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BIBLICAL PARENTHOOD

#204

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BRINGING UP CHILDREN FOR GOD

Edward Payson (1783-1827)

“Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.”—Exodus 2:9

THESE words were addressed by Pharaoh’s daughter to the mother of Moses. Of the circumstances that occasioned them, it can scarcely be necessary to inform you. You need not be told that soon after the birth of this future leader of Israel his parents were compelled by the cruelty of the Egyptian king to expose him in an ark of bulrushes on the banks of the Nile. In this situation, he was found by the daughter of Pharaoh. So powerfully did his infantile cries excite her compassion that she determined not only to rescue him from a watery grave, but to adopt and educate him as her own. His sister Miriam, who at a distance had watched his fate unseen, now came forward like a person entirely unacquainted with the circumstances of his exposure and, on hearing of the princess’ determination, offered to procure a Hebrew woman to take the care of him until he should be of sufficient age to appear at her father’s court. This offer being accepted, she immediately went and called the child’s mother to whose care he was committed by the princess in the words of our text—“Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.”

In similar language, my friends, does God address parents. To everyone on whom He bestows the blessing of children, He says in His Word and by the voice of His Providence, “Take this child and educate it for Me, and I will give thee thy wages.” From this passage, therefore, we may take occasion to show what is implied in educating children for God.

The first thing implied in educating children for God¹ is a realizing, heartfelt conviction that they are His property, His children, rather than ours. He commits them for a time to our care, merely for the purpose of education, as we place children under the care of human instructors for the same purpose. However carefully we may educate children, yet we cannot be said to educate them for God unless we [believe] that they are His; for if we [believe] that they are ours exclusively, we shall and must educate them for ourselves and not for Him. To know that they are His is to feel a cordial, operative conviction² that He has a sovereign right to dispose of them as He pleases and to take them from us whenever He thinks fit. That they are His and that He possesses this right is evident from innumerable passages in the inspired writings. We are there told that God is the former of our bodies and the Father of our spirits, that we are all His offspring, and that consequently we are not our own but His. We are also assured that as the soul of the parent, so also the souls of the children are His. God once and again severely reproveth and threatens the Jews because they sacrificed *His* children in the fire to Moloch (Eze 16:20-21). Yet plain and explicit as these passages are, how few parents appear to feel their force. How few appear to feel and act as if conscious that they and theirs were the absolute property of God, that they were merely the foster parents of their children, and that, in all which they do for them, they are or ought to be acting for God. But it is evident that they must feel this before they can bring up their children for Him; for how can they educate their children for a being whose existence they do not realize, whose right to them they do not acknowledge, and whose character they do not love?

Nearly connected with this is a second thing implied in educating children for God—namely, a cordial and solemn dedication or surrender of them to Him to be His forever. We have already shown that they are His property and not ours. By dedicating them to Him, we mean nothing more than an explicit acknowledgment of

¹ educating...God – by this the author means bringing our children up in the knowledge of God, especially employing the practice of daily family worship.

² cordial, operative conviction – heartfelt, significant persuasion.

this truth or an acknowledgment that we consider them as entirely His and that we unreservedly surrender them to Him for time and eternity...If we refuse to give them to God, how can we be said to educate them for Him?

In the third place, if we would educate children for God, we must do all that we do for them from right motives. Almost the only motive that the Scriptures allow to be right is a regard for the glory of God and a disinterested³ desire to promote it; and they consider nothing as really done for God that does not flow from this source. Without this, however exemplary we may be, we do but bring forth fruit to ourselves and are no better than empty vines. We must be governed therefore by this motive in the education of our children if we would educate them for God and not for ourselves. In all our cares, labors, and sufferings for them, a regard to the divine glory must be the main spring that moves us. If we act merely from parental affection, we act from no higher principle than the irrational animals around us; many of them evidently appear to love their offspring no less ardently and to be no less ready to encounter dangers, toils, and sufferings to promote their happiness than we are to promote the welfare of ours. But if parental affection can be sanctified by the grace of God and parental duties hallowed by a wish to promote His glory, then we rise above the irrational world to our proper station and may be said to educate our children for God. Here, my friends, we may observe that true religion, when it prevails in the heart, sanctifies *everything*. [It] renders even the most common actions of life acceptable to God and gives them a dignity and importance, which of themselves they by no means deserve...Thus, the care and education of children, however trifling it may be thought by some, ought to be attended to from a regard to the divine glory. When this is done, it becomes an important part of true religion.

In the fourth place, if we would educate our children for God, we must educate them for His service. The three preceding particulars that we have mentioned refer principally to ourselves and our motives. But this has more immediate relation to our children themselves...In order to qualify yourselves for instructing and preparing your children for God's service, you [must] diligently study His Word to ascertain what He requires of them and frequently pray for the assistance of His Spirit, both for them and yourselves...You will carefully guard against saying or doing anything which may, either directly or indirectly, lead them to consider religion as an object of secondary importance. On the contrary, you will constantly labor to impress upon their minds a conviction that you consider religion as the great business of life, the favor of God as the only proper object of pursuit, and the enjoyment of Him hereafter as the only happiness, while everything else is comparatively of no consequence, however important it may otherwise be.

From "Children to Be Educated for God" in *The Complete Works of Edward Payson*, Vol. III, reprinted by Sprinkle Publications.

Edward Payson (1783-1827): American Congregational preacher; pastor of the Congregational Church of Portland, ME; born in Rindge, NH, USA.

NURTURE AND ADMONITION

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."—Ephesians 6:4

IF we are to carry out the Apostle's injunction...we must sit back for a moment and consider what we have to do. When the child comes, we must say to ourselves, "We are the guardians and the custodians of this soul." What a

³ **disinterested** – free from self-interest.

dread responsibility! In business and in professions, men are well aware of the great responsibility that rests upon them in the decisions they have to take. But are they aware of the infinitely *greater* responsibility they bear with respect to their own children? Do they give even the same amount of thought and attention and time to it, not to say more? Does it weigh as heavily upon them as the responsibility that they feel in these other realms? The Apostle urges us to regard this as the greatest business in life, the greatest matter that we ever have to handle and transact.

The Apostle does not stop at that: “Bring them up,” he says, “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” The two words he uses are full of interest. The difference between them is that the first, *nurture*, is more general than the second. It is the totality of nurturing, rearing, bringing up the child. It includes, therefore, general discipline. And, as all the authorities are agreed in pointing out, its emphasis is upon actions. The second word, *admonition*, has reference rather to words that are spoken. *Nurture* is the more general term and includes everything that we do for the children. It includes the whole process in general of the cultivation of the mind and the spirit, the morals and the moral behavior, the whole personality of the child. That is our task. It is to look upon the child, care for it, and guard it...

The word *admonition* carries much the same meaning, except that it puts greater emphasis upon speech. Thus, there are two aspects of this matter. First, we have to deal with general conduct and behavior, the things we have to do by actions. Then, in addition, there are certain admonitions that should be addressed to the child: words of exhortation, words of encouragement, words of reproof, words of blame. Paul’s term includes all these, indeed everything we say to the children in actual words when we are defining positions and indicating what is right or wrong, encouraging, exhorting, and so on. Such is the meaning of the word *admonition*.

Children are to be reared in “the nurture and the admonition”—and then the most important addition of all—“of the Lord.” This is where Christian parents, engaged in their duty towards their children, are in an entirely different category from all other parents. In other words, this appeal to Christian parents is not simply to exhort them to bring up their children in terms of general morality or good manners or commendable behavior in general. That, of course, is included. Everyone should be doing it; non-Christian parents should be doing it. They should be concerned about good manners, good general behavior, an avoidance of evil. They should teach their children to be honest, dutiful, respectful, and all these various things. That is but common morality, and Christianity has not started at that point. Even pagan writers interested in the good ordering of society have always exhorted their fellow men to teach such principles. Society cannot continue without a modicum⁴ of discipline and of law and order at every level and at every age. But the Apostle is not referring to that only. He says that the children of Christians are to be brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

It is at this point that the peculiar and specific Christian thinking and teaching enter. In the forefront of the minds of Christian parents must ever be the thought that the children are to be brought up in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and as Lord. That is the peculiar task to which Christian parents alone are called. This is not only their supreme task: their greatest desire and ambition for their children should be that they should come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and as their Lord. Is that our main ambition for our children? Does that come first?—that they may come to “know Him Whom to know is life eternal,” that they may know Him as their Savior and that they may follow Him as their Lord? “In the nurture and admonition of the Lord!” These, then, are the terms the Apostle uses.

...In the Bible itself there is a great deal of emphasis laid upon child training. Take, for instance, words found in the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses has reached the end of his life, and the children of Israel are shortly to enter the Promised Land. He reminds them of the Law of God and tells them how they are to live when they enter into the land of their inheritance. And among other things, he is very careful to tell them that they have to teach their children the Law. It is not enough that they know it and observe it themselves; they must pass on their knowledge. The children must be taught it and must never forget it...

It is very interesting to observe in the long history of the Christian church how this particular matter always reappears and receives great prominence at every period of revival and re-awakening. The Protestant Reformers⁵

⁴ **modicum** – small amount.

⁵ **Protestant Reformers** –16th century Christians who sought to reform the abuses of Roman Catholicism, such as Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), and Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531).

were concerned about it, and the instruction of children in moral and spiritual matters was given great prominence. The Puritans⁶ gave it still greater prominence, and the leaders of the Evangelical Awakening⁷ of two hundred years ago also did the same. Books have been written about this matter and many sermons preached about it.

This happens, of course, because when people become Christian it affects the whole of their lives. It is not merely something individual and personal; it affects the marriage relationship, and so there are far fewer divorces among Christian people than among non-Christian people. It also affects the life of the family, it affects the children, it affects the home, it affects every department of human life. The greatest epochs in the history of this country, and of other countries, have always been the years that have followed a religious awakening, a revival of true religion. The moral tone of the whole of society has been raised; even those who have not become Christian have been influenced and affected by it.

In other words, there is no hope of dealing with the moral problems of society except in terms of the Gospel of Christ. Right will never be established apart from godliness; but when people become godly they proceed to apply their principles all along the line, and righteousness is seen in the nation at large. But, unfortunately, we have to face the fact that for some reason this aspect of the matter has been sadly neglected in this present century...For one reason or another, the family does not count as it used to do. It is not the center and the unit that it was formerly. The whole idea of family life has somehow been declining; and this, alas, is partly true in Christian circles also. The family's central importance that is found in the Bible and in all the great periods to which we have referred seems to have disappeared. It is no longer being given the attention and the prominence that it once received. That makes it all the more important for us to discover the principles that should govern us in this respect.

First and foremost, the bringing up of children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” is something that is to be done in the home and by the parents. This is the emphasis throughout the Bible. It is not something that is to be handed over to the school, however good the school may be. It is the duty of *parents*—their primary and most essential duty. It is their responsibility, and they are not to hand over this responsibility to another. I emphasize this because we are all well aware of what has been happening increasingly during this present century. More and more, parents have been transferring their responsibilities and their duties to the schools.

I regard this as a most serious matter. *There is no more important influence in the life of a child than the influence of the home.* The home is the fundamental unit of society; and children are born into a home, into a family. There you have the circle that is to be the chief influence in their lives. There is no question about that. It is the biblical teaching everywhere, and it is always in so-called civilizations where ideas concerning the home begin to deteriorate that society ultimately disintegrates...

