

## THE RELATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

We may call a certain building a home. In reality, however, only the people who live in that building make it a home. These persons stand in a relationship to one another such as can be found nowhere else on earth. The strongest earthly ties hold them together for life. Yet the happiness of each individual member depends on the attitude of the whole family.

There can be a happy and blessed home only where the proper relationship exists between parents and children. Under the theme of our convention, "As For Me And My House", a subject that merits our close attention is

### THE PROPER RELATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

The proper relation between parents and children may be best summed up in the instructions given by the Apostle Paul in Eph. 6, 1-4: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Let us consider this relationship first from the parents' side. The Apostle says: "Ye fathers." He addresses the fathers because they are the heads of the households. It is self-evident, however, that mothers are included. We note that in the first part of the quotation above that mothers are included in the respect and obedience which are accorded the fathers. And in his letter to the Colossians, Paul says: "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this well-pleasing unto the Lord." Both parents are to be involved in the training and guidance of their children. The fact that fathers are, for the most of the day and week, deeply and busily engaged in making a livelihood for the family, in no wise exempts them from the obligation of properly training and instructing their children. And mothers are to assist them in carrying out their obligation. We are, of course, speaking of Christian parents. Where the father may be an unbeliever, or is remiss in his responsibility, the mother may have to shoulder the entire responsibility of instructing her children in religion and in Christian attitude

and ethics. Perhaps the best illustration of this is that of Timothy being brought up by his mother Eunice.

As a rule the relationship existing between parents and children may be traced back to the early attitude of the parents. They create the home atmosphere. By precept and example they mold the character of the children. Frequently the selfish, uncompromising, reckless spirit of the children is due to mistakes or negligence on the part of the parents. "As the sapling is bent, so the tree has grown." But not always; for at times "more springs up in the garden than the gardener ever sowed."

In most cases the mistake and negligence of parents can be traced to the naturalistic philosophy of modern educators and psychologists. Even before the 1930's the idea was being fostered that by nature a child is inherently good. It was believed that evil in children develops because they come in contact with evil in their experience. Inherited sin was denied. This naturalistic philosophy found ready acceptance in the world. And an outgrowth of this philosophy is that every child must pass through a series of stages in his growth. Such a conception fills the parent with the blind hope that, if only the present stage will pass, things will soon be better. Even Christian parents have been overtaken by this philosophy, and like so many others, have failed or neglected to train their children properly.

Since World War II this has become more prevalent than at any other time in the history of our society. Fathers working, sometimes two shifts, seven days a week, and mothers also working away from home all day long, made proper training and instruction impossible, leaving children to take care of themselves and a law unto themselves, or in the care of such who felt no responsibility towards the children. And today those children have become parents.

There are exceptions, but the general rule is: "Tell me who the parents are, and I will tell you what the child will be." Words, deeds, and examples are the seed of character, and children are apt to be second editions of their parents. I am of the opinion that conditions in our homes, communities, and country today can be traced to the precepts and examples set by parents during the past few decades. The lawlessness

disobedience, disrespect, wilfulness, defiance of authority of today are due to yesterday's parents lack of training and responsibility. And today's parents are following in their parents' footsteps. The sense of right and wrong, which they developed with proper guidance in childhood, is being passed on to their own children. Just as the parents, with little or no guidance and training, were left to decide their relation to home and society, so also their offsprings today. And where there is some semblance of training, it is based on the perverted precepts and examples of these parents.

Moreover, too many parents bemoan their duties as drudgeries and shirk their responsibilities by giving their children's training to untrained people, calling in high school children, and younger, to be daily baby-sitters while both parents work or seek pleasure and recreation. Or children are placed in Day-care Centers and Nursery schools under the care of such who, for monetary reasons, provide conveniences for parents, or who mold the character according to their own often perverted standards and principles. And as soon as they are in an elementary and high school, they are left to fend for themselves, learning decision-making and judgment on their own, or from comrades on the street, whose judgment is just as inferior and immature as their own. And it is my considered opinion that this has resulted in the lovelessness, disrespect, disobedience, and lawlessness moving down from the campuses to the high school and elementary level today.

