

The Duties of Parents – Part III

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*"Train up a child in the way he should go;
and when he is old, he will not depart from it" – Prov. 22:6.*

IX. *Train them to a habit of obedience.*

This is an object which it is worth any labour to attain. No habit, I suspect, has such an influence over our lives as this. Parents, determine to make your children obey you, though it may cost you much trouble, and cost them many tears. Let there be no questioning, and reasoning, and disputing, and delaying, and answering again. When you give them a command, let them see plainly that you will have it done.

Obedience is the only reality. It is faith visible, faith acting, and faith incarnate. It is the test of real discipleship among the Lord's people. *"Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you"* (John 15:14). It ought to be the mark of well-trained children, that they do whatsoever their parents command them. Where, indeed, is the honour which the fifth commandment enjoins, if fathers and mothers are not obeyed cheerfully, willingly, and at once?

Early obedience has all Scripture on its side. It is in Abraham's praise, not merely he will *train* his family, but *"he will **command** his children and his household after him"* (Gen. 18:19). It is said of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, that when "He was young He was *subject* to Mary and Joseph" (Luke 2:51). Observe how implicitly Joseph obeyed the order of his father Jacob (Gen. 37:13). See how Isaiah speaks of it as an evil thing, when *"the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient"* (Isa. 3:5). Mark how the Apostle Paul names disobedience to parents as one of the bad signs of the latter days (II Tim. 3:2). Mark how he singles out this *grace* of requiring obedience as one that should adorn a Christian minister: "a bishop must be one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." And again, "Let the deacons rule their children and their own houses well" (I Tim. 3:4, 12). And again, an elder must be one "having faithful children, children not accused of riot, or unruly" (Tit. 1: 6).

Parents, do you wish to see your children happy? Take care, then, that you train them to obey when they are spoken to, – to do as they are bid. Believe me, we are not made for entire independence, – we are not fit for it. Even Christ's freemen have a yoke to wear, – they "*serve the Lord Christ*" (Col. 3:24). Children cannot learn too soon that this is a world in which we are not all intended to rule, and that we are never in our right place until we know how to obey our betters. Teach them to obey while young, or else they will be fretting against God all their lives long, and wear themselves out with the vain idea of being independent of His control.

Reader, this hint is only too much 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 it were a thing not to be blamed. To my eyes, a parent always yielding, and a child always having 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 self-conceit. You must not wonder that men refuse to obey their Father which is in heaven, if you allow them, when children, to disobey their father who is upon earth.

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

X. Train them to a habit of always speaking the truth.

Truth-speaking is far less common in the world than at first sight we are disposed to think. The whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is a golden rule which many would do well to bear in mind. Lying and prevarication are old sins. The devil was the father of them, – he deceived Eve by a bold lie, and ever since the fall it is a sin against which all the children of Eve have need to be on their guard.

Only think how much falsehood and deceit there is in the world! How much exaggeration! How many additions are made to a simple story! How many things left out, if it does not serve the speaker's interest to tell them! How few there are about us of whom we can say, we put unhesitating trust in their word! Verily the ancient Persians were wise in their generation: it was a leading point with them in educating their children, that they should learn to speak the truth. What an awful proof it is of man's natural sinfulness, that it should be needful to name such a point at all!

Reader, I would have you remark 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 with whom we have to do. 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 less than the truth is a lie; that evasion, excuse-making, 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 speak the truth.

I press this subject on your attention, not merely for the sake of your children's character in the world, – though I might dwell much on this, – I urge it rather for your own comfort and assistance in all your dealings with them. You will find it a mighty help indeed, to be able always to trust their word. It will go far to prevent that habit of concealment, which so unhappily prevails sometimes among children. Openness and straightforwardness depend much upon a parent's treatment of this matter in the days of our infancy.

XI. *Train them to 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 harm. An idle mind is like an open door, and if Satan does not enter in himself by it, it is certain he will throw in something to raise bad thoughts in our souls.

