

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 228

FATHERHOOD

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

Ephesians 6:4

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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#228

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Published by Chapel Library • 2603 West Wright St. • Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

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FATHER AS PROPHET, KING, PRIEST

William Gurnall (1616-1679)

EVERY father hath the care of souls upon him. He is prophet, king, and priest in his own house, and from these will appear his duty.

First, he is a *prophet* to teach and instruct his family. Wives are bid to learn at home of their husbands (1Co 14:35); then surely they are to teach them at home. Parents are commanded to instruct their children: “Ye shall teach them when thou sittest in thine house” (Deu 11:19). “Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Now, there is a teaching and admonition by prayer to God and praising of God, as well as in catechizing of them: “Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns” (Col 3:16). The father’s praying with his family will teach them how to pray when by themselves. The confessions he makes, petitions he puts up, and mercies he acknowledges in his family duty are an excellent means to furnish them with matter for their devotion. How comes it to pass that many...children, when they come to be themselves heads of families, are so unable to be their relations’ mouth to God in prayer, but because they have in their [childhood] lived in prayerless families and were kept in ignorance of this duty...?

Again, he is a *king* in his house to rule his family in the fear of God...He is to say with Joshua, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Jos 24:15). Would it be a sin in a prince not to set up the public worship of God in his kingdom, although he served God himself in his palace? Surely, then, it is a sin in the father not to set it up in his house, though he prays himself in his closet.

Lastly, he is a *priest* in his own house; and where there is a priest, there must be a sacrifice. What sacrifice [is there] among Christians, but the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving? Thus, David went from public ordinances to perform private duty with his family: “Then David returned to bless his household” (1Ch 16:43), that is, saith one upon the place, he returned to worship God in private with them and to crave a blessing from God upon them.

From *The Christian in Complete Armor*, The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.



FATHERHOOD: RESPONSIBILITY AND PRIVILEGE

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

ONE of the saddest and most tragic features of our twentieth-century¹ “civilization” is the awful prevalence of disobedience on the part of children to their parents during the days of childhood and their lack of reverence and respect when they grow up. This is evidenced in many ways and is general, alas, even in the families of professing Christians. In his extensive travels during the past thirty years, the writer has sojourned in a great many homes. The piety and beauty of some of them remain as sacred and fragrant memories, but others of them have left the most painful impressions. Children who are self-willed or spoiled not only bring themselves into perpetual unhappiness but also inflict discomfort upon all who come into contact with them. [They] augur,² by their conduct, evil things for the days to come.

In the vast majority of cases, the children are not nearly so much to be blamed as the parents. Failure to honor father³ and mother, wherever it is found, is in large measure due to parental departure from the Scriptural pattern. Nowadays the father thinks that he has fulfilled his obligations by providing food and raiment for his children, and by acting occasionally as a kind of moral policeman. Too often, the mother is content to be a domestic drudge,⁴ making herself the slave of her children instead of training them to be useful. She performs many a task that her daughters should do in order to allow them freedom for the frivolities of a giddy set.⁵ The consequence has been that the home, which ought to be—for its orderliness, its sanctity,⁶ and its reign of love—a miniature heaven on earth, has degenerated into “a filling station for the day and a parking place for the night,” as someone has tersely expressed it.

Before outlining the duties of *fathers* toward their children, let it be pointed out that they cannot properly discipline their children unless they have first learned to govern themselves. How can they expect to subdue self-will in their little ones and check the rise of an angry temper if their own passions are allowed free reign?

¹ The same sadly applies to our 21st century.

² **augur** – predict; become a sign that something is about to happen.

³ EDITOR’S NOTE: Several articles in this issue are addressed to both parents—fathers and mothers. To emphasize the father’s role, *parent* is sometimes replaced with *father* in italics.

⁴ **drudge** – person made to do hard, dull work; slave.

⁵ **frivolities...giddy set** – silly behaviors of foolish people, incapable of serious thought.

⁶ **sanctity** – holiness.

The character of *fathers* is to a very large degree reproduced in their offspring: “And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen 5:3). The *father*...must be in subjection to God if he would lawfully expect obedience from his little ones. This principle is enforced in Scripture again and again: “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?” (Rom 2:21).

Of the bishop, that is, elder or pastor, it is written that he must be “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)” (1Ti 3:5-6). And if a *father* knows not how to rule his own spirit (Pro 25:28), how shall he care for his offspring?

God has entrusted to *fathers* a most solemn charge, and yet a most precious privilege. It is not too much to say that in their hands are deposited the hope and blessing, or else the curse and plague, of the next generation. Their families are the nurseries of both Church and State, and according to the cultivating of them *now* will be their fruitfulness hereafter. Oh, how prayerfully and carefully should you who are parents discharge your trust!

Most assuredly, God will require an account of the children from your hands; for they are His and only lent to your care and keeping. The task assigned you is no easy one, especially in these superlatively⁷ evil days. Nevertheless, if trustfully and earnestly sought, the grace of God will be found sufficient in this responsibility as in others. The Scriptures supply us with rules to go by, with promises to lay hold of, and, we may add, with fearful warnings lest we treat the matter lightly.

Instruct Your Children. We have space to mention but four of the principal duties devolving⁸ on *fathers*. First, it is your duty to instruct your children. “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deu 6:6-7). This work is far too important to allocate to others: parents, and not Sabbath School⁹ teachers, are divinely required to educate their little ones. Nor is this to be an occasional or sporadic¹⁰ thing, but one that is to have constant attention. The glorious character of God, the requirements of His holy Law, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the wondrous gift of His Son, and the fearful doom that is the certain portion of all who despise and reject Him are to be brought repeatedly before the minds of your little ones. “They are

⁷ **superlatively** – in the highest degree.

⁸ **devolving** – passing down.

⁹ **Sabbath School** – Sunday School.

¹⁰ **sporadic** – happening only occasionally.

too young to understand such things” is the devil’s argument to deter you from discharging your duty.

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). It is to be noted that the “fathers” are here specifically addressed, and this for two reasons: (1) because they are the heads of their families and their government is especially committed to them; and (2) because they are prone to transfer this duty to their wives. This instruction is to be given by reading to them the Holy Scriptures and enlarging upon those things most agreeable to their age. This should be followed by catechizing¹¹ them. A continued discourse to the young is not nearly as effective as when it is diversified by questions and answers. If they know they will be questioned on what you read, they will listen more closely; and the formulating of answers teaches them to think for themselves. Such a method is also found to make the memory more retentive,¹² for answering definite questions fixes more specific ideas in the mind. Observe how often Christ asked His disciples questions.

Be a Good Example. Second, good instruction is to be accompanied by good example. The teaching that issues only from the lips is not at all likely to sink any deeper than the ears. Children are particularly quick to detect inconsistencies and to despise hypocrisy.¹³ It is at this point that parents need to be most on their faces before God, *daily* seeking from Him that grace that they so sorely need and that He alone can supply. What care you need to take, lest you say or do anything before your children that would tend to corrupt their minds or be of evil consequence for them to follow! How you need to be constantly on your guard against anything that might render you mean and contemptible in the eyes of those who should respect and revere you! The *father* is not only to instruct his children in the ways of holiness, but is himself to walk before them in those ways and show by his practice and demeanor¹⁴ what a pleasant and profitable thing it is to be regulated by the Divine Law.

In a Christian home, the supreme aim should be household piety—the honoring of God at all times. Everything else must be subordinated to this high purpose. In the matter of family life, neither husband nor wife can throw on the other all the responsibility for the religious character of the home. The mother is most certainly required to supplement the efforts of the father, for the children enjoy far more of her company than they do of his. If there is a tendency in fathers to be too strict and severe, mothers are prone to be too lax and lenient; and they need to be much on their guard against anything that would weaken their husband’s authority.

¹¹ **catechizing** – instructing in the Christian faith by means of question and answer.

¹² **retentive** – able to store facts and remember things easily.

¹³ See FGB 193, *Hypocrisy*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

¹⁴ **demeanor** – way a person looks or behaves toward other people.

When he has forbidden a thing, she must not give her consent to it. It is striking to note that the exhortation of Ephesians 6:4 is preceded by instruction to “be filled with the Spirit” (5:18), while the parallel exhortation in Colossians 3:21 is preceded by the exhortation to “let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (5:16), showing that parents cannot possibly discharge their duties unless they are filled with the Spirit and the Word.

Discipline Your Children. Third, instruction and example is to be enforced by correction and discipline. This means, first of all, the exercise of authority—the proper reign of Law. Of “the father of the faithful,” God said, “For I know him, 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; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen 18:19). Ponder this carefully, Christian fathers. Abraham did more than proffer¹⁵ good advice: he enforced law and order in his household. The rules he administered had for their design the keeping of “the way of the Lord”—that which was right in His sight. And this duty was performed by the patriarch in order that the blessing of God might rest on his family. No family can be properly brought up without household laws, which include reward and punishment; and these are especially important in early childhood, when as yet moral character is unformed and moral motives are not understood or appreciated.

Rules should be simple, clear, reasonable, and inflexible like the Ten Commandments—a few great moral rules, instead of a multitude of petty restrictions. One way of needlessly provoking children to wrath is to hamper them with a thousand trifling restrictions and minute regulations that are capricious¹⁶ and are due to a fastidious¹⁷ temper in the parent.

It is of vital importance for the child’s future good that he or she should be brought into subjection at an early age. An untrained child means a lawless adult. Our prisons are crowded with those who were allowed to have their own way during their minority. The least offense of a child against the rulers of the home ought not to pass without due correction; for if he finds leniency in one direction or toward one offense, he will expect the same toward others. And then disobedience will become more frequent until the parent has no control save that of brute force.

The teaching of Scripture is crystal clear on this point. “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Pro 22:15; cf. 23:13-14). Therefore, God has said, “He that spareth his rod hateth his

¹⁵ **proffer** – offer for acceptance.

¹⁶ **capricious** – guided by whim or fancy, not settled judgment.

¹⁷ **fastidious** – difficult to please.

son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes¹⁸” (Pro 13:24). And again, “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying” (Pro 19:18). Let not a foolish fondness stay thee. Certainly God loves His children with a much deeper parental affection than you can love yours, yet He tells us, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev 3:19; *cf.* Heb. 12:6). “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Pro 29:15). Such severity must be used in his early years, before age and obstinacy¹⁹ have hardened the child against the fear and smart of correction. Spare the rod, and you spoil the child; use it not on him, and you lay up one for your own back.

It should hardly need pointing out that the above Scriptures are by no means teaching that a reign of terror is to mark the home life. Children can be governed and chastened in such a way that they lose not their respect and affection for their *father*. Beware of souring their temper by unreasonable demands or provoking their wrath by striking them to vent your own rage. The *father* is to punish a disobedient child not because he is angry, but because it is right—because God requires it, and the welfare of the child demands it. Never make a threat that you have no intention of executing nor a promise you do not mean to perform. Remember that for your children to be well informed is good, but for them to be well controlled is better.

Pay close attention to the unconscious influences of a child’s surroundings. Study how to make your home attractive, not by introducing carnal and worldly things, but by noble ideals, by inculcating²⁰ a spirit of unselfishness, by genial²¹ and happy fellowship. Separate the little ones from evil associates. Watch carefully the periodicals and books that come into your home, the occasional guests that sit at your table, and the companionships that your children form. Parents often carelessly let others have free access to their children who undermine parental authority, overturn parental ideals, and sow seeds of frivolity and iniquity before they are aware. Never let your child spend a night among strangers. So train your children that your girls will be useful and helpful members of their generation and your boys industrious and self-supporting.

