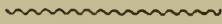


A SERIES
OF
TRACTS
ON THE
DOCTRINES, ORDER, AND POLITY
OF THE
✓
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
EMBRACING
SEVERAL ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

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HOW TO BRING UP CHILDREN.

I WAS dining at the house of a friend. The conversation turned upon the religious education of children. Some things said were so profound or rhetorical, that I have forgotten them. My host was a plain man, who preferred the practical to the poetical. He said: "A good religious education is rare. The whole subject is difficult. Yet our duty in the matter may be stated in few words: *teach well, rule well, live well, pray well.*" At first silence, then a few words of assent followed. The company separated to meet no more on earth. Some may have forgotten the occasion, and all that was said. But I have thought much of the eight monosyllables. I think my friend was right. I take his words for a guide.

I. TEACH WELL. In teaching the *matter* and *manner* both claim attention. He, who takes heed *what* but not *how* he teaches, or *how* but not *what* he teaches does at the most but half his duty. Teach truth and not its semblance, fiction. Teach truth and not its opposite, error. Teach the truths God has taught you. Teach the whole word of God. The law is holy, just, and good. The promises are many, sweet, and faithful. The doctrines are true, sublime, and purifying. The threatenings are wise, righteous, and terrible. The examples are striking, various, and instructive. The encouragements are great, necessary, and seasonable. The invitations are kind, sincere, and persuasive. Omit nothing, abate nothing, add nothing. God's word is perfect. He, who made the Bible, made the mind of your child, and knew perfectly what would be best for it.

Teach things in the proportion, in which God has taught them. If God is just and holy, he is also good and merciful. If he forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin, he will also by no means clear the guilty. If his wrath is dreadful, his love is infinite. If he is a Saviour, he is also a Judge. If he is

a Sovereign, he is also a Father. If he pardons, it is not because sin is not infinitely hateful to him.

Give clear ideas of the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. Show how they differ. Never confound works and grace. Let Mount Sinai and Mount Calvary be set over against each other. Sinai without Calvary will fill the mind with terrors. Calvary without Sinai will breed contempt of mercy. The angels, who never sinned, are accepted for their works. "Do and live," is a law that suits them well. But eternal justice will smite to death the sinner who seeks acceptance by his own merits. He is a thief and a robber. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified."

Give to the person, teaching, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, offices, and glory, of Christ the place assigned them in Scripture. He is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, light, life, prophet, priest, king, shepherd, surety, sacrifice, advocate. We are complete in him. He is all, and in all. He is Alpha and Omega, the first, and the last.

Draw from the Bible the duties you inculcate, and the motives you urge. If you would repress self-will, stubbornness, immodesty, impatience, idleness, pride, deceit, selfishness, bigotry, cruelty, profaneness, or any vice, show that God forbids it. Always take sides with God against the sins and vices of even your own child. Explain the nature and urge the necessity of submission, patience, industry, humility, sobriety, moderation, truth, candour, honesty, justice, kindness, charity, faith, hope, repentance, fidelity, benevolence, respect for superiors, and reverence for God's name, word, Sabbath, worship, and ordinances. Take not the duty from the Bible, and the motives from Chesterfield, Rochefaucault, Seneca, or Plato. Present scriptural motives to an upright and virtuous life.

Think not to be wise above what is written: but try to be wise, and to make your children wise up to what is written. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." Mix it not up with dreams and fancies, and loose opinions. "What is the chaff to the wheat."

In teaching, great diligence is essential. So says God: "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. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." Deut. vi. 6-9. "Be instant in season, out of season." The holy Sabbath, sickness or death in your family or neighbourhood, a narrow escape from some great evil, a time of drought or of plenty, any event that excites notice, even the common incidents of life, furnish fit occasions for dropping the precious seeds of truth in the heart. Occasional remarks are no less impressive than stated instructions. They are often more pithy, and more easily remembered.

Take not too much for granted. Children are feeble and heedless. A little at a time, and often repeated, is the great secret of successful teaching. "Line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept," is the scriptural method. Though you may have taught a lesson twenty times, it is not certain that it has been perfectly learned.

Avail yourself of the love of narrative, so common in children. God has revealed much of his will in this way. The stories and parables of Scripture are not only admirable for their plainness and simplicity, but they enforce truth with unsurpassed power. Almost every principle of religion and morals is thus illustrated and enforced in the word of God.

A good teacher must be gentle and patient. It is hardly worse not to speak divine truth at all, than not to speak it in love. Teach the same lesson a hundredth time. Upbraid not a child for its dulness. Be like Jesus, who said: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly." Terror produces agitation, and thus precludes the power of learning. Nor can any thing be more undesirable than to have religious instruction associated in the mind of a child with moroseness and harshness. The human heart is sufficiently opposed to the truth of God without our strengthening it by roughness or severity.

