

The Duties of Children and Parents



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THE DUTIES OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS

*“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the LORD.
Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”*

—Colossians 3:20-21

Introduction

This is a topic in which we all need serious instruction repeatedly. I intend to show the duties of both children and parents from Scripture, and how to fulfill these duties. In the first two main points, I shall 1) expound the text and then 2) exhort you to fulfill it. Under the third point I shall give further directions as to how you may be godly children and parents.

The Doctrine: God’s pleasure and children’s encouragement should move Christian children to obedience, and parents to moderate control, in all things.

I. The Duty of Children

A. The Duty Itself

First, *the duty itself*: “Obey your parents.” This means a humble subjection to their authority and control, with a ready performance of what they require. It is the same as giving “honor” to your parents (Exo 20:12), which connotes valuing highly and revering one’s parents. “Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father” (Lev 19:3). The disposition of a godly child is a combination of love and fear that moves him to obedience. We may further describe four elements. The first three are active obedience, while the fourth is passive obedience.

Reverence

This begins with reverence for God, the Parent of us all (Act 17:28-29). True reverence results in an earnest desire to behave yourselves in everything you do with a view toward pleasing your parents.

1) *With respect to your speech.* You should speak reverently of your parents both in their presence and absence. Give them honorable titles like “father” and “mother”

and “lord” because these recognize the dignity of their office. Good examples include Isaac: “And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father” (Gen 22:7); Joseph (Gen 45:9-13); and the daughter of Jephthah (Jdg 11:36). You should speak when spoken to, wait to hear your parents speak first, and never to speak in their presence without a good reason for it. When they are not around, speak of them in such a way that all who hear conclude that you regard them highly.

2) *With respect to your behavior.* Rise for your parents as for the elderly (Lev 19:32). Although king, Solomon bowed to Bathsheba (1Ki 2:19); and although a prince, Joseph to Jacob (Gen 46:29). Seek your parents’ prayers for blessing. Avoid rude and haughty looks. “The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it” (Pro 30:17). Even when parents are deceased you should give them honor.

Obedience proper

Not only reverent speech and conduct before parents is required, but a heartfelt submission to their authority and hearty compliance with all their commands. Even Jesus submitted Himself to His mother and step-father. “And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them” (Luk 2:51). He Who was their Creator, and to Whom angels were subject, was subject to Mary and Joseph!

1) *Pay close attention to their teaching.* Love for your parent’s joy should move you to listen carefully to all they teach, whether spiritual or otherwise. This applies equally to both sons and daughters. A foolish child is a grief to his parents.

2) *Perform their commands.* Don’t talk back! This immediate and silent obedience is the main duty of the text. You should obey as the centurion’s men in Matthew 8:9: “I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.” Other examples include Samuel (1Sa 3:4-18), David (1Sa 17:20), Jacob and his sons (Gen 42:2-3), Isaac (Gen 22:6-9), the Rechabites (Jer 35:6-10), Abraham’s children (Gen 18:19), and Solomon (1Ch 22:19; 2Ch 2:1).

Yet this is not to be a blind obedience, especially as you grow up to exercise some moral discernment of your own. Then your obedience should be reasonable, such as is according to God’s Word. “The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going” (Pro 14:15). That is, you should comply in everything that does not involve sin.

3) *Depend upon their advice.* Parents naturally have more experience, ability, and right to rule their children than the children themselves. The prodigal son would not listen to his father’s advice until he had learned by experience of the bad consequences of his foolish choice and had grieved his father. Therefore, as a child you cannot spend money without your parents’ consent, you cannot choose friends disagreeable to your parents, and you must be content to dress the way your parents want.

In your choice of a career. Your parents should guide you in this, as the example of the children of Jonadab the son of Rechab prove (Jer 35). Generally this means following in your parents' footsteps.