Pray for Your Children. Fourth, the last and most important duty, respecting both the temporal and spiritual good of your children, is fervent supplication to God for them. Without this, all the rest will be ineffectual. Means are unavailing unless the Lord blesses them. The “throne of grace” (Heb 4:16) is to be earnestly implored that your efforts to bring up your children for God may be crowned with

¹⁸ **betimes** – speedily; diligently.

¹⁹ **obstinacy** – stubbornness.

²⁰ **inculcating** – teaching or impressing upon the mind by frequent instruction or repetition.

²¹ **genial** – friendly; cheerful.

success. True, there must be a humble submission to His sovereign will, a bowing before the truth of election. On the other hand, it is the privilege of faith to lay hold of the divine promises and to remember that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (Jam 5:16). Of holy Job, it is recorded concerning his sons and daughters that he “rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all” (Job 1:5). A prayerful atmosphere should pervade the home and be breathed by all who share it.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

A.W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England.



A FATHER'S MAIN RESPONSIBILITY

John Calvin (1509-1564)

For I know him, 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; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.—Genesis 18:19

LET us...note that we are told here that God knows Abraham will instruct his children to walk in his way after him. First, there is instruction, and then what kind [of instruction] is noted. In other words, we are told the nature of that instruction and then how it extends beyond death. So in the person of Abraham, we see what the responsibility of all believers is, principally the responsibility of the fathers of family whom God set up as heads of household and to whom He gave life, children, and servants so they would be diligent in teaching them. For when a father has children, his responsibility is not only to feed and clothe them, but his *principal* responsibility is to guide them so that their lives will be well regulated, and he will dedicate his full attention to that...

God values His servant Abraham's piety,¹ which is shown in the effort he will make to serve and honor Him and to guide his family and those entrusted to his charge, for it is particularly stated that he will teach them to walk in the way of the Lord. Consequently, we see the nature of the right kind of instruction. For someone could be rather careful to give many rules and many laws without providing stability. There can be no foundation to build on unless God dominates and people obey Him and conform to His Word. That, then, is what we have to remember.

When fathers of family and those of some preeminence get ready to teach, they must not be presumptuous and say, "This seems good to *me*," and then try to subject everybody to their opinion and their concepts. "What? Shall I teach what I learned from God in His school?" What we have to remember from this passage is, briefly, that no one will ever be a good teacher unless he is God's pupil. So let there be no teaching authority that advances what *we* invent and what our minds come up with, but let us learn from God so that He will dominate and alone have all preeminence; and may great and small bring themselves into conformity with Him and obey Him. That much for that instruction.

At that time, there was no written law and even less gospel; but Abraham still knew God's will to the extent necessary. So Abraham is without Scripture, but

¹ piety – godliness.

even so, he does not presume to or attempt to set up laws to his own liking. But he asks God alone to govern and show the way to everybody else and lead them, for he does not wish to say, “Let us go the way I say,” but, “I am teaching you what I have learned from God. And may He alone have all mastery,² and may I be a teacher only if I speak as by His mouth.” That is the second point we have to remember here.

So what is to be noted here is that heads of family must go to the trouble of being instructed in God’s Word if they are to do their duty. If they are stupid, if they do not know the basic principles of religion or of their faith and do not know God’s commandments or how prayer is to be offered to Him or what the road to salvation is, how will they instruct their families? All the more, then, must those who are husbands and have a family, a household to govern, think, “I must establish my lesson in His Word so that I will not only try to govern myself in accordance with His will, but that I will also bring to it at the same time those who are under my authority and guidance.”

Now in the third place, Abraham will teach his family to walk in the fear of the Lord after his death, just as if it were said that the faithful man is not only to get honor for God and live tomorrow, but that he leaves good seed after his death. For God’s Word is the incorruptible seed of life: it endures forever. And even though heaven and earth tend to corruption and will pass away, the Word of God must *always* retain its power (*cf.* Mat 25:3; Isa 40:8; 55:11). Therefore, it is not without reason that it dies with us, is extinguished when God withdraws us from this world, and we carry everything off with us. But let us work, though we are weak and mortal and must depart this world, to leave the Word of God with a root here. And when we are dead and have turned to dust, may God be honored and may His memory endure forever. That, then, is what we have to remember...

Now since God spoke that way, He is saying that Abraham’s children, whom he will teach, will do *justice* and *judgment*. With those two words, Scripture comprises what concerns the second table of the Law. Moses says they will do justice and judgment. That shows us what the way of God is and how we will show we are obeying Him. For those two words...involve uprightness and equity³ so that we may be kind, give ourselves to charity,⁴ help one another, protect everyone’s right and not defraud, abstain from doing wrong and violence to one another, and even help those who need our help.

Now, it is certain that in God’s Law there is nothing but justice and judgment. In the first table, we see how we are to worship God, how we are to revere His name, and how we are to practice calling upon Him and trusting in Him so that

² **mastery** – the condition of being ruler; authority.

³ **equity** – fairness.

⁴ **charity** – benevolence to one’s neighbors; provision for relief of the poor.

we will devote ourselves this way to His service and dedicate ourselves to it. All of that is properly called justice and judgment.

Now as I said, that commonly involves our neighbors and the rule of living right with men in uprightness and equity; but that is an ordinary way of speaking in Scripture, and the prophets are filled with it (*cf.* Isa 1:27; 5:16; 28:17). When they deal with God's Law, they sometimes depart from the first table and speak of uprightness and equity. They cry out against fraud, violence, robbery, and such like. Those things, in brief, mention a part while signifying the whole. In this way, although there is here only a type and a portion of God's way, God, in general, nonetheless wanted to declare that Abraham would teach his family to govern itself in all equity and uprightness so that no one would rise up against his neighbor, that no one would commit fraud or do any wrong. That is what we have to remember.

From *Sermons on Genesis*, Vol. 1, The Banner of Truth Trust,
used by permission, www.banneroftruth.org.

John Calvin (1509-1564): French theologian, pastor, and important leader during the Protestant Reformation; born in Noyon, Picardie, France.



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

LEADING A FAMILY FOR CHRIST

Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

THE principal thing requisite to the right governing of families is the fitness of the governors and the governed thereto...But if persons unfit for their relations have joined themselves together in a family, their first duty is to repent of their former sin and rashness and presently to turn to God, [seeking] after that fitness that is necessary to the right discharge of the duties of their several places. In *fathers*, these three things are of greatest necessity hereunto: 1. authority, 2. skill, 3. holiness and readiness of will.

1. GENERAL DIRECTIONS: LET FATHERS MAINTAIN THEIR AUTHORITY IN THEIR FAMILIES. For if once that is lost and you are despised by those you should rule, your word will be of no effect with them. You do but ride without a bridle: your power of governing is gone when your authority is lost. And here you must first understand the nature, use, and extent of your authority: for as your relations are different to your wife [and] your children...so is your authority. Your authority over your wife is but such as is necessary to the order of your family, the safe and prudent management of your affairs, and your comfortable cohabitation. The power of love and complicated interest must do more than magisterial¹ commands. Your authority over your children is much greater; but only such as conjunct² with love is needful to their good education and felicity...For the maintaining of this your authority, observe these following sub-directions:

Direction 1: *Let your family understand that your authority is of God, Who is the God of order, and that in obedience to Him they are obliged to obey you.* “There is no power but of God” (Rom 13:1), and there is none that the intelligent creature can so much reverence as that which is of God. All bonds are easily broken and cast away—by the soul at least, if not by the body—which are not perceived to be Divine. An enlightened conscience will say to ambitious usurpers, “God I know, and His Son Jesus I know, but who are ye?”

Direction 2: *The more of God [that] appeareth upon you in your knowledge, holiness, and unblamableness of life, the greater will your authority be in the eyes of all your [household] that fear God.* Sin will make you contemptible and vile; holiness, being the image of God, will make you honorable. In the eyes of the faithful, “a vile person is contemned³”; but they honor “them that fear the LORD” (Psa 15:4).

¹ **magisterial** – authoritative.

² **conjunct** – combined.

³ **contemned** – treated with contempt; despised.

“Righteousness exalteth a nation”—*and a person*—“but sin is a reproach⁴ to any people” (Pro 14:34). Those that honor God He will honor, and those that despise Him shall be lightly esteemed (1Sa 2:30). They that give up themselves to vile affections and conversations⁵ (Rom 1:25) will seem vile when they have made themselves so. Eli’s sons made themselves vile by their sin (1Sa 3:13). I know men should discern and honor a person placed in authority by God, though they are morally and naturally vile; but this is so hard that it is seldom well done. And God is so severe against proud offenders that He usually punisheth them by making them vile in the eyes of others. At least when they are dead and men dare freely speak of them, their names will rot (Pro 10:7). The instances of the greatest emperors in the world—Persian, Roman, and Turkish—do tell us that if (by whoredom, drunkenness, gluttony, pride, and especially persecution) they will make themselves vile, God will permit them to become the shame and scorn of men by uncovering their nakedness. And shall a wicked *father* think to maintain his authority over others while he rebelleth against the authority of God?

Direction 3: *Show not your natural weakness by passions or imprudent words or deeds.* For if they think contemptuously of your person, a little thing will draw them further to despise your words. There is naturally in man so high an esteem of reason that men are hardly persuaded that they should rebel against reason to be governed (for order’s sake) by folly. They are very apt to think that rightest reason should bear rule. Therefore, any silly, weak expressions, any inordinate passions, or any imprudent actions are very apt to make you *contemptible* in your [household’s] eyes.

Direction 4: *Lose not your authority by a neglect of using it.* If you suffer children...to have the head⁶ but a little while and to have, say, and do what they will, your government will be but a name or image. A moderate course between a lordly rigor and a soft subjection...will best preserve you from your [household’s] contempt.

Direction 5: *Lose not your authority by too much familiarity.* If you make your children...your playfellows or equals and talk to them and suffer them to talk to you as your companions, they will quickly grow upon you and hold their custom.⁷ Though another may govern them, they will scarce ever endure to be governed by you, but will scorn to be subject where they have once been as equal.

2. GENERAL DIRECTIONS: LABOR FOR PRUDENCE AND SKILLFULNESS IN GOVERNING. He that undertaketh to be a *father* undertaketh to be their governor; and it is no small sin or folly to undertake such a place [that] you are utterly unfit for,

⁴ **reproach** – disgrace.

⁵ **vile affections and conversations** – disgraceful lusts and lifestyles.

⁶ **head** – leadership.

⁷ **grow...custom** – get used to being treated as equals and eventually lose respect for your authority.

when it is a matter of so great importance. You could discern this in a case that is not your own, as if a man undertake to be a schoolmaster that cannot read or write; or to be a physician, who knoweth neither diseases nor their remedies; or to be a pilot that cannot tell how to do a pilot's work; why can you not much more discern it in your own case?

Direction 1: *To get the skill of holy governing, it is needful that you be well studied in the Word of God.* Therefore, God commandeth kings themselves that they read in the Law all the days of their lives (Deu 17:18-19) and that it depart not out of their mouths, but that they meditate in it day and night (Jos 1:8). And all *fathers* must be able to teach it [to] their children and talk of it both at home and abroad, lying down and rising up (Deu 6:6-7; 11:8-9). All government of men is but subservient to the government of God to promote obedience to His laws...

Direction 2: *Understand well the different tempers of your [household] and deal with them as they are and as they can bear, not with all alike.* Some are more intelligent and some more dull. Some are of tender and some of hardened dispositions. Some will be best wrought upon by love and gentleness, and some have need of sharpness and severity. Prudence must fit your dealings to their dispositions.

