



Bringing up Children

The bringing up of children for God is a very important subject. It is wonderful to be married to a godly wife or husband and such can be a great help to you on the road to heaven. The reasons for marrying are companionship, purity and the raising of children. The Psalmist says: *'Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate'* (Ps 127:3-5). Children can be a real blessing to their parents. But we certainly do not want to bring children into the world to train them for hell. It is awful to think that we will get to heaven and our family be lost. We love our children and do not want them to be eternally separated from us. So how are we to bring up our children? No one can say, 'I am an expert'. We all need grace. God has to help us or we will fail. It is an impossible task without God's help.

Children need to be saved

First of all, it is vital to remember that all children are born sinners. The little child appears so innocent, dependent and pure. Some will say 'Surely babies can't sin?' Alas, yes they can. Even before they are born, all have sinned in Adam. When our first parent ate the forbidden fruit we ate it too. In this sense we are all guilty even before actually sinning. But sin also displays itself very quickly in young lives. Babies can show bad temper and discontentedness. They are often jealous of other children and will not share toys. As they get older they will say 'No' to mum and dad. They do not have to be taught to tell lies or to fight. They want to do their own thing. All this shows how they are sinners, how they have a fallen nature and must be born again. Godly parents can sometimes have ungodly children, e.g. Isaac, Eli, Samuel and David. Some Reformed churches argue that children of Christians should be treated as Christians until they profess faith or rebel. The danger with this approach is that it encourages nominal Christianity. As with the Pharisees in the time of Jesus they took it for granted that they were right with God and forgot that they required to be born again.

Promises

God has made covenants with His people and their children. All God's covenants, e.g. with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Israelites and David, included children. In the New Testament the new covenant would therefore be expected to include children and this is shown to be the case by Peter's words on the day of Pentecost, *'For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call'* (Acts 2:39). Children have a special place. Jesus demonstrated a special interest in children: *'Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence'* (Mt 19:13-15). God loves us and our children. The children of the godly are special.

Expectancy

This should lead us to expect their conversion. It is very important that we believe in covenant blessings and look for our children's salvation. If you expect your children to be lost they will very likely be lost. Expecting them to be saved will encourage you to bring them up for God. It will encourage you to lay upon them the requirement of faith and repentance and call them to respond

to God. He gives us children and we must bring them up for Him, but we need His help. Pray, with faith in the promises, and look for your children to be converted.

Danger

There is a danger here. Grace does not run in the blood. While children are young they will agree with their parents and do anything to please them. But as they get older they will want to do their own thing. Some churches happily accept children's professions of faith when they are still only 10 or 12 years. They treat the children from then on as Christians. Now God can save children even in the womb but it is wiser to wait till they grow up a bit more and pass through the critical early and mid-teen's stages. Many Christian children rebel as teenagers. The world becomes very attractive, the lust of the flesh is powerful and they begin to follow friends in the world rather than parents. Give them time to prove that they are Christians. Don't encourage premature conversions and leave children thinking they tried Christianity and there is nothing in it.

Prayers

In bringing up children the most important thing is prayer. Pray for your children. God loves to hear prayer. Only God can save them. We cannot save them. They are dead in sins and cannot save themselves. They need the irresistible grace of God to operate in them. Pray for them till they are converted. Continue to pray for them all their days.

But also pray with your children. Let them hear you praying for them. Let them see that nothing is more important to you than their salvation. Make it plain to them that you will die in the deepest disappointment if they reject Christ and turn away from Him. For them to be saved is far more important to you than that they should be rich, or successful, or do well in their education or in their job. What is the good of them making lots of money if they end up in hell?

Teach your children to pray themselves. Get them to pray meaningfully. Set forms are not good. Get them to think through their own prayers. Stress to them the importance of praying for their own soul's salvation.

Law

A very important part of instruction is the law of God. God has given us ten commandments. These need to be stressed. God demands holiness from men and women. The moral law is the standard which will be used on the judgment day. The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It shows us our guilt. The more we try to keep the law the more we see how far short we come. That forces us to cry out to Christ, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'. As Christians the law shows us how to live and how to express the love which we have to God.

Discipline

It is vital for children to be punished when they do wrong. They must learn that sin does not pay. Never punish in anger. Let it hurt you as much as it hurts them. Show your children that you really care for them. Let your love shine through. I once stole some little money as a child and bought sweets. When I was found out I expected to be sorely punished but my mother took me aside and wept with me. It was sorer than a beating. I could see that she loved me and that she was deeply hurt.

Gospel

Some parents make the mistake of teaching only the law to their children – the do's and don'ts. But that will never save our children. In fact it has a tendency to harden them. It causes them to have a very negative view of salvation and the Christian life. We must teach them about grace – about God's love. We must stress to them the need to repent and believe in Jesus, but also the willingness of Christ to save. Plead with them to give their life to Christ, to cast themselves upon

His mercy and to commit their souls to His keeping. Also, encourage them to seek assurance. They must not take it for granted that they are saved. They are to strive to make sure: *'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall'* (2 Pet 1:10). It is a lifelong occupation. Teach them Scripture verses off by heart and also the catechism. Store their minds when young with truths which will be a blessing to them all their life. It is much easier to memorise when young.

Church

Church should have a very important part in the bringing up of our children. Take them to church from a very young age. Make church their second home. They should if possible be brought to all the regular meetings of the church. The preaching in our churches has a duty to aim at the children as well as the adults. Children came to listen to Jesus. The Apostles in their Epistles had a word for the children. Ministers should address them particularly from time to time and they must aim to make the difficult things of the gospel clear to the young. They should speak in language which the children can understand.

Education

Education is very important for children. Teach them to read as soon as possible. Get them to read Scripture for themselves. Be aware that a school can undermine the teaching of the home. Ask your children each day what they are taught. This can be hard work but it is worth it. Talk to your children and spend time with them to see what they are thinking. It is very important to listen to them. Be careful not to do all the talking. Try to build up trust and love with your children and do not ignore their concerns. Do not unnecessarily embarrass them.

Companions

How often children are led astray by bad friends! It is very important to be aware of this. Friends are a huge influence especially in teenage years. Try to keep them away from bad friends. Encourage them to make friends with those who will help them. It is better for them to have no friends than to have friends who will lead them into evil. Watch your children and know where they are. Keep them much about the home, near yourself and other good Christians. A strong, united, loving family will be a great antidote to evil. Realise the world and the devil are out to get your children. There are huge temptations out there for teenagers.

Example

Finally, of very great importance in bringing up children is to set a good example before them. All you say is judged by your life. If you are a hypocrite your children will see through you. Don't tell them to do things that you don't do. Show that your Christianity is real by living a holy, loving life before them. Be a godly person all the time – in the secrecy of your own home as well as when people are watching. This is hard but seek God's grace so that you can honestly say to your family, *'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ'* (1 Cor 11:1). How many children have been turned off Christianity by the inconsistent lives of their parents and on the other hand how many children have known the truth of Christianity because they saw it lived out as a reality before them!

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