In the Old Testament, it is quite clear that the father was a kind of priest in his household and family; he represented God. He was responsible not only for the morals and the behavior but for the instruction of his children. The Bible's emphasis everywhere is that this is the primary duty and task of the parents. And it remains so to this day. If we are Christians at all, we must realize that this great emphasis is based upon those fundamental units ordained by God—marriage, family, and home. You cannot play fast and loose with them...

What are parents to do? They are to supplement the teaching of the church, and they are to apply the teaching of the church. So little can be done in a sermon. It has to be applied, to be explained, to be extended, to be supplemented. That is where the parents play their part. And if this has been always right and important, how much more so today than ever before! I ask Christian parents, Have you ever given serious thought to this matter? You face a greater task, perhaps, than parents have ever done, and for the following reason. Consider what is now being taught the children in the schools. The theory and hypothesis of organic evolution is being taught them as a fact. They are not being presented with it as a mere theory that has not been proved; they are given the impression that it is an absolute fact, and that all people of scientific knowledge and learning believe it. And they are regarded

⁶ **Puritans** – name applied to English Protestants of the 16th century who sought to “purify,” i.e., to further reform the Church of England under Elizabeth I. This included groups such as Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and others who embraced Reformed Theology and had great theological and practical impact on 16th and 17th century England and America.

⁷ **Evangelical Awakening** – loosely connected series of English revivals that spread to the American colonies as the Great Awakening (app. 1739-1743), which included leaders such as George Whitefield (1714-1770), Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), and others.

as odd if they do not accept it. We have to meet that situation...Children are being taught perverse things in the schools. They hear them on the wireless and see them on the television. The whole emphasis is anti-God, anti-Bible, anti-true Christianity, anti-miraculous, and anti-supernatural. Who is going to counter these trends? That is precisely the business of parents—"Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." It demands great effort by the parents at the present time because the forces against us are so great. Christian parents today have this unusually difficult task of protecting their children against these powerful adverse forces that are trying to indoctrinate them. There, then, is the setting!

To be practical, I wish, in the second place, to show how this is not to be done. There is a way of trying to deal with this situation that is quite disastrous and does much more harm than good. How is this not to be done?

It is never to be done in a mechanical, abstract manner, almost "by numbers," as if it were some sort of drill. I remember an experience of my own in this connection some ten years or so ago. I went to stay with some friends while I was preaching in a certain place; and I found the wife, the mother of the family, in a state of acute distress. In conversation, I discovered the cause of her distress. A certain lady had been there lecturing that very week, her theme being "How to bring up all the children in your family as good Christians." It was wonderful! She had five or six children, and she had so organized her home and her life that she finished all her domestic work by nine o'clock in the morning, and then gave herself to various Christian activities. All her children were fine Christians; and it was all so easy, so wonderful. The mother talking to me, who had two children, was in a state of real distress feeling that she was a complete and utter failure. What had I to say to her? This: I said, "Wait a moment; how old are the children of this lady?" I happened to know the answer, and my friend knew also. Not one of them at that time was above the age of sixteen, or thereabouts. I went on: "Wait and see. This lady tells you that they are all Christians, and that all you need is a scheme that you carry out regularly. Wait a while; the story may be different in a few years." And, alas, it turned out to be very different. It is doubtful whether more than one of those children is a Christian. Several of them are openly anti-Christian and have turned their backs upon it all. You cannot bring up children to be Christians in that way. It is not a mechanical process, and in any case, it was all so cold and clinical...A child is not a machine, and so you cannot do this work mechanically.

Nor must the work ever be done in an entirely negative or repressive manner. If you give children the impression that to be religious is to be miserable and that it consists of prohibitions and constant repression, you may well drive them into the arms of the devil and into the world. Never be entirely negative and repressive...

My last negative at this point is that we must never force a child to a decision. What trouble and havoc has been wrought by this! "Isn't it marvelous?" say the parents, "my little So-and-So, a mere youngster, decided for Christ." Pressure had been brought to bear in the meeting. But that should never be done. You are violating the personality of the child. In addition, of course, you are displaying a profound ignorance of the way of salvation. You can make a little child decide anything. You have the power and the ability to do so; but it is wrong, it is unchristian, it is not spiritual...Do not force them to a decision...

What then is the true way?...The important point is that the impression should always be given that Christ is the Head of the house or the home. How is that impression given? *Chiefly by your general conduct and example!* The parents should be living in such a way that the children should always have a feeling that they themselves are under Christ, that Christ is their Head. The fact should be obvious in their conduct and behavior. Above all, there should be an atmosphere of love...The fruit of the Spirit is love, and if the home is filled with an atmosphere of the love produced by the Spirit, most of its problems are solved. That is what does the work, not the direct pressures and appeals, but an atmosphere of love....

From *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home & Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18 to 6:9*, published by The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Perhaps the greatest expository preacher of the 20th century; Westminster Chapel, London, 1938-68; born in Wales.

PRIMARY OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” —Proverbs 22:6

I SUPPOSE that most professing Christians are acquainted with the text at the head of this page. The sound of it is probably familiar to your ears, like an old tune. It is likely you have heard it, read it, talked of it, or quoted it many a time. Is it not so? But after all, how little is the substance of this text regarded! The doctrine it contains appears scarcely known, the duty it puts before us seems fearfully seldom practiced. Reader, do I not speak the truth?

It cannot be said that the subject is a new one. The world is old, and we have the experience of nearly six thousand years to help us. We live in days when there is a mighty zeal for education in every quarter. We hear of new schools rising on all sides. We are told of new systems and new books for the young of every sort and description. Still for all this, the vast majority of children are manifestly not trained in the way they *should* go; for when they grow up to man’s estate, they do not walk with God.

Now how shall we account for this state of things? The plain truth is the Lord’s commandment in our text is not regarded. Therefore, the Lord’s promise⁸ in our text is not fulfilled.

Reader, these things may well give rise to great searching of heart. Suffer then a word of exhortation from a minister about the right training of children. Believe me, the subject is one that should come home to every conscience and make every one ask himself the question, “Am I in this matter doing what I can?”

It is a subject that concerns almost all. There is hardly a household that it does not touch. Parents, nurses, teachers, godfathers, godmothers, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters—all have an interest in it. Few can be found, I think, who might not influence some parent in the management of his family or affect the training of some child by suggestion or advice. All of us, I suspect, can do something here, either directly or indirectly; and I wish to stir up all to bear this in remembrance...

First, then, if you would train your children rightly, train them in the way they *should* go, and not in the way that they would. Remember children are born with a decided bias towards evil. Therefore, if you let them choose for themselves, they are certain to choose wrong.

The mother cannot tell what her tender infant may grow up to be—tall or short, weak or strong, wise or foolish. He may be any of these things or not—it is all uncertain. But one thing the mother *can* say with certainty: he will have a corrupt and sinful heart. It is natural to us to do wrong. “Foolishness,” says Solomon, “is bound in the heart of a child” (Pro 22:15). “A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Pro 29:15). Our hearts are like the earth on which we tread: let it alone, and it is sure to bear weeds.

If, then, you would deal wisely with your child, you must not leave him to the guidance of his own will. Think for him, judge for him, act for him, just as you would for one weak and blind. But for pity’s sake, give him not up to his own wayward tastes and inclinations. It must not be his likings and wishes that are consulted. He knows not yet what is good for his mind and soul any more than what is good for his body. You do not let him decide what he shall eat, what he shall drink, and how he shall be clothed. Be consistent, and deal with his mind in like manner. Train him in the way that is Scriptural and right and not in the way that he fancies.

⁸ Not all Christian commentators, pastors, and theologians understand this to be a promise that the children of Christians will infallibly be saved.

If you cannot make up your mind to this first principle of Christian training, it is useless for you to read any further. Self-will is almost the first thing that appears in a child's mind. It must be your first step to resist it.

Train up your child with all tenderness, affection, and patience. I do not mean that you are to spoil him, but I do mean that you should let him see that you love him. Love should be the silver thread that runs through all your conduct. Kindness, gentleness, long-suffering, forbearance, patience, sympathy, a willingness to enter into childish troubles, a readiness to take part in childish joys—these are the cords by which a child may be led most easily—these are the clues you must follow if you would find the way to his heart...

Now children's minds are cast in much the same mold as our own. Sternness and severity of manner chill them and throw them back. It shuts up their hearts, and you will weary yourself to find the door. But let them only see that you have an affectionate feeling towards them—that you are really desirous to make them happy and do them good—that if you punish them, it is intended for their profit, and that, like the pelican, you would give your heart's blood to nourish their souls. Let them see this, I say, and they will soon be all your own. But they must be wooed with kindness if their attention is ever to be won...Love is one grand secret of successful training. Anger and harshness may frighten, but they will not persuade the child that you are right. If he sees you often out of temper, you will soon cease to have his respect. A father who speaks to his son as Saul did to Jonathan (1Sa 20:30) need not expect to retain his influence over that son's mind.

Try hard to keep up a hold on your child's affections. It is a dangerous thing to make your children afraid of you. Anything is almost better than reserve and constraint between your child and yourself; and this will come in with fear. Fear puts an end to openness of manner. Fear leads to concealment—fear sows the seed of much hypocrisy and leads to many a lie. There is a mine of truth in the Apostle's words to the Colossians: "Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, lest they be discouraged" (Col 3:21). Let not the advice it contains be overlooked.

Train with this thought continually before your eyes—that the soul of your child is the first thing to be considered. Precious, no doubt, are these little ones in your eyes; but if you love them, think often of their souls. No interest should weigh with you so much as their eternal interests. No part of them should be so dear to you as that part that will never die. The world with all its glory shall pass away; the hills shall melt; the heavens shall be wrapped together as a scroll; the sun shall cease to shine. But the spirit that dwells in those little creatures, whom you love so well, shall outlive them all, and whether in happiness or misery (to speak as a man) will depend on you.⁹

This is the thought that should be uppermost on your mind in all you do for your children. In every step you take about them, in every plan and scheme and arrangement that concerns them, do not leave out that mighty question, "*How will this affect their souls?*"

Soul love is the soul of all love. To pet, pamper, and indulge your child, as if this world was all he had to look to and this life the only season for happiness—to do this is not true love, but *cruelty*. It is treating him like some beast of the earth that has but one world to look to and nothing after death. It is hiding from him that grand truth that he ought to be made to learn from his very infancy—that the chief end of his life is the salvation of his soul.

A true Christian must be no slave to fashion if he would train his child for heaven. He must not be content to do things merely because they are the custom of the world; to teach them and instruct them in certain ways, merely because it is usual; to allow them to read books of a questionable sort, merely because everybody else reads them; to let them form habits of a doubtful tendency, merely because they are the habits of the day. He must train with an eye to his children's souls. He must not be ashamed to hear his training called *singular*¹⁰ and *strange*. What if it is? The time is short—the fashion of this world passeth away. He that has trained his children for heaven rather than for earth—for God, rather than for man—is the parent that will be called wise at last.

Train your child to a knowledge of the Bible. You cannot make your children love the Bible, I allow. None but the Holy Ghost can give us a heart to delight in the Word. But you can make your children acquainted with the Bible. Be sure they cannot be acquainted with that blessed book too soon or too well.