In your choice of a spouse. Parents should "sway much" in this matter. Examples include Isaac (Gen 24:4-8), Jacob (Gen 28:1-4), Ruth (Ruth 3:1-4), and Samson (Jdg 14:3). Parents are wiser than you, more objective than you, and should not have their children taken away without their consent. This would be a kind of stealing. To take a wife against her father's will is a disparagement of him. This is the most important decision you will make in your life; how can you leave your parents out of it? In the case of their choosing someone for whom you have no feelings, be sure that your lack of feelings are not without reason. If after much prayer you still find yourself unwilling to marry their choice for you, then try to persuade your parents in a reverent way to seek someone else for you to marry. Surely you cannot be expected to marry someone whom you do not love. In the case of parents choosing an ungodly partner for you, you must humbly refuse. The best counselors agree that though you do not have the right to choose a partner for yourself without your parents' consent, you do have the right to refuse one chosen for you.

4) *Follow their good example.* Imitate whatever is good in them. This is why the wise man charged his son to observe his ways: "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways" (Pro 23:26). Follow them as they follow Christ: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1Co 11:1). Do not follow them in their errors as an excuse for your sin. Mere tradition received from parents is no reason to sin against God (Eze 20:18-20). Asa (1Ki 15:11), Josiah (2Ki 22:2), and Timothy (2Ti 1:5) are examples for good; in other words, try to be like your father. This is the way you pay greatest honor to him.

Heartfelt gratitude and endeavoring to repay them

You owe much to your parents.

1) *Respecting their benevolence.* Show a gratefulness for their kindness and supply of your needs. Be eager to repay their provision in any way that you can. The smallest thing you can do is to acknowledge their parental love and care. Without this you are not truly spiritual, but wicked. Piety must begin at home by showing your appreciation for your parents. Treasure their wise sayings, rehearse before others what they have done well, and choose their religion, if it be right. Preserve their good name.

2) *Respecting their poverty.* Cover or bear with their faults, do what you can to supply their needs, and defend their reputation. Noah (Gen 9:23), Isaac, and Jacob had their faults as parents, and their children covered them. So did Jonathan, Jesus, Jacob, Ruth, and Joseph have parents with faults and needs, and they moved to their

aid. Philo¹ says that old storks who cannot fly any longer are brought food by their brood, and we should imitate their example. Especially should you be concerned about your parents' spiritual needs, so that if they are not Christians, with all humility and prudence you should use fit means to lead them to Christ. The best you can do for your parents will not be sufficient to repay them for their love. When your parents die, see that they have an honorable burial in a decent Christian manner.

Submission to parental discipline

As a child, you must bear your parents' rebukes with humility. Because you were born sinful, you need them.

1) *Their admonitions.* Nothing should shame you more than your father's reprimand, and you should amend in response to it. Even when they rebuke you wrongly in matter and manner, you should bear with it, as Joseph did (Gen 37:10). Moses heeded his father-in-law's advice (Exo 18:13-24), but Eli's sons slighted his (1Sa 2:25). Only fools will not hear rebuke. "A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke" (Pro 13:1). "A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent" (Pro 15:5). Be patient with parental restrictions on your food, drink, clothing, and recreation. Learn self-denial and patience. Isn't it inappropriate to rage against those who love you best?

2) *Their corrections.* I mean real punishments inflicted upon you. Realize they do this out of love and aim for your good. There is biblical warrant for corporal discipline. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Pro 13:24). "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Pro 22:15). See also Proverbs 19:18 and Hebrews 12:9. If you will not be reformed by it, your parents have a right to call in the magistrate (Deu 21:18-21). When you are corrected, you should be too ashamed even to look into your parent's face. Though you need not tolerate others to spank you, your parents have this right for the purpose of delivering your soul from hell. Pray that God will bless this means of grace to your good. Do not become bitter toward your parents for disciplining you. Your parents have a responsibility with God's authority to maintain His government in your life.

