

Parenting

By Philip Venables

I am a parent. I am a failing parent. Therefore, I do not come to this study as the oracle of all virtue on the subject. I, in many ways, come as a needy learner. I come not as an expert, but a failure who is seeking to learn to be a better parent.

So where do I look, and where do you look, for counsel on this issue of parenting? It is interesting to observe in the newspapers, how from time to time different advice and different theories are brought forward to seek to help those in parenting. Often this advice and these theories are contradictory to one another.

The parenting advice industry thrives on the fact that people are at a loss as to know where to go for advice as they struggle with bringing up their children. Everything, though, with parenting counselling seems to be "shifting sand" with one breakthrough theory being replaced by the next panacea for all parenting ills.

But we as Christians have something far more sure. We have the Word of God. We have the revelation of the eternal LORD God, Our Creator. In this book we have everything we need. **"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"** (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Word of God is sufficient to give us the framework for parenting.

BASIC PRINCIPLES:

1. Children Are A Gift From The LORD.

**"Children are a heritage from the LORD,
offspring a reward from Him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one's youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court."
Psalm 127:3-4.**

We need to continually remind ourselves of this. Sometimes, we start to think of our children as a nuisance and a great encumbrance upon our lives. No! Fellow parent, always remind yourself that your children are gifts from the LORD.

I was reminded of this when I was seeing off children to go to camp some time ago. There were other parents gathered and as the youngsters left a couple of mothers started to do a fake celebration as their kids disappeared in the minibus. I felt at the time that this was one of those things that are too important to joke about. If their children had seen those parents I wonder what they would have thought. Would they have thought that their parents were cherishing them as a gift from the LORD?

2. Children Are Given To Parents.

They are not given to the state to indoctrinate. They are not given to childminders or nursery workers to merely supervise. They are not given to the church even. They are given to parents. God knows the best place to be given into is a parental home.

3. Children Should Honour Their Parents.

The LORD says, **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother"– which is the first commandment with a promise – 'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth'** (Eph. 6:1-3). Paul here bases his

admonition on the fifth commandment, **“Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you”** (Ex. 20:12).

The idea involved in honouring parents here is that of treating them weightily. Children should have a deep respect for their parents. We must note here that the commandment specifically states **both** father and mother.

4. A Child Is Created In The Image Of God.

Parents, you are to respect the child God has given to you. That child bears the image of the Eternal Creator, God. In Genesis 1:27 we read, **“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.”**

The implication of this is that we should not use demeaning language towards our children whether they are boys or girls. It is wrong to say such things as, *“You are just a stupid idiot.”* No! A parent should never say that to (or of) their child.

5. Your Child Is Unique.

We, as parents, need to remember as regards to our children that they are who they are! Each child is different, and that is how God Has made them. Do not live your life through them so they have to develop to be what you impose upon them. Rather, you want them to develop into who God has made them to be. In parenting there is not a “one-size-fits-all” pattern. There are the principles of God's Word which need to be applied in to each situation. Teach them to be their own people.

6. Children Are Sinners.

You have a child who was born in sin and shaped in iniquity, (see Psalm 51:5), and need to remember that, **“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away”** (Proverbs 22:15). We need to reject the fantasising of the world which sees children as born as sinless, but only being harmed by their environment. No! Children are born as sinners.

7. Parents Are Also Sinners.

You are a sinner as well and do not always get things right. One of the most humbling things about parenthood is when your child points out that you have got things wrong. What do you do? You need to confess your sins. You need to ask for their forgiveness. By this means you are modelling grace to your child.

8. Parents Always Love Their Children.

Regardless of their behaviour, parents should always love their children. Sometimes you hear parents say, *“If you do this then mummy will love you”*. No! We should never speak like that. We always love our children. We may be displeased with their behaviour, but we always love them.

9. Parents are to Provide For their Children.

“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1Tim. 5:8).

“Charity begins at home” as the saying goes. Parents have a primary responsibility to provide for their children.

PRIORITIES:

1. Their Spiritual Welfare.

Here are some pointers to make sure that we get a good focus on the spiritual welfare of our children.

