

TRAIN UP A CHILD – I

Oran Rhodes

In a survey several years ago taken among college students, the sad lack of instruction and training on the part of parents was graphically demonstrated and I am certain that it has not improved in the ensuing years. In that survey, 91% said their parents had never given them any instruction about dating; 43% said they had not been given **any** instruction whatsoever on sex. Additionally, 82% said they had received little or no instruction or warning about drinking, smoking, or using drugs. Is it any wonder that we have a world filled with indecisive young people, many giving way to addiction, perversion, and all forms of immorality?

Although I seldom agree with the socially-acceptable advice of newspaper columns, in an old Ann Landers column was this pithy response to an age-old dream.

Dear Ann: I was touched by the beautiful letter from the 15-year old Boy who was so kind and generous to the old man who lived next Door. It was a heart-warming letter and I thank you for it. I'd give 15 Years of my life for a son like that.--- Scarsdale.

Dear Scars: I'll bet that's about what the boy's mother gave --- 15 years of her life.

Now when Ann said that, she said a mouthful. Men are made, not born. It is the training that determines the result. Solomon, the wisest of men, continually emphasized that training is necessary. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Children are going to receive training whether you plan it or not. It is the parent who determines whether the training is in the right way or the wrong way. The Bible gives us examples of both kinds. Eli failed to train his sons properly as did Samuel and David, whereas we have the wonderful successes of Elkanah and Hannah with Samuel; Jesse with David; Sarah and Abraham with Isaac, and Zacharias and Elizabeth with John.

I have heard parents blame the church for the failure of their children. They cry that the church should have given special care and attention to the young people, and should provide special activities for them. (Jesus Christ did not die so that we might provide entertainment for young people. When young people obey the gospel, they become members of the body of Christ, with all the blessings and responsibilities that go with it. If we do provide for special activities, and I believe we should, these activities should certainly be in direct relation to carrying out the great commission and not "just for something for them to do.") It certainly is the responsibility of the church to teach the truth, but it is not the God-given responsibility of the church to bring up children. God has placed that responsibility squarely on the shoulders of you and me as parents – a responsibility for which we shall be held accountable for in eternity!

In Proverbs 22:6, Solomon states four particular things which we should note in relation to the training of youth. (1) There is a certain way which we should go and it is such a perfect way that we should never depart from it. (2) Children should be trained very

carefully in this way. (3) Youth is the best time for this teaching to take place. (4) When the effort is made, success has been promised. What is this training? It is a very practical thing. Our way or journey through life is well marked. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). The Bible, then, contains the way, marked clearly, in which the child should be trained. The word "training" literally means "to put something in the mouth." It is in the same relation as the feeding of an infant. Proper training of a child then means the feeding of the child upon the way expressed in God's Word. A young mind is tender, pliable, open and disengaged and if it is not filled with godly things, you can be sure it will be filled with ungodly things.

TRAIN UP A CHILD --- II

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The Archdeacon of Chesterfield gave his Church of England parishioners a handy guide on "How to turn your child into a crook."

1. Begin in infancy to give the child everything he wants. In this way he will grow up to believe that the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad words, laugh at him. It will encourage him to pick up 'cuter phrases' that will blow the top of your head off later.
3. Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he is 21, and then let him decide for himself.
4. Avoid the use of the word 'wrong'. It may develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later when he is arrested for stealing a car that society is against him and he is being persecuted.
5. Pick up everything he leaves lying around – books, shoes and clothes. Do everything for him so he will be experienced in throwing the responsibility onto others.
6. Let him read any printed matter he can get his hands on. Be careful the silverware and drinking glasses are sterilized, but let his mind feed on garbage.
7. Quarrel frequently in the presence of the children. Then they won't be shocked when the home is broken up.
8. Give the child all the spending money he wants. Never let him earn his own. Why should he have things as tough as you had them?
9. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink and comfort. See that every desire is gratified. Denial may lead to harmful frustration.
10. Take his part against the neighbors, teachers, and policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child.
11. When he gets into real trouble, apologize for yourself by saying, "I never could do anything with him."
12. Prepare for a life of grief --- You will have it!

