

The Duties of Parents

by J.C. Ryle

The sermon emphasizes the importance of training children in the way they should go, with a focus on love, patience, and consistency, and highlights the need for parents to prioritize their child's soul and biblical knowledge.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:4, 2 Samuel 23:2, Psalm 19:7, Matthew 12:36, John 14:6, John 17:17, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 3:7, 2 Peter 1:21, 1 John 5:7

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Divine Inspiration"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher delves into the concept of divine inspiration of the Scriptures, emphasizing that every word of Scripture is God-breathed, not originating from human will but from the Holy Spirit. The sermon highlights the importance of recognizing the Bible as the voice of God to humanity, emphasizing its trustworthiness and authority. Various theologians and biblical figures are quoted to support the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, stressing that the Bible is the ultimate guide to divine truth and must be revered and obeyed.

Transcript

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

[Proverbs 22:6]

I believe that most professing Christians are acquainted with our sermon text. The sound of it is probably very familiar to your ears, like an old tune. It is likely that you have heard it, or read it, talked of it, or quoted it, many times. Is that not true?

But, despite it being a well-known Bible verse, how little do we regard its truth! The doctrine it contains appears scarcely known, the duty it puts before us is seldom put into practice. My friends, am I not speaking the truth?

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

Now how do we account for this state of affairs? The plain truth is, the Lord's commandment in our text is not regarded; and therefore the Lord's promise in our text is not fulfilled.

Friends, these things may cause you to seriously search your hearts. Permit a word of exhortation from a minister, about the right training of children. Believe me, the subject is one that should hit home to every conscience, and make every one ask himself the question, "In the matter of training children, am I doing what I am supposed to do?"

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

It is also a subject, on which everyone concerned are in great danger of falling short of their duty. This is notably a point in which men can see the faults of their neighbors more clearly than their own. They will often raise their children in the very path which they have denounced to their friends as unsafe. They will see little problems in other people's families, and overlook major ones in their own. They will have the eyesight of an eagle in detecting mistakes everywhere else, and yet be blind as bats to the fatal errors which are daily going on in their own homes. They will be wise about their brother's house, but foolish about their own flesh and blood. Here, if anywhere, we have need to suspect our own judgment. This, too, you will do well to keep in mind.

As a minister, I cannot help remarking that there is hardly any subject about which people seem so stubborn as they are about their own children. I have sometimes been absolutely astonished at the slowness of sensible Christian parents to accept the fact, that their own children are at fault, or deserve blame. There are many persons to whom I would much rather speak about their own sins, than to tell them that their children had done anything wrong.

Come now, and let me place before you a few hints about the proper training of children. May God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit bless them, and make them timely words to everyone of you. Do not reject them because they are blunt and simple; do not despise them because they contain nothing new. You can be sure, that if you want to train your children for heaven, then the hints that that follow ought not to be lightly set aside.

Hint #1. If you want to train your children correctly, train them in the way they should go, and not in the way that they want to go.

Remember children are born with a definite bias towards evil, and therefore if you let them choose for themselves, they are certain to choose wrong.

The mother cannot tell what her tender little infant may grow up to be--tall or short, weak or strong, wise or foolish--he may be any of these things or not--it is all uncertain. But one thing the mother can say with certainty: he will have a corrupt and sinful heart. It is natural for us to do wrong. "Folly," says Solomon, "is bound up in the heart of a child" [Proverbs 22:15]. "A child left to himself disgraces his mother" [Proverbs 29:15]. Our hearts are like the earth on which we walk; leave it alone, and it is sure to bear weeds.

If, then, you want to be wise in dealing with your child, then you must not leave him to the guidance of his own will. Think for him, judge for him, act for him, just as you would for one who is weak and blind; but for pity's sake, do not allow him to pursue his own unruly tastes and inclinations. It must not be his tendencies and wishes that are favored. He does not yet know what is good for his mind and soul, any more than what is good for his body. You do not let him decide what he will eat, and what he will drink, and how he will be clothed. Be consistent, and deal with his mind in the same manner. Train him in the way that is scriptural and right, and not in the way that he thinks is right.

If you cannot agree with this first principle of Christian training, then it is useless for you to listen any further. Self-will is almost the first thing that appears in a child's mind; and it must be your first step to resist it.

Hint #2. Train your child with all tenderness, affection, and patience.

I do not mean that you are to spoil him, but I do mean that you should let him see that you love him.

Love should be the golden thread that runs through all your actions in dealing with the child. Kindness, gentleness, tolerance, patience, sympathy, a willingness to enter into childish troubles, a readiness to take part in childish joys--these are the cords by which a child may be led most easily--these are the clues you must follow if you would find the way to his heart.

Most persons, even among grown-up people, are more easily led than they are to be pushed. There is that in all of our minds which rises up against compulsion; we straighten up our backs and stiffen our necks at the very thought of a forced obedience. We are like young horses in the hand of a trainer: handle them kindly, and they will learn quickly, and in time you may guide them with a piece of thread; but treat them and use them roughly and violently, and it will be many months before you get mastery over them--if at all.

Now children's minds are cast in much the same mold as our own. Sternness and severity of manner causes them to be unresponsive and to back away. It shuts up their hearts, and you will wear yourself out trying to find the door. But only let them see that you have an affectionate feeling towards them--that you really desire to make them happy, and do them good--that if you punish them, it is intended for their good, and that, like the pelican, you would give your heart's blood to nourish their souls; let them see this, and they will soon be yours to mold and shape. But they must be wooed with kindness, if you ever hope to win their attention.

And surely reason itself might teach us this lesson. Children are weak and tender creatures, and, as such, they need patient and considerate treatment. We must handle them delicately, like frail objects, lest by rough handling we do more harm than good. They are like young plants, and need gentle watering--often, only a little at a time.

