

Parents' Groans

over Their
Ungodly Children



Edward Lawrence (1623-1695)

PARENTS' GROANS OVER THEIR UNGODLY CHILDREN

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The author's dedication:

"To my beloved children, Deborah, Samuel, Edward, John, Thomas, Elizabeth, Mary, Benjamin, Nathanael; and to all the children of Christian parents."

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PARENTS' GROANS OVER THEIR UNGODLY CHILDREN

Published for the benefit of all, but especially
for the benefit of good parents and their children

*“Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their
father, because the Lord would slay them.”*

—1 Samuel 2:25

Prologue

My Dear Children:

I AM sensible of my unworthiness and unfitness to be seen in print. It is now above twenty years since, by the power and goodness of God, I was unexpectedly rescued from the jaws of death. This was the reason I then published that little book called *Christ's Power over Bodily Diseases*. I had never been the author of a book of this title, had not two of you, but especially one, made me the father of fools.

I shall here say no more particularly to you two, but that sound repentance and the fruits thereof, in a settled reformation of life, will yet be your glory and my joy. But if ye hate to be reformed (which God forbid), I shall mourn until I die for the loss of children; but ye will be tormented forever for the loss of God.

Children! I have not of the things of this world to leave you. I do acknowledge the wisdom of God in not judging me fit to be entrusted with these things; but it is enough for us if we can call God our own, though we cannot call the riches of the world our own. Some of you do with comfort remember how we have often worshiped God together in singing with delight those words, “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked...” (Psa 37:16-20).

I here leave you this letter of the counsel and advice of your aged, loving, and faithful father, who sees death looking him and you in the face and beholds the Judge before the door. This will speak to you, when death hath silenced me. It speaks the same things that God, Christ, and your own consciences speak to you; and it speaks to you (as it were) in the hearing of the world.

1. *Put a true value on your own beings*, for ye cannot love God and Christ, if ye do not love yourselves.¹ Ye are of that kind of creatures who are made much higher than all other visible creatures, and but a little lower than the angels. Ye are capable to know, choose, love, and delight in God; to speak of Him; and to entertain yourselves continually with Him. Ye are of those creatures in whose happiness God glorifies all His perfections. He made this world for man. He commanded His only-begotten Son to sacrifice Himself for man and sent Him to be born, to live, to die, to rise again, and to intercede in heaven for man. He hath revealed all the truths of the Christian religion for the good of man. Therefore, ye should think it greater madness to sell your precious souls and bodies to the devil and to your lusts, for the short and dirty pleasures of fun, than to sell a purse of gold or a cabinet full of jewels for a bag of chaff or cherry-stones.² You should account it below you to give yourselves to any but to God!

2. Know that as your beings are great, so *your happiness or misery will be very great*. Riches or poverty, sickness or health, this present life or the death that deprives you of it, are things too little to make you blessed or miserable. Rather, all the curses of God or the blessings of the Gospel will be upon you presently! Ye can live neither like men, nor like Christians, until ye know what it is to be saved or damned, and what it is to lose or enjoy God.

3. That ye may escape the wrath and obtain the glory set before you, let it be your chief end and interest *to know, honor, and enjoy God*. Use the creatures as His witnesses to testify and declare the being and glory of God to you—for God hath not only made and appointed them to fill your hearts with food and gladness, but also that in the use of them ye may feel, find, and fill your souls with God. Especially behold the glory of God as He is presented to you in the glass³ of the Scriptures, that He may have that name in your hearts, which He hath in His Word.

Present Him to your souls as God over all blessed forever (Rom 9:5) that ye may conclude that He, Who is so infinitely good as to be His own happiness, is sufficient to make *you* happy. That this God may be your eternal life and happiness, ye must know and behold His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, Who is the image of the invisible God, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person (Heb 1:3). Therefore, behold His glory as the Father of such a Son, and as the Lord of such a servant; for Jesus Christ is the Lord's Christ (Luk 2:26). Christ is God's (1Co 3:23), and executes His office of a Mediator⁴ in obedience to the will and glory of God the Father. Ye may behold Christ's

¹ **love yourselves** – The author is not referring to what we commonly hear from modern psychology. Rather, he emphasizes the reader's need to understand that his soul is a creation of God that will last into timeless eternity. Valuing this eternal existence will lead us to consider God's claim upon us to repent and believe.

² **cherrystones** – the pits of cherries, used as a type of something of little value.

³ **glass** – mirror.

⁴ **Mediator** – one who goes between two parties to remove a disagreement or reach a common goal; "It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the

glory in God's calling Him to such a high office, in His accomplishing Him for the execution thereof, in prospering Him, and making Him successful in His whole work, in giving Him such a blessed seed, in making Him victorious over all His enemies, and in rewarding Him for His great service and obedience. So, according to the intent of the Scriptures forenamed, ye must labor to get such a sight of the glory of God shining upon you in the face of Jesus Christ, as will make an impression of His image in your souls.

Therefore, loathe and abhor sin, which is against the glory of God and which is the only evil that can make you lose such a glorious God.

For this reason be convinced of the vanity of this world, which is but a poor thing when the glory of God shines on your souls. For ye will be most blessed in Him when this world shall be dissolved and passed away.

Let this make Jesus Christ glorious and acceptable to you, Whose office and work it is to redeem you from all sin and misery, and to make you blessed forever in the likeness and enjoyment of this glorious God.

Let this also cause you to endeavor to fill all persons with the great Name of God and Christ that ye may gain them all the hearts, love, and service ye can. Therefore, in all company, let God and Christ have your good word.

4. Know that *to love and delight in God is the best employment* for the days of your youth. God is much concerned for young persons. The Proverbs of Solomon are written to give to the young man knowledge and discretion⁵ (Pro 1:4), and one great use of the word of God is to teach young men to cleanse their way (Psa 119:9). Young men, maidens, and children are called upon to praise the Name of the Lord (Psa 148:12-13). We find many mourning with holy Augustine⁶ that they loved God so late, but none complaining that they loved Him too soon! As young as you are, in heaven and hell, it is better to be a young child of God than a young child of the devil. Young saints are the glory of God, the fullness and accomplishment of Christ, the joy of angels, the security and support of religion, the crown of their parents, and the blessing of their generation.

5. *Fill your time with the fruits of the Spirit.* See that your hearts be filled with grace, and then your days will be filled with fruit. Be always receiving Christ and resigning yourselves to Him. Feel your hearts continually laying hold on eternal life, and live as if ye were always running to heaven. Spend every day so that ye may lie down in peace at night that the Lord's Day may be pleasant, death gainful, and eternity glorious.

6. *Improve God's ordinances of worship...* Feel the difference betwixt the Lord's Day and other days. See that the Word preached be mixed with faith, engrafted⁷ in your hearts, that it kill your sins and reform your lives. Pray continually, and in that duty, see

world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." (1689 London Baptist Confession 8.1, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)

⁵ **discretion** – the ability to discern or distinguish what is right;prudence.

⁶ **Aurelius Augustine** (354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian, born in Tagaste, North Africa.

⁷ **engrafted** – inserted permanently to something else.

that ye be with the spirits of children with your Father in heaven. Let all your affairs pass through praying hearts; and reckon all your own that ye sincerely pray for. Sing Psalms as those that make God your song and joy, and as if ye were sensible that ye are in the gates of heaven, ready to enter therein, to join with that world of blessed angels and saints in admiring and praising God. When ye come to the Lord's Supper, see all that is presented to you, receive all that is offered, and do all that is commanded you.

7. *Be faithful in the truth*, and then ye need not be afraid of yourselves or of any other. This is your greatest safety. Ye may then feel the ground firm under you, and may say with David, "My foot standeth in an even place" (Psa 26:12). If ye are called to suffer, choose it rather than sin—seeing men cannot kill your souls, let not the fear of them make you destroy them yourselves.

8. *Decline evil company*. Do not go with them to hell, who will not go with you to heaven. But if ye are called into such company, feel yourselves with God, whilst ye are with them; and carry it as those that are sensible that there is a God in the place. Exercise those graces that are contrary to and do condemn their sins: be humble with the proud, meek with the angry, loving with the malicious, that they may be reproved by your graces and that ye may not be defiled by their sins.

9. *Labor to be a blessing to all persons*. Let me see that in you, for which they may have cause to love and praise God. Bear all wrongs, but do none. Do what lies in you to make all persons holy and joyful, but make none sinful, angry, or sad. Forgive all, but let none have need to forgive you. Exercise their love, but do not by your sins exercise their patience. Give all [persons] cause to bless God for you, but give not cause any to wish they had never known you.

10. *Dread debts*. Do not bring yourselves under the bondage of debtors unnecessarily. Look upon it as more just and honorable to beg than to borrow, if ye are not likely to pay—except in that case ye plainly acquaint the lender with your condition that he may know what adventure he makes. When ye are able, pay seasonably,⁸ fully, and thankfully: I would have none to lend to any children of mine without first advising with me, except they be in a hopeful way of trade. My advice to such of you is, that you be afraid of being too much trusted; for it is often seen that they who go to the length of their credit are injurious to others and prove bankrupts themselves.

11. *Abhor lying*. This is a sin that is an abomination to the Lord, Whom ye should always please. It is contrary to the Divine Nature, which is in everyone that is born of God (Eph 4:24). It is an abuse of your tongues, which should be your glory. For the use of your tongues is to express your minds, but in a lie your minds and thoughts do contradict your words. It is a wrong to others whom ye would have believe you, when ye do not believe yourselves; it makes you unfit for humane society, for who will converse with those whom they cannot believe? Ye hereby rot your names, for a liar is one of the worst characters of the devil of hell. Ye destroy your bodies and souls forever, for all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

⁸ **seasonably** – at the right time or occasion.

12. *Do not dare to steal.* Take nothing from any person, but what ye can say ye received from the hand of God, can praise Him for it, and can comfortably beg His blessing upon it. Kill those lusts that ye would feed with the fruit of other men's labors. Consider that when ye are tempted to this sin of theft, ye are tempted to bring a curse on your estates and persons, to thrust a dagger into your father's heart, and to hasten yourselves to an untimely and shameful death and a tormenting eternity.

13. *Deride and jeer no persons.* Let your jests be harmless, and make not yourselves the fools of your company; but while ye are cheerful as men and women, lose not the favor of Christians.

14. *Haunt not taverns or alehouses, etc.* Go not into such places, but when God calls you. Stay no longer than He will stay with you. And do nothing there, but what ye shall have cause to bless God for when ye come away.

15. *Be thankful to them who have showed mercy and kindness* to me and you. Pray for them; inquire how it is with their posterity; and as ye are capable, do them good. Remember, "Thy own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not" (Pro 27:10).

16. *Forgive all that have done me wrong,* and pray to God not to visit it on them or their posterity. Ye know I have had hard measure⁹ from some, and I know that I have stood before God to speak good for them and to turn away His wrath from them.

17. As for you that are or may be hereafter set up for yourselves in a way of trade, my counsel to you is this: *See that your persons be upright with God,* that ye may have a Scripture-right to the promises of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, which is to be preferred before the best estate in the world. Pray to God for His blessing. See every customer as sent from Him; and love them as yourselves. Let all that deal with you have cause to say that they deal with the members of Jesus Christ.

18. For you that are or may be apprentices, my counsel and command to you is this: *Let those Scriptures dwell in your hearts that teach you your duty* and encourage you therein (as Eph 6:5-8, Col 3:22-25, Ti 2:9-10, 1Pe 2:18-21). Commit them to memory and bless God that He condescends to be a teacher of servants. Be content with your present condition, which may be the easiest time of your whole age. Be not apt to find fault, for that will make you uneasy to yourselves and to the family. Let all your words, looks, and actions be such as do witness that ye do in your hearts honor your masters and mistresses, and Christ in them. Bear correction patiently, though ye be wronged—the sufferings of Christ are set before you as your pattern herein. Pray daily for your masters and their families, for ye ought to improve all your interest in God for their good. Pray to God to fit you for your calling, that He who teacheth the husbandman¹⁰ to plow and sow may teach you herein (Isa 28:26).