B. The Extent of This Duty

Second, *the extent of this duty*: "In all things." This must not be understood as universal and absolute obedience to parents, for that is our duty to God alone. God is the only one free to give whatever laws He pleases that all are absolutely bound to obey. You are to obey your parents in all things acceptable to the Lord. "Children,

¹ **Philo** (20 B.C.-A.D. 50) – a Hellenistic Jewish biblical philosopher born in Alexandria, Egypt. He used philosophical allegory to attempt to fuse and harmonize Greek philosophy with Jewish philosophy.

obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (Eph 6:1). If parents were not sinful, absolute obedience could be rendered them; but they are fallen and fallible. This text proves that the only obedience to be rendered parents is that which is consistent with the Lord’s pleasure, and He cannot be pleased when you choose to obey them rather than Him. Yet even in refusing to do wrong things they command you to do, you may show your submission by suffering the penalty with cheerfulness (1Pe 2:19-20). In all legitimate things, you must honor your parents as much as you can.

C. The Motive to This Duty

Third, *the motive to this duty*: “For this is well pleasing to the Lord.” This is the best motive possible for anything. The Lord vigorously enforces the fifth commandment in our text and elsewhere, such as Ephesians 6:1-3. Our heavenly Father has supreme authority. Anything He requires is eminently reasonable and good. Those who seek His pleasure above all things are not only pleasing, but well pleasing, to Him. In pleasing the Lord you will ultimately please your parents and yourself besides. This is the way to your true happiness. In keeping God’s commandments there is exceedingly great reward (Psa 19:7-11).

All parents, due to their high and holy office, deserve the obedience of their children. Disobedient children are unworthy of being considered Christians, and are worse than ordinary unbelievers and brute beasts. Obedience to parents is not an arbitrary thing, but a solemn divine commandment with the greatest of rewards and punishments attached: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Exo 20:12). (See Romans 1:28-31 for the evil of disobedience). As children of Christian parents having high privileges, you have greater responsibilities to fulfill your duty. Lack of natural affection of your parents is so monstrous that it is severely punished by God (1Sa 4:11; Deu 21:18-21). The old Romans would put those who murdered their parents into a large ox-hide bag together with a live dog, a rooster, a poisonous snake, and an ape. Then they would beat them bloody and throw them into the Tiber River! That shows how abominable parricide² was even to the heathen.

II. The Duty of Parents

A. Their Role as Parents

First, *in their role as parents*. The prohibition is against “irritating” your children, for this is the meaning of the Greek word translated *provoke*.³ “*Provoke* not your children to wrath” (Eph 6:4) is more specific than this. You abuse your parental

² **parricide** – murder of a parent or other close relative.

³ **provoke** – “stir up, rouse; make resentful, bitter” (Lexicon; Greek New Testament; 4th edition).

authority whenever your children are justly irritated. Being too strict or not providing adequately for their needs are examples. Don't burden them with unnecessary commands and rules. Don't make them do work fit only for slaves. Don't curse them or speak to them without due respect. How many parents have beaten their children merely to gratify their lust for rage! How often has the punishment exceeded the crime! Even spankings are to be administered in a humane way with gentleness and moderation. Strike that proper balance between extreme strictness and indulgence. Rule over your children in such a way that they love and honor you for it. Don't be too fond, or you will lose their fear; nor too strict, or they will fear you too much. The underlying principle behind godly parenting is that natural love for children which should influence all your dealings.

General duties

These two duties done well will give success to all the others. Without these, the other particular duties cannot be done well.

1) *Prayer*. You should pray without ceasing for your children on all occasions through the course of their lives (1Sa 12:23). Be their orators at the throne of grace. Ask God to make your children His children. Entreat God for every physical and spiritual blessing for them. See how David fasted and prayed for the life of his child! God has answered love-born prayers of many parents to the salvation of their children already.

2) *Good behavior out of love for God and your children*. Your prayers must be backed up by your good example before them. "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him" (Pro 20:7).