- **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom”** (Prov. 1:7a). So we must teach our children to have a deep respect for God.
- Teach them that this God has standards. He is to be respected. So teach the Law of God; teach “The Ten Commandments”.
- Teach them the gospel because as those who have failed to meet God's standards they need salvation.
- Thereby from the earliest age we teach them about sin. We teach them about Christ and we teach them about their need to turn to Him.
- From the time you receive them into the mother’s womb you are praying that they would be followers of the LORD and mightily used by Him.
- We need to read the Word to them (and with them) at home. Read it as a family and to them individually.
- You need to teach them from the Word what is important.
“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.” (Proverbs 1:8-9)
- The child is to listen, but you are to teach. If necessary get books to help you and ask others for help.
- Remember you are seeking to win the heart. You are not just wanting to get outward behaviour right. You want their hearts to be for the LORD.
- Children can take in such a vast amount. So make sure you get the Word of God in there.
- Parents, seek not to be hypocrites; seek to live by the Word; always be seeking to live by the Word. Children take in a lot by observing their parents.
- Our homes should be gospel homes. The themes of grace are ever being outlined to our children.

This leads me to make some thoughts about family worship; about erecting what used to be called “the family altar”. It is my observation that those parents who have family worship have seen their children go on to follow the LORD.

Family worship does not have to be a big thing. You need to pitch it at an appropriate age level. A brief reading of scripture and a short prayer may be all you can accomplish, but make sure you do accomplish what you can. If you are struggling with knowing what to do then ask others. There are also resources around that can help you.

I remember a friend who was brought up with family worship at home saying to me how through this he had come to know that his parents believed the Word of God was important.

Take your children to church. Right from the beginning bring them to church. Make them know that being in church on Sunday is important. Away with such stuff as saying they have to make up their own mind when they are older. No, you make it clear that faith in God through Jesus matters by taking them to the place where God's people meet to worship.

Never speak ill before them of anyone or anything in church. I remember hearing a well-known pastor from a London church recounting how the church he had been in as a boy was experiencing great difficulties, but because of the wisdom of his parents he was unaware of anything happening.

The church needs to receive them into the church. There needs to be give and take in church as regards to the children's behaviour. The congregation need to be able to tolerate a bit of noise!

However, parents should not allow their children to make a racket.

2. Expect Obedience.

We need to remember Exodus 20:12, and Ephesians 6:1-3. The call to the children is to, “obey”. The call on parents is to expect obedience.

It should not be the case, that only when Mum / Dad says it for the third time then I obey. It should not be only when Mum shouts then I obey. No! They should be taught to obey. The importance of all this in the sight of God is seen from a passage in the Old Testament which we might find somewhat shocking.

It concerns a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him. In such a case:

“...his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid” (Deut. 21:19-21).

As we read this passage, we notice that the LORD calls such disobedience evil. Complementing that is the statement in Ephesians 6:1 where the LORD says obeying your parents is right. Disobedient children harm families. And from such a beginning harmful developments start to appear in other areas of their lives. Ultimately they grow up to be harmful to whatever circle they move in.

Brian Edwards puts the matter starkly like this,

“Long before a child thinks about murder, contemplates the passing pleasure of adultery, understands the apparent advantage of stealing, learns to lie or yearns for the possessions of others; it struggles to break free from parental discipline. That is always the first relationship to be trampled upon and therefore the first one that a child must learn to value. From this commandment flows an attitude to a thousand people.”

As we ponder upon the beauty of the life of a child who is obedient to their parents let us be drawn to consider our LORD. We read of Him in Luke 2:51, **“Then He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.”**

This was Jesus as a twelve year old. He moved into His teenage years and through them displaying obedience to His parents. I suggest that it is a myth to expect teenagers to “rebel”. No doubt the teenage years are times of change and development, but they should not necessarily be times of rebellion. We should still expect our children to display obedience as they move into adolescence.

3. Truth.

This is an absolute priority. Children need to know that they *always* have to tell the truth. If they have been honest about something even if it is to their own detriment you encourage them for telling the truth.

It is terrible to have people around you who do not tell the truth. Of course *you*, as a parent, have a responsibility to tell the truth. That would be one of the reasons why I would not do Father Christmas. In playing Father Christmas you are bound to be drawn into deceiving your children.

FULL DEVELOPMENT

We read of our Lord:

“And the child grew and became strong; He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on Him” (Luke 2:40). And again we read, **“Then He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”** (Luke 2:51-52).

From this we can discern four aspects to the development of our LORD: “Spiritual” (growing in favour with God), “Social” (growing in favour with man), “Mental” (growing in wisdom) and “Physical” (becoming strong and growing in stature). We have dealt with the issue of spiritual development above in the “priorities” section. We now come to look at the other three so that we can ensure that our children develop fully.

