

## SERMON XXIX.

### DUTY OF PARENTS.

EPHES. vi. 4.

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

It is the observation of Solomon, that if you train up a child in the way wherein he should go, he will not depart from it when he is old ; and a celebrated countryman of our own expresses his opinion, “ that of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education.”<sup>a</sup> Sometimes indeed even those who have been well brought up, disappoint the hopes of their friends ; while others, whose education has been neglected, are, by the grace and good providence of God, led into the paths of true religion. Generally speaking, however, the observation above quoted holds good ; it is generally true, that men are made what they are by education. If they have been well brought up by sensible and pious parents, they are usually a comfort and joy to their friends, and an ornament to society ; and when they quit this world, they quit it with a well-grounded hope of future happiness through the merits of their Redeemer. If their

<sup>a</sup> Locke.

education has been neglected, and they have been left to the influence of their own bad passions and appetites, and to that of an evil world, they generally become a reproach to their parents, and a nuisance to those among whom they dwell ; and are perhaps tempted to curse the hour in which they were born.

Such being my conviction of the importance of a right education, I am anxious to give what assistance I can to such parents, as have not as yet thought much upon this subject. I trust that you will attend seriously to what I say. Reflect, that your children—those little creatures which you now fondle in your arms, or see gaily playing about you—are all heirs of immortality. The *being*, which they have now received through you, will never end. They will—they *must*—live for ever either in happiness or in misery. They must be for ever either with the holy angels and saints of God in heaven, or the miserable companions of devils in hell. Can you think of this without being very desirous to do what you can to work out their salvation ? Reflect too that your children, amiable and pleasing as they now seem, yet inherit from you a nature prone to evil. They have come into the world with passions, and appetites, and desires, which, if not corrected, will certainly lead them to destruction. The great corrector and restrainer of the evil tendencies of their nature, is the preventing and assisting grace of God, for which you must earnestly and constantly pray. But then you must endeavour to work together with that grace, and do what you can yourselves to train them up in the way wherein they should go,<sup>b</sup>—to “ bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”<sup>c</sup> The meaning of these expressions is, that you

<sup>b</sup> Prov. xxii. 6.

<sup>c</sup> Eph. vi. 4.

should bring them up in the habitual practice of all the duties of the religion of Christ, and, as their understandings open, in the knowledge and belief of its doctrines.

But while it is your wish to accustom them to have respect unto *all* God's commandments without exception, there are some particular instances of duty which require your especial attention.

In the first place, bring them up in the habit of *obedience* to your authority. This is one of their leading obligations when they come to the use of their reason: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right."<sup>d</sup>—"Obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord."<sup>e</sup> Endeavour to accustom them to it from their earliest years. Even before they are able to speak, children show that they have a will of their own. We often see little creatures of two or three years old expecting every one in the family to do their pleasure; their parents, and brothers and sisters, partly from mistaken fondness, partly to avoid trouble, and partly for amusement, encourage them perhaps in their wilfulness. But by so doing they are laying up in store much future uneasiness for themselves, and for the objects of their indulgence. I do not wish parents to thwart the wishes of their children without cause, or needlessly to find fault with them. But whenever there is good reason for it, they must assert their authority—kindly indeed, but firmly and steadily. Never suffer a child to obtain by crying, any thing which you think improper for it. When it is very young, you may divert its attention from the forbidden object; if, after withholding it, you give way in consequence of the child's noise and clamour, it gains a victory over you, which will be most mischievous in its

<sup>d</sup> Ephes. vi. 1.

<sup>e</sup> Col. iii. 20.

consequences. You teach the child to think that it can at any future time gain its object by crying, and strengthen its wilfulness and disposition to passion. As the child advances in understanding, you may accustom it to give up what it wishes for from a principle of obedience, even though the forbidden object may happen to continue in its sight. This will contribute to lay the foundation of that self-denial, which is so necessary through life.

Occasionally it may be necessary to support your authority by actual *punishment*. Punishment must always be painful to a parent, and you will employ it as seldom as possible. The necessity of it may be in a great measure prevented by the steadiness, and kindness of behaviour, which I have been recommending. When it is *necessary*, you must not suffer a mistaken fondness to prevent you from inflicting it. Seasonable correction is an instance and token of love. "Whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."<sup>f</sup> Remember the observations of Solomon, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."<sup>g</sup> "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."<sup>h</sup> "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying."<sup>i</sup> "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell."<sup>k</sup> Reflect upon this last passage, which represents the efficacy of punishment in delivering the soul from *hell*. And is it not worth while for a parent to give himself and his child some pain and uneasiness *now*, rather than run the hazard of its perishing everlastingly?

