

Children to Be Educated for God.

by Edward Payson

Parents must educate their children for God by realizing they are His property, dedicating them to Him, and doing everything from right motives.

Scripture: Genesis 18:19, Deuteronomy 6:6, Psalm 78:4, Psalm 127:3, Proverbs 22:6, Matthew 19:14, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21, 2 Timothy 3:15

Topics: "Christian Parenting", "Spiritual Education"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the importance of educating children for God, drawing parallels from the story of Moses being nursed by his own mother at the request of Pharaoh's daughter. He emphasizes the need for parents to realize that their children belong to God, to dedicate them to Him, to have right motives in their upbringing, and to prepare them for God's service. Payson highlights the joy and reward parents receive when they see their children walking in the truth and serving God, urging all parents to prioritize their children's spiritual education for eternal purposes.

Transcript

"Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages."

Exodus 2:9

words were addressed by Pharaoh's daughter to the mother of Moses. Of the circumstances which occasioned them, it can scarcely be necessary to inform you. You need not be told, that, soon after the birth of this future leader of Israel, his parents were compelled by the cruelty of the Egyptian king to expose him in an ark of bulrushes, on the banks of the Nile. In this situation he was found by the daughter of Pharaoh; and so powerfully did his infantile cries excite her compassion, that she determined not only to rescue him from a watery grave, but to adopt and educate him as her own.

His sister Miriam, who at a distance, had watched his fate unseen, now came forward like a person entirely unacquainted with the circumstances of his exposure, and on hearing of the princess' determination, offered to procure a Hebrew woman, to take the care of him, until he should be of sufficient age to appear at her father's court. This offer being accepted, she immediately went and called the child's mother, to whose care he was committed by the princess in the words of our text, --Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.

In similar language, my friends, does God address parents. To every one, on whom he bestows the blessing of children, he says in his word and by the voice of his Providence, Take this child and educate it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. From this passage, therefore, we may take occasion to show, I. What is implied in educating children for God; II. The reward which he gives to those who perform this duty aright. I. The first thing implied in educating children for God, is a realizing, heart-felt conviction that they are his property, his children, rather than ours; and that he commits them for a time to our care, merely for the purpose of education, as we place children under the care of human instructors for the same purpose.

However carefully we may educate children, yet we cannot be said to educate them for God, unless we feel that they are his; for if we feel that they were ours exclusively, we shall and must educate them for ourselves and not for him. To know that they are his, is to feel a cordial operative conviction that he has a sovereign right to dispose of them as he pleases, and to take them from us whenever he thinks fit. That they are his, and that he possesses this right, is evident from innumerable passages in the inspired writings.

We are there told that God is the former of our bodies, and the father of our spirits; that we are all his offspring, and that consequently we are not our own but his. We are also assured that, as the soul of the parent, so also the souls of the children are his; and God, once and again severely reproveth and threatens the Jews, because they sacrificed his children in the fire, to Moloch. Yet plain and explicit as these passages are, how few parents appear to feel their force.

How few appear to feel and act as if conscious that they and theirs were the absolute property of God; that they were merely the foster-parents of their children, and that, in all which they do for them, they are, or ought to be, acting for God. But it is evident that they must feel this before they can bring up their children for Him; for how can they educate their children for a being whose existence they do not realize, whose right to them they do not acknowledge, and whose character they do not love?

Nearly connected with this is a second thing implied in educating children for God, --namely, a cordial and solemn dedication or surrender of them to him, to be his forever. We have already shown that they are his property and not ours; and by dedicating them to him, we mean nothing more than an explicit acknowledgment of this truth; or an acknowledgment that we consider them as entirely his; and that we unreservedly surrender them to him for time and eternity. This, my friends, is a reasonable service.

The apostle beseeches Christians by the tender mercies of God, to present themselves as living sacrifices to him, holy and acceptable, and to glorify God in their bodies and spirits which are his. But the same considerations which render it right and reasonable that we should dedicate ourselves to God, render it equally right and reasonable, that to him we should also dedicate our children. If we refuse to give them to God, how can we be said to educate them for him? In the third place, if we would educate children for God, we must do all that we do for them from right motives.