If parents are to teach their children the way that leads unto life, however, there are four kinds of exercise required --- parental discipline, education, example, and love. First on all, there are also four essentials of parental discipline. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul commends Timothy by placing confidence that he had followed the example of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. For proper discipline, we must be careful we do

not correct or teach contrary to what we do. Another essential of good discipline is the feeling of companionship between parent and child. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 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" (Deut.6:6-7). This same passage also illustrates the third essential of parental discipline, the instruction of the child. "Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge" (Proverbs12:1a). The fourth essential is that which we most often think of when we think of discipline, that is, correction. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Proverbs 13:24). This certainly does not say that he who beats his child regularly is showing his love. It is teaching that he who loves his child is going to correct the child effectively. We must look at correction in the light of love as God corrects us because he loves us. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:7). Discipline is good for the child and a well-disciplined child is a happy, emotionally secure child. Firm discipline is absolutely necessary in the home in order to stave off the driving forces of Satan.

TRAIN UP A CHILD --- III

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The second exercise required in training up a child in the way he should go is his education. From the time children are born until they reach the age of twenty-one, they are awake 105,000 hours. Out of that 105,000 hours, approximately 10,000 hours are spent in the public schools (if they never miss); 2,100 hours are spent in Bible school (if they never miss). That leaves 93,000 hours under direct influence and supervision of the home (At least this should be the case.). Now, where should the blame lie if children go wrong?

The very least parents can do is to see to it that their children have the advantage of every hour of Bible study offered through the local congregation. Ninety-nine per cent of the criminals in the land never attended Bible school or church services. They never studied the Bible. "May the Father of mercy open the eyes of the blind parents who never attend Bible study with their children! Who never open the Bible in their homes. How tragic the future if changes aren't made!" The basic fundamentals of living have to be taught in the home if they are going to be taught. If children are not encouraged to study the Bible at regular times, you can well know that they are not going to be studying it at home.

There are some people who have children just about big enough to start to school and yet they have not started them in Bible classes because they think they are too young to know what it is all about, too young to know how to behave themselves. It is like the preacher who went to visit a family in order to encourage their Bible school attendance. "But my child is too young to learn, so I don't bring her to Bible Class. Isn't she cute? She can recognize Santa Claus! Did you ever hear her recite, 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star?' She doesn't miss a word of it. You know, she can tell when I am trying to slip away from her and leave her with the baby sitter. When I came in from town the other day she said the naughtiest word! I just don't know where she learned it. Yes, preacher, we are going to start bringing her to Bible class before long now... just as soon as she gets old enough to learn. And say, while you are here, I wish you would talk to my older daughter about Bible

study. She is 10 now, and she doesn't care for the classes at all. I can't understand it.. And you might say something to Junior. He is 15 and he has not been to church services in years. It just worries me and his father that he has not been baptized. Can you say something that might help?"

And if that is not ridiculous enough, there is the parent who says, "I just do not want to MAKE my children go to Bible study or MAKE them go to church." Why not? "Because I am afraid if I do, when they get older they will rebel against it and they won't study the Bible anymore and they won't go to church anymore." I have always wondered if that parent made their children go to public school or made their children get their school lessons? It makes one wonder if they ever made their children take a bath. The child is going to get an education; it's up to the parents to determine what kind.

TRAIN UP A CHILD --- IV

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Watch out! Your example is showing! "The younger generation isn't so bad. It's just that they have more critics and models." "There would be less juvenile delinquency if parents led the way instead of pointing to it." O how much truth is stated in those two short sentences. Our children see us in our unguarded moments --- without our company manners. Our example is continually before our children. How important it is in training up a child in the way that he should go, that we as parents are in that way ourselves. How harmful it is if we profess to belong to Christ and yet live as if we belonged to the world!

There are too many homes today in which children grow up in an environment so materialistic that it can hardly be expected of them to understand Biblical demands of the Christian faith. These are Christian homes where parents stress the values of church attendance, Bible study, prayer --- yet, unfortunately, many of these same parents provide their children with every possible trapping of luxury within (and sometimes outside) their financial means. Too, too often parents delight in seeing their children dressed in the latest fashions, moving in the "right" circle of friends, interested in pursuing careers that guarantee financial security above all else. Then people wonder why these same youngsters leave a church that preaches, in deed if not in word, a similar material gospel. Where is Christ? Where is His example lived? Wherever it is, that parent's child is being trained in the way he should go. Without that kind of example being set by you, parents, don't expect much from your children.

