



Cannon Blast

Classics

JUST CALL ME “ATTILA THE DAD”

By Bart Cannon

Columnist Teryl Zarnow says that strictness among parents varies according to “style more than substance.” I respect her opinion, but considering the goings-on permitted by some parents nowadays, I don’t agree. So, just call me Attila the Dad.

Attila the Hun became known as “the scourge of God” because of his ruthless and savage approach to conquering kingdoms in the 5th century. I never really considered myself an oppressive tyrant—much less a “scourge.” Neither have I beheaded, bludgeoned, or gutted anyone with a bone-tipped spear. However, establishing and enforcing curfews, limiting telephone, computer, and television privileges, and generally serving as an accountability person could be construed by the post-modern teenage mind as roughly equivalent to Attila’s barbarism.

I’m “mean, unreasonable, unfair, and don’t understand.” My atrocities include levying the loss of two days’ telephone privileges for violation of the telephone curfew. I didn’t intend to be “mean.” I was just concerned for my 14 year-old’s health. After prolonged contact, doesn’t a telephone become fused to the human ear and need to be surgically removed?

Apparently expecting a teenager to sit down with the rest of the family for an evening meal is unreasonable—rather than chatting on the Internet or the telephone until bedtime. It’s also unreasonable to think a teenager should clean up after herself, keep her area neat and actually contribute some elbow grease to cleaning dirty dishes, sweeping the floor, or policing the front yard. Those duties just aren’t fun.

Attila the Dad unfairly requires his kids to keep normal sleeping hours while other teenagers carouse around all hours of the night or talk on the phone past the midnight hour. So what if drive-by shootings usually occur late at night or in the wee hours of the morning. Liberal parents are just more “cool.”

Since I’m old as dirt, I “don’t understand.” On the contrary, I was a teenager for seven years, which means I should know more about being one than either a 14 or 18 year old. Granted, a lot has changed, but some things haven’t changed. In particular, the activity God reserved exclusively for marriage still crosses the minds of young men about as often as in past generations. Raging hormones, the media’s “sex sells” approach, and society’s fixation on pushing kids into romantic involvement at early ages, make me wonder how young guys today can think about anything else.

When I was in high school, the locker room prophets used to say that a boy’s parents only had one male to worry about, whereas a girl’s parents must keep an eye on the entire male population. That’s why having a reputation as Attila the Dad can be advantageous.

Momz and I tenaciously adhere to the timeless principle “bad company corrupts good morals.” We therefore insist on knowing when, where, for how long, with whom and who’s supervising before we

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grant our kids permission to participate in a given activity. "Dad, just trust me" seldom works. Our teens know I'll say, "I trust you, but I trust my decades of experience more."

Considering the challenges facing some parents, our skirmishes seem pretty minor. Momz and I have much for which to be thankful, yet we continually promote high standards of character and conduct and encourage our teens to fulfill their God-given potential.

Richard S. Taylor in *The Disciplined Life* states, "the young person who has built-in habits of regularity and obedience certainly has a head start for effective and efficient living." Further, Taylor predicts "disastrous consequences" when parents fail to teach their children to "adjust to life's realities, create beauty out of ugliness, achieve over obstacles, control self when frustrated, [and] work patiently and perseveringly in the face of difficulties." According to Taylor, such neglect "is a crime against society and a sin against God."

Even though Beth and Melissa are awesome teenagers, they sometimes need to be reminded of the big picture. A recent discussion with Melissa reached an impasse, so I said, "Go get your Bible and read Hebrews 12:10." She read, "For they [our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness." "I made this decision because it 'seemed best' to me," I added.

The decisions that "seem best" to Momz and me may sometimes be unpopular with our teenagers, their peers, and others in the community, but the long-term results may prove that Attila the Dad wasn't as mean, unreasonable, unfair, and void of understanding as some people think.

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