 22:31-33)

Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of war, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end will come... So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time (Mark 13:5-7, 23).

All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you (John 16:1-3).

I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe (John 14:29).

Did you pick out the strategy? Jesus explicitly forewarned his disciples about trials that will come their way. He described to them specific situations they would face and specific things that people would say. All these warnings helped keep them from being overwhelmed by these confusing thoughts and circumstances. Jesus demonstrated his ability as a shepherd and strengthened them for the coming trial by accurately describing it ahead of time and by equipping them as to how to think.

Research and Inoculation

If we find this strategy in the Bible, we would expect the research of social psychology to find the same thing. Yale psychologist William McGuire spent his career studying how people change and resist changing ideas. His findings have major implication for Christian parents.²

² Em Griffin, *The Mind Changers: The Art of Christian Persuasion* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1987), p.169-192. My thanks to Jeff Myers for pointing this research out to me.

To start his experiment, McGuire needed to find an idea that everyone believed to be true. He decided what he was looking for was a "cultural truism." McGuire was looking for an idea that everyone knew was true and no one even considered to be untrue. He settled on the area of brushing of our teeth. Thanks to the American Dental Association, everyone in our country knows that brushing your teeth twice a day is good for you. Whether you actually brush your teeth that amount is another question. But we all believe it to be beneficial.

In the experiments, McGuire sought to change the beliefs of his subjects. He wanted to persuade them that brushing their teeth was actually bad for them. To accomplish this goal he would present them with messages that stated the opposite of their belief. All their lives they had been taught that brushing their teeth was a beneficial thing to do. Now, for the first time, they would be hearing arguments *against* brushing their teeth.

No Preparation. For his first group of students, McGuire simply presented the anti-brushing message. As he expected, they easily shifted from a pro-brushing point of view to one that was persuaded of the dangers. This established McGuire's belief that ideas that are generally endorsed but rarely attacked can be easily changed when assailed from the outside. Ideas that seemed quite strong were in fact quite susceptible to change.

So then the questions must be asked, "How to prevent this change? How could his subjects be helped to hold on to the view that brushing is good?"

Belief Boost. For his second group, McGuire sought to prepare the students by providing them with lots of information on the benefits of tooth brushing. In other words, they were given a **belief boost**. They already believed that tooth brushing was good for them. Now, before they had this information attacked, they were encouraged in this belief.

The results were surprising. Though strongly pro-brushing after the boost, this group had a dramatic opinion swing. After the

message attack, they moved strongly into the anti-brushing camp. Surprisingly, this group ended up more antagonistic to their original belief than the group that had no preparation! The belief boost had served to create what McGuire called a "paper tiger" effect. While looking ferocious on the outside, the "tiger" was made out of paper and easily destroyed.

Inoculating To Prevent the Change of Mind

A Warning. McGuire tried a different strategy for his third group of subjects. Before they were exposed to the anti-brushing message, he gave them a warning that they were going to be exposed to persuasive arguments against their belief. He did not deal with any of the content they would hear, he only warned them that an attack was coming. McGuire found that even though some of the subjects shifted their attitude, the warning decreased the amount of shift. By warning them ahead of time, they were less susceptible to the attack.

A Warning + Arguments Used. For his fourth group, McGuire began the inoculation process in earnest. For this set of students he gave a warning as before. In addition, he provided some of the arguments that the opponent would use to attack the regular brushing of teeth. He did not give them all the information but merely sought to give them a few of the arguments beforehand. This time the reaction of his subjects was even more heartening. Predicting the arguments as well as the warning decreased the attitude shift. But there was a small problem. McGuire realized that the students were not proficient enough to come up with counter-arguments on their own. Providing arguments helped decrease susceptibility but it did not completely equip the students to fight back.

A Warning + Arguments Used + Answers. McGuire's next group was given a warning that an attack was coming, some of the arguments that would be used *and* the answers to those arguments. With this group, McGuire would coach them on how to respond. As one who knew more about the research on dental hygiene, he could

equip them with data that the opponents were ignoring or hiding. The results from this fifth group were especially encouraging. There was very little shift in attitude. But there still was a small shift. McGuire wondered if there was a way to prevent even that shift.

