

The Duties of Parents – Part 4 – Ryle’s Insights

II. “Train up your child with all tenderness, affection, and patience” (continued)

Ryle wrote: “Nothing will compensate for the absence of this tenderness and love. A minister may speak the truth as it is in Jesus, clearly, forcibly, unanswerably; but if he does not speak it in love, few souls will be won. Just so you must set before your children their duty – command, threaten, punish, reason – but if affection be wanting in your treatment, your labor will be in vain.”

Application: Here is a point where many men can learn from watching their wives. So much of communication is *non-verbal*. This is one reason when I do premarital counseling, I always tell married people never to discuss things of major consequence via texting or other electronic forms of communication. So much of our heart comes out in our tone, body language, voice inflection, etc. But men in particular can really, as Ryle says, “chill them and throw them back” by our tone.

Ryle wrote: “Love is one grand secret of successful training. Anger and harshness may frighten, but they will not persuade the child that you are right; and if he sees you often out of temper, you will soon cease to have his respect. ... Try hard to keep up a hold on your child’s affections. It is a dangerous thing to make your children afraid of you. Anything is almost better than reserve and constraint between your child and yourself; and this will come in with fear. Fear puts an end to openness of manner; fear leads to concealments; fear sows the seed of much hypocrisy, and leads to many a lie.”

Ryle then cites: Col. 3:21 “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”

Discussion Question #1: What are some ways Fathers (and mothers at times) “provoke” their children? What does it mean to be “provoked?” Have you provoked your kids? How? Were you provoked by your parents as a child? How?

My precious wife once asked me a profound question (which, by its very nature communicated my stupidity as well): “Patrick, why do you act shocked when your children sin?” [i.e. “Patrick, you seriously need to work on your *PATIENCE*.]”

III. “Train you children with an abiding persuasion on your mind that much depends upon you.”

Point: This was one of the main reasons we went through all of those passages the first week regarding the Biblical commandments given directly to parents and grandparents regarding the training of children. Much does depend upon us and our faithfulness to the task at hand. We’ve spoken already some about how much our habits and character are influenced by those who trained and educated us as children. Ryle wrote, “We catch the language of our nurses and mothers, and learn to speak it almost insensibly, and unquestionably we catch something in their manners, ways, and mind at the same time.”

Ryle wrote: “And all this is one of God’s merciful arrangements. He gives your children a mind that will receive impressions like moist clay. He gives them a disposition at the starting-point of life to believe what you tell them, and to take for granted what you advise them, and to trust your word rather than a stranger’s. He gives you, in short, a golden opportunity of doing them good. See that the opportunity be not neglected, and thrown away. Once let slip, it is gone forever.”

That’s a powerful illustration: Children initially are like moist clay – easily molded. But as they age, the clay begins to dry little by little...

Point 2: When Ryle says we need to train our children with the persuasion that much depends upon us, he is also trying to avoid the unbiblical idea that: “well, if we can’t actually convert our children, what’s the point of working to

that end? It can't be done. Let's just leave them alone and pray for grace." Says Ryle in response to this idea, "... the devil rejoices to see such reasoning, just as he always does over anything which seems to excuse indolence, or to encourage neglect of means. I know that you cannot convert your child. I know well that they who are born again are born, not of the will of man, but of God. But I know also that God says expressly, 'Train up a child in the way he should go,' ..."

Application: There is a very prominent misunderstanding of biblical Christianity (aka: Calvinism / Reformed theology) that says God has only decreed the final outcome of all things, *and not also every single minute step toward those outcomes*. Think about it, have you ever wondered: *why do we pray for and witness to the lost in general if the list of the elect is already determined and cannot be expanded or diminished by anything we do?* There are two reasons: 1) God commands us to, and 2) God has not just decreed the final result (i.e. who ends up in heaven), but also all the means toward that end – namely, our prayers, love, training, and witnessing. And we also know that God uses those means to bring about the salvation of people He has chosen. God does not just save them by the raw power of His decree. *Essential links of the chain in which we participate are also part of that decree*. For example: Praying, sharing the gospel, loving, conversations, reading books, etc. Consider this example regarding prayer:

