

# Letters to Parents No. 3

by Charles Finney

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*Parents should train their children by remembering their nature, influencing their will through sense and moral considerations, and securing the mastery of their will from the beginning.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6:6-7, Psalm 127:3, Proverbs 13:24, Proverbs 22:6, Proverbs 29:15, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21, 1 Timothy 4:7, 2 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 12:11

**Topics:** "Obedience", "Parenting"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical role of parents in shaping their children's will and character through proper physical and moral training. He argues that parents must first address their children's bodily appetites to prevent the formation of harmful habits and ensure a foundation for temperance. Finney stresses the importance of early intervention to master the child's will, advocating for consistent and firm guidance to instill obedience and submission. He warns against relying solely on reasoning with children, asserting that parental authority must be established first to prepare them for moral truths later in life. Ultimately, he highlights that the effectiveness of moral training is directly linked to the strength of parental influence over the child's will.

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## Transcript

DEAR BRETHREN AND SISTERS:--

In addressing you farther on this subject I remark,

6. That in training children, parents should remember their nature, and that their will is in the first instance influenced by sense, and not by moral considerations--that their bodily appetites come to have a strong influence over their will, before moral truth can reach the heart through the conscience, unless their minds are enlightened by a supernatural divine agency. Hence,

7. Parents should remember that physical training must precede moral training. Pains should be taken to keep their bodily appetites in a perfectly natural state. And as far as possible prevent the formation of artificial appetites, and do all that the nature of the case admits to restrain the influence of the appetites over the will.

8. Parents should remember that all artificial stimulants lead directly to intemperance--that tea, coffee, tobacco, spices, ginger, and indeed the whole family of innutritious stimulants, lead directly and powerfully

to the formation of intemperate habits--create a morbid hankering after more and more stimulants, until both body and soul are swallowed up on the terrible vortex of intemperance.

9. Parents should remember that the least stimulating kinds of diet, are best suited to the formation of temperate habits in all respects. And just as far as they depart from a mild, bland, unstimulating diet, they are laying, in the perversion of the child's constitution, a foundation for any and every degree of intemperance.

10. Parents should remember that the temper of the child is in a great measure dependent upon, and intimately connected with his physical habits. If, during the period of nursing, the mother makes a free use of innutricious stimulants, she is continually poisoning the infant at her breast, and rasping up its nervous system into a state of extreme irritability. The certain consequence sooner or later, will be the development of an irritable temper, with many disagreeable and even disgusting traits of character. If when the child is weaned from the breast, the irritating process is still kept up--if it is fed with much pastry, unripe fruits, at unseasonable hours, and in improper quantities--nothing else can be expected than that it will be a spoiled child.

11. Parents should secure the earliest opportunity to get the mastery of the will. The very first time, at whatever age, children manifest temper and set up their will, they should be calmly but firmly resisted. It matters not how young they are. If they manifest a disposition to obtain a thing by crying, or in any way insisting upon having their will, the parent should at once adopt some method of steadily and perseveringly opposing their will in that particular. To press the hand upon them and hold them still when they are struggling and screaming to get up, or even to let them lie and scream is vastly better than to yield any point to them when their spirit is stirred, and their will is stubborn.

12. Parents should begin at the outset to get the mastery over the will and then keep it. The most steadfast and uniform perseverance is essential to retaining the mastery of their will. I have always observed that persons whose will has not been early subdued and kept under, are either never converted, or if hopefully converted, make but little progress in piety. I have had so much opportunity of making observation in this respect, that if I find a person lingering under conviction, and finding it very difficult to submit to God--if I find him grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit, and if converted, given to perpetual backsliding, I often make inquiry, and with scarcely a solitary exception, find that parental authority has never had a thorough influence over him--that his will was not early subdued, and ever after, while in a state of minority, kept in a state of unqualified submission and obedience.

13. Parents should lay great stress upon the unconditional submission and obedience of their children. Some parents seem to have adopted the principle of not subduing the will of their children until they are old enough to be reasoned with, when they expect to govern them by reason, and moral suasion as they say. Now it should be understood that any thing is moral suasion that acts as a motive--that the rod is one of the most powerful and even indispensable forms of moral suasion. It acts as a most commanding motive when the mind is very insensible to the voice of reason. It is no doubt the duty of parents to teach their children in the outset, that it is their right and their duty to insist upon unconditional submission to their will--to make the child understand from the very first that the will of the parent is a good and sufficient reason for the child's pursuing a required course of conduct. If the child is not taught that this is a good and sufficient reason--if it is left to demand other reasons, and if the parent is to succeed in gaining the child over to any course of conduct in proportion as he satisfies or fails to satisfy the child with the offered reasons, the child is inevitably ruined. For in such cases, if the reason satisfies the child, and he yields

obedience, it is not filial obedience, it is not rendered out of respect for the authority of the parent. It is no recognition of the parent's right to govern or of the child's duty to obey the parent. It is simply yielding to the offered reasons, and not to parental authority. Parents must therefore commence the government of the child, and perfect their influence over its will, if they ever expect to do so, long before the child can be reasoned with. In this respect the parent stands to the child in the place of God, lays his influence upon the will, and holds it in a state of submission to parental authority until the higher claims of God can come in--until moral considerations can be thrown in upon the mind as the regulator of the will. And ordinarily moral truth will have greater or less influence with the will, just in proportion to the perfection or imperfection with which parental authority has influenced the will.

Your bro. in the bonds of the gospel,

C.G.FINNEY

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