

The Duties Which Parents Owe Their Children by Thomas Boston

I) THE DUTY WHICH PARENTS OWE THEIR CHILDREN WHILE YET IN THE WOMB.

1st, Parents are obliged to use all care for the preservation of the child, to beware of any thing that may harm the child in the belly, and especially that may procure abortion, Judges 13:4.

2ndly, Dealing with God in behalf of the child, praying for its preservation, and for its soul, as soon as it is known to be a living soul. I think that no sooner should the mother or father know a living soul to be in the womb, but as soon with Rebekah, they should go to God for it, Genesis 25:21-22. If Hannah could devote her child to God before it was conceived, 1 Samuel 1:11, Christian parents may and ought to devote their children to God when quickened in the womb. Whoso neglect this, consider not that then the child is a sinful creature under the wrath of God, and the curse of the law; that it is capable of sanctification, must live for ever in heaven or hell, and that possibly it may never see the light."

II) THE DUTY PARENTS OWE THEIR CHILDREN IN THEIR INFANCY.

1st, Parents should bless God for them when they are born, Luke 1:67, etc. Children are God's heritage; the key of the womb is in his hand; he gives them to some, and withholds them from others; and they should be received with thankfulness from the Lord's hand. . .

[Next], Tender care of them, doing all things necessary for them, while they are not capable to do for themselves, Isaiah 49:15. And here it is the duty of the mother to nurse the child herself, if she be able, Hosea 9:14. And this care of infants, the burden of which lies most on the mothers is one great piece of their generation-work, wherein they are useful for God, and which they ought to look on as special service for their comfort in the trouble which therein they have."

III) THE DUTIES PARENTS OWE TO THEIR CHILDREN FROM THE TIME THEY COME TO THE USE OF REASON, AND SO FORWARD.

1st, They are to provide for them, and that aye and until they be in a capacity to provide for themselves, 1 Timothy 5:8. This arises from the natural obligation and instinct that is common to men with beasts whereof the wildest will feed their young till they be able to do for themselves. Thus parents are,

(1) To provide suitable maintenance for their children for the present, and to lay out themselves for it, though with the sweat of their brows.

(2) And, as God prospers them, they are to lay up something for them, 2

Corinthians 12:14: for though the possession be their parents entirely, yet he is stinted to the use of a part according to what is necessary. 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, Ecclesiastes 2:18-19, 24. But for people to deny themselves things necessary and comely, that they may lay up for their children, is a curse; and if their children should follow their example, to deny themselves the use thereof, to transmit them to theirs, the use of it should never be had: but ordinarily what the parents narrowly gather, and keep so as they cannot take the convenient use of it themselves, the children quickly run through.

2ndly, Civil education, that they may be useful members of the commonwealth. This we may take up in these three things.

(1) Parents should polish the rude natures of their children with good manners, so as they may carry comely and discreetly before themselves or others, Proverbs 31:28. It is the dishonour of parents to see children rude and altogether unpolished as young beasts; and religion is an enemy to rudeness and ill manners, 1 Peter 3:8.

(2) They should give them learning according to their ability, and see that at least they be taught to read the Bible, 2 Timothy 3:15. What is it that makes so many ignorant old people, but that their parents have neglected this? But where parents have neglected this, grace and good nature would make a shift to supply this defect.

(3) They should train them 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, if Providence do not mercifully interpose, Proverbs 31:27. Christians should train up their daughters to do virtuously, Proverbs 31:29. For their own sakes, let them be capable to make their hands sufficient for them, seeing none knows what straits they may be brought to. And for the sake of others to whom they may be joined, let them be virtuously, frugally, and actively educated, otherwise what they bring with them will hardly quit the cost of the mischief that their unthriftiness and silliness will produce, Proverbs 14:3. Whether ye can give them something or nothing, let them not want Ruth's portion, a good name, a good head, and good hands, Ruth 3:11. Sons should be brought up to some honest employment, whereby they may be worth their room in the world, Genesis 4:2. This is such a necessary piece of parents' duty to their children, that the Athenians had a law, That if a son was brought up to no calling at all, in case his father should come to poverty, he was not bound to maintain him, as otherwise he was.