Do not be easily discouraged. Persevere. He has seen but little of mankind, who has not witnessed the sad failures of the precocious, and the final success of the slow. "Long patience" is even more essential to the teacher than to the husbandman.

Enter with spirit and zeal on the work of instruction. Put off all languor and sloth. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to

do, do it with thy might." A lifeless formalism is as truly mischievous at the fireside as in the pulpit.

To your own efforts add those of well-selected pious teachers, both during the week and on the Sabbath. Every school, even every Sabbath school is not well taught. Exercise your best judgment in the choice of teachers.

Know what books your children read. The world is deluged with books, which abound in error. Guard the minds of your children against a fondness for novel-reading. It has ruined thousands.

II. RULE WELL. The elements of good family government are strength, justice, discrimination, uniformity, and love. Act not the tyrant, yet be master or mistress of your own house. In your superior years, place, experience, and vigour, God has given you all that is necessary for making your government strong. Let it be a government, and not mere counsel. But let its provisions and administration be just. A child can *feel* injustice as soon and as keenly as a man. Impose no impossible tasks. Take into account all the weaknesses of childhood. In governing your children make a difference, not from partiality, but from a proper estimate of their various capacities, years, dispositions, and temptations. The varieties of character even in the same family are often surprising. Yet be uniform. Be not lax to-day and rigid to-morrow. Have settled principles, and let your children know them. Yet beware of making too many laws. They will not only ensnare your children, but destroy your government. Children may be governed too much. Do not expect perfection. In all you do, be guided by enlightened and pure affection. Never chide, nor correct in passion. If you cannot rule your own spirit, you may break the spirit of your child, but you cannot establish a wholesome government over him.

That we are bound to use authority is manifest from many parts of Scripture. Of Abraham God says: "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." Behold the dreadful end of the sons of Eli, and be warned. He was a good man, hated sin even in his own children, and reprov'd it, saying: "It is no good thing I hear of you, my sons." But he used not authority, as their father, and as the high-priest, to *require* reformation. Follow not so dangerous an example.

With reproof God has united the rod. When it is necessary, use it. It commonly is necessary in cases of wilful and deliberate disobedience. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." Never use the rod to gratify a feeling of anger, nor without being sure that it is deserved. I have some where read the following story, which well illustrates the matter. Two stages, belonging to opposition lines, left the same place at the same hour every day for London. Both drivers had orders to make the distance in the shortest time possible. One driver mounted the box, with whip in hand, excited, spoke angrily to his horses, and alternately relaxed and jerked the reins, at the same time using his whip freely. In a few miles his horses gave signs of distress, and before he reached London some of his team was usually broken down. The other driver coolly took his seat, spoke gently to his horses, held a steady rein all the time, and seldom even cracked his whip. He was often hindmost for a few miles, but while the horses of the other team were in a foam, hardly a hair of his horses was moist. The last few miles, his team not being jaded, he took the lead, and seldom even distressed a horse. The reason of the difference was, not that one driver had a better team than the other, but one was a better driver than the other. One held a steady rein, and never used the whip unless it was necessary. The other constantly used the whip, fretted his team, and wasted both their spirit and strength.

Who has not seen this precise difference in the government of families? The first driver would have done as well, perhaps better, without a whip. And many a family would not have been in a worse state, if a rod had never been in it. Family government is always a failure when it does not secure prompt obedience and sincere affection from the child to the parent.

Parents should be agreed in the government of their children. If they do not support each other's authority, it must fall. A divided house cannot stand. Nor should they permit grand-parents, aunts, or any person whatever to weaken their authority.

III. LIVE WELL. Set a good example in all things. "Tinder is not more apt to take fire, nor wax the impression of the seal, than the young are to follow example." If your child may in his heart say: "Physician, heal thyself," your

influence for good in that matter is at an end, at least until you reform. He, who delivers good precepts, sows good seed. He, who adds good example, ploughs in that seed. Children are the most imitative creatures in the world. The different species of ape excite the laughter of fools by their powers of mimicry, but children excite the admiration of wise men by their powers of imitation. Quintilian rightly says that nurses should not have a bad accent. The reason is that children will soon acquire it. And Dr. Watts well says, "it is far less difficult to learn than to unlearn." In his Ode to the Romans, Horace says: "Brave men are made by brave men." Nor is there any other way of making men brave. Precept, eloquence, and poetry cannot do it. Cowards breed cowards. The same is true of all the virtues and vices.

