

# Letters to Parents. No. 7.

by Charles Finney

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*Parents have a crucial role in training their children in the way they should go, and neglecting this duty can have serious consequences.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6:6, Proverbs 22:6

**Topics:** "Parenting", "Spiritual Training"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical role of parents in training their children in the way they should go, asserting that if this is done, the children will not depart from it as they grow older. He highlights the importance of parental affection, the formation of habits, and the necessity for both mothers and fathers to actively engage in their children's spiritual and moral upbringing. Finney also addresses common objections regarding the failure of some good parents, attributing it to neglect or external influences, and stresses the need for parental associations to ensure a unified approach to child-rearing. He concludes by urging parents to prioritize their children's training and maintain a deep devotion to God in their efforts.

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## Transcript

DEAR BRETHREN AND SISTERS:--

I now observe:

V. That if the condition be fulfilled, that is, if a child be trained up in the way he should go, it is certain, that when he is old, he will not depart from it.

1. Because God has said it.

2. He has laid the foundation of this certainty in the very nature of human beings. It is a fact, well known to every body, that human beings form habits, by the repetition of any given course of conduct, or feeling, until their habits become too confirmed to be counteracted and put down by any thing but Almighty Power. It is the law of habit that lies at the foundation of the difficulty of bringing sinners to abandon their sins. A long indulged and confirmed habit is, in the Bible, compared to the strength and stability of nature itself. God says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spot? then can ye, who are ACCUSTOMED to do evil learn to do well." Here the law of habit is compared to the strength and permanency of nature itself. Now if a child be trained up in the way he should go, the rectitude of his future conduct is secured, not only by the promise and grace of God, but by this law of habit, which is laid deep

in the foundation of his constitution.

3. Thus God has put the destiny of the child into the hand of the parent, who naturally loves it more than any other human being.

4. But again, God has established the law of parental affection, for the benefit of the child, and so far as may be, to secure the training it up in the way it should go. I might quote a great many passages of scripture in confirmation of this doctrine; but if the text itself does not satisfy your mind, no multiplication of texts would do so.

Here I must notice an objection to the view of the subject I have taken. There is one common and grand difficulty, which has seemed to stumble Christians, in respect to their laying hold on the promises, in regard to their children, and calculating with any thing like certainty upon their being converted, sanctified, and saved. It is this: Many good men have, in all ages, had abandoned and reprobate children. To this I answer:

(1.) Good men are not always perfect in judgment, and therefore may be, and sometimes doubtless have been guilty of some capital error, in training their children.

(2.) A great many good men have been so occupied with the concerns of the Church and the world, as to pay comparatively little attention to the training of their own children. Their children have been neglected and almost of course lost. At all events, when they have been neglected, they have not been trained up in the way they should go. So that the condition has not been fulfilled.

(3.) Many good men have lived in bad neighborhoods, and found it nearly or quite impossible to train up their children in the way they should go, without changing their locations. And notwithstanding they saw the daily contact of their children was calculated to ruin them, and did, as a matter of fact, prevent their training them up in the way they should go; yet they have, probably from a sense of duty, remained where they were, to the destruction of their children. In such cases, the ruin of their children may be chargeable to their neighbors, because the influence of their neighbor's children prevented their bringing them up in the way they should go.

A few remarks must close what I have to say to parents at this time:

1. You see the great importance of Maternal Associations. Mothers must make the training of their children the subject of much consideration, study, and prayer. If any mind should be well stored with knowledge, it is the mind of a mother. If any one needs to understand philosophy, mental, natural, and moral, it is a mother. If any one needs wisdom of a serpent and the harmlessness of a dove, it is a mother. It is, therefore, all-important that mothers should associate together, exchange views, and books, and converse, and pray, and discuss, and devise every measure, for training up their children in the way they should go.

2. There should also be Parental as well as Maternal Associations. If there be any thing important to the interests of this world, it is that children should be universally trained up aright. And how wonderful it is, that fathers are so slow to perceive the necessity of deep study and research, prayer, discussion, reading, and conversation, on the subject of training their children. There are associations among men for almost every thing else, and yet, I hesitate not to say, that associations for this end are as necessary and important as for any other object whatever. Pious mothers are often at their wits' end, to know what to do

to secure the salvation of their children. They are greatly at a loss, to know what course of training will most likely result in their sanctification. They go to their husbands; but their minds are engaged in every thing else. They have paid very little or no attention to the subject of training their children. And, as a general thing, if a father governs his family at all, it is only by a legal system, more or less rigid, according to his natural temper, habits, and way of doing things. And notwithstanding the wife needs the counsel of her husband, and the father of her children, fathers are, as a general thing, little prepared to give them counsel. There should be a great deal of consultation between the father and mother of every family, in relation to training the children--a great deal of consideration and forethought.