Almost the only motive which the Scriptures allow to be right, is a regard for the glory of God, and a disinterested desire to promote it; and they consider nothing as really done for God, which does not flow from this source. Without this, however exemplary we may be, we do but bring forth fruit to ourselves, and are no better than empty vines. We must, therefore, be governed by this motive in the education of our children, if we would educate them for God, and not for ourselves.

In all our cares, labors and sufferings for them, a regard to the divine glory must be the main spring which moves us. If we act merely from parental affection, we act from no higher principle than the irrational

animals around us, since many of them evidently appear to love their offspring no less ardently, and to be no less ready to encounter dangers, toils, and sufferings, to promote their happiness, than we are to promote the welfare of ours. But if parental affection can be sanctified by the grace of God, and parental duties hallowed by a wish to promote his glory, then we rise above the irrational world, to our proper station, and may be said to educate our children for God; and here, my friends, we may observe that true religion, when it prevails in the heart, sanctifies everything, renders even the most common actions of life acceptable to God, and gives them a dignity and importance which, of themselves, they by no means deserve.

What, for instance, can be more common or trifling, than the daily reception of food for the support of the body? Yet even this may be done, and ought to be done, to the glory of God; and when this is the case, instead of a trifling, unimportant action, it becomes an important religious duty; Whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God. Thus the care and education of children, however trifling it may be thought by some, ought to be attended to from a regard to the divine glory; and when this is done, it becomes an important part of true religion.

In the fourth place, if we would educate our children for God, we must educate them for his service. The three preceding particulars which we have mentioned, refer principally to ourselves and our motives; but this has more immediate relation to our children themselves. With a view to show with all possible clearness what we mean by educating our children for the service of God, permit me to make the following supposition. Suppose that any of you had a young and numerous family, for which you felt yourselves unable to provide.

Suppose, farther, that some benevolent, rich and powerful monarch should condescendingly offer to support them and yourselves, during your lives, and at your death to adopt your children as his own, and raise them to the highest honors and employments in his kingdom, provided that they should be found on examination, any way qualified for his service. Suppose also, that he furnished you with the clearest and fullest instructions respecting the qualifications of every kind which he should require of them, and offered you every necessary assistance, to enable you to instruct and qualify them aright.

Now it is evident, that if you should think proper to embrace his offers, you would educate your children entirely for his service; this would be your sole object respecting them; to this everything else would be made to give place, and you would feel, and endeavor to make them feel, that everything which did not tend, either directly or indirectly, to prepare them for the examination through which they must pass, was of no use or consequence to them, however important or pleasant it might be in itself.

In order to qualify yourselves for the right instruction of your children, you would diligently study the directions given you, and ascertain as nearly as possible, the qualifications which would be necessary to prepare your children for the honors and employments designed for them. In the next place, as soon as your children were capable of understanding you, you would inform them of everything relative to their situation and prospects. You would tell them that you were poor, and unable to make provision for their future support; that you must soon die and leave them friendless, destitute and forlorn; and that they would then indispensably need some kind and powerful friend to provide for and protect them.

When they began to feel their need of such a friend, you would proceed to tell them of the condescending offers which the king had made, to adopt and provide for them as his own; of the qualifications which his service required, and of the assistance which he was ready to give them in acquiring these qualifications.

You would tell them of his power, majesty, riches and goodness; of all the favors he had bestowed on you, of the great importance of securing his favor, and of the dangerous consequences of losing it.

You would early begin to teach them the language of the country for which they were destined, and the laws, customs, and dispositions of its inhabitants; you would frequently remind them of the honors and employments before them, and of the folly of degrading themselves by frivolous pursuits, trifling amusements, and unworthy conduct; you would carefully guard against their associating with such companions as would tend to render their taste, their disposition, their conversation and deportment unsuitable to the exalted situation for which they were preparing.

You would frequently seek for them the promised assistance of the king; warn them of the fatal effects of indolence and delay, and press then in every possible way, and by every motive which you could conceive of, to persevering diligence and active exertion. In a word, you would so conduct and converse with your children, as most clearly to show them that you considered their preparation for the examination through which they were to pass, as the great object of their lives, the one thing and the only thing really needful; and so to turn their thoughts, desires, words and actions into one channel, and direct them to this one end.