To conclude, love one another according to all the obligations that are upon you, but never put it in the power of anyone to undo the other. Kill all lustings after the honors,

⁹ **hard measure** – severe treatment.

¹⁰ **husbandman** – farmer.

riches, or pleasures of the world. Remember I have told you that as love fulfills all the Law of God, so lust fulfills the law of the devil.

I will say no more. Choose Him for your Father that cannot die. And as Mr. Bolton¹¹ said to his children, so say I to you, “Do not dare to meet me at the Day of Judgment in an unregenerate state!”

—*Your loving and faithful father, Edward Lawrence – 6 June 1681*

Introduction

*“A foolish son is a grief to his father, and
bitterness to her that bare him.”*

—Proverbs 17:25

It is one great argument of the vanity of this world that we may be spoiled of all that is dear to us under the sun by the sins of other men.

A common and sad instance of this is that the comforts of godly parents here are very much at the will and pleasure of their own children. Had a good man all other delights that the creatures can yield and did wash his steps in butter and dip his foot in oil, nay suppose he had all the pleasures of godliness that are ordinarily attained in this life; yet he will be a man of sorrow if a wicked child make him the father of a fool.

This doleful¹² case is presented to us in this text, which I have chosen for the subject of this discourse, that I may duly affect my own and others’ hearts with this great calamity.

In the text, two things are clearly set before us:

1. A case taken for granted; and that is, that godly parents have often foolish children.
2. The misery of that case is expressed; that is, that such children are a grief to their fathers and bitterness to the mothers that bare them.

“*A foolish son*,” that is, a wicked and ungodly son or daughter. It is usual in this book of the Proverbs that both sexes are intended when but one is expressed. Wicked children think themselves wise—wiser than their parents, masters, or ministers; for vain man would be wise though he be like a wild ass’s colt (Job 11:12). But all the devil’s children are fools: for he that will obey and imitate the devil, who is a murderer of all his own children and will not obey and imitate Christ, Who is the Redeemer and Saviour of all His children, I may say of him in the words of a wise woman, “A fool is his name, and folly is with him” (see 1Sa 25:25).

“*Is a grief to his father*.” By father and mother in the text, I understand a godly father and mother who are most affected with this case. “*Is a grief*”: some render the word “an-

¹¹ **Robert Bolton** (1572-1631) – English Puritan preacher and theologian.

¹² **doleful** – mournful; heaviness at heart.

ger,” or “indignation.” Both grief and anger are intended, for a foolish son maketh his good father both angry and sad.

“And bitterness to her that bare him,” that is, to his good mother, called “her that bare him,” to aggravate the mother’s misery and the child’s sin. It cannot but torment the good mother to think that she did with so much sickness, pain, and sorrow bear and bring forth one that proves a child of the devil and is likely to be a firebrand¹³ of hell. It is a great aggravation of the child’s sins to embitter the life of her that was a means of life to him and to hasten that womb to the worms, which with such pangs and throes brought him into the world.

The text will be further opened in the following discourse, which I shall reduce to these three heads. First, that it is ordinary for godly parents to have wicked and ungodly children. Secondly, that this is a very great calamity to these godly parents. Thirdly, use or application.

I. Godly Parents Can Have Ungodly Children

It is ordinary for godly parents to have wicked and ungodly children: this is implied in the text. I may say of this what Solomon speaks of another case, it “is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men” (Ecc 6:1). In the handling of this, I shall,

- A. Give some characters of godly parents.
- B. Give some characters of ungodly children.
- C. Give you several instances for the confirmation of it.

A. The Character of Godly Parents

I shall only give you two main characters of godly parents. First, they are conscientiously careful for their [children’s] preservation; secondly, for the eternal happiness and salvation of their children.

1. Godly parents are careful for the preservation of their children

They are conscientiously careful for the preservation of the natural lives of their children, as trees support and feed the branches that grow out of themselves. As it is natural to the brutes to defend and keep their own young, so nature itself teacheth and inclineth parents to defend, preserve, and provide for the fruit of their own bodies. For this end, they supply them with food, raiment, and physic;¹⁴ fit them for callings;¹⁵ seasonably provide for them meet yokefellows;¹⁶ and every way to take care that they neither perish nor be made miserable. But godly parents, in whom natural affections are sanctified and improved by grace, do all these out of a principle of godliness, as persons who have to do with God herein. They do it in a sense

¹³ **firebrand** – apiece of burning wood, therefore one who deserves to burn in hell.

¹⁴ **physic** – medical treatment; healing.

¹⁵ **fit...callings** – prepared them for making a living.

¹⁶ **seasonably...meet yokefellows** – at an appropriate time provided suitable spouses.

of their dependence on God, pray for daily bread to feed their children, and are thankful when they feel it come warm from their Father in heaven. They do it in obedience and faithfulness to God and with a design that their children may live to be born of God, to be a blessing to this world, and to be blessed in the other world.

As for those unnatural monsters, who feed their lusts with that which should maintain their children, they are so far from being godly parents, that they are worse than infidels in not providing for their families. [They] are like the devil, who (as I said) is a murderer of his own children.

2. Godly parents are careful for the salvation of their children

They are conscientiously careful for the eternal happiness and salvation of their children. Their natural affections, being now sanctified, do work in them for the spiritual good and happiness of their children: “I was my father’s son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother” (Pro 4:3-5). Solomon was his father’s and mother’s darling; their love did run out exceedingly upon this son. He tells us which way their love and kindness was expressed: “He taught me also, and said unto me, get wisdom, get understanding.” He tells us also how the affections of his good mother did work, “What my son? and what the son of my womb? and what the son of my vows?” (Pro 31:2-3). The son of her womb was the son of her vows, whom she had devoted to God.

Those parents who have known both states—the state of wrath and the state of grace—and have experimentally felt what it is to pass from death to life and from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God cannot but desire that the same change be wrought upon their children. And as they who love themselves with a holy love, do take 1) God for their eternal life and happiness; and 2) Christ for their Redeemer, to redeem them from all evil and to bring them to this happiness; and 3) the Spirit for their Sanctifier, to fit them for this happiness, so they that love their children with this holy love will desire and endeavor that they be partakers with them of the same happiness.

B. The Character of Ungodly Children

I proceed to give you three characters of ungodly children.

1. Not subject to reverence their parents

They are such children as will not be subject to the authority of their parents. The reverence of children to their parents is so incorporated into the whole body of religion that all religion is in vain without it. This fully appears, “Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my Sabbaths, I am the Lord your God” (Lev 19:3).

Observe, this duty is here joined with keeping the Lord’s Sabbaths, wherein religion did always very much consist. But it is often seen that disobedient children are great profaners¹⁷ of the Lord’s Day. They are always bad, but usually worst on that day. Some of them may remember that their first breaking out into scandalous sins was on the Lord’s Day!

¹⁷ **profaners** – those who disregard, show contempt, or desecrate sacred things.

We are here further taught that this duty of reverence to parents is joined with all religion to God. God saith in effect, it is in vain for any to pretend to call Me their Lord and their God, if they do not fear their parents. Therefore, wicked children are numbered among the most flagitious¹⁸ and worst sinners. “In thee have they set light by father and mother” (Eze 22:7). They vilified and despised them, and made nothing of them. Such break all the bonds of religion. Many hasten through a shameful and untimely death into a dreadful and tormenting eternity, whose wickedness first began in scorning and despising their parents.

2. Will not obey their parents

They are such children as will not obey the commands of their parents. The godly commands of parents are the means that God hath appointed, and doth often bless, to make the children godly. “I know Abraham, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment” (Gen 18:19). And God commands all children to obey all the holy and lawful commands of their parents, “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph 6:1). It is the parents’ right that their children should obey them, and it is God’s right that they should obey them in the Lord. This, saith the Apostle, “is well-pleasing to the Lord” (Col 3:20). Those children do neither fear provoking God, nor care to please Him, who will not obey their parents. And so they are children of their parents’ sorrow and of God’s wrath.

3. Are unthankful to their parents

They are such children as are unthankful to their parents. The Apostle tells us in 1 Timothy 5:4 that it is good and acceptable before God for children to requite¹⁹ their parents. They have great things for which they should labor to requite their godly parents, viz.,²⁰ for all their care, cost, and pains to keep them alive, and for all their diligence and faithfulness in endeavoring to make them blessed. All the requital that the poor parents desire is that their children would but love and obey God, and not damn themselves. But these ungodly children are so far from requiting them that, like so many dogs and lions, they tear in pieces the hearts and bowels of their tender parents.

C. Examples

I now come to confirm this: it is ordinary for godly parents to have ungodly children. For this end, I shall first give you some instances recorded in Scripture. Secondly, I shall instance in several cases wherein this is verified.

1. Four examples in Scripture

I shall only give you four instances recorded in Scripture for the confirmation hereof.

a. Adam and Eve

¹⁸ **flagitious** – enormously cruel; vicious.

¹⁹ **requite** – to make payment in return for what has been received.

²⁰ **viz.** – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

Instance²¹ is in Adam and Eve; these were both godly parents. Therefore, in that first evangelical promise, Genesis 3:15, we have notice of the two great parties in the world and the enmity betwixt them: the one was the woman and her Seed and the other the serpent and his seed. Though there is only mention made of the woman, yet the man is also included. So that by the woman and her Seed, we are to understand Adam and Eve and Christ and His Church. By the serpent and his seed are meant the devil and all [his] children. And forasmuch as we find Adam and Eve of the same party with Christ and His Church and in enmity with the devil and his seed, we conclude them to be godly persons and godly parents. Moreover, we find in Genesis 4 that they brought up their children in that religion...These two were the first fruits of Christ, the first persons that ever entered into the Covenant of Grace. Christ might say to them, as Jacob said to Reuben, “Ye are my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength” (Gen 49:3). At first, the whole church of God was only in these two persons, and yet these are the parents of that cursed and bloody Cain.

I shall observe three things in this history that render this case very doleful.

1. That Eve was so exceeding glad for the birth of Cain. Some are of opinion that she thought she had brought forth the promised Messiah, and it made her break out with joy, saying, “I have gotten a man from the Lord” (Gen 4:1). Yet this is he of whom the Apostle speaks, “He was of that wicked one” (1Jo 3:12), meaning the devil. This is a common case: parents are exceedingly glad for the birth of a child and call their friends and neighbors to rejoice with them; yet that sweet and pleasant babe proves the greatest torment to his parents, whichever they met with in their whole age.

2. Consider his crime: he barbarously murdered his own brother, “Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him” (Gen 4:8). He considered not how this would grieve the heart of his good father and mother nor that he was the elder brother and therefore ought to have nourished the life of the younger and to have been a pattern of holiness and love to him. Neither did he consider that he hated and murdered not only a brother, but also a holy child of God, and for that which he ought to have honored and loved him because his brother’s works were righteous. And he considered not how his brother’s blood would cry to God for vengeance against him! Bonds, arguments, or reasons will not prevail with ungodly children.

3. Consider the dreadful judgment of God, both upon [Cain] and his posterity. God’s judgment on his soul was so dreadful that he desperately cries out, “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (Gen 4:13). He was cast out of the favor of God, excommunicated from the Church, and all his posterity were excluded from communion therewith. They are called the sons and daughters of men in opposition to the Sons of God—and at last all perished in the deluge of waters. Yet I say, this bloody and cursed monster was the son, the eldest son, of the two first godly parents that ever were in the world.

b. Noah

²¹ **instance** – an illustrative example.