⁹ Scripture reveals both the sovereignty of God in salvation and the responsibility of man. The author is not denying God's role in salvation here. He is speaking in terms of parental responsibility, hence his comment, "to speak as a man."

¹⁰ **singular** – different from that which is customary; peculiar.

A thorough knowledge of the Bible is the foundation of all clear views of religion. He that is well-grounded in it will not generally be found a waverer¹¹ and carried about by every wind of new doctrine. Any system of training that does not make knowledge of Scripture the first thing is unsafe and unsound.

You have need to be careful on this point just now, for the devil is abroad and error abounds. Some are to be found amongst us who give the Church the honor due to Jesus Christ. Some are to be found who make the sacraments saviors and passports to eternal life. And some are to be found in like manner who honor a catechism more than the Bible or fill the minds of their children with miserable little storybooks instead of the Scripture of truth. But if you love your children, let the simple Bible be everything in the training of their souls; and let all other books go down and take the second place.

Care not so much for their being mighty in the catechism as for their being mighty in the Scriptures. This is the training, believe me, that God will honor. The Psalmist says of Him, “For thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Psa 138:2). I think that He gives an especial blessing to all who try to magnify it among men.

See that your children read the Bible reverently. Train them to look on it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, written by the Holy Ghost Himself—all true, all profitable, and able to make us wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

See that they read it regularly. Train them to regard it as their soul’s daily food—as a thing essential to their soul’s daily health. I know well you cannot make this anything more than a form; but there is no telling the amount of sin that a mere form may indirectly restrain.

See that they read it all. You need not shrink from bringing any doctrine before them. You need not fancy that the leading doctrines of Christianity are things that children cannot understand. Children understand far more of the Bible than we are apt to suppose.

Tell them of sin—its guilt, its consequences, its power, its vileness. You will find they can comprehend something of this.

Tell them of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work for our salvation—the atonement, the cross, the blood, the sacrifice, the intercession. You will discover there is something not beyond them in all this.

Tell them of the work of the Holy Spirit in man’s heart, how He changes, renews, sanctifies, and purifies. You will soon see they can go along with you in some measure in this. In short, I suspect we have no idea how much a little child can take in of the length and breadth of the glorious Gospel. They see far more of these things than we suppose.

Fill their minds with Scripture. Let the Word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young.

Train them to a habit of prayer. Prayer is the very life-breath of true religion. It is one of the first evidences that a man is born again. “Behold,” said the Lord of Saul in the day He sent Ananias to him, “Behold, he prayeth” (Act 9:11). He had begun to pray, and that was proof enough.

Prayer was the distinguishing mark of the Lord’s people in the day that there began to be a separation between them and the world. “Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen 4:26).

Prayer is the peculiarity of all real Christians now. They pray—for they tell God their wants, their feelings, their desires, their fears, and mean what they say. The nominal Christian¹² may repeat prayers and good prayers too, but he goes no further.

Prayer is the turning point in a man’s soul. Our ministry is unprofitable, and our labor is vain until you are brought to your knees. Until then, we have no hope about you.

Prayer is one great secret of spiritual prosperity. When there is much private communion with God, your soul will grow like the grass after rain. When there is little, all will be at a standstill; you will barely keep your soul alive. Show me a growing Christian, a going forward Christian, a strong Christian, a flourishing Christian, and sure am

¹¹ **waverer** – one who is undecided in opinion or choice.

¹² **nominal Christian** – one who is Christian in name only and gives no evidence of true conversion.

I, he is one that speaks often with his Lord. He asks much, and he has much. He tells Jesus everything, and so he always knows how to act.

Prayer is the mightiest engine God has placed in our hands. It is the best weapon to use in every difficulty and the surest remedy in every trouble. It is the key that unlocks the treasury of promises and the hand that draws forth grace and help in time of need. It is the silver trumpet God commands us to sound in all our necessity, and it is the cry He has promised always to attend to, even as a loving mother to the voice of her child.

Prayer is the simplest means that man can use in coming to God. It is within reach of all—the sick, the aged, the infirm, the paralytic, the blind, the poor, the unlearned—all can pray. It avails you nothing to plead want¹³ of memory, want of learning, want of books, and want of scholarship in this matter. So long as you have a tongue to tell your soul's state, you may and ought to pray. Those words, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jas 4:2), will be a fearful condemnation to many in the Day of Judgment.

Parents, if you love your children, do all that lies in your power to train them up to a habit of prayer. Show them how to begin. Tell them what to say. Encourage them to persevere. Remind them if they become careless and slack about it. Let it not be your fault, at any rate, if they never call on the name of the Lord.

This, remember, is the first step in religion which a child is able to take. Long before he can read, you can teach him to kneel by his mother's side and repeat the simple words of prayer and praise that she puts in his mouth. And as the first steps in any undertaking are always the most important, so is the manner in which your children's prayers are prayed—a *point that deserves your closest attention*. Few seem to know how much depends on this. You must beware lest they get into a way of saying them in a hasty, careless, and irreverent manner. You must beware...of trusting too much to your children doing it when left to themselves. I cannot praise that mother who never looks after this most important part of her child's daily life herself. Surely if there be any habit which your own hand and eye should help in forming, it is the habit of prayer. Believe me; if you never hear your children pray yourself, *you* are much to blame...

Prayer is of all habits the one that we recollect the longest. Many a grey-headed man could tell you how his mother used to make him pray in the days of his childhood. Other things have passed away from his mind perhaps. The church where he was taken to worship, the minister whom he heard preach, the companions who used to play with him—all these, it may be, have passed from his memory and left no mark behind. But you will often find it is far different with his first prayers. He will often be able to tell you where he knelt, what he was taught to say, and even how his mother looked all the while. It will come up as fresh before his mind's eye as if it was but yesterday.

Reader, if you love your children, I charge you, do not let the seedtime of a prayerful habit pass away unimproved. If you train your children to anything, train them at least to a habit of prayer.

From *The Duties of Parents*, reprinted and available from Chapel Library.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Bishop of the Anglican Church; revered author of *Holiness, Knots Untied, Old Paths, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, and many others; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.

Ours is peculiarly an age of irreverence, and as the consequence, the spirit of lawlessness, which brooks no restraint and which is desirous of casting off everything that interferes with the free course of self-will, is rapidly engulfing the earth like some giant tidal wave. The members of the rising generation are the most flagrant offenders, and in the decay and disappearing of parental authority, we have the certain precursor of the abolition of civic authority. Therefore, in view of the growing disrespect for human law and the refusal to "render honor to whom honor is due," we need not be surprised that the recognition of the majesty, the authority, the sovereignty of the Almighty Law-giver should recede more and more into the background, and that the masses have less and less patience with those who insist upon them.—*A. W. Pink*

¹³ want – lack.

TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT GOD

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)

I VERY readily allow that no human endeavors, either of ministers or of parents, can ever be effectual to bring one soul to the saving knowledge of God in Christ without the cooperating and transforming influences of the blessed Spirit. Yet you well know, and I hope you seriously consider, that this does not in the least weaken our obligation to the most diligent use of proper means. The great God has stated rules of operation in the world of grace as well as of nature. Though He is not limited to them, it is arrogant and may be destructive to expect that He should deviate from them in favor of us or ours.

We live not by bread alone, “but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mat 4:4). Were He determined to continue your lives or the lives of your children, He could no doubt feed or support you by miracles. Yet you think yourselves obligated to a prudent care for your daily bread. [You] justly conclude that, were you to neglect to administer it to your infant offspring, you would be charge-able with their murder before God and man; nor could you think of pleading it as any excuse that you referred them to a miraculous divine care while you left them destitute of any human supplies. Such a plea would only add impiety¹⁴ to cruelty and greatly aggravate the crime it attempted to palliate.¹⁵ As absurd would it be for us to flatter ourselves with a hope that our children should be taught of God, and regenerated and sanctified by the influences of His grace, if we neglect that prudent and religious care in their education which it is my business this day to describe and recommend...

1. Children should undoubtedly be trained up in the way of piety and devotion towards God. This, as you well know, is the sum and foundation of everything truly good. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psa 110:10). The Psalmist therefore invites children to him with the promise of instructing them in it: “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD” (Psa 34:11). And, it is certain, some right notions of the Supreme Being must be implanted in the minds of children before there can be a reasonable foundation for teaching them those doctrines that peculiarly relate to Christ under the character of the Mediator. “For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6).

The proof of the being of God and some of those attributes of the divine nature in which we are most concerned depends on such easy principles that I cannot but think the weakest mind might enter into it. A child will easily apprehend that as every house is built by some man and there can be no work without an author, so He that built all things is God. From this obvious idea of God as the Maker of all, we may naturally represent Him as very great and very good, that they may be taught at once to reverence and love Him.

It is of great importance that children early imbibe¹⁶ an awe of God and a humble veneration for His perfections and glories. He ought, therefore, to be represented to them as the great Lord of all. And, when we take occasion to mention to them other invisible agents, whether angels or devils, we should...always represent them as entirely under the government and control of God...

There should be a peculiar caution that when we teach these infant tongues to pronounce that great and terrible name, The Lord our God, they may not learn to take it in vain, but may use it with a becoming solemnity, remembering that we and they are but dust and ashes before Him. When I hear the little creatures speaking of “the *great* God, the *blessed* God, the *glorious* God,” as I sometimes do, it gives me a sensible pleasure. I consider it as a probable proof of great wisdom and piety in those who have the charge of their education.

¹⁴ **impiety** – lacking reverence for God.

¹⁵ **palliate** – partially excuse.

¹⁶ **imbibe** – receive into the mind and retain.

Yet, great care should be taken not to confine our discourses to these awful views lest the dread of God should so fall upon them that His excellencies should make them afraid to approach Him. We should describe Him as not only the greatest, but the *best* of beings. We should teach them to know Him by the most encouraging name of “The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exo 34:6-7). We should represent Him as the universal, kind, indulgent¹⁷ parent, Who loves His creatures and by all proper methods provides for their happiness. And we should particularly represent His *goodness* to them: with what more than paternal tenderness He watched round their cradles, with what compassion He heard their feeble cries before their infant thoughts could form themselves into prayer. We should tell them that they live every moment on God and that all our affection for them is no more than He puts into our hearts and [that] all our power to help them is no more than He lodges in our hands.

We should also solemnly remind them that in a very little while their spirits are to return to this God. As He is now always with them and knows everything they do, speak, or think, so He will bring every work into judgment and make them forever happy or miserable, as they, on the whole, are found obedient or rebellious. Here the most lively and pathetic¹⁸ descriptions that the Scriptures give us of heaven and hell should be laid before them and urged on their consideration.

When such a foundation is laid in the belief of the being and providence of God and of a future state both of rewards and punishments, children should be instructed in the duty they owe to God. [They] should be particularly taught to pray to Him and to praise Him. It would be best of all if, from a deep sense of His perfections and their own necessities, they could be engaged to breathe out their souls before Him in words of their own, were they ever so weak and broken. Yet you will readily allow that, until this can be expected, it may be very proper to teach them some forms of prayer and thanksgiving, consisting of such plain Scriptures or other familiar expressions as may best suit their circumstances and understandings...