<sup>f</sup> Prov. iii. 12.

<sup>g</sup> Prov. xiii. 24.

<sup>h</sup> Prov. xxii. 15.

<sup>i</sup> Prov. xix. 18.

<sup>k</sup> Prov. xxiii. 14.

I do not consider these passages as prescribing any particular sort of punishment. The slighter the punishment the better, provided its end be answered. And perhaps, generally speaking, almost any kind of punishment is better than *beating*. But though moderate, it should be *certain*, if the offence for which it is threatened be committed. Be true to your word in every thing. If you tell a child that you will punish him if he acts in such or such a manner, be sure to inflict what you threaten, if he persists in the forbidden line of conduct. Make always the greatest difference between inadvertence or accident, and wilful offence or obstinacy. Let the punishment be in proportion to the guilt of the child, rather than to the loss or pain which you suffer yourself. But if you allow a foolish fondness for your children, an unwillingness to put them to present pain or uneasiness, or to see them cry, to prevent you from punishing at all, when punishment is really expedient, you act with cruelty to your children, you act as if you hated them.

It is of the utmost consequence in the infliction of *punishment*, as in the whole business of education, that the two parents should mutually support and assist each. If when the father punishes a child, the mother should weakly call it to her to sooth and pity it, as if it had been hardly dealt by, the end of punishment is entirely defeated, and the injury done to the child in every point of view is of the most serious description. Remember the sore judgments upon Eli and his house, "because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." The young men perished in their iniquity, and the whole family was reduced to the extreme of wretchedness. Of Adonijah it is said, that "his father had not displeased him at any

"time, in saying, Why hast thou done so?"<sup>11</sup> He had suffered him to have his own way, and had *spoilt* him. The case seems to have been the same with his brother Absalom. The consequence was, they both died by a bloody death in the flower of their age. Beware of *spoiling* your children: a spoilt child is a trouble to itself, to its parents, and to all within its reach. It is spoilt for this world, and, what is worse, spoilt for heaven. Some thoughtless parents are in the habit of saying that their poor children are likely to have trials and hardships as they grow up, and therefore they give them their own way now. Such conduct proceeds from ignorance, and is in reality cruelty to their children under the pretence of kindness. It is contrary to the voice of reason and Scripture, which both require, that children should be restrained from following their own wills and humours, and that they should be punished when punishment is necessary.

But then never inflict punishment as if you took delight in it: never chasten them *for your own pleasure*, or by way of giving vent to your anger or vexation. "Correct not in anger," is an excellent maxim. If you are in a passion with your children, wait until you are cool before you punish them. When cool, you can correct them with judgment and moderation, which will not be the case when you are under the influence of passion. Never *scold*, or abuse them with reproachful language. Scolding never does good, but only serves to irritate, or injuriously to frighten them. To *swear* at them is dreadful. On the whole of this part of the subject keep in mind the admonition of St. Paul, "Fathers, provoke not your children to *anger*, lest they be discouraged."<sup>m</sup> Be careful not to *discourage*

<sup>11</sup> Kings i. 6.<sup>m</sup> Col. iii. 21, and Ephes. vi. 4.

them by undue severity, or by harshness of manner. If you give way to violence of temper, and angrily beat or scold them, you will "provoke them to anger," will lessen their respect for you, and deaden their love.

Endeavour as much as possible to win your children to their duty by kindness and affection. Love to you is implanted in their nature. Do nothing that may needlessly weaken it. Our Lord observes, that if any man love him he will keep his word; and the assertion is applicable to the present case. The more your children love you, the more will they regard your instructions and admonition.<sup>n</sup> Be kind and gentle to them in your look and manner. Comply in things indifferent with their wishes and inclinations; and contribute as far as you reasonably can to their pleasures and amusements.

Cultivate in them not only love to yourselves, but a general spirit of *kindness* and *goodwill* to all within their reach. Teach them, very early, that it is their duty to love their fellow creatures as themselves, and to do to every one as they would be done by. Lead them gently to examine themselves by this rule; and whenever, in word or deed, they break it, try in a kind way to make them sensible of their fault. Diligently labour to get the better of their disposition to *selfishness*. Selfishness is one of the most rooted evils of our nature. Teach them, when they see another, especially a brother or sister enjoying any pleasure, to be as glad as if they enjoyed it themselves, and on no account to be jealous or envious. Accustom them readily to give up to each other, to sacrifice their own wills and wishes, to take a pleasure in doing good-natured and obliging actions.

<sup>n</sup> Doddridge.

