

The Christian Home (21): Parental Duties (part 4)

Having divided parental duties into instruction, provision, and discipline, we come this week to parental provision, leaving discipline for next week.

I. Parental Provision

1. *Parents must provide for physical needs.* "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him" (Matt.7:11)! "For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children" (2Cor.12:14). "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1Tim.5:8). "Maintenance is a claim which every child justly prefers upon his parents, till he is of sufficient age to be able to provide for himself" (James).¹

Parents who take no care to feed and clothe their children, are like those heathen whom the apostle describes to be without natural affection (Rom.1:32). He that provides not for his household is worse than an infidel, and has denied the faith (1Tim.5:8). Such a person is worse than a heathen; he is so far from grace, that he has put off nature and humanity.²

Ezekiel Hopkins, in his exposition of the fifth commandment, says parental duty "respects either the temporal or spiritual good of children." "As for their temporal good, two duties are incumbent upon them: Protection and Provision."³ (a) Protection. "This is due their weakness and helplessness. How many diseases and dangers is their feeble infancy exposed unto, and, in their growing childhood, want of care and experience runs them daily into more!" (b) Provision. "As parents owe their children protection from incident evils, so likewise provision of necessaries and conveniences, according to the rank and degree in which the Divine Providence has set them."

Thomas Boston, in his exposition of the fifth commandment, adds that parents are not only to provide suitable maintenance for their children for the present, "but as God prospers them, they are to lay up something for them."⁴ "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous" (Prov.13:22). Boston provided an important clarification: "Only no man is to take from present necessities for future provisions; but what God has given, let men take the comfortable use of it; and what remains, let them lay by for their children."⁵

Richard Baxter, in his *Christian Directory*, points out the need for sports and physical exercise, but with an important clarification. "For sports and recreations, let them be such, and so much, as may be needful to their health and cheerfulness; but not so much as may carry away their minds from better things, and draw them from their books or other duties, nor such as may tempt them to gambling or covetousness."⁶

2. *Parents must provide for social needs.* (1) Basic education. Parents must either teach their children themselves (homeschool), or else secure a sufficient education for their children. But either way, they remain responsible for their education. "Parents should give children learning according to their

¹ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 116

² George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:418

³ Ezekiel Hopkins, *Works*, 1:394-395

⁴ Thomas Boston, *Works*, 2:223

⁵ Thomas Boston, *Works*, 2:223

⁶ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 452

ability, and see that at least they be taught to read the Bible" (Boston).⁷ "Alas! The people perish for want of knowledge. And how can they know God's will that cannot read it" (Swinnock)?⁸

There are many points of a good education that we should bestow upon our children. They should read, write, cypher (compute), and be put into some agreeable callings. And not only our sons, but our daughters also should be taught such things as will later make them useful in their places.⁹

(2) Public interaction. Parents must teach their children how to interact socially with others. How to show respect and honor. "Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity" (1Tim.5:1-2). "Parents should polish the rude natures of their children with good manners, so as they may carry comely and discreetly before themselves or others. It is the dishonor of parents to see children rude and altogether unpolished as young beasts; and religion is an enemy to rudeness and ill manners."¹⁰

A youth may have his head stuffed full of Latin, Greek, mathematics, and natural philosophy; a girl may draw, and dance, and play, and speak French superbly, and yet be miserably educated after all. Integrity, good sense, generosity, and a capacity for reflection, are worth all the achievements which even a university can bestow.¹¹

Properly speaking, education in the true and higher import of the term, means the implanting of right dispositions, the cultivation of the heart, the guidance of the temper, the formation of the character. Or allowing, as we must, that education applies to the whole soul and character, and includes general instruction in knowledge, I should say that its most important part is that which relates to the communication of active principles, and the formation of moral habits.¹²

There is indeed an instruction in civil matters which we owe to our children. It is very pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ that our children should be well-in-formed with, and well-informed in, the rules of civility, and not be left as clownish, sottish, and ill-bred sorts of creatures. An unmannerly brood is a dishonor to religion.¹³

(3) Vocational trade. "Parents should train children up to do something in the way of some honest employment, whereby they may be useful to themselves or others. To nourish children in idleness is but to prepare them for prisons or correction-houses, or to be plagues to some one family or another" (Boston).¹⁴ "Adam brought up Cain to be a husbandman, and Abel to be a shepherd. The ancient Jews were very careful that all their children should be trained up in some calling" (Swinnock).¹⁵ "It is the duty of parents to make a provision for their children, sufficient, if they can, to enable them, by honest industry, or some liberal profession, to support themselves and be useful members of society" (Venn).¹⁶ If possible, fathers can/should train their sons in their own trade or business.