2. Children must be trained up in the way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, my friends, and I hope many of you know it to the daily joy of your souls, that Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” (Joh 14:6). It is by Him we have boldness and access with confidence to a God, Who might otherwise appear as a “consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). It is, therefore, of great importance to lead children quickly into the knowledge of Christ, which is no doubt a considerable part of the “nurture and admonition” of the Lord, which the Apostle recommends and was perhaps what he principally intended by those words (Eph 6:4).

We should, therefore, teach them quickly that the first parents of the human race most ungratefully rebelled against God and subjected themselves and all their offspring to His wrath and curse (Gen 1-3). The awful consequences of this should be opened at large, and we should labor to convince them that they have made themselves liable to the divine displeasure—that dreadful thing!—by their own personal guilt. Thus, by the knowledge of the Law, should we make way for the Gospel—the joyful news of deliverance by Christ.

In unfolding this, great care ought to be taken that we do not fill their minds with an aversion¹⁹ to one sacred person while we endeavor to attract their regards to another. The Father is not to be represented as severe and almost inexorable,²⁰ hardly prevailed upon by the intercession of His compassionate Son to entertain thoughts of mercy and forgiveness. Far from that, we should speak of Him as the overflowing fountain of goodness, Whose eye pitied us in our helpless distress, Whose almighty arm was stretched out for our rescue, Whose eternal counsels of wisdom and love formed that important scheme to which we owe all our hopes. I have had occasion to show you at large that this is the Scripture doctrine. Our children should be early taught it and taught what that scheme was, as far as their understanding can receive it and ours can explain it. We should often repeat to them that God is so holy, and yet so gracious that, rather than He would on the one hand destroy man or on the other leave sin unpunished, He made His own Son a sacrifice for it, appointing Him to be humbled that we might be exalted, to die that we might live.

¹⁷ The author does not mean *sinful* indulgence as is mentioned in other articles, but rather “ready to show favor.”

¹⁸ **lively and pathetic** – vivid and moving.

¹⁹ **aversion** – feeling of intense dislike.

²⁰ **inexorable** – unmoved by persuasion or pleading.

We should also represent to them—with holy wonder and joy!—how readily the Lord Jesus Christ consented to procure our deliverance in so *expensive* a way. How cheerfully He said, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God” (Heb 10:7, 9)! To enhance the value of this amazing love, we should endeavor, according to our weak capacities, to teach them Who this compassionate Redeemer is, to represent something of His glories as the eternal Son of God and the great Lord of angels and men. We should instruct them in His amazing condescension in laying aside these glories that He might become a little, weak, helpless child, and afterwards an afflicted, sorrowful man. We should lead them into the knowledge of those circumstances of the history of Jesus that may have the greatest tendency to strike their minds and to impress them with an early sense of gratitude and love to Him. We should tell them how poor He made Himself that He might enrich us, how diligently He went about doing good, how willingly He preached the Gospel to the lowest of the people. We should *especially* tell them how kind He was to little children and how He chided²¹ His disciples when they would have hindered them from being brought to Him. It is expressly said that Jesus was much displeased and said, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Luk 18:16)—a tender circumstance that perhaps was recorded, in part at least, for this very reason: that children in succeeding ages might be impressed and affected with it.

Through these scenes of His life, we should lead them on to His death. We should show how easily He could have delivered Himself—of which He gave so sensible an evidence in striking down by one word those who came to apprehend Him (Joh 18:6)—and yet how patiently He submitted to the most cruel injuries: to be scourged and spit upon, to be crowned with thorns, and to bear His cross. We should show them how this innocent, holy, and divine Person was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and, while they were piercing Him with nails, instead of loading them with curses, He prayed for them, saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luk 23:34). And when their little hearts are awed and melted with so strange a story, we should tell them it was thus He groaned, bled, and died for us, and often remind them of their own concern in what was then transacted.

We should lead on their thoughts to the glorious views of Christ’s resurrection and ascension and tell them with what adorable goodness He still remembers His people in the midst of His exaltation, pleading the cause of sinful creatures, and employing His interest in the court of heaven to procure life and glory for all that believe in Him and love Him.

We should then go on to instruct them in those particulars of obedience by which the sincerity of our faith and our love is to be approved. At the same time, [we must remind] them of their own weakness and [tell] them how God helps us by sending His Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts to furnish us for every good word and work. An important lesson without attending to which our instruction will be vain and their hearing will likewise be vain!

From *The Godly Family*, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a division of Reformation Heritage Books, www.heritagebooks.org.

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751): English Nonconformist minister; prolific author and hymn writer; born in London, England.

Parents should polish the rude natures of their children with good manners.—*Thomas Boston*

THE ART OF BALANCED DISCIPLINE

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the

²¹ **chided** – expressed disapproval.

NOTICE that [Paul] mentions the fathers only. He has just quoted the words of the Law—“Honour thy father and mother”—but now he singles out the fathers because the whole of his teaching has been, as we have seen, that *the father is the one who is in the position of authority*. That is what we always find in the Old Testament; that is how God has always taught people to behave; so he naturally addresses this particular injunction to the fathers. But the injunction is not to be confined to the fathers; it includes the mothers also; and at a time like the present, we have reached a position in which the order almost has to be reversed! We are living in a kind of matriarchal society where fathers, alas, and husbands, have *so abdicated their position in the home* that almost everything is being left to the mothers. We have to realize therefore that what is said here to the fathers applies equally to the mothers. It applies to the one who is in the position of having to exercise discipline. In other words, what we are introduced to here in this fourth verse, and it is involved in the previous verse, is the whole problem of discipline.

We must examine this subject carefully, and it is of course a very extensive one. There is no subject, I would say once more, that is of such urgent importance in this country,²² and in every other country,²³ as this whole problem of discipline. We are witnessing a breakdown in society, and it is mainly in connection with this matter of *discipline*. We have it in the home, we have it in the schools, we have it in industry; it is everywhere. The problem confronting society today in every walk of life is ultimately the problem of discipline. Responsibility, relationships, how life is to be conducted, how life is to proceed! The whole future of civilization, it seems to me, rests upon this...I venture on this assertion, this prophecy: If the West goes down and is defeated, it will be for one reason only: *internal rot*...If we continue to spend our lives in jollification,²⁴ doing less and less work, demanding more and more money, more and more pleasure and so-called happiness, more and more indulgence of the lusts of the flesh, with a refusal to accept our responsibilities, there is but one inevitable result—complete and abject failure. Why did the Goths and the Vandals and other barbarians conquer the ancient Roman Empire? Was it by superior military power? Of course not! Historians know that there is only one answer: the fall of Rome came because of the spirit of indulgence that had invaded the Roman world—the games, the pleasures, the baths. The moral rot that had entered into the heart of the Roman Empire was the cause of Rome’s “decline and fall.” It was not superior power from the outside, but internal rot that was Rome’s ruination. And the really alarming fact today is that we are witnessing a similar declension in this and most other Western countries. This slackness, this indiscipline, the whole outlook and spirit is character-istic of a period of decadence. The pleasure mania, the sports mania, the drink and drug mania have gripped the masses. This is the essential problem, this sheer *absence* of discipline and of order and of true notions of government!

These matters, it seems to me, are raised very clearly by what the Apostle tells us here. I shall proceed to present these further to view and to show how the Scripture enlightens us in regard to them. But before doing so, let me mention something that will assist and stimulate your whole process of thinking. One of our problems today is that we no longer do our own thinking. Newspapers do it for us, the people interviewed on Radio and Television do it for us, and we sit back and listen. *That is one of the manifestations of the breakdown of self-discipline*. We must learn to discipline our minds! So I will give two quotations of Scripture, one on the one side, and one on the other side of this whole position. The problem of discipline lies between the two. Here is the limit on one side: “He that spareth his rod hateth his son” (Pro 13:24). The other is, “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.” The whole problem of discipline lies between those two limits, and they are both found in the Scriptures. Work the problem out in the Scriptures, try to get at the great Scriptural principles that govern this vital; this urgent matter, this greatest problem confronting all the Western nations, if not also others, at this hour. All our problems result from our going to one extreme or the other. That is never found in Scripture. What characterizes the teaching of the Scriptures always and everywhere is their perfect balance, a fairness that never fails, the extraordinary way in which grace and law are divinely blended...

²² England.

²³ Especially in the United States of America—*Editor*.

²⁴ **jollification** – merry-making; boisterous celebrations.

We come now to the question of the administration of discipline... Discipline is essential and must be enforced. But the Apostle exhorts us to be very careful as to how we exercise it because we can do more harm than good if we do not do it in the right way...

The Apostle divides his teaching into two sections, the *negative* and the *positive*. This problem he says is not confined to the children: the fathers, the parents, have also to be careful. *Negatively*, he tells them, “Provoke not your children to wrath.” *Positively*, he says, “But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” As long as we remember both aspects all will be well.

We start with the negative: “Provoke not your children to wrath.” These words can be translated, “Do not exasperate²⁵ your children, do not irritate your children, do not provoke your children to become resentful.” That is always a very real danger when we exercise discipline. And if we become guilty of it we shall do much more harm than good...As we have seen, both extremes are altogether wrong. In other words, we must exercise this discipline in such a manner that we do not irritate our children or provoke them to a sinful resentment. We are required to keep the balance.

How is this to be done? How is such discipline to be exercised by parents?...Once more we must go back to chapter 5, verse 18 [of Ephesians]. “Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.” That is always the *key*. We saw when we were dealing with that verse that the life lived in the Spirit, the life of a man who is filled with the Spirit, is characterized always by two main things—*power* and *control*. It is a *disciplined* power. Remember how Paul puts it in writing to Timothy. “For God,” he says, “hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (*discipline*)” (2Ti 1:7). Not uncontrolled power, but power controlled by love and a sound mind—*discipline!* That is always the characteristic of the life of a man who is “filled with the Spirit”...

How, then, am I to exercise this discipline? “Provoke not your children to wrath.” This is to be the first principle governing our action. We are incapable of exercising true discipline unless we are first able to exercise self-control and discipline our own tempers...People who are filled with the Spirit are always characterized by *control*. When you are disciplining a child, you should have first controlled yourself. If you try to discipline your child when you are in a temper, it is certain that you will do more harm than good. What right have you to say to your child that he needs discipline *when you obviously need it yourself?* Self-control, control of temper is an essential pre-requisite in the control of others...So the very first principle is that we must start with ourselves. We must be certain that we are in control of ourselves, that we are cool...There must be this personal discipline, this self-control that enables a man to look at the situation objectively and to deal with it in a balanced and controlled manner. How important this is!...

The second principle arises, in a sense, out of the first. If a parent is to exercise this discipline in the right way, he must never be capricious.²⁶ There is nothing more irritating to the one who is undergoing discipline than a feeling that the person who is administering it is capricious and uncertain. There is nothing more annoying to a child than the kind of parent whose moods and actions you can never predict, who is changeable, whose condition is always uncertain. There is no worse type of parent than he who one day, in a kindly mood, is indulgent and allows the child to do almost anything it likes, but who the next day flares up in a rage if the child does scarcely anything at all. That makes life impossible for the child...Such a parent, I say again, fails to exercise a true and helpful discipline, and the position of the child becomes impossible. He is provoked and irritated to wrath and has no respect for such a parent.