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, ever doing His will. Adam, in Paradise, had work, – he was appointed to dress the garden of Eden, and to keep it. The redeemed saints in glory will have work, – "*They rest not day and night,*" singing praise and glory to Him who bought them. And man, weak, sinful man, must have something to do, or else his soul will soon get into an unhealthy state. We must have our hands filled, 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. Alas, indeed, for the man that has nothing to do! The Jews thought idleness a positive sin: it was a law of theirs that every man should bring up his son to some useful trade, – and they were right. They knew the heart of man better than some of us appear to do.

Idleness made Sodom what she was. "*This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her*" (Ezek. 16:49). Idleness had much to do with David's awful sin with the wife of Uriah. – I see in II Sam. 11 that Joab went out to war against Ammon, "*but David tarried still at Jerusalem.*" Was not that idle? And then it was that he saw Bathsheba, – and the next step we read of is his

tremendous and miserable fall.

Verily, 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 a work of the flesh, – the mother of adultery, fornication, drunkenness, and many other deeds of darkness that I have not time to name. Let your own conscience say whether I do not speak the truth. You were idle, and at once the devil knocked at the door and came in.

And indeed I do not wonder; – 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 steam machinery, you must work it, or it soon gets out of order. If you have a horse, you must exercise him; he is never so well as when he has regular work. If you would have good bodily health yourself, you must take exercise. If you always sit still, your body is sure at length to complain. And just so is it with the soul. The active moving mind is a hard mark 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 sow tares.

Reader, 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 idling over what they have in hand, whatever it may be. 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 to their amusements, when they go to play.

But if you love them well, let idleness be counted a sin in your family.

XII. Train them with a constant fear of over-indulgence.

This is the one point of all on which you have 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. Take heed that it does not make you blind to your children's faults, and deaf to all advice about them. Take heed lest it make you overlook bad conduct, rather than have the pain of inflicting punishment and correction.

I know well that punishment and correction are disagreeable things. Nothing is more unpleasant than giving pain to those we love, and calling forth their tears. 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 it is the shortest way to spoil children 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 it, whatever pain it may cost you unless you wish to ruin your children's souls.

You cannot say that Scripture does not speak expressly on this subject: *"He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes"* (Prov. 13:24). *"Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying"* (Prov. 19:18). *"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it from him"* (Prov. 22:15). *"Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell"* (Prov. 23:13, 14). *"The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."* *"Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest, yea, he shall give delight to thy soul"* (Prov. 29:15, 17).

How strong and forcible are these texts! How melancholy is the fact, 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 inspiration of God, and profitable. It is given for our learning, even as the Epistles to the Romans and Ephesians. Surely the believer who brings up his children without attention to its counsel 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 in fault, you are doing them a grievous wrong. I warn you, this is the rock on which the saints of God, in every age, have only too frequently made shipwreck I would fain persuade you to be wise in time, and keep clear of it. See it in Eli's case. His sons Hophni and Phinehas *"made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."* He gave them no more than a tame and lukewarm reproof, when he ought to have rebuked them sharply. In one word, he honoured his sons above God. And what was the end of these things? He lived to hear of the death of both his sons in battle, and his own grey hairs were brought down with sorrow to the grave (I Sam. 2:22-29, 3:13).

See, too, 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 there no fault on his side? I fear there can be no doubt there was. I find a clue to it all in the account of Adonijah in I Kings 1:6: *"His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done*

so?" There was the foundation of all the mischief. David was an over-indulgent father, – a father who let his children have their own way, – and he reaped according as he had sown.

Parents, I beseech you, for your children's sake, beware of over-indulgence. I call on you to remember, it is your first duty to consult their real interests, and not their fancies and likings; – to train them, not to humour them; – to profit, not merely to please.

You must not give way to every wish and caprice of your child's mind, however much you may love him. You must not let him suppose his will is to be everything, and that he has only to desire a thing and it will be done. Do not, I pray 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 fit 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. ³ Threatened folks, and threatened faults, live long. Punish seldom, but really and in good earnest, – frequent and slight punishment is a wretched system indeed. ⁴

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 great.

Reader, if there be 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 do not take trouble with your children when they are young, they will give you trouble when they are old. Choose which you prefer.

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³ Some parents and nurses 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 blame should never be used without real reason.

⁴ As to the best way of punishing a child, no general rule can be laid down. The characters of children are so exceedingly different, that what would be a severe punishment to one child, would be no punishment at all to another. I only beg to enter my decided protest against 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.