

The Duties of Parents for their Children

By Richard Baxter

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OF HOW GREAT IMPORTANCE the wise and holy education of children is, to the saving of their souls, and the comfort of their parents, and the good of church and state, and the happiness of the world, I have partly told you before; but no man is able fully to express. And how great that calamity is, which the world is fallen into through the neglect of that duty, no heart can conceive; but they that think what a case the heathen, infidel, and ungodly nations are in, and how rare true piety is grown, and how many millions must lie in hell for ever, will know so much of this inhuman negligence, as to abhor it.

Direct. I. Understand and lament the corrupted and miserable state of your children, which they have derived from you, and thankfully accept the offers of a Saviour for yourselves and them, and absolutely resign, and dedicate them to God in Christ in the sacred covenant, and solemnize this dedication and covenant by their baptism.¹ And to this end understand the command of God for entering your children solemnly into covenant with him, and the covenant mercies belonging to them thereupon. Rom. 5:12, 16-18; Eph. 2:1, 3; Gen. 17:4, 13, 14; Deut. 29:10-12; Rom. 11:17, 20; John 3:3, 5; Matt. 19:13, 14.

You cannot sincerely dedicate yourselves to God, but you must dedicate to him all that is yours, and in your power; and therefore your children, as far as they are in your power. And as nature hath taught you your power and your duty to enter them in their infancy into any covenant with man, which is certainly for their good; (and if they refuse the conditions when they come to age, they forfeit the benefit;) so nature teacheth you much more to oblige them to God

¹ See my *Treatise for Infant Baptism*

for their far greater good, in case he will admit them into covenant with him. And that he will admit them into his covenant, (and that you ought to enter them into it,) is past doubt, in the evidence which the Scripture giveth us, that from Abraham's time till Christ it was so with all the children of his people; nay, no man can prove that before Abraham's time, or since, God had ever a church on earth, of which the infants of his servants (if they had any) were not members dedicated in covenant to God, till of late times that a few began to scruple the lawfulness of this. As it is a comfort to you, if the king would bestow upon your infant children, (who were tainted by their father's treason,) not only a full discharge from the blot of the offence, but also the titles and estates of lords, though they understand none of this till they come to age; so is it much more matter of comfort to you, on their behalf, that God in Christ will pardon their original sin, and take them as his children, and give them title to everlasting life; which are the mercies of his covenant.

Direct. II. As soon as they are capable, teach them what a covenant they are in, and what are the benefits, and what the conditions, that their souls may gladly consent to it when they understand it; and you may bring them seriously to renew their covenant with God in their own persons. But the whole order of teaching both children and servants, I shall give you after by itself; and therefore shall here pass by all that, except that which is to be done more by your familiar converse, than by more solemn teaching.

Direct. III. Train them up in exact obedience to yourselves, and break them of their own wills. To that end, suffer them not to carry themselves unreverently or contemptuously towards you; but to keep their distance. For too much familiarity breedeth contempt, and imboldeneth to disobedience. The common course of parents is to please their children so long, by letting them have what they crave, and what they will, till their wills are so used to be fulfilled, that they cannot endure to have them denied; and so can endure no government, because they endure no crossing of their wills. To be obedient, is to renounce their own wills, and be ruled by their parents' or governor's wills; to use them therefore to have their own wills, is to teach them disobedience, and harden and use them to a hind of impossibility of obeying. Tell them oft familiarly and lovingly of the excellency of obedience, and how it pleaseth God, and what

need they have of government, and how unfit they are to govern themselves, and how dangerous it is to children to have their own wills; speak often with great disgrace of self-willedness and stubbornness, and tell others in their hearing what hath befallen self-willed children.

Direct. IV. Make them neither too bold with you, nor too strange or fearful; and govern them not as servants, but as children, making them perceive that you dearly love them, and that all your commands, restraints, and corrections tire for their good, and not merely because you will have it so. They must be ruled as rational creatures, that love themselves, and those that love them. If they perceive that you dearly love them, they will obey you the more willingly, and the easier be brought to repent of their disobedience, and they will as well obey you in heart as in outward actions, and behind your back as before your face. And the love of you (which must be caused by your love to them) must be one of the chiefest means to bring them to the love of all that good which you commend to them; and so to form their wills sincerely to the will of God, and make them holy. For if you are too strange to them, and too terrible, they will fear you only, and not much love you; and then they will love no books, no practices, that you commend to them, but like hypocrites they will seek to please you to your face, and care not what they are in secret and behind your backs. Nay, it will tempt them to loathe your government, and all that good which you persuade them to, and make them like birds in a cage, that watch for an opportunity to get away and get their liberty. They will be the more in the company of servants and idle children, because your terror and strangeness maketh them take no delight in yours. And fear will make them liars, as oft as a lie seemeth necessary to their escape. Parents that show much love to their children, may safely show severity when they commit a fault. For then they will see, that it is their fault only that displeaseth you, and not their persons; and your love reconcileth them to you when they are corrected; when less correction from parents that are always strange or angry, and show no tender love to their children, will alienate them, and do no good. Too much boldness of children leadeth them, before you are aware, to contempt of parents and all disobedience; and too much fear and strangeness depriveth them of most of the benefits of your care and government: but tender love,

with severity only when they do amiss, and this at a reverent, convenient distance, is the only way to do them good.

Direct. V. Labour much to possess their hearts with the fear of God, and a reverence of the holy Scriptures; and then whatsoever duty you command them, or whatsoever sin you forbid them, show them some plain and urgent texts of Scripture for it; and cause them to learn them and oft repeat them; that so they may find reason and divine authority in your commands; till their obedience begin to be rational and divine, it will be but formal and hypocritical. It is conscience that must watch them in private, when you see them not; and conscience is God's officer and not yours; and will say nothing to them, till it speak in the name of God. This is the way to bring the heart itself into subjection; and also to reconcile them to all your commands, when they see that they are first the commands of God (of which more anon).

Direct. VI. In all your speeches of God and of Jesus Christ, and of the holy Scripture, or the life to come, or of any holy duty, speak always with gravity, seriousness, and reverence, as of the most great and dreadful and most Sacred things: for before children come to have any distinct understanding of particulars, it is a hopeful beginning to have their hearts possessed with a general reverence and high esteem of holy matters; for that will continually awe their consciences, and help their judgments, and settle them against prejudice and profane contempt, and be as a seed of holiness in them. For the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, Psal. 111:10; Prov. 9:10; 1:7. And the very manner of the parents' speech and carriage, expressing great reverence to the things of God, hath a very great power to leave the like impression on a child: most children of godly parents that ever came to good, I am persuaded, can tell you this by experience, (if their parents did their duty in this point,) that the first good that ever they felt upon their hearts, was a reverence to holy things, which the speech and carriage of their parents taught them.

Direct. VII. Speak always before them with great honour and praise of holy ministers and people, and with dispraise and loathing of every sin, and of ungodly men.¹ For this also is a thing that children will quickly and easily receive from their parents. Before they

¹ Isa. 3:7-9, 11; Psalm 15:4; 101; 10:2-4.

can understand particular doctrines., they can learn in general what kind of persons are most happy or most miserable, and they are very apt to receive such a liking or disliking from their parents' judgment, which hath a great hand in all the following good or evil of their lives. If you possess them with good and honourable thoughts of them that fear God, they will ever after be inclined to think well