I am referring not only to temperamental reactions, but to conduct also. The parent who is not *consistent* in his conduct cannot truly exercise discipline in the case of the child. A parent who does one thing today and the contrary thing tomorrow is not capable of sound discipline. There must be *consistency*, not only in the reaction but also in the conduct and the behavior of the parent. There must be a pattern about the life of the parent, for the child is always observing and watching. But if he observes that the parent is erratic²⁷ and himself does the very thing that he forbids the child to do, again you cannot expect the child to benefit from any discipline administered by such a parent...

²⁵ **exasperate** – enrage.

²⁶ **capricious** – guided by whim or fancy, not settled judgment; given to sudden changes.

²⁷ **erratic** – given to sudden unpredictable change.

Another most important principle is that the parents must never be unreasonable or unwilling to hear the child's case. There is nothing that so annoys the one who is being disciplined as the feeling that the whole procedure is utterly unreasonable. In other words, it is a thoroughly bad parent who will not take any circumstances into consideration at all or who will not listen to any conceivable explanation. Some fathers and mothers, in the desire to exercise discipline, are liable to become utterly unreasonable; and they themselves may be very much at fault. The report they have received concerning the child may be wrong, or there may have been peculiar circumstances of which they are ignorant; but the child is not even allowed to state the position or to give any kind of explanation. Of course, one realizes that advantage can be taken of this by the child. All I am saying is that *we must never be unreasonable*. Let the explanation be given by the child, and if it is not a true reason, then you can chastise for that also as well as for the particular act that constitutes the offence. But to refuse to listen, to prohibit any kind of reply, is inexcusable...Such conduct is always wrong; that is to provoke our children to wrath. It is certain to exasperate and irritate them into a condition of rebellion and of antagonism...

That leads inevitably to [another] principle: Discipline must never be too severe. Here is perhaps the danger that confronts many good parents at the present time as they see the utter lawlessness about them, and as they rightly bemoan it and condemn it. Their danger is to be so deeply influenced by their revulsions as to go right over to this other extreme and to become much too severe. The opposite of no discipline at all is not cruelty; it is balanced discipline, it is controlled discipline...

Let me summarize my argument. Discipline must always be exercised in love; and if you cannot exercise it in love, do not attempt it at all. In that case, you need to deal with yourself first. The Apostle has already told us to speak the truth in love in a more general sense; but exactly the same applies here. Speak the truth, but in love. It is precisely the same with discipline: it must be governed and controlled by love. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." What is "the fruit of the Spirit"? "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal 5:22). If, as parents, we are "filled with the Spirit," and produce such fruit, discipline will be a very small problem as far as we are concerned...You must have a right view of parenthood and regard the child as a life given to you by God. What for? To keep to yourself, and to mould to your pattern, to impose your personality upon it? Not at all! But put into your care and charge by God that his soul may ultimately come to know Him and to know the Lord Jesus Christ...

From Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home & Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18 to 6:9, published by The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.

TEACHING CHILDREN CHARACTER

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)

Children should be trained up in the way of obedience to their parents. This is a command that God [ordained] from Mount Sinai by annexing to it a peculiar promise of long life, a blessing that young persons greatly desire (Exo 20:12). The Apostle, therefore, observed that it is the first commandment with promise, namely, a command eminently remarkable for the manner in which the promise is adjoined. And it is certainly a wise constitution of Providence that gives so much to parental authority, especially while children are in their younger years, their minds being then incapable of judging and acting for themselves in matters of importance. Children should, therefore, be early taught and convinced by Scripture that God has committed them into the hands of their parents. Consequently, [they should be taught] that reverence and obedience to their parents is a part of the duty they owe to God and disobedience to them is rebellion against Him. Parents should by no means indulge their children in a direct and resolute opposition to their will in matters of greater or smaller moment, remembering, "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" and himself to ruin (Pro 29:15). And with regard to subjection,

as well as affection, “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth” (Lam 3:27).

Children should be trained in the way of benevolence and kindness to all. The great Apostle tells us that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10), and that all those branches of it that relate to our neighbor are comprehended in that one word: *love*. This love, therefore, we should endeavor to teach them. We shall find that in many instances it will be a law to itself and guide them right in many particular actions, the obligations to which may depend on principles of equity²⁸ that lie far beyond the reach of their feeble understandings. There is hardly an instruction relating to our duty more happily adapted to the capacity of children than that Golden Law (so important to all of the maturest age): “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Mat 7:12). This rule we should teach them and by this should examine their actions. From their cradles we should often inculcate²⁹ it upon them that a great deal of religion consists in doing good, that the wisdom from above is full of mercy and good fruits, and that every Christian should do good unto all as he has opportunity.

That such instructions may be welcome to them, we should endeavor by all prudent methods to soften their hearts to sentiments of humanity and tenderness, and guard against everything that would have a contrary tendency. We should remove from them, as much as possible, all kinds of cruel and bloody spectacles, and should carefully discourage any thing barbarous in their treatment of brute creatures. By no means [should we allow] them to sport themselves in the death or pain of domestic animals, but rather [teach] them to treat the poor creatures kindly and take care of them, the contrary to which is a most detestable sign of a savage and malignant disposition. “A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Pro 12:10).

We should, likewise, take care to teach them the odiousness and folly of a selfish temper and encourage them in a willingness to impart to others what is agreeable and entertaining to themselves. Especially we should endeavor to form them to sentiments of compassion for the poor. We should show them where God has said, “Blessed is the man that considereth the poor, the Lord will remember him in the day of trouble.” He that has pity upon the poor lends to the Lord, and that which he has given will He pay him again. And we should show them, by our own practice, that we verily believe these promises to be true and important. It might not be improper, sometimes, to make our children the messengers by which we send some small supply to the indigent and distressed; and, if they discover a disposition to give something out of the little stock we allow them to call their own, we should joyfully encourage it and should take care that they never lose by their charity, but that in a prudent manner we abundantly repay it. It is hardly to be imagined that children thus brought up should, in the advance of life, prove injurious and oppressive; they will rather be the ornaments of religion and blessings to the world and probably will be in the number of the last whom Providence will suffer to want.

Children should be trained up in the way of diligence. This should undoubtedly be our care if we have any regard to the welfare either of their bodies or their souls. In whatever station of life they may at length be fixed, it is certain there is little prospect of their acquitting themselves with usefulness, honor, and advantage without a close and resolute application; whereas the wisest of princes and of men has said, “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men” (Pro 22:29). And it is evident that a diligent prosecution of business keeps one out of the way of a thousand temptations that idleness seems to invite, leading a man into numberless instances of vice and folly because he has nothing else to do.

A prudent and religious parent will therefore be concerned that his children may not early contract so pernicious a habit, nor enter upon life like persons that have no business in it but to crowd the stage and stand in the way of those who are better employed. Instead of suffering them to saunter about from place to place (as abundance of young people do to no imaginable purpose of usefulness or even of entertainment), he will quickly assign them some employment for their time: an employment so moderated and so diversified as not to overwhelm and fatigue their tender spirits, yet sufficient to keep them wakeful and active. Nor is this so difficult as some may imagine; for children are a busy kind of creatures, naturally fond of learning new things and trying and showing what they can do. So that, I am persuaded, were perfect inactivity to be imposed upon them as a penance but for

²⁸ **equity** – what is fair and right.

²⁹ **inculcate** – teach and impress by frequent repetition.

one hour, they would be heartily weary of it and would be glad to seek their refuge from it in almost any business you would think fit to employ them about...

Children should be trained up in the way of integrity. Simplicity and godly sincerity is not only a very amiable, but an essential, part of the Christian character...It is very melancholy to observe how soon the artifices³⁰ and deceits of corrupt nature begin to reveal themselves. In this respect, we are transgressors from the womb and go astray almost as soon as we are born, speaking lies (Psa 58:3). Great care, therefore, should be taken to form the minds of children to a love for truth and candor and a sense of the meanness as well as the guilt of a lie. We should be cautious that we do not expose them to any temptations of this kind, either by unreasonable severities on account of little faults or by hasty surprises when inquiring into any matter of fact, which it may seem their interest to disguise by a falsehood. When we find them guilty of a known and deliberate lie, we should express our horror of it not only by an immediate reproof or correction, but by such a conduct towards them for some time afterwards as may plainly show them how greatly we are amazed, grieved, and displeased. When so solemn a business is made of the first faults of this kind, it may be a means of preventing many more.

I will further add that we ought not only thus severely to critically remark upon a direct lie, but likewise, in a proper degree, to discourage all kinds of equivocations³¹ and double meanings and those little tricks and artifices by which they may endeavor to impose on each other or on those that are older than themselves. We should often inculcate upon them that excellent Scripture, "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely, but he that perverteth his ways (that twists and distorts it with the perplexities of artifices and deceit) shall be known" (Pro 10:9). Be showing them every day how easy, how pleasant, how honorable, and how advantageous it is to maintain a fair, open, and honest temper; and, on the other hand, what folly there is in cunning and dishonesty in all its forms; and how certain it is that by studying and practicing it, they take the readiest way to make themselves noxious³² and useless, infamous and odious.³³ Above all, should we remind them that the righteous Lord loves righteousness, and His favorable countenance beholds the upright; but lying lips are such an abomination to Him that He expressly declared, "All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev 21:8).

Children should be trained up in the way of humility. This is a grace that our Lord particularly invites us to learn of Him and most frequently recommends to us, well knowing that without it so humbling a scheme as He came to introduce would never meet with a welcome reception. And, with regard to the present life, it is a most lovely ornament which engages universal esteem and affection, so that before honor is humility (Pro 15:33). On the whole, we find he that exalts himself is abased, and he that humbles himself is exalted, both by God and by man.

A regard, therefore, to the ease, honor, and happiness of our children should engage us to an early endeavor of checking that pride which was the first sin and the ruin of our natures and diffuses itself so wide and sinks so deep into all that draw their original from degenerate Adam. We should teach them to express humility and modesty in their converse³⁴ with all.

They should be taught to treat their superiors with peculiar respect and should at proper seasons be accustomed to silence and reserve before them. Hence, they will learn in some degree the government of the tongue, a branch of wisdom that, in the advance of life, will be of great importance to the quiet of others and to their own comfort and reputation.

Nor should they be allowed to assume airs of insolence towards their equals, but rather be taught to yield, to oblige, and to give up their right for the sake of peace. To this purpose, I cannot but think it desirable that they should be generally accustomed to treat each other with those forms of civility and complaisance³⁵ that are usual among well-bred people in their rank of life. I know those things are mere trifles in themselves, yet they are the outguards³⁶ of humanity and friendship, and effectually prevent many a rude attack which, taking its rise from some little circumstance, may nevertheless be attended with fatal consequences...

³⁰ **artifices** – deceptions of people using cleverness or subtlety.

³¹ **equivocations** – statements that are vague and often deliberately misleading.

³² **noxious** – harmful to minds and morals.

³³ **odious** – arousing hatred or disgust; detestable.

³⁴ **converse** – manner of life.

³⁵ **complaisance** – the desire and care to please.

³⁶ **outguards** – guards placed at a distance outside the main body of an army.