A Warning + Arguments Used + Partial Answers. For his sixth group, McGuire repeated his warning, and presented the arguments that would be used in trying to persuade his subjects. But this time he did not give them all the answers. In fact, he reasoned that by giving his subjects the answers, he was actually robbing them of requiring the effort to really own the answers. While group five had the answers, they had not had to work very hard for them. Having to work to articulate the answers increased the effectiveness of the inoculation.

Applying to Our Children

McGuire's research reveals that a person in a "germ-free" environment may appear healthy but, in fact, they may be highly vulnerable to hostile ideas. Pre-exposing a person to a weakened form of the hostile ideas can actually stimulate him to begin developing a defense.

The implications for Christian parents are obvious. We dare not send our children into a hostile world without preparation for the attack coming to them. Why are we surprised when they have a heart shift? The truthfulness of Scripture, the truthfulness of the creation account as recorded in the Bible, or the beauty of saving sexual involvement until marriage, are all under attack in our society. So many times we give our children no preparation that an attack is coming. Then they encounter kind people who give them anti-Biblical, persuasive arguments. We should not be shocked when they radically change their views. We have told them *what to believe* but not *why to believe*.

The answer to this problem is not to merely assert the positive truth we hope they will hold onto. It is not enough to say, "Just

believe because the Bible says so." We may actually be setting them up for a major shift and possibly even failure.

It is actually most helpful to proactively give our children warnings about the issues they will face in the future. But we dare not leave them there. At the appropriate time we need to introduce some of the arguments against the faith that they will hear. But it is not enough to expose them to the arguments they will hear. We must give them the answers. By recognizing that they will have doubts or be bombarded with anti-Christian media messages, we build trust and confidence. Jesus' disciples had their faith *built* when their Jewish leaders rejected Jesus because *Jesus had predicted it*.

Lastly, we provide quality answers and reasons to those arguments. It may take research on our part. Or we may go and learn some of those counterarguments together. But we must realize that our children need answers and we should actively search for them. After teaching the truth we want them to hold onto, it will be helpful if we actually introduce some of the other arguments they will face. And the best way of doing this is to actually force them to articulate the answers.

The Power of Apologetics

What we are actually talking about is apologetics. Apologetics does not mean apologizing! No, the word apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia* which is often translated defense. Peter used the word when he commands believers, "always being prepared to make a defense (apologia) to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you," (1 Peter 3:15 ESV). Paul used the same word about his ministry quite a bit (see Acts 19:33, 22:1, 24:10, Philippians 1:7, 1:18). Even as Paul was speaking the gospel, he was also defending it with rational arguments.

Our young people growing up in Christian homes need to be given the reasons for our faith. Sunday after Sunday they are being taught what to believe. But no one is teaching them why it is true. As in our previous illustration, they are being told over and over that

brushing their teeth is good. They are never being told why it is good. They are not being presented with questions that skeptics use. Nor are they being asked to articulate those reasons back. No wonder they fall away in college like lemmings over a cliff.

Vital Questions To Be Answered

Based on my experience growing up in a Christian home and the teaching I have done, I believe young people need the answers to these intellectual questions.

1. How do we know that Jesus really existed in history? Is there any proof besides the Bible?
2. How do we know what Jesus really said and did? Can we trust the gospels? Can we trust the Bible? Wasn't the Bible written and put together long after Jesus died?
3. How do we know that Jesus is the only way? How can so many good people be wrong?
4. Was Jesus really God or did his followers thrust that upon him?
5. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? How do we know for sure? Why does it matter?
6. How do we know that God exists? Are there better arguments for God or for atheism?
7. How can a good God allow suffering?
8. How can a loving God send people to hell?
9. Why do Christians oppose homosexuality?
10. Why are there good people who aren't Christians and bad people who say they are?

All these questions have been asked before. There really is no new question. We can and should proactively find answers for our children. They are having these questions already. We will not harm them by bringing them up.

How Can We Speak to Their Doubts?