⁷ Thomas Boston, *Works*, 2:224

⁸ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:420

⁹ Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*. 9-10

¹⁰ Thomas Boston, *Works*, 2:224

¹¹ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 118

¹² John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 126

¹³ Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*. 9

¹⁴ Thomas Boston, *Works*, 2:224

¹⁵ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:421

¹⁶ Henry Venn, *The Godly Family*, 94-95

Let every Christian tradesman, who has a business worth following, keep as many of his sons as he can at home with him, and educate them himself for trade in his own warehouse. Due attention must, of course, always be paid in the selection of a business, to the physical strength, to the mental capacity, and to the prevailing taste of a child.¹⁷

Choose such a calling and course of life for your children, as tends most to the saving of their souls, and to their public usefulness for church or state. Choose not a calling that is most liable to temptations and hinderances to their salvation, though it may make them rich; but a calling which allows them some leisure for the remembering the things of everlasting consequence, and fit opportunities to get good, and to do good.¹⁸

Children must be taught industry, frugality, and generosity. (a) Industry. Parents must teach children the value of hard work and diligence. "He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (Prov.10:4). "The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich" (Prov.13:4). "The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor" (Prov.21:25). "The hand of the diligent will rule, but the lazy man will be put to forced labor" (Prov.12:24). "Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men" (Prov.22:29). "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Ecc.9:10). "It is a duty all parents owe their children to accustom them to early habits of industry, and to inspire them with a contempt and abhorrence of idleness as the great corrupter of the human mind and inlet to every vice" (Venn).¹⁹

Parents must teach industrious habits. Caution them against slothfulness. From the dawn of reason endeavor to convince them not merely by argument, but by a reference to their own experience, that employment is pleasure, and idleness misery. Impress them with the value of time; that it is the stuff of which life is made, and that we lose as much of life as we do of time. And connected with this, enforce habits of order and punctuality.²⁰

(b) Frugality. Parents must teach children to live frugal and prudent lives within their financial means. This they do by instruction and example.

Do not let them hear you magnify the value of wealth by your words, nor see you do it by your actions. From the time that they are capable of receiving an idea, or an impression, teach them it is character that constitutes true respectability: that a good man is reputable in any circumstances, a bad man in none. Remind them of the danger of riches, and that they are Satan's baits to tempt men to love the world, and lose their souls. Not that you should provide a cynical disposition towards either riches or the rich; much less repress industry, and foster indolence; no, rather as a means of usefulness, than a source of personal gratification.²¹

(c) Generosity. "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Prov.11:25). "The lazy man covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare" (Prov.21:26). "A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion" (Ps.112:5). "While teaching management, we must be careful not to drive the mind into covetousness;

¹⁷ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 123

¹⁸ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 454

¹⁹ Henry Venn, *The Godly Family*, 93

²⁰ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 120

²¹ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 119-120

hence it is of consequence, that with all our endeavors to cherish frugality, we should be no less diligent to encourage generosity; and to impress them with the idea, that the end of saving, is not to hoard, but to distribute to the wants of others" (James).²²

All children, and consequently all mankind, are more or less selfish by nature. This should be early watched and checked by a judicious parent, and an opposite disposition taught. Even infants may be made to feel the pleasure of sharing their possessions with others. Let them be taught that enjoyment arises not from individual gratification, but from a communion in pleasure. As children advance in years and reason, they should hear much of the happiness arising from gratifying others; of a luxury of benevolence, and of the nastiness of greediness.²³

3. *Parents must provide for marital needs.* "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished" (Jer.29:4-6). "Parents must endeavor that their children may timely and conveniently be married" (Swinnock).²⁴ "From Abraham's search for Isaac's mate in Genesis 24 to Paul's instructions to father of virgin daughters in 1Corinthians 7, we see paternal involvement in marriage" (Baucham).²⁵

But your main care must be to match your child rather with one that is good than with one that is great. If your child be gracious (a Christian), it will be a grief to live with one that is vicious; if your child be wicked, he will get little good by one that is as bad, or worse. Health cannot be caught from one that is sound, but a disease may quickly from one that is sick. What communion has light with darkness. A godly husband will have little help from, or comfort in, an ungodly wife. Why should your son for a little silver be unequally yoked? I wish that Alas! How sad will it be with your child to marry one that has an inheritance on earth, but no estate in the covenant, to lie so near to one that is far from God. Remember, it is the blessing of the Lord, not such a quantity of land, that must make your child's life happy.²⁶

William Gouge gave two cautions for parents in providing marriages for their children: first, that the match which they provide be fitting. "The match provided must not be of family too closely related, of a contrary religion, of too unequal an age, of too great a difference in standard of living." Second, though the match may seem good in the parent's eye, yet he may not force his child to accept it. "Parents may use all kinds of lawful means to move their children to yield to that which they see good for them, but if they cannot move them to yield, they must leave the matter to God and not force their children against their wills."²⁷

Another general duty of parents is the bestowing of their children. This bestowing is when they, knowing their children fit for marriage, not to have the gift of singleness, do use their best endeavor to provide matches for them in time, or, at least, do advise them thereunto (Perkins, 10:179)

²² John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 121

²³ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 123

²⁴ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:423

²⁵ Voddie Baucham, *What He Must Be*, 51

²⁶ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:423-124

²⁷ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:153-154