James 5:17-18 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. [18] And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Questions to consider: Could God have stopped the rain Himself? Yes. Was this how God, in His sovereign decree and providence, chose to stop the rain? No. In this particular instance, God decreed to stop the rain *through Elijah's prayers*. As a point of application, remember that every time you pray, your Creator decreed from before time began that you would have the burden at that particular point in time to pray the very prayers you are praying. And it is precisely God's sovereignty and the comprehensive nature of His decree and foreordination of all that comes to pass *that gives us confidence in James' application to Christians of this incident with Elijah's prayers stopping the rain:*

James 5:16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Application: And so, when people ask us: "Why pray at all if God has already determined everything?" Our answer is: "We pray because we know that our prayers *themselves* are part of what God has determined and are effective and powerful in bringing about what He has planned and determined." We pray and ask God what we know *only* He is able to do. In fact, rejecting the sovereignty of God is the death-knell to prayer and evangelism and training of our children. If people who reject the sovereignty of God took that rejection to its logical conclusion, they wouldn't pray for anyone's salvation. To pray for someone's salvation would be to ask God something *He is not able to do*. If the hinge-point and decisive force in a person's salvation is ultimately their own independent choice which they either will or will not exercise, *then God can't do anything to save them – it is all in their hands. Prayers would be a waste of time*. Think about it, if God is not sovereign in the matter of salvation and we ask him in prayer, "Lord, please save my child's soul," He will simply look back at us and say, "why are you asking me? I've done everything I can... now it's up to him."

Illustration: I still have a large section of my backyard that is barren with no grass at all. Can I make grass grow? No. But I can plow, scatter seed, faithfully water, and then watch. Even then, can I make that grass grow? No. But will grass grow if I do not plow, scatter seed, and faithfully water? **No**. God decrees the end and the means to that end. Ryle wrote this: "We have only to do as the servants were commanded at the marriage feast in Cana, to fill the water-pots with water, and we may safely leave it to the Lord to turn that water into wine."

1 Cor. 3:5-7 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? [6] I planted, Apollos watered, **but God gave the increase**. [7] So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, **but God who gives the increase**.

⇒ We must plant and water. And recognize that God gives the increase. When we speak of “The Duties of Parents” – it could be summarized in that way: *plant and water*.

Discussion Question #2: Did people pray for you when you were growing up – for your salvation, wisdom, future spouse, etc? Did you know those people were praying? Did you ever hear them pray for you? How did this affect you? Did you have the impression that someone did as Ryle said toward you: *they trained you as though much depended upon them*?

IV. Train with this thought continually before your eyes – that the soul of your child is the first thing to be considered.

Point: It is stirring to consider the fact that our children will live for eternity. Jonathan Edwards made a regular practice of meditating on that word: *eternal*. Ryle wrote, “No part of them should be so dear to you as that part which will never die. The world, with all its glory, shall pass away; the hills shall melt; the heavens shall be wrapped together as a scroll; the sun shall cease to shine. But the spirit which dwells in those little creatures, whom you love so well, shall outlive them all, and whether in happiness or misery (to speak as a man) will depend on you.”

Point 2: There must be regular lines of conversation with your children regarding what they believe about God, sin, their own judgment, the Lord Jesus, and how to be saved. I would encourage you to ask them regularly if they think they will go to heaven when they die. Reconciliation with God is our first great goal for them – to see true repentance and sorrow for their sin, and genuine faith in Jesus. We must catechize and instruct, teach godly habits and discipline, but with the constant eye to seeing *them converted and adopted as children of God through faith in Christ alone*.

Discussion Question #3: What role did your parents / grandparents / family or older friends play in your conversion to Christ? Who looked at your soul as precious enough to labor for your conversion? Tell us about it.

