

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

CHAPTER 14: TRUTHFULNESS

1. What other habit should be promoted, with all care and at all cost, in children?

The habit of truthfulness; that is to say, children should be so trained that when they speak or act about matters, they shall always do so in accordance with what they really know or sincerely believe to be true.

2. Is it possible to train children so that they shall be always true and real?

We think it is; there may be exceptions, but if right methods are taken, these exceptions will be very few.

3. How is this habit of truthfulness to be created?

(1.) Parents must rely upon the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, who alone can work that Divine change in the hearts of your children, which will make them INWARDLY TRUE, without which all your efforts will be in vain.

A true life can only proceed from a true heart. With this, you may succeed in obtaining from your children words and looks and actions that shall be loyal towards God and straight towards men. In striving to make your children true, imitate the Master, and pay careful attention to their hearts. We read that He "desires truth in the inward parts."

(2.) Parents should strive to get deeply fixed in their own breasts a supreme love for truth and a thorough abomination for the habit of falsehood. They should come to see that to deliberately lie is more disgusting and hateful in the sight of God than are many murders and other crimes that are considered so terrible by society, seeing that these may be done under great excitement, provocation, or sudden temptation. In fact, they should perceive that falsehood and deception more or less enter into the very essence and constitution of almost every other sin or vice, and consequently they should be prepared to labour constantly, not only to root out any tendency to

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

falsehood already existing in their children, but most carefully to prevent the future formation of the habit.

(3.) Explain to the children how important truth is. Show them that it is really the foundation of a good, useful, and holy character, and that without it there can be no happiness or success in any department of life, nor any respect from good and godly men.

(4.) Show the children how hateful falsehood is. Teach them that deliberate lying or deception in any form is one of the most, if not the most, hateful of any of the vices that can take possession of the human breast. Create as early on in life as possible, in their hearts, a strong feeling as to the meanness and cowardliness of this habit; so that they shall prefer to suffer, all the way through life, any loss or trouble, rather than condescend to be false or act untruthfully.

(5) Make the children familiar with the hatred that God bears to falsehood, and the denunciations that are contained in His Book respecting it. Let them see that from the beginning to the end of the Bible His face is everywhere shown to be against falsehood, hypocrisy, and deception—how He declares His hatred of it, and His determination to punish it, both in this world and the world to come. On the other hand, show them the high esteem in which He holds truthfulness and reality.

(6.) Make the children understand that the habit of truthfulness is to extend to all the relations in which they stand to those around them. That is to say, they are to be true, not only in their words but in their conduct, to their parents, teachers, brothers and sisters, servants, playmates, and all other persons with whom they are or shall hereafter become associated.

(7.) Familiarise the minds of the children with the temptations to be untrue that will be presented to them as they grow older. Give them instances which have occurred to others, and imagine circumstances that are likely to come to them, in which earthly gains and honour and pleasures may be presented as inducements to depart from the paths of truth. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Take pains on this subject. In no direction is Satan more likely to seek to draw your children astray; in no direction,

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

perhaps, is he more frequently successful in polluting and destroying the innocence of youth than this. And to rear up children whose word is their bond, who are "the soul of honour, who speak the truth in their hearts, and swear to their own hurt and change not, is a prize and a glory worth any amount of labour on the parents' part.

(8.) Never allow anything that is false to be spoken approvingly before the children. If you carry this out, you will not allow the lying habit to be practised in your house, of saying that a parent is "not at home," when he is; or of seeming to be sick or anything else that is contrary to the facts of the case. We are sure, also, that you will not allow yourselves, or anybody else about you, to practise the common deception of professing to be so much pleased to see visitors, wishing they would stay, and then, when the door is closed and their backs are turned, pronouncing them to be a bore and a nuisance, and wondering what they came to bother you for. Neither will you practise in the presence of your children (or anyone else) the dissimulation, practised by many, of going into raptures on meeting people in the streets or elsewhere, for whom you have no particular regard, or expressing extravagant thanks for every little service of the most trivial value. All such untrue and unreal conduct and conversation should be avoided.

(9.) Never let any achievements in deception, or cheating, or lying be related with approbation in the hearing of your children, because they happen to have been cleverly carried out, or wittily contrived. Always remember that the devil is clever enough in his lying delusions and schemes, but that he is a hateful devil still.