3rdly, Religious education, Ephesians 6:4. If parents provide not for their children, they are worse than beasts to their young; if they give them not civil education, they are worse than heathens; but if they add not religious education, what do they more than civilized heathens? When God gives thee a child, he says, as Pharaoh's daughter to Moses' mother, "Take this child and nurse it for me," Exodus 2:9. Though we be but fathers of their flesh we must be careful of their

souls, otherwise we ruin them.

(1) Parents ought to instruct their children in the principles of religion, and to sow the seeds of godliness in their hearts, as soon as they are able to speak, and have the use of reason, Deuteronomy 6:6-7. Such early religious education is a blessed mean of grace, 1 Kings 18:12, compare 1 Kings 18:3. Not only is this the duty of fathers, who should teach their children, Proverbs 4:3-4, but of mothers, who, while the children are young about their hand, should be dropping something to them for their soul's good. Solomon had not only his father's lesson, but the prophecy his mother taught him, Proverbs 31:1. See Proverbs 1:8.

(2) They should labour for that end to acquaint them with the scriptures, 2 Timothy 3:15, to cause them to read them. Let the reading of their chapters be a piece of their daily task; and cause them read the scriptures in order, that they may be acquainted both with the precepts and histories of the Bible. Let them be obliged to learn their Catechism, and catechise them yourselves, according to your ability. For teaching by way of question and answer is most easy for them. (3) If they ask you any questions concerning these things, do not discourage them, but take pains to answer all their questions, however weakly they may be proposed, Deuteronomy 6:20-21. Children are often found to have very misshapen notions of divine things; but if they were duly encouraged to speak, they might vent their thoughts, which parents thus get occasion to rectify.

4thly, Labour to deter them from sin. The neglect of this was Eli's sin, for which God judged his house, 1 Samuel 3:13. Endeavour to possess their hearts with an abhorrence of sinful practices, and a dread of them. Carefully check their lying, swearing, cursing, or banning, and Sabbath-breaking. If they learn these while young, they will be fair to accompany them to gray hairs. Let them not dare to meddle with what is another man's, if it were not worth a farthing. Encourage them in taking up little things, and they may come in time to bring themselves to an ill end, and you to disgrace.

5thly, Stir them up to the duties of holiness, and the practice of religion. Often inculcate on them the doctrine of their sinful miserable state by nature, and the remedy provided in Christ. Shew them the necessity of holiness, pointing out Christ to them as the fountain of sanctification. Commend religion to them, and press them to the study of it, as the main thing they have to do in the world, Proverbs 4:4, etc.

6thly, Pray with them, and teach them to pray. For this cause let not the worship of God be neglected in your families: but for your children's sake maintain it. No wonder that those children seek not God who never see their parents bow a knee. Ye should take them alone, and pray with them, and teach them to pray, laying the materials of prayer often before them; and let them learn the Lord's prayer, and use it as a form till such time as they can conceive a prayer by that directory. For though we do not think the Lord has bound us to that form, (if he has, the forms of the English liturgy are most impertinent, which intrude themselves on us, and do not leave us to it), yet that it may not be used as a prayer, or as a form, I know none that do affirm; though it is plain it is principally intended for a directory in

prayer, Matthew 6:9.

Seventhly, and last. . .when ye have been at pains to instruct them in the principles of religion, and they have attained to a tolerable measure of knowledge, so that with judgment they may personally consent to the covenant, as a child religiously educated may be able to do betwixt nine and twelve years of age, if not before; it would be profitable to call them before you, and solemnly declare how ye have laboured to do your duty to them. . .and require them expressly to consent unto the covenant for themselves; taking them personally engaged to be the Lord's."