How might this actually work? How do I actually prepare them to live in a germ-filled world? Let's start by restating the inoculation principles we learned earlier. We want to:

1. Warn them of issues they will face
2. Give them biblical answers to those issues.
3. Solicit a response.

In some cases a short conversation can work well. I have communicated it to my children this way,

"At some point in your walk with God, you may have some doubts. After all we can't see Him. And we live in a world that is hostile to Him. When that happens, let's talk about it. There are answers out there. Don't let those doubts nag on you. We will find the answers together."

I am hoping that this response communicates several things: 1. my wisdom about a normal process of life, 2. my confidence that there are answers and 3. my desire to have an open, communicative relationship. Just this one little conversation warns about the likelihood of doubts and then tells them how to respond when this occurs. Behind this all is a quiet confidence that this is a normal part of growing up. I want to show them a relaxed confidence as well as my own vigilance. This sentence is an example of a simple, quick, informal way to start the inoculation process.

More Systematic and Comprehensive

Even better is more systematic approach. There is great value in discussing these issues in a comprehensive way. As a parent, you might want to read a book together. *Know Why You Believe More Than a Carpenter*, and *The Case for Christ* are just a few of the readable, comprehensive presentations on the reasons for our faith. Audio presentations for listening in the car are also excellent. Check out www.theapollosproject.com/answers for more resources.

Though passing on the faith cannot be transferred to others, in some cases parts can be delegated. This is one area where it is easy to join together with a group of parents in your church and watch video presentations such as *The Truth Project*. But don't just send your child! You must go also, to learn and to discuss later. The influence on your children is not just in the presentation but in the later discussions with you.

Because I so believe in the power of apologetics, for several years I have taught a class on doctrine and apologetics to high school students. This class (and other formal resources) provide a comprehensive and safe environment to bring up the arguments the young people encounter in the media, among their friends, and in their hearts. It also allows us to proactively inoculate them to the false ideas they will hear in the future.

The testimonies I receive back demonstrate the hidden doubt that is happening and the power of well-taught doctrine and apologetics.

"I've been a Christian since age 11. Over the past couple of years I had begun to doubt my faith in a couple of areas. Questions like, "Is there really only one way to God?" and "Is there even proof of God's existence?" had begun to creep into my mind. This class answered all my questions."

"This class has really grounded my faith. Before, I believed the Bible, but it was along the lines of 'The Bible says it's true, so it must be true.' I had faith but not understanding or knowledge. Also, because my knowledge was in reality fluff, I've always dreaded the thought of witnessing."

"This class had to be one of the best spiritual experiences I have ever had. Previously, I had hundreds of questions that kept eating away at me. After the class most of those questions were answered."

Your children are having these same questions that are "creeping into their minds" and "eating away at" them. Spend the money and the time to invest in reading a book together or sign them up for a formal apologetics class. By explaining the different worldviews in a

safe environment and helping to see how Christianity refutes them, we are well down the road in helping our children be taken captive to vain philosophies (Colossians 2:8).

Practical Suggestions

1. Ask yourself, "What is my attitude toward doubt? Do I have a relaxed confidence? Do I understand the power of inoculation? Am I expecting and preparing for doubts?"
2. Ask age appropriate questions that open up the lines of communication. "Sometimes kids who grow up in Christians homes have doubts. Do you ever have any? If you do, let's talk. It's a very normal process of growing in your faith.
3. You could read a book together like *Know Why You Believe* or *More Than a Carpenter*.
4. You could gather the young people in your church and watch a video resource like *The Truth Project*.
5. You could send them to a camp which specializes in teaching a Christian worldview training like Worldview Academy or Summit Ministries.
6. You could subscribe to blogs like theapollosproject.com that highlight material that gives reasons for the faith and the practical benefits of God's holiness.

Chapter 2

Doubting the Goodness of Christianity

Intellectual doubts are not the only winds that will buffet our children. They, like their parents, will also be tempted to doubt the goodness of the commands of Jesus. I still remember the teenage temptations that pounded at my soul. I held my ground as best I could. But in the back of my mind were these gnawing thoughts, "Is following Jesus really the good way? Others seem to be ignoring his commands and having a good time with no consequences." Young people who grow up in a Christian home are often torn between God's restrictive ethical teaching and gnawing doubts that God is withholding something good from them.