1. Social Development.

Here again I provide some pointers:

- A child needs to grow up interacting well with others.
- A child has to be taught that the world does not operate around them. Parents need to teach them how to relate to other people. Teach them to respect other people. Calling their name is an important issue here. Teach them manners. Teach them good manners which are the oil of life “Please, thank you, sorry” are important.
- Make meal times important to them. At these times they are forced to interact with others.
- Help them to find good friends. So parents need to encourage them to go to places where they will make friends with those who are helpful to them. It is no good when they are eighteen complaining about them, *“getting in with the wrong crowd”*, when you have done nothing to facilitate them meeting with those who would be good friends when they are younger.
- As mentioned above we need to get them to church. And then we need to think about getting them to go to appropriate events and camps.

2. Mental Development.

We parents need to help our children to grow in wisdom. Accordingly we help them with their education; we seek to equip them with the necessary skills for life.

One very important thing is to get our children reading. We need to get them reading good stuff. We need to encourage them to learn. One of the problems can be that they are in environments where because of peer pressure or other influences they are encouraged not to learn. We need to do everything to fight against this.

3. Physical Development.

We have a responsibility as parents to make sure that our children develop physically in an appropriately healthy way. Even from the earliest days this matters. So seeking to breast feed is a good aspiration. In doing so we are following in the way God ordained. The mother is providing the food for her baby as the Lord has physically arranged

As the children grow up we need to provide them with appropriate food and a safe environment. And we take all necessary action to facilitate their recovery when they are not well by using medicines, doctors and hospitals.

Physical exercise should also be a priority. This leads us on to think about the danger of SAS – *“sitting at screens.”* No doubt the preponderance of IT nowadays necessitates that our children have to spend time using computers. But we need to make sure that they get away from the computer and enjoy some physical exercise.

DO NOT EXASPERATE YOUR CHILDREN.

We have dealt with some of the key issues governing the parenting of children. For the rest of this study I want to come to an exposition of Ephesians 6:4, **“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”** (Eph. 6:4). Let us start with the call not to exasperate our children.

The call upon parents to not exasperate their children is given similarly by Paul to the Colossians when he exhorts, **“Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged”** (Col. 3:21).

Let us then look at some ways in which we can avoid exasperating our children.

1. By Not Making Meaningless Threats.

A meaningless threat is of this ilk. A parent says to their child. *“If you do not stand up straight away I will not give you any meals for a month.”* Upon hearing that the child looks on and thinks that is a load of nonsense; they will never carry that out. It is meaningless.

2. By Carrying Out Our Threats.

Threats must be carried out. This means we need to be very careful in choosing our words. If, as parents we do not carry out our threats then our words become meaningless. If you say it you must do it.

3. No Favouritism.

I believe this caused so many problems in Jacob's family. The fact that Joseph was the favourite led to what? It led to the other brothers hating him. If you read Genesis 37 you will see how this unfolds. In v.3 we read that Joseph was loved more than the other sons by Jacob. The result was in v.4 that the brothers hated Joseph. Favouritism causes great harm. Your children need to know that they are each equally loved and equally appreciated. Tell them this. Never for one moment should you do anything to give the impression that you have a favourite among your children. They are equally loved.

4. By Appreciating / Encouraging.

We need to learn to appreciate our children. When they do something well say so. When their behaviour is good; tell them that it was good. My wife and I talk about the 50% rule. This means that we seek to be positive with the children more than we are negative.

So encourage your children. When they do something well then seek to make sure that you tell them of this. Seek to find your child behaving well. Do not just let it pass; make sure that you acknowledge it.

5. By Implementing Boundaries.

Children push boundaries. They need to know where they stand. This means that care has to be taken to make sure that you are drawing boundaries that can be kept to. One important way of doing this is with computer time. This is particularly important with younger children. Give them a certain amount of time on the computer, make it clear what that time is.

6. Be Consistent.

Do not one day say this, then the next day say that. One day you are very strict and then one day very lax.

7. Give them time.

If you are too busy to spend time with your children then you are too busy! This is hard. There are times when we are very busy. But we *must* give them time. One thing I want to debunk is the idea about “quality time”. Children want our time, never mind quality time; they *need* our time.