Second instance is in Noah. The first instance was in the first godly man in the “old world,” as the ages before the flood are called (2Pe 2:5). This instance is in the best man in the “new world” after the flood. This Noah hath a great character in the Scriptures, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8-9). Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations. When all the earth was debauched²² and corrupt (Gen 6:11-12), yet then was Noah just and upright and walked with God. It is he that is called in 2 Peter 2:5, “A preacher of righteousness.” It is he that was so much in the favor of God that he and his family were singled out to be preserved in the ark, when all the world besides were drowned and perished in the waters. Yet this holy Noah was the father of that wicked Ham, whom all the waters of Noah (as the Scripture calls that deluge) were not effectual to cure of his wickedness. He went a wicked man into the ark and came wicked out—insomuch that his own holy father was inspired by a prophetic spirit to curse both his son and posterity, and the crime mentioned was his irreverence and disrespect to his father (Gen 9:22, 25).

c. Isaac

Third instance is in Isaac, that holy patriarch, who so greatly feared God that his son Jacob gives God that honorable name, “The fear of Isaac” (Gen 31:42), meaning “the God whom Isaac feared.” Yet he and that good mother Rebekah were the parents of a wicked Esau, whom God is said to hate (Rom 9:13). I know we read in Genesis 25:28 that Isaac loved Esau; but we see that children may be greatly beloved of their parents, and yet abhorred and cursed of God.

d. David

Fourth instance is in David, called a man after God’s own heart, whom God raised up to be king of Israel. He was a penman of a considerable part of the Holy Scriptures and such an eminent type of Christ that Christ Himself is often called David in Scripture. Yet he was the tender father of that wicked Absalom, who bloodily murdered his brother Amnon and miserably and shamefully died in treason and rebellion against his royal father. David’s bitter lamentation is yet in our ears, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2Sa 18:33).

2. Four examples from life

Secondly, I shall further instance in four cases, wherein this is often verified.

1. *Those children who are most beloved of their parents*, do often prove the most wicked children. Absalom was David’s darling, insomuch that, although he set his whole kingdom in a flame and constrained his father to fly for his life—yet when David sent out his army to suppress that rebellion, he gives this charge to his commanders in the audience of the soldiers, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom” (2Sa 18:5).

It often happens that the children who have most of their parents’ love and delight—whose looks and talk they are most taken with, whom they are most apt to boast of and are most unwilling to part with, and in whom they promise themselves most content

²² **debauched**—given up to sensual pleasures or loose living.

and pleasure—do often prove the greatest scourge and torment to their parents. It is not the love of the godly parents, but the love of God that makes children holy and happy.

2. *This is often the sad case of some holy ministers of the Word.* I know it is a Popish and peevish humor²³ in some to say that ministers' children never do well. Indeed, everything of ministers is most exposed to the observation of people, and therefore the wickedness of their children is most observed and talked of. But the holy, learned, and every-way prosperous and blessed seed of divers godly ministers is sufficient to confute²⁴ and shame the ignorance of people herein. Yet, it is true that many godly ministers in all ages have groaned under this sad calamity. Eli was a holy priest of God, but his two sons were devils incarnate, monsters of men, scandalous, sacrilegious and adulterous sons of Belial,²⁵ as appears 1 Samuel 2. This is no rare thing: the prayers, studies, sermons, examples of many good ministers are often made successful to bring others to heaven, when they can by no means restrain their own children from running to hell. Their own children make them do the work of their ministry with grief, when often the children of drunkards, worldlings, and whoremongers will be their crown and glory in the day of the Lord Jesus.

3. *This is often true, when both parents are godly.* Indeed, when either father or mother is wicked, it is no marvel if the children be hardened in their sins by their examples. But it is usually seen, that when children have both the instruction of the father and also the law of the mother, and when they cry to all the ministers and Christians about them to help them by their prayers and counsels to save their children; yet all prevail not, but the holy father and mother can scarce keep one another's heart from being broken by their stubborn and disobedient children.

4. *The children of godly parents often prove wicked, when God doth sanctify, bless, and save the children of ungodly parents.* We see sometimes trees of righteousness growing in the families of the wicked, when briars and thorns grow up in the families of the righteous. We read in Matthew 1 that Ahaz, a very wicked king, begat holy Hezekiah. And good Hezekiah begat Manasseh, who was an idolater of the highest rate, a witch and such a bloody murderer that the chronicle of his reign tells us, "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (2Ki 21:16)—though afterwards he is set forth to be the greatest pattern of the grace of God in the Old Testament, as Paul is in the New Testament. It is no new sight to see children of the best saints in the way to hell and children of atheists and persecutors in the way to heaven. Nay, though some parents do persecute their own children for loving and fearing God, yet they cannot debauch them; when all endeavors of godly parents will not prevail to make their children hate sin and love God. This is one of the saddest instances of that great mystery of providence: "there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous" (Ecc 8:14).

²³ **peevish humor** –foolish inclination.

²⁴ **confute** – prove to be wrong.

²⁵ **sons of Belial** – worthless, good-for-nothings.

II. Ungodly Children Are a Great Calamity to Their Parents

It is a very great calamity to godly parents to have wicked and ungodly children. Our text says, “A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him” (Pro 17:25). To the same purpose, “He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy” (Pro 17:21)—a foolish son damps all his joy. And, “A foolish son is the calamity of his father” (Pro 19:13).

I shall set forth the greatness of this trouble by these eight particulars:

- A. By the matter of these parents’ grief.
- B. By the passions that this calamity doth move and affect.
- C. By comparing this with other afflictions and showing how this exceeds them.
- D. By showing that this makes these parents do all their work with grief and sorrow.
- E. By showing that this embitters all their other comforts.
- F. By the sad concomitance²⁶ of it.
- G. By the several aggravations of it.
- H. By instancing in some cases wherein this calamity is more grievous.

A. Grief Burdensome

First, the matter of these parents’ grief is very sad, as appears in these seven things:

1. *That their children are so defiled and debauched with sin*, which is so loathsome to these holy parents. It vexed the righteous soul of Lot to see and hear the filthy conversation of the beastly Sodomites. How grievous then must it be to these godly parents to see and hear the filthiness of their own dear children! It is a grievous thing to a man that loves God, godliness, and souls, to see a drunkard staggering in the streets or to hear any man blaspheming and reproaching his Maker and Redeemer. But none can tell but those that feel it, what a sad spectacle it is to sober and godly parents to see their own children drunk. How it torments them to hear their own children lying and blaspheming God and His saints.

2. *That their children are the children of the devil*, under the power of Satan, ridden by him, and carried captive by him at his will. It was a lamentable case of that good mother who came to Christ, saying, “Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil” (Mat 15:22). Yet this was not her daughter’s sin, but only her great affliction.

But how doleful is it to these parents, who have renounced the devil themselves and live in continual warfare with him, to see the hearts, mouths, and lives of the children whom they have devoted to God, filled and possessed with the devil, whose children they are and whose lusts they will do. If the devil tempts the parents, their own graces will

²⁶ **concomitance** – things connected with one another.

resist and overcome his temptations. But they cannot secure their children from being overcome and from falling into the condemnation of the devil. With sad hearts do they see the Lion of Hell running away with the lambs of their flock and cannot recover them.

3. *That their children are under the wrath and curse of God.* It did sadly affect the father of that lunatic son to see his son fall often into the fire and often into the water: how would he screech at such a sight and cry, “Ah my dear child will be burnt, my child will be drowned!” (see Mat 17:15). But much more terrible is it to these parents who know the terrors of the Lord to know that their children have cut off the entail²⁷ of the Covenant of Grace and are every moment ready to fall into the hands of the living God! When such parents are, with faith, reading the curses of God’s Law, how doth it cut them to the heart to think that they are then reading their children’s doom.

4. *That their children are under those black characters, which are given in Scripture to ungodly men.* The faith of these parents makes all persons have that name in their hearts that they have in the Word. As God is no respecter of persons, so faith, so far as it prevails, respecteth not the persons of any, no not of a man’s own children. But because they are more under their notice and observation than others and because they are more concerned for them, therefore the deeper impressions do these characters make on their hearts. This then is the misery of these parents: that while they look on persons through the glass of the Scriptures and see many to be the jewels, treasure, children, heirs of God, and the glorious bride and spouse of Christ, they must and do judge their own wicked children to be a generation of vipers, serpents, dogs, swine, lions, bears, and wolves, as God calls them in His Word.

5. *That the anger and displeasure of God appears so much against these good parents herein.* Indeed, the sense of their own folly must make them justify God in this sharp correction and cause them to say with Solomon, “A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool’s back” (Pro 26:3). But this is very grievous that God should correct them with a scourge made of their own bowels and should chasten a blessed father with a cursed child. God’s holy anger must be acknowledged herein, for when the child despiseth his father, God Himself doth justly spit in the father’s face.

6. *The shame and disgrace that comes to them hereby.* “He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame” (Pro 19:26). Everyone will be ready to reflect upon their parents and to say, “Surely these children were never taught to serve God, who do so sacrifice themselves to the service of the devil.”

7. *Both parents are deeply affected for the trouble and misery that comes hereby to one another.* Their love to and sympathy with one another makes the burden of both more uneasy. The good father is not only troubled with a wicked child but also for the bitterness and sorrow of his wife. And the good mother is not only troubled with the wicked child but also for the grief of her husband. The mother’s heart bleeds to see the tears and to hear the groans of the afflicted father and cries out, “Oh, what a child have I brought forth that so much deprives me of the comfort of a loving husband and is like to

²⁷ entail – secured inheritance.

break his heart, and to make me a desolate and disconsolate widow.” The father mourns to see the tears and the sad countenance and to hear the groans of the distressed mother and is ready to cry out, “Woe is me, that the child of my bowels is destroying the wife of my bosom.” Yet these hardhearted children are not affected herewith! Let the parents sigh, they will sing. Let the parents weep and mourn, they will rant and roar. They will care no more to break their parents’ hearts than to break a tobacco pipe. They will not abate²⁸ a lie, oath, or cup, to save the lives of their tender parents.

B. Emotions Extreme

Secondly, the greatness of this calamity appears by the passions in the parents, which are moved and affected hereby. I shall only instance in three passions: fear, anger, and sorrow.

1. Fear

Fear is a troublesome passion, and godly parents are never out of fear of their wicked children. They are afraid that everyone who knocks at the door, every post,²⁹ and every friend that comes to visit them brings them some sad tidings of their disobedient children. I shall amplify this by instancing in three great evils, which such parents are greatly perplexed with the fear of.

a. 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 said, It may be my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts” (Job 1:5). 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, and to the allurements of evil company. They know that their corrupt hearts are set to comply with all these and that they have provoked God to give them up to their own lusts. Therefore, they are in continual fear, lest these poor children are lying, swearing, cursing, whoring, drunk, defiling, debauching, and destroying themselves and others.

b. 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, as birds wandering from the nest (Pro 27:8) are 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. Therefore, they are in fear, lest their sins should bring them to some untimely and shameful death.

c. They are in fear of their eternal damnation.

They are sensible that their children are children of wrath and do live in those sins for which the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. These parents believe what hell is, for as faith in the promises is the substance of things hoped for, so faith, as

²⁸ **abate** – put an end to; do away with.

²⁹ **post** – letter-carrier.

it believes the threatenings, is the 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 to be cast into the fire that is prepared for devils.

2. Anger

Anger is another passion that is moved in godly parents with the wickedness of their children. This is troublesome, for a man is never out of trouble whilst he is in anger. 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 and to see them destroying their precious souls, which they are laboring to save, and to see them waste those estates on their filthy lusts, which they have got by their care, 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, which should be their delight and pleasure, are a continual cross and vexation to them.

3. 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 that they see in God and Christ. And whilst 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 chiefest good.

C. Troubles Exceeded

Thirdly, I proceed to shew the greatness of this calamity, by comparing it with other troubles and showing how this exceeds them. I shall instance in four other troubles.

1. This is a greater calamity than to be without children.

If God had said of those parents, as He said of him, "Write ye this man, and this woman childless" (Jer 22:30), the punishment had not been so great as to be afflicted with wicked children. Such parents may say with our Savior in another case, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck" (Luk 23:29). As it is better to have no herbs in your gardens than to have only stinking weeds that cumber³⁰ the ground, and better to have no beasts in your ground than a company of foxes and wolves; so it is better to have no children than to have only such who are the continual shame, plague, and torment of their parents.