Particular duties

1) To the birth of the child

Even while still an embryo, there should be fervent prayers together with tender care to preserve the life. The Angel of the Lord ordered Manoah's wife to drink neither wine nor strong drink during her pregnancy, both for her own and the child's good (Jdg 13:4). The father should be as careful as the mother to provide everything necessary and to bring a healthy baby into the world. A pregnant woman should avoid all physical activity that poses any significant risk to her baby.⁴

2) After birth, do all you can to promote their natural and spiritual life.

Use the best means of nature and grace. Breast milk is the best food for newborns. Mothers have an obligation to nurse their own babies. There are only a few exceptions, such as her natural inability to do so, and affliction with disease which might come through the milk to the baby. God gave women breasts full of milk for this purpose! No

⁴ **risk to her baby** – What awful, murderous conduct is abortion, in which both father, mother, and abortionist are all more immediately guilty; and courts, politicians, and our society as a whole share blame for legalizing and tolerating it.—*Editor*

mother should blush to nurse her child. Even queens have done this. Doubtless Jesus took milk from Mary's breasts, the bottles of His own filling. Everywhere the Scriptures assume that godly mothers nurse their babes, although self-denial is involved. I cannot remember a single case in Scripture where a godly mother gave her baby to another to nurse for her. The pleasure and benefit to the nursing mother will sweeten and compensate for the pain and sacrifice involved.

Fathers should promote this. Give mother everything she needs to care physically for the child. Of course Christian parents should dedicate their children to the Lord; there should be no delay about this. For their physical life, provide food, clothing, physical recreation, and medicine when they are sick. As much as you can, keep them from physical dangers.

3) *Educate them.*

Ephesians 6:4 summarizes parental duty as bringing up children in the training (or discipline or instruction) and admonition of the Lord.

a) Training

Training is "coaching in or accustoming to a mode of behavior or performance"—*Webster's dictionary*.

Training by example. This is the earliest way children learn how to behave. Your example of grace may powerfully influence your children. They will notice even the little things of tone and gesture. You should have awe in the thought that even your youngest children are watching you. The young rooster crows like the old one. They will learn to bless or curse according to your example. Like Titus, you should show yourself to be a pattern of good works (Ti 2:7). Beware of making promises which you never intend to perform, because this is teaching them to lie and be unfaithful to their word. All kinds of habits are learned by example. Man is the most likely creature to imitate what he admires. Be careful of your associates for this reason.

Training to rules of morality and civility. Teach them how to behave in all their relationships, toward those older and younger and peers, toward teachers and ministers of the Gospel, and in all places, as at home and abroad, in school and in church, and in all circumstances, in mourning and joy, in public and private, when praised and criticized. Humility is a chief virtue to be inculcated (Pro 15:33, 18:12, 22:4; 1Pe 5:5). Teach them to take the lowest place for themselves, and to rise up before the aged. Teach them to keep confidences, to avoid boasting, to eat in moderation, to avoid visiting too long, to share with those who have less. Be teaching these things from their earliest years, as soon as they can understand them, which is very young. Use good Christian books which speak of these things. Manners are important. Stimulate their desire to read and learn. Avoid teaching them superstitious notions about hobgoblins and fairies, for these tend to ungodliness and promote needless fears.

Training by moderate chastening. Use both correction and reward to promote good behavior. Do not leave a child to himself, but use the rod to form his charac-

ter—yet use it with prayer always, because apart from prayer it will do no ultimate good. Join the rod with instruction also. Use much Christian prudence so that your children will understand:

- That you do this out of love for them and out of obedience to God.
- That you do this because of their folly, not your passion.
- That what they did wrong and why it is wrong, and that neglecting discipline leads to worse things.

Parental love chastens early, both with respect to a child’s age and his commission of wrongdoing. When they are old enough to sin, they are old enough to be spanked. Take the child early, while there is still hope. The twig may be bent while it is young. Nip sin in the bud. As God was severe in punishing the first violations of His statutes (Num 15:25; Lev 10:2), so be swift and decisive in punishing early rebellion.