One thing we have done is that since they were just over 11, I have one day out with the boys on their own one afternoon / evening three times a year. They generally choose what to do where they want to eat. It disciplines me to give them a time alone with each of them on a one-to-one basis.

8. Do not neglect them.

This obviously includes the issue of properly feeding and clothing our children. Even if we have to sacrifice we need to make sure that they are properly cared for.

It also includes just ignoring our children. It is easy to say you are so busy. It is interesting to think about the lifestyle of Samuel and how it affected his children. In 1 Samuel 7:15-17 we read of his ministry circuit each year through Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah. Then we read,

“When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel’s leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice” (1 Sam. 8:1-3).

Was it the case that Samuel was away from home too much? As a result he ended up with wayward sons.

We need to do things with our children. We need to go out with them. Also Dads when we are out with them we need to make sure we are with them. If we are more interested in our phone than in them then we are likely neglecting them. Turn your phone off or put it on silent so you can give your time and attention to your children.

So we must not neglect our children. We need to take time to listen to them and be willing to hug them.

9. By giving consideration to our children.

As children get older you need to be informing them of what is going on.

I am aware of the situation of a child who was in their early twenties; so effectively they were a young adult living at home. The young adult was not involved in a decision which had implications for their own situation and were just told what was happening. The consequences were not great, in fact pretty horrific.

As regards to when children are younger here is one tip I have come across. Always give them five/ten more minutes before the end of an activity. So when you are leaving someone's house always give them an extra five minutes.

10. By allowing them to grow up.

You are preparing them like arrows:

**“Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one’s youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.”** (Psalm 127:4-5)

You are preparing them, as it were, to fly out into the world as straight arrows.

PARENTS

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Let us now turn to consider “parents”.

The idea behind the word rendered parents is that of being a protector. Most versions render the word “fathers”. However, it does seem that the word can legitimately be rendered “parents”. The best way to consider it is that of the parents being together in protecting their children with the father being the chief protector.

1. Parents Together.

The mother and father need to be together so they need to talk together and pray together. It is important that the children know that you are together. One way that children seek to take advantage of parents is by driving a wedge between them. They play one off against another to get their own way.

It is good to think here of the differing roles of parents in the family unit. The man is responsible for order; the mother is responsible for the atmosphere. So you can have the following:

- A chaotic fridge where both husband and wife are failing.
- Chaotic warmth where the man is failing, but the woman succeeding.
- A well ordered fridge where the man is succeeding but the woman failing.
- A well ordered and warm environment where the man and woman are both succeeding in their God-ordained call.

The implication of all this is that fathers need to be involved in family life. I know this can be hard sometimes when the men have jobs and responsibilities which take them away from home for long periods of time. But where there is a will there is a way. When a father's heart is towards the children then a way can emerge. Let us then hear this scripture:

“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction” (Malachi 4:5-6).

In parenting if you think one of you has made a mistake then seek not to reveal it in front of the children. But do not forget to re-visit the issue when the two of you are on your own. The important thing is to be together and that the children know you are together.

This reminds me of the relentless need there is for husband and wife to pray together. Pray about everything concerning the children's welfare.

As children get older you need to speak privately about issues. Work things out together. Show the children that you are together.

We need to be aware that Satan wants to destroy families. We should be doing everything to stand against this and to cultivate strong united families. Husbands and wives should ponder these two questions in the light of that:

1. How can you expect the children to respect the Father if the Mother does not respect the husband?
2. How can you expect the children to love their mother if the husband does not love his wife?

This is a bit of a joke in our house. When I tell the boys that I love their mother they say, “Oh Dad we've heard that so many times before”. But it is good that the children know this.

I remember hearing Don Carson say that he had a happy upbringing, but one thing that his father would not tolerate was disrespect for their mother. If such took place it was met with firm discipline.

The Father is the head of the household; he has ultimate responsibility, the children need to know this. But the parents together have authority over the children. Moreover, all connected with the family should take their stand and reinforce the parental authority. We stand with those in authority. So, if the child says something nasty to you and the parent tells the child to say sorry, then you do not say that it does not matter. You stand on the side of the parent. You reinforce their position of discipline.

2. Single Parent Roles.

It is good at this point to consider the situation of those who are single parents. We want to support those who find themselves in this challenging role.

If it is the woman who is on her own then there is an extra vulnerability to the situation. As we are told in 1 Peter 3:7 concerning the husband's attitude to his wife **“and treat them with respect as the weaker partner.”** The woman is the weaker vessel; she is vulnerable.