You would be careful never to say or do anything, which should lead them to think of any other friend or protector than the one whom you had chosen for them; of any other kind of honor or happiness than that which would result from his favor; or of any disgrace or misery comparable to the loss of it. Such, in brief, is the manner in which you would probably conduct to the circumstances we have supposed. My friends, this supposition is not very far from the truth; and you may easily learn from it what is implied in educating your children for God.

Like the parents mentioned above, you are in a spiritual sense poor, unable to provide for the happiness of your children in this world, and much more so in the next. God, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, condescendingly offers to adopt them into his own family, cause all things to work together for their good, and make them heirs of a heavenly inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, provided they are properly qualified to serve and enjoy him. He has also, in his Word, given you the fullest and clearest instruction, respecting the qualifications, which he requires in his servants, and offers you the influence of his Spirit, to impart these qualifications to your children, and assist you in educating them aright.

Now if you think proper to accept these offers, and educate your children for the service of God, or to be his servants, you will conduct in a manner very similar to that described above. In the first place, in order to qualify yourselves for instructing and preparing your children for God's service, you diligently study his Word, to ascertain what he requires of them, and frequently pray for the assistance of his Spirit, both for them and yourselves. In the next place, as soon as they arrive at a suitable age, which is much earlier than is generally supposed, you will begin to tell them of your own inability to preserve them from misery, and render them happy either in this world or the next; of their indispensable need of some other friend and protector, of the gracious offers and invitations of their heavenly Father, of the infinite importance of securing his favor, and the inconceivably dreadful consequences of incurring his displeasure.

You will also early begin to teach them the language of heaven, the dispositions, employments and enjoyments of its inhabitants, and the qualifications which are necessary to prepare them for it. You will tell them that God is able and willing to impart these qualifications to all who come to him in the name of Christ; that he has already conferred on them ten thousand favors; that he is the greatest, wisest, and best

of beings, and that his Son Jesus Christ is the friend of children, and the Saviour of sinners.

You will diligently caution them against all those sinful tempers and practices which are inconsistent with the favor of God, labor to form them to his image, and prevent them so far as possible, from associating with companions, who might poison their principles, corrupt their morals or weaken their sense of the infinite importance of religion. In a word, you will carefully guard against saying or doing anything which may, either directly or indirectly, lead them to consider religion as an object of secondary importance; on the contrary you will constantly labor to impress upon their minds a conviction, that you consider religion as the great business of life; the favor of God, as the only proper object of pursuit, and the enjoyment of him hereafter, as the only happiness; while everything else is comparatively of no consequence, however important it may otherwise be.

Such, my friends, in brief, is the manner in which we must educate children, if we would educate them for the service of God; and the reasonableness of this, we presume no one will deny. No one would think of qualifying a child for a physician, without giving him some knowledge of diseases and their remedies; or for a counsellor without putting him upon the study of the law; or for a divine, without making him acquainted with theology. Equally necessary is it, if we would educate children for God, thus to attempt to qualify them for his service.

And this, we may farther observe, implies three things. It implies, 1. That we pay more attention to the soul than the body. We do not mean that the body is to be neglected; but the soul must be considered as the superior part, and the body merely as its servant. In this respect multitudes of parents fail. They are extremely attentive to the bodies of their children, their health, their beauty, the elegance of their form, and the gracefulness of their deportment; but seem entirely to forget that they have a soul, a mind, a heart, that deserves attention.

If the slightest illness affects their children, they are alarmed; but they feel neither concern nor anxiety on account of the diseases of their minds. They would be unspeakably distressed should their children be distorted or deformed, and would use every possible means to correct or remove the deformity; but their minds may be deformed, and their tempers distorted by a thousand evil passions, without giving them any disturbance. They would be extremely mortified to see their children awkward, rude and unpolished in their behavior to their fellow-creatures; but seem to think it of no consequence with how much indecent rudeness and impiety, they treat their Creator.

