



Dealing with Sin in Our Children

by Arthur Hildersham

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The doctrine that sin is passed from parents to children serves to exhort and stir us up who are parents to do our uttermost to work grace in our children, and so cure the deadly wound that we have given them, and to preserve them from perishing by that poison and infection that we have conveyed upon them.

To better enforce this necessary exhortation, I will give you certain motives that may provoke us all to this care. The motives are of three sorts:

Some of them respect our children and our duty towards them.

Some of them respect ourselves and our own comfort.

Some of them concern our duty towards God and the respect we should have unto His glory.

I will also show you the means that we must use to this purpose.

The Motives

Motives Respecting Our Children

Of the first sort of motives, there are two principally.

First, our love to our children binds us to it. Nature moves us to love them, and has given bowels of pity and compassion towards them when we see them in any misery. The Lord has been pleased to set forth His mercy and compassion towards His children by the compassion of a mother. Isaiah 49:15: "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" And by the compassion of a father in Psalm 103:13: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." He is worse than a beast who

does not love his children, and does not grieve to see them in misery. Lamentations 4:3: "Even the sea monsters draw out the breast; they give suck to their young ones."

The apostle teaches us in Romans 1:31 that they who are without this natural affection have extinguished in themselves the very light of nature and are, in God's just judgment, given up unto a reprobate mind. And what love can we bear to our children if we have no care for their souls? The nature of true Christianity is to seek the good of their souls whom we love. 1 Corinthians 8:1: "Charity edifieth." See how Abraham expressed his love to Ishmael in Genesis 17:18: "O that Ishmael might live in Thy sight." Thus did Solomon's parents in Proverbs 4:3-4: "I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me and said unto me, 'Let thine heart retain my words; keep my commandments and live.' "

No, this is the only way to express true love to their bodies and their outward estate also. No lands or possessions that we can leave them can give us the assurance that they shall live comfortably in this life as this will do, if we can be a means to breed saving grace in their hearts. 1 Timothy 4:8: "Godliness hath the promises even of this life."

Second, we admit that we are not bound to love them above others, yet we are bound in justice to make amends for the wrong we have done them. There is no man whom we have hurt in body, goods, or good name, but we are bound in conscience to do what we can to make satisfaction to him. See the equity of God's law in this point, Exodus 21:19, "He that smote him shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed." How much more are we bound to take care that our own children may be thoroughly healed of that wound that we have given them in our souls, of that filthy disease that we have infected them with?

Motives Respecting Ourselves

Three motives concern us and our comfort:

First, it will be a matter of singular comfort unto us to see the corruption of their nature healed and saving grace wrought in them, especially if it is by our means. A great comfort to a minister is to see any of his people reformed and won to God by his labors. "Ye are our glory and our joy," said Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:20. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth," said the apostle John in 3 John 4. But it must be much more comfort to a parent to see this in his own child. Solomon said in Proverbs 10:1, "A wise son maketh a glad father." And in Proverbs 23:23-25 he says, "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice, and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him; thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice."

Second, when grace is wrought in them (especially if it is by our means), they will be far more loving and dutiful unto us than otherwise they would be. "A wise son maketh a glad father," said Solomon in Proverbs 15:20. How? By his dutiful and respectful carriage towards him. This is his meaning there, as appears by the last words of the verse, "but a foolish son despiseth his mother." See this in the sons of Isaac. Esau did not care that he grieved his parents by mating with the daughters of Heth, but Jacob did (Genesis 26:34-35 and 27:46). See it also in the sons of Jacob. Of all his sons, Joseph, who had the most grace, was also the most loving and dutiful child to him (Genesis 45:11). This will make a man love him dearly who otherwise was a stranger unto him, if he were the means to win him to God. We see this in the affections of the Galatians towards Paul. Galatians 4:15: "I bear you record that, if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes to have done me good."

Third, and last, this will be a comfortable testimony unto us of the truth and soundness of the grace that is in

us when we are careful to breed grace in all who belong to us, and especially our own children. Without this, we can have no such testimony and assurance of ourselves. Therefore, we shall find this oft observed for a note of them who were soundly converted themselves: their care was to reform their families and make them religious also. There was Abraham in Genesis 18:19; Joshua in Joshua 24:15; Zaccheus in Luke 19:9; the nobleman of Capernaum in John 4:53; Cornelius in Acts 10:2; Lydia in Acts 16:15; the jailer in Acts 16:33-34; and Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, in Acts 18:8. Therefore the Lord in His law forbade any proselyte to be admitted to the Passover (though he was himself circumcised, and outwardly professed the truth) unless all the males in the house were circumcised also, and professed the faith as well as himself (Exodus 12:48). And in the condition of that promise He made to His people for delivering them out of the captivity, which He foretold He would bring them for their sins, He requires not only that they themselves should return to the Lord and obey His voice, but their children also. Deuteronomy 30:2-3: "If thou shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey His voice, thou and thy children, with all thy heart and with all thy soul, then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity."

