

CHAPTER 5: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS

1. What is the second condition of successful training?

That there shall be on the part of the parents a clear idea of the nature and value of the godly life desired for their children, of the training necessary to secure it, and of their own responsibility for imparting it.

2. Why are parents held responsible for this training, more than any other persons?

Because children are entrusted to them for this very purpose—this is the parents' special duty. They are stewards before God, and responsible to Him for the discharge of it.

Every father and mother ought to look upon their child as a sacred trust from Jehovah, as much so as though sent to their arms by an angel direct from Heaven, with the same command which Pharaoh's daughter gave with the infant Moses, when she placed him in the charge of his mother, "Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." – Exodus 2:9.

Indeed, this is exactly what the King of kings has done. He has entrusted you with that boy or girl in order that you may lead it to the Saviour, train it in holy living, instruct it as to the nature of the foul rebellion raging against His authority, and inspire it with undying devotion to His cause. In other words, that you may mould and shape it into a holy, loving saint, fit for the worship of God and the companionship of angels in Heaven, and into a courageous, self-sacrificing, skilful warrior, able to war a good warfare on His behalf on earth. How will you deal with your trust?

3. Are these the feelings with which parents ordinarily regard their children?

We are afraid not. By many – even professing Christians – children seem to be regarded as a necessary evil, to be avoided, if possible, as being in the way of their comfort and ease, and involving a great deal of trouble and expense. By others children are looked upon simply as a means of selfish gratification, welcomed and

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regarded with no higher feelings than those with which the animals regard their offspring. Parents calculate about their children with favour or disfavour just as they seem likely to minister to their own Pleasure, gratify their family pride, assist in their worldly business, or help them in carrying out some personal ambitious aims or projects.

4. But do not all professedly Christian parents desire that their children shall be really religious?

They say so when first their babe is placed in their arms. You would think so as you hear them pray when kneeling by its little cot; they declare it at the baptismal font, and elsewhere, when in the most solemn manner they promise to train it for God, and on its behalf renounce the world and all its pomps, and the devil and all his works.

Parents do a great deal of sentimental talking and praying about their dear children being nurtured for the Lord, but we fear that in the hearts of very few is there any definite purpose that their sons and daughters shall be trained to follow the Lord Jesus Christ in such hardships and persecutions, self-denial, and toil, as the following Of Christ really signifies.

Alas! how few professedly Christian fathers and mothers plan anything higher for their children than that they should be so educated and brought up as to secure comfortable earthly positions! Is not this made only too evident by their being just as anxious as the rest of the world that their children shall be comfortable or rich, or learned, or famous? And do not these purposes determine, in the main, the training and education that they give them?

5. But do not such parents in all their plans desire that their children shall grow up to be the servants of God?

Yes, they desire all this after a fashion, and if anyone were to prophesy to them that these children would grow up godless, and at last die in their sins, and go to Hell, and also propose that they should train their children for this end, they would be very much shocked, and indignantly refuse to educate them after such an inhuman

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manner. But the poor children would have a far better chance of finding out the truth were they to do so; for as it is, while praying and talking about their anxiety that their children should be Christians, they are all the time training them as closely as possible for a life of worldliness and selfishness. AR the blessing such parents want from the Lord is that the children may have success down here, and that when living on earth any longer is impossible, they may be taken to Heaven. They seem to have no higher idea or nobler purpose for them than that they should spend their time and strength either in promoting the interests of the parents or in the gratification of their own selfishness. And then they call it being religious, because they ask and expect that God is going to prosper them in it here, and acknowledge them hereafter.

6. Then you think those parents are wrong who regard their children with these interested and selfish feelings?

Most assuredly I do I Parents have no more right to train their children for the gratification of their own selfish interests and fancies than a steward has to use his master's property for his own personal advantage, or a nurse to train the children entrusted to her care to advance her own particular views or interests. Let every parent carefully consider this, and be prepared to give account how he deals with this precious trust.

7. Can you give any other reason why parents are held responsible for giving this training?

Yes, the superior information which the parent possesses concerning the child's welfare shows him to be positively cruel if he refuse to impart it. What would be thought of a parent who, seeing the dangers, difficulties, and enemies scattered through the coming life of his child, should refuse to warn, counsel, and strengthen it to the utmost of his ability as to the best way to meet, resist, and overcome them; or, who, seeing the happiness and usefulness possible to his child, should fail to do all in his power to instruct, guide, and inspire it to attain to them?

8. Is there any further reason why the parents should be held responsible for this training?

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Yes. The natural instincts which lead the parent, mother or father, to yearn with indescribable and irrepressible desire for the supreme good of the child, show that the parent is responsible for the employment of every possible method for promoting his present and future welfare. However far the parents themselves may be from righteousness, there are instincts in them which lead them to desire-and that very strongly-that their children should be good and happy. Do not all parents, at times at least, feel how easy it would be for them to make any sacrifice for the real well-being of their children? It would not be difficult-nay, it would be easy-for them to die to save them from any terrible woe, or to secure for them any great good. Why did God implant these instincts if not to lead parents to do all that is possible for the good of their children? A bear will die to save her cubs from death; and the parental instinct was implanted for a more glorious Salvation than that of the body only.