But surely this is not educating children for God. If mankind indeed were mere animals, devoid of reason, such a mode of education would be proper for them; but surely there ought to be some difference between the education of rational and irrational beings. 2. Educating children for the service of God implies, that we pay more attention to the heart or disposition, than to the mind. You will not surely suspect me of thinking that the mind, or, in other words, our rational faculties, should be neglected; or that the cultivation of it is not of very great importance.

We only mean to assert that it is of far less importance than the cultivation of the heart. This, few, if any, will deny; for it is evident that, though our minds should be cultivated in the highest possible degree, and stored with every kind of human literature and science; yet if our hearts are neglected, if our passions, appetites and dispositions continue depraved, we can neither feel nor communicate happiness; but shall only be wretched ourselves, and occasion unhappiness to others, even in this world, much more in the world to come.

It is notorious that many of the individuals, whose agency has been productive of the greatest mischief both in the moral and political world, were persons whose mental powers had been carefully cultivated, while their tempers and dispositions were neglected. On the contrary, the most ignorant person, if his heart be right, will be happy himself, both here and hereafter; and may be the means of communicating much happiness and doing much good to others; though not so much, me allow, as he might accomplish with an educated mind.

It is therefore evident, that although both are important, yet the cultivation of the heart is more so than that of the understanding. It is highly desirable that our children should possess both the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove; but if they cannot have both, the latter is certainly to be preferred. But this many parents appear to forget. They are sufficiently attentive to the minds of their children, and spare no pains or expense, to give them the best education in their power to bestow.

Every kind of knowledge, and every accomplishment, whether useful or not, which is fashionable, must be acquired by them. But meanwhile their hearts and dispositions are, in a great measure, or entirely, neglected. No means are employed to teach them the most important of all sciences, the knowledge of themselves, of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ, whom to know aright is life eternal. On the contrary, they are suffered to grow up, almost as perfect strangers to the very first principles of the oracles of God, as if there were no such book, or as if they were inhabitants of a heathen country.

Surely, my brethren, these things ought not so to be. This cannot be educating children for God. 3. Educating children for the service of God implies, that we educate them for eternity, rather than for time; for a future world, rather than for this. You need not be told, my friends, that a different education is necessary to prepare us for different situations. For instance, if a parent designs one of his children for the navy, another for the counting house, a third for the bar, and a fourth for the desk, he will give them in some respects a different education; an education suited to their respective destined employments.

So he who educates his children for this world, will, in many respects, educate them very differently from one who educates them for the next. The first will confine his views to the present life, and be anxious to teach his children only those things which are necessary to qualify them for acquiring riches, or honors, or applauses here. But the other will extend his views to eternity, and be principally, though not entirely concerned, to give his children that knowledge which will be useful to them beyond the grave.

Here, again, multitudes fail. How few parents, my friends, educate their children in such a manner as would lead a stranger to conclude that they believed in God, or a future state; that they viewed their children as immortal beings, in a state of probation for eternity, and candidates for everlasting happiness or misery. He would see many anxious for the success of their children here, rising early, and late taking rest, and eating the bread of carefulness, to promote their temporal welfare; while no anxiety is manifested respecting the destiny of their undying souls.

Thus, my friends, have we endeavored to give you a concise view of what is implied in educating children for God. Let it be observed, in addition, that all this must be done in such a manner, as to convince your children, that you are sincere, that you are in earnest, that the promotion of their spiritual and eternal welfare is the great, the absorbing concern of your souls. We proceed now, as was proposed, II. To consider the reward which God usually bestows on those who thus educate their children for him.

Though God is the Creator and sovereign Lord of all things, and might therefore, with the most perfect justice, have required us to obey all his commands without any compensation, yet he has been graciously

pleased to attach a reward to the performance of every duty, and of this among the rest. This reward consists, 1. In the pleasure which attends every attempt to educate children for God. However strong parental affection may be, it is rarely, if ever, sufficient to render the various cares, anxieties, and duties which attend a numerous family, delightful or even pleasant.

There is reason to believe, that, in many instances, these cares and troubles are productive of fretfulness, impatience, and discontent; and not only embitter the lives, but sour the tempers of parents. Even Christian parents, who do not recollect that they are, or ought to be, educating their children for God, are prone to murmur at the frequent interruption which they meet with in the hours set apart for devotion, and the little time which the cares of their families allow them, for reading, meditation and prayer.