- That you will not spare discipline for their crying.

“Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying” (Pro 19:18). Have a compassionate resolve to give them a good spanking when they need it! Yet do not exceed a just proportion, for this may discourage children as well. Doctors must carefully measure their medicines, and parents their discipline, or it will not be effective. Take into account the age, gender, and disposition of the child, the nature and circumstances of the fault, and how they may repay for their fault. Be ready to forgive and to overlook smaller things.

b). Admonition

The Greek *nouthesia* means to provide instruction as to correct behavior and belief; to advise someone concerning the dangerous consequences of some happening or action. It involves putting truth into children’s minds, so that they may discern right from wrong and live accordingly. This is to be the main thing in Christian education. Your chief goal in rearing children is to get the fear of God planted in their souls, so they may know, love, trust, and obey Him.

c). Instruction

Impart a knowledge of religious principles to them. Teach your children and grandchildren theology (faith) and casuistry⁵ (duty), according to the ancient charge “teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (Deu 4:9). This is your daily and constant parental duty. Adam taught his sons to sacrifice to God. Noah taught his children. Abraham was commended for training or catechizing⁶ his children (Gen 18:19). The rabbis say that he did train his *katechoumenoi* (Greek, “initiated ones”) in religion

⁵ **casuistry** – the application of general principles of ethics to specific problems of right and wrong in conduct in order to solve them.

⁶ **catechizing** – the act of teaching doctrine by asking specific questions and memorizing set answers. Excellent catechisms for use today include *A Catechism with Proofs*, written by Benjamin Keach (1640-1704) in support of the *London Baptist Confession of 1689*, and revised by Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) for use with his own congregation. *A Catechism for Boys and Girls* by Erroll Hulse is a simplified version for younger children. All of these titles, together with *Gadsby’s Catechism* (1773-1844), are available from Chapel Library.

and warfare alike. Other good examples include David (Pro 4:3-4; Psa 34:11), the mother of King Lemuel (Pro 31:1-9), and Lois and Eunice (2Ti 1:5). Catechizing children is a parental duty because of their natural folly and need for a form of sound words. Luther called orthodox catechisms “little Bibles.” Here parents may help a pastor’s ministry to their children very much.

d). Inspection

You should daily examine whether your children are doing the things they are learning, just as a farmer keeps careful watch over the garden after sowing, to keep good seed from being stolen away or choked by weeds. You must bring them to daily family worship and weekly Church worship. Even the child Jesus observed Sabbath gatherings, and He had no sin (2Co 5:21). The duty of daily inspection is very difficult indeed, but it is excellent and has the most rewarding effects. It may be done informally at all times, when they are praying, reading, hearing, eating, drinking, playing, visiting, studying, working, and sleeping.

Teach children to sing psalms, to pray in secret sometimes, to be faithful and reverent in family worship,⁷ to be attentive to sermons and able to give some account of their matter afterwards. Teach them a serious observance of the Lord’s Day, and on other days allow only such recreations as tend toward their health and cheerfulness. Do not let them have ungodly playmates. Regulate the type and quantity of food they eat. Make sure they study enough, but not too much. Watch out for pride, willfulness, lying, and laziness. Reward with honor and praise instead of toys. I have lingered on this point, but I did so because of the common lack of watchfulness among parents.

4) Particular duty: Prepare them for adult life

A good career. Consider what calling may do the most good to mankind, as well as their abilities. Parents are the best judges of what line of work is most fitting for their children. Two children in the same family may certainly head in two very different directions, like Cain and Abel, and Esau and Jacob.