And yet how common it is to hear parents and others at the table describe, in the presence of children, how they have made great bargains, or succeeded in important business negotiations, by a misleading statement about the value of things. If any lying or deceit is to be practised in your business or your home by any persons within your family circle or acquaintance, for God's sake don't let such exploits be dwelt upon in the hearing of your children. If you lie, or seem to lie, or anybody else does the shameful business for you, though you are minting money by the practice, keep the knowledge of it from the ears of your children. Ten thousand thousand times better that they should be true with poverty than that they should grow up to be false, though the falsehood should bring with it all the riches of the Indies.

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

(10.) As far as in you lies, let nothing that is false be acted in their presence. Always remember that it is just as wicked to act a lie as to speak one, and that children take even more notice of actions than they do of words. Here, at least, ignorance is not only bliss, but security.

In all your domestic affairs, in your business, in all your dealings with your relatives and friends, as well as in all your religious professions and doings, be real, honest, straightforward, and true; not only speak the truth, but act it.

Let your home be filled from top to bottom, year in and year out, with the spirit of truth and reality. Your children shall then grow up and thrive in it, and become strong for the great battle of life, which has to be fought so largely with unrealities and shams, and with people who try to appear what they are not. They shall be strong enough not only to fight, but to gain the victory, and survive the final overthrow of all that is false and evil when all lies and liars shall be driven to their own natural abode in the bottomless pit.

But if an opposite course is taken, and if parents, or those in authority, are continually acting contrary to what is true in the presence of their children, let such parents not be in the least surprised if their children grow up in the same spirit, to practise with increased skilfulness all manner of deception upon them in turn, improving on their teachers. They say that "all curses come home to roost," and anyhow we know that children cradled in lying often enough pay back their teachers in their own coin. Nor, further, will it be surprising if, after seeing those for whom they have the greatest respect practising so much deceit, they should come to consider that everybody else is tarred with the same brush, and so grow up to doubt, not only the truth of what they hear or read about earthly things, but everything that is told them about heavenly things also.

4. Do not many parents, and others in charge of children, act altogether contrary to the counsel just given, by speaking and acting that which they know to be false in the presence of the children almost as soon as they can understand them?

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

Yes, they do, and that in many different ways. Before the little ones can well understand the difference between truth and falsehood, they gradually and insidiously, though often quite unintentionally, instil into their minds the principles and practice of deception and untruthfulness. Such incidents as those described in Mrs. Booth's article on the "Training of Children" in "Practical Religion," are quite common.

If a child knocks itself against the table, mother and servants will flog the table, and say, "Naughty table, to knock Johnny!" Very soon Johnny finds out that this is an untruth, and assumes, of course, that if mother lies, there is not much harm in his doing so too.

Or the parents will promise to bring the child presents which they have not the most distant idea of procuring, such as a pony, or some other unlikely thing, which said promises the child goes on believing, until he finds out that they are made without any intention of fulfillment.

Again, parents or servants will threaten children with ghosts, bogies, black dogs, and other ridiculous terrors, threatenings which they know, and the children soon come to know, are based on utter falsehood.

A method better adapted and more likely to succeed in nurturing and training a child in habits of deception and lying could not possibly be conceived; and a more admirable plan for laying the foundation of a life of suspicion and disbelief before God, could not have been more cleverly invented or more thoroughly approved by the devil himself.

In all you say and do before your children, stick to the truth; be as anxious to fulfill all your promises as you would be if you were dealing with the Queen or any other person whose good opinion you highly prize, or with whom you feel your honour' to be at stake.

5. Is it wrong to deceive children when such deceit seems likely to lead to a good result?

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

You are never to do evil that good may come. No matter how good the end may be that you think is going to be served by making your children believe one thing while you mean another, that end had better be sacrificed. But we do not think there is any great danger in this respect, seeing that by a little thoughtful ingenuity the interests of truth can be maintained without any injury to the children. Nevertheless, whatever might apparently be gained by dissimulation or equivocation, do not destroy the confidence of your children in your word and in your hatred of falsehood. Do not lay the foundation yourself of habits of deception and lying in them.

If, after seeing your children grow up to years of maturity, you should be called upon to bury them, it will be a great consolation, as you stand by their coffin, if you are able to say, "My son, my daughter, never told a lie!" Let your children, and their children also, if it should be their lot to follow you to the grave, have the same inestimable privilege of saying, "My mother, my father, never deceived me; I never knew them tell a lie!"

6. In dealing with children, is it not wise to avoid that sensational way of talking, and that exaggeration of facts which so largely prevails, in order to make what is said appear more interesting?