2. It is a greater misery than to have diseased or deformed children.

This indeed is a sore affliction, to be the parents of sick, blind, lame, or monstrous³¹ children because such children are naturally disabled to do that service to God, their

³⁰ **cumber** – to fill up with what hinders action, that is, to fill up the garden so that flowers or plants cannot grow.

³¹ **monstrous** – deformed, not intended in a negative sense, as evidenced by what follows.

generation, and their parents, which otherwise they might do. But this is not so grievous as to have wicked children, for they that are most diseased and uncomely are often called to be the blessed and glorious children and heirs of God and the amiable and beautiful bride and spouse of Christ—when all wicked children are the filthy and loathsome children of the devil.

3. This is more grievous than the death of children.

I know it is a matter of deep sorrow when parents may say with the tender patriarch, “Joseph is not, and Simeon is not” (Gen 42:36). “My son is dead and is not; and my dear daughter is dead and is not.” But this sorrow is not lasting; the impression of it usually doth, and should, wear off. But wicked children are constant troubles to their parents and cause them to say with the Psalmist, “My days are spent with grief, and my years with sighing” (Psa 31:10).

4. This calamity is greater than persecution from wicked men, though that be also very grievous.

Paul, a man of a great spirit, was so affected herewith that he solemnly beseecheth the Roman Christians, for the Lord Jesus’ sake and for the love of the Spirit, that they would strive together with him in prayer to God for him, to deliver him from persecuting-men (Rom 15:30). It is a sad case to be smitten and wounded in our names by lying and slanderous tongues: David, and Christ in him, tells us that reproach hath “broken” his heart (Psa 69:20). It is sad for the jewels of God to be accounted and used as the sink and jakes³² of the world, to have our estates wasted and spoiled, to be exposed to beggary and want, to be dragged from our healthful and pleasant habitations and families, to be cast among rogues and thieves into nasty and loathsome prisons, and to have our innocent and precious blood shed by barbarous men; but all this is not so grievous as to be tormented by wicked children! For in that case we are distressed by the sins of our enemies, and if so, as David speaks, “We could have borne it” (Psa 55:12). Yet in this case, we are afflicted by the sins of our own children and may say with David, when he was reviled by Shimei, “Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it?” (2Sa 16:11). It is a far greater torment to have the children of our own bowels tear and break our hearts than to be destroyed by merciless enemies.

D. Works Sorrowful

Fourthly, the greatness of this calamity is seen in that it causeth these good parents to do all their work with sorrow. I shall instance in three sorts of works that they do in the bitterness of their souls: natural, civil, and religious works. He that hath a wicked child on his heart doth all these with a sad heart.

1. Natural works

Parents do natural work with sorrow. They are fed with the bread of tears and drink their tears in great measure, as the Psalmist speaks in another case (Psa 80:5). And as it

³² **sink and jakes** – cesspools and outhouses.

is said in the prayer of the afflicted, “For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping” (Psa 102:9).

2. Civil works

They do their civil works with grief. This makes them labor with sorrow in their particular callings. It was Solomon’s trouble to think that a fool should have the rule of his labor, wherein he labored and showed himself wise under the sun (Ecc 2:18-20). This sad case is often observed: the same estates that were the fruit of the wise and good parents’ prayers and diligence are consumed upon the children’s lusts; the good creatures³³ that were a blessing to the parents, wherewith they did honor God and feed Christ in His members, do prove a curse to their children and weapons in their hands wherewith they fight against God and His people.

3. Religious works

This also causeth them to do their religious works in grief and sorrow. I shall only instance in two particulars.

a. This makes them instruct these poor ungodly children with sorrow.

It is a doleful case when men can have their dogs to come at their whistle, their horses to yield to the bridle, and their oxen to submit to the yoke; but their unruly children will not be subject to the holy government of their parents. They can readily learn filthy words and wicked actions from their ungodly schoolfellows or fellow-apprentices or debauched companions; but they will not hear the instruction of their father nor obey the law of their mother.

b. This causeth them to pray for such children with sorrow, for according as is the spiritual state of the children, so are their holy parents affected in prayer to God for them.

When they can in prayer call upon God as the Father of their children and can present their children to God as such who are born of God and adopted of Him and can beg mercy for them who are the vessels of mercy, then they do, as the Apostle, in every prayer make request for them with joy (Phi 1:4). But when children are manifestly wicked, their good parents must in prayer to God call them what they are and must say, “Lord, my poor children are children of the devil, children of disobedience, children of Thy wrath, lying, swearing, covetous, drunken, unclean, stubborn children. Oh pity, pardon, save, convert them!” They pray for them, but they pray in the sorrow and anguish of their souls.

E. Comforts Embittered

Fifthly, I come to shew how wicked children embitter all the comforts of their good parents, so that as Solomon tells us, “A father of a fool hath no joy” (Pro 17:21). I shall exemplify this in four particulars.

1. The good parents cannot be so comfortable and delightful to *one another* as they would be, when both are in bitterness for their wicked children. The husband cannot be

³³ **creatures** – things that are produced; material comforts, such as food and clothing.

such a comfort to his wife, when he is almost in continual anger and sorrow for his wicked child. Nor can the wife be such a delight to her husband, when her heart is bleeding for her ungodly child. For if they have no joy in themselves, as was said before, they cannot be so much the joy and delight of one another. When they lie down, this makes them water their bed with tears, and they awake with sorrow with a wicked child on their hearts.

2. They cannot take so much comfort as they would in the *other children that are godly*. Not that they love them less, but rather more; but their joy in them is much interrupted hereby. Suppose among many children there be but one ungodly child; that one is a disturbance and annoyance to the whole family. That one sinner (as Solomon speaks in a more general case) destroys much good...

3. They cannot take so much comfort in the *victory over their own sins*, when they see the same corruptions, which are abhorred, mortified, and forsaken by the parents, breaking out and reigning in the children.

4. This interrupts their *joy in God and Jesus Christ*, when such parents must with the same faith believe God's wrath to their children, as they believe His love to themselves. When they look upon God as their Father, they must look upon Him as an enemy to their children. When they say, "We hope heaven is our portion and place," it must grieve them that their children will not go with them thither [unless they repent and believe].

F. Accompaniments Severe

Sixthly, the greatness of this affliction appears further by the concomitance of it. I shall only instance in three things that usually accompany it, which make it more grievous.

1. Such children do often *impoverish their parents*. Solomon tells us, that a wicked child wasteth his father and chaseth away his mother! Such children care not if they starve their poor parents so that they can feed their own lusts. It is often seen that riotous children consume a plentiful estate.

2. Such children do often *debauch and corrupt the other children and make their brethren in nature to be their brethren in iniquity*. Often their brothers and sisters are easier enticed to sin by a wicked brother than drawn to God by a godly father. If any of the other children be godly, these wicked ones do hate, revile, and persecute them like wicked Cain, who slew his brother because his works were righteous.

3. They bring reproach upon *that good religion that their good parents profess and practice*: thus Eli's sons made men abhor the offerings of the Lord. With some, the holy lives of the parents cannot wipe off the reproach that is cast on religion by the wickedness of their children.

G. Aggravations Multiplied

Seventhly, the greatness of this affliction appears by these eight aggravations of it.

1. 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, lies, and other rotten speeches. It torments them now to think that these who once were so forward to clasp about their necks, to kiss them, and to run at their commands, do now lift up the heel against them.

2. It aggravates their sorrow to see themselves *so miserably disappointed in their former hopes of these children*. “Hope deferred,” saith Solomon, “maketh the heart sick” (Pro 13:12). But to be crossed and disappointed in hopes of so great mercy doth even *break* 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, which they did with Hannah lend to the Lord, should sell themselves to the devil.

3. 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.

4. It aggravates their sorrow *to look upon the holy children of others*, when they may say, “Yonder are children that make a glad father and mother,” when the children of their own bodies, counsels, prayers, vows, and tears live as if their father were an Amomite and their mother an Hittite.

5. Aggravation is in the case *when the parents have but one child and he proves foolish and disobedient*; and of this, there be many instances. The Scripture, to set forth the saddest kind of mourning, compares it to the mourning for an only son, “Make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation” (Jer 6:26). “They shall mourn as one that mourneth for an only son” (Zec 12:10). I know 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 should prove such a monster of wickedness, as if the sins of many ungodly children met in him.

6. Aggravation: *When God’s holy ministers are the fathers of fools, which (I have told you) often happens*. 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 do, and therefore they must be more affected to believe that this at present is the portion of their own children.

7. Aggravation: *When such children whom their parents designed to serve God in the ministry of the Gospel, do prove ungodly*. This is matter of great lamentation, for the parents to intend them for the highest office in the church and to give them education for that end, that these children should make themselves as salt without savor, which is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

8. 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 against the command of God. “Despise not thy mother when she is old” (Pro 23:22), Solomon tells us. The days of old age are evil days; their very age is a troublesome and incurable disease. The grasshopper, every light thing, is a burden to them. Therefore, it must be more troublesome to them to be then tormented with wicked children, when the strong men (as divines think Solomon calls the legs) do bow themselves, and their children, who should be a staff and support to them, do break their hearts and cause their grey-hairs to go with sorrow to the grave.

III. Responses to Having Ungodly Children

I now come to make application of this discourse.

A. Praise God for Obedient Children

Let such parents praise and honor God, whom God hath blessed with wise, holy, and obedient children. Whether by those words in Psalm 144:12 David means children accomplished with natural or spiritual endowments, or both, I shall not determine. But to apply them to the case in hand, I say it is the great mercy of God to you that when so many children are as noisome³⁴ weeds, your sons should be as hopeful plants grown up in their youth. When so many make themselves ugly and deformed with sin, your daughters should be as cornerstones in which is seen the beauty of the building and the art and skill of the workman, polished after the similitude of a palace. Do not hence conclude, that you are better parents than others are or have had more care in the education of your children than others, but ascribe all to the free grace of God, who will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy (Rom 9:15, 18).

B. Do Not Censure Others for Wicked Children

Let none presume to censure³⁵ godly parents for their wicked children. “To him that is afflicted,” saith Job, “pity should be shewed from his friend” (Job 6:14). Have they not trouble enough already, but will you add to their affliction? They have not hereby forfeited the good thoughts and esteem that you should have of them; and if you judge them for this, ye must judge as wise and holy saints of God as ever were in the world. Though God herein doth sharply correct them, yet He will not allow you to sit in judgment and to pass sentence upon them. I say to you, as Job to his friends, “Hold your peace, let me alone” (Job 13:13), and let them stand or fall to their own Master (Rom 14:4).

³⁴ **noisome** – troublesome.

³⁵ **censure** – find fault with; express disapproval or condemnation.

C. Hate All Sin

This should fill the hearts of these holy parents with revenge upon sin and Satan, which have so debauched, defiled, and destroyed their dear children. If a man should murder your child, a spirit of revenge would rise in you, and you would say to such a one, "I will have thy life and blood for the life and blood of my child." But sin and Satan have destroyed both the precious soul and body of the child; therefore labor, as for other reasons, so for this also to be revenged of them. Labor to do as David did by the lion and the bear, which took a lamb out of his flock: he slew both the lion and the bear and delivered the lamb. So do all ye can to rescue your poor lambs out of the jaws of Satan; however, *labor to hate sin and Satan more, to promote God's honor and kingdom, and the salvation of souls more.* This is the way to be revenged on sin and Satan for the ruin of your children.

D. Let Obedient Children of Godly Parents Praise God

I do hence exhort holy and obedient children to acknowledge the grace of God to them, that they are or have been the joy and crown of their parents. It is His distinguishing grace that made you to differ from all wicked children, and perhaps from some that came out of the same womb and sucked the same mother's breasts as you did. Consider four things that are great matters of praise.