A good marriage. When they are old enough and in a suitable circumstance to marry, they should probably do so. Make sure they do not become unequally yoked with an unbeliever. Your main aim should be to advance the spiritual good of your descendants for generations to come. Thus Abraham was motivated (Gen 24:2-9), as were other godly parents in Scripture. Wealthy sons should seek a godly wife, before a wealthy one to join their estates. Too often wealthy families marry off their children to swine for a golden trough. They prefer earthly riches to heavenly. Future generations pay an awful price for such spiritual intermingling with the heathen. So a potential husband’s ability to provide financially for your daughter is not the most

⁷ **family worship** – the practice since the Reformation where Christian fathers gather their families about them each evening to read the Bible and teach its truths, thereby training them up in the way they should go (Pro 22:6). See *Free Grace Broadcaster #188: Family Worship*, available from Chapel Library.

important thing. There is nothing more to be feared than an ungodly husband! Not only a spiritual person should be sought, but one who gets along easily with others. Do not force your children to marry those whom they do not love. One wise father told his sons, “When you are youths, choose your callings; and when men, choose your wives—only take me along with you; it may be old men may see farther than you.”

5) Provide financially for them, both before and after they leave home.

Give them allowance as they grow up, and save for their adult years (2Co 12:14). Those who do not provide for their own household are worse than unbelievers (1Ti 5:8). In this way families may become more wealthy through the generations, to provide for their own needs and to show charity toward others.

Do not procrastinate until you are dead. Begin to turn over your estate to them while you are still living, as did the wise father of the prodigal (Luk 15).

Make sure what you pass on to them was honestly gained. Treasures of sin will not last long because they are cursed by God. But if they were gained honestly, they will wear like steel.

When you are dying. Be prepared to “set thine house in order” (2Ki 20:1) by leaving lessons of wisdom with your children on your deathbed, because these will make a deep impression upon them. Even though we do not have an extraordinary prophetic gift like the patriarchs, yet we may give solemn warnings and pray for God’s blessing. Twenty-two years before his death, Dr. Robert Harris attached extended counsel to his will for his wife and children about the management of their bodies, souls, and estates. Do not be like the ungodly who have no care what shall happen to their posterity after they are gone. A great estate without virtue is a poison with no antidote.

B. Your Motive to Do These Duties

Your heavenly Father prohibits discouraging your children, which is the end result of neglecting your duties. Just as the positive possibility of pleasing the Lord is a sufficient motive for your children to obey you, so this negative prohibition is sufficient for you to avoid unjustly irritating your children. Either neglect or abuse of parental authority may discourage them. If God has graciously given you children, then the least you can do out of gratitude to Him is to manage them as He directs. They are not born with Bibles in their hands or its truth in their minds. They can no more go out to adult life without the knowledge of God’s will than to sea without a compass. Your duty is to indoctrinate them! Otherwise you disparage God’s precious gifts to you and will incur His wrath, destroy your own crown and glory, burn up your olive plants, unfeather the arrows in your quiver, and cast your polished stones into the trash heap. Negligent or abusive parents rob God, for all children ultimately belong to Him, and you must give account to your Master.

III. How to Accomplish Both Duties

A. General Considerations

Be more concerned with pleasing God than gaining the approval of men. The kind of love between parents and children I have described is the perfect bond: “And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness” (Col 3:14). You must keep up frank and humble communication between each other, and sometimes parents should listen to warnings from their children. Keep up daily prayer for each other.

B. Particular Considerations

Directed to children

1) *Fully realize the blessings of obedience, and the miseries of disobedience.* Believe with all your heart that obedience will receive a great reward, and disobedience a terrible punishment from God Himself. Long life is promised to obedient children, which does not necessarily mean they will have a longer life on earth, but at the end of their lives they will come to God in peace. Small circles are as perfect as large ones, and David’s seventy years were as blessed as Isaac’s one hundred eighty, since David is said to have died “in a good old age” (1Ch 29:28). Lamech lived seven hundred seventy-seven miserable years and was not more blessed than these. It is not how many days you live as much as how they are filled that matters. If they are filled with good things, you have lived a long life. Good children never die before they are ripe for salvation. Disobedient ones are dead while they live (1Ti 5:6).