Yes, this is very important indeed. For instance how often people, in speaking of crowds, will talk of "thousands" when hundreds would have been nearer the truth; when describing distances, they will say "six miles" instead of four. Somebody has been "all over England," when he has only visited three or four counties. Buildings were "crowded to suffocation," when the seats were only well filled. Their "hearts were broken," when they have had only some small anxiety. They "have been awake all night," when they only lost an hour's sleep. This habit is, unfortunately, too common to need further illustration.

Children will see through statements which, although substantially true, are in ordinary conversation stretched and made the most of. And if they hear this frequently done by those who are older than themselves, they will not only feel that it is proper for them to do the same, but in their love for the surprising and sensational, they will

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

naturally go beyond the pattern set them, and you will have, first an extravagant statement, and then an actual falsehood.

7. Is not much injury done to the love and appreciation of truthfulness in the minds of children by the appalling difference they often see between the profession and practice of parents and others with respect to religion?

Certainly there is. It is very much to be deplored that, in many families, there is a most serious contrast between what is professed and what the children see is really practised; and none have quicker eyes to see or sharper instincts to detect unreality than little children. They can see through the whited-sepulchre business sometimes quicker than a doctor of divinity.

So if you don't want them to think it a light matter to lie and deceive, by professing one thing while practising another, mind you do not act anything in their presence that has the slightest resemblance to it.

It is to be feared that the striking contradiction seen by children between the formalities of family and public worship—the songs longing for Heaven, and all that kind of thing—and the actual spirit and practice of the everyday life, often leads to much of the disgust and infidelity felt by multitudes of children belonging to professedly Christian families.

At the table, children will hear their father pray, "For what we are about to receive, the Lord make us truly thankful, and then as he opens his eyes exclaim, "Cold mutton again! " or make some other unreasonable complaint, keeping up the grumbling, more or less, until the meal is finished.

Or at family worship the children hear their father repeat the Lord's prayer, all the time knowing that his life is in direct contradiction to almost every sentence it contains. What must a brewer's or a publican's children feel, for example, who know full well the body and soul destroying character of their father's business, when they hear him pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"? Again, what must be the feelings of children when they hear a mother, whose heart they know is possessed of a

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

bitter, revengeful spirit continually manifested towards some imagined enemy, pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us"? How must the children, who know that their parents are rolling in wealth and that the poor are rotting and starving at their very gates, feel, when they hear them talk about feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, and having the love of God in their hearts, when all the time they will scarcely part with the crumbs from their table for Lazarus to eat?

How often the children of parents who can find any amount of money to spend on their own indulgences, hear them sing

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

How false such professions must appear in the eyes of the children, who know that these parents, when asked to do or give anything to help that same Saviour, dole out their substance in the most stingy and grudging manner.

Or they hear them sing

Oh, I long, I long, I long to be there!

when the children know perfectly well that their parents would almost die of fear at the very thought of being taken away from the amusements and employments of what they insincerely call "this sinful world," and the Lord Jesus, coming in the clouds of Heaven, would be the last person they would like to see.

If children see their parents living a life of pretence with respect to religion, it will not only make them hate religion, but make them feel that it is perfectly allowable for them to act one part and practise another, not only on the subject of religion, but on every other subject as well.

We need scarcely say to Salvationists, be thorough, be honest, seek Holiness until you

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

find it in all its fulness and beauty, and then walk in the way of righteousness and truth before your children in your everyday life. Confess and profess before them to the uttermost what God has done for you. But at the same time we do Say, DO NOT LET YOUR PROFESSION GO BEYOND YOUR POSSESSION. Be as good as you seem.

Remember always that there is a great difference between Sanctification and sanctimoniousness—the first is excellent, the second is execrable. In all your religious habits be true, and your children will not only respect your religion, but be proud of it; and what is better still, they will never rest until they realise it in their own hearts.

8. Is it not very objectionable to use those exclamations so commonly employed by many in conversation, such as, "Oh, Lord!" "My goodness!" "My gracious!"?

Certainly it is; and the practice often carries those addicted to it into the regions of swearing and the use of profane language. I need not say such a practice should be especially avoided in the presence of children.

Earnest natures, who feel strongly, always want to carry conviction into other minds, and make others around them feel as they do. Such are specially prone to use these forms of speech. But moderation should be practised in the presence of children. Remember that they will ever be in danger not only of imitating, but of going beyond your example. Let your "yea " be "yea," and your "nay," it nay." Cultivate in the children the habit of stating the truth with plainness and simplicity, and then leaving it to make its own impression.

9. Can any other course be taken with children in order to lay the foundations of truth in their minds?

Be severe in punishing any departure from it. Never pass over in a light manner any word or act which you have reason to believe is untrue. (See chapter on "Chastisement.")