The evil example of parents, whose children become their second edition may be illustrated from incidents in the Scriptures. David, the king of Israel, became guilty of adultery and murder. True, he was deeply conscious of his sin, repented, and received forgiveness. But the evil consequences remained. His son, Amnon, committed incest with Tamar, his half-sister. It is quite certain that David would have swiftly punished the offender had his own record been clean. As it was, he did nothing about it, with the result that Absalom avenged the wrong done to his sister by having Amnon killed. Absalom lived in banishment for three years, and he saw his father's face not a single time, even though he had returned, for two additional years. All this did not fail to alienate the son's affections from his father and encouraged Absalom, unprincipled man that he was, to go forward with his wicked plans of rebellion. He stopped short of nothing vile

and shameful; he went to war against his own father. Note the terrible results of bad example, of even indiscretion, in the life of parents. You may tell your children the right thing; but if you do not live an upright life, your word will not have the desired effect.

The lack of responsibility on the part of parents is due to the lack of responsibility to God. What should be the attitude of parents toward their children? This may be learned from our heavenly Father's dealing with His children. "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." 1 Jn. 4, 8. "The Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God." Jn. 16, 27. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." 1 Jn. 3,1. Parental love is an affection which resides in every normal parent's heart. But in the heart of the Christian this love is purified and lifted to a higher plane. Too often children are not regarded as gifts of God, but are looked upon as a nuisance. Christian parents love their children, not merely because they are flesh of their flesh, but also because they regard them as precious gifts of God. "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward." Ps. 127, 3. In answer to Esau's question regarding the children whom Jacob brought with him from Haran, Jacob said: "The children which God hath graciously given thy servant." Gen. 33,5. And in Is. 8, 18, we read: "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts." Luther says: "Children are the lovelier and more magnificent creations of God than the fruit of all our trees. In them we behold the omnipotence, wisdom and the art of God."

On addressing Christian parents, St. Paul seems to take it for granted that they are making an effort to "bring up" their children in the fear of the Lord. Children must be instructed, trained, led on, in the paths of righteousness by precept and example. nothing is more important in the life of a child than a Christian home. Luther says: "The father is the bishop and pastor of his household." But even in the church of today, one of the most alarming symptoms is the superficiality, even total absence of Christian training in the average Christian home. In how many of our Christian homes do we still

find regular family devotions, proper respect and obedience, insistence upon proper and good preparation in the Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine, or even regular attendance at divine services and Sunday School? Is it not true that too often, instead of training, leading, and guiding, parents try to treat their children as equals before they are mature enough? No doubt, this has resulted in children insisting upon the right to be involved in decision-making, not only in our public school system, but even in the home.

But the Apostle also shows how parents may avoid this mistake. He adds: "But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." "Nurture" is education and training, with special reference to chastening. "Admonition" is training by word, especially by word of reproof. Children must be compelled to honor and obey their parents and to conduct themselves as Christians. Frequently this necessitates chastening and reproof. "He that spareth the rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Prov. 13, 24. To me, the so-called generation gap, is often the distance between the paddle and the seat. But when parents are forced to punish and reprove their children, they should exercise great care and self-control. Instead of yielding to their passions they should follow the Lord's method of chastening and reproof: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent." Rev. 3, 19. Parental love and solicitude must be evident throughout. The Lord's method of training does not irritate and work anger, but has as its purpose, to win. This should also be the method of parents. Love must be the dominant factor in chastening and reproof so that repentance may be gained and forgiveness may be offered and received.

The best example of the proper relation of parents toward their children is, no doubt, that of Joseph and Mary. Of them we read: "Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover." Lk. 2, 41. Mary and Joseph observed the commandments of God, and thereby set a good example to the Child that was entrusted to them. Children learn more by the example given them in daily life than by anything else. Live Christianity before their eyes, and they will learn Christianity. If we walk sincerely in the fear of God, our children will be imbued with the spirit of godliness.

Moreover, the parents of Jesus did not neglect the religious training of their

Child. They did not content themselves with the good example, but led Him to do as they did. "And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the Child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem." Lk. 2, 42. They took Jesus with them to Jerusalem and had Him worship with them in the temple. Parents should teach their children to pray and worship the Lord. Of course, children cannot be forced to believe. Faith is God's work. But they should be led, exhorted and admonished to make diligent use of the means of grace by which faith is produced and sustained. They should be entreated, admonished, and warned. And this should be done even after they have left the shelter of the parental roof.

Parents should also be watchful that their children do not get into bad company and associate with such as will harm their souls. Of Mary and Joseph we read:"But they, supposing Him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinfolk and acquaintance." Lk. 2, 44. His parents knew that they could safely entrust Him to that company, and so they were not disturbed when they did not see Him on leaving Jerusalem. Now, as the parents of Jesus watched over their Child, how much more should all parents keep watch over their children and see that they do not get into bad company. Jesus' parents knew that their boy would do no wrong. But how is it with our children? How easily they are misled! How easily they fall prey to the temptations with which they are beset! Indeed, Christian parents cannot be careful enough about the company of their children. They should not let their children associate with everybody that comes along. They should make certain that the good Seed which they have sown in their children's hearts be not trodden down, and not permit them to make friends with such as seduce them into sin and vice.