1. That ye are *the children of holy parents, that ye may comfortably come to God in prayer*, and say, "We are the children of thy servant our father; we are thy servants and the children of thy handmaid our mother." Bless God for your parents' good counsels and examples and for a great part of an age of prayers, which ye are daily receiving the benefit of. If your parents are dead and in heaven, it may put you into a holy and spiritual frame to think of the graces of God that did shine in them.

2. That *the same graces that dwelt in your good parents are in you*. Paul speaks of it as matter of praise to God that the same faith was in Timothy, which dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2Ti 1:5). The Apostle John rejoiced greatly that he found the children of the elect lady walking in truth (2Jo 1:4).

3. That thou art *freed from those stings of conscience, which graceless children shall one day feel for their disobedience to their parents*. Thou mayest joyfully reflect, that thou wast the joy of thy holy parents, that their lives have been made sweeter, and their crosses easier by thee; that thou art the honor and seal of their holy education, when wicked children are the shame and reproach of their parents.

4. That thou hast *a right to that rich and precious promise annexed to the Fifth Commandment* and mentioned in Ephesians 6:2-3: "That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." I do seriously profess, I had rather have a right to that one promise made to obedient children than to the best estate and inheritance under the sun.

IV. Preventing This Calamity

I shall finish this discourse,

- A. In prescribing some means and directions to prevent this calamity to be used by parents;
- B. I shall direct those parents that groan under this calamity, how to bear it;
- C. I shall give a serious exhortation to such children who are the grief and bitterness of their parents.

A. Means to Prevent This Calamity

1. Choose a spouse prudently

Use all holy prudence and care in your choice of a yokefellow, for if ye make yourselves the husbands or wives of fools, ye are like in time to become the fathers or mothers of fools. When, before the flood, the members of God's church married with a wicked generation (Gen 6:2), they brought forth a wicked posterity. But to have a holy yokefellow is the way to have a holy seed. Therefore, what ye would most desire to have for yourselves, labor to find in the person who is to be one flesh with you. Thou wouldst have thyself born of God; thou wouldst have the image of God and the life of Christ in thyself. Labor that these things be in the person whom thou choosest for thy yokefellow; but never make choice of one for thy husband or wife, whom thou shouldst not choose for thy companion.

2. Be faithful to God

Be faithful and upright with God (Pro 20:7). The just man walketh in his integrity, and his children are blessed after him. If you would have grace and mercy for your children, love and please the God of all grace and mercy. Whatever secret sins are in thee, kill those sins for thy poor children's sake, lest the sins you too much harbor in your own hearts do break out in your children's lives. Parents may often see their own sins against their heavenly Father in their children's disobedience to them. When your children despise you, remember your want of honor, fear, and reverence of God. When they vex and trouble you, remember how ye have grieved and provoked Him. When they decline your company, remember how your hearts have wandered from God in His ordinances.

3. Ask forgiveness for past sins toward your parents

Bewail and beg pardon of God for your failings heretofore to your parents. For many do often reap from their own children what they formerly sowed by their sins against their parents, and their miscarriages to their parents do fall upon them in the wickedness of their children. The best may sadly reflect upon their want of due honor, obedience, and thankfulness to their parents. Ye may remember your peevish looks, indecent behavior to them, your grieving them in quarrelling with your brethren and sisters, your unjust censuring them for partiality in their love to their children and judging them to [lack] love to you, when you were [lacking] in your duty to them. Many who are now

godly parents themselves may remember that by great sins in their youth they were the grief and bitterness of their fathers and mothers. Therefore, pray mightily to God to pardon you and not to visit these sins upon you in the disobedience of your children.

4. Ask God not to visit your sins on your children

Pray to God not to visit your sins upon your children. When Manasseh was in heaven, Amon his son followed the steps of his unconverted estate, and Jehoiakim was carried captive into Babylon for the sins of Manasseh. Pray that your children may not be like you in anything, wherein ye are unlike God, and their teeth may not be set on edge for the sour grapes that ye have eaten (Jer 31:29).

5. Take in your children's corrupt nature

Be deeply affected with the corruption of nature in your children. Just as no man will value a Savior for himself who is not convinced of the sin and misery that he must be saved from; so ye must be sensible of your children's sins, or else ye cannot labor for their salvation. When your sweet babes are born, ye rejoice to find that in God's book all their members were written; but ye should also be sensible of that body of sin they are born with, and that by nature they are young atheists, infidels, haters of God, blasphemers, whoremongers, liars, thieves, and murderers! They are naturally inclined to these and all other sins and are by nature children of the wrath of the infinite God. Being convinced of this, ye will find that your chief care of them should be to save them from this dreadful state of sin and misery.

6. Understand the enormity of the work

Be convinced what a great deal of work lies upon you to endeavor the salvation of your children. Young children always make a great deal of work: they make work for parents, work for servants, and work for all that are about them. But to save them from sin and hell is the greatest work³⁶ that belongs to their parents: for this purpose they have a great deal of work to do in their own hearts. They must know, believe, love, and obey the doctrine of salvation themselves—that they may be able and fit to instruct their children therein. A man cannot train up his child in the way he should go, if he does not know the way himself. We read, “These words shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children” (Deu 6:6- 7). It is fitly rendered in the margin, “Thou shalt whet or sharpen them.” The Word of God is more keen and sharp when it hath first done its work on the parents' hearts and so comes from their hearts to their children. Parents must keep their own graces in exercise, to put authority and favor in all that they say and do for the salvation of their children: grace must work in their prayers, grace must rule their tongues, grace must guide the rod, and grace must shine in their lives. Then it is a great work that is to be wrought in the children: it is a great work for them who are born of the flesh to be born of the Spirit, a great work to make religion

³⁶ **to save them from sin** – the author here refers to the work of parents in training their children in the ways of God, faithfully praying for their souls, and pointing them to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus the Lord. The author does not imply that parents can actually accomplish the salvation of their children; this is the sole work of Christ in His death and resurrection, and it is finished!

and godliness natural to them, to make the children of the devil to become the children of God Almighty...

7. Be mighty in prayer

Be mighty in prayer for your children, for all the good ye desire for them must come from God, and therefore must be begged by prayer. It is in vain for them to be taught of us, except they be taught of God. “Whose words, Lord,” saith holy Augustine, “were they but Thine, which by my faithful mother thou hast sung in my heart.” Pray, and pray in faith and hope: “Thy ears,” saith Augustine again, “were at my mother’s heart, when she prayed for me.” Ye must pray with tender and melting hearts. The same father tells us that his mother’s tears watered the earth when she prayed for him. And, ye must pray for their salvation. This also Augustine calls the hinge of his holy mother’s prayers for him.

8. Dedicate them to God and instruct them in the covenant

When they are capable of it, instruct them in the covenant...For this end, ye must diligently teach them these six things.

a. The evil and danger of sin

To know the evil and danger of sin: for until they come to know what sin is, what it is to be saved or damned, and what it is to lose or enjoy God, they will not value or accept of Christ, but will despise the Redeemer of the World as good for nothing. Ye must therefore labor to make sin odious³⁷ and Christ precious to your children. Then they will value Christ and obey you. It was prophesied of John the Baptist that he was to prepare the way of the Lord and to turn the children to the parents, so let it be your care to make way for Christ in your children’s hearts. If ye prevail in that, they will be obedient to you.

b. The doctrine of the Trinity

Inform yourselves and them in the doctrine of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for this is the doctrine whereinto they are baptized. By baptism, they are solemnly entered into covenant with these sacred Persons, against the flesh, Satan, and the world. Show them the glory and love of God the Father in choosing, ordaining, fitting, and sending Jesus Christ and in commanding Him to be a sacrifice for us. Inform them that God the Father is the fountain of life, for Christ lives by the Father, the fountain of authority; for Christ received all power in heaven and earth from Him. The Father is the fountain of all the Christian religion, for Christ first heard these truths from the Father and then made them known to us. The Father is the fountain of glory, for the Father hath exalted Christ; and all glorified saints are the blessed of the Father. Labor by these and all other means, that God the Father have the greatest place in your children’s hearts.

Teach them to know and prize Jesus Christ. Without this, they cannot be true Christians. Show them all the fullness and glory of the Godhead in Jesus Christ. Labor to make them see His glory as the only begotten Son of God and [to see] all that He as Me-

³⁷ **odious** – deserving of hatred.

diator and Redeemer hath done in the state of His humiliation, is doing, and will do in the state of His exaltation for the salvation of lost sinners.

Labor to imprint these great truths upon their hearts:

1. That it was the will and Law of God the Father that God the Son in our nature should be a sacrifice for our sins. This fully appears, “A body hast thou *prepared* me” (Heb 10:5ff), or *fitted*, meaning *to be a sacrifice*. And, saith He, “Lo, I come...to do thy will, O God.” And, “Thy law is in my heart,” meaning that will and Law of the Father, which bound Him to offer and sacrifice Himself for our sins.

2. That Jesus Christ by His obedience to the death of the cross did perfectly obey and fulfill this Law and will of God the Father.

3. That all salvation and happiness is by the Covenant of Grace settled upon all and only those who believe and obey the Gospel, only for the sake of this sacrifice and obedience of Jesus Christ. And therefore, saith the Apostle, “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10); that is, by Christ’s fulfilling the will of His Father, in once sacrificing Himself for sinners, we and all true believers are sanctified, that is, perfectly saved.

4. Ye must also acquaint them with the office and work of the Holy Ghost, which our Savior tells us is to guide or lead them into all truth (Joh 16:13); that is, to enable them to believe, love, and obey the saving-truths of God revealed in the Gospel...

c. The blessings of walking with God

Thirdly, labor to convince your children of *the excellency of the life* of religion³⁸ and obedience to God. Commend this to them as the *most honorable life*; for our Savior tells us, “If any man serve me, him will my father honour” (Joh 12:26). “What shall be done to the man,” saith Ahasuerus, “whom the king desires to honour?” (Est 6:6)—but who is able to tell what shall be done to the man whom the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will honor? Let them also know that this is the *wisest life*. It is Job’s inquiry, “Where shall wisdom be found?” (Job 28:12). And saith he, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding” (Job 28:28). Further, that it is the *safest life*, for God is a shield, rock, and wall to all that obey Him. Although such things that they have in common with other men are exposed to danger and loss, yet their persons and their whole portion are always safe. Also, that this is the *most gainful life*, for hereby saints gain God, Christ, and heaven and lose nothing. For we cannot lose by a Savior Who saves us from all evil and brings us into the possession of all good. Though death itself strips us naked of all things under the sun, yet death is unspeakable gain to all who live this life.

Ye must further assure them, that this is the *most pleasant life*, for it is a life of faith, love, praise, and joy, and a life of victory over sin. They who live this life have all things to please them: they have God to please them, Christ and His merits to please them, and a prospect of a holy and blessed eternity to please them. Ye would never be the fathers

³⁸ **religion** – the author here refers to Biblical Christianity.

and mothers of fools, if ye could persuade your children to be so wise as to prize and love a life of obedience to God.

d. The blessings of the local church

Commend to your children the glory and amiableness of the house and church of God...Take your child with you, go walk about Zion, go round about her, tell³⁹ the towers thereof, mark well her bulwarks,⁴⁰ and consider her palaces as ye are taught (Psa 48:12-13). Present to their view King Jesus and at His right hand standing, the Queen (His church) in gold of Ophir (Psa 45:9). Say to them, as the angel said to John, "Come hither, and I will shew you the bride" (Rev 21:9), the Lamb's wife. Show them that glorious sight, "The woman clothed with the sun, and upon her head [that bright and glorious constellation] a crown of twelve stars" (Rev 12:1) so that the company of those who live in communion with God and Jesus Christ may be desirable and delightful to them and that they may forsake evil company, which is often the bane⁴¹ of youth.

e. The blessings of church life

Teach them to esteem aright of God's ordinances. For by baptism, they are solemnly admitted into that house and family that is blessed with these...Labor to beget in them good thoughts of God's ministers, for ye shall ever find that those children will despise you who make light of them. Teach them to pray; ye can never have comfort in your children until they cry to God, "Abba Father." Teach them to know, prize, and long for the Lord's Supper, and therein to [remember] Christ and all salvation in a little bread and wine. Teach them to honor and delight in the Lord's Day, as the diamond in the ring of time. Those children are always the honor and joy of their godly parents, who make conscience to keep holy the Lord's Day.

f. The shortness of time

Make them sensible that time is short and precious, that an eternity of glory and misery is at hand, and that death, judgment, and heaven or hell are at the door of young children.

