

# Can Children Really Be Raised ‘Without the Concept of Sin’?

Working for an online publication naturally brings a lot of feedback from those in the trenches. These reports are fascinating, for they give a snippet view of what real families in every day America are experiencing.

One such piece of recent feedback came in the form of the photo below, which depicts a child’s school assignment discussing the idea of an inner critic.



As one can infer, the “inner critic” is not necessarily a positive thing. In fact, the assignment encourages children to fight the inner critic and condemn negative self-talk.

In looking at this assignment, it’s easy to see that yes, there is a time and a place for encouraging children in positive paths. They need to be told to try hard, do their best, and avoid a continually defeatist attitude about life.

At the same time, it also seems wise to look at this assignment – *ahem* – critically and ask some key questions. In telling children to avoid self-criticism, does this assignment also teach that there is never a time to point out legitimate character flaws? And in teaching children to avoid honest self-evaluation of their character flaws, does it also suggest that they can do no wrong? That they themselves are their own moral compass who determine what they should or should not do?

Such a scenario would not be surprising for we live in a world which increasingly destroys external standards. There is no objective truth. No right or wrong. Because everything is now relative and flexible, something is right only as an

individual determines that is the case for himself.

Nowhere is this idea more on display than in a recent *New York Times* [article](#) by author Julia Scheeres. As Scheeres explains, growing up in a culture which emphasized sin and encouraged a strict moral standard led her to abandon such a concept as an adult. But as part of this abandonment, she also determined to raise her children according to her own moral code.

*Although I no longer have contact with my parents and live a very different life, we do have this in common. Just as my parents' approach to imparting their values was shaped by an effort to avoid the sins they feared, I am raising my two daughters according to my moral code. To me, the greatest sin of all is failing to be an engaged citizen of the world, so the lessons are about being open to others rather than closed off.*

According to Scheeres' description of her children, her plan has been an effective one. Her children have adopted their own moral code and are working hard to make the world a better place. They have no notion of "sin," but are striving to live in the way that they see best. In other words, they have bought into the relativism mantra, effectively abolishing the concept of sin from their home and booting external standards out the door.

The curious thing, however, is that the Scheeres family seems to feel the need to have a moral code at all. Why is that the case?

C.S. Lewis pondered a similar question in [Mere Christianity](#). As he explains it:

*Human beings, after all, have some sense; they see that you cannot have any real safety or happiness except in a society where every one plays fair, and it is because they see this that they try to behave decently.*

Lewis goes on to say:

*[M]en find themselves under a moral law, which they did not make, and cannot quite forget even when they try, and which they know they ought to obey.*

Furthermore, he notes:

*The Law of Human Nature, or of Right and Wrong, must be something above and beyond the actual facts of human behavior. In this case, besides the actual facts, you have something else – a real law which we did not invent and which we know we ought to obey.*

Is Lewis correct in his assessment of the situation? Despite society's best efforts to convince the next generation to abolish external moral standards and do whatever seems best in their own eyes, will humanity continue to deal with an internal, objective moral code, a code which "we did not invent" but "which we know we ought to obey"?

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