We must not expect everything at once. We must remember what children are, and teach them as they are able to bear. Their minds are like a lump of metal--not to be forged and made useful all at once, but only after a succession of little blows of the forger's hammer. Their ability to understand what we are teaching them is like the small opening of a wine bottle: we must pour in the wine of knowledge gradually, or else most of it will be spilled and lost. Our rule must be, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, a little here and a little there." The hard stone used to sharpen knives does its work slowly, but frequent rubbing will bring it to a fine edge. Truly there is a need of patience in this training of a child, for without it nothing can be done.

Nothing will compensate for the absence of this tenderness and love. A minister may speak the truth as it is in Jesus, clearly and with all authority; but if he does not speak it in love, few souls will be won. Likewise, you must set before your children their responsibilities to God--you can command, threaten, punish, and try to reason with them--but if love is missing in the way you treat them, then your labor will be all in vain.

Love is the one great secret of successful training. Anger and harshness may frighten them, but they will not persuade the child that you are right; and if he often sees you angry and harsh, you will soon cease to have his respect. A father who speaks to his son as Saul did to Jonathan, saying, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?" [1 Samuel 20:30], that father who speaks like this cannot expect to retain his influence over that son's mind.

Try hard to maintain your child's affections. It is a dangerous thing to make your children afraid of you. Anything is almost better than the coldness and bitterness that will come between you and your children, because they are afraid of you. Fear puts an end to openness between the parent and child--fear leads to concealment--fear sows the seed of hypocrisy, and leads to many lies. There is a great deal of truth in the Apostle's words to the Colossians: "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. [Colossians 3:21] Do not ignore his advice.

Hint #3. Train your children with a lasting conviction in your mind, that most of it depends on you.

Grace is the strongest of all principles. See what a great change grace effects when it comes into the heart of an old sinner--how it overturns the strongholds of Satan--how it throws down mountains, and fills up valleys--makes crooked things straight--and newly creates the whole man. Truly nothing is impossible for grace.

Nature, too, is very strong. See how it struggles against the things of the kingdom of God--how it fights against every attempt to be more holy--how it keeps up an unceasing warfare within us to the very last hour of life. Indeed, nature is strong.

But after nature and grace, undoubtedly, there is nothing more powerful than education. Early habits are very important. We are made what we are by training. Our character takes the form of that mold into which our first years are cast. It has been said, that, "Education has a tremendous effect on men's opinions and thinking habits. What children learn in the nursery, will be displayed throughout their lives."--Cecil.

We heavily depend on those who bring us up. We get from them a taste and a bias which clings to us most of the days of our lives. We learn the language of our mothers and fathers, and learn to speak it almost without thinking, and unquestionably we catch something of their manners, ways, and mind at the same time. Time will tell, how much we all owe to early impressions, and how many things in us may be traced back to the seeds sown in the days of our infancy, by those who were around us. A very educated Englishman, has gone so far as to say: "That of all the men we meet with, nine out of ten are what they are, good or bad, useful or not, according to their education"--Locke

And all this is one of God's merciful arrangements. He gives your children a mind that will receive impressions like moist clay. He gives them a disposition at the starting-point of life to believe what you tell them, and to take for granted what you advise them, and to trust your word rather than a stranger's. He gives you, in short, a golden opportunity of doing them good. See that you do not neglect such an

opportunity. Once you let it slip, it is gone forever.

Beware of that miserable delusion into which some have fallen--that parents can do nothing for their children, that you must leave them alone, wait for grace, and sit still. These parents would like their children to die the death of the righteous person, but they do nothing to help them live a righteous life. They have great hope, but they receive nothing. And the devil rejoices to see such thinking, just as he always does over anything which seems to excuse laziness, or to encourage neglect.

I know that you cannot convert your child. I know that they who are born again are born, not of the will of man, but of God. But I also know that God specifically says, "Train a child in the way he should go," and that He never gave a command to men and women which He would not give them the grace to perform. And I also know that our duty is not to stand still and dispute the command, but to go forward and obey it. It is only when we move out in obedience that God will meet us. The path of obedience is the way in which He gives the blessing. We only have to do as the servants were commanded at the marriage feast in Cana, to fill the water-pots with water, and we may safely leave it to the Lord to turn that water into wine.

Hint #4. Train with this thought continually before your eyes--that the soul of your child is the first thing to be considered.

Precious, no doubt, are these little ones in your eyes; but if you truly love them, then often think about their souls. Nothing should concern you as greatly as their eternal destiny. No part of them should be so dear to you as that part which will never die. The world, with all its glory, will pass away; "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." But the spirit which dwells in those little creatures, whom you love so well, will outlive them all, and whether they spend eternity in happiness or misery will depend a lot on you (speaking from man's perspective).

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

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

A true Christian must not be a slave to what's currently "in-fashion," if he wants to train his child for heaven. He must not be content to teach them and instruct them in certain ways, merely because it is customary, or to allow them to read books of a questionable sort, merely because everybody else reads them, or to let them form bad habits, merely because they are the habits of the day. He must train with an eye to his children's souls. He must not be ashamed to hear his training called odd and strange. What if it is? The time is short--the customs of this world are passing away. He that has trained his children for heaven, rather than for the earth--for God, rather than for man--he is the parent that will be called wise in the end.

Hint #5. Train your child to have a knowledge of the Bible.

You cannot make your children love the Bible, I admit. No one but the Holy Spirit can give us a heart to delight in the Word. But you can make sure that your children are acquainted with the Bible; and remember that they can never become acquainted with that blessed book too soon, or too well.