B. Directions to Prevent This Calamity

I shall further add five directions to godly parents to prevent this sad calamity.

1. Win your child's heart

Labor to save your children from those sins that provoke God and will destroy them, as well as from those sins that will also bring loss and reproach upon you. Some are sadly affected to see their children given to drunkenness, whoredom, or the like sins, but are not so much concerned for their unbelief, impenitency, want of love to God, and their covetousness. This shows such parents to have too much of the love of the world and too little love to God and their children's souls. We must take our measures of the evil and danger of sin from the Word of God, which tells us that the covetous, as well as

³⁹ **tell** – count.

⁴⁰ **bulwarks** – an embankment built around a space for defensive purposes.

⁴¹ **bane** – that which causes ruin.

drunkards and whoremongers, shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1Co 6:9-10). This will teach parents not only to mourn over a debauched child, but also over a covetous, though he be a wealthy child.

2. Identify their besetting sins

Observe what sins your children are most prone unto, and labor to fill them with revenge and hatred against those sins. If your child has a foot or hand gangrenous,⁴² ye will cut off the incurable member, rather than bury your child. So ye should do what ye can to pull out the right eye and to cut off the right hand and the right foot of sin in your children, rather than suffer their bodies and souls to be cast into hell. As ye should especially kill those sins in yourselves, which your natures are most inclined unto, so ye should do by your children, who are so great a part of yourselves. We are taught, “Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right” (Pro 20:11). Parents may much discern by the manners and ways of their children in their childhood, what they are like to prove in their riper years. Therefore, [parents] must observe [children] that they may encourage them in the good and discourage them in the evil, which they then appear to be most bent unto.

3. Choose holy friends

Choose to place your children in families of holiness and prayer. Ye will not plant your trees among briars and thorns; much less should ye choose to place your children to serve those who will not serve God.

4. Correct them for disobedience

Give them due correction. This hath God commanded to kill their sins and to save their souls. “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Pro 23:13-14). It is better thy child be whipped than damned.

Let not thy child’s weeping and crying under the rod move thee to withhold due correction, “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying” (Pro 19:18). If your child’s bone be out of joint, ye will have it set, though he cry and bawl under the hand of the surgeon. Ye will say, “It is better he cry now, than be lame so long as he lives.” So it is better your children cry now under the rod of their father, than that they should weep and wail forever under the wrath of the infinite God.

Therefore, take these five directions that ye may perform this duty:

(1) Do not allow your servants to correct your children. For correction is an act of authority, and therefore cannot belong to those who are merely your servants. I would not have parents to permit their children to despise and abuse their servants; but for parents to suffer their servants to correct their children is the way to make their children stubborn, their servants proud, and themselves contemptible in the eyes of both.

⁴² **gangrenous** – suffering from the decay of body tissue.

(2) *Convince them that it is your duty to correct them for their sins.* Therefore, it is advisable that you make them get those Scriptures without book,⁴³ which bind you to correct them, and some of those Scriptures that condemn the sins that you correct them for. Do this so that their consciences may justify you in doing your duty, and so that they may be more afraid of sin than the rod and of provoking God than offending you.

(3) *Correct them betimes.*⁴⁴ “Chasten thy son while there is hope” (Pro 19:18; 13:24). Use the rod wisely to them before they become scourges and scorpions to you.

(4) *Labor to be in a good frame when you correct them* that love, prudence, and meekness—not rage and fury—may govern the rod. Do not exercise too much severity towards them that ye may not provoke them to wrath, lest the wrath of the children prove the grief of the parents.

(5) *Pray to God for a blessing upon your correcting them* that it may be effectual to drive out that foolishness which is bound up in their hearts.

5. Be a good example

Lastly, be good examples to your children. Let them not see you in any sin, for that may infect them and make them despise you. But let them always see you shining in the image of God. That is the way to make them honor and obey you in the Lord. Live so that ye may say to them, as Paul to the Philippians, “Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do, and the God of [love and] peace shall be with you” (4:9).

C. Directions for Bearing This Calamity

I proceed to direct those parents who are under this calamity, how to bear it, in eight directions.

1. Abhor idolatry!

Abhor it as a great sin to faint under this affliction, that is, either to be disabled for thy duty or to sink in thy comforts. It is a sign that thou didst place too much of thy happiness in thy children, if their wickedness make thee faint under this calamity. I shall only plead with thee, as Joab did with David when he made that bitter lamentation for his son Absalom, “Thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes, nor servants” (2Sa 19:6). So I say to thee, thou hereby declarest that thou regardest not God and Christ, if thy soul faint under the burden of a disobedient child.

2. Realize you are not alone

Consider what I have proved that this is an affliction that ordinarily befalls God’s dearest children. Ye must not think of this as if ye 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

⁴³ **get...without book** – memorize.

⁴⁴ **betimes** – early in life.

them. [They] say with the church, “Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow...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 hath usually lain on the lot of the righteous.

3. Realize there are greater miseries

Consider that there might have befallen thee greater miseries than this. I shall instance in three greater evils that would have made thee more miserable.

a. Thou mightest have been a wicked, ungodly wretch thyself.

For the great Jehovah to have cursed and damned thee forever would have made thee unspeakably more miserable than to be tormented awhile with a wicked child.

b. Thou mightest have had an ungodly yokefellow [spouse] to be as rottenness in thy bones.

Solomon seems to speak of a troublesome yokefellow as more grievous than a wicked child, “A foolish son is the calamity of his father, and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping” (Pro 19:13). This is like the constant dropping of rain into a house, which rots the building, spoils the goods, and ruins both house and inhabitants. Forasmuch as thy yoke-fellow is nearer and ought to be dearer to thee than thy child, to be afflicted therein is a greater calamity.

c. God might have left all your children to perish in their sins.

If ye have but one godly child, your joy in that should much abate your sorrow for your other wicked children.

4. Realize there are greater things to mourn

Consider, thou hast greater things to affect thee with grief and sorrow than thy wicked children do. There are whole empires and kingdoms of men, women, and children, who have as precious souls as thine or thy children’s. These dishonor the same God and perish under His wrath. Multitudes that have the Scriptures and ordinances despise the same Christ and the same Gospel as thy children do. Why shouldst thou be more concerned for one or more of thy wicked children, than for the whole world that lies in wickedness?

5. Forsake sinful sorrow

Let your sorrow be guided by Scripture and reason, that ye may not provoke God, defile your souls, and wound your consciences by sinful groans and tears. For this end, observe two rules:

a. 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.

Do this so that it may appear that the love of God and your children’s souls, and not the love of the world, hath 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.

b. Secondly, let not thy sorrow disease thy body and impair thy health.

God doth not require us to mourn more for our children's sins than our own. 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 thyself of all opportunities to honor God and serve His church. Do not make thy yokefellow desolate nor thy children orphans by such sorrow. That will neither please God nor ease thyself nor do any good to thy wicked and miserable children.

6. Seek Christ's strength

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

7. Realize your blessings in Christ

Comfort thyself, in that the greatest and best things that thou hast most prayed for, trusted unto, expected, and chiefly loved and desired are all safe and sure.

a. Thy God is and will be blessed and glorious forever, whatever becomes of thy child.

All His infinite perfections are working for His glory. Christ Himself is God's and doth 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.

b. God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are forever thy own and will to all eternity be glorified in making thee blessed and glorious.

Thou hast a bad child, but a good God. All thy work will be done, thy sins pardoned and killed, thy graces perfected, and body and soul glorified—and shall an ungodly child make all thy consolations herein small to thee?

8. Consider your eternity in heaven

Lastly, 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 that this love will shortly bring him unto.

To tell you that this is and hath been the case of other godly parents, may allay⁴⁵ 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 no more than to think they may be saved, or they may be damned. There is as much reason to fear the one, as to hope for the other.

⁴⁵ **allay** – lessen.

But for a man to see his own gainful death, ready to loose him into that world where there is none of this sorrow and to know that at the Day of Judgment⁴⁶ his wicked children will be no more to him than bloody Bonners⁴⁷ or Gardiners,⁴⁸ or damned devils, and that he himself shall sit with Christ to judge them. He shall love and delight in the holiness and justice of the Judge of all the World in passing that sentence upon them, “Depart 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.

V. Exhortations to Ungodly Children

Lastly, I shall finish this discourse in a serious exhortation to those ungodly children, who are the grief and bitterness of their good parents. Herein I shall,

- A. Endeavour to convince them of their sins.
- B. Of their misery.
- C. Persuade them to forsake their sins, so that they may be freed from that misery.

A. The Greatness of Your Sins

First, I shall set before you the greatness of your sins in these four particulars: 1) ye have broken your covenant with God; 2) ye have broken the bonds wherein ye were bound to the church of God; 3) ye have broken the bonds of your duty to your parents; 4) ye have broken the bonds of your duty to your other relations.

1. Broken your duty toward God

First, ye have broken your covenant with God, whereinto ye were solemnly entered by baptism; for it is clear by that Scripture before mentioned (Lev 19:3), that by casting off the authority of your parents, ye have disowned the Lord to be your God. Your breach of covenant with God appears more fully in these four particulars.

a. Ye do in your hearts and practices deny the being of God.

The first article of the covenant is that ye should acknowledge and believe that the Lord He is God; for he that cometh to God, must believe that He is (Heb 11:6). But this is the language of your hearts and lives: there is no God. Ye deny God to be the first and best being in preferring the creatures before Him and saying in effect that the creatures are *all*, and the great Jehovah is but as a cipher⁴⁹ to you.

⁴⁶ See *Free Grace Broadcaster* 210, “Day of Judgment,” available from Chapel Library.

⁴⁷ **Edmund Bonner** or **Boner** (c. 1500-1569) – Bishop of London; initially an instrumental figure in the schism of Henry VIII from Rome, but later reconciled himself to Roman Catholicism. He became notorious as “Bloody Bonner,” persecuting Protestants under the Catholic government of “Bloody Mary” of England.

⁴⁸ **Stephen Gardiner** (1483-1555) – Bishop of Winchester; known by some as “black and bloody Gardiner” for his persecution of Protestants under “Bloody Mary.”

⁴⁹ **cipher** – a person or thing without value; a non-entity.

Ye deny His omnipresence. He fills all places where ye are, but ye take no notice of Him. The presence of a father or master hath some influence upon you; but it works not at all upon you that God is in the room.

Ye deny His infinite wisdom, that wisdom of God in contriving the work of salvation by Jesus Christ. That wisdom, which is so glorious and wonderful to the principalities and powers of heaven, is to such proud and ignorant boys and girls as you but a foolish and ridiculous thing.

Ye deny His power in daring to war against Him. Like those hectoring⁵⁰ atheists, “Ye stretch out your hands against God, and strengthen yourselves against the Almighty” (Job 15:25-26). Ye run upon Him, even on His neck, upon the thick bosses⁵¹ of His buckler, as if ye were able to fight God and overcome the Almighty.

Ye deny His holiness and think that God is altogether such a one as yourselves (Psa 50:21). And that ye may not be terrified by your enmity and unlikeness to Him, ye will please yourselves in fancying that God is like you—as if ye must rather be a pattern to Him, than He be a pattern to you. In this way, ye will persuade yourselves that He is the God of atheists, whoremongers, drunkards, liars, and thieves and not the holy God of a holy people.

Ye deny the truth of God. One of the greatest and best truths that ever God spake to man is that, “God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1Jo 5:11). Yet herein ye would make Him a liar in not believing this solemn record that He gave of Christ. A liar is one of the worst characters of the devil, and this ye give to the true and holy God. These things I write, as it were, upon the brazen faces of all ungodly and disobedient children.

b. You refuse to be satisfied in God.