2) *Remove from your heart all disrespect, and value their instructions.* Yes, you can do this by God’s grace. Otherwise you could not be held responsible for it.

3) *Perform all duties with equal sincerity to both parents.* Avoid feigned respect and obedience (Mat 21:28-30). The Law expressly mentions father and mother are to be honored. So do the Proverbs. If in indifferent matters they conflict, then choose to obey your father, but with great respect to your mother. It matters not if they are pious parents or not—so far as your obedience is concerned—as long as they do not require you to sin against God.

4) *Let your obedience be willing, cheerful, and ready.* Not grudging or with disdain, but with genuine zeal to do all they require. In this you must have self-denial and love, for many things will be hard and unpleasant in themselves. Christ said to His Father, “I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Psa 40:8).

5) *Persevere in constant diligence to the end, regardless of temptations to stop.* Hold out to the very end in honoring your parents. Do not stumble over anything in performing it. Even if your parents become old, irritable, and unreasonable, honor

them still. Even if they persevere in rejecting Christ, still honor them. He who endures to the end shall be saved.

Directed to parents

1) *Keep up the life of godliness in your household.* Your piety is for your children's benefit as well as your own. Only by being an authentic Christian can you really keep up their respect for your authority. Lure them to Christ by showing them the joy and pleasantness of serving Him. Even wicked Herod respected John the Baptist (Mar 6:20). If you are not a sincere Christian, then you will find all these duties to be difficult and unsuccessful. You will be like the mother crab who ordered her son to walk straight ahead. He replied, "I will do it, mother, if you show me how." Teach with words, and confirm the doctrine with a holy life.

2) *Maintain parental authority.* Do this not with rigor, but love and mildness. When the captain lets go of the helm, the ship is blown about; and when you let down your authority, you lose control of your household. Too much familiarity with your children will make them too bold; too little will discourage them. Learn how to use your role well.

3) *Convince them of your ardent love for them, and win their affections, but with Christian prudence.* Make your control of them as easy and acceptable to them as you can in keeping with wisdom. Nothing should please your children better than your commendation of them, and nothing grieve them more than your disapproval and disappointment with them. If you can gain their hearts, they will give you their ears. That is why our heavenly Father lavishes His love upon us, to gain our affectionate obedience. Weep as you instruct them. Show them how much you care about them. Allure them with suitable gifts and rewards. Fathers, rule your children gently. Mothers, let your tongue show the "law of kindness" (Pro 31:26).

4) *Be impartial to every child of yours.* Even though there are differences of excellence in them, yet cherish a strong desire to do each one good alike. Do not hug one and hunch (that is, shove or push) another. This does not mean you must distribute your estate equally, since godly fathers did not necessarily do this in Scripture. While your affection should be the same for all, yet in justice you might reward an obedient child with a greater proportion, and thus possibly do good to the souls of both obedient and disobedient children.

5) *Seek the counsel of pastors and spiritual guides in difficult circumstances, and study biblical parenting well.* Get their advice because they are like fathers of the whole church, shepherds of the lambs of the flock as well as the sheep. A special duty of pastors is to reconcile parents and children, as was the ministry of John the Baptist (Mal 4:6; Mat 17:12). Therefore a special duty of parents is to promote their children's respect and esteem for their pastors, to make their ministry easier. Be careful that any educators and tutors of your children be very religious and orthodox, not to mention discreet, humble, courteous, skillful, diligent, and not covetous. How can you let unbe-

lievers teach your children? You might as well commit a lamb to the care of a wolf! Make sure all their teachers are fitting models for their imitation.

Conclusion

I hope all I have said is in accord with the mind of God. That is the only defense I shall make for my plain dealing. I leave you with a prayer for the blessing of parents. “Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us” (Psa 90:16-17), “that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace” (Psa 144:12), considering what the Lord has promised for the encouragement of His faithful servants, namely, “The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee” (Psa 102:28). Amen.