It is as if He should say, "You do not turn to the Lord yourself unfeignedly, with all your heart, unless your care is that your children may do so also." But, alas, if that law were not in force, that none should be admitted to the Lord's Supper who had any in their family who did not make at least an outward profession of religion, how few communicants would we have? If none may be accounted unfeignedly religious themselves whose children and servants do not live in an outward conformity and obedience to the Word, how few sound-hearted Christians will there be found in this age?

Motives Respecting Our Duty to God

The last sort of motives concern our duty to God and the respect we should have unto His glory:

The first motive is the trust that the Lord has put us in and the charge that He has given us concerning our children. For we must know that our children are not our own but the Lord's (I speak to such as are God's people and members of His church). Thus did the Lord speak to His people in Ezekiel 16:20: "Thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto Me, thou hast taken and sacrificed." And as we have begotten and borne them for Him, so He has charged us to educate and bring them up for Him. That is such a charge as the prophet tells Ahab in a parable, that he had received for the keeping of a man committed to his trust in the battle. 1 Kings 20:39: "If by any means he be missing, thy life shall be for his life."

If the child's soul perishes (through the parent's default, whom God put in trust to keep and look to it), the parent's soul must die for it. For this is the righteous sentence of God against them whom he has charged with the souls of others. Ezekiel 3:18: "He shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand." If anyone objects that this is spoken of the charge God has given to prophets and ministers concerning their flocks, not of that which He has given to parents concerning their children, I answer that every parent is as deeply charged by God with the souls of his children as any pastor is with the souls of his flock, and more deeply too.

You call the congregations that we pastors are set over our "charge." And you say well, for so they are; and you can cry shame on us if we, either by idleness or worldliness, show ourselves careless of our charge, and you have indeed just cause to do so. But in the meantime, you forget that your children and family are your charge also. You make no scruple of neglecting all duty, all care, of the souls of your own charge.

Know therefore for certain that you are as much, yea much more, charged with the souls of your families, and of your children especially, than any pastor is with the souls of his flock. And hearken to your charge, I pray you.

You are as often and as expressly charged to use the means to save your children's souls, and to breed grace in them, as any minister is. Exodus 13:8: "Thou shalt show thy son" the meaning, the end, and the use of the Sacrament of the Passover. Deuteronomy 6:6-7: "These words which I command thee this day, thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children." Psalm 78:5: "He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a Law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known unto their children." Ephesians 6:4: "Fathers, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." No minister is more straitly charged of God to teach and catechize his flock than you are to instruct your children.

Parents stand obliged to their children by more and stronger bonds than any pastor can be to his flock, as we have heard in the first sort of motives. Parents have more means and opportunities to prevail with their children than any pastor can have to do good upon his flock. The interest they have in their children's love and affection is a great matter; so is the advantage they may take of their children's tender years; so is their continual conversing with them, and so is their authority also. None have such opportunities to instruct and bring others to goodness as parents have.

This was what good Hezekiah meant in his prayer in Isaiah 38:18-19: "The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee. The living, the living he shall praise thee (and who among all the living?) the father to the children shall make known thy truth." In this respect we have seen, in those eight examples I mentioned unto you, how soon godly masters of families have prevailed with all

who were under them to bring them to an outward profession and conformity in religion.

Joshua is bold (Joshua 24:15) to undertake for himself and his house that they shall serve the Lord. Some might have said to him, "Joshua, speak this for yourself, and that will be well enough."

"No," said he, and that before all the people. "I will undertake this also for my whole house."

And in this respect also it is that the children's sins are said to be a blemish and reproach to the parents in Proverbs 28:7. Yes, the Lord often imputes the sins of the children unto the parents and lays them to their charge (see 2 Chronicles 22:3). Ahaziah was a wicked man, for Athaliah was his mother. And the apostle commands that such should only be admitted to the ministry who "govern well their own houses and keep their children in subjection" (1 Timothy 3:4-5), such "as have faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly" (Titus 1:6); which he would not have done if parents were not chargeable with their children's sins, if they were not a chief cause of them, if it does not lay greatly in their power to prevent the ungraciousness of children.

Let us all who are parents seriously think of this motive, namely, how God has charged us with our children's souls, and consider that it will be a most heavy reckoning that we must make unto God for them if any of them shall perish through our default. On the other hand, it will be a matter of unspeakable comfort to us at that day if we can say of our children unto the Lord, as our blessed Savior speaks in John 17:12: "Those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost."

The second motive that concerns the Lord and His glory is that the hope of God's church and the propagation of religion unto posterity depends principally upon parents taking care to make their children religious. All who fear and love the Lord should unfeignedly desire and

endeavor to provide for the continuance of religion, and for the deriving of it unto posterity; especially that the true church and religion of God may continue in their own posterity. See a noble example of this care in the two tribes and the half, who had their possessions given them beyond Jordan. Joshua 22:23–25: “We have built us an altar . . . for fear of this thing, saying, ‘In time to come your children might speak unto our children, saying, “What have ye to do with the Lord God of Israel?” . . . So shall your children make our children cease from fearing the Lord.” Concerning this you must understand that there is no man who desires to have a posterity and to provide for a posterity as much as the Lord does. And as it is counted a great honor to a man to have a great posterity (Proverbs 17:6: “Children’s children are the crown of old men.”), so is this spoken of as a great honor to Christ, that He shall have a great posterity. Isaiah 53:8: “Who shall declare His generation?” And verse 10: “When thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed.”