There are many cases of parent abuse. There are cases where the mother is abused by the child. Situations where the child either physically or mentally overpowers the mother. No doubt it can happen with fathers, but it is a particular issue with mothers. This is a problem. This is where we need to make sure that others reinforce the role of the mother. We tell the children that they are to show respect to their mother. We need to tell them that they have got a good mother; you should do what she says.

Moreover, the men of the church should be seeking to be godly role models of manhood for these children. This should be true towards all the children, but particularly for those children being brought up with no father around.

This applies to us all in the church. We say we are a family in the church; we need to think about how we show it.

Similarly challenging parental issues arise when there is a non-Christian married to a Christian. In such a situation Eunice and Lois are always an encouragement.

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”
(2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Eunice had an unsaved husband, but she still strives from an early age to bring up her son, Timothy, for the Lord. Her mother, Lois, assisted her in this task. We do need many actual and surrogate grandmothers who help in this grand task. How we need to be supporting the Eunices who are labouring faithfully to do the best for their children.

BRING THEM UP

Parents are to bring up their children. The verb here is in the present continuous. This means that we need to be parenting continuously. We are to be bringing them up. This is not a part-time task. All the time we are on duty. We need to be all the time taking action.

It is like you have a tiny plant and you place a structure alongside it so that it grows up healthily. However, as it gets stronger and stronger, the less you need to be involved. From an early age we are doing everything to set the child off in the right way. It would be my contention that you have to win a child by the age of seven. After that you are always working from a situation of difficulty.

Accordingly, we need to set out at an early age to bring up our children in the right way.
“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

Right from the baby being in the womb parents should be praying for their children and planning how to bring them up. We also need to be aware that most of the battles are won when a child is young.

Discipline of a baby that does not know right from wrong and has got no awareness of what they are doing, is just cruelty. When a child does know what they are doing you have to intervene. Leave the child to go its own way and it will go its own way and end in a mess. Lots of the main discipline issues are dealt with at aged 3/4. As I have just mentioned you have to win a child by aged seven, after that you are always struggling; you are always “batting on a sticky wicket”.

But what if you have got it wrong? What if you have failed to get your children going in the right direction? Is it all now helpless? No! Remember these things:

- God is a God of grace.
- Confess to the child you have got it wrong.
- Seek to implement the ways of God as much as you can. It may be very limited.
- Now make sure you keep at it.
- And pray pray pray, to our kind forgiving Father.

TRAINING

In bringing our children up we are to be training them. We are to be “nurturers” of our children. This word implies training by action. The word begs that we need to get involved to instruct. It involves demonstrating and showing the right ways. It brings us back to the issues of being the right example to our children.

The Word also embraces the issues of chastening and disciplining. Let us then look at this issue of discipline. Here are some scriptures that bid us to see the importance of disciplining our children:

“Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.” (Proverbs 13:24)

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.” (Proverbs 22:15)

“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die.” (Proverbs 23:13)

“Punish them with the rod and save them from death.” (Proverbs 23:14)

“A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother.” (Proverbs 29:15)

The Word of God demands that we get involved to chastise our children. In this we are conforming to the pattern set by our Father in heaven. In Hebrews 12:6a we read, **“the Lord disciplines the one He loves.”** This leads us on to the issue of smacking. Let us mention some issues that appertain here:

- You are not there to humiliate the child. You are disciplining in order to correct the child. Therefore, discipline should normally be in private. If possible get a child out of the situation, get them away from other people. Then you can deal with the child.
- The main issues which lead to smacking are disobedience and lying.
- Use a rod (wooden spoon or ruler); these give a sting without power and that is the safest. Do not use the hand. The hand exerts too much power to bring forth the necessary sting.
- Using a rod also makes sure that you do not lash out in anger. You always have a built-in protection because you always have to go and find a rod.
- We should never smack out of anger.

- Be careful where you smack. The backside is best.
- Always explain to the child why they are being smacked.
- After you have smacked always pray with the child, hug and tell the child that you love them. They need to know that your love stands firm and true.

With regards to the matter of love, it has been said that smacking is the most loving form of discipline; this is because it gets the matter dealt with. Other measures such as the withdrawal of privileges may be appropriate, but do not neglect smacking.