A thorough knowledge of the Bible is the foundation of all proper views of true religion. He that is well-grounded in the Bible will not generally be found to be a person who wavers in his beliefs. He will not be blown and tossed by every wind of new doctrine. Any system of training which does not make the knowledge of Scripture the first priority is unsafe and unsound.

You need to be very careful on this point, for the devil is in the world, and false doctrine abounds. Some are to be found among us who wrongly give to the Church the honor that is due to Jesus Christ. Some are to be found who make "rituals and forms" into saviors and passports to eternal life. And some are to be found in like manner who honor a catechism more than the Bible, or fill the minds of their children with miserable little story-books, instead of the Scripture of truth. But if you love your children, let the simple truths of the Bible be everything in the training of their souls; and let all other books take second place.

Do not care so much for your children being mighty in the catechism, as for them being mighty in the Scriptures. This is the training, believe me, that God will honor. The Psalmist says to God, "You have exalted above all things Your name and Your word." [Psalm 138:2] and I think that He gives a special blessing to everyone who tries to magnify His Word and His Name among children.

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

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

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

Tell them of sin, its guilt, its consequences, its power, its vileness: you will find they can comprehend this.

Tell them of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His work for our salvation--the atonement, the cross, the blood, the sacrifice, the intercession: you will discover that it is not beyond them to understand.

Tell them of the work of the Holy Spirit in man's heart, how He changes, and renews, and sanctifies, and purifies: you will soon see they can follow your teaching to some degree. In short, I believe that we have no idea how much a little child can take in of the length and breadth of the glorious gospel. They understand far more of these things than we suppose.

As to the age when the religious instruction of a child should begin, no general rule can be laid down. The mind seems to open in some children much more quickly than in others. We seldom begin too early. There are wonderful examples on record of what a child can attain to, even at three years of age.

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

Hint #6. Train them to have a habit of prayer.

Prayer is the very life-breath of true religion. It is one of the first evidences that a man is born again. "Behold," said the Lord of Saul, in the day he sent Ananias to him, "Behold, he is praying" [Acts 9:11, KJV]. He had begun to pray, and that was proof enough. Prayer was the distinguishing mark of the Lord's people in the day that there began to be a separation between them and the world. The Bible says, "At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD" [Genesis 4:26].

Prayer is the distinction of all real Christians. They pray--for they tell God their needs, their feelings, their desires, their fears; and they mean what they say. The person who is a Christian in name only may repeat prayers over and over, but he goes no further. Prayer is the turning-point in a man's soul. Our ministry is unprofitable, and our labor is in vain, until you are brought to your knees. Till then, we have no hope for you.

Prayer is the one great secret of spiritual prosperity. When there is frequent private communion with God, your soul will grow like the grass after the rain; when the communication is infrequent, everything will come to a stop, you will barely keep your soul alive. Show me a growing Christian, a strong Christian, a flourishing Christian, and I am sure, that he is one that speaks often with his Lord. He asks much, and he has much. He tells Jesus everything, and so he always knows how to act.

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

Prayer is the simplest means that man can use in coming to God. It is within the reach of everyone--the sick, the aged, the paralytic, the blind, the poor, the uneducated--everyone can pray. It gains you nothing to plead your need of learning, and need of books, and your need of scholarship in this matter. So long as you have a tongue to speak of your soul's state, you must and should pray. Those words, "You do not have, because you do not ask God." [James 4:2], will be a fearful condemnation to many in the day of judgment.

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

Remember, that this is the first step in religion which a child is able to take. Long before he can read, you can teach him to kneel by his mother's side, and repeat the simple words of prayer and praise which she puts in his mouth. And as the first steps in any undertaking are always the most important, so is the manner in which your children's prayers are prayed, a point which deserves your closest attention. Few seem to know how much depends on this. You must be careful that they don't say their prayers in a hasty, careless, and irreverent manner. You must beware of giving up the oversight of this matter to others, or of trusting too much to your children doing it when left to themselves. I cannot praise that mother who never personally looks after this most important part of her child's daily life. Surely if there is any habit which your own hand and eye should help in forming, it is the habit of prayer. Believe me, if you never hear your children pray yourself, you are much to blame. You are not much wiser than the bird described in the Book of Job, "She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush

them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain." [Job 39:14-16]

Prayer is, of all habits, the one which we remember the longest. Many an elderly man could tell you how his mother used to make him pray in the days of his childhood. Other things have passed away from his mind perhaps, but not this. The church where he was taken to worship, the minister whom he heard preach, the companions who used to play with him--all these have passed from his memory, and left no mark behind. But you will often find it is far different with his first prayers. He will often be able to tell you where he knelt, and what he was taught to say, and even how his mother looked while they prayed together. It will be as fresh in his mind as if it was only yesterday.

Oh, dear friend, if you love your children, I charge you, do not let the early impression of a habit of prayer slip by. If you train your children to do anything, train them, at least, to have a habit of prayer.

Hint #7. Train them to be faithful and regular in attending church and the Lord's Supper.

Tell them of the duty and privilege of going to Church, and joining in the prayers of the congregation. Tell them that wherever the Lord's people are gathered together, there the Lord Jesus is present in a special way, and that those who are absent must expect, like the Apostle Thomas, to miss out on a blessing. Tell them of the importance of hearing the Word of God preached, and that it is God's ordained way of converting, sanctifying, and building up the souls of men. Tell them how the Apostle Paul commands us not to "give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but to encourage one another--and all the more as we see the Day approaching." [Hebrews 10:25]

It is a sad sight in a church when nobody comes to the Lord's Table but the older people, and the young men and the young women all turn away. But it is a sadder sight still when no children are to be seen in a church, except those who come to the Sunday School, and are often obliged to attend. Let none of this guilt lie at your doors. There are many boys and girls in every city, besides those who come to Sunday School, and you who are their parents and friends should see to it that they come with you to church.