Last, children should be trained up in the way of self-denial. As without something of this temper, we can never follow Christ or expect to be owned by Him as His disciples, so neither indeed can we pass comfortably through the world. For, whatever inexperienced youth may dream, a great many distasteful and mortifying circumstances will occur in life that will unhinge our minds almost every hour if we cannot manage and, in many instances, deny our appetites, our passions, and our humors. We should, therefore, endeavor to teach our children this important lesson quickly; and, if we succeed in our care, we shall leave them abundantly richer and happier in this rule and possession of their own spirits than the most plentiful estates or the most unlimited power over others could make them.

When a rational creature becomes the slave of appetite, he sinks beneath the dignity of the human nature as well as the sanctity of the Christian profession. It is therefore observable that when the Apostle mentions the three grand branches of practical religion, he puts sobriety in the front, perhaps to intimate that where that is neglected, the other cannot be suitably regarded. The grace of God, namely the Gospel, teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly. Children therefore, as well as young men, should be exhorted to be sober-minded; and they should be taught it by early self-denial. It is certain that if their own appetite and taste were to determine the kind and quantity of their food, many of them would quickly destroy their constitution and perhaps their lives, since they have often the greatest desire for those things that are the most improper. And it seems justly observed by a very wise man (who was himself a melancholy instance of it), that the fondness of mothers for their children, in letting them eat and drink what they will, lays a foundation for most of those calamities in human life which proceed from bodily indisposition. Nay, I will add that it is the part of wisdom and love not only to deny what would be unwholesome, but to guard against indulging them in too great a nicety,³⁷ either of food or of dress. People of sense cannot but see, if they would please to consider it, that to know how to fare plainly, and sometimes a little hardly, carries a man with ease and pleasure through many circumstances of life that to luxury and delicacy would be almost intolerable.

The government of the passions is another branch of self-denial to which children should early be habituated; and so much the rather because, in an age when reason is so weak, the passions are apt to appear with peculiar force and violence. A prudent care should, therefore, be taken to repress the exorbitances of them. For which purpose it is of great importance that they never be suffered to carry any point by obstinacy, noise, and clamor, which is indeed to bestow a reward on a fault that deserves a severe reprimand. Nay, I will venture to add that, though it is very inhuman to take pleasure in making them uneasy by needless mortifications, yet when they are eagerly and intemperately desirous of a trifle, they ought, for that very reason, sometimes to be denied it to teach them more moderation for the future. And if, by such methods, they gradually learn to conquer their little humors and fancies, they learn no inconsiderable branch of true fortitude and wisdom...

From *The Godly Family*, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a division of Reformation Heritage Books, www.heritagebooks.org.

Wicked parents are the most notable servants of the devil in all the world and the bloodiest enemies to their children's souls. More souls are damned [by God through the influence of] ungodly parents—and next [to] them...ungodly ministers and magistrates—than by any instruments in the world besides.—*Richard Baxter*

³⁷ **nicety** – excessive refinement or elegance in dress or manner of living.

PRINCIPLE OBSTACLES IN BRINGING UP CHILDREN FOR CHRIST

John Angell James (1785-1859)

THAT, in many cases, the means employed by Christian parents for their children's spiritual welfare are unsuccessful is a mel-ancholy fact established by abundant and, I fear, accumulating evidence. I am not now speaking of those families—and are there indeed such?—where scarcely the semblance of domestic piety³⁸ or instruction is to be found, where no family altar³⁹ is seen, no family prayer⁴⁰ is heard, no parental admonition is delivered! What! This cruel, wicked, ruinous neglect of their children's immortal interests in the families of *professors*!⁴¹ Monstrous inconsistency! Shocking dereliction of principle! No wonder that their children go astray. This is easily accounted for. Some of the most profligate⁴² young people that I know have issued from such households. Their prejudices against religion and their enmity to its forms are greater than those of the children of avowed worldlings. Inconsistent, hypocritical, negligent professors of religion frequently excite in their sons and daughters an unconquerable aversion and disgust against piety, which seems to produce in them a determination to place themselves at the furthest possible remove from its influence.

But I am now speaking of the failure of a religious education where it has been in some measure carried on, instances of which are by no means infrequent... Too often do we see the child of many prayers and many hopes forgetting the instructions he has received and running with the multitude to do evil. Far be it from me to add affliction to affliction by saying that this is to be traced in every case to parental neglect. I would not thus, as it were, pour niter and vinegar⁴³ upon the bleeding wounds with which filial⁴⁴ impiety has lacerated many a father's mind. I would not thus cause the wretched parent to exclaim, "Reproach hath broken my heart, already half-broken by my child's misconduct." I know that in many cases no blame whatever could be thrown on the parent. It was the depravity of the child alone, which nothing could subdue but the power of the Holy Ghost, that led to the melancholy result. The best possible scheme of Christian education, most judiciously directed and most perseveringly maintained, has in some cases totally failed. God is a sovereign, and He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy (Rom 9:15). Still, however, there is in the order of means a tendency in a religious education to secure the desired result. God usually does bless with His saving influence such efforts. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Pro 22:6). This is certainly true, as a general rule, though there are many exceptions to it.

I shall now lay before you the principal obstacles to the success of religious education as they strike my mind.

FIRST: It is frequently too negligently and capriciously⁴⁵ maintained, even where it is not totally omitted. It is obvious that, if at all attended to, it should be attended to with anxious earnestness, systematic order, and perpetual regularity. It should not be maintained as a dull form, an unpleasant drudgery, but as a matter of deep and delightful interest. The heart of the parent should be *entirely* and *obviously* engaged. A part of every returning Sabbath should be spent by him in the instruction of his filial charge. His concern should be embodied, more or

³⁸ **domestic piety** – reverence and obedience to God in the home.

³⁹ **family altar** – the place or scene of family worship.

⁴⁰ **family prayer** – many older writers used this as another term for family worship. For encouragement and help with this important practice, see FGB 188, *Family Worship*.

⁴¹ **professors** – those who profess to be Christians.

⁴² **profligate** – recklessly immoral.

⁴³ **niter...wounds** – pouring sodium carbonate and vinegar on an open wound would be extremely painful.

⁴⁴ **filial** – relationship of a child to his parents.

⁴⁵ **capriciously** – unpredictably.

less, with the whole habit of parental conduct. The father may lead the usual devotions at the family altar. The mother may join with him in teaching their children catechism, hymns, and Scripture. But, if this be unattended by serious admonition, visible anxiety, and strenuous effort to lead their children to think seriously on religion as a matter of *infinite* importance, little good can be expected. A cold, formal, capricious system of religious instruction is rather likely to create prejudice against religion than prepossession⁴⁶ in its favor

Then again, a religious education should be *consistent*. It should extend to everything that is likely to assist in the formation of character...It should select the schools,⁴⁷ the companions, the amusements, the books of youth. For if it do nothing more than merely teach a form of sound words to the understanding and to the memory, while the impression of the heart and the formation of the character are neglected, very little is to be expected from such efforts. A handful of seed, scattered now and then upon the ground without order or perseverance, might as rationally be expected to produce a good crop as that a mere lukewarm, capricious, religious education should be followed by true piety. If the parent be not visibly in earnest, it cannot be expected that the child will be so. Religion, by every Christian parent, is theoretically acknowledged to be the most important thing in the world. But if in practice the father appears a thousand times more anxious for the son to be a good scholar than a real Christian, and the mother more solicitous for the daughter to be a good dancer or musician than a child of God, they may teach what they like in the way of good doctrine, *but they are not to look for genuine piety as the result*. This can only be expected where it is really taught and inculcated as the one thing needful.

SECONDLY: The relaxation of domestic discipline is another obstacle in the way of a successful religious education. A parent is invested by God with a degree of authority over his children, which he cannot neglect to use without being guilty of trampling underfoot the institutions of heaven. Every family is a community, the government of which is strictly despotic,⁴⁸ though not tyrannical. Every father is a sovereign, though not an oppressor. He is a legislator, not merely a counselor. His will should be law, not merely advice. He is to command, to restrain, to punish; and children are required to obey. He is, if necessary, to threaten, to rebuke, to chastise; and they are to submit with reverence. He is to decide what books shall be read, what companions invited, what engagements formed, and how time is to be spent. If he sees anything wrong, he is not to interpose merely with the timid, feeble, ineffectual protest of Eli—"Why do ye thus, my sons?" (1Sa 2:23)—but with the firm though mild prohibition. He must rule his own house and by the whole of his conduct make his children feel that obedience is his due and his demand.

The want of discipline, wherever it exists, is supplied by confusion and domestic anarchy. Everything goes wrong in the absence of this. A gardener may sow the choicest seeds. But if he neglect to pluck up weeds and prune wild luxuriances,⁴⁹ he must not expect to see his flowers grow or his garden flourish. So a parent may deliver the best instructions. But if he does not by discipline eradicate evil tempers, correct bad habits, repress rank corruptions, nothing excellent can be looked for. He may be a good prophet and a good priest; but if he be not also a good *king*, all else is vain. When once a man breaks his scepter or lends it to his children as a plaything, he may give up his hopes of success from a religious education...The misfortune in many families is that discipline is unsteady and capricious, sometimes carried even to tyranny itself, at [other times] relaxed into a total suspension of law, so that the children are at one time trembling like slaves, at others revolting like rebels; at one time groaning beneath an iron yoke, at others rioting in a state of lawless liberty. This is a most mischievous system, and its effects are generally just what might be expected.

In some cases, discipline commences too late. In others, it ceases too early. A father's magisterial⁵⁰ office is nearly coeval⁵¹ with his parental relation. A child, as soon as he can reason, should be made to feel that obedience is due to parents. For if he grow up to boyhood before he is subject to the mild rule of paternal authority, he will very probably, like an untamed bullock, resist the yoke. On the other hand, as long as children continue beneath the parental roof, they are to be subject to the rules of domestic discipline. Many parents greatly err in abdicating the throne in favor of a son or daughter because the child is becoming a man or a woman. It is truly pitiable to see

⁴⁶ **prepossession** – favorable inclination toward.

⁴⁷ For this reason, many in our day have chosen to educate their children at home.

⁴⁸ **despotic** – having an absolute ruler, in this case the father.

⁴⁹ **luxuriances** – excessive growths.

⁵⁰ **magisterial** – authoritative.

⁵¹ **coeval** – equal in duration.

a boy or girl of fifteen...allowed to sow the seeds of revolt in the domestic community and to act in opposition to parental authority until the too compliant father gives the reins of government into filial hands or else by his conduct declares his children to be in a state of independence. There need not be any contest for power. For where a child has been accustomed to obey, even from an infant, the yoke of obedience will generally be light and easy. If not, and a rebellious temper should begin to show itself early, a judicious father should be on his guard and suffer no encroachments⁵² on his prerogative.⁵³ At the same time, the increased power of his authority, like the increased pressure of the atmosphere, should be felt without being seen. This will make it irresistible.