But another thing that renders both Parental and Maternal Associations of the utmost importance is, that there may be concert and unanimity in the neighborhood, on the subject of training children. If possible, every father and every mother should be enlisted in these associations, so as to secure the right training of all the children in the neighborhood. For, as I have said in a former letter, one unmanaged family will often, in spite of all that can be done, corrupt a whole neighborhood. Parents, therefore, ought to be instructed throughout whole neighborhoods, in respect to training their children. For if some families of children are allowed to run about and visit, both by day and by night, it will be difficult to restrain other children in the neighborhood from doing the same thing; and as moral influences tell with so much readiness as that the results spread as naturally and as certainly as a contagious disease, it is, therefore, of the utmost importance, to secure the attention and hearty co-operation of every parent in the neighborhood.

3. Permit me here again to revert to a topic, which I have mentioned in a former letter, and say again, that it is of the utmost importance, that care should be taken to secure the right kind of domestic help. As you value the souls of your children, do not receive into your family any filthy girl or young man, or old man, that will tell falsehoods to your children, tell them vile stories, use vulgar language, or in any way corrupt their morals or their manners. I would sooner have the plague in my family, than to have such influences as these. I would not suffer the nearest relative I have on earth to remain in my family, unless he would refrain from corrupting my children.

4. Again, see the great importance of selecting the right kind of Sabbath School teachers.

5. You see the great importance of selecting the right kind of books and periodical literature for your children. There are many books and periodicals, and those too that are extensively circulated, that I regard as of a very pernicious and highly dangerous tendency. They are calculated to form any thing else than right notions and character among children.

6. All the domestic arrangements of every family should have a special regard to the training of their children. The right training of them should be a prime object, and every other interest of the family should be made to bend to this. The hours of retiring in the evening and rising in the morning, the hours at which meals are taken, kinds of foods, and in short all the habits of the family should have a direct reference to the right training of the children. Nothing should be suffered to enter into the family arrangements that has a tendency to injure their health, their intellect or their heart. No company should at any time be received and entertained whose conduct may endanger the manners or morals of the children.

7. Mothers should never, under any pretence whatever, neglect their own children for the purpose of attending to other matters. Mother, remember that nothing can compensate for the neglect of your duty to your children. This is your first great indispensable duty, to train your children in the way they should go.

Attend to this then, whatever else you neglect.

8. Do not suppose that you can attend to this without being yourself devotedly pious. No mother has begun to do her duty to her children, who is not supremely devoted to God, and is not endeavoring to train them up for God. Some mothers will neglect their children under the pretence of going to meeting and especially attending protracted meetings, leaving it, as they say, with God to take care of their children while they do his work. They seem to think the time spent in taking care of their children is almost thrown away. And even some seem unwilling to have children because they shall have to throw away so much time in taking care of them. Now woman, you ought to know that a leading object of your life is to bear and train up children for God--and that time is as far as possible from being lost which you spend in this employment.

Other women, instead of neglecting their children to attend to their devotions, are neglecting their devotions almost altogether, and pretending to discharge their duty to their children while they are neglecting God and religion. Now this is equally erroneous with the other course. No parent can train up children in the way they should go, without maintaining a spirit of deep devotion to God on the one hand, and on the other without paying the most rigorous and unremitting attention to their training, physical, intellectual, and moral. Mothers should be emphatically "keepers at home." During the minority of their children, they should consider it their great business to train them up in the way they should go.

9. But in doing this they should consult God at every step, and should not imagine that they begin to do their duty any farther than they consult the living oracles, and live under the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit.

10. If you would train your children in the way they should go, be invincibly firm in training your own family, let other families do as they may.

11. Remember that if you resist the true light, or neglect your duty to your children, God "will visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generations."

Your brother in the bonds of the gospel,

C.G.FINNEY

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