Do not allow them to grow up with a habit of making vain excuses for not coming. Make them clearly understand, that so long as they are under your roof, it is the rule of your house for every one in good health to honor the Lord on the Lord's day, and that you believe that the healthy person who refuses to go to church on the Lord's Day brings great harm to his soul.

Also see to it, if it can be arranged, that your children go with you to church, and sit near you when they are there. To go to church is one thing, but to behave well at church is quite another. And believe me, there is no guarantee for good behavior like that of having them under your own watchful eye.

The minds of young people are easily distracted, and their attention lost, and every possible means should be used to counteract this. I do not like to see them coming to church by themselves--they often get into bad company, and so learn more evil on the Lord's day than in all the rest of the week. Neither do I like to see what I call "a young people's corner" in a church. They often catch habits of inattention and irreverence there, which it takes years to unlearn, if they are ever unlearned at all. What I like to see is a whole family sitting together, old and young, side by side--men, women, and children, serving God as a family.

But there are some who say that it is useless to urge children to attend church and the Lord's Supper, because they are too young to understand them.

Do not listen to such reasoning. I find no such doctrine in the Old Testament. When Moses goes before Pharaoh, I observe that he says, "We will go with our young and old, with our sons and daughters, because we are to celebrate a festival to the LORD." [Exodus 10:9] When Joshua read God's Law, I notice that the Bible says, "There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children." [Joshua 8:35] And when I turn to the New Testament, I find children mentioned there as partaking in public acts of religion as well as in the Old Testament. When Paul was leaving the disciples at Tyre for the last time, he said, "We left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray." [Acts 21:5]

Samuel, in the days of his childhood, appears to have ministered to the Lord some time before he really knew Him, the Bible says, "Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him." [1 Samuel 3:7] The Apostles themselves do not seem to have understood all that our Lord said at the time that it was spoken: "At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about Him." [John 12:16]

Parents, comfort your minds with these examples. Do not be discouraged because your children do not see the full value of church and the Lord's Supper now. Just train them to have a habit of regular attendance. Set it before their minds as a high, holy, and solemn duty, and believe me, the day will very likely come when they will bless you for your efforts.

Hint #8. Train them to have a habit of faith.

By this I mean, you should train them to believe what you say. You should try to make them feel confidence in your judgment, and respect your opinions, as better than their own. You should cause them to think that, when you say a thing is bad for them, it must be bad, and when you say it is good for them, it must be good; that your knowledge, in short, is better than their own, and that they may rely implicitly on your word. Teach them to feel that what they do not know now, they will probably know later, and to be satisfied there is a reason for everything you require them to do.

Who can describe the blessedness of a real spirit of faith? Or rather, who can tell the misery that unbelief has brought on the world? Unbelief made Eve eat the forbidden fruit--she doubted the truth of God's word: "You will surely die." Unbelief made the old world reject Noah's warning, and so perish in their sin. Unbelief kept Israel in the wilderness--it was the barricade that kept them from entering the promised land. Unbelief made the Jews crucify the Lord of glory--they did not believe the voice of Moses and the prophets, even though they were read to them every day. And unbelief is the reigning sin of man's heart down to this very hour--unbelief in God's promises--unbelief in God's wrath and discipline--unbelief in our own sinfulness--unbelief in our own danger--unbelief in everything that runs counter to the pride and worldliness of our evil hearts. Your training of your children is worth very little if you do not train them to have a habit of implicit faith--faith in their parents' word, confidence that what their parents say must be right.

I have heard it said by some, that you should require nothing of children which they cannot understand, and that you should explain and give a reason for everything you desire them to do. I solemnly warn you against such a notion. I tell you plainly, I think it is an unsound and corrupt principle. No doubt it is absurd

to make a mystery of everything you do, and there are many things which it is good to explain to children, in order that they may see that what we say is reasonable and wise. But to bring them up with the idea that they must take nothing on trust, that they, with their weak and imperfect comprehension, must have the "why" and the "wherefore" made clear to them at every step they take--this is indeed a fearful mistake, and likely to have the worst effect on their minds.

At certain times, if you are so inclined, reason with your child, but never forget to keep in mind (if you really love him) that he is only a child--that he thinks as a child, he understands as a child, and therefore must not always expect to know the reason for everything.

Set before him the example of Isaac, in the day when Abraham took him to offer him as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah [Genesis 22]. Isaac asked his father a simple question, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" and he got no answer but this, "Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb." How, or where, or when, or in what manner, or by what means--all this Isaac was not told; but the answer was enough. He believed that it would all be okay, because his father said so, and he was content.

Also, tell your children, that we must all be learners in all of our beginnings, that there is an alphabet to be mastered in every kind of knowledge--that the best horse in the world once needed to be broken--that a day will come when they will see the wisdom of all your training. But in the meantime if you say a thing is right, it must be enough for them--they must believe you, and be content.

Parents, if any point in training is important, it is this. I charge you by the love that you have for your children, use every means to train them to have a habit of faith.

Hint #9. Train them to have a habit of obedience.

This is a goal which is worth any amount of effort to attain. No habit, I believe, has such an influence over our lives as this. Parents, determine to make your children obey you, though it may cost you a lot of trouble, and cost them many tears. Let there be no questioning, and reasoning, and disputing, and delaying. When you give them a command, let them clearly see that you expect them to do it.

Obedience is the only reality. It is faith visible, faith acting, and faith manifest. It is the test of real discipleship among the Lord's people. Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command." [John 15:14] It ought to be the mark of well-trained children, that they do whatever their parents command them. Where, in fact, is the honor which the fifth commandment directs, if fathers and mothers are not obeyed cheerfully, willingly, and at once?