But did they realize that they are encountering all these cares and troubles for God, that they are educating his children, and that whatever they do or suffer for then, if performed from right motives, will be considered and rewarded as done for him, how greatly would it lessen their sorrows, and alleviate the cares and perplexities attending a family. How easy would it be to spend wearisome days, and sleepless nights, for their children, could they feel that they are acting and suffering for God; and that he looks on, and approves their conduct.

This alone, were there no other, would be a sufficient reward to the Christian for bringing up his children for God. 2. Another part of the reward which God bestows on those who educate their children for him, is the happiness which they enjoy, when they see their labors crowned with success. This happiness will usually, if not always, be enjoyed by those who educate their children in the manner above described, and seek with proper earnestness and perseverance, the blessing of God to render their exertions effectual.

I am warranted to make this assertion by the authority of Scripture. We are there expressly assured, that if we train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old, he will not depart from it. In addition to this, God's language to every believing parent, to every child of Abraham is, I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee. These passages are abundantly sufficient to warrant a belief, that God will save, at least, some of the seed of every believer, who, like Abraham, teaches and commands his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord; for were it true, that God does not promise to be a God to all the children of such parents, yet he does promise that he will be a God to some of them; and we dare challenge any person to produce a single instance, in which all the offspring of believing parents who educate their children for God, in the manner above described, died without giving evidence of hopeful piety.

We know, indeed, that many children of parents undoubtedly pious, far from imitating their example, have been notoriously wicked; but we know also that many parents, really pious, do not educate their children, by any means as they ought. We know also that all the means and endeavors which parents can use, will avail nothing, without the sovereign grace of God; but we likewise know that God usually works by means, and converts those children whose parents labor and pray most earnestly for their conversion.

The labors of ministers for their people are no more effectual, without the grace of God, than those of parents for their children; yet St. Paul assures Timothy, that if he took heed to himself and to his doctrine, and continued in them, he should in so doing, both save himself, and them that heard him. Why then may we not with equal reason conclude, that if parents take heed to themselves, to their conduct, and the doctrines of Christ, and continue in them, they shall save, not only themselves, but their children; We cannot at present insist any longer on this part of our subject; but we are, I think; sufficiently warranted to

conclude, that God will bestow on every parent who educates children for him, the pleasure of seeing, at least some of them, walking in the truth.

My friends, what a reward is this! How must it relieve the anxiety of a parent's heart, how soothing, how delightful must it be, to see his children safe in the arms of the great Shepherd, happy in the enjoyment of God's love; and to feel assured that all things shall work together for their good, and that they are heirs of a heavenly inheritance. What music can be more sweet, more ravishing to a parent's ear, than the accents of a beloved and affectionate child exulting in hope of the glory of God, and gratefully declaring that to the prayers, labors and pious example of his parents, he is indebted, under God, for all his present happiness and future hopes.

How must it alleviate the pangs of separation, when death arrives, to know that we leave our children under the care of an infinitely good, wise, and powerful being, who will do for them all that they need to have done, and watch over them with more than parental tenderness; to know too that they will soon follow us to the mansions of eternal rest. Or if they are called to go before us, how easy must it be to part with them, when we know that they are going to be with Christ, which is far better, and that we shall soon be reunited to them in his presence to part no more.

And hereafter, when we meet them in the abodes of the blessed, when we hear them praising God, for giving them such parents, when we lead them on to the throne of God and the Lamb, saying, Behold, here are we and the children whom thou hast given us; and to hear him greet us with, Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord; --what will be our feelings? how inconceivable our happiness! how great the reward of educating children for God! And even should our endeavors fail of success, still we shall not lose our reward; still the Judge will own and approve us, before the assembled universe, and call us to enter into his joy; for in his kingdom, rewards are ever proportioned, not to our success, but to our zeal and faithfulness.

From what has been said, we infer, 1. That the number of those who educate their children for God is small, very small indeed. This, my friends, is too evident to require proof; for if it be true that a child trained up in the way he should go, will not depart from it when he is old; how few have been thus trained; how few walk in the way they should go, the strait and narrow way to life! And on the contrary how many walk in the way they should not go; the broad way that leadeth to destruction!