You must bring them up to be *kind*, not only towards man, but also to *brutes*. Little children, from mere thoughtlessness, often put such animals as fall into their power to great and unnecessary pain. Never suffer them in pure wantonness to beat a horse, or dog, or any other animal. Never permit them, for mere amusement, to rob a poor bird of its young, or to torment and teaze any living creature. To see a child for its sport hunting domestic fowls, or piercing an insect in order to make it whirl on a string, is painful to every feeling mind.

Be particularly careful to bring them up with a sacred regard for *truth*. This habit is of the utmost consequence to their happiness both in this world and the next. Children, when not properly instructed, are very apt to be regardless of truth. When any blame has been incurred, they often try to throw it from themselves on some other person; to defend themselves by false excuses; or perhaps to invent charges against those whom they wish to put in the wrong. In short, even from their earliest years, they are by nature too ready to "go astray, and speak lies." Even when their wishes or their interests are not concerned, they frequently make little distinction between truth and falsehood, and relate events, or give them their colouring with little attention to accuracy.

Try very anxiously to put a stop to these bad habits. Teach them the hateful nature of falsehood in the sight both of God and man. When you think that they have done any thing wrong, or occasioned to you any loss or damage by carelessness, take care lest by the violence or severity of your manner you frighten them into a lie. By all means encourage a frank and open confession, and let such confession generally save them from punishment; though if they have acted wrong, you must try to make them sensible of it in a serious though

kind manner. In all your intercourse with your children, show a scrupulous regard to truth yourselves. Never deceive them at any time, even in their earliest youth. Always be as good as your word either in promises or threatenings. Do not allow either yourselves or your children to tell falsehoods in joke. A disregard for truth in matters of jest, is apt to lead to a disregard for it in things of consequence.

Teach them to be *humble*. Pride was not made for man; and it is from pride and self-conceit that many of the crimes, and much of the misery that prevail in the world, have their origin. The advice of St. Peter is, "all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Endeavour to make your children enter into the spirit of this scriptural exhortation: make them understand, that pride is the parent of ill-humour and quarrelling, and too often of malice and hatred; and that true honour, peace, and comfort, spring from humility.

Connected with this part of the subject is vanity of person or dress. Your children should be as clean and neat as your circumstances will permit; but check from the beginning every disposition to *finery*. The foolish vanity of mothers sometimes tempts them to indulge their children in a taste for dress beyond what their situation in life requires, or their means allow. Such a taste is natural in children, and if encouraged, instead of being checked, will grow up with them, and foster a silly levity of mind, and too probably betray them into dangerous and deadly sin.

As soon as their minds are at all able to receive it, endeavour gently and gradually to instil into

° 1 Peter v. 5.

them the knowledge of the truths of religion. This appears to be particularly meant by the exhortation to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." When very young, they may be made to understand that they are at all times in the presence of God, that he sees every thing that they do, and hears every word that they speak; and that he is displeased whenever they use any bad words, or do any bad actions. When a little older, you may accustom them always to bear in mind the recollection of the great account which they must one day give before the judgment-seat of Christ, and of the never-ending state either of happiness or of misery in which that judgment will place them. You will often remind them of the proneness to evil which they brought into the world, and of their many actual transgressions; they will thus be prepared to understand their want of a Redeemer and a Sanctifier. This will lead you to explain to them the method of man's redemption by Christ, and the means by which they may obtain the help of the Holy Ghost.

Bring them early into the habit of *praying* to God every night and morning. Never rest satisfied with the repetition of the words of a prayer, but strive to make them enter into the meaning of what they are saying, so that their hearts and thoughts may really accompany their lips.

Often hear them repeat parts of the Church Catechism yourselves. Try whether they understand it; explain to them its meaning; and carry it into their daily and hourly practice. For instance—are they guilty of falsehood? Remind them that lying is one of the works of the devil, which, at their baptism, they engaged to renounce. Do they swear, or take God's name in vain? Tell them that God will not hold guiltless, but will surely punish those who thus break the third command-

ment. And, in like manner, remind them of all other parts of their duty as occasions occur. These things you must with kindness and seriousness impress upon your children over and over again, as they are able to attend to them. There must be line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. It is a care which you must never give over. You know the direction of the Hebrew lawgiver—"These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."<sup>p</sup> You are to take every opportunity of impressing upon your children religious truths. In particular, you must employ in their instruction much of those parts of the Lord's day which are not devoted to public worship. Surely it is better to employ the rest of the Sabbath in this manner, than in careless talk, in noisy pastimes, or in listless indolence.

Much assistance in acquiring and preserving the knowledge of religion may be obtained from being able to *read*. Most parents are properly anxious to give this advantage to their children; but are sometimes not sufficiently careful in making the most of the opportunities in their power. When your children are put to school, take care that they are regular and constant in their attendance. By frequently absenting themselves, they break into the good order of the school, and hinder their own progress.