Early obedience has all Scripture on its side. It was Abraham who said, that he will not only train his family, but "that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just." [Genesis 18:19] It is said of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, that when He was young, He was obedient to Mary and Joseph. [Luke 2:51] Observe how implicitly Joseph obeyed the order of his father Jacob in Genesis 37:13. See how Isaiah speaks of disobedience as an evil thing, when he says, "the young will rise up against the old." [Isaiah 3:5] Note how the Apostle Paul names disobedience to parents as one of the terrible sins of the last days. [2 Timothy 3:2] Note how he singles out the obedience of children as one of the requirements of a Christian minister, saying, "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect." [1 Timothy 3:4] And again that, "a deacon must manage his children and his household well." [1 Timothy 3:12] And again, an elder must be "a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient." [Titus 1:6]

Parents, do you want to see your children happy? Be careful, then, that you train them to obey when they are spoken to--to do as they are told. Believe me, we are not made to be entirely independent--we are not fit for it. Even those whom Christ has set free have a yoke to wear, they "are serving the Lord Christ." [Colossians 3:24] Children cannot learn too soon that this is a world in which not everyone was intended to rule, and that we are never in our right place until we know how to obey those over us. Teach them to obey while they are young, or else they will be protesting against God all their lives, and wear themselves out with the vain idea of being independent of His control.

My friends, what I suggest to you is greatly needed. You will see many in this day who allow their children to choose and think for themselves long before they are able, and even make excuses for their disobedience, as if they were not to be blamed for it. In my eyes, a parent who is always yielding, and a child who always has its own way, are a most painful sight--painful, because I see God's appointed order of things inverted and turned upside down--painful, because I feel sure the consequence to that child's character in the end will be self-will, pride, and conceit. Is it any wonder that men refuse to obey their Father who is in heaven, if you allow them, when children, to disobey their father who is on earth.

Parents, if you love your children, let obedience be a motto and a watchword continually before their eyes.

Hint #10. Train them to have a habit of always speaking the truth.

Speaking the truth is far less common in the world than we may suspect. The whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is a golden rule which many would do well to bear in mind. Lying and deception are old sins of the past. The devil was the father of them--he deceived Eve by a bold lie, and ever since the fall of man it is a sin which all the children of Eve have to guard against.

Think about how much falsehood and deceit there is in the world! How much exaggeration! How many untruths are added to a simple story! How many things are left out, if it does not serve the speaker's interest to tell them! How few there are around us of whom we can say, that we trust their word without question! Truly, the ancient Persians were wise in their generation: it was a most important rule with them in educating their children, that they should learn to speak the truth. What an awful evidence of man's natural sinfulness, that we should have to mention such a point at all!

My friend, think how often God is spoken of in the Old Testament as the God of truth. Truth seems to be especially set before us as a leading feature in the character of Him to whom we are subject to. He never swerves from the straight line. He abhors lying and hypocrisy. Try to keep this continually before your children's minds. Press upon them at all times, that anything less than the truth is a lie; that evasion, making excuses, and exaggeration are all halfway houses towards what is false, and ought to be avoided. Encourage them in any circumstances to be straightforward, and, whatever it may cost them, to always speak the truth.

I bring this subject to your attention, not merely for the sake of your children's character in the world, but rather for your own comfort and assistance in all your dealings with them. You will find it a great help, to always be able to trust their word. It will go far to prevent that habit of concealment, which so often prevails among children. Openness and straightforwardness depends a lot on a parent's treatment of this matter in the early days of our childhood.

Hint #11. Train them to have a habit of always redeeming the time.

Idleness is the devil's best friend. It is the surest way to give him an opportunity of doing us some harm. An idle mind is like an open door, and if Satan does not come through it himself, it is certain he will throw something in to arouse bad thoughts in us.

No created being was ever meant to be idle. Service and work is the appointed portion of every creature of God. The angels in heaven work--they are the Lord's ministering servants, always doing His will. Adam, in Paradise, had work--he was appointed to work and take care of the garden of Eden. And man, weak, sinful man, must have something to do, or else his soul will soon get into an unhealthy state. We must keep our hands busy, and our minds occupied with something, or else our imaginations will soon ferment and breed mischief.

And what is true of us, is true of our children too. The Jews thought idleness was an absolute sin: it was a law of theirs that every man should train his son in some useful trade--and they were right. They knew the heart of man better than some of us appear to today.

Idleness made the wicked city of Sodom what she was. [Ezekiel 16:49] Idleness had a lot to do with King David's awful sin with the wife of Uriah. I see in the Book of 2 Samuel, chapter 11, that Joab went off to war against the Ammonites, "but David remained in Jerusalem." Was that not idleness? And it was during that time of idleness that he saw Bathsheba--and the next step we read of is his tremendous and miserable fall into the sin of adultery.

Truly, I believe that idleness has led to more sin than almost any other habit that could be named. I suspect it is the mother of many sins of the flesh--the mother of adultery, sexual immorality, drunkenness, and many other deeds of darkness that I do not have time to name. Let your own conscience say whether I speak the truth or not. You were once idle, and immediately the devil knocked at the door and came in.

And why should this surprise us--everything in the world around us seems to teach the same lesson. It is the still water which becomes stagnant and impure: the running, moving streams are always clear. If you have machinery, you must run it now and then, or it soon begins to rust or break down. If you have a horse, you must exercise him; or he will not be strong for regular work. If you want to have good bodily health yourself, you must exercise. If you always sit still, then in time your body will complain. And so is it with the soul. The active moving mind is a hard target for the devil to shoot at. Try to be always full of useful employment, and thus your enemy will find it difficult to get room to plant evil thoughts.