The incident of Jesus in the temple also contains a lesson on parental authority. When Mary and Joseph found Jesus among the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions, we read that Mary said:"Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."Lk. 2, 48. These words of Mary were evidently meant as a rebuke. This censure would have been in the right place, if Jesus had done wrong and had not been the Son of God. As the Son of God He had to be about His FATHER's business,

and His mother's authority did not exceed the authority of His heavenly Father.

It is quite different with other parents. God Himself has established the authority of parents over their children. When God says: "Honor thy father and thy mother," this implies that parents are the children's superiors, that they stand above the children, and that the children must obey them. Parents, therefore, do perfectly right when they rebuke and censure their children for the things they do wrong, and when they punish them for their wickedness. They must do that. They are commanded to do that. In the Book of Proverbs, God says: "Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." In our days, too often, the sentiment among parents is to let the children have their own way, not to punish them for their wrongs, and simply tell them that it is to their detriment if they do wrong. Parents who really love their children will and must exercise their authority and make their children understand that they must obey. They will mold their character and train them to be good men and women in future years. They will bend the tree when it is young, so that it may grow up to the joy and to the delight of others.

The proper relation of the children toward their parents is determined by the word "obey" and "honor". The Apostle charges the children to obey in the Lord. The obedience and honor which they render to their parents should not be products of coercion or fear, but the fruits of their filial love and devotion, which grow and ripen in their youthful hearts as a result of their faith in Christ. Again we turn to the Child Jesus. "He went down with them and came to Nazareth; and was subject to them." Lk. 2, 51. Although by nature immeasurably above them, since He was the Son of God, He, "being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself." Phil 2, 8.

Every child should honor his father and mother. To honor means to hold another in esteem, to treat him with respect and reverence. We honor those whom we look up to because we regard them as higher than ourselves. Of King Solomon we read: "The king rose up to meet her (his mother; Bathsheba) and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand." Lkgs. 2, 19. Luther says in his Large Catechism: "To parents above all other

persons God has given this high prerogative, that he tells us not only to love them, but above that, to honor them. For toward brothers and sisters and our neighbor in general He commands us nothing more than that we should love them, but He places parents on a higher plane and distinguishes them from all others by telling us that we must honor them. To honor is something in addition to loving them. By commanding us to honor them, He insists that we must think of them with respect, humility, and reverence, as we honor and reverence majesty. Nor are we to treat them simply friendly and with a show of respect, but more than that, we are from the heart and also in all our manner so to conduct ourselves that they may notice that they are precious to us and that we esteem them under God more highly than all others. For whom we are to honor from the heart, him we are to consider very high and very precious."

Children owe their parents obedience. Parents have a divine right to command their children, and children are in duty bound to obey, not only when it suits them, but in all things (Col. 3,20) which are not contrary to God's will. Acts 5, 29. And this obedience should be rendered willingly and cheerfully, "With good will doing service, as unto the Lord." Eph. 6, 7.

"For this is right." Eph. 6, 1. Children owe this to their parents according to the law of nature and according to the Fourth Commandment. This is what God requires of all children. Not Moses, but God says to all children: "Children, obey your parents." It is God who has given us our parents. Through them He has given us life and being. He has placed them over us to care for us and to rule over us in His stead. Now He demands of us that we respect their dignity as His representatives. When they tell us what to do, we are to think: God Himself is speaking to me through them, and I must mind them as though the Lord Himself were commanding me. If I despise and disobey my father and mother, I despise and disobey God. Even when we come of age and our parents have grown old and feeble, yes, even if our parents have great faults and weaknesses, we should nevertheless give them honor, do all we can to help them, and hold them in love and esteem.

But what is the situation today? On every hand, even in Christian homes, we behold disobedient children, who despise and mock parents and wilfully go their own way.

Take a typical example in many American homes. The children command their parents, "sass" them, call them by disrespectful names, expect their parents to wait on them continually, but do nothing for them. Almost everyone is familiar with the picture that shows how young America has gone in its disrespect of parental authority. Children see and hear many things which suggest that they owe their parents nothing. Many movies and comics breathe the spirit of disrespect for parents. Fathers and mothers are made the butt of rough jokes, and when youngsters succeed in outwitting the "old folks", it is supposed to be screamingly funny. A radio speaker some years ago said in effect: It is high time we rid ourselves of the idea that children are under obligation to their parents. It is the parents who are under obligation to their children. Children owe their parents nothing. Parents should expect no more from their children than friendly toleration." It is such thoughts that breed contempt of children for their parents. Thus in many homes we observe children treating their parents, not as superiors, but as inferiors. Questions and requests by parents are met with curt, discourteous, flippant answers. How often one sees boys and girls in their teens order their parents around, demanding service, and see them going into a tantrum when their requests and demands are not complied with.