One more Ryle quote from this section: “A true Christian must be no slave to fashion, if he would train his child for heaven. He must not be content to do things merely because they are the custom of the world; to teach them and instruct them in certain ways, merely because it is usual; to allow them to read books of a questionable sort, merely because everybody else reads them; to let them form habits of a doubtful tendency, merely because they are the habits of the day. He must train with an eye to his children's souls. He must not be ashamed to hear his training called singular and strange. What if it is? The time is short, — the fashion of this world passeth away. He that has trained his children for heaven, rather than for earth, — for God, rather than for man, — he is the parent that will be called wise at last.”

Discussion Question #4: Ryle says that in every step we take with our children, every plan we make, every scheme, and every arrangement we make that concerns them, we must never leave out that mighty question: “*How will this affect their souls?*” Why is this the key question?

V. Train your child to a knowledge of the Bible.

Ryle wrote: “You cannot make your children love the Bible, I allow. None but the Holy Ghost can give us a heart to delight in the Word. But you can make your children acquainted with the Bible; and be sure they cannot be acquainted with that blessed book too soon, or too well. A thorough knowledge of the Bible is the foundation of all clear views of religion. He that is well-grounded in it will not generally be found a waverer, and carried about by every wind of new doctrine. Any system of training which does not make a knowledge of Scripture the first thing is unsafe and unsound.”

Point: One issue that comes up, especially if a parent is newer to the faith is: “I just feel like I don’t know enough about the Bible or enough sound doctrine to really be effective at teaching it to my children.” Just reading Scripture to them *says and accomplishes a lot itself*.

Isaiah 55:11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Exhortation: If you'd like to be well-grounded in the faith doctrinally – the book rack has free copies of the Westminster Confession and the Westminster Larger Catechism, as well as the *excellent* resource: *A Manual of Christian Doctrine* – by Louis Berkhof.

Point 2: Ours is an age of unprecedented error and false teaching. The Christian church in America today is, in the eyes of many, as much or more in need of a reformation of biblical doctrine as was the medieval church on the eve of the Protestant Reformation itself 400 years ago. The true gospel has almost disappeared from the scene.

Discussion Question #5: What are some of the dangerous errors around us today which we must protect our children from?

Point 3: Read the Word of God to your children every day recognizing that they might not fully understand everything you read to them (nor might you for that matter), but that God will often bring the things they hear to their minds when they need them. POWs have often reported that what carried them through were the Bible verses and catechism questions their parents taught them as children.

Discussion Question #6: How many of you have ever faced a big trial and suddenly a passage of Scripture comes to your mind – you might not recall the specific reference – but you remember what the Word of God said, and it helped you? What passages specifically?

Ryle says: “See that your children read the Bible *reverently*. Train them to look on it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, written by the Holy Ghost Himself, — all true, all profitable, and able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Point 4: It's important to encourage children to read the Bible with volume and authority, and not lethargically or via mumbling.

Ryle says: “See that they read it *regularly*. Train them to regard it as their soul's daily food, — as a thing essential to their soul's daily health. I know well you cannot make this anything more than a form; but there is no telling the amount of sin which a mere form may indirectly restrain.”

Point 5: It must be read every day unless providentially hindered. What could be more important to your life and soul and *theirs*?

Ryle says: “See that they read it *all*. You need not shrink from bringing any doctrine before them. You need not fancy that the leading doctrines of Christianity are things which children cannot understand. Children understand far more of the Bible than we are apt to suppose. ... In short, I suspect we have no idea how much a little child can take in of the length and breadth of the glorious gospel.”

Illustration: The kids at camp – 3rd thru 7th grade – we did Christology and the atonement of Christ. And they loved it. Also, there's a 5 year-old boy at Bluff City named Gabriel, who told me himself that he keeps asking his parents to take him to church but they won't. After Good News Club one Thursday he and a few other kids came to sit on the floor with me to discuss what being a Christian means and while I was trying to explain the gospel to the other kids I brought up the issue of disobedience to God's law. This 5 year old suddenly said to the other kids, “we need Jesus because he was the only man who never disobeyed God's law or committed sin.” Not bad for a 5-year old that doesn't go to church. He told me, “When you guys come here Thursday, this is my church.”