Surely this is the means whereby the Lord may have a seed and posterity raised and preserved. This is the means to derive religion unto posterity, when parents are not only religious themselves, but are careful to provide that their children may be also. This is the seminary of God’s church. This was the cause of that commandment in Deuteronomy 4:9: “Take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them thy sons, and thy son’s sons.”

This is noted by the prophet in Malachi 2:15 to have been the cause why the Lord, at the first institution of marriage, appointed but one woman for one man, and so restrained promiscuous lust: “that he might seek a seed of God,” that is, that He might provide for the continuance of His church. This is made by the prophet (Psalm 22:29–30) as one principal end God has respect unto in convert-

ing us Gentiles unto the gospel, and men of all sorts among us, poor and rich: "that our seed might serve Him and might be accounted unto the Lord for a generation"—that God might have a posterity and a people to serve Him when we are gone.

So, to conclude the motives, if we either respect our children, our own comfort, or the glory of God, we must be careful to do our best endeavor that the corruption of nature that we have conveyed unto them may be healed, and that saving grace may be wrought in their hearts.

The Means

We proceed to the means that God has, in His Word, directed parents to use for the saving of their children's souls. And those are five:

1. If we desire to save our children and heal their natures, we must be careful to maintain that authority and preeminence that God has given us over them. We must take heed we do not lose that honor and reverence that is due to us from our children. It is certain that, by the will of God, and even by the law of nature, there is an honor and inward reverence of heart due from the child to every parent, be the parent never so poor, never so full of weakness and infirmities. You know that in the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12) this is made the sum of all the duties the child owes to his parents: "Honor thy father and thy mother," because this is the chief duty of all others. Yes, this is the root and fountain of all other duties a child can perform. If he does not in his heart honor and reverence them, he can do no duty to them well. "A son honoreth his father," said the Lord in Malachi 1:6. "If I be a father, where is Mine honor?" And Deuteronomy 27:16: "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or mother." It is not sufficient for a child to love his parents, but he

must also (out of this inward reverence and honor he bears them in his heart) stand in awe of them and be afraid to offend them. Leviticus 19:3: "Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father." See how fearful Jacob was to grieve or offend his father, though he was an old, blind man. Genesis 27:12: "My father will peradventure feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver, and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing."

It is no marvel that this honor and reverence is due to our parents; for our parents, by being the means and instruments of our being, are unto us in God's stead and (as His lieutenants) have had His power communicated unto them (for He only is properly and absolutely our Father, and the Author of our being). And, in this respect, that which the apostle speaks of husbands in 1 Corinthians 11:7, and so of all superiors, may be said of them: they bear the image and glory of God. In honoring the, we honor God; in despising them we despise the Lord.

Now this authority and pre-eminence that God has given us over our children, we must be careful to maintain. We must take heed that we do not lose this honor and inward reverence that is due unto us from them. The Lord requires of a minister towards his flock (Titus 2:15) that he should "speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority, and see that no man despise him." He should take heed that he does not by his looseness, either in life or in doctrine, lose his honor and authority in the hearts of his people; for if he does, there will be little hope that his doctrine shall ever do good, be his gifts never so excellent. That is every whit as much required of parents towards their children, and to every parent the Lord likewise says, "Maintain your authority; take heed that your children do not despise you."

We shall find it noted by the apostle in 1 Timothy 3:4 to be a great blemish in a Christian, and such a one as (be his gifts otherwise never so excellent) makes him inca-

pable of the honor of the ministry, if he cannot rule in his own house, if he does not keep his children in subjection. Every father must be a ruler in his own house, and every child must be kept in subjection.

Our blessed Savior was subject unto His parents (Luke 2:51). Yet His father, Joseph, was but a poor carpenter, and his mother so poor that she could get no better room in Bethlehem than a stable to be brought to bed in. It is not sufficient for you who are parents to advise and wish and admonish your children to leave any lewd course you see them to hold. Eli did this much in 1 Samuel 2:23–24, and yet we know God was highly offended with him because he did not do enough. Parents must do more than this; they must with authority charge, command, and compel them to do it. “I know,” said the Lord of Abraham in Genesis 18:19, “that he will command his children to keep the way of the Lord.” And Deuteronomy 32:46: “Ye shall command your children to observe and do all the words of this law.” The apostle “charged every one of you as a father doth his children” (1 Thessalonians 2:11).