THIRDLY: Undue severity, in the other extreme, is as injurious as unlimited indulgence. If injudicious fondness has slain its tens of thousands, unnecessary harshness has destroyed its thousands. By an authority that cannot err, we are told that the cords of love are the bands of a man. There is a plastic⁵⁴ power in love. The human mind is so constituted as to yield readily to the influence of kindness. Men are more easily led to their duty than driven to it...Love seems so essential an element of parental character that there is something shockingly revolting not only in a cruel, not only in an unkind or severe, but even in a coldhearted father. Study the parental character as it is exhibited in that most exquisitely touching moral picture, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. When a father governs entirely by cold, bare, uncovered authority; by mere commands, prohibitions, and threats; by frowns, untempered with smiles; when the friend is never blended with the legislator, nor authority modified with love; when his conduct produces only a servile⁵⁵ fear in the hearts of his children instead of a generous affection; when he is served from a dread of the effects of disobedience rather than from a sense of the pleasure of obedience. When he is rather dreaded in the family circle as a frowning specter than hailed as the guardian angel of its joys; when even accidents raise a storm or faults produce a hurricane of passion in his bosom; when offenders are driven to equivocation or lying with the hope of averting by concealment those severe corrections which disclosure always entails; when unnecessary interruptions are made to innocent enjoyments; when in fact nothing of the father, but everything of the tyrant is seen: can we expect religion to grow in such a soil as this? Yes, as rationally as we may look for the tenderest hothouse plant to thrive amidst the rigors of eternal frost.

It is useless for such a father to teach religion. He chills the soul of his pupils. He hardens their hearts against impression. He prepares them to rush with eager haste to their ruin as soon as they have thrown off the yoke of their bondage and to employ their liberty as affording the means of unbridled gratification.

Let parents then in all their conduct blend the lawgiver and the friend, temper authority with kindness...Let them so act that their children shall be convinced that their law is holy and their commandment is holy, and just, and good and that to be so governed is to be blessed.

FOURTHLY: The inconsistent conduct of parents themselves is a frequent and powerful obstacle to success in religious education....What then must be the influence of parental example? Now, as I am speaking of religious parents, it is of course assumed that they do exhibit in some measure the reality of religion...Religion may be seen in dim outline by the children in their parents' conduct. But it is attended with so many minor inconsistencies, such a mist of imperfections, that it presents little to conciliate their regard or raise their esteem. There is so much worldly-mindedness, so much conformity to fashionable follies, so much irregularity of domestic piety, such frequent sallies⁵⁶ of unchristian temper, such inconsolable grief and querulous⁵⁷ complaint under the trials of life, such frequent animosities towards their fellow Christians observable in the conduct of some Christians that their children see religion to the greatest possible disadvantage. The consequence is that it either lowers their standard of piety or inspires disgust towards it altogether.

Parents, as you would wish your instructions and admonitions to your family to be successful, *enforce them by the power of a holy example*. It is not enough for you to be pious on the whole, but you should be wholly pious; not only to be real disciples, but *eminent* ones; not only sincere Christians, but *consistent* ones. Your standard of religion should be very high. To some parents I would give this advice: *Say less* about religion to your children, or else *manifest more* of its influence. Leave off family *prayer*, or else leave off family *sins*. Beware how you act, for all your

⁵² **encroachments** – gradual intrusions.

⁵³ **prerogative** – exclusive right.

⁵⁴ **plastic** – formative; creative.

⁵⁵ **servile** – slave-like submission.

⁵⁶ **sallies** – outbursts.

⁵⁷ **querulous** – whiney.

actions are seen at home. Never talk of religion but with reverence. Be not forward to speak of the faults of your fellow Christians. When the subject is introduced, let it be in a spirit of charity towards the offender and of decided abhorrence of the fault. Many parents have done irreparable injury to their children's minds by a proneness to find out, to talk of, and almost to rejoice over the inconsistencies of professing Christians. Never cavil⁵⁸ at nor find fault with the religious exercises of the minister you attend. Rather, commend his discourses in order that your children may listen to them with greater attention. Direct their views to the most eminent Christians. Point out to them the loveliness of exemplary piety. In short, seeing that your example may be expected so much to aid or to frustrate your efforts for the conversion of your children, consider "what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness" (2Pe 3:11).

FIFTHLY: Another obstacle to the success of religious instruction is sometimes found in the wild conduct of an elder branch of the family, especially in the case of a dissipated⁵⁹ son. The elder branches of a family are found, in general, to have considerable influence over the rest and oftentimes to give the tone of morals to the others. They are looked up to by their younger brothers and sisters. They bring companions, books, amusements into the house and thus form the character of their juniors. It is of great consequence therefore that parents should pay particular attention to their elder children. If unhappily the habits of these should be decidedly unfriendly to the religious improvement of the rest, they should be removed, if possible, from the family. One profligate son may lead all his brothers astray. I have seen this, in some cases, most painfully verified. A parent may feel unwilling to send from home an unpromising child under the apprehension that he will grow worse and worse. *But kindness to him in this way is cruelty to the others.* Wickedness is contagious, especially when the diseased person is a brother.

SIXTHLY: Bad companions out of the house counteract all the influence of religious instruction delivered at home. A Christian parent should ever be on the alert to watch the associations that his children are inclined to form. On this subject, I have said much to the young themselves in the following work. But it is a subject that equally concerns the parent. One ill-chosen friend of your children's may undo all the good you are the means of doing at home. It is impossible for you to be sufficiently vigilant on this point. From their very infancy, encourage them to look up to you as the selectors of their companions. Impress them with the necessity of this and form in them a habit of consulting you at all times. Never encourage an association that is not likely to have a decidedly friendly influence on their religious character. This caution was never more necessary than in the present age. Young people are brought very much together by the religious institutions that are now formed... Yet it is too much even for charity to believe that all the active young friends of Sunday Schools, Juvenile Missionary Societies, etc., are fit companions for our sons and our daughters.

SEVENTHLY: The schisms that sometimes arise in our churches and embitter the minds of Christians against each other have a very unfriendly influence upon the minds of the young. They see so much that is opposite to the spirit and genius⁶⁰ of Christianity in both parties and enter so deeply into the views and feelings of one of them that either their attention is drawn off from the essentials of religion, or their prejudices raised against them. I look upon this as one of the most painful and mischievous consequences of ecclesiastical contentions...

[LASTLY]: The spirit of filial independence, which is sanctioned by the habits if not by the opinions of the age, is another hindrance and the last that I shall mention to the good effect contemplated and desired by a religious education. The disposition, which is but too apparent in this age to enlarge the privileges of the children by diminishing the prerogative of their parents, is neither for the comfort of the latter, nor for the wellbeing of the former. Rebellion against a justly constituted authority can never be in any case a blessing; all wise parents, together with all wise youth, will unite in supporting that just parental authority, which, however the precocious⁶¹ manhood of some might feel it to be an oppression, the more natural and slowly approaching maturity of others will acknowledge to be a blessing. Children who find the parental yoke a burden are not very likely to look upon that of Christ as a benefit.

Such, my dear friends, as they appear to my mind, are the principal obstacles to the success of those efforts that are carried on by many for the religious education of their children. Seriously consider them and, having looked at

⁵⁸ **cavil** – raise trivial objections.

⁵⁹ **dissipated** – excessive in the pursuit of pleasure.

⁶⁰ **genius** – distinctive character.

⁶¹ **precocious** – early developed.

them, endeavor to avoid them...and while you neglect not any one means that can promote their comfort, reputation, and usefulness in this world, concentrate your chief solicitude⁶² and employ your noblest energies in a scriptural, judicious, persevering scheme of *religious* education.

From *The Christian Father's Present to His Children*, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a division of Reformation Heritage Books, www.heritagebooks.org.

John Angell James (1785-1859): English Congregationalist minister; author of *Female Piety, A Help to Domestic Happiness, An Earnest Ministry*, and many others; born at Blandford, Dorsetshire, England.

THE CALAMITY OF UNGODLY CHILDREN

Edward Lawrence (1623-1695)

“A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.”—Proverbs 17:25

IT is a very great calamity to godly parents to have wicked and ungodly children. “A foolish son (says the Proverbs text) is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.” To the same purpose is Proverbs 17:21: “He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy.” A foolish son dampens all his joy. And Proverbs 19:13: “A foolish son is the calamity of his father”...

The greatness of this calamity appears by the passions in the parents that are moved and affected hereby. I shall only give you three: fear, anger, and sorrow.

FEAR: This is a troublesome passion, and godly parents are never void of fear of their wicked children. They are afraid that everyone who knocks at the door, and that every post,⁶³ and every friend who comes to visit them brings them some sad tidings of their disobedient children. I shall amplify this by giving three great evils that such parents are greatly perplexed with the fear of.

They are afraid lest their children are in the practice of some great sins. This was Job's fear when his children were feasting together (Job 1:5). Job said, “It may be my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” Their children are seldom out of their sight, but the good parents are in fear of this. They know their children are always exposed to the devil's temptations, to the snares of the world, to the allurements of evil company, that their corrupt hearts are set to comply with all of those, and that they have provoked God to give them up to their own lusts. And therefore, they are in continual fear lest these poor children are lying, swearing, cursing, whoring, or are drunk, defiling, debauching,⁶⁴ and destroying themselves and others.

They are in fear lest some heavy judgment of God will befall them in this life. Thus David, when his son Absalom was in the head of a high rebellion against his father and the battle was to be fought with the rebels, was fearful lest his son should then perish in his sins. These parents know that their poor children are out of God's way, and are, as birds wandering from the nest (Pro 27:8), exposed to all manner of danger. They know what the Word threatens against them and what fearful instances there are of the vengeance of God upon disobedient children. And therefore, they are in fear lest their sins should bring them to some untimely and shameful death.

They are in fear of their eternal damnation. They are sensible that their children are children of wrath and live in those sins for which the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. And these parents believe what hell is. For as faith in the promises is the substance of things hoped for, so faith as it believes the threatenings is the

⁶² **solicitude** – concern for the well-being of another.

⁶³ **post** – one who bears a letter or message.

⁶⁴ **debauching** – indulging in excess sensual pleasures.

substance of things feared. Therefore, they cannot but tremble to think that their dear lambs, whom they so tenderly nourished and cherished, are in danger every moment of being cast into the fire that is prepared for devils.

ANGER: Anger is another passion that is moved in godly parents because of the wickedness of their children. And this is troublesome, for a man is never out of trouble while he is in anger. And the more the wills of these parents are bent to have their children godly, the more are they displeased and provoked to anger by their sins. They are angry to see them provoke that God Whom they themselves are so careful to please, to see them destroying their precious souls that they are laboring to save, and to see them waste those estates on their filthy lusts that they have gotten by their care and labor and prayers. They cannot but think of them with anger, speak of them with anger, and look at them with anger. And thus, their children, who should be their delight and pleasure, are a continual cross and vexation to them.

SORROW: They are deeply affected with grief and sorrow for the wickedness of their children. The parents' graces cause them to mourn for their children's sins. Their saving knowledge makes their hearts bleed to see their children scorn and despise that glory which they see in God and Christ. And while they by faith are feeding on Christ, it grieves them to see their children feeding themselves with the dirty pleasures of sin. Their love to God makes them groan that their children love sin, the worst evil, and hate God, the chief good.

The greatness of this affliction appears by these eight aggravations of it: *First, it aggravates their grief to remember what pleasure and delight these children were to them in their childhood.* It torments them now to see their sweet and pleasant smiles turned into scornful and disdainful looks at their parents and their pretty, broken words turned into oaths and lies and other rotten speeches. It torments them to think that these who were so forward to clasp their arms around their necks, to kiss them, and to run at their commands, now lift up the heel against them.