This strategy of doubting the goodness of God is not new. When Satan tempted Eve in the garden, his attack was on the goodness of God. "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil," (Genesis 3:4-5). Satan gave a direct lie (you will not die), followed by the

accusation that God was withholding something good from them (you will be like God). Sound familiar? Most temptations our teens are facing have this underlying message: 1. you will not die (there will be no consequences) and 2. God is holding back something good from you.

Here again is a place for giving a defense of our faith. Only this time, the defense is not for the evidence for the faith itself. In this case the defense is for the wisdom and ultimate blessing of living the Christian life. How do we provide this defense? Again, Scripture gives us guidance.

Solomon Inoculated His Son

Once again, we look to master teachers from the Bible who will help us. In particular, we can observe how Solomon used the method of inoculation with his son. The forewarning of Solomon was not about denying the faith but for a different kind of danger, the danger of impurity. A quick read through Proverbs 5-8 demonstrates Solomon's strategy. First, he forewarned his son that he *will* face sexual temptation. He did not wait and react. Second, Solomon provided illustrations of the nature of the temptation he would face. He proactively brought up different real-life scenarios his son might face. Third, Solomon provided arguments against those temptations by showing what the consequences for sin would be. In practicing this inoculation, Solomon demonstrated his wisdom of living in the world and instructed his son who was naive to the deception of sin.

While Solomon warned his children of the pain of not following God's ways, the writer of Psalm 112 wanted to instruct children in the blessedness of following God's ways. This Psalm is an acrostic, each line beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to aid memorization by young minds. The subject? The blessedness of the man of God. Here the writer wanted his listeners to know the goodness of following God.

Jesus, our master teacher, succinctly taught this principle to his disciples. "The thief (Satan) comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I

have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (abundantly)," (John 10:10). In this important passage, Jesus proactively assured his disciples that while following him may be difficult, it is good. He also taught them that Satan's temptation to sin, while appearing attractive, leads only to destruction.

The Nature of Temptation

Because our children are born naive (Proverbs 1:20), they are often deceived by the nature of sin. They see only the pleasure that sin offers; they do not see the consequences. Sin does have pleasure for a season. As parents, we are foolish to not realize that this is true. Let me repeat that again. Sin has real pleasure (Proverbs 20:17, Hebrews 11:24-25). The world, while highlighting that pleasure, hides the consequences of sin. Our job as parents is to unmask the deceptiveness of sin and make clear how those who mock God turn out.

Jesus said that those who put his words into practice are building a house that will withstand the storms (Matthew 7:24-27). Those who do not put his words into practice are building on the sand. Their life will not withstand the storms. Unfortunately, the problem is that *there is often a time lag between the building of the houses and the storms!* The one who built his house further back from the beach can look enviously at one who built right on the beach. But wait until the hurricane comes! On the beaches of Cape Cod, Massachusetts stand some beautiful houses at the top of thirty foot bluffs. Their beautiful view and location provoke envy until we learn that the Cape bluffs are eroding at a rate of three feet a year! The "foolish" homeowner has some serious consequences coming soon!

Similarly, our children may look enviously at those who are ignoring God's commands. Our job is to point out to our children all those lives that have crashed. We can be sure that God will not be mocked. A man will harvest what he plants (Galatians 6:7-9). It will just take some time.

Issues to Anticipate and Equip

Because of their age and our culture, several issues seem to be particular struggles for our young men and women::

The temptation of pornography.

The temptation of premarital sex.

The temptation to dismiss the value of singleness.

The temptation to marry a non-Christian.

The temptation to live together before marriage.

The temptation to see my walk with the Lord as personal, thus dismissing my need of and duty to the local church.

Remember our proven strategy is to: 1. forewarn about the arguments they will hear in their culture 2. equip them to with the biblical position 3. solicit a response as to the argument to use. The best time to deal with these is before the issue comes up. Let's take these one at a time.

Doubting the Goodness of Purity

A wise parent will realize the enormous sexual pressure on our children. For my boys, I have forewarned that they will, at some point, come across some inappropriate material. The question is, "What will they do at that point?" It is not a matter of if, but when. I might say something like this, "One day you might come across something inappropriate on the Internet. You will be tempted to look at it, rather than click away. Tell me what you think you should do." This method warns them of the danger, tells them what they will be tempted to think or do and then elicits a response as to what they think they should do. It provides all three elements: the warning, the attack they will feel, and elicits an active response in them.

