

## Forty-seventh Day

# The Reign of Love

*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.*  
Ephesians 6:4

*Fathers, provoke not your children lest they become  
disheartened.* Colossians 3:21

*Charity suffers long and is benign; ... seeks not her  
own, is not easily provoked.* 1 Corinthians 13:4-5

*Teach the young women ... to love their children.*  
Titus 2:4

**T**HE apostle had noticed in the houses he visited how education often suffers from a lack of love. And so, in addressing different classes in his general epistles, he speaks especially to fathers. On the two occasions in which he names them, he repeats the warning to them not to provoke their children to wrath. His words suggest three thoughts: a child is often provoking; a father often allows himself to be provoked; and the result generally is that he again provokes the child to wrath. Thus, instead of his reproof being the help and the strength of his child in seeking what is good, he discourages and hinders

him. Paul's warning indicates the whole subject of the difficulty of giving reproof or punishment in the right spirit and the need of patience and wisdom and self-control. Paul shows that the secret of a parent's rule is to reign in love.

Note first that fathers are here particularly addressed. They are expected to take a part in the management of the children. Many fathers neglect this and seek to throw the work entirely on the mother. When returning home from the day's labor, they do not feel inclined to trouble themselves, and the children are regarded more as a burden and a weariness than as a charge entrusted by the Lord to be met in the spirit of love and gladness. God has joined the weakness and gentleness of the mother to the firmness and strength of the father; it is as each takes his share in the work and becomes the helper of the other that the divine blessing may be expected.

Therefore, it is of great importance that in addition to the daily, united devotions at the family altar, there should be set times when father and mother join in reading and conversation and prayer on the training of their children. One-half hour a week set apart for this purpose, if it were only for one year, would bring a rich reward. It would supply the lack of a training school for parents and draw attention to many important lessons, which may not be noticed in the presence of work. It would give the opportunity for a mother's calling for and receiving a father's aid and guidance. It would bring the blessing on conjugal and parental love, of which Peter speaks: *Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them wisely, giving honour unto the woman, as unto a more fragile vessel and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers not be hindered.* Let every father accept his calling to take his part in the training of the children (1 Peter 3:7).

*Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.* The occasion of this taking place is ordinarily that the child has first provoked

the father. A child is sometimes wayward, often thoughtless, so that even what was well intentioned may be the cause of annoyance. It is only when the weak nature of the child is carefully and lovingly taken into account that the parent will be able to patiently bear with him and train him. It is the privilege and honor of the parent to have this immortal spirit entrusted to his charge, even with all his failings and the trials of patience. Let parents not be surprised or be taken unaware by what may be trying to their temper and patience; they will see the need for preparing themselves for their holy work by faith in Him who fits us for every work He gives us to do.

*Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.* There is much in some children that is provoking, and there is much in some fathers that is easily provoked. Beware of giving way to such provocation, for it has been the ruin of many children. To educate a child is impossible without self-control.

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This Scripture is true: For patience is necessary, and the patience finishes the work (Hebrews 10:36; James 1:4). The whole life of the Christian is meant by the Father in heaven, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to be one of watchfulness and self-recollection. In home life these graces are especially indispensable. The sudden outbreaks of temper in children, the little vexations arising from their disobedience or neglect or mistakes, their little quarrels and naughtinesses are all occasions on which a father needs the love that is not easily provoked. God meant the rule of the family to be like His own, a reign of law inspired by love.

*Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.* However provoking the child may have been, however inclined the father may be to feel provoked, he must not provoke the child to wrath. One provocation calls forth another; an angry father, giving way to his failing of being provoked easily, makes an

angry child. The calm, quiet assertion of authority helps to bring the offender to the acknowledgment of the justice of his punishment. When the parent gives way to anger and passion in a sharp reproof or hasty punishment, the child's passion is roused too. He becomes angry and vexed at an infliction he does not understand. Passion ordinarily rouses passion; the parent is the teacher and example of the child, appointed by God to meet and conquer outbreaks of his passion by the gentle firmness of love. How sad when the opposite is the case, and a father's hasty anger inflames a child's passion, and the father becomes his provocation to wrath.

*Lest they become disheartened.* In the struggle between good and evil that goes on in the child, there is nothing needed as much as being encouraged to believe that the victory of the good is within his reach; goodness is possible and pleasant. To inspire a child with a holy confidence in what he can accomplish by God's grace and the aid of his parents is one of the blessed secrets of success in training.