Second, it aggravates their sorrow to see themselves so miserably disappointed in their former hopes of these children. "Hope deferred (said Solomon) maketh the heart sick" (Pro 13:12), but to be crossed and disappointed in hopes of such great mercy even breaks the heart. When these parents remember how pleasant it was to them to hear these children lisp out their catechisms and to hear their good words of God and Christ, it cannot but be very grievous to them that the same children whom with Hannah they lent to the Lord should sell themselves to the devil.

Third, it aggravates their sorrow that their children are so void of love to their parents and to see that the company of liars, drunkards, whoremongers, and thieves is more delightful to them than the company of their parents.

Fourth, it aggravates their sorrow to look upon the holy children of others and say, "Yonder are children that make a glad father and mother, when the children of our bodies and counsels and prayers and vows and tears live as if their father was an Amorite and their mother an Hittite!" (Eze 16:3).

Fifth, it aggravates the parents' sorrow when they have but one child, and that one proves to be foolish and disobedient. Of this, there are many instances. The Scripture, to set forth the saddest kind of mourning, compares it to mourning for an only son. Jeremiah 6:26: "Make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation." Zechariah 12:10: "They shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son." I know that these Scriptures speak of parents mourning for the death of an only son, but it is not so sad to follow an only son to the grave as to see an only child live to the dishonor of God, to be a curse to his generation, and to be continually destroying his precious soul. It is a very bitter case when as much love, kindness, care, cost, pains, prayers, and fastings are bestowed upon one child as other parents bestow upon many children. And, notwithstanding all this, one child still proves to be such a monster of wickedness, as if the sins of many ungodly children met in him.

Sixth, it is an aggravation when God's holy ministers are the fathers of fools, which...often happens. And this is a most dreadful case for such who have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and yet must bind over their own children to the wrath of God. Such know the terrors of the Lord and the torments of hell more than others know, and therefore must be more affected to believe that this at present is the portion of their own children.

Seventh, it is an aggravation when such children, whom their parents designed to serve God in the ministry of the Gospel, prove to be ungodly. This is a matter of great lamentation, for the parents intend them for the highest office in the church, give them education for that end, and then these children make themselves as salt without savor, which is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

Eighth, it is an aggravation when children are a grief to their parents in their old age, and do, as it were, throw dirt upon their hoary heads, which is their crown of glory. It is the command of God in Proverbs 23:22: “Despise not thy mother when she is old.” Solomon tells us that the days of old age are evil days (Ecc 12); their very age is a troublesome and incurable disease. They are like the grasshopper: every light thing is a burden to them. Therefore it must be more troublesome to them to be tormented with wicked children when the strong men (as divines think) Solomon calls “the legs” bow themselves, and their children, who should be a staff and support to them, break their hearts and cause their gray hairs to go with sorrow to the grave.

From *Parents’ Concerns for Their Unsaved Children*, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a division of Reformation Heritage Books, www.heritagebooks.org.

Edward Lawrence (1623-1695): Nonconformist English minister; educated Magdalene College, Cambridge; ejected from his pulpit in 1662 by the Act of Uni-formity; loved and respected by other Puritans such as Matthew Henry and Nathanael Vincent; born in Moston, Shropshire, England.

Unless we are careful over the young, there may be none to bear the Lord’s banner when we sleep among the clods. In matters of doctrine, you will find orthodox congregations frequently change to heterodoxy in the course of thirty or forty years, and that is because too often there has been no catechizing of the children in the essential doctrines of the Gospel.—*Charles Spurgeon*

Learn to say “No” to your children. Show them that you are able to refuse whatever you think is not fit for them. Show them that you are ready to punish disobedience, and that when you speak of punishment, you are not only ready to threaten, but also to perform.—*J. C. Ryle*

DIRECTIONS FOR GRIEVING OVER UNGODLY CHILDREN

Edward Lawrence (1623-1695)

DIRECTION 1: *Abhor it as a great sin to faint under this affliction, that is, either to be disabled for your duty or to sink in your comforts.* For it is a sign that you placed too much of your happiness in your children if their wickedness makes you faint under this calamity. I shall only plead with you as Joab did with David when he made that bitter lamentation for his son Absalom in 2 Samuel 19:6: “For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants.” So I say to you, you hereby declare that you do not regard God and Christ if your soul faints under the burden of a disobedient child.

DIRECTION 2: *Consider...that this is an affliction that ordinarily befalls God’s dearest children.* You must not think of this as if you were the first godly parents of ungodly children, or as if herein some strange thing happened unto you. I confess where a calamity seems singular or extraordinary, it is more apt to overwhelm the afflicted because they will be then apt to think that there is some extraordinary displeasure in God against them and to say with the church, “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger” (Lam 1:12). But this affliction is ordinary and is consistent with the saving and distinguishing grace of God to them and is a rod that is usually lain on the lot of the righteous.

DIRECTION 3: *Consider that there might have befallen you greater miser-ies than this.* I will give you three greater evils that would have made you more miserable. First, you might have been a wicked, ungodly wretch yourself. And for the great Jehovah to have cursed and damned you forever would have made you unspeakably more miserable than to be tormented a while with a wicked child. Second, you might have had an ungodly spouse to be as rottenness in your bones. Solomon seems to speak of a troublesome spouse as being more grievous than a wicked child is. Proverbs 19:13: “A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.” This is like the constant dropping of rain into a house, which rots the building, spoils the goods, and ruins both

house and inhabitants. To the extent that your spouse is nearer and ought to be dearer to you than your child, to be afflicted therein is a greater calamity. Third, God might have left all your children to perish in their sins. But if you have even one godly child, your joy in that should greatly abate your sorrow for your other wicked children...

DIRECTION 5: *Let your sorrow be guided by Scripture and reason, so that you may not provoke God, defile your souls, and wound your consciences by sinful groans and tears.* For this end, observe two rules: First, mourn more for their sins whereby they provoke and dishonor God and defile and destroy themselves and others, than for any shame or loss in worldly things that befall you hereby. In this way, it may appear that the love of God and your children's souls, and not the love of the world, has the greatest influence on your sorrow. For I fear that there is usually in good parents too much of carnal sorrow and too little of godly sorrow in their mourning under this great calamity. Second, do not let your sorrow disease your body and impair your health. God does not require us to mourn more for our children's sins than our own, and He never makes it our duty by sorrow for either to destroy our bodies, which are the temples of the Holy Ghost. The truth is that godly sorrow is the health of the soul and never hurts the body. For grace is always a friend and never an enemy to nature. Therefore, do not deprive yourself of all opportunities to honor God and serve His Church. Do not make your spouse desolate or your children orphans by such sorrow that will neither please God, ease yourself, nor do any good to your wicked and miserable children.

DIRECTION 6: Labor to get your graces strengthened under this great affliction; for you have need of more knowledge, wisdom, faith, hope, love, meekness, and patience to enable and fit you to bear this than most other affections. And you must see and enjoy more of God and Christ to keep your hearts up under this than under most other troubles. Yet by the strength of Christ, you may be enabled not only to bear this tribulation, but to glory in it. And the greater the trouble is, the more good you may gain by it.

DIRECTION 7: *Comfort yourself in that the greatest and best things that you have most prayed for, trusted unto, expected, and chiefly loved and desired are all safe and sure.* God is and will be blessed and glorious forever, whatever becomes of your child. All His infinite perfections are working for His glory. Christ Himself is God's and does the whole work of a Mediator as His servant and for His glory. All the blessed angels and saints will forever honor, admire, love, and praise Him.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are forever your own and will to all eternity be glorified in making you blessed and glorious. You have a bad child, *but a good God*. All your work will be done, your sins pardoned and killed, your graces perfected, and your body and soul glorified—and shall an ungodly child make all your consolations herein small to you?

DIRECTION 8: *Last, consider this trouble will last but a little while.* I confess I do not know or can upon search find anything that can lift up the heart above this trouble but the knowledge and sense of the infinite love of God in Christ to a man's self and of that holy and glorious eternity which this love will shortly bring him unto. To tell you that this is and has been the case of other godly parents may allay something of your grief. But what is this but to tell you that others are and have been as miserable as you, or to tell you that children as wicked as yours have been sanctified and saved yields some hopes? But it can amount to nothing more than to think that they may be saved or they may be damned, and there is as much reason to fear the one as to hope for the other. But for a man to see a gainful death, ready to loose him into that world where there is none of this sorrow and to know that at the Day of Judgment...he himself shall sit with Christ to judge them; and that he shall love and delight in the holiness and justice of the Judge of all the world in passing that sentence upon them, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mat 25:41)—this is sufficient to overcome all immoderate grief for his ungodly children.

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The willow grows fast, and so do young Christians. If you want the eminent men in God's Church, look for them amongst those converted in youth...our Samuels and Timothys must come from those who knew the Scriptures from their youth. O Lord! Send us many such whose growth and advance shall as much astonish us as the growth of the willows by the watercourses.—*Charles Spurgeon*

The Lord teach you all how precious Christ is and what a mighty and complete work He hath done for our salvation. Then, I feel confident you will use every means to bring your children to Jesus that they may live through Him. The Lord teach you all your need of the Holy Spirit to renew, sanctify, and quicken your souls. Then, I feel sure you will urge your children to pray for Him without ceasing and never rest until He has come

down into their hearts with power and made them new creatures. The Lord grant this, and then I have a good hope that you will indeed train up your children well—train well for this life and train well for the life to come; train well for earth and train well for heaven; train them for God, for Christ, and for eternity. —*J. C. Ryle*

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY OF WITNESSING TO THE WORLD

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

THE Apostle reminds us that at a time of apostasy, at a time of gross godlessness and irreligion, when the very foundations are shaking, one of the most striking manifestations of the lawlessness is “disobedient to parents” (2Ti 3:2)...When will the civil authorities learn and realize that there is an indissoluble connection between godlessness and a lack of morality and decent behavior?...The tragedy is that the civil authorities—irrespective of which political party is in power—all seem to be governed by modern psychology rather than by the Scriptures. They all are convinced that they can deal with unrighteousness directly, in and by itself. But that is impossible. Unrighteousness is always the result of ungodliness, and the only hope of getting back any measure of righteousness into life is to have a *revival of godliness*. That is precisely what the Apostle is saying to the Ephesians and to ourselves (Eph 6:1-4). The best and the most moral periods in the history of this country, and every other country, have always been those periods that have followed mighty religious awakenings. This problem of lawlessness and lack of discipline, the problem of children and of youth, was just not present fifty years ago as it is today. Why? Because the great tradition of the Evangelical Awakening of the 18th century was still operating. But as that has gone, these terrible moral and social problems are coming back, as the Apostle teaches us, and as they have always come back throughout the running centuries.

Present conditions therefore *demand* that we should look at the Apostle’s statement. I believe that Christian parents and children, Christian families, have a unique opportunity of witnessing to the world at this present time by just being different. We can be true evangelists by showing this discipline, this law and order, this true relationship between parents and children. We may be the means under God’s hand of bringing many to a knowledge of the Truth. Let us therefore think of it in that way.

From *Life in the Spirit in Marriage, Home & Work: An Exposition of Ephesians 5:18 to 6:9*.