Direction 3: *You must put much difference between their different faults and accordingly suit your reprehensions.* Those that have [the] most willfulness must be most severely rebuked, [along with] those that are faulty in matters of greatest weight. Some faults are so much through mere disability and unavoidable frailty of the flesh that there is but little of the will appearing in them. These must be more gently handled as deserving more compassion than reproof. Some are habitual vices, and the whole nature is more desperately depraved than in others. These must have more than a particular correction. They must be held to such a course of life as may be most effectual to destroy and change those habits. And some there are upright at the heart, and in the main and most momentous things are guilty but of some actual faults; and of these, some [are] more seldom and some more frequent. If you do not prudently diversify your rebukes according to their faults, you will but harden them and miss of your ends.⁸ For there is a family justice that must not be overthrown unless you will overthrow your families, [just] as there is a more public justice necessary to the public good.

Direction 4: *Be a good husband to your wife, a good father to your children, and let love have dominion in all your government that your [household] may easily find that it is [in] their interest to obey you.* For interest and self-love are the natural rulers of the world. And it is the most effectual way to procure obedience or any good, to make men perceive that it is for their own good and to engage self-love for you

⁸ **miss of your ends** – fail to accomplish your purpose in discipline.

that they may see that the benefit is like to be their own. If you do them no good, but are sour, uncourteous, and close-handed⁹ to them, few will be ruled by you.

Direction 5: *If you would be skilful in governing others, learn first exactly to command yourselves.* Can you ever expect to have others more at your will and government than yourselves? Is he fit to rule his family in the fear of God and a holy life, who is unholy and feareth not God himself? Or is he fit to keep them from passion, drunkenness, gluttony, lust, or any way of sensuality that cannot keep himself from it? Will not [your household] despise such reproofs that are by yourselves contradicted in your lives? You know this [is] true of wicked preachers: is it not as true of other governors?

3. GENERAL DIRECTIONS: *You must be holy persons if you would be holy governors of your families.* Men's actions follow the bent of their dispositions. They will do as they are. An enemy of God will not govern a family for God, nor [will] an enemy of holiness (nor a stranger to it) set up a holy order in his house and in a holy manner manage his affairs. I know it is cheaper and easier to the flesh to call *others* to mortification¹⁰ and holiness of life than to bring ourselves to it, but when it is not a bare command or wish that is necessary, but a course of holy and industrious government, unholy persons—though some of them may go far—have not the ends and principles that such a work requireth.

Direction 1: *To this end, be sure that your own souls be entirely subjected to God and that you more accurately obey His laws than you expect any [household member to] obey your commands.* If you dare disobey God, why should they fear disobeying you? Can you more severely revenge disobedience or more bountifully reward obedience than God can? Are you greater and better than God Himself is?

Direction 2. *Be sure that you lay up your treasure in heaven and make the enjoyment of God in glory to be the ultimate commanding end, both of the affairs and government of your family and all things else with which you are entrusted.* Devote yourselves and all to God, and do all for Him...If thus you are separated unto God, you are sanctified; then you will separate all that you have to His use and service...

Direction 3: *Maintain God's authority in your family more carefully than your own.* Your own is but for His. More sharply rebuke or correct them that wrong and dishonor God than those that wrong and dishonor you. Remember Eli's sad example: make not a small matter of any of the sins, especially the great sins, of your children...God's honor must be greatest in your family, and His service must have the preeminence of yours. Sin against Him must be the most intolerable offence.

Direction 4: *Let spiritual love to your family be predominant, let your care be greatest for the saving of their souls, and [let] your compassion [be] greatest in their spiritual mis-*

⁹ **close-handed** – stingy.

¹⁰ See FGB 201, *Mortification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

eries. Be first careful to provide them a portion in heaven and to save them from whatsoever would deprive them of it. Never prefer the transitory pelf¹¹ of earth before their everlasting riches. Never be so cumbered about many things as to forget that one thing is necessary, but choose for yourselves and them the better part (Luk 10:42).

From “A Christian Directory” in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, Vol. 4, Soli Deo Gloria, a division of Reformation Heritage Books,
www.heritagebooks.org.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691): Anglican Puritan preacher and theologian; born in Rowton, Shropshire, England.



Many are careful to educate their children in the favor of great men, but, alas! who brings up his children in the fear of the great God?—*George Swinnock*

¹¹ **transitory pelf** – temporary wealth and possessions.

A FATHER MUST BE GODLY

Nicholas Byfield (1579–1622)

THE signs of the true Christian that has true grace in this world and shall be saved in heaven when he dies may be cast into two catalogs¹—the one more brief and the other more large. The one catalog of signs describes him by such marks as, for the most, part outwardly distinguish him among men. The large catalog I intend especially as a more infallible and effectual way of trial, containing such signs as, for the most part, are not observed by other men, or not fully, but are known to himself and can be found in no one who is a reprobate.²

For the *first* catalog: The true Christian usually discovers himself by these marks. *First*, he will not “have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11). He will not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners” (Psa 1:1). He will not sort himself with workers of iniquity (2Co 6:14-18).

Second, he will afflict and humble his soul for his sins, mourning and weeping for them...He accounts his sins to be his greatest burden. He cannot make a mockery of sin.

Third, he labors to be holy in all parts of his conversation, watching over his own ways at all times and in all companies (Psa 50:23; 2Pe 3).

Fourth, he makes conscience of the least commandments as well as the greatest, avoiding filthy speaking, vain jesting, and lasciviousness³ (Eph 5:4), as well as whoredom; lesser oaths as well as greater; reproachful speeches as well as violent actions.

Fifth, he loves, esteems, and labors for the powerful preaching of the Word above all earthly treasures.

Sixth, he honors and highly accounts of the godly and delights in the company of such as truly fear God above all others (Psa 15).

Seventh, he is careful of the sanctification of the [Lord’s Day], neither daring to violate that holy rest by labor nor to neglect the holy duties belonging to God’s service—public or private (Isa 56, 58).

Eighth, he does not love the world, neither the things of it (1Jo 2:15), but is more heartily affected in things that concern a better life. So [he] does in some degree love the appearing of Christ (2Ti 4:8).

¹ **catalogs** – complete lists of things, usually arranged systematically.

² **reprobate** – one rejected by God.

³ **lasciviousness** – inclined to lust or sexual desires.

Ninth, he is “easy to be intreated” (Jam 3:17). He forgives his enemies, desires peace, and does good even to those that persecute him if it lies in his power (Mat 5:44-45).

Tenth, he goes on in the profession of the sincerity of the gospel and does such duties as he knows God requires of him in the business of his soul, notwithstanding the oppositions of profane persons or the dislike of carnal friends.

Eleventh, he sets up a daily course of serving God and that with his family too, if he has any. [He] exercises himself in the Word of God as the chief joy of his heart and the daily refuge of his life, calling on God continually. So much of the shorter catalog of signs.

[**Second catalog:**]...I will now by God’s assistance, for the helping of the weakest Christians...endeavor to express myself in this doctrine of the trial of a true Christian’s estate in a more plain and easy course of examination. [I will] leave...this new catalog to the blessing of God and the free choice of the godly reader to use, which he finds most agreeable to his own taste, being both such as are warranted and founded on the infallible evidence of God’s unchangeable truth...

There are three sorts of places in Scripture (as I conceive) that point out the grounds of infallible assurance in those that can attain to them. As *first*, such places as expressly affirm that such and such things are signs. For example, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1Jo 3:14). Here the Holy Spirit shows us expressly that the love of the brethren is a sign by which a Christian may know that he is translated from death to life. And so the Apostle Paul gives signs to know whether their sorrow was “after a godly sort” or not (2Co 7:11). So does the Prophet David (Psa 15) give diverse signs by which the man that shall dwell in God’s holy hill may be known. So the Apostle James tells us how he may know the wisdom from above: by reckoning the fruits and effects of it (Jam 3:17). So does the Apostle Paul tell us how we may know whether we have the Spirit of Christ in us or not (Rom 8:9, 15; Gal 5:22, 4:6-7).

Second, I find out signs by marking what graces in man the promises of God are made to. For in this way I reason: *Whatsoever gifts of God in man bring him within the compass of God’s promises of eternal mercy, that gift must be an infallible sign of salvation*...Therefore, the man that can find those gifts in himself shall be certainly saved. For example, the Kingdom of heaven is promised to such as are “poor in spirit” (Mat 5:3). From there, I gather that poverty of spirit is an infallible sign. The like I may say of the love of the Word, of uprightness of heart, of the love of God, and the love of the appearing of Christ.

Third, I find out other signs by observing what godly men in Scripture have said for themselves when they have pleaded their own evidence for their interest in God’s love or their hope of a better life. Look how godly men in Scripture have

proved that they were not hypocrites. Even so may any Christian prove that he is not a hypocrite either. For example, Job, being charged to be a hypocrite and lying under the heavy hand of God, pleads his cause and proves that he was not a hypocrite by his constancy in God's ways and by his constant estimation of God's Word: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:10-12).

Now, whereas some signs are *general* and thou mightest doubt the exposition,⁴ namely, how that sign is infallible in such and such senses...you may observe that I expound the sign as it is expounded in several other Scriptures. For example, the love of the brethren is a general sign. Now how shall I know that I have the right love of the brethren? This I explain by flying to diverse other Scriptures in which the particular explications⁵ of this sign are pleaded.

The *first* way, then, by which a Christian may try himself is to examine himself about his humiliation for sin, whether it is right or not. For under this head is comprehended the explication of the doctrine of poverty of spirit and godly sorrow—and so in general of repentance of sins.

Now the true Christian in this matter of humiliation shows himself to have attained that which no reprobate could ever attain, and that in diverse particulars, such as, *first*, he has a true sight and sense of his sins. He discerns his sinfulness of life both past and present and is affected and pained under the burden of his daily wants⁶ and corruptions. [He] sees his misery in respect of his sins (Mat 11:29; 5:4).

Second, he trembles at God's Word and fears His displeasure, while it yet hangs in the threatenings (Isa 66:1-2).

Third, he renounceth his own merits and disclaims all opinion of true happiness in himself or in anything under the sun. [He is] fully persuaded that he cannot be saved by any works of his own or be happy in enjoying any worldly things.⁷ Therefore, [he] is fully resolved to seek for the chief good in God's favor in Jesus Christ only.

Fourth, he mourns heartily and secretly for his sins; and so he [mourns] 1. for all sorts of sins, for secret sins as well as known sins; for lesser sins as well as greater; for the present evils of his nature and life, as well as the sins he has loved or [that] have been gainful and pleasing to him. Yes, he grieves for the evil that cleaves to his best works as well as for evil works (Isa 6:5, 1:16; Rom 7:24; Mat 5:6). 2. For sin as it is sin and not as it does or might bring him shame or punishments in this life or in hell. 3. He is as much troubled for his sins as he was accustomed, or now

⁴ **thou...exposition** – you might doubt the author's interpretation.

⁵ **explications** – explanations.

⁶ **wants** – inadequacies.

⁷ The author is referring to sinful, worldly pursuits, not the enjoyment of God's creation.

should be, for crosses in his estate.⁸ He mourns as heartily for the sorrows that fell on God's Son for his sin, as if *he* had lost his one and only son (Zec 12:10-11); or at least he strives for this and judges himself if worldly afflictions trouble him more than his sins (Psa 38:5).

Fifth, he is truly grieved and vexed in soul for the abominations that are done by others to the dishonor of God, [to the] slander of true religion, or [to] the ruin of the souls of men—thus, Lot (2Pe 2:6), David (Psa 119:136), and the mourners marked for God's own people (Eze 9:4).

Sixth, he is heartily affected, troubled, and grieved for spiritual judgments that reach to the souls of men, as well as wicked men are wont⁹ to be troubled for temporal crosses. So he is grieved and perplexed for hardness of heart (when he cannot mourn as he would), for the famine of the Word, for the absence of God, for the blasphemies of the wicked, or the like (Psa 44:2-3, 137; Neh 1:3-4; Isa 63:17).