There is an old saying that if you give to a pig when it grunts, and a child when it cries, you will have a good pig and a bad child. I think a similar problem of discernment arises when speaking of the love we have for our children. I believe that the necessary motivating force behind all that has already been mentioned is love; yet, I believe there is more. To teach a child to obey, for instance, is the convenient thing for natural love, but it is a necessary thing to spiritual love, for that child knows that obedience to parents is the first step in the ultimate goal of obedience to God (Ephesians 6:1-2). Natural love will lead us to acquire adequate clothing for our children whereas spiritual love will lead us to help them acquire white garments of godliness. Natural love will lead us to feed our children, but spiritual love will cause us to see that they receive the bread of life. Natural love will

cause us to protect our children from physical dangers and to seek out preventive medicines for their health. Spiritual love seeks to protect them from spiritual danger and to use prevention by grounding them in the truth that they may be able to overcome all attacks of the devil.

Here are the ten commandments for love of children that will help parents in training up their children:

1. Thou shalt earn your children's respect and not acquire it through fear.
2. Thou shalt not recreate your life through your children.
3. Thou shalt give your children every opportunity to expand and express their individual personality and not smother their growth.
4. Remember your children are human and have feelings, emotions, and problems as serious to them as your own are to you.
5. Thou shalt return understanding and instruction, not recrimination, when your children confide in you. Let them feel comfortable in knowing they can turn to you for encouragement; do not frighten them away.
6. Thou shalt teach by precept and example, serving, as a model and not a critic for your children.
7. Thou shalt not seek perfection from your children.
8. Thou shalt keep your word, and thereby teach your children the inestimable worth of honor.
9. Thou shalt not shield your children from the realities of life.
10. Thou shalt teach your children there is a right and wrong and that Christ, not man, is the yardstick with which we measure and are measured.

TRAIN UP A CHILD --- V

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In reflecting upon all that has been written in the previous four articles, the question is "Just in what kind of home does all this take place?" It is a home in which both parents are Christians, so that discipline and education is uniform and the example and love are of a spiritual nature. It is a home where the father is in his rightful place as head of the house (Ephesians 6:4). It is a home where the mother has not forgotten that her responsibility is that of a homemaker (Titus 2:5) and not that of a money maker. (Hell is going to be full of those who at one time were helpless boys and girls, delinquent in life, because their parents forsook their responsibilities at home for a bit of things offered them by the world.) It is a home where both parents are zealous and sincere and where Bible teaching takes place. It is a home where the basic values of life are learned. It is a home where children are given encouragement to dedicate their lives in particular service to God instead of a home where parents "don't want their daughter to marry a preacher", or "don't want their son to be a missionary." It is a home like the homes from which Samuel and John the Baptist came. May God help us all to create homes like those.

So much has been said of Proverbs 22:6, in fact the whole series has been based upon the premise that it is true, that we must stop and consider its validity. "Train up a child

in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” If that statement is not true, I have no reason to accept anything else the scriptures teach. But I believe with all my heart that what Solomon said hundreds of years ago is an eternal truth. I would not say that there have not be exceptions to this rule, but an exception does not invalidate the rule, whether it is in economics, English grammar, or with this principle. But we must be careful with considering our case always as the exception, when it is, in fact, only an excuse. I believe this rule of life is true because man is an intellectual and moral being, and is capable of progressive advancement according to teaching, and I believe it because most of us have seen the text completely proved in godly families that we personally know.

The question usually arises, What if after proper training, a child takes a step in the wrong direction? I believe we can see in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:24) an example of one returning to the ways of righteousness, once having gone astray. What if after proper training, they abandon the church? If the training was proper, there is always hope; and one consolation, however slight, is at least if you have endeavored to teach them properly, they cannot rise up at judgment and accuse you for their condemnation. But let me emphatically emphasize that the rule is that if a child is properly trained in the way he should go, he will not depart from it.

Parents, your child may think less of God, Christ, the church, than you do, but seldom more. A child's attitudes toward these will be determined to a great extent by the right or wrong attitudes of his parents. God has instructed parents in how to train their children, in why to train them, and in what to train them. He has given the promise as to the result. God has also promised His help when we need it in order to carry out our responsibility as parents. The great challenge can be met with a life of prayer and sincere effort to prepare our children to be God's faithful servants.