When they are taken from school, in order to their earning something towards their maintenance, they should make a point of keeping up at home

<sup>p</sup> Deut. vi. 6, 7.

what they have learnt, if not of adding to it. I have often been grieved to find, how soon boys, who, when at school, could read correctly and readily, forget what they have learnt, so as hardly to be able to get through two lines together without hesitation. This evil would be prevented, if their parents would accustom them to read aloud for five or ten minutes every evening after the labours of the day are over. Sunday schools may be particularly useful in keeping up the reading of those who go to work during the week. It is, indeed, to young people of this age that they are of most use, and their parents should gladly take advantage of them. It is very desirable that you should prevail on them frequently to learn by heart a verse or two of Scripture. For this purpose you should choose such passages as relate to the leading doctrines of the Gospel, or to those duties and those temptations, of which, from their situation in life, they particularly need to be reminded.<sup>q</sup>

Lastly, try to keep your children from all bad company; and, above all, set them a good example yourselves. Children are naturally prone to imitation, and are more influenced by what they see than by what they hear. You can hardly expect them to mind you, when you exhort them to keep the laws of God, if you habitually break those laws yourselves. Let them never see you give way to excessive anger or violence of temper. Let them never see you overcome by liquor. Let them never hear you curse or swear, or in any other way speaking unadvisedly with your lips. It has been well and strongly said, "to give children good instruction and a bad example, is but beckoning them with the head to show them the way to heaven, while we take them by the hand and

<sup>q</sup> See the selection of texts at the end of this Sermon.

“lead them in the way to hell.” To your other cares for your children, you must add fervent prayer for them to Almighty God. Without his blessing all your labour will be in vain. You must implore him to send down upon your children the constant influences of his Spirit to assist them in getting the better of their corruptions, and in going on from strength to strength in the paths of virtue and holiness.

The religious education of your children will require from you considerable pains and unceasing attention. Such pains and attention you will think well bestowed when you reflect, that the happiness of your children both in this life and the next is at stake. Think what you would feel, if, in consequence of your neglect, your children should grow up to be a reproach to you, and a curse to themselves; still more think what you would feel, if, at the day of judgment, you should hear pronounced upon them the sad sentence of “Depart ye cursed,” and should be then sensible that they might have avoided it, had not you neglected their education when young.

If, on the other hand, you so train them up in the way wherein they should go, so fix in their minds good principles and good habits, that, through divine grace, they never depart from them as they grow old, great indeed will be your reward; you will look forward with humble hope to their being your crown of rejoicing at the last day. United with them in humble reliance on the merits of your Redeemer, you will meekly stand before his throne, and say—“Behold, I, and the children which God hath given me.”

<sup>r</sup> Isaiah viii. 18; Heb. ii. 13.

*Note.* I strongly recommend to such parents as can procure them, the Essay on Education, by Mrs. Trimmer, (a name not to be mentioned by the friend of children, and of the poor, but with respect and gratitude,) and those excellent little books, “A Practical View of Christian Education,” and “Hints for the Improvement of Early Education and Nursery Discipline.”

I subjoin references to a few passages of Scripture to be learnt by heart by children, and explained to, and impressed upon them, by their parents. The number may easily be enlarged.

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*God the Maker and Preserver of all things, and every where present.* Acts xvii. 24—28; Psalm xxxiii. 6; Heb. xi. 3; Matt. vi. 26—30; Psalm viii; Psalm cxxxix.

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*Redemption through Christ.* 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22; Ephes. v. 2; Rom. v. 6, 8; 1 Peter iii. 18; 2 Cor. v. 21; Isaiah liii.

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*Necessity of divine grace, and means of procuring it.* 2 Cor. iii. 5; Phil. ii. 13; James i. 5; Luke xi. 9—13.

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*Resurrection and future judgment.* Acts xxiv. 15; Rev. xx. 13; 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52; Acts xvii. 31; 2 Cor. v. 10; John v. 28, 29; Matt. xxiv. 36.

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*Christian practice, &c.* Mark x. 13—16; Ephes. iv. 20—32; Ephes. vi. 1—3; Col. iii. 1—4, and 8—10, and 12—17; Gal. v. 14, and 22—26; Titus ii. 11—14, and iii. 1—7; Heb. xii. 5—11; Rom. xii. 1—3, and 9—11; Rom. xiii; Rom. vi; 1 Cor. xiii; 1 Peter ii. 20—25; 1 Peter iii. 8—18; 2 Peter i. 5—8; Psalm i. xv. xix. xxiii. xxiv. xxvi. xxxii. xxxiv. xxxvii. xlii. xli. li. xc. ci. ciii. civ. cvii. cxix.