No doubt,, all of us have experienced this rebellious, contrary attitude and spirit in our homes. And this, inspite of the stress that is laid on the Fourth Commandment in home and instruction classes. They seem little impressed by God's Word. Such threats of God as "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," Prov. 30, 17, leaves them cold and adamant; much less does God's promise of blessing to all who keep the Fourth Commandment warm their hearts with respect, love, and obedience toward parents. It seems only too often that Satan is successful in picking off the Word between the ear and the heart so that it does not bring forth God-pleasing fruit. How many homes have been wrecked by wayward sons and daughters! How many fathers and mothers have died prematurely of a broken heart! Surely we are living in an age when the Fourth Commandment has fallen into contempt.

What shall then be done? Shall we discard attempts to get results in our children with the Fourth Commandment? Shall children be let go to their doom because they will not listen? No, we must continue to stress the Fourth Commandment and all that the Lord says regarding the relation between parents and children. Let us emphasize with St. Paul that the Fourth Commandment is one of the foremost commandments, a commandment of the first rank, pointing out that God promises special blessing to all who keep it, while unusual punishments are to be meted out to those who flagrantly transgress it. In fact, filial disobedience is classed as one of the heinous sins of heathendom: "Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedience to parents," Rom. 1,30, and are an outstanding vice of the last age, "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy." 2 Tim. 3,2.

In spite of the fact that the Word of God is often lost between the ear and the heart, parents must continue to strive to instill Christian virtues in the lives of their children. Not only the success of their children in this life depends on their up-bringing, but also their life hereafter. The eternal salvation of the souls entrusted to them must be the first and foremost aim of parents. Parents will care for their children in every way, but especially bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.. They will begin by teaching them the love of Jesus at home, both by word and example, and not withhold punishment when that is necessary. They will take their children with them for regular worship in the house of God, send them to Sunday School, enroll them in a Christian Day School under Christian teachers wherever possible, and continue their training in a Christian high school when and where such school is available, lead, guide, and correct them when such schools are not available to their children, doing everything possible to keep them on the narrow way that leads to heaven. The motto of every Christian home should be that of Joshua: "As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord." Josh. 24, 15.

What shall we make of our homes? Shall we say, "As for me and my house, we will have a good time?" or: "As for me and my house, we will choose the dollar?" or is our motto: "As for me and my house, we will aspire to social distinction?" Can it be:

"As for me and my house, we don't care?" Satan is always ready and active to plant the same attitudes in children, and with such attitudes, there can be no salvation for them.

On the other hand, Children must learn to obey and honor their parents. Love for parents and for the Lord should constrain them to listen respectfully to what parents have to say, do what they say, and do what they say with a willing and cheerful heart, knowing that what they do for their parents they are doing unto the Lord. Not only should children do this when their parents are young and able to give them every advantage, but also when they are old. Honor, respect, helpfulness, service, are obligations of children toward parents as long as they live. Solomon mentions "thy mother when she is old." Prov. 23, 22. Poverty, weakness, or other distressing circumstances may overtake them. That is when St. Paul says: "Let them learn first to show piety at home and to requite their parents." 1 Tim. 5,4. In this, Jesus has given us a wonderful example. When hanging on the cross, bereft of his clothing, while poorer than the poorest, laboring more than the most diligent, suffering more intensely than any one else before or after, He yet provided for His mother. Jn. 19, 26-27.

If every day, we as children, recognize with gratitude toward God who rich He, the Giver of all good gifts, has made us in giving us parents; if every day we repent of our lack of appreciation, of our sins of disobedience; if every day we seek cleansing from these disgraceful and shameful sins in the blood of Jesus; if every day we increase in requiting our parents with love, honor esteem, and respect, then every day will be Mother's and Father's Day, a blessed day for our parents, and a day of joy before the angels in heaven.

This then, is the proper relation between parents and children: They are to be united in the Lord by the bonds of true Christian love, the parents caring for the children in every way, but especially bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; the children, on the other hand, obeying and honoring their parents. Where this relationship is maintained, there the home will be full of joy and sweet companionship.

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