My friend, I ask you to set these things before the minds of your children. Teach them the value of time, and try to make them learn the habit of using it well. It pains me to see children wasting time. I love to see them active and industrious, and giving their whole heart to all they do; giving their whole heart to lessons, when they have to learn--giving their whole heart even when they are playing.

But if you really love your children, then let idleness be counted as a sin in your family.

Hint #12. As you train your children, make sure that you maintain a constant fear of being an over-indulgent parent.

This is the one point out of all the rest on which you have the most need to be on your guard. It is natural to be tender and affectionate towards your own flesh and blood, and it is the excess of this very tenderness and affection which you have to fear. Be careful that it does not make you blind to your children's faults, and deaf to all the advice that I am giving to you. Be careful that your love for them does

not make you overlook their bad conduct, rather than you experiencing the pain of inflicting punishment and correction.

I am very aware that punishment and correction are disagreeable things. Nothing is more unpleasant than giving pain to those we love, and causing them to cry. But so long as hearts are what hearts are, it is vain to suppose, as a general rule, that children can ever be brought up without correction.

Spoiling is a very expressive word, and sadly full of meaning. Now the quickest way to spoil children is to let them have their own way--to allow them to do wrong and not to punish them for it. Believe me, you must not do this, whatever pain it may cost you unless you wish to ruin your children's souls.

You cannot say that Scripture does not specifically speak on this subject, listen to God's Holy Word:

"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him." [Proverbs 13:24]

"Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death." [Proverbs 19:18]

"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him." [Proverbs 22:15]

"Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death." [Proverbs 23:13, 14]

"The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother." [Proverbs 29:15]

"Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul." [Proverbs 29:17]

Oh, how strong and compelling are these verses! How sad it is, that in many Christian families they seem almost unknown! Their children need reproof, but it is hardly ever given; they need correction, but it is hardly ever employed. And yet this book of Proverbs is not obsolete and unfit for Christians. It is given by the inspiration of God, and is beneficial. It is given for our learning, even as the Epistles to the Romans and Ephesians. Surely the believer who brings up his children without paying attention to the wisdom of these verses is making himself wise above that which is written, and greatly errs.

Fathers and mothers, I tell you plainly, if you never punish your children when they are at fault, you are doing them a grievous wrong. I warn you, this is the great mistake made by saints of God, in every age, and they have suffered greatly because of it. I beg you to be wise, and avoid making such foolish mistakes. We can see it in Eli's case. His sons Hophni and Phinehas "made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them." [1 Samuel 3:13] He gave them no more than a tame and lukewarm reproof, when he ought to have rebuked them sharply. In one word, he honored his sons above God. And what was the final result? Eli lived to hear of the death of both of his sons in battle, and upon hearing the news he fell over and died, taking the sorrow with him, down to the grave [1 Samuel 2:22-29].

See, also, the case of David. Who can read without pain the history of his children, and their sins? Amnon's incest--Absalom's murder and proud rebellion--Adonijah's scheming ambition: truly these were grievous wounds for the man after God's own heart to receive from his own house. But was he not at fault? I fear there can be no doubt that he was. I find a clue to it all in the account of Adonijah in 1 Kings 1:6, listen to the Scriptures, "His father had never interfered with him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?'" That was the foundation of all the evil. David was an over-indulgent father--a father who let his children have their own way--and he reaped according to what he had sown.

Parents, I plead with you, for your children's sake, beware of over-indulgence. I call on you to remember, that it is your primary duty to consult their real interests, and not their whims and fantasies--to train them, not to humor them--to train them for their benefit, not merely to please them.

You must not give way to every wish and whim of your child's mind, no matter how much you may love him. You must not let him assume that his will is all-important, and that he has only to desire something and it will be done. Do not, I beg you, make your children idols, lest God should take them away, and break your idol, just to convince you of your folly.

Learn to say "No" to your children. Show them that you are able to refuse whatever you think is not right for them. Show them that you are ready to punish disobedience, and that when you speak of punishment, you are not only ready to threaten, but also to perform. Do not threaten too much. Seldom punish, but when you do, make it sincere and firm--frequent and light punishment is truly a wretched system of discipline.

Some parents have a way of saying, "Naughty child," to a boy or girl on every slight occasion, and often without good cause. It is a very foolish habit. Words of condemnation should never be used without real reason.

As to the best way of punishing a child, no general rule can be laid down. The characters of children are so vastly different, that what would be a severe punishment to one child, would be no punishment at all to another. I am emphatically opposed to the modern notion that no child ought ever to be whipped. Doubtless some parents use bodily correction far too much, and far too violently; but many others, I fear, use it far too little.

Beware of letting small faults pass unnoticed under the idea "it is a little one." There are no little things in training children; all are important. Little weeds need plucking up as much as any. Leave them alone, and they will soon be large and overpowering.

Friend, if there is any point which deserves your attention, believe me, it is this one. It is one that will give you trouble, I know. But if you are not willing to put forth the effort, it will take, to discipline your children when they are young, then be assured they will give you plenty of trouble when they are old. Choose which you prefer.

Hint #13. As you train your children, continually remember how God trains His children.

The Bible tells us that God has an elect people--a family in this world. All sinners who have been convinced of sin, and fled to Jesus for peace, make up that family. All of us who really believe in Christ for salvation are its members.

Now God the Father is always training the members of this family for their everlasting home with Him in heaven. He acts like a farmer pruning his vines, that they may bear more fruit. He knows the character of each one of us--our besetting sins--our weaknesses--our special needs. He knows our deeds and where we live, who our companions in life are, and what our trials are, what our temptations are, and what our privileges are. He knows all these things, and is always working out everything for our good. He allots to each of us, in His providence, the very things we need, in order to bear the most fruit--He gives us as much sunshine and rain as we can stand--as much of bitter things as we can bear, and as much of sweet things that would be good for us. Dear friend, if you want to train your children wisely, note well how God

the Father trains His children. He does all things well; the plan which He adopts must be right.