Seventh, he is most stirred up to abase¹⁰ himself and mourn for his sins when he feels God to be most merciful. The goodness of God makes him fear God and hate his sins rather than [God's] justice (Hos 3:5).

Eighth, his griefs are such as can be assuaged¹¹ only by spiritual means. It is not sport or merry company that eases him. His comfort is only from the Lord in some of His ordinances. As it was the Lord that wounded him with the sight of his sins, so to the Lord only he goes to be healed of his wounds (Hos 6:1-2; Psa 119:24, 50).

Ninth, in his grief, he is inquisitive:¹² he will ask the way and desires to know how he may be saved. He cannot smother and put off his doubts in so great a business. He does not dare now any longer to be ignorant of the way to heaven. He is not careless, as he was accustomed to be, but is seriously bent to get directions from the Word of God about his reconciliation, sanctification,¹³ and salvation (Jer 50:4-5; Act 2:37).

Tenth, he is fearful of being deceived and therefore is not slightly satisfied. He will not rest on a common hope, nor is he carried with probabilities. Nor does it content him that other men have a good opinion of him. Nor is he pleased that he has mended some faults or begun to repent; but, repenting, he repents still, that is, he takes a sound course to be sure his repentance is effectually performed (Jer 31:19).

⁸ **crosses in his estate** – afflictions in one's moral, bodily, or mental condition.

⁹ **wont** – accustomed.

¹⁰ **abase** – humble.

¹¹ **assuaged** – relieved.

¹² **inquisitive** – given to questioning; eager for knowledge.

¹³ See FGB 215, *Sanctification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Eleventh, he is vehemently carried with the desires of the sound reformation of his life...Godly sorrow [for sin] always tendeth to reformation and sound amendment.

Twelfth, in all his sorrows, he is supported by a secret trust in the mercy and acceptance of God, so as no misery can beat him from the consideration, inward assurance, and hope in the mercy of God. In the very disquietness¹⁴ of his heart, the desire of his soul is to the Lord and before His presence. Though he is never so much cast down, yet he waits upon God for the help of His countenance and, in some measure, condemns the unbelief of his own heart. [He] trusts in the name of God and His never-failing compassions (Psa 38:9, 42:5, 11; Lam 3:21; Zep 3:12).

Thirteenth, he is wonderfully inflamed with love to God, if He at any time lets him know that He heareth his prayers.¹⁵ In the midst of his most desperate sorrows, his heart is eased if he speeds well¹⁶ in prayer (Psa 116:1, 3).

Fourteenth, he daily keeps a watch upon his own soul. He judgeth himself for his sins before God, arresting, accusing, and condemning his sins. He confesseth his sins particularly to God, without hiding any sin, that is, without forbearing to pray against any sin he knows by himself, out of any desire he still has to continue in it. By this sign, he may be sure he has the Spirit of God and that his sins are forgiven him (1Jo 1:7; 1Co 11:32).

Fifteenth, his requests are daily poured to God. He cries to God with affection and confidence, though it is with much weakness and many defects, as the little child does to the father. Thereby he discovers the Spirit of adoption in him (Rom 8:15; Eph 3:12).

Sixteenth, he is unfeignedly desirous to be rid of *all* sins as well as *one*. There is no sin he knows [to be in] himself, but he doth desire as heartily that he might never commit it, as he doth that God should never impute it.¹⁷ This is a never-failing sign, a fundamental one (2Ti 2:19).

Seventeenth, he is content to receive evil¹⁸ at the hand of God, as well as good, without murmuring or letting go his integrity, as being sensible of his own deserts¹⁹ and desirous to approve himself to God, without respect of reward. This proved that Job was a holy and upright man (Job 1:1, 2:3, 10).

¹⁴ **disquietness** – restlessness; uneasiness.

¹⁵ God “hearing” a believer’s prayer, in this context, appears to mean granting the thing prayed for.

¹⁶ **speeds well** – meets with success; attains his desire.

¹⁷ In other words, when a believer finds any sin in himself, he is as earnest about not wanting to commit that sin as much as he earnestly fears God charging him guilty for it.

¹⁸ **receive evil** – to receive difficulties, trials, or afflictions.

¹⁹ **his own deserts** – what he deserves.

[*Finally*], he has a spirit without guile²⁰ (Psa 32:2). He is more desirous to *be* good, than to be thought to be so. [He] seeks the power of godliness [rather] than the show of it (Job 1:1; Pro 20:6-7). His praise is of God, not of men (Rom 2:29). And in this way, we see much of the trial of his humiliation.

From *The Signs of a Wicked Man and the Signs of a Godly Man*,
Puritan Publications, www.puritanpublications.com.

Nicholas Byfield (1579-1622): Anglican Puritan preacher and author; born in Warwickshire, England.



A *father* may deliver the best instructions. But if he does not by discipline eradicate evil tempers, correct bad habits, repress rank corruptions, nothing excellent can be looked for. He may be a good prophet and a good priest; but if he be not also a good *king*, all else is vain.—
John Angell James

Fathers...must go before their households in the things of God. They must be as prophets, priests, and kings in their own families; and, as such, they must keep up family doctrine, family worship, and family discipline.—*Matthew Henry*

²⁰ **guile** – deceit; treachery.

FATHERS MUST TEACH GOD'S WORD AND PRAY

Thomas Doolittle (1630-1707)

As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.—Joshua 24:15

FATHERS ought to read the Scripture to their families [and] teach and instruct their children...in the matters and doctrines of salvation. Therefore, they are to pray *in* and *with* their families.

No man that will not deny the Scripture can deny the unquestionable duty of reading the Scripture in our houses, governors of families teaching and instructing them out of the Word of God. Amongst a multitude of express Scriptures, look into these: “And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? ²⁷ That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD’S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses” (Exo 12:26-27). There is as much reason that Christian parents should explain to their children the [ordinances] of the New Testament to instruct them in the nature, use, and ends of baptism and the Lord’s Supper: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach¹ (*whet* or *sharpen*) them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up,” that is, morning and evening (Deu 6:6-7; 11:18-19). “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). And God was pleased with this in Abraham: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD” (Gen 18:19). This, then, is undeniable if the Word is to be believed, received as our rule, and obedience to be yielded thereunto. And the heathens taught a necessity of instructing youth betimes.²

The reason of this consequence—from family reading and instructions to family praying—is evident (we need to beg of God the illumination of His Spirit, the opening of the eyes of everyone in the family, the blessing of God upon our endeavors, without which it will be to no saving benefit) and will be more manifest if we consider and lay together these things following:

¹ **teach** – Hebrew = ׀ַשׁוּ׀ַם

² **betimes** – in good time; before it is too late.

First, whose word it is that is to be read in the family together—the Word of the eternal, blessed, glorious God. And doth this call for and require preceding prayer, no more than if you were to read the book of some mortal man? The Word of God is that *out of which* God speaketh to us. It is that *by which* He doth instruct and inform us in the highest and weightiest concernments of our souls. It is that *from which* we must fetch remedies for the cure of our spiritual maladies. It is that *from whence* we must have weapons of defense against our spiritual enemies that do assault our souls and be directed in the paths of life.

And is not prayer together needful, then, that God would prepare all their hearts to receive and obey what shall be read to them of the mind of God? Is all the family so serious and so sensible of the glory, holiness, and majesty of that God that speaketh to them in His Word that prayer is not needful that they may be so? And if it is needful, should it not first be done? And when it hath been read and the threatenings, commands, and promises of the glorious God been heard, your sins and God's wrath against them discovered, duties enjoined, precious privileges opened, and promises of a faithful God—both “great and precious promises” made to such as do repent, believe, and turn to God with all their hearts unfeignedly³—have you not all need together to fall down upon your knees; to beg, cry, and call to God for pardon of those sins that by this Word you are convinced you are guilty of and to lament them before the Lord? And that when your duty is discovered, you might all have hearts to practice and obey? That you might unfeignedly repent and turn to God so that you may apply those promises to yourselves and be partaker of those privileges? From this, then, there is great reason, when you read together, [that] you should also pray together.

Secondly, consider what great and deep mysterious things are contained in the Word of God that you are to read together, and there will appear a necessity of praying together also. Is there not in this Word the doctrine concerning God—how He might be known, loved, obeyed, worshipped, and delighted in? Concerning Christ, the God-man, a mystery that the angels wonder at and no man fully understands or can express and fully unfold? Concerning the offices of Christ—Prophet, Priest, and King,⁴ the example and the life of Christ, the miracles of Christ, the temptations of Christ, the sufferings of Christ, His death, the victories of Christ, the resurrection, ascension, and intercession of Christ, and His coming to judgment? Is there not in the Scripture the doctrine of the Trinity, of the misery of man by sin, and of his remedy by Christ? Of the covenant of grace, the conditions of this covenant, and the seals thereof? The many precious, glorious privileges that we have by Christ—reconciliation with God, justification,⁵ sanctifica-

³ **unfeignedly** – with sincerity.

⁴ See FGBs 183, *Christ the Mediator*, and 225, *The Work of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁵ See FGB 187, *Justification*.

tion,⁶ and adoption? The several graces to be got, duties to be done, and of men's everlasting state in heaven or hell⁷? Are these and such like contained in the Word of God that you ought to read daily in your houses? And yet do you not see the need of prayer before and after your reading of it? Weigh them well, and you will.

Thirdly, consider how much all the family are concerned to know and understand these things so necessary to salvation. If they are ignorant of them, they are undone. If they know not God, how shall they love Him? "Things *unseen* may be loved, but things *unknown* cannot." We might love an *unseen* God and an *unseen* Christ (1Pe 1:8), but not an *unknown* God. If they in your family know not Christ, how shall they believe on Him? And yet they must perish and be damned if they do not. They must forever lose God, Christ, heaven, and their souls, if they do not repent, believe, and be converted. Yet when that Book is read by which they should understand the nature of true saving grace, is not prayer needful? Especially when many have the Bible and read it, yet do not understand the things that do concern their peace?

Fourthly, consider further the blindness of their minds and their inability without the teachings of God's Spirit to know and understand these things. And yet is not prayer needful?

Fifthly, consider yet further: the backwardness of their hearts to hearken to these weighty, necessary truths of God and their natural unwillingness to learn show prayer to be necessary that God would make them able and willing to receive them.

Sixthly, once more, consider that prayer is a special means to obtain knowledge from God and a blessing upon the teachings and instructions of the *father*. David prayed that God would open his eyes that he might behold wondrous things out of God's Law (Psa 119:18). There are "wondrous things" in the Word of God. That fallen man should be recovered is a wondrous thing. That a holy God should be reconciled to sinful man is a wondrous thing. That the Son of God should take upon Him the nature of man, [that] God be manifested in the flesh, and [that] a believer [is] justified by the righteousness of another—these are wondrous things! But there is darkness upon our minds, a veil over our eyes, and the Scripture is a clasped, closed book that we cannot savingly understand these great, wonderful things, to have our love chiefly upon them and our delight in them, except the Spirit of God take away the veil, remove our ignorance, and enlighten our minds. This wisdom is to be sought from God by fervent prayer. You that are *fathers*—would you have your children... know these things and be affected with them? Would you have impressions made upon their minds and hearts of the great concerns of their souls? Therefore do you instruct them. But can *you* reach their

⁶ See FGB 215, *Sanctification*.

⁷ See FGB 211, *Hell*.

hearts? Can *you* awaken their consciences? Can you not? Doth it not become you to pray to God with them that He would do it? While you are praying jointly with them, God may be secretly disposing and powerfully preparing their hearts to receive His Word and your instructions from it.

