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Should Parents Honor a 'Zone of Privacy' For Their Children?

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These days, parenting books and experts often argue that parents should largely leave their children alone — allowing them to forge their own way, choose their own path, and find their own 'truth.' As a matter of fact, this is the reigning orthodoxy of the parental advice industry.

This advice is extended even to matters of ultimate meaning and the truth of the Gospel. Parents are often encouraged to avoid any intrusion into the spiritual and moral lives of their children, especially as they grow older. Tragically, many Christian parents seem to be buying this line of argument. I was recently shocked and saddened to hear a very confused Christian parent say this: "I don't want my son to be a Christian simply because I am." One cannot become a Christian by proxy, and having Christian parents is no guarantee of salvation; but Christian parents must understand their duty to teach their children the truths of the Christian faith, to explain and demonstrate the power of the Gospel, and to raise children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

A good antidote to modern confusion is found in this excerpt from the writings of Robert L. Dabney, one of the most significant evangelical theologians of the nineteenth century. Dabney's message is needed now as perhaps never before: *The parent has power to invade this sacred liberty of (the child's) soul. It is made both his privilege and his duty to impose the principles and the creed which he has sincerely adopted as the truth for himself upon the spirit of the child. Some men, it is known, vainly prate of the supposed obligation to leave the minds of their children independent and "unbiased" until they are mature enough to choose for themselves. But a moment's thought shows this unlawful and impossible.... One thing is certain, this young and plastic soul will take impress from somewhere—if not from the appointed and heaven-ordained hand of his parent, then from some other irresponsible hand, of man or evil angel. One might as well speak of immersing an open vessel in the ocean and having it remain empty as of having a youthful soul to grow up in society "unbiased," until it is qualified to elect its own creed most wisely.*

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