9. What further can be said to show that parents are held responsible for giving that training which is calculated to secure the Salvation of their children?

The solemn religious dedicatory vows taken upon them in multitudes of instances, bind them in the most sacred manner to give their children the best possible training with a view to making them good, holy, and Christ-like.

The fact that large numbers of parents stand up with their children in dedicatory, baptismal, and other religious ceremonies and declare their desire that their children should truly serve God and also their full intention to train them for this purpose, shows in the consciences of the parents a recognition of this solemn obligation.

10. Do parents sometimes admit their responsibility for thus training their children for God?

Parents confess it in the little religious teaching they do give their children. They show it in the prayers they offer for them; in the hymns they teach them to sing themselves, and the hymns they sing about them. Also in their anxiety about them if they die young, and in all their imaginings concerning them after death. If any of their children die, they always approve of their being very religious, of their serving God with all

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their strength, and being fully consecrated-in the next world. They are quite willing for them to be as holy as possible in Heaven. They can wear uniform, and play music, and march about in procession through the golden streets, of the New Jerusalem, week-days and Sundays, to any extent-nay, they like the idea of their doing so. They would be disgusted at the thought of their departed darlings growing up to live selfish, unruly, proud, vain, conceited lives in the Holy City. They would be a-shamed of their setting up their interests against those of Christ in a second Paradise. Indeed, they would condemn the very thought of the children who have gone away to Heaven living just such lives in spirit and in manner there, as they are quite content for the children whom God has not taken, to live down here.

All of which goes to show not only that in their consciences parents ordinarily recognise the justness of God's claims to the whole-hearted service of their children, but at the same time bears testimony to their responsibility for securing it.

11. In what other way is the responsibility of parents for the training of their children made manifest?

By the fact that God has given them such a remarkable opportunity for imparting it. For the first few years-in the most impressionable period of their existence-they are left unavoidably in the society of their parents, chiefly of the mother. Their minds and hearts are really and truly as much in the power of the parents to be moulded and shaped to whatever form they choose, as is the soft clay in the bands of the potter; that is, if they, the said parents, think it worth their while to be at the trouble to make them any shape at all.

But whether the opportunity be used wisely and well or not, there it is. God has given it, and the parent has the field all to himself. He can give here a little and there a little. No need for him to be in haste; if he seem not to succeed one day there is another, and another, and another after that. For weeks and months, and even years, he can go plodding on, Whatever opposition there may be, little or much-as opposition there will be some-whether from disposition, or temper, or waywardness, or the devil, it can be fought with and surmounted. Father, mother, God has given you abundance of time, and therefore He naturally expects that you will do the work. If you do it not, you

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will certainly have to tell Him the reason why it is not done. So do it, and do it thoroughly, and never fear the result, because it is your high privilege not to work alone and unaided, but to be "labourers together with God." – 1 Cor. 3:9.

12. Is there any other argument which goes to show the responsibility of parents for imparting this training?

Yes; this responsibility is shown in the remarkable influence which God has given the parent over the child during the first years of its life.

Parents are usually worshipped by their children. The mother, and often the father, during the period of infant life, and frequently far into childhood, stand in the place of God to their children. This mighty influence might be continued, and is continued in the after years of childhood and maturity to a degree which it is difficult to measure, unless destroyed by the painful discovery on the part of the children that their parents are not the good, true, and honourable beings that they have imagined them to be.

Consider this, you fathers and mothers! Think of the irresistible influence YOU wield over the children-an influence which must increase, if only you are careful to maintain and use it as God intends you should.

There YOU are then, by your own fireside, absolutely supreme, with none to say you nay; able to hut out all opposing influences, not only having the ability-which I hope you have, and if you have not, I Pray you get it immediately-but the wonderful opportunity to make these children such as your Heavenly Father can honour and bless on earth, and receive, exalt, and crown in Heaven.

13. Are parents the only persons responsible for giving this training?

Ordinarily it is so. But in the case of the children of parents who refuse the performance of this duty, and in that of orphans, the work devolves upon others, and with the opportunity for doing the work there comes a measure of the responsibility. This applies to the guardians of children, governesses in private families, Captains and Sergeants of Little Soldiers, teachers in schools, and to all servants who are brought



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into contact with children. These People, in some of the instances named,, stand before God in the relation of fathers and mothers. A solemn responsibility devolves upon all such to make up to the poor bereaved ones-bereaved whether by death or misfortune – for the loss of the watchful eye and kindly hand and tender heart of the parent. All such ought to feel this responsibility, to thank God for the opportunity, and to discharge their duty as those who must give an account.