What multitudes of parents and children go on together, hand in hand, to eternal ruin, without once pausing to inquire or reflect, whither they are going. My friends, of all the melancholy, heart-rending spectacles, which this lost world affords, this is perhaps the worst; and of all the sins which exist among us, none is more prevalent or destroys more immortal souls, than the neglect of educating children for God. It involves the souls both of parents and children in one common ruin.

Nor is any sin more destructive to a nation, or detrimental to the peace of society. How can it be expected that children, who were never governed or restrained while young, should prove friends of good order, or useful members of society when old? My friends, this subject calls loudly for our attention, as citizens, as parents, as Christians; and if we have any love either for our country, our children, our God, or ourselves, we shall learn to give it that attention which it deserves. 2.

Permit me to improve this subject by asking every parent present, for whom are you educating your children? We ask not this question, as having authority to call you to an account; we ask it not with a view to pry into the state of your families; we ask it not to condemn you; but we ask it merely with a view to call

your attention to the subject, and to lead conscience to give an answer. Say then, my friends, for whom are you educating your children; for God, or for his enemies?

Do you consider your children as a sacred gift; entrusted to you only for a short period, and which the Donor expects to be employed in his service, and returned to him more valuable than when it was bestowed? Do you recognize God's right to dispose of them according to his good pleasure, and to take them from you whenever he shall see best? Have you sincerely and solemnly surrendered them to God, and dedicated them to his service? Are you governed by a supreme regard to the glory of God, in all your efforts for their improvement, and in all the labors, cares and sufferings, which you undergo on their account?

Do you educate them for the service of the King of kings, daily laboring to convince them of the infinite importance of securing his favor, and of avoiding his displeasure; conducting every part of their education with ultimate reference to this end, endeavoring to cultivate all those tempers and dispositions which are agreeable to his will, and to prepare them, as far as in your power, for the employments of heaven? Do you study the directions which God has given you in his word, and frequently implore the assistance of his Holy Spirit, in performing your arduous and responsible duties?

Do you pay more attention to the souls than to the bodies of your children? Do their spiritual maladies occasion you more distress than any infirmities of body, and are you more pained by observing in them wrong tempers and sinful passions, than by seeing them awkward and unpolished in their intercourse with society? Not only so, do you esteem the education of the heart more important than that of the mind, and labor more earnestly to cherish correct moral feelings and suitable affections than to impart intellectual acquirements?

In a word, do your children see in your daily deportment, in your conversation, in your very looks, that all your aims and wishes respecting them, are centered in the one great wish for their conversion; that in comparison with this, you regard no other object as of any importance, and that you would be content to see them poor, despised, and contemned in this world, if they may but secure eternal riches and an unfading crown in that which is to come? If you are not at least attempting to do all this, you are not educating your children for God.

If any feel concerned that they have hitherto neglected this great and important duty, we would improve the subject, 3. By urging them immediately to give it that attention which it merits. Consider the reasonableness of this duty. You are the natural guides, friends, and protectors of your children. They look to you for direction in their yet untrodden path. They are necessarily dependent on others for all the light which can be made to shine on their future course; and their unsuspecting feet will follow wherever you lead the way.

How cruel in you to lead them wrong, knowing, as you do, the tremendous and irreparable consequences of such guidance! This duty may be urged on the ground of justice. You have been instrumental of conveying to your children a depraved nature; and are bound by every principle of justice to do all in your power to eradicate that depravity, and to oppose to its tendencies all the counteracting influences, with which the precepts, the threatenings, the promises, and the Spirit of God supply you; and to add to all the weight of your uniform example and daily prayer.

And let the reward, which God promises to those who educate their children for him, stimulate you to maintain over them a steady government and salutary discipline; to give them line upon line, and precept

upon precept; to talk of their obligations, their duties, and their prospects, when you sit in the house, when you walk by the way, when you rest and when you rise, and on all suitable occasions, --till they shall be taken from under your care, or you removed from them, to enjoy the immediate instruction of the Great Father of our spirits.

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