Ye break the covenant in refusing to take God for your God and happiness. The greatest promise that ever God made to man is that, “I will be to you a God” (Heb 8:10). But this signifies nothing to you; you will not accept of Him for your chief honor, treasure, and joy. It is no honor to you to have the great Jehovah for your Father: ye see no good in Him and account not yourselves the better for Him. And if ye lose Him, ye think ye lose nothing. Ye neither love nor desire Him, nor take any delight or pleasure in Him.

c. You despise Christ’s redemption...

Your lives declare that ye had rather have the love of a debauched companion, than the love of the Father of Jesus Christ. Ye despise the Lord Jesus, account the great price of redemption to be worth nothing, and would rather keep your sins than be saved from them. Ye defy the wrath of God and scorn that the Mediator should make your peace with Him. Ye resist the Holy Spirit and would rather be made filthy and wicked and be taught to lie, swear, and steal than that the Spirit should teach you to love, serve, and delight in God.

d. You have chosen the world over God

⁵⁰ **hectoring** – bullying.

⁵¹ **bosses** – dome-shaped ornaments in the center of shields.

Ye have broken the covenant, in taking part with the devil, the world, and sin, against the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and this ye have done two ways.

1. In *believing* the promises of the devil, the world, and sin and in not believing the promises of God. The devil, the world, and sin are the three great cheats of mankind. They deceive men by making seemingly great and high promises. By these they have prevailed with man to break both the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. The devil tempted our first parents not to believe that word of God which He gave them to deter and keep them from sin, which word is written, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17). The devil tempted them to look on that word as a lie and made them that great promise (Gen 3:4-5), wherein he promiseth them that if they eat the forbidden fruit, they shall not only be safe from all evil, saying, "Ye shall not surely die"; but that they shall also be preferred to greater happiness than God had then placed them in. He saith, "Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." By believing this promise of the devil, they brake the covenant of life and brought that deluge of sin and misery which came upon all mankind. And, since he prevailed with men not to believe the word of God, which [God] spake to keep them from sin and destruction, his work is to tempt them to make God a liar in the word that He hath spoken to save them from sin and ruin by Jesus Christ. This is the word of the Covenant of Grace, which promiseth eternal life and salvation to all that believe in Christ, repent of their sins, and live the lives of new creatures, according to the rules of the Gospel. But the devil tempts men to break this covenant by promising them life and all happiness in a course of sin. These wicked children believe the devil herein, and bless themselves in their sins, saying with those bold ranters, "We shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our own hearts, to add drunkenness to thirst" (Deu 29:19). Thus, ye break your covenant with God and make a covenant with death and hell.

2. In *obeying* the devil, the world, and sin, and in disobeying God. Ye call God your Father in heaven, but ye do the lusts of the devil your father in hell. Ye walk according to the course of this world (Eph 2:2) and are the servants of sin (Rom 6:20), and ye hate and fight against God your Maker and Redeemer. Were it possible for you, ye would every day kill Him Who only hath immortality! And thus, like a company of renegades, ye live as if ye were baptized in the name of the devil, the world, and the flesh to renounce the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

2. Broken your duty to the church

Secondly, ye have broken the bonds of your duty to the church of God...By baptism, ye were solemnly admitted into that great, holy, victorious, and blessed society (Heb 12:22 ff.), Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly and church of the first-born written in heaven. But ye have forsaken this church and turned yourselves out of the family and house of the living God. Ye are become of the same party with the devil and his seed and have labored to fill the world with sin and the kingdom of Satan. Ye would have Jesus Christ to have no name, or kingdom, or ministers, or ordinances, or people in the world!

3. Broken your duty to your parents

Thirdly, ye have broken the bonds of your duty to your parents. This appears in those black characters⁵² already given of wicked children that are found on you. Whereunto, I shall add this one, which includes all the particulars of your disobedience that can be mentioned, namely, ye do not love your parents! Love worketh no evil unto, but always willeth and seeketh the good of the beloved. Love ever inclines persons to please them whom they love, to love and delight in their company, and causeth such looks, words, and behavior as are expressions of love. How pleasant hath it been sometimes to me to see, as it were, the heart and soul of a child running out in his pleasant and loving looks to his parents! But, ye disobedient children do not love your parents: [you] do them more hurt and cause them more sorrow than all the malicious enemies and persecutors they ever met with in the world. Ye are always vexing, crossing, and provoking them and are as continual pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides! [You] had rather be with liars, swearers, and drunkards and with your wanton and idle companions than with your wise, grave, and holy parents. How merry and jovial are ye in the company of such who will join with you to serve the devil, dishonor God, and destroy your souls! But how uneasy, lumpish,⁵³ sour, and discontent are ye in the presence of your parents? Your spiteful looks, sullen words, and scornful carriage doth betray your hatred, anger, and envy against your good parents. Ah wicked wretches! Ye cannot find in your hearts to love your parents from whom ye had your beings under God and who have used all holy means to make you holy and blessed!

4. Broken your duty to others

Lastly, ye have broken the bonds of your duty to your other relations and to all men. Ye cannot be good brothers or sisters whilst ye are such bloody⁵⁴ children to your parents. Ye cannot be good servants or apprentices, or good husbands or wives, or good subjects to magistrates, whilst ye are bad children. The same sins that debauch you in that relation will debauch you in all and will make you an encumbrance to your place, the troublers of the world, and a very plague and curse to your generation.

B. The Greatness of Your Misery

I shall now endeavor to convince you of your misery. Oh, that I had a heart and tongue to think and speak of this as the matter doth require! Consider: ye are cursed children, “Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother, and all the people shall say, Amen” (Deu 27:16). Observe: God Himself doth here proclaim you cursed. Only He can curse or bless you, having all curses and blessings at command. [He] can set His love or pour out His wrath where He pleaseth. He is able and faithful to fulfill His own threatenings. And He knows you to be cursed, for He knows all the children of His grace and all the children of His wrath. Observe further that all God’s ministers are to pronounce you cursed: “The Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a

⁵² **black characters** – negative and ungodly descriptions.

⁵³ **lumpish** – low-spirited; dejected.

⁵⁴ **bloody** – bad; unpleasant.

loud voice...Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother” (27:14, 16). The ministers of God must with a loud voice, as if they would ring in the ears of all, declare you to be cursed. And I, a minister of the Gospel, do hereby proclaim all wicked and disobedient children—though some of them may be the fruit of my own body—to be cursed! Nay further—all people, yea, even your own selves, are to judge you cursed; and all the people shall say, “Amen.” They and you are to believe it and to approve of it as most just and righteous that ye be cursed. But that I may convince you of your misery, I shall further set before you these four things:

1. Ye are *out of the way of all good*. God hath His way of mercy and His way of wrath. Ye are out of the way of His mercy, for ye do not stand in the grace and love of God, which causeth all good; and ye are children of His wrath, which causeth all misery. And, as I have told you, ye have broken that covenant that conveys all grace and mercy: no good can come to you, except ye turn to God and your parents.

2. Ye are *in the very way and road to all wickedness*. Many of the most horrid sins in the world first began in disobedience to parents. Most of those who have proved liars, drunkards, whoremongers, thieves, and murderers were first ungodly and disobedient children.

3. Ye are *in continual danger* of some remarkable judgment of God in this life, “He that curseth [revileth] his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death” (Exo 21:17). “Whoso curseth his father, or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness” (Pro 20:20). Your lamp of life and pleasure may seem to burn and shine at present, but there is a black and dismal night hastening on all disobedient children, “The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it” (Pro 30:17). None are more likely to pass into the eternal world, through a shameful and untimely death, than disobedient children. When God leaves children to disobey their parents, it is a dreadful sign of their approaching ruin. It is re-corded of Eli and his sons that “they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them” (1Sa 2:25)!

4. If ye *go on in your course of disobedience*, ye will forever be damned in hell, for ye have broken that covenant that promiseth eternal life to all that believe and obey the Gospel and doth as certainly bind over to the wrath and vengeance of God all that live in disobedience to God and their parents.

Miserable children! I have sent this poor little book to overtake you before the wrath and vengeance of God do overtake you! I am not altogether a stranger to the terrors of the Lord, but do know what is before you and what a meeting there will quickly be between God and you, better than ye do. I have labored to affect my heart in seeing what lies at your door. I know that whilst ye are following the chase of your filthy pleasures, evil from God is hunting you and will find you out to destroy you. I dare not damn my own soul by not warning you of those sins that will be the damnation of yours. Foolish boys and girls can now laugh at the hearing of death, hell, and judgment to come. When ministers sound the trumpet in their ears to give them warning of these things, they, like the war-horse in Job, can say among the trumpets, “Aha,” for the devil tempts his

children to make sport of those things at which he trembles himself. But when I remember how I have seen in some of you your down-looks, your pale-faces, your shivering-limbs—as Job speaks of the adulterer when he comes to be known (Job 24:17)—that ye have been as in the terrors of the shadow of death when your mortal parents have found you out in your sins, I cannot but think how your countenances will fall, your stout spirits sink, and your mettle fail, when ye come to fall into the hands of the living God.

C. The Way Forward

Lastly, I come now to exhort and persuade you to abhor and forsake your sins that ye may escape this misery. I would have you to repent and believe with the saints of God that ye may be saved before ye come to repent with the damned in hell and with the devils to believe and tremble. For this end, I shall 1) endeavor to convince you of your folly and 2) direct you how to attain true wisdom.

1. *Your folly*

First, I shall endeavor to convince you of your folly. Ye see the text; it calls a wicked son to be a foolish son. God, Who knows you best and hath a true judgment of you, calls you fools and would have all the world to be of the same judgment with Himself, and therefore to account you fools. Ye yourselves will at last call yourselves fools when ye come to have the portion of fools. Except ye judge yourselves fools, ye cannot be wise. And that ye may, as in a glass, see your own folly, I shall propound to you these five questions. As God said to Job, so do I say to you in His name, “Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me” (Job 38:3).

a. Are ye not very fools in that ye do in your hearts and lives deny the being of God? There are no worse fools than they that “say in their hearts, There is no God” (Psa 14:1). For such a one says, in effect, that there is no religion, no sin, no heaven nor hell; yea, he saith that he himself is nothing, and that there are neither heavens, nor earth, nor seas, nor men, nor beasts, nor any other creatures. For, if there be no God, there can be nothing else. So, ye have the name of fools written on your foreheads; as it is said, “When he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool” (Ecc 10:3).

b. Are ye not fools to make such a foolish choice? It is the infinite goodness of God that ye have life and death, blessing and cursing, set before you...And these, as Solomon speaks, are but as a price in the hands of a fool that hath no heart to it (Pro 17:16).