From all this I argue thus for family prayer: If it be the duty of families, as such, to read and hear the Word of God together read, then it is the duty of families, as such, to pray together (this is shown by the six things last mentioned). It is the duty of families, as such, to read the Word of God and to hear it together read (this was proved from Scripture before). Therefore, it is the duty of families, as such, to pray together.

From “How May the Duty of Daily Family Prayer Be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Everyone in the Family?” in *Puritan Sermons*, Vol. 2, Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers.

Thomas Doolittle (1630-1707): English Nonconformist minister; born at Kidderminster, Worcestershire, England.



FATHERS AND DISCIPLINE

William Gouge (1575-1653)

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

THE fountain of a father's duties is love...Great reason there is why this affection should be fast fixed in the heart of fathers towards their children. For great is that pain, pains, cost, and care that fathers must undergo for their children. But if love is in them, no pain, pains, cost, or care will seem too much. Herein appeareth the wise providence of God, Who by nature hath so fast fixed love in the hearts of fathers—if there be any in whom it aboundeth not, he is counted unnatural. If love did not abound in fathers, many children would be neglected and lost...They are not able to help themselves. As God by nature hath planted love in all parents, so Christians, for conscience sake, ought to nourish, increase, and blow up this fire of love. [By this,] they may thereby be made more forward to do every duty with cheerfulness. The more fervent love is, the more readily will every duty be performed...In my text, the apostle nameth *fathers*. Solomon saith that his father taught him even while he was tender (Pro 4:3-4); and David felt the smart of neglecting his other children...Fathers therefore must do their best endeavor and see that mothers do theirs also because he is governor over child, mother, and all...

Of adding admonition to instruction: The means of helping forward the good work of nurture are especially two: 1. frequent admonition, 2. due correction. Both of them are implied in this text: one in the word translated *admonition*, which [according to the notation of the Greek word] is a putting of a thing into the mind—an urging and pressing of it. The other [is] in the word translated *nurture*.

Now both these are to be joined together as being very helpful to each other. For admonition without correction is likely to prove but mere vanity, and correction without admonition will be too much austerity.¹ The duty that the first of these setteth forth is this:

Fathers must often whet² instruction upon their children. They may not think it enough to tell their children what they ought to do, but to instruction, they must add admonition and, as it were, beat into their children's heads³ the lessons that they teach them, so that they may make a deeper impression in their hearts. Thus

¹ **austerity** – harshness to the feelings; severity of discipline.

² **whet** – urge.

³ **beat into...heads** – this is an obsolete way of saying “to insist on with repetition.”

shall their instructions be like the words of the wife that are as nails fastened (Ecc 12:11) or fast knocked in. They remain firm where they are once fastened and cannot easily be plucked out. For as many blows do knock a nail up to the head [as we speak], so many admonitions do settle good instructions in a child's heart and cause that the heart be established in that which is taught. [This] is a thing to be labored after (Heb 13:9)...The direction that is in particular given to fathers of whetting God's words upon their children (Deu 6:7)...may be applied to this purpose.

To this purpose it is that Solomon useth to double his instructions and urge them again and again, as "Hear the instruction, forsake not the law" (Pro 1:8); "receive my words, hide my commandments with thee; incline thine ear, apply thine heart" (Pro 2:1-2). Yea, often he repeateth the very same precepts.

The apprehension of children is fickle⁴ and their memory weak: if they be but once, seldom, or slightly instructed, that which is taught will soon slip away and do little or no good.

For the better performing of this duty, fathers must think of the best means they can to fasten their instructions upon their children, observe their inclination and disposition, and see with what they are most moved. Constant exhortations and powerful persuasions are comprised under admonition, which in their kinds, as occasion requireth, are to be used...

Of fathers *reproving* their children: The other means of helping nurture is correction, which is of two sorts: *verbal* by words, *real* by [the use of the rod]. The former is *reprehension*;⁵ and it must always go before the latter, which is most usually and properly called *correction*.

Reprehension is a kind of middle thing betwixt admonition and correction: it is a sharp admonition, but a mild correction. It is rather to be used because it may be a means to prevent [spanking], especially in ingenuous⁶ and good-natured children [A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool (Pro 17:10)] and because it may be used, when it is not so meet⁷ to use [spanking], as when children are grown to man-age.

The many good fruits that the Holy Ghost noteth to proceed from due reproof do show that it is a duty whereof fathers ought to make conscience as they desire to promote the good of their children, and so much the rather because many good fruits redound⁸ to the fathers that reprove, as well as to the children reprov'd. In regard of their good who are reprov'd, it is said, "Reproofs of instruction are the

⁴ **fickle** – unreliable.

⁵ **reprehension** – an act of reproving or finding fault with.

⁶ **ingenuous** – honest.

⁷ **meet** – proper for the occasion.

⁸ **redound** – result.

way of life” (Pro 6:23). They cause understanding (Pro 15:32) and make prudent⁹ (Pro 15:5). In regard of their good who reprove, it is said, “To them that rebuke...shall be delight [that is, much comfort and matter of rejoicing, so as they shall not need to repent what they have done] and a good blessing shall come upon them” (Pro 24:25). That is, either a blessing of good men, who will bless, praise, and commend them, or a blessing of good things and that from the Lord Who will reward them for this conscionable¹⁰ performance of their duty.

Upon these grounds, holy men have not spared to rebuke their children as there was occasion (Gen 9:25; 34:30; 49:4). Though Eli did somewhat in this duty, yet because he was not more severe therein, he brought destruction both upon himself and his children (1Sa 2:23)...

Of correcting children: The latter and more proper kind of correction, that is, by [the rod,] is also a means appointed by God to help the good nurture and education of children. It is the *last* remedy that a father can use—a remedy that may do good when nothing else can.

It is by the Holy Ghost both expressly commanded and also very often pressed under these and such like phrases: “chasten thy son” (Pro 19:18); “correct thy son” (Pro 29:17); “withhold not correction from the child” (Pro 23:13); “thou shalt smite him with the rod” (Pro 23:14). Were there no other motive, this is sufficient. God’s charge was such a motive to Abraham [that] he would have sacrificed his son (Gen 22:2-3). Wilt thou not correct thy child at God’s command?

It is further commended by God’s own example, which is not only set forth in some particular instances, but by His general constant dealing with all, and that as an especial token and fruit of His love. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth...But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons (Heb 12:6, 8). Let this example of God be well weighed, for it is of great weight. Who can better tell what kind of dealing is fittest for children than God? Who can better nurture children than God? Who doth more truly aim at and procure the good of children than God? Yea, who doth more tender¹¹ children than God? If God, the Father of spirits in wisdom and love, thus deals with His children, fathers of the flesh may not think by the contrary to show wisdom or love. Their wisdom will be folly, their love, hatred. Upon these grounds, it is taken for a thing granted that fathers [who tender the good of their children as they should] do chastise their children as need requireth; for it is said, “For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Pro 3:12)...As a thing without controversy, it is said, “We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us” (Heb 12:9).

⁹ **prudent** – wise with a sense of caution.

¹⁰ **conscionable** – conscientiously observant; showing a regard for conscience.

¹¹ **tender** – act tenderly toward; treat with tenderness.

The grounds of the equity of this duty respect partly the children corrected and partly the fathers that correct. Regarding children, it freeth them from much evil and worketh in them much good.

Correction is as physic¹² to purge out much corruption that lurketh in children and as a salve to heal many wounds and sores made by their folly. In which respect Solomon saith, “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Pro 22:15)...In regard to the inward operation of this physic, correction is further said to preserve a child from death, [if thou beatest him he shall not die (Pro 23:13)] and that not only from temporal death [as many children are thus preserved from the Magistrate’s sword] but also from external death [thou shalt deliver his soul from hell (Pro 23:14)]. Note this, ye cockering¹³ fathers, whose over-much lenity¹⁴ is very great cruelty. For may we not justly count him a cruel father who should suffer diseases, boils, sores, and wounds to remain, increase, and fester in his child, and give him no physic, nor apply any plasters or medicines to him? Nay, rather, who seeth his son running into a flaming fire or deep water and would not hold him back? Even so cruel and crueler are they who suffer their children to run on in evil, rather than correct them.

Objection: Who can endure to make his own child smart¹⁵ and to put him to pain?

Answer: The future fruit is more to be considered than the present pain. Potions, pills, and corrosives are fulsome,¹⁶ bitter, and painful; but because there is a necessity of using them, and great mischief is prevented by the use of them, wise fathers will not forbear them for the sensible bitterness and pain. Fitly doth the Apostle thus answer that objection: “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:11). This may be applied to fathers’ corrections as well as to God’s. The good that correction bringeth to children is by Solomon noted in this and such like phrases [as,] “The rod giveth wisdom” (Pro 29:15); for it maketh children observe what is good, evil, commendable, and blameworthy. And, accordingly, [it teacheth them] to do the good and leave the evil, which is a great point of wisdom...

In regard of fathers, due correcting of their children both freeth them of many inconveniences and bringeth to them much quiet. 1. It spareth them many pains. For many admonitions oft repeated and inculcated again and again will not make

¹² **physic** – medicine.

¹³ **cockering** – pampering; treating with excessive indulgence.

¹⁴ **over-much lenity** – excessive mildness.

¹⁵ **make...smart** – cause to feel pain or stinging.

¹⁶ **fulsome** – nauseating.

many children so much to heed wholesome and good advice as a little correction. They are much more sensible of smart than of words. 2. It preventeth much grief, shame, and vexation. For “a foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him” (Pro 17:25). But it is the rod of correction that driveth away foolishness (Pro 22:15) and so preventeth that grief and bitterness. 3. It freeth them from the guilt of their children’s sin, so [that] they are not accessory thereto as Eli was (1Sa 3:13). For correction is the last remedy that a father can use: if by that he can do no good, it is presupposed that he hath done his uttermost endeavor. In [this] respect, though the child die in his sin, yet the father hath delivered his own soul.

The quiet that is brought to fathers by correcting their children is thus noted out by Solomon: “Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul” (Pro 29:17). For children well-nurtured, and by correction kept in a filial awe, will so carry themselves as their fathers may rest somewhat secure and not disquiet themselves [as they do with children set at liberty]. Yea, as trees well pruned and ground well tilled, they will bring forth pleasant and abundant fruit; and their fathers will have just cause to rejoice in them.

A direction to fathers in correcting their children: For well using this biting corrosive¹⁷ of correction, fathers must have respect to the *matter* for which they do correct and to their *manner* of correcting.

In regard of the *matter*, these three things must be noted: 1. *That they are sure there is a fault committed*, so that there is just cause for correcting. [Otherwise,] more hurt than good will proceed from thence. If corrosive is laid where there is no sore, it will make one. If correction is unjustly given, it may provoke to wrath, but will do little good. This is it wherein earthly fathers are taxed¹⁸ and made unlike to God, for that many times they correct after their own pleasure (Heb 12:10), which is a point of great injustice. 2. *That the fault be made known to the child corrected* and he apparently convinced thereof. Correction must be for instruction, which cannot be except the child knows *why* he is corrected. For it is all one to him, as if he were corrected for no fault, if he know not his fault. God thus at first proceeded with the serpent, with Eve, and with Adam (Gen 3:11). Thus judges proceed in punishing malefactors. Yea, thus will men deal with a dog. Should they not much more with a child? 3. *That the faults be such especially as the fathers can show to their children* [if at least they be of so much discretion] *to be against God’s Word*, [such as] swearing, lying, pilfering,¹⁹ and the like. For (1) these are most dangerous faults and therefore more carefully to be purged out. (2) The child cor-

¹⁷ **corrosive** – medically speaking, a remedy or drug that eats away or consumes by chemical action like an acid.

