

Letters to Parents. No. 5.

by Charles Finney

Parents should cultivate natural affection among their children, encourage their inquiries, deal thoroughly with their consciences, and guard against a legal spirit.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:7, Proverbs 19:18, Proverbs 23:13

Topics: "Parenting", "Spiritual Education"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the vital role of parents in cultivating affection and moral understanding among their children. He urges parents to encourage their children's inquiries and to provide truthful answers, while also being vigilant about the influences of external environments like schools. Finney stresses the importance of teaching children the law of God and the plan of salvation, alongside appropriate discipline. He highlights the necessity of demonstrating a joyful and sincere faith, as well as the power of prayer in parenting. Ultimately, he calls parents to rely on God's promises for their children and to actively engage in their spiritual upbringing.

Transcript

DEAR BRETHREN AND SISTERS:--

I remark:

22. Cultivate natural affection among your children. Remember, that what is called natural affection, is natural in no other sense, than that it is natural for children to love those that love them. Therefore, what is generally called natural affection is cultivated affection. Therefore, great pains should be taken by parents, to cultivate among children, not only an affection for themselves, but for each other. Many parents, and fathers especially, treat their children in such a manner, as that their children have very little affection for them, and in many instances, it is to be feared, that they have none at all. And then, perhaps, the children are upbraided with the want of natural affection. But parents should have consideration enough not to wonder at the absence of natural affection, as they call it, in their children, when they take little or no pains to be worthy of or to cultivate their affection.

23. Again--encourage inquiry on the part of your children. They come into a world of novelties. Before they are a week old, they may be seen staring around the room, as if they would inquire who, and what, and where they are. As soon as they are able to talk, they manifest the most intense desire to be instructed in regard to every thing around them. Now parents, and all others who have the care of children, should

encourage their inquiries, and as far as is possible, or proper, give them satisfaction on every subject of inquiry. Give them reasons, as far as may be, that shall satisfy their little minds.

24. Parents will find their children inquisitive on those subjects that are by many supposed to be of too delicate a nature to be conversed upon by children. E.g., What constitutes a breach of the 7th commandment, and things of this nature. At a very early age, it is no doubt proper to inform children, that they are yet too young to be instructed upon such subjects; but that, at a suitable time, you will give them the requisite information, requesting them at the same time, not to converse with others than their parents, about such things as these. But previous to the age of puberty, and before an explanation of such things will excite improper feelings, parents should, beyond all question, give their children requisite instruction and caution upon all such subjects. When instruction is given, caution and admonition should be so frequently repeated, accompanied with solemn prayer, and instructions from the word of God, as to make a deep impression on the mind, and thoroughly to quicken and awaken conscience. Parents cannot neglect to do this without guilt, inasmuch as it is expressly enjoined upon parents, by the authority of God, to teach their children the law and commandments of God. "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

25. Parents, and the guardians of children, should never suffer themselves to evade the inquiries of children by falsehood. For example--When an infant is born in the family, telling them that the physician brought it, or that it was found in a hollow tree, or, in short, telling them any thing false about it. There is nothing improper, unnatural, or indecent, in letting them know so much upon the subject, as that it was born of their mother.

26. To tell children falsehoods about such things, is only still further to excite their curiosity, and create the necessity either of telling them the truth or still more falsehoods.

27. Be especially careful of the influences that act upon your children at common schools. It often seems to me, that parents hardly dream of the amount of corruption, filthy language, and conduct, often witnessed in common schools. Little children of the same, as well as of the opposite sexes, deeply corrupting and defiling each other. These things are often practised, to a most shocking extent, without parents seeming even so much as to know of it. I would rather be at any expense, at all within my means, or even to satisfy myself with one meal a day, to enable me to educate my children at home, sooner than give them over to the influence of common schools, as they are often arranged and conducted.

28. Remember that your children will be educated, either by yourself or by some one else. Either truth or error must possess their minds. They will have instruction, and if you do not secure to them right instruction, they will have that which is false.

29. Prove yourselves in all respects worthy of the confidence of your children. Let them always witness in you the utmost integrity of character. Let them, in no instance, see in you the appearance of deceit, falsehood, or unkindness. Let your whole heart stand open to them; and in return, you will find, as a thing of course, that their little hearts will stand open to you. If you show yourselves worthy of their confidence, rely upon it you will have it.

30. Deal thoroughly with their consciences. As soon as they are able to be instructed on moral questions, give yourself to a thorough enlightening their minds upon every precept of the law of God. Put their minds as fully as possible in possession of those truths that will make their consciences quick and sharp as a two

edged sword.

31. Guard against the cultivation of so legal a spirit, as to drive them to despair when they have sinned. While you cultivate the most discriminating conscience, be sure also, to instruct the little one thoroughly in respects to the plan of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

32. Add physical discipline to moral instruction. I have referred to this subject before, but wish to say in addition, that it is doubtless one of the greatest errors, in the education of children, to overlook the fact, that at that early age the discipline of the rod, will often present to them a more powerful motive than can be brought to bear upon them by moral truth, presented to their uninformed minds. The rod cannot safely be laid aside, until the powers of the mind are so fully developed and the mind so thoroughly instructed, that the whole range of moral truth may be brought to exert its appropriate influence upon the mind, without the infliction of pain. It seems to me, that some parents effect to be wiser than God, in taking it upon them to decide, that it is not wise to use the rod upon children. Prov. 19:18: & 23:13, 14: "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." "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."

33. Let them see that your religion is your life--that it is your joy and rejoicing from day to day--and not that it fills you with gloom and melancholy. Many professors have such a kind of religion, as to render them rather miserable than happy. They are almost constantly in bondage to sin, and consequently under a sense of condemnation. They are wretched, and exhibit this wretchedness, daily, before their children. This creates the impression on their little minds, that religion is a gloomy thing, fit only for funerals and death-beds; and only to be thought of on a near prospect of death. Now this is making the most false and injurious impression upon their minds that can be conceived. It is a libel upon the religion of Christ. But shocking to say, it is almost as common as it is false. Now your children should see, that you are religious in every thing, and that in all things you are not reluctantly but joyfully acquiescent in the will of God.

34. By all means let them daily see, that you are not creatures of appetite--that you are not given up to the pursuit of wealth, or to the pursuit of fashion--not seeking worldly reputation or favor--that neither good eating, or good drinking, or good living, in any other sense than holy living, is the object at which you aim. Let them see, that you are cheerful and contented with plain, simple food--that you are strictly temperate in all things, in respect to the quality and quantity of whatever you eat, drink, do, or say. In short, let your whole life inculcate the impressive lesson, that a state of entire consecration to God is at once the duty and the highest privilege of every human being.

35. Be sure to pray much with and for them. Never punish them without praying with them. Whenever you give them serious admonition pray with them. Pray with them, when they lie down and when they rise up. And enforce the lesson by your own example, that they are never to do any thing without prayer.

36. Lay hold on the promises of God for them. Search the Bible for promises. Lay your Bible open before you. Kneel over it, and spread out the case of your children before God. Begin with the covenant of Abraham, and understand that God made the covenant as well with the children as with the parents. And remember that an inspired Apostle has said, "The promise is to you and to your children, and to as many as are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Take the promise in Isa. 44:3-5: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up among the grass, as willows by the water-courses.

One shall say I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Remember, that this promise was made more especially to the Church under the Christian dispensation, and respects the children of Christians, more especially than the children of Jewish parents. Throw your souls into these promises, and wrestle until you prevail.

Your brother in the bonds of the gospel,

C.G.FINNEY

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