Consider: there are two sorts of affections in all humane creatures, and all are wise or fools according as they set and place these. There are affections of union, as love, desire, and delight, which do unite the heart to their objects. And there are affections of opposition, as hatred and anger, which do separate the heart from their objects. Are ye not monstrous fools, then, in that ye hate and abhor God and your Redeemer, in Whom there are all reasons for your love, desires, and joy; and in that ye love, desire, and delight in sin, the devil, and death and hell, in whom there are all reasons for the hatred

and revenge of your souls? To love those things that are altogether loathsome and to hate what is altogether lovely is a plain argument of your madness and folly.

c. Are ye not fools in suffering everything to deceive you? The Scripture tells you that the devil is a deceiver. It tells you of the deceitfulness of your hearts, of the deceitfulness of sin, of the deceitfulness of riches, of the deceitfulness of wine and strong drink; of the deceitfulness of harlots, who promise pleasure but prove a deep ditch and a narrow pit; of the deceitfulness of a lying tongue, which promiseth that lies shall serve the liar's turn and do his work but proveth to be but for a moment; of the deceitfulness of theft and unjust gain, which seems sweet at present but soon after proves as gravel in the mouth. Yet, notwithstanding all the shame, rags, stings, and torments of conscience that have come upon you by trusting in these, yet ye will still believe them and suffer yourselves by these deceivers to be cheated of God and Christ, and of your souls, your time, and heaven.

d. Are ye not fools in being so set and bent to ruin and destroy yourselves? "A fool's mouth is his own destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul" (Pro 18:7). "The lips of a fool will swallow up himself" (Ecc 10:12). Ye are so bent on your own ruin that your hearts rise in anger and hatred against your good parents and ministers and all that labor to save you. Ye account them your worst enemies, who would not have you damned. Miserable children! Allow yourselves but one hour's serious consideration of your eternal estate, and ye will see reason to condemn yourselves for a company of proud and ignorant fools; in attempting to run down God and His kingdom and religion; and in valuing your cups, lusts, and lies at such a rate as for them to exchange the eternal life and happiness of your souls.

e. Are ye not fools in not preparing for death and judgment that are ready to overtake you? To convince you of this, be informed that men are prepared for death and judgment, who by faith, repentance, and holiness are become heirs of the promises of the Gospel. These have a right unto and fitness for all that glory, which in performance of these promises, God will give them the possession at those great days. But men are unprepared when they are under the wrath and curse of God and are condemned to those eternal torments that are threatened in the Scriptures and will at death and judgment be executed upon them. Now, prove yourselves by these things, and ye may then see what fools ye are in not preparing for these days. For if ye were prepared, ye should then enter into a world where all will love you. God, Christ, all angels, and all saints will love you; and ye will forever be holy and blessed in their love to you and in your love to them. But being unprepared, ye must then be cast into a world where all will hate you and where you will hate all the holy and blessed. God will there hate you and be a consuming fire against you. The devils and all the damned in hell will hate you, and you will hate them. We find that our Savior brands him for a fool (Luk 12:20), who promiseth to himself an easy and merry life for many years, when that very night he was to lose his soul. He gives the character of foolish virgins to those who were unprepared for that great, terrible, and sudden cry, "The bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Mat 25:6).

Poor children! Let these common things be imprinted on your hearts. Death is certain; the day of death is as certainly appointed as was the day of your birth; and as your birth kept its time, so will your death keep its time. Ye cannot sin away death, though ye sin away the sense of death.

Consider also that death is near. Whatever ye think of your lives, they will be but as a vapor, shadow, or smoke, as God speaks them to be. Though ye put death far from you, yet it will be within a hands-breadth of you. One day or hour may put an end to your space of repentance, conclude your day of grace and salvation, and dispatch you into that world where no new creatures are made. Ye now defy death, as if ye were a fit match for the king of terrors; ye scorn the grace, scoff at the Day of Judgment, and deride everlasting burnings. But when God shall pour upon you your own wickedness (Jer 14:16), then ye will too late condemn yourselves for fools, when ye come to reap the fruit of your own folly.

2. How to progress

Secondly, I come to give you directions to direct you to true wisdom that ye may be such wise children as to make glad fathers and not to be the heaviness of your mothers.

Direction 1. *Do not dare to put off your repentance any longer.* It is not too late to repent, so long as God calls you to repentance and gives you time for it. “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2Co 6:2). God, Christ, angels, the church, and your bleeding parents are yet ready to receive you in love and joy. But it will shortly be too late to repent, though it can never be too soon. Dear children! Either ye must persuade yourselves that the Word of God is a lie, and so think ye are secure from hell because ye deny the Bible that threateneth it; or ye must presume that ye are not ungodly children, as indeed ye are. Or else, ye must conclude that your present state is not safe and good, and that therefore ye must either repent or be damned.

Perhaps the devil himself doth not tempt you to resolve that you will never repent but to think that there is *yet time enough* and that therefore ye will repent hereafter. I have sometimes dreaded to hear debauched children confidently say that they do not question but they shall be converted and become good when at present they hate to be reformed. Yea, I am persuaded that some secure themselves in their sins by presuming that the prayers of their good parents for their conversion and salvation will at last be heard. But how many such have been, as Solomon speaks of others, “driven away in [their] wickedness” (Pro 14:32)—in whom that dreadful Scripture hath been fulfilled, “He, that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Pro 29:1).

I shall here seriously reason this case a little with you. Why should ye continue one moment longer in those sins that ye must repent of or perish and defer repentance, for which ye shall have cause forever to rejoice and bless God when it is done? Are ye not wicked enough already that ye must stay to be worse? Have ye not defiled yourselves, provoked God, refused Christ, and afflicted your parents long enough already? Poor souls! If there be one hour yet left wherein ye are sure that ye shall not die and fall into hell; or one hour wherein sin is better than grace and wherein it is better to be a child of

the devil than a child of God; or if ye can come into the kingdom of God and begin an eternal life an hour too soon—take that hour, and spend it on your lusts! But if not, stop presently, and let this be the hour wherein ye begin to believe, repent, and reform and wherein ye begin to set your faces toward heaven with an unmovable resolution to walk in the way of faith and obedience until ye come there.

Direction 2. *Judge whether ye have more reason to obey the devil or to obey God*, as the Apostles said to their persecutors, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (Act 4:19). So say I to you, whether it be right to obey the devil rather than God, judge ye. Consider: God hath authority to command you, for He is your Maker, Preserver, and Redeemer; and ye owe yourselves to Him. But the devil neither made, nor kept, nor bought you and therefore can have no right to command you. Consider further that all the commands of God are the commands of His love; for He doth not only command you as your Lord, but also as your Father and Savior. Therefore, He commands you to take Himself to be your God and happiness, to take His Son Jesus Christ to save you from all evil, and to make you forever holy and blessed. But the devil commands you out of hatred and malice: all his commands are the commands of a murderer, and therefore he commands you to defile, destroy, and damn yourselves. He commands you to be blind and ignorant, to hate and scorn God and Christ, and to love sin, death, and hell. Consider also, that God is able to reward your obedience and to punish your disobedience. He is that only Lawgiver, Who is able to save and to destroy (Jam 4:12). He can crown you with eternal glory if ye obey Him and can cast you into everlasting flames if ye disobey Him. But the devil, who is cursed and tormented himself, cannot make you happy if ye obey him or miserable if ye do forsake and renounce him.

Direction 3. See the great difference betwixt those wise and holy children who live in obedience to God and their parents, and you who live in disobedience to both. Not wealth, poverty, beauty, deformity, sickness, or health, but sin and grace make the greatest difference betwixt persons. Ye must know God and Christ, or else ye cannot understand the worth of a saint or the vileness of a sinner. Some of you may look into your own families and there see some of your brethren and sisters like pleasant and fruitful plants about your father’s table, when ye are as briars, thorns, and weeds in the family. They are the crown and joy, and you the calamity of your parents. All that see them may look upon them as a seed whom the Lord hath blessed, but all that see you have reason to judge you to be a cursed generation.

Poor children! Is it better to be like Cain than like Abel? Or like cursed Canaan than like Shem? Or like Ishmael than like Isaac? Or like Esau than like Jacob? Are not your souls and bodies as precious as the souls and bodies of your good brethren and sisters? Can the devil, sin, and the world be better to you than to them? Is not death and judgment as near you as it is to them? Have not ye as much reason to love and obey God and your parents as they? Can ye endure the loss of heaven or torments of hell better than they? If not, why should not ye be as good as they are?

Direction 4. Do nothing but what ye are willing should be known. If ye would not have your parents, masters, the magistrates, and your friends and foes know your lies,

lusts, theft, your profaning the Lord's Day, and your haunting evil company, do not practice these things. Ye need not fear who knows how holy, just, sober, and chaste ye are; religion can boldly shew its shining face to God and man. But sin makes you sneak, cowardly, base, and fearful. It imprints marks of dishonor and shame upon your looks and countenances and fills you with horror and consternation when ye are discovered.

Consider seriously that all from whom your greatest shame and misery will come do know you. The devils know you and will accuse, disgrace, and torment you for the same sins they tempted you unto. They will not help you to hide your sins when time of grace, repentance, and pardon is past. Your own hearts and consciences know you and will awake out of their present sleep to condemn and sting you. And God, who is greater than all, knows you; and all your secret sins are in the light of His countenance. He will bring them all to judgment: it will then fully appear to angels and devils and to saints and sinners what ye are.

Direction 5. Therefore be not such now, as ye dare not at the hour of death profess yourselves to be. Religion and godliness is at all times to be professed before God, angels, and men, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom 10:10). But what monsters would ye appear to yourselves, if ye did profess yourselves to be what ye are? Suppose ye were reading this but one hour before ye die and must say, "We are now falling into the hands of the living God; and by the time the glass is run out and the clock strikes next, we are to give account of ourselves to the Judge of all the World." Dare ye then say, "We profess ourselves to be haters of God, children of the devil, and despisers of our holy parents, and that we choose the way to hell"?

Direction 6. Consider what account ye can give in being such burdens of the earth and in being so grievous and chargeable to all who are concerned with you. Is it nothing to you to be as biles⁵⁵ or scabs in the body, or as smoke, or a stinking smell, or an infectious disease in the house and family where ye are? Or as weeds in a garden to cumber and annoy your place? Ye will pay dear one day for all the sighs, groans, and tears that ye have caused to your afflicted parents and friends. It will sting you to think that so many have been losers by you; that your parents, brethren, and sisters have been so much wasted and impoverished by your costly lusts; that ye have given cause to all your wicked companions to curse the day that ever they knew you; and that ye have filled so many other parents besides your own with grief and bitterness by infecting, defiling, and debauching their children. I think I hear all these saying to you, as Joshua said to Achan, "Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day" (Jos 7:25).

Direction 7. Lastly, I shall ask you this one question: What would ye have your parents to do with you? Their love makes them to be continually concerned for you—but they know not what to do with you, for all the means that they have yet used for your good hath but aggravated your guilt and their grief. Whilst they kept you at home, ye did break all the good orders and rules of government in the family. At set-times for meat

⁵⁵ biles – boils.

and family-worship, either your places were empty or filled with sin. Ye disquieted your parents, wasted the estate, defiled or disturbed your brethren and sisters, and troubled the house night and day. When they sent you to school, ye played the truants, grieved and dishonored your masters, debauched your schoolfellows, and were a reproach and scandal to the school. If they set you to be apprentices, ye hated and wronged your masters, and were a plague to the family. If any of you were sent to the university, ye were the rakehells⁵⁶ of the college, and the society was sick of you until it had expelled and cast you out! If after all other means were used your parents sent you to sea, the atheism and wickedness of some of the seamen did you more hurt than all the wonders of God in the deep waters did you good; so that ye returned, as if the sea had made you like itself—more raging and boisterous than before. Insomuch, your miserable parents can do nothing but spend their days in mourning for your sins, in praying for your salvation, in laboring to bear patiently your ruin, and to be content to live and die the fathers and mothers of fools!

A Final Word

Now, children, I will take my leave of you and shall leave you to the God with whom ye have to do and with whom ye must have to do forever. He is the God Who will plead the cause of His own name, honor, and religion with you, and Who will plead the cause of your distressed parents with you. He is a God whose wrath ye can neither escape nor bear. There is a war betwixt this God and you! If ye can make it appear that ye are greater, wiser, stronger, and better than He, ye may go on—but my design in all this discourse is to persuade you to believe, repent, and obey the Gospel—and so to make peace with God through Jesus Christ.

And for your encouragement, I do assure you that the grace of God and merits of Christ are as sufficient to save you from all your horrid abominations, as if ye were as innocent as when ye were newborn. God, Christ, angels, your parents, friends, and all saints are ready to rejoice in your conversion and salvation; and your iniquities shall never be mentioned against you. But upon your unfeigned turning to Him, God will (as

He is represented in the parable of the prodigal son) meet you in mercy, fall on your necks and kiss you, and entertain you with all the blessings of the Gospel, saying, “These my children were dead, and are alive; they were lost, and are found” (*see* Luke 15:24).



⁵⁶ **rakehells** – utterly immoral persons.