The power of good examples above bare precepts is threefold; *first*, they most clearly show what the duty is; *then*, they prove that it is practicable; and *lastly*, they awaken a more lively desire to perform it, by arousing the imitative principle of our nature. I have known two men, by precept and authority, without example, to try to restrain their sons from intemperance and profanity. They both failed. I have known many a parent, whose precepts were few, and whose use of the rod was sparing, to raise a family to virtue and honour chiefly by a blameless example. It is as true of parents as of preachers, that a bad example will destroy the good that might be expected from sound instruction. "Do as I say, and not as I do," is a sentence that converts the best teaching into poison, and dreadfully hardens the heart. Precepts give the theory, but example instils principle. Words impart notions, but example carries conviction. One plain man of blameless life and good sense, will more enforce the obligations of true piety than a hundred orators of godless lives. A heathen once gave as a reason for his guarded behaviour in the presence of the young, "I reverence a child." If you deceive your child, break your promises to him, or practise any sin before him, you cannot fail to teach him to do the same.

IV. PRAY WELL. "Pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance." "Pray without ceasing." Pray in the house of God, in your family, in your closet, in your daily walks. Ask others to pray for you and your children. This should

not be a mere formal, but an earnest request. You need special wisdom and grace to preserve you from error, and sin, and folly. The heart of your child is corrupt, and all your culture will be lost without God's blessing. You cannot change the heart, renew the will, or wash away the sins of your child. God alone can impart to him a love of the truth, or give him repentance. You may use your best endeavours, but all will be in vain without God's Spirit. Sails are necessary, but a thousand yards of canvass will not carry forward a vessel, unless the wind blows.

Be fervent in your supplications. Monica, the mother of Augustine, said she "had greater travail and pain that her son might be born again, than that he might be born." God answered her prayers, and that too at a time when he seemed to be utterly lost. John Newton tells of a mother of eleven pious children, who, being asked how she came to be so much blessed, said, "I never took one of them into my arms to give it nourishment, that I did not pray that I might never nurse a child for the devil." "Elijah's prayer brought down fire from heaven, because, being fervent, it carried fire up to heaven." It is as true now as in any former age of the world, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Never despair of the salvation of a child. While there is life, there is hope. Wrestle with God like Jacob, and you shall prevail like Israel. Never by unbelief deliver over a child to sin, and to the wrath of God. Pray on. Hope on.

CONCLUSION.—For your encouragement take the promises of the covenant of peace: "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee." "The promise is to you and to your children." "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." More precious promises could not be made. Believe them. Plead them before God. Richard Baxter has said, that if pious education, family worship, parental instruction, and a holy example were properly regarded by parents, even the *preaching* of the gospel would not be the most common means of conversion. The best encouragement to effort is found in the hope of success. In this case that hope is well founded. God's word and providence both prove it. The great mass of the pious now on earth is made up of those, who from childhood have been

taught the ways of God. Many foolish things have, no doubt, been said concerning the religious impressions of children. Yet there have been many well authenticated cases of early piety. Our children cannot too soon begin to live to the glory of God. He, who is old enough to sin against God, is old enough to love God. Whether your children shall be early or late converted, yet if they shall obtain salvation at all, they will be kings and priests unto God for ever and ever. Does a sweeter hope ever visit the parental mind than that of standing before God in the last day, and saying: "Behold, I and the children, whom the Lord hath given me?" "A whole family in heaven" will for ever be matter of greater wonder and louder praise, than can be found in all the works disclosed by microscopes and telescopes in the boundless dominions of God.

But if you neglect the religious education of your children, dreadful will be the consequences. "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." Parental love is often blind and foolish.

"A parent's heart may prove a snare;
The child she loves so well,
Her hand may lead with gentlest care,
Down the smooth road to hell."

Trust not your heart. Trust God's word. Give not place to evil tempers and ways in yourself or your child. It is not many years since a young lady thus addressed her parents: "You have been the unhappy instruments of my being. You fostered me in pride, and led me in the paths of sin. You never once warned me of my danger, and now it is too late. In a few hours you will have to cover me with earth, but remember, while you are casting earth upon my body, my soul will be in hell, and yourselves the miserable cause." If you would escape the scourges of a guilty conscience, the reproaches of a lost child, and the rebukes of an angry God, do your duty to your children. Only when the heart of the fathers is turned to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, may we hope that God will not come and smite the earth with a curse. As a town without walls, as a house without a roof, as a garden without a hedge, and as sheep without a shepherd, so is a family, whose thoughts and affairs are not moulded by the fear and love of God.