Notice, too, how many things there are which God withholds from His children. The majority of His children, have had desires which God has determined not to fulfill. There has often been some one thing they wanted to attain, and yet there has always been some barrier to prevent fulfillment. It has been just as if God was placing it above our reach, and saying, "This is not good for you; this must not be." Moses greatly desired to cross over the Jordan, and see the land of promise; but you will remember his desire was never granted.

Notice, also, how often God leads His people by ways which seem dark and mysterious to our eyes. We cannot see the meaning of all His dealings with us; we cannot see the reasonableness of the path in which our feet are walking. Sometimes so many trials have assaulted us--so many difficulties surrounded us--that we have not been able to discover the purpose of it all. It has been just as if our Father was taking us by the hand into a dark place and saying, "Don't ask any questions, but just follow Me." There was a direct road from Egypt to Canaan, yet Israel was not led into it; but round and round, through the wilderness. And this seemed very hard at the time. "The soul of the people," we are told, "became very discouraged on the way." [Exodus 13:17; Numbers 21:4]

Also, see how often God chastens His people with trial and affliction. He sends them crosses and disappointments; He lays them low with sickness; He strips them of property and friends; He changes them from one position in life to another; He visits them with things that are most difficult to flesh and blood; and some of us have almost fainted under the burdens laid on us. We have felt pressed beyond strength, and have been almost ready to murmur at the hand which chastened us. Paul the Apostle had a thorn in the flesh assigned to him, some bitter bodily trial, no doubt, though we do not know exactly what it was. But this we do know--he pleaded with the Lord three times that it might be removed; yet it was not taken away [2 Corinthians 12:8, 9].

Now, dear friends, despite all these things, did you ever hear of a single child of God who thought his Father did not treat him wisely? No, I am sure you never did. God's children will always tell you, in the long run, it was a blessed thing they did not have their own way, and that God had done far better for them than they could have done for themselves. Yes! And they could tell you, too, that God's dealings had provided more happiness for them than they ever would have obtained themselves, and that His way, however dark at times, was the way of joy and the path of peace.

I ask you to take to heart the lesson which God's dealings with His people is meant to teach you. Do not be afraid to withhold from your child anything you think will do him harm, whatever his own wishes may be. This is God's plan.

Do not hesitate to give him commands, of which he may not presently see the wisdom, and to guide him in ways which may not now seem reasonable to his mind. This is God's plan.

Do not shrink from chastising and correcting him whenever you see his soul's health requires it, however painful it may be to your feelings; and remember medicines for the mind must not be rejected because they are bitter. This is God's plan.

And, above all, do not be afraid that such a plan of training will make your child unhappy. I warn you against this delusion. Depend on it, the road to unhappiness is always having our own way. To have our wills checked and denied is a blessed thing for us; it makes us value enjoyments when they come. To be

perpetually indulged is the way to become selfish; and selfish people and spoiled children, believe me, are seldom happy.

Brethren, do not pretend to be wiser than God--train your children as He trains His.

Hint #14. Train them, remembering continually, the influence of your own example.

Instruction, and advice, and commands will profit little, unless they are backed up by the pattern of your own life. Your children will never believe you are serious, and really wish them to obey you, so long as your actions contradict your instruction. One minister I know, made a wise remark when he said, "To give children good instruction, and a bad example, is the same as pointing out to them the way to heaven, while we take them by the hand and lead them down the road to hell." [Tillotson]

We have no idea of the force and power of example. None of us can live to himself in this world; we are always influencing those around us, in one way or another, either for good or for evil, either for God or for sin. They see our ways, they note our conduct, they observe our behavior, and what they see us do, they assume we think is right. And never, I believe, does example tell so powerfully as it does in the case of parents and children.

Fathers and mothers, do not forget that children learn more by the eye than they do by the ear. No school will ever make such deep marks on character as does the examples found in the home. The best of school teachers will not imprint on your children's minds as much as they will pick up in your living room. Imitation is a far stronger principle with children than memory. What they see has a much stronger effect on their minds than what they are told.

Be careful, then, how you act in front of a child. It is a true adage, "He who sins in front of a child, sins double." Strive to be a living epistle of Christ, so your families can clearly read it. Be an example of reverence for the Word of God, reverence in prayer, reverence at the Lord's Table, reverence for the Lord's day. Be an example in words, in temper, in diligence, in moderation, in faith, in love, in kindness, and in humility. Do not think for a moment that your children will practice what they do not see you do. You are their model, and they will copy what you are. Your reasoning and your lecturing, your wise commands and your good advice; all this they may not understand, but they can understand your life.

Children are very quick observers; very quick in seeing through some kinds of hypocrisy, very quick in finding out what you really think and feel, very quick in adopting all your ways and opinions. You will often discover that, as the father is, so is the son.

Remember the word that the conqueror Caesar always used to his soldiers in a battle. He did not say "Go forward," but "Come." So it must be with you in training your children. They will seldom learn habits which they see you despise, or walk in paths in which you do not walk yourself. He that preaches to his children what he does not practice, is wasting his time. It is like the old fabled web of Penelope, who wove all day, and unwove all night. Even so, the parent who tries to train without setting a good example is building with one hand, and tearing down with the other.

Hint #15. Train them, remembering continually, the power of sin.