In carrying out discipline though, we must not forget to reward good behaviour. However, children should not expect to be rewarded all the time. They should not need incentives to do the right thing.

INSTRUCTION

We are to be admonishers of our children. The focus here is on teaching through the Word. It gives emphasis to the verbal aspect of instructing our children. This raises the question: Who is teaching your children?

The important thing to emphasise here is that God requires this of parents for their children. It is too easy to allow others to be the primary providers of training and instruction for our children. We can too easily offload our responsibility to the church or the government or both. In such cases we can become merely the providers of food and lodging for our children who are actually being reared by others. No! Parents are to do the bringing up of their children.

Does that mean that we should not use outside sources to assist us in our child rearing? No, of course not, but we do have to be very careful how we use those sources. So I can use the state school system, or whatever school system is provided, as long as I know that I am using them and they are not using me. What I mean is that the parent(s) is/are using the school to assist him/her in bringing up the child. As someone once said to me, "I home school, but I use the school system to help me."

There is growing pressure from the state to take over the rearing of our children. The state wants to indoctrinate our children in its secular thinking which is opposed to the Word of God. We must resist this. God did not give children to the state; He gave them to parents.

Similarly, parents should not offload responsibility to the church for their children's spiritual education. The assistance of the church is very important, but fathers should never say that they use the church to teach their kids about God. Fathers, you must teach them. If you are struggling in this, then seek help.

So every Christian father/parent should be schooling their children. By schooling I mean giving them a full education. The Word of God enjoins this for you. You may use the state system or other means to help you. But it is you that the LORD holds responsible for bringing up your kids.

So, Christian parents, let us be supporting one another in whatever way we choose to go about this great business of educating our children. Let this issue NOT be divisive in the church. Whether parents are using the state system or not using it, we are all bringing up our children for the glory of God together. Let us then, encourage each other. Let us freely talk about the different ways of doing our best for our children.

Two further things we need to remember in the Word training of our children.

The first is that the book of Proverbs should be readily used. Remember that the book is couched in terms of parental guidance for a child. Here are the words from Proverbs 1:8-9:

“Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.”

The second is the general command given in the re-capping of the law in Deuteronomy:

“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates” (Deut. 6:6-9).

This reminds us of the need to be continually talking of the Lord's Word and ways to our children.

OF THE LORD

Everything we do in bringing up our children is to be coloured by the fact that we are engaging in that which is of the Lord. The training and instruction should not be that dreamed up by ourselves. It should not be that which has been drawn from worldly thinking. Everything should be under the governorship of the Lord and that means it is under the governorship of the Word of the Lord; the Bible.

We need to be aware that, as parents, we are not bringing them up so that our reputation will be enhanced. Zacharias and Elizabeth brought up their son John for the LORD. But he probably did not enhance their reputation in the community. We read in Matthew 3:1-3:

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ This is He who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

**‘A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
“Prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight paths for him.” ’**

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt round his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.”

This leads us to think that John the Baptist was not necessarily acceptable in the more genteel circles of society. His parents could possibly have been a little embarrassed on account of him. However, the most important thing was that they were bringing him up for the Lord.

We are not bringing our children up to become popular with them or to please others. We are bringing them up for the LORD.

CONCLUSION

As we come to conclusion here are some final points to spur us forward in this great task of parenting.

- Get on with it. If we have children, we cannot wait to some dreamed of fair day when all will be conducive to parent these difficult children. No, now is the time; get on with it.
- When something breaks in the news about someone causing havoc, generally be sure there was a malfunction in childhood. So good parenting is absolutely vital. Go wrong here and a child can be harmed for life.
- **“A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother.”** (Proverbs 10:1)

There are such rewards from seeing a son grow well. But, contrariwise, such sadness from a foolish son.

- Who is sufficient for these things? To which we respond, “Our sufficiency is of God.” Parenting is such an overwhelming task. We do not have sufficient abilities in ourselves. We have need of God. So everyday seek Him for fresh enabling to bring up our children for the Lord.
- Remember, they will soon be gone? When my wife and myself asked an experienced Christian couple for advice about parenting they said this; “*they will soon be gone.*” The days to influence and enjoy soon pass away. Let us engage with our children now and seek to do our best for them before God.
- It is beautiful to see a well ordered family; different cultures, different backgrounds, but one God forming a family through His Word. It is a joy to behold and be a part of when we see it. It is only the Lord that can do this. Praise to His Name.

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