Cyber-Age Parenting

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission recently published a bulletin insert entitled "Smart phones, Tablets, and Christian Parenting,"[1] authored by Dr. Russell Moore, president of the Commission.

As Dr. Moore notes, digital technology continues its encroachment into every aspect of our lives. He observes that technology comes with "powerful temptations" other generations have never faced and that too many parents assume the danger to their children from the cyber-world is "limited." Dr. Moore disavows that and encourages parents to rear their children "to see technology as a tool to be used for kingdom priorities," while admonishing parents to be "more vigilant and attentive."

Parents definitely need to be alert regarding technology and their children. Satan is eager to use the digital world to destroy your son or daughter. With that understanding, here are some practical suggestions to enable parents to be "more vigilant and attentive" in this cyber-crazed age.

- **Love your children and spend quality time with them talking, reading, playing games, etc.** Ensure a home environment where relating to each other is more of a priority than relating to a smart phone, tablet or television screen. This means mom and dad will need to model appropriate uses of technology.

- **Assume that your child is NOT perfectly safe** using a smart phone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer and take steps to ensure, as best you can, that your children are not victimized. This means you must be familiar with the digital devices and the apps your child is using. You are the parent, not a friend. You are supposed to invade your children's cyber privacy—because you love them and want to protect them. Don't make this a battleground, but firmly establish cyber-use rules and enforce them.

- **Discuss and set the rules, *before*** the device is purchased and given to the child. Ban certain apps like SnapChat, Omegle,

Instagram, etc. Check the Internet for information on each app and to learn about other apps to avoid. Remember this is a moving target. Approve every app on your child's phone or tablet.

- **Any technology that a child has access to ought to be in the open** where a parent can see the screen at any moment. Allowing children to be alone in their rooms for hours interacting with technology is a recipe for disaster.

- **All devices should be filtered**, complete with passwords that the children don't have and can't easily get. A survey of the Internet will afford numerous good options. In addition, most phones and tablets, as well as desktops, now have some parental controls built in, as do Internet search engines.

- **Pick up the device from time to time and find out what apps are active**, where your child has been on the Internet, and check all text messages and all instant message apps regularly. Hold your child accountable for following the rules.

- **Set a good example.** Developing a family pledge regarding Internet use is a great idea, with everyone signing and being held accountable, including dad and mom.

- **Talk to your children**. Explain you love them and are seeking to appropriately protect them. Give them God's principles for righteous living, as well as practical safety measures. Talk about the dangers, in age-appropriate ways, and instruct them to never give any identifying information about themselves or where they live to anyone electronically. Discuss how to use technology for good, as Dr. Moore says, for "kingdom priorities." Plan as a family some activities that involve using technology for God—such as Skyping with a missionary or posting a Scripture verse meme on social media.

- Most importantly, **pray regularly with and for your children**. Pray for God to place a hedge about your children to protect them from Satan and His relentless efforts to search them out and destroy them.

In this cyber age, as in every age and in every area, we must build in safeguards to protect the minds, hearts and souls of our children. Doing so is good parenting, not privacy-invading policing. Too much is at stake to do otherwise.

[1]http://erlc.com/resource-library/bulletin-inserts/bulletin-insert-parenting-and-technology (accessed 8/7/17)

About Wisconsin Family Council