¹⁸ **taxed** – called into question.

¹⁹ **pilfering** – stealing in small quantities or things of little value.

rected will thus be the better evicted²⁰ of his fault, will the more condemn himself, and will more contentedly bear the correction.

In regard of the *manner* of correcting, four *general* and four *particular* rules are to be observed. The *general* rules are these: 1. An eye must be had to God's manner of correcting His children and, in particular, of God's correcting the father himself. No better general direction can be given, for God's pattern is a perfect rule. 2. Prayer must be made by fathers for themselves and for their children: for themselves to be directed in doing it [and] for their children to be bettered by it. Thus will good physicians in ministering physic. In all duties is prayer to be used, especially in this: for a father is ready, partly through his own intemperate passion and partly through the child's impatience, to fall into one extreme or other. This is not to impose upon all, whenever they take up the rod, to go and make a solemn prayer, but to lift up the heart for direction and blessing. 3. *Correction must be given in love.* All things must be done in love (1Co 16:14)—much more this that carries a show of anger and hatred...God correcteth His children in love: so must fathers. Love will make them do it with tenderness and compassion. 4. *Correction must be given in a mild mood,* when the affections are well ordered and not distempered²¹ with choler,²² rage, fury, and other like passions. Disturbed passions cast a mist before the understanding, so [that] a man cannot discern what is enough [or] what [is] too much. When passion is moved, correction must be deferred. God correcteth in measure.

The *particulars* are these: 1. *Due order must be kept.* Correction by word must go before correction by the rod. "I rebuke and chasten," saith the Lord (Rev 3:19). Thus, a father will show that he taketh no delight in smiting his child; it is *necessity* that forceth him thereunto. Thus, a father showeth himself like God, Who doth not punish willingly (Lam 3:33). Physicians, when they minister strong physic, will give preparative; rebuke may be as a preparative. Good and pitiful surgeons will try all other means before they come to lance and sear. 2. *Due respect must be had to the party corrected.* If he is young and tender, the lighter correction must be used. Solomon oft mentioneth a rod as [appropriate] oft for a child, for that is the lightest correction. So if the child is of a flexible and ingenuous disposition, soon snapped, the correction must accordingly be moderated. If he is well grown and withal be stout and stubborn, the correction may be more severe. 3. *Due respect must be had to the fault.* Sins directly against God, open, notorious, scandalous sins, known sins, sins often committed, in which they are grown up and whereof they have [become] a habit are with greater severity to be corrected. 4. *A father must be-*

²⁰ **evicted** – convinced.

²¹ **distempered** – disordered; disturbed.

²² **choler** – anger.

hold his own faults in correcting his child's, so more compassion will be wrought in him.

From *Of Domestical Duties*, Puritan Reprints,
www.puritanreprints.com.

William Gouge (1575-1653): English Puritan pastor, theologian, and author; born in Stratford-Bow, Middlesex County, England.



HOW FATHERS CAN PROVOKE THEIR CHILDREN TO WRATH

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.—Ephesians 6:4

ACT prudently towards your children. It is a great point of prudence in a *father* not to provoke his children to wrath. “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Col 3:21). How may a *father* provoke his children to wrath?

(1) **By giving them abusive terms.** “Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman,” said Saul to his son Jonathan (1Sa 20:30). Some parents use imprecations¹ and curses to their children, which provoke them to wrath. Would you have God bless your children, and do you curse them?

(2) **Fathers provoke children to wrath when they strike them without a cause or when the correction exceeds the fault.** This is to be a tyrant rather than a father. Saul cast a javelin at his son to smite him, and his son was provoked to anger. “So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger” (1Sa 20:33-34). “A father exercises a kingly power over his son, not that of a tyrant.”²

(3) **When parents deny their children what is absolutely needful.** Some have thus provoked their children: they have stinted them and kept them so short [of necessities] that they have forced them upon indirect courses and made them put forth their hands to iniquity.

(4) **When parents act partially towards their children, showing more kindness to one than to another.** Though a parent may have a greater love to one child, yet discretion should lead him not to show more love to one than to another. Jacob showed more love to Joseph than to all his other children, which provoked the envy of his brethren. “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him” (Gen 37:3-4).

(5) **When a parent does anything that is sordid and unworthy, which casts disgrace upon himself and his family, as to defraud or take a false oath, it provokes**

¹ **imprecations** – acts of calling down evil, calamity, or divine vengeance on someone.

² Latin = *In filium pater obtinet non tyrannicum imperium, set basilicum.* “Among children, a father holds not a tyrannical, but a kingly rule.” From John Davenant (1572-1641), *An Exposition of St. Paul to the Colossians*, 191.

the child to wrath. As the child should honor his father, so the father should not dishonor the child.

(6) **Parents provoke children when they lay commands upon them that they cannot perform without wronging their consciences.** Saul commanded his son Jonathan to bring David to him. “Fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die” (1Sa 20:31). Jonathan could not do this with a good conscience, but was provoked to anger. “Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger” (1Sa 20:34). The reason why parents should show their prudence in not provoking their children to wrath is this: “Lest they be discouraged” (Col 3:21). This word *discouraged* implies three things. Grief: The *father’s* provoking the child, the child so takes it to heart that it causes premature death. Despondency: The *father’s* austerity dispirits the child and makes it unfit for service, like members of the body stupefied,³ which are unfit for work. Contumacy and refractoriness:⁴ The child being provoked by the cruel and unnatural carriage of the parent grows desperate and often studies to irritate and vex his parents, which, though it be evil in the child, yet the parent is accessory to it as being the occasion of it.

(7) **If you would have honor from your children, pray much for them.** Not only lay up a portion for them, but also lay up a stock of prayer for them. Monica prayed much for her son Augustine;⁵ and it was said [that] it was impossible that a son of so many prayers and tears should perish. Pray that your children may be preserved from the contagion⁶ of the times. Pray that as your children bear your images in their faces, they may bear God’s image in their hearts. Pray that they may be instruments and vessels of glory. One fruit of prayer may be that the child will honor a praying parent.

(8) **Encourage that which you see good and commendable in your children.** “Goodness increases when praised.”⁷ Commending that which is good in your children makes them more in love with virtuous actions and is like the watering of plants, which makes them grow more. Some parents discourage the good they see in their children and so nip virtue in the bud and help to damn their children’s souls. They have their children’s curses.

(9) **If you would have honor from your children, set them a good example.** It makes children despise *fathers* when [they] live in contradiction to their own precepts; when they bid their children be sober, and yet they themselves get drunk; or bid their children fear God, and [they] are themselves loose in their lives. O if you

³ **stupefied** – deprived of feeling; deadened.

⁴ **contumacy and refractoriness** – rebellious stubbornness and disobedience to authority.

⁵ **Aurelius Augustine (A.D. 354-430)** – Bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa and leader in the early Christian Church; converted as a young man from a life of immorality to become wise and godly.

⁶ **contagion** – hurtful, defiling, or corrupting contact; infecting influence.

⁷ Latin = *Virtus laudata crescit*. This was the original motto of Berkhamsted School, founded 1541, in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, England.

would have your children honor you, *teach them by a holy example*. A father is a looking glass that the child often dresses himself by. Let the glass be clear and not spotted. *Fathers* should observe great decorum⁸ in their whole conduct, lest they give occasion to their children to say to them as Plato's servant, "My master has made a book against rash anger, but he himself is passionate"; or, as a son once said to his father, "If I have done evil, I have learned it of you."

From *The Ten Commandments*, The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.

Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686): English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and author; possibly born in Yorkshire, England.



The very inquisitiveness of little ones affords their elders an opportunity to make known unto them the wonderful works of God that their minds may be informed and their hearts awed by His perfections. But note well, it is the father (the "head" of the home) upon whom the main responsibility devolves, to see to it that his children are taught by him the things of God (Eph. 6:4). Let him not pass on this task to his wife, still less to Sunday School teachers.—*Arthur W. Pink*

Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that the Sunday School is intended to ease them of their personal duties. The first and most natural condition of things is for Christian parents to train up their own children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.—*Charles H. Spurgeon*

Holy Jacob, the famous patriarch, was a prophet to instruct his family in true religion and a king to govern them for God; so a priest to set up an altar [and] offer sacrifices and perform religious worship for and with his family. Even the poorest man that has a family is to be a prophet, priest, and king in his own home.

—*Oliver Heywood*

⁸ **decorum** – that which is proper to the character, position, rank, or dignity of a person.

COUNSEL TO REFORMING FATHERS

Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

PAUL:¹ Welcome, Neighbor! How do you like the new life that you have begun? You have taken home instructions already... but what do you find in the practicing of them?

Saul: I find that I have foolishly long neglected a necessary, noble, joyful life, and thereby lost my time and made myself both unskillful and undisposed to the practice of it. I find that the things that you have prescribed me are high, excellent, and doubtless must be very sweet to them that have a suitable skill and disposition. And some pleasure I find in my weak beginnings; but the greatness of the work and the great untowardness and strangeness of my mind doth much abate the sweetness of it by many doubts, fears, and difficulties. When I fail, I find it hard both to repent aright and, by faith, to fly to Christ for pardon...

Paul: Where is your great difficulty that requireth counsel?

Saul: I find a great deal of work to do in my family: to govern them in the fear of God, to do my duty to them all, especially to educate my children and daily to worship God among them. And I am so unable for it that I am ready to omit all! I pray you help me with your advice.

Paul: My first advice to you is that you resolve by God's help to perform your duty as well as you can. Devote your family to God, and take Him for the Lord and Master of it. Use it as a society sanctified to Him. And I pray you let these reasons fix your resolution:

1. *If God is not master of your family, the devil will be.* And if God is not first served in it, the flesh and the world will be. I hope I need not tell you how bad a master, work, and wages they will then have.

2. *If you devote your family to God, God will be the Protector of it.* He will take care of it for safety and provision as His own. Do you not need such a Protector? And can you have a better [One] or [can you] better take care for the welfare and safety of you and yours? And if your family is not God's, they are His enemies and under His curse as rebels...

3. *A holy family is a place of comfort, a church² of God.* What a joy will it be to you to live together daily in this hope that you shall meet and live together in heav-

¹ EDITOR'S NOTE: The author wrote the following in the form of a dialogue between "Paul," a teacher, and "Saul," a learner.

² The author does not mean that a family is the equivalent of a local church, performing the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, but like a church gathered for worship in singing, praying, and reading the Word.

en—to think that wife, children, and servants shall shortly be fellow citizens with you of the heavenly Jerusalem! How pleasant is it to join with one heart and mind in the service of God and in His cheerful praises! How lovely will you be to one another when each one beareth the image of God! What abundance of jars³ and miseries will be prevented, which sin would bring among you daily. And when any of you die, how comfortably may the rest be about their bed and attend their corpse unto the grave, when they have good hopes that the soul is received to glory by Christ. But if your family is ungodly, it will be like a nest of wasps or like a jail, full of discord and vexation.⁴ It will be grievous to you to look your wife or children in the face and think that they are likely to lie in hell. Their sickness and death will be tenfold heavier to you to think of their woeful and unseen end.

4. *Your family hath such constant need of God, as commandeth you constantly to serve Him.* As every man hath his personal necessities, so families have family necessities that God must supply or they are miserable. Therefore, family duty must be your work.