In training a horse, the utmost care is taken never to overtax it or give it a load that might lead to failure; at each difficult place its master is alert with his voice and hand to inspire it with confidence. The horse must not know that it could fail. May the child never be discouraged by thinking his weakness is not regarded or that he has not received the help or justice he expects. Children need a love, which they too seldom receive, and a thoughtfulness, which parents too seldom bestow.

*Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.* The education of a child is a holier work than many think. It needs self-training above everything. Without his knowing it, your child is God's schoolmaster to bring you nearer to Christ. Not only does the child, in his tenderness and lovingness, call forth the love of your heart, but his waywardness and willfulness call for it even more, as he puts it to the test and schools it in patience.

and gentleness. Study to have every token of your displeasure, every reproof and every punishment, so marked by love that through it all the child may be encouraged into goodness.

But it is not by reproof and punishment, however gently and wisely administered, that parents will keep their children from becoming provoked or discouraged. This is only the negative side; the positive is of more importance. Prevention is better than cure. Always cultivate in yourself and the child that state of feeling which takes away the opportunity of conflict. Endeavor by your own tranquility, gentleness, and kindness to promote the same feelings in the child. Throw yourself in sympathy into their interests, entering into their state of mind and feeling. Expect them to enter into your spirit and temper and instinctively to yield themselves to its influence. And as you seek to maintain the rule of love as a principle of action, you will find how the children will catch its spirit and become your helpers in making your home the reflection of the life of love in which the heavenly Father guides and trains His children.

### A Prayer for Parents

Gracious God and Father, the longer we listen to the teaching of Your Word on our duty as parents, the more deeply we feel the need of a divine grace for doing that work correctly. I come to You with the humble confession of my sin; how often sin in the child has only been met by sin in the parent, causing new sin in the child and discouraging him in the battle. And You have meant the parent to be the model of a holy, patient love, uniting and helping the child's weakness and by his example encouraging him into the assurance that he, too, can conquer.

O God, we ask You to open our eyes that we may know our holy calling. Give us a deep conviction that nothing but Your own Spirit, dwelling in us day by day, can fit us for training sinful beings in a life of holiness; that nothing but the most entire surrender to walk with You, to be in everything guided and possessed by Your Spirit, can prepare us for the work of parents. O God, may a holy wisdom and patience in meeting each little outbreak and the power of a love that enables us to bear and to conquer be given to us. May we inspire our child with confidence in us and the victory of good. O God, may we train our children after Your mind to be a pleasure to You with Your help. Amen.

## Forty-fourth Day

# Parental Self-Culture

*Thou, therefore, who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Romans 2:21*

**N**OTHING can be more inconsistent and vain than the attempt to teach others without teaching ourselves. Only in ordinary instruction that the teacher has mastered and made his own can he successfully communicate to others. It is only the lesson I first teach myself that I can really teach my child. One of the first laws in the science of home education is that it depends far more on example than precept; what parents are avails more than what they say. There is not one lesson of child life, which the parent must not first learn himself. Let us look at some of them.

The great aim of education is to give the child the perfect mastery and ready use of all the wondrous powers God has endowed him with. To this end a wise self-control is one of the first virtues. As a state cannot prosper if there is no wise, intelligent ruler to make its laws and provide for its needs, so happiness cannot thrive in the little empire within man's home, unless everything be subject to a ruling power. The child must be

trained to habits of quiet thoughtfulness in speech and actions. This training comes far more through example than precept. The atmosphere of a well-regulated home and the influence of parental self-control will unconsciously set their mark on the child. When parents give way to impulse and temper, perhaps while reproofing the child's temper, the effect of the good advice is more than neutralized by the evil influence of the spirit displayed. It is the spirit of the parent that influences. The child may never look up and say, "But God's Word says, *Thou, therefore, who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?*" If parents honestly watch themselves, they will often discover the causes of their children's failings in themselves. Such discovery ought to lead to confession before God and a hearty surrender to the teaching of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We can depend upon the divine renewal to fit us for true self-control; and what we by grace teach ourselves will in due time influence our children too.

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But the self-control must know its object and the path to reach that object. The child finds both in the word we have repeated so often – obedience. He must control himself to be able to render obedience to his parent, so he may be trained to what will be his liberty and his glory, obedience to God. But here again the parent's obedience will be contagious; it will inspire the child. If the parent's position is one of privilege and liberty and command, the child may feel that the burden of obedience is all put upon him, the weaker one.