If parents do not maintain this authority, as certainly many have not done nowadays, they shall dishonor their head, as the apostle says in 1 Corinthians 11:4. The dishonor and contempt reaches unto God, whose image they bear and whose person they represent. They also undo their children and disable them from profiting by any means they shall use for reforming them or saving their souls.

OBJECTION. “Surely it would be an excellent thing,” you will say, “if parents could maintain their authority and honor in the hearts of their children; but how may this be done? This is such an age as there is little or no possibility of it!”

ANSWER. It is true that sometimes, through the just judgment of God, parents do what they can and yet children are stubborn and rebellious, sons of Belial who will

bear no yoke. It is foretold by the Holy Ghost in 2 Timothy 3:2 as one of the chief mischiefs and diseases that will reign and rage in these last days, and what will make the times so perilous, that men will be disobedient to parents. It cannot be avoided; it must be so, so that the Scriptures may be fulfilled. And it is foretold as a sign and forerunner that presages the ruin of a state and nation. Isaiah 3:5: "The child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable." Yet it is also certain that parents themselves are, for the most part, the cause why they have no more honor and reverence in the hearts of their children when they do not maintain, but rather lose the authority that God has given them over His children. And that happens in two ways:

First, because they do not themselves honor and fear God; therefore, their children cannot honor or fear them. Solomon, by the Spirit, tells us in Proverbs 11:16 "that a gracious woman retaineth honor." And that which is there said of a woman, even of a mother, may likewise be said of a gracious father: he retains honor. The true fear of God will procure reverence and esteem to a man, even in the hearts of such as have no grace in them. Mark 6:20: "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy, and he observed him." For this image of God carries such a majesty in it that a man cannot choose but to honor it in whomever he sees it. It is called therefore by the apostle, "the spirit of glory" (1 Peter 4:14). Besides, the Lord has bound Himself by promise to give honor to those who honor Him. 1 Samuel 2:30: "Them that honor Me, I will honor." Our Savior said in John 12:26, "If any man serves Me, him will My Father honor." Certainly, if parents fear and honor God in their hearts, and express it in their whole conversation, their children must honor them. They could not despise them. On the other hand, if parents do not fear God themselves, their children cannot honor them.

If children see their parents as irreligious, malicious against religion, filthy and drunken persons, how can they honor them? I know they should be unwilling to see any such thing in their parents. They should, with Seth and Japheth, cast their mantle over them, but it is not possible for them to do it. That which is said of Jerusalem may be said of all men: "All that honored her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness" (Lamentations 1:8). They who thus see the nakedness of those who by nature they ought most to honor, cannot choose but to despise them. I told you, all parents bear the image of God; but these soul-sins deface it so that men can discern no glory in it; men cannot honor it. God has said, "They that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30). And when God will have men to be despised, when He pours contempt upon them, when He says of any as He does of Nineveh in Nahum 3:6, "I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile"—who can then honor them in their hearts? This is one cause why most parents have no reverence in their children's hearts.

Second, another reason is because they neglected to keep their children in awe when they were young. They laid the reins upon their backs; they did not correct them, but pampered them in their tender years. "The fathers of our flesh corrected us, and we gave them reverence" (Hebrews 12:9). It is as if the apostle had said, "If they had not corrected us, we would not have revered them so much." And it is expressly noted that this is the reason why David lost his honor in the heart of his son Adoniah. 1 Kings 1:6: "His father had not displeased him at any time, not so much as in saying, 'Why hast thou done so?'"

I grant that those parents govern best who can maintain their authority and keep their children in awe with little or no sharpness or severity; and many parents are too apt to offend by being too harsh this way. Otherwise the apostle would not have given this charge twice unto par-

ents in Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21: "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; exasperate them not." But it is also certain that the best children, when they are young, are of a servile disposition, more moved with fear than love. The best man's heir, "as long as he is a child," says the apostle in Galatians 4:1, "differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all." And Solomon observes in Proverbs 29:19 that "a servant will not be corrected by words."

No parent may hope to weaken and destroy the corruption that is in his child's heart, though he teaches him never so well and uses all the allurements he can to draw him to goodness, if he does not also correct him and use the rod sometimes. The Lord Himself, who is both the wisest and the best Father, and who loves his children a thousand times more than any of us can love ours, takes this course with His children; yes, in this way He gives Himself as a model for all wise parents. Deuteronomy 8:5: "Consider in thine heart that as a father chasteneth his son, so the Lord God chasteneth thee." Hebrews 12:6-7: "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

This is a special means commended unto us by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to this end, even to abate the strength of natural corruption in children and to make them capable of saving. Therefore it is to be observed in the law that no child was to be reputed graceless and past hope until he had showed himself not only unteachable, but incorrigible also; until his parents had used means to reform him not only by counsel, instruction, and reproof, but by correcting and chastisement also, and all in vain; who would not obey the voice of his father nor the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not listen unto them (Deuteronomy 21:18). "He that

spareth the rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Proverbs 13:24).

OBJECTION. You say, "It is nothing but love that makes me bear with my child. Would you not have me love my child? Alas, who could find it in their heart to beat so sweet a child?"