In addition, as my children become older, they will come in contact with those who are participating in premarital sex. Recent studies proclaim the uptick in numbers of teens keeping themselves pure. Unfortunately, the study completely misses the 80% of older

teens have already been sexually active. Life has not always been this way. One prominent study found that for women born between 1933 and 1942, 93 percent had their first union with a man when they were married. Over a half-century later, times have certainly changed, and not for the better! We truly are raising our children in an environment hostile to the Christian faith!

From our children's perspective, there seem to be no temporal consequences to this sin, only pleasure. They will be tempted to doubt the goodness of God's commands. God and their parents seem to be keeping something from them that is fun. Yet God in his wisdom has said that this gift needs to have the protection of the marriage covenant surrounding it. Our children should be told the different, hidden consequences of violating God's moral framework.

As just one example, the emotional consequences of casual sex are hollowing out the souls of the girls around us. In the book *Unprotected*, an anonymous campus physician writes about the emotional consequences of casual sex in the souls of the girls on campus. He writes, "My patients were hurting, they looked to me and what could I do?" These women are not hurting from eating disorders or drug abuse. No, two hundred pages are filled with stories of young girls who are miserable because of their "sexual choices."

In age appropriate ways, we need to anticipate and inoculate our children against the underlying message of our sexually saturated culture. God, the manufacturer, knows what he is doing when he limits sexual activity to the context of marriage. Trust God, there will be consequences to the sin. Maybe now. Maybe later.

Doubting God's Commands for Singleness and Marriage

Most parents dream of the day their child will get married. Nothing can make a grown man choke up more easily than the thought of walking his little girl down the aisle. In addition, our culture pushes young people to pair up. Just ask any single person how they feel on Valentine's Day. As a result, as our children move

into the teen years, they may begin to have a natural longing for companionship. How will we coach our children to think biblically?

Marriage can be a great blessing and a great temptation. Specifically, let's think about several different biblical standards that we need to mention to our older children.

1. You may be called to singleness. In *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, Tom Bisset states that wanting to get married but not finding a mate was one reason that young people walked away from their faith. Could it be that these children left because we never mentioned the possibility that they might be called to singleness? Could it be that the church and many parents do not have a robust understanding of singleness?

Our Lord was single as was the most effective Christian of his day, Paul. Our children must realize that God calls everyone to be single for a part of their lives. For some people, God's call is to singleness for the whole life (Matthew 9:12). Singleness is a privilege and a great opportunity for service (1 Corinthians 7:7). If God does not provide them with a Christian mate, they should not be tempted to walk away from their faith because of a desire to be married. And with Christian girls outnumbering Christian guys 3 to 2, there is a good possibility that some of our girls will remain single. A wise parent will ask his or her children, "If God calls you to singleness, are you ready to follow him? Some young people have walked away from their faith because they really wanted to be married. How do you think you would handle that?" In addition to this conversation, I need to ask myself, "If God calls my child to prolonged singleness, am I ready to celebrate that as a glorious calling?"

2. You can only marry another believer. Scripture is clear that God's wise standard is that a follower of Jesus may only marry another follower of him (2 Corinthians 6:14ff, 1 Corinthians 7:29). As a pastor, I cannot tell you the pain that I have seen by having a believer unequally yoked with an unbeliever! The two people have two masters. How can they strive together as one? As parents, we need to make this biblical standard clear early and often. It truly is in

their best temporal and eternal interests. Sharon and I have tried to mention this biblical standard to our children early on. Again, we want to mention what God says and why he says it.

3. If God hasn't called you to singleness, then get married.

The principle of inoculating our children teaches us to proactively bring up thoughts they will encounter in the world and actively deal with them. Since the 1960s, marriage has been under assault. Today we can see that the anti-marriage message has won among non-Christians. Living together before marriage is the accepted norm. How will we prepare our children to handle this? We can tell them that it violates God's word. But it is also helpful to show them that there are negative effects in this life of disobeying God. God's word is for our best. Since sin has consequences, we should expect that even non-Christians who violate God's law experience some negative consequences.