"Johnny," said a father once to a child, who was hesitant in obeying, "whose will must you do, your own or Papa's?"

"Papa's will," was the reluctant answer, but he followed with the question, "But whose will must Papa do then?"

The father was able at once to answer, "God's will," and then explained how he considered such obedience his greatest

privilege. He could at once take his place by the side of his child as also having to give up his own will. The parent who can appeal to his daily life with his children, so they know how he seeks to do the will of his God and prays in their presence will find a mighty power to inculcate obedience in the child. When, on the contrary, the seeking of our own will marks our communication with our children, we do not need to wonder why our education is a failure. Let us turn at once and hearken to the voice: *Thou, therefore, who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?*

Very specifically this holds true with the great commandment that is the fulfilling of the law. Family life has been specially ordained of God as the sphere where love can be cultivated. In nothing is our self-control to be more proved than in loving others

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and restraining everything that is selfish or unloving. In the daily life of our children with each other and their companions, we have in miniature the temptations to which later life will expose them. For the exercise of the virtues of gentleness and forbearance,

of forgiveness and generosity, of helpfulness and generosity, continued opportunity will be found. Principles must not only be inculcated, but the trouble must also be taken to lead the child to do the right thing easily and lovingly. Many wish to help the poor, for instance, but do not undertake it, because they do not know how to begin. One of the highest parts of a right Christian education is to make generosity the chief object of life, and awaken the desire to live to make those around us better and happier. But this can only be attained as the parents teach themselves as well as their children to cultivate these virtues. In the daily life of the family, the parents must seek to prove that love is the law of their life. It must be understood that unkind words, harsh judgments, and unloving reports

form no part of their conversation. In communication with each other, with children, with servants, with friends, and with the world, God's love must be sought after and manifested. In the sympathy with the needy and wretched and in the actual loving self-denial exercised for the sake of the poor or the suffering, the example of Christ and His love must be reduced to practice in daily life. In this way can education to a life of love be truly successful.

*Thou, therefore, who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?* These words ask whether we are doing the first and most needful thing for being successful teachers of our children: teaching ourselves. Yes, parents, teach yourselves. If we are to train our children wisely, we must go through a new course of training ourselves. We must put ourselves to school again and be teachers and scholars in one. Of the two scholars whose education has to go on simultaneously, the parent and the child, the parent will often find that the child makes more progress. The lessons, which teach parents, are often of greater importance and difficulty than those the child has to learn. It is especially beneficial if the first lesson learned is the need of self-teaching, the need of teachableness, the need of continual daily learning.

Let the parent who begins to see this realize what it means to become a scholar. All schooling requires time and trouble, patience and payment. Teaching that costs nothing is of little value. No one can graduate as competent to train a child for eternity without making sacrifices. Take time to study God's Word and what it says about a parent's duty. Study man's moral nature as the sacred trust committed to your care. Teach yourself to cultivate that nature to its highest fitness for God's service: it will be the best preparation for teaching your children correctly. And if you feel you need the help of some friend to stimulate and to guide – let Jesus be that teacher. He came

and taught Himself that He might know how to teach us; He learned obedience that He might show us the way. He came to show us the Father; He will likewise reveal the Father's love and grace, the fatherly tenderness of our God, so we will be full of a joyful assurance that He will not refuse to teach and enable us to be true fathers and mothers to our children. And we shall understand that to be teachable, obedient, loving children of the heavenly Father is the surest way of having our children be teachable, obedient, and loving too.

### A Prayer for Parents

Gracious God, I come again to seek the grace I need for filling my place as a parent. I ask You to imprint deep on my heart the solemn thought that I can effectually teach my children only what I teach myself, and I can only expect the truth that influences my own life to influence theirs.

O my God, I think with shame of how I reprove them for the reflection of what they have seen in me. I confess how much there has been lacking in me of that spirit of childlike love and self-denial, joyful obedience to You, and thoughtful self-sacrifice for others, which would have been the highest education to them. O my God, forgive me for what is past and give me grace in everything to teach myself what I want to teach my children.

Be pleased especially to help me realize that as I live as an obedient child with my Father in heaven, I can teach my children and expect them to be obedient to me. Lord, may childlike simplicity and obedience be the atmosphere my home breathes, the bond that makes

parents and children one. As I think of my own slowness in learning, may I be very patient and gentle with my children, yet full of hope that the lessons I impart to them will have their effect.

Jesus, Master, teach me, that with Your teaching I may teach my loved ones. Amen.