You must not expect to find your children's minds a sheet of pure white paper, and to have no trouble if you only use right means. I warn you plainly you will find no such thing. It is painful to see how much corruption and evil there is in a young child's heart, and how soon it begins to bear fruit. Violent tempers,

self-will, pride, envy, irritability, passion, idleness, selfishness, deceit, cunning, lying, hypocrisy, a terrible aptitude to learn what is bad, a painful slowness to learn what is good, a readiness to pretend anything in order to gain their own ends--all these things, or some of them, you must be prepared to see, even in your own flesh and blood. In little ways they will creep out at a very early age; it is almost startling to observe how naturally they seem to spring up. Children require no schooling to learn how to sin.

But you must not be discouraged and depressed by what you see. You must not think it a strange and unusual thing, that little hearts can be so full of sin. It is the only inheritance which our father Adam left us; it is that fallen nature with which we come into the world; it is that inheritance which belongs to us all. May the awareness of it make you more diligent in using every possible means which seem most likely, by God's blessing, to counteract the evil. Let it make you more and more careful, so far it lies with you, to keep your children out of the way of temptation.

Never listen to those who tell you your children are good, and well brought up, and can be trusted. Rather, remember that their hearts are always ready to burst into flame like dry tinder. At their very best, they only need a spark to ignite their evil. Parents are seldom too cautious. Remember the natural depravity of your children, and be careful.

Hint #16. Train them, remembering continually, the promises of Scripture.

This point is meant to guard you against discouragement.

You have an absolute promise on your side, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." [Proverbs 22:6] Think what it is to have such a promise like this. Promises were the only lamp of hope which cheered the hearts of the patriarchs before the Bible was written. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph--all lived on a few promises, and prospered in their souls. Promises are the energizers which in every age have supported and strengthened the believer. He that has a clear text of Scripture on his side need never be depressed. Fathers and mothers, when your hearts are failing, and ready to give up, look at the words of this text, and take comfort.

Think about who it is that promises. It is not the word of a man, who may lie or repent; it is the Word of the King of kings, who never changes. Has He ever said something, and not done it? Or has He ever spoken a promise, that He will not make good? Neither is anything too hard for Him to perform. The things that are impossible with men are possible with God. Oh, my friend, if we do not receive the benefit of the promise we are dwelling upon, then the fault is not in Him, but in ourselves.

Think, too, what the promise contains, before you refuse to take comfort from it. It speaks of a certain time when good training will especially bear fruit--"when he is old." Surely there is comfort in this. You may not see with your own eyes the result of careful training, for you do not know what blessed fruits may spring from it, long after you are dead and gone. It is not God's way to give everything at once. "Later" is the time when He often chooses to work, both in the things of nature and in the things of grace. "Later" is the season when affliction bears the peaceable fruit of righteousness. [Hebrews 12:11] "Later" was the time when the son who refused to work in his father's vineyard repented and went [Matthew 21:29]. And "later" is the time to which parents must look forward to if they do not quickly see success--you must sow in hope and plant in hope.

"Cast your bread upon the waters," says the Spirit, "for after many days you will find it again." [Ecclesiastes 11:1] I do not doubt, that many children, will rise up in the day of judgment, and bless their

parents for good training, who never gave any signs of having profited by it during their parents' lives. Go forward then in faith, and be sure that your labor will not totally be wasted. Three times, Elijah stretch himself upon the widow's child before it revived. Use him as an example and persevere.

Hint #17. Lastly, train them with continual prayer for a blessing on all you do.

Without the blessing of the Lord, your best efforts will do no good. He has the hearts of all men in His hands, and unless He touches the hearts of your children by His Spirit, you will wear yourself out for nothing. Therefore, water the seed you sow in their minds with unceasing prayer. The Lord is far more willing to hear than we are to pray; far more ready to give blessings than we are to ask them--and, oh, how He loves to be petitioned for our children. And I set this matter of prayer before you, as the capstone and seal of all you do. I believe the child of many prayers is seldom cast away.

Look upon your children as Jacob did on his; he tells Esau they are "the children God has graciously given your servant." [Genesis 33:5] Look on them as Joseph did on his; he told his father, "They are the sons God has given me here," [Genesis 48:9] Count them with the Psalmist to be "a heritage from the LORD. . . a reward from Him." [Psalm 127:3] And then ask the Lord, with a holy boldness, to be gracious and merciful to His own gifts. Note how Abraham intercedes for Ishmael, because he loved him, "And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" [Genesis 17:18] See how Manoah speaks to the angel about Samson, saying, "what is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?" [Judges 13:12] Observe how tenderly Job cared for his children's souls, "He would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' This was Job's regular custom." [Job 1:5] Parents, if you love your children, go and do likewise. You cannot name their names before the mercy-seat too often.

And now, friends, in conclusion, let me once more press on you the necessity and importance of using every single means in your power, if you would train children for heaven.

I well know that God is a sovereign God, and does everything according to the counsel of His own will. I know that Rehoboam was the son of Solomon, and Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, and that you do not always see godly parents having a godly offspring. But I also know that God is a God who works by means, and I am sure, that if you ignore the suggestions I have mentioned, then your children are not likely to turn out well.

Fathers and mothers, you may have your children baptized, and have them enrolled as members of the Church--you may send them to the best of schools, and give them Bibles, and fill them with head knowledge but if all this time there is no regular training at home, I tell you plainly, I fear it will go hard in the end with your children's souls. Home is the place where habits are formed--home is the place where the foundations of character are laid--home gives the bias to our tastes and opinions. Be sure, I beg you, that there is careful training at home.

Fathers and mothers, I charge you solemnly before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, make every effort to train your children in the way they should go. I charge you not merely for the sake of your children's souls; I charge you for the sake of your own future comfort and peace. Truly it is your best interest to do so. Truly your own happiness in great measure depends on it. Children have always been the bow from which the sharpest arrows have pierced man's heart. Children have mixed the bitterest cups that man has ever had to drink. Children have caused the saddest tears that man has ever had to shed. Adam could tell you so; Jacob could

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