Indeed there are consequences. Michael McManus helps us here, "First, about 45 percent of those who begin cohabiting, do not marry. Those who undergo "premarital divorce" often discover it is as painful as the real thing. Another 5-10 percent continue living together and do not marry. These two trends are the major reason the marriage rate has plunged 50 percent since 1970. Couples who cohabit are likely to find that it is a paltry substitute for the real thing, marriage. Of the 45 percent or so who do marry after living together, they are 50 percent more likely to divorce than those who remained separate before the wedding."³

Though my children may not communicate it, Satan will buffet them with doubts about the goodness of God's commands. Like Solomon, I desire to anticipate and inoculate my children to those temptations they will sense. I want to confidently show them the eventual peril of ignoring God's ways and the blessedness of obeying him. He truly does have my best in mind!

³ Michal McManus, *Living Together: Myths, Risks and Answers* (New York, NY Howard Books, 2008).

Conclusion

A majestic 17th-century royal warship sits in a popular museum in Stockholm, Sweden--a vessel that, sadly, sank on the day it entered the water. The *Vasa* was built for King Gustavus Adolphus in 1628. On August 10th of that year, the ship set sail on her maiden voyage from the Royal Castle. After leaving the harbor, she soon came into open waters and the wind increased sharply. A few strong gusts made her list so dramatically that water began to pour in through the lower gun ports. The crew made frantic attempts to save her but nothing could be done. After traveling less than a nautical mile, the warship built for the king himself had sunk on her maiden voyage. Fifty sailors lost their lives. An investigation revealed the cause: insufficient ballast. She had been designed without sufficient ballast to steady her in the open seas.

I see in the *Vasa* a picture of our discipleship. Too many of our children are like the *Vasa*: top heavy and flying beautiful sails but in the hull there is insufficient ballast.

Your child will face a time of doubts and questions. Don't be surprised by it any more than you are surprised by their body changing from a child to an adult. This time when they are becoming convinced may involve questions of truth or practice. As a parent, I want to actively inoculate them with reasons why Christianity is objectively true. And I want to inoculate them with reasons why following Jesus and his commands leads to the good life. I want to

keep the lines of communication open so they can voice any questions to me. In fact, I want to proactively suggest that such a time may come.

The wise and godly parents I have observed over the years, have numerous conversations with their children as they seek to warn them about what they will face, preview what will come their way, and equip them with biblical answers. They do not want to isolate them, they want to equip them. May that be true of us!

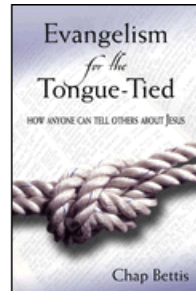
My prayer for my children and your children echoes Jesus' prayer for his disciples on that final night: *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.. Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth. As you have sent them into the world, I have sent them into the world. (John 17:15, 17, 18).*

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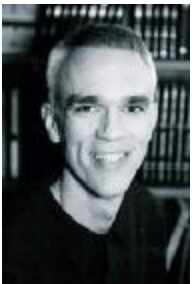
Do you understand the doubts your children are having?

Do you understand how deadly those doubts can be?

Whether we teach young Christians truth or not, the devil will be sure to teach them error. They will hear of it somehow, even if they are watched by the most careful guardians. -- Charles Spurgeon

In this little booklet you will discover:

- * The two types of doubts your children will have
- * How Jesus prepared his disciples for their coming doubts
- * How Solomon prepared his son to handle temptation
- * The scientific research that can equip your children for standing strong in a hostile world
- * The questions that stalk our children
- * Suggested resources to equip the parent to handle this vital area



Chap Bettis serves as teaching pastor of New Covenant Christian Fellowship in Attleboro, Massachusetts. He is also founder and director of *The Apollos Project*, a ministry dedicated to helping parents pass on their faith to their children. In addition, he has authored *Evangelism for the Tongue Tied*. Chap and his wife Sharon, have four children: Kara, Chapman, Rebekah and Nate. He can be reached at www.chapbettis.com.