ANSWER. But the Holy Ghost says that you lie! It is not love; indeed, it is hatred! We do not love our children, rather we hate them if we do not correct them speedily while they are such pretty young ones. Proverbs 19:18: "Chasten thy son while there is hope." That is, while he is young, there is great hope of doing him good by it, and small hope afterwards if it is neglected then.

OBJECTION. "Oh, but I cannot endure to hear him cry!"

ANSWER. But what does the Holy Ghost say in the next words? "And let not thy soul spare for his crying." It is a strange thing to observe how the Holy Ghost speaks of the efficacy and fruits of this, and how He meets with all excuses that foolish parents are wont to pretend for the neglect of it. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15).

OBJECTION. "But would you have me be cruel to my own child?"

ANSWER. The Holy Ghost says that this is not cruelty. You are unmerciful to your child if you do not correct him! Proverbs 23:13: "Withhold not correction from thy child, for if thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die." He will die, he will perish, if you do not correct him; and are you not cruel if you will not do what you can to keep your child from perishing?

OBJECTION. "Oh, but children's faults are nothing. Their stubbornness, lying, cursing swearing, and profanity are nothing!"

ANSWER. But what does the Holy Ghost say? Proverbs

23:14: "Thou shalt beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from hell." He will go to hell if you let him do what he wants to do. You may keep him from hell by correcting him.

OBJECTION. "Oh, but this is the way to make my child hate me, yes, and to make him a dunce, so that I will never have comfort of him."

ANSWER. No, says the Holy Ghost, there is no such danger in it. Proverbs 29:17: "Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest, yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul."

To conclude this first means, oh, that parents would see their sin in the neglect of this! They lose that inward honor, reverence, and subjection also that their children owe unto them. They spoil and undo their children, and make themselves the authors of all the ungraciousness. For the best-natured child in the world, if he is not kept in awe, if he is allowed to do what he will, must run to riot. Proverbs 29:15: "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." Yes, and his father, too; though the mother only is there named because she, usually, is most to blame for this kind. Parents dishonor God and quite pervert His ordinance. For whereas, by God's ordinance, their children should honor them, they honor their children, as the Lord told Eli in 1 Samuel 2:29: "Thou honor-est thy sons above Me." And whereas, by God's ordinance, their children should fear them and be afraid to displease them, they are afraid to displease their children, as the Holy Ghost said of David in 1 Kings 1:6. He dared not displease his son Adoniah, not so much as with a cross word, or "by saying unto him, Why hast thou done so?"

2. The second means all parents must use to destroy corruption of nature in their children, and to breed grace in them, is instruction. We heard in the motives that parents are as expressly and as often and as straitly charged by God to teach their children as any minister is to teach his flock. Yes, this domestic and parental instruction God has

appointed and sanctified for a special means to propagate religion, to restrain and weaken the corruption of nature, and to prepare the heart and make it more capable of grace. We heard that speech of Hezekiah's in Isaiah 38:19: "The living, the living he shall praise Thee, as I do this day, the father to the children shall make known Thy truth."

FOUR WAYS PARENTS CAN MAKE GOD'S TRUTH KNOWN

There are four ways whereby you that are parents may, yea must, do this.

1. Teach them soon to know God, to know what is good and what is evil; teach them a few of the first and easiest principles of religion while they are very young, as soon as they discover any capacity or understanding, as they will do if you observe it. Solomon said that when he was young and tender, "his father taught him" (Proverbs 4:3-4). His mother did too (Proverbs 31:1). And he often put God's people in mind not only of the instruction and charge they received from their fathers, but also of the law or doctrine of their mothers (Proverbs 1:8, 6:20), which plainly shows that it was the practice of God's church then that even mothers were teachers of their children. Even when they were very young and under their government, they were wont to teach them good things.

There is an expressed commandment not only that we should teach our children, but that we should teach them even when they are very young. "Teach a child in his way," said Solomon in Proverbs 22:6; that is, by way that is fit for him, according to his capacity, according as he is able to receive it; a little at a time, as you pour liquor into narrow-mouthed bottles. As you do when you first begin to feed their bodies with a spoon, so you must do when you first begin to feed their soul with instruction.

2. You must quickly acquaint them with the practice of

religion, like reading the Word, prayer, and giving thanks at their mealtimes, with singing of psalms. We find in Matthew 21:15 that the little children had learned from their parents to sing Hosanna, which was a part of Psalm 118, to the praise of Christ. Yes, more than this, parents should endeavor to restrain their children from evil and to breed in them a conscience of sin even while they are very young. You know the fourth commandment enjoins us that not only ourselves, but also our children are to refrain from all work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10). Ezekiel professed unto God that from his childhood (his infancy, as some read it) he had not eaten anything that God's law had forbidden (Ezekiel 4:14). His parents taught him even then to make conscience of it. Parents therefore must join instruction with corrections so that they may breed in their children a knowledge and conscience of the sin for which they correct them. "Reproofs for instruction are the way of life" (Proverbs 6:23). Without instruction, correction will do little good; and one fault amended by a child out of conscience that it is a sin is worth amending a hundred by the rod only. That which David said of God's corrections may be fitly applied to this: "Blessed is the man who Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law" (Psalm 94:12). Few or none are the better even for the Lord's rods if they are corrected only by Him, and are not instructed also.

3. You must bring them with you to the church to the public worship of God quickly, even while they are very young, as soon as they can come and be there without disturbing the congregation, so that they may be acquainted with God's worship and ordinances soon. Moses told Pharaoh in Exodus 10:9 that they must have their little ones with them to the solemn worship they were to do unto God in the wilderness, and would not accept liberty for all the rest unless they might have their little ones with them. And when Joshua, according to God's command-

ment, read the law of God solemnly to the congregation of Israel (Joshua 8:35), they had their little ones with them in that solemn assembly. When Christ was preaching in the congregation, the people brought their little children unto Him (Matthew 19:13) so that their little ones might have the benefit of His prayers.

4. You who are parents must examine your children as to how they profit by the means of grace. You must test them as to how they understand what they hear. Repeat it and make it more plain to them, and, in repeating it, apply it also. Moses required the people in Deuteronomy 6:7 to teach that to their children which they heard from Him.

They might have objected, "What need is there for that, seeing they are present in the congregation, and heard what was taught as well as we did?"

Yes, but you must teach it to them again in spite of all that, more plainly and more familiarly. "Teach these things diligently to your children," Moses said. Yea, whet and sharpen them upon your children (for so the word signifies); that is, so repeat and make things plain to them that you may apply them also and labor to bring them to some feeling and conscience of that which is taught to them.

Oh, how would religion flourish! How would knowledge and grace grow in your children, if you who are parents would thus do your duty, if you would be teachers as well as we, and lay your helping hand to this work! The best ministry in the world will do little good while you hang off and do nothing.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

There are objections that some parents are apt to make against this teaching:

OBJECTION. "It is an absurd thing to teach children religion, for them to meddle with the Scriptures, or for them to be taught either to say their catechism, prayers, or grace. A parrot may as well be taught these things as a little child. Alas, they have no capacity to understand and be sensible of such matters! And therefore it is but taking God's name in vain to teach them such things!"

ANSWER. Indeed, this has always been the thinking of carnal men. Pharaoh could not abide to hear Moses say that they must have their little ones with them to serve God (Exodus 10:10). In Matthew 21:15, when the high priest and scribes heard the little children meddle with the Psalms and sing Hosannas, "they were sore displeased." Yea, even the disciples themselves did not understand (Mark 10:13). They were like carnal men in this, as appears by the rebuke they received for it from their Master in verse 14: "He was much displeased with them for it." When they saw men bringing their children to Christ, they rebuked them for it; but this is only a carnal conceit, as shall appear by these three things:

First, children, when they are very young, are capable of the seeds and beginnings of regeneration and saving grace. See a notable proof for this in the example of John the Baptist. Luke 1:44: "As soon as the voice of thy salvation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy," said his mother to Mary. There were certainly in that baby the seeds and beginnings of saving knowledge and faith, of saving grace in both his understanding and in his will and affections also.

OBJECTION. "But that case was extraordinary and miraculous."

I will grant that it was so indeed, yet it is to the purpose

in spite of that. For it shows that the youngest infant is not incapable of saving grace, but that God is able even to work it in them. And this should encourage us to use all the means we can to breed grace in them quickly, because we do not know how soon God may be pleased to work with the means and bless them unto them. Ecclesiastes 11:6: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper either this or that."

But there are other examples to prove that this is not so extraordinary, as the case of John the Baptist was.

For saving knowledge we have the apostle's testimony of Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15, that he had known the Holy Scriptures from his childhood, yea, from his infancy, as the word properly signifies. As for the seeds and beginnings of holy affections, see them in the little children of God's people at Tyre (Acts 21:5). They showed their love for the apostle, and went with their parents to bring him on his way to the seashore. As for conscience of sin and a fear of offending God, see it in Daniel 1:8: "He resolved with himself that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine that he drank." And if you consider how long he lived after this (in the reign of four kings: Nebuchadnezzar, Evilmerodach, Belshazzar, and Darius), it will plainly appear that he was very young when he made this conscience of sin.

Second, childhood is the fittest age of all to be wrought upon this way. Children, of all others, are the fittest to have the seeds and beginnings of saving grace wrought in them. That which the prophet said by way of exprobatation to the Jews may be fitly applied to this purpose. Isaiah 28:9: "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts." They are not indeed fit to feed themselves, nor capable of strong meat, but they are the most fit of all others to be

fed and dieted by others, to be fed with milk. That is a comparison the apostle uses twice (1 Corinthians 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12).

Your children, while they are young, are like soft wax: soft enough to receive any impression. They are like little twigs which you may bend and bow any which way you want to. There is not in them that stubbornness, that spirit of contradiction, neither in their reason or will, to oppose and reason against good things, as you shall find in them of more years. In this respect, our Savior tells us in Mark 10:15, we must all be like unto them: "Verily, I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

Third, suppose that I admit that your children have no understanding at all, no feeling of the good things you teach them while they are so young, admit no seeds, no beginnings of grace are wrought in them thereby. Will that which you teach them do them good afterwards and prepare and make them more fit to receive good by the ordinary means of grace afterwards when they shall come to more understanding and discretion? We baptize our children when they are infants, though they have for the present no feeling nor understanding of it. It is twice noted of our Savior's disciples (John 2:22 and 12:16) that the things which they understood not a whit of when Christ first taught them did them a great deal of good afterwards. The same is noted also of the disciples of John (John 10:41). And parents may well think they have not lost their labor, but done a good and blessed work, if they have by their teaching prepared their children to receive good by the public ministry of the Word.

OBJECTION. "I admit that children, by the teaching they have, may attain to some beginnings of knowledge and grace; yet no heed is to be taken of the good things that are in children, for they will quickly lose all again. Many a young saint has proved to be an old devil."

ANSWER. I answer with the words of our Savior to the Sadducees (for they are certainly little better than Sadducees and atheists who say or think this way). Matthew 22:29: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, and the power of God."

First, the Scripture teaches us that a great guess may be made what our children will prove when they grow in years by observing well their disposition when they are young. Proverbs 20:11: "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure or whether it be right." For then they cannot dissemble, but will more freely discover their inclinations—and then they will do this when they are grown in years. As experience has proved in a number of lewd men our old proverb to be true—"Soon it pricks, that thorn will be"—they discovered when they were young a most ungracious disposition; so it has also proved this true of many worthy men that the great towardness and inclinations unto good that appeared in them while they were very young presaged what they would prove afterwards. And parents shall do well to observe that not only may they know thereby what callings to fit and prepare their children for, but also what vices they should chiefly labor to prevent in them, and what good things above others they should principally nourish in them.

Second, Scripture teaches us that by teaching our children good things while they are young, they will be made the better while they live. Proverbs 22:6: "Teach a child in his way, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Experience in all ages has confirmed that as a casket will long keep the savor of that liquor it was first seasoned with, so men keep the instructions they have learned in their childhood. The seeds of knowledge and grace which were sown in Moses' heart by his mother while she nursed him (Exodus 2:9-10) could never be gotten out of him by all the pleasures, honors, and examples he had in Pharaoh's court.

Third, the Scripture teaches us that, though some who have been negligent in their childhood have proved most lewd (and so it has been with men, too, as well as children), yet the worthiest men, and such as have done God most excellent service, began to be gracious and good quickly, even in their childhood. Many such examples we have: Joseph, Moses, Obadiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Timothy, and many more. Those who proved to be such excellent saints when they were old were saints when they were young. On the other hand, we find by experience that the most of them who are old devils in their age were also young devils in their childhood, and showed much ungraciousness even when they were very young.

You must instruct your children early, even while they are very young.

3. The third means is a good example. You who are parents must be careful to give a good example to your children. Cause it to appear to them in your whole conversation that you unfeignedly fear God and love good things. See three notable principles and examples of this care. Of Abraham God gives this testimony in Genesis 18:19, that "He knew him, that he would command his sons, and his house after him, to keep the way of the Lord." He would go before them himself in that way. We see it in Joshua. "Me and my house will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). We see it in David: "I will walk in the uprightness of mine heart, in the midst of mine house" (Psalm 101:2). Without this, neither your commandments, your correction, or your instruction will do them any good.

Therefore Paul requires this even of Timothy and Titus, men of such rare and extraordinary gifts, to see that they gave good example as well as good teaching. It is as if he had said, "You shall hardly do good to the people by your doctrine if they do not discern in your lives that you believe and make conscience of that which you teach, and

then persuade others to it.”

On the other hand, there is a great force in example to draw others either to do good or evil. See the force of a good example even in an inferior, especially such a one as we love. 1 Peter 3:1: “They that obey not the word may without the word be won by the good conversation of their wives.” And the example of a superior, of one whom we not only love, but reverence in our hearts, is of more force than any inferiors can be. The apostle says in Galatians 2:14 that Peter, by his example, “compelled the Gentiles to do as the Jews did.” But domestic examples, especially the example of parents, is of more force with their children to do them either good or harm than all other examples are.

See the force it has to draw our children to goodness, at least in outward conformity, in three notable examples. It is said of Amaziah, King of Judah, in 2 Kings 14:3: “He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father; he did according to all things as Joash his father did.” And it is said of Azariah (or Uzziah) his son, in 2 Kings 15:3: “He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Amaziah his father had done.” It is said of Jotham, his son, in 2 Kings 15:34: “He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Uzziah his father had done.”

On the other hand, see the force that the parents’ example has to corrupt their children in three other examples. The first is of Zachariah, the king of Israel, of whom it is said in 2 Kings 15:9: “He did evil in the sight of the Lord as his father had done; he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam.” He would be of his father’s religion. The second is that of the Samaritans, of whom it is said in 2 Kings 17:41: “These nations feared the Lord (made some profession of the true religion as the ten tribes had done) and served their graven images too, both their children and their children’s children” did this; “as did

their fathers, so do they unto this day." The example of their fathers drew them into idolatry, and rooted them in it. The third example is of the kingdom and church of Judah, of which we read in Jeremiah 17:1-2 that the main reason why they were so settled in their idolatry, so that there was no hope of reclaiming them, is that it was "graven upon the table of their heart, as with a pen of iron, or with the point of a diamond." The reason for it, I say, is rendered to be this, that "their children remembered their altars, and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills."

And certainly it is so in these days. A chief cause why profaneness and impiety so cleave to the hearts of most men, so that no means are powerful enough to reclaim them, is the evil example of their parents. Oh, think of this, you who are parents; and if nothing else will reclaim you from lewdness and make you careful to take heed to your ways, let your love to your children do it so that you may not corrupt them by your evil example. Is it not wrong enough what you have done to them by conveying into them so corrupt and cursed a nature, but will you also, by your evil example, make them twofold more the children of hell than they are by nature?

4. The fourth means parents must use for the saving of their children's souls is to take heed how they dispose of them when they leave the home. Every true Christian will be careful not to placing himself where he shall lack the means of grace, but resolves with David in Psalm 23:6: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." So in placing his children, a parent will be careful that he does so also.

Parents must take heed what schoolmasters and tutors they send them to, what service and what marriages they place them in. The Apostle Paul reports in Acts 22:3 that he was sent by his parents to Jerusalem, the best school, the best university, the best college, and to Gamaliel, the

best teacher, the best tutor there, where he was "taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers," and learned to be zealous towards God.

As for services, it is threatened as a great curse to God's people that their children should serve the greatest nobleman, yea, the greatest prince in the world, if he is a wicked man and enemy to God; yes, though they serve him in the highest offices that may be. The Lord said to Hezekiah: "Thy sons that shall issue from thee shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isaiah 39:7).

For marriages, we see the care of Abraham first (Genesis 24:3-4), and of Rebecca afterwards (Genesis 27:46), that their children might by no means be matched with Canaanites. Certainly, in this point, most parents evidently betray that they have no care at all for their children's souls. In placing their children in any of these three things, they aim at nothing but that they may get that which may make them able to live, and live in credit; but as for living under the means of grace, for living so that they may live eternally, they have no respect at all unto this. Whereby they show themselves to be "wholly sensual, not having the Spirit," as the apostle says in Jude 19.

5. The fifth and last means, without which all the former are to no purpose, is prayer. Parents must be earnest with God in prayer for their children. Solomon's mother called him the "son of her vows" (Proverbs 31:2). She had been wont to pray much for him. Parents should not only use these means, but pray earnestly to God to give them wisdom to know what they may do to destroy corruption and breed grace in their children. They should pray as Manoah did in Judges 13:8: "Lord, teach me what I shall do to the child that Thou hast given me." We should do as the woman of Canaan did, complain to God of the corruption that is in our children's natures, and desire Him to

heal it. "Have mercy on me, O Lord," she said in Matthew 15:22, "my child is miserably vexed with a devil." And as Job offered sacrifice daily for them in Job 1:5, we should pray daily for them, that God would forgive them their sins.

Now, to conclude all this that I have said touching the means that parents are to use to restrain and weaken that corruption in their children which they have infected them with, and breed grace in them. I cannot assure you that if you use these means you shall see the effect and fruit of them in every one of your children; for you may justly object that many parents who have been as careful as is possible in the use of these means have had as ungracious children as any others; for the Lord is the God of all grace, and the only Author of it (1 Peter 5:10), and He gives success and fruit to all means thereof (1 Corinthians 3:6). He works herein most freely, according to the good purpose of His own will, "as the wind bloweth where it listeth" (John 3:8). Romans 9:18: "He hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth."

Yet I have two things to say for your encouragement and comfort who are Christian parents.

None have more cause to expect and, with patience, to wait for a blessing from God in the use of the means of grace towards any than you have towards your children because of the promises God made to you concerning your children (see Genesis 17:7; Psalm 22:29-30; and Isaiah 44:3). The fruit of your labor may appear hereafter, though it does not yet, as experience has proved in many good men's children who for a long time lived most ungraciously.

Admit that, though God may never be pleased to vouchsafe a blessing to you in your labors with your children, yet shall your labors, and the fruit of them, rebound into your own bosom (Psalm 35:13). For you highly please God in doing your duty, and He accepts your work never-

theless (Isaiah 49:4 and 2 Corinthians 8:12), which will yield you unspeakable comfort (2 Corinthians 1:12). You have hereby delivered your own souls, so that the sins and damnation of your ungracious children shall never be imputed to you.