5. *Holy families⁵ are the seminaries of Christ's Church on earth, and it is very much that lieth upon them to keep up the interest of religion in the world.* Hence come holy magistrates, when great men's children have a holy education. And, oh, what a blessing is one such to the countries where they are! Hence spring holy pastors and teachers to the churches, who, as Timothy, receive holy instructions from their parents and grace from the Spirit of Christ in their tender age. Many a congregation that is happily fed with the bread of life may thank God for the endeavors of a poor man or woman that trained up a child in the fear of God (2Ti 3:15) to become their holy, faithful teacher. Though learning is found in schools, godliness is more often received from the education of careful parents. When children and servants come to the church with understanding, godly, prepared minds, the labors of the pastor will do them good; they will receive what they hear with faith, love, and obedience. It will be a joy to the minister to have such a flock; and it will be joyful to the people that are such to meet together in the sacred assemblies [and] to worship God with cheerful hearts. Such worshippers will be acceptable to God. But when families come together in gross ignorance with unsanctified hearts, there they sit like images, understanding little of what is said. [They] go home little the better for all the labors of the minister. The motions of their tongue and bodies are most of the worship that they give to God, but their hearts are not offered in faith and love as a sacrifice to Him; nor do they feel the power and sweetness of the Word and worship Him in spirit and truth (Joh 4:24).

³ jars – quarrels.

⁴ discord and vexation – disagreement and aggravation.

⁵ 1Ti 3:12; Deu 6:7, 30:2; Psa 147:13; Act 2:39; Eph 6:4-6; Pro 22:6, 15; 29:15, 23:13.

6. *In times when the churches are corrupted and good ministers are [in short supply], and bad ones either deceive the people or are insufficient for their work, there is no better supply to keep up religion than godly families.* If parents and masters will teach their children...faithfully, worship God with them holily and constantly, and govern them carefully and orderly, it will much make up the [lack] of public teaching, worship, and discipline. Oh, that God would stir up the hearts of people thus to make their families as little churches that it might not be in the power of rulers or pastors that are bad to extinguish religion or banish godliness from any land! For,

7. *Family teaching, worship, and discipline hath many advantages that churches have not.* 1. You have but a few to teach and rule, and the pastor hath many. 2. They are always with you, and you may speak to them as seasonably and as often as you will, either together or one by one; [he] cannot. 3. They are tied to you by relation, affection, and covenant and by their own necessities and interest, otherwise than they are to him. Wife and children are more confident of your love to them than of the minister's, and love doth open the ear to counsel. Children dare not reject your words because you can correct them or make their worldly state less comfortable. But the minister doth all by bare exhortation; and if he cast them out of the church for their impenitence, they lose nothing by it in the world. And unless it is in a very hot persecution, families are not so restrained from holy doctrine, worship, and discipline, as churches and ministers often are. Who silenceth you or forbiddeth you to catechize and teach your family? Who forbiddeth you to pray or praise God with them as well and as often as you can? It is self-condemning hypocrisy in many *fathers*, who now cry out against them as cruel persecutors, who forbid us ministers to preach the Gospel, while they neglect to teach their own children...when no man forbiddeth them (so hard is it to see our own sins and duty in comparison of other men's).

8. *You have greater and nearer obligations to your family than pastors have to all the people.* Your wife is as your own flesh; your children are, as it were, parts of yourself. Nature bindeth you to the dearest affection and therefore to the greatest duty to them. Who should more care for your children's souls than their own parents? If you will not provide for them, but famish them, who will feed them? Therefore, as ever you have the [hearts] of parents, as ever you care what becometh of your children's souls forever, devote them to God, teach them His Word, educate them in holiness, restrain them from sin, and prepare them for salvation.

Saul: I must confess that natural affection telleth me that there is great reason for what you say, and my own experience convinceth me. For if my parents had better instructed and governed me in my childhood, I had not been likely to have lived so ignorantly and ungodly as I have. But, alas! Few parents do their duty. Many take more pains about their horses and cattle than they do about their children's souls.

Paul: O that I could speak what is deeply upon my heart to all the *fathers* of the land! I would be bold to tell them that multitudes are crueler than bears and lions to their own children. God hath committed their souls as much to their trust and care as He hath done their bodies. It is they...that are to teach them (Deu 6:6-8; 11:19-20). [It is they that are] to catechize them and to remind them of the state of their souls, their need of Christ, the mercy of redemption, the excellence of holiness, and of everlasting life. It is they that are to watch over them with wisdom, love, and diligence, to save them from temptation, Satan, and sin, and to lead them by the example of a holy life.

But, alas! If they teach [their child] to say the Creed,⁶ the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, they never teach him to understand them. They never seriously remind him of his natural corruptions, of the need and use of a Savior and a Sanctifier, of the danger of sin and hell, of the way of a holy life, or of the joyful state of saints in glory. They teach him his trade and business in the world, but never how to serve God and be saved. They chide him for those faults that are against themselves or against his prosperity in the world, but those that are against God and his soul only, they regard not! If by their own example they do not teach him to be prayerless and neglect God's Word, to curse, to swear, to speak filthily, and to deride a holy life...yet they will bear with him in all this wickedness. They are content that he spend the Lord's Day in idleness and sports, instead of learning the Word of God and practicing His holy worship, so that he may be more willing to do *their* work the week following. In a word, they treacherously teach their children to serve the flesh, the world, and the devil...and to neglect, if not despise, God, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of souls...So that their education is but a teaching or permitting them...under the name of Christians, to rebel against God and Jesus Christ.

And is this not greater treachery and cruelty than if they famished their bodies or turned them naked into the world? Yea, or if they murdered them and ate their flesh? If an enemy did this, it were not as bad as for a parent to do it. Nay, consider whether the devil himself be not less cruel in seeking to damn them than these parents are? The devil is not their parent: he hath no relation to them, no charge of them to educate and save them. He is a known, renounced enemy, and what better could be expected from him? But for father and mother thus to neglect, betray, and undo their children's souls forever! For them to do it that should love them as themselves and have the tenderest care of them! O worse than devilish, perfidious⁷ cruelty!

Repent, repent, O you forsworn, unmerciful murderers of your children's souls! Repent for your own sakes! Repent for their sakes! Teach them...and tell them

⁶ **Creed** – the Apostles' Creed: a statement of faith from around the end of the 2nd century.

⁷ **perfidious** – deceitful and untrustworthy.

what Christianity is! You have conveyed a sinful nature to them; help yet to instruct them in the way of grace. But how can we hope that you should have mercy upon your children's souls that have no mercy on your own? Or that you should help them to that heaven that you despise yourselves? Or save them from sin, which is your own delight and trade?

Saul: Your complaint is sad and just. But I find that men think that the teaching of their children belongeth to the schoolmaster and the minister only and not to them.

Paul: Parents, schoolmasters, and pastors have all their several parts to do, and no one's work goeth on well without the rest. But the *parents' [work] is the first and greatest of all*...A minister should find all his hearers catechized and holily educated that the church may be a church indeed; but if a hundred or many hundred parents...cast their work upon one minister, is it likely, think you, to be well done? Or is it any wonder if we have ungodly churches of [professing] Christians [who] are not Christians, who hate the minister, his doctrine, and a holy life...

I know that all this will not excuse ministers from doing what they can for such. If you will send your children...ignorant and ungodly to him, he must do his best. But O how much more good might he do and how comfortable would his calling be, *if parents would but do their parts!*

We talk much of the badness of the world, and there are no men (except bad rulers and pastors) that do more to make it bad than bad *fathers*. The truth is, they are the devil's instruments (as if he had hired them) to betray the souls of their families into his power and to lead them to hell with a greater advantage than a stranger could do or *than the devil in his own name and shape could do!* Many call for church reformation and state reformation, who yet are the plagues of the times themselves and *will not reform one little family*. If *fathers* would reform their families and agree in a holy education of their children, church and state would be soon reformed, when they were made up of such reformed families.

Saul: I pray you set me down such instructions together, as you think best, concerning all my duty to my children that I may do my part. And if any of them perish, their damnation may not be along of me.

Paul: ...*Let your teaching of them to this end be jointly of the words, the sense, the due affections, and the practice*. That is, (1) Teach them the words of...the Creed,⁸ the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and of a catechism and the words of such texts of Scripture as have the same sense. (2) Teach them the *meaning* of all these words. (3) Join still some familiar, earnest persuasions and motives to stir up holy affections in them. (4) And show them the way of *practicing* all.

⁸ The reader may choose to substitute his or her church's confession.

No one or two of these will serve without all the rest. (1) If you teach not the forms of wholesome or sound words, you will deprive them of one of the greatest helps for knowledge and soundness in the faith. (2) If you teach them not the meaning, the words will be of no use. (3) If you excite not their affections, all will be but dead opinion and tend to a dreaming and prating⁹ kind of religion, separated from the love of God. (4) And if you lead them not on to the practice of all, they will make themselves a religion of zealous affections corrupted by a common life or quickly starved for want of fuel. Therefore, be sure you join all...When you teach them the words of Scripture and catechism, make them *plain*, and often mix familiar questions and discourse about death, judgment, eternity, and their preparations. Many professors teach their children to go in a road of hearing, reading, repeating sermons, and joining in constant prayer, when all proveth but customary formality, for [lack] of some familiar, serious, wakening speech or conference interposed¹⁰ now and then.

To this end, (1) *Labor to possess them with the greatest reverence of God and the Holy Scriptures*. Then show them the Word of God for all that you would teach them to know or do; for until their consciences come under the fear and government of God, they will be nothing. (2) Never speak of God and holy things to them but with the greatest gravity and reverence that the *manner*, as well as the *matter*, may affect them. For if they [become used] to slight, jest, or play with holy things, they are hardened and undone. (3) Therefore, avoid such kind of frequencies and formality in lifeless duties as tendeth to harden them into a customary deadness and contempt. (4) Often take an account of what they know, how they are affected and resolved, and of what they do, both in their open and their secret practice. Leave them not carelessly to themselves, but narrowly watch over them.

Use all your skill and diligence by word and deed to make a holy life appear to them as the most honorable, profitable, safe, and pleasant life in the world that it may be their constant delight. All your work lieth in making good things pleasant to them. Keep them from feeling [the Christian faith] as a burden or taking it for a disgraceful, needless, or unpleasant thing. To which end, (1) Begin with and intermix the easiest parts, such as the Scripture history.¹¹ Nature is pleased sooner with history than with precept, and it sweetly insinuateth¹² a love of goodness into children's minds...(2) Speak much of the praise of ancient and later holy men, for the due praise of a person allureth to the same cause and way. And speak of the just disgrace that belongs to those sots¹³ and beasts who are the despisers, deriders, and enemies of godliness. (3) Overwhelm them not with that which for quality or

⁹ **prating** – idly chatting.

¹⁰ **interposed** – placed at intervals.

¹¹ **Scripture history** – the portions of the Scriptures that are narratives or stories.

¹² **insinuateth** – introduces by gradual degrees.

¹³ **sots** – foolish persons.

quantity they cannot bear. (4) Be much in opening to them the riches of grace and the joys of glory. (5) Exercise them much in psalms and praise.

Let your conference and carriage¹⁴ tend to the just disgrace of sensuality, voluptuousness,¹⁵ pride, and worldliness. When fools commend fineness¹⁶ to their children, you tell them how pride is the devil's sin; teach them to desire the lowest room and to give place to others. When others tell them of riches, fine houses, and preferments,¹⁷ tell them that these are the devil's baits by which he stealeth men's hearts from God that they may be damned. When others pamper them and please their appetites, tell them often how base and swinish a thing it is to eat and drink more by appetite than by reason. And labor thus to make pride, sensuality, and worldliness odious¹⁸ to them. Make them often read Luke 12:16, 18, James 4 and 5, Romans 8:1-2; and Matthew 5:1-21, and 6.

Wisely break them from their own wills, and let them know that they must obey and like God's will and yours. Men's own wills are the grand idols of the world, and to be given up to them is next to hell. Tell them how odious and dangerous self-willedness is. In their diet, let them not have what they have a mind to nor yet do not force them to what they loathe...And let them have that in temperance what is wholesome...A corrupted appetite, strengthened by [habit], is hardly overcome by all the teaching and counsel in the world! Especially [do not let them grow accustomed] to strong drink, for it is one of the greatest snares to youth. I know that some "wise" parents (wise to further the everlasting ruin of the children's souls!) do still say that the more they are restrained, the more greedily they will seek it when they are at liberty. Unhappy children that have such parents! As if the experience of all the world had not told us long ago that custom increaseth the rage of appetite and temperance by custom [becomes] a habit...They that will teach them sobriety with the cup at their noses or temperance at a constant feast or full table of delicious food—and this in their injudicious¹⁹ youth—deserve rather to be numbered with the devil's teachers than with God's.

So if their fancies be eagerly set upon any vanity, deny it them and tell them why. [Do not accustom them] to have their wills; let them know that it is the chief thing that the devil himself desireth for them that they may have all their own carnal will fulfilled. But they must pray to God, "Thy will be done," and deny their own.

¹⁴ **conference and carriage** – conversation and conduct.

¹⁵ **voluptuousness** – addiction to sensual pleasures.

¹⁶ **fineness** – showy dress; striking appearance.

¹⁷ **preferments** – advancements in status or position in life.

¹⁸ **odious** – deserving of hatred.

¹⁹ **injudicious** – showing very poor judgment; unwise.

As you love their souls, keep them as far from temptations as you can. Children are unfit persons to struggle against strong temptations. Their salvation or damnation lieth very much on this. Therefore, my heart melteth to think of the misery of two sorts: (1) the children of heathens, infidels, heretics, and malignants,²⁰ who are taught the principles of sin and wickedness from their infancy and hear truth and godliness scorned and reproached; (2) the children of most great men and gentlemen, whose condition maketh it seem necessary to them to live in that continual fullness...which is so strong a temptation daily to their children to the sins of Sodom—pride, fullness of bread, and idleness (Eze 16:49). It is as hard for them to be godly, sober persons, as for those that are [brought] up in [theaters], ale-houses, and taverns. Alas, poor children, that must have your salvation made as hard as a camel's passage through a needle's eye! No wonder if the world is no better than it is, when the rich must be the rulers of it, of whom Christ and James have said what they have done (Luk 12:19; 16:1-31; Jam 5:1-6).

Be sure, therefore, (1) to [bring up] your children to a temperate²¹ and healthful diet; and keep tempting [foods], but specially drinks, from before them. (2) [Bring] them up to constant labor, which may never leave mind or body idle but at the hours of necessary recreation that you allow them. (3) Let their recreations be such as tend more to the health of their bodies than the humoring of a corrupted fancy²²; keep them from gaming for money...love-books,²³ and foolish wanton tales and ballads.²⁴ Let their time be stinted²⁵ by you; and let it be no more than what is needful to their health and labor...(4) Let their apparel be plain, decent, and warm, but not gaudy [or worn] to signify pride or to tempt people to it.²⁶ (5) Be sure when they grow towards ripeness that you keep them from opportunity, nearness, or familiarity with tempting persons of another sex...

Be sure that you engage your children in good company and keep them as much as possible out of bad. Wicked children, before you are aware, will infect them with their wicked tongues and practices: they will quickly teach them to drink, to game, to talk filthily, to swear, to mock at godliness and sobriety, and, oh, what tinder is in corrupted nature! But the company of sober, pious children and servants will use them to a sober, pious language, and will further them in knowledge and the fear of God, or at least will keep them from great temptations.

²⁰ **malignants** – those who are inclined to rebel against God or any constituted authority.

²¹ **temperate** – moderate; not excessive.

²² **corrupted fancy** – sinful imagination.

²³ **love-books** – romance novels.

²⁴ **wanton tales and ballads** – lawless, violent, and/or sexually immoral stories and songs.

²⁵ **stinted** – limited.

²⁶ See FGB 216, *Modest Apparel*, and *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America*, available from Chapel Library.

Do all that you do with them in love and wisdom: make them not so familiar with you as shall breed contempt, and be not so strange to them as shall tempt them to have no love to you or pleasure in your company. But let them perceive the tender [heart] of a *father*, that, indeed, they are dear to you, and that all your counsel and government are for their good, and not for any ends or passions of your own...

Keep a special watch upon their tongues, especially against ribaldry²⁷ and lying. For dangerous corruptions do quickly this way obtain dominion.

Teach them highly to value time. Tell them the preciousness of it because of the shortness of man's life, of the greatness of his work, and of how eternity dependeth on these uncertain moments. Labor to make time-wasting odious to them. Set death before their eyes, and ask them oft whether they are ready to die.

Let correction be wisely used, as they need it—neither so severely as to disaffect them to you nor so little as to leave them in a course of sin and disobedience. Let it be always in love and more for sin against God than any worldly matters. And show them Scripture against the sin and for the correction...

Pray earnestly for them, and commit them by faith to Christ... Go before them by a holy and sober example, and let your practice tell them what you would have them be, especially in representing godliness [as] delightful and living in the joyful hopes of heaven.

These are the counsels that I earnestly recommend to you in this important work. But you must know that your children's souls are so precious and the difference between the good and bad so great that all this must not seem too much ado to you. But as you would have ministers hold on in the labor of their places, so must you in yours, as knowing that a dumb and idle parent is no more excusable than an unfaithful, dumb, and idle minister. The Lord give you skill, will, and diligence to practice all: for I take the due education of children as one of the most needful and most excellent works in the world.

From "The Poor Man's Family Book" in *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, Vol. 19 (London: James Duncan, 1830).



²⁷ **ribaldry** – obscene or humorously vulgar language.

A FATHER'S PRAYER

George Swinnock (1627–1673)

I [PRAY] that the Word of Christ may dwell richly in my heart and house that my whole family may have their set meals every day of this spiritual food. How can I expect that children...who know not the God of their fathers, should serve Him with perfect hearts? (1Ch 28:9). Alas! How often are their ignorant hearts (like dark cellars abounding in vermin) full of sin! O that I might so talk of the Word of God in my house, when I lie down and when I rise up, that it may be written upon the posts of my house and on my gates (Deu 6:7-8), that I may so often water the young plants in it that their first acquaintance may be acquaintance with God, and [that] from their childhood they may know the Holy Scriptures and be wise “unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 3:15)...Though others labor to leave their children rich, let my endeavor be to leave mine [godly]. Lord, enable me so to teach them Thy trade in their youth that they may not depart from it when they are old (Pro 22:6), that their young years well led may be like the sweetness of a rose, whose smell remaineth in the dried leaves.

I [pray] that all the voices in my house may [harmoniously] sing God's praises, yet that they may not, like trumpets and pipes, make a sound being filled only with wind, but have hearts fixed and prepared when they sing and give praise...Drunkards have their songs in derision of them that are good; atheists have their sonnets in dishonor of the blessed God; why should not the voice of joy and rejoicing be in the tabernacle of the righteous? (Psa 118:15). Though my house is a tabernacle and all the inhabitants in it travelers, yet our work is pleasant. O let us go merrily on and make God's statutes our songs in this house of our pilgrimage.

Because my pattern of evil will do more hurt to my family than my precepts can do good—children being apt to be led more by the eye than the ear—I wish that I may take heed to myself, weigh and watch over all my words and works, not only for my own, but also for the sake of them that are committed to my charge...O that I might therefore be wary in all my ways and be so serious in *spiritual* [actions], so sober in *natural* actions, so righteous towards men, so [devout] towards my God, so faithful in every relation, and so holy and heavenly in every condition that I may have cause to say to my children and servants as Gideon to his soldiers, “Look on me, and do likewise” (Jdg 7:17).

I [pray] that my house may not only spend some part of every weekday, but also the whole [Lord's Day], in the service of my God. It is a special privilege granted

me by the Lord for my family's profit, wherein I may be singularly helpful to my own and my household's everlasting happiness. O that not the least part of it may be lost or profaned by any within my gate, either by worldly labor, pastimes, or idleness, but that I may be so mindful of my charge as to take care that my children...do forbear what my God forbiddeth and spend that sacred day altogether in sacred duties. To which purpose I desire that all my household, both males and females, (if of capacity) may appear before the Lord in public and in His temple give Him praise and that in private I may whet the Word on them (as the mower doth his scythe) by going over it again and again, according to the precept (Deu 6:6-7). Lord, let my house on Thy day be like Thy house, employed wholly in Thy worship. And let Thy gracious presence so assist us in every ordinance that the glory of the Lord may fill the house.

I [pray] that I may manifest my love to the souls in my family by manifesting my anger against their sins. My God hath told me, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him" (Lev 19:17)...Should I suffer [my children] in unholiness, I should bring them up for hell. Those deepest purple sins many times are those that are dyed in the wool of youth. O the sad aches that many have when they are old by falls that they received when they were young! Let me never, like Eli, honor my sons...above my God, lest my God judge my house forever...because my children make themselves vile, and I restrain them not. Lord, let me never be so fond and foolish as to kill any in my family with soul-damning kindness; but let my house be as thine ark, wherein there may be not only the golden pot of manna, seasonable and profitable instructions, but also Aaron's rod, suitable and proper reprehension and correction.

I [pray] that I may never expose my family to the suggestions of Satan by allowing any in laziness, but may be busy myself in my particular vocation and see that others be diligent in their distinct stations. The lazy drone is quickly caught in the honeyed glass and killed, when the busy bee avoideth that snare and danger. O that I and mine might always be so employed in the work of our God that we may have no leisure to hearken to the wicked one!...Lord, since Thou hast entrusted everyone in my house with one talent or other wherewith he must trade, cause me and mine to labor and work in this and to look after rest in the other world.

I [pray] for the furthering of holiness and purity in my house that I may be careful to keep it in peace. Our bodies will thrive as much in fevers as our souls in the flames of strife. Satan, by the [grenades] of contention, will hope in time to take the garrison. "Where strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work" (Jam 3:16). O that love (which is the new commandment, the old commandment, and indeed all the commandments) might be the [uniform] of all in my fami-

ly...Because marriage is a fellowship of the nearest union and dearest communion in this world and because the fruits of religion will thrive much the better if cherished by the sweet breath and warm gale of love in this relation, Lord, let my wife be to me as the loving hind and pleasant roe. Let me be ravished always with her love (Pro 5:19). Let there be no provocation but to love and to good works. Let our only strife be who shall be most [active in service] to Thy majesty in furthering one another's eternal felicity. Enable us to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal 6:2), and to dwell together as fellow heirs of the grace of life that our prayers be not hindered.

In a word, I [pray] that I may, like Cornelius, fear the Lord with all my house (Act 10:1-2) [and] so govern it according to God's Law that all in it may be under the influence of His love and heirs of everlasting life. Lord, be Thou pleased so to assist and prosper me in the management of this great and weighty trust that my house may be Thy house...my children Thy children, and my wife belong to the spouse of Thy dear Son, so that when death shall give a bill of divorce and break up our family, we may change our place, but not our company. [May we] be all [promoted] from thy lower house of prayer to thine upper house of praise, where is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but all are as the angels (Mat 22:30), ever pleasing, worshipping, and enjoying Thy blessed Self, "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph 3:15), to Whom be glory, hearty and universal obedience, forever and ever. Amen.

From "The Christian Man's Calling" in *The Works of George Swinnock*, Vol. 1,
The Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.com.

George Swinnock (1627-1673): Puritan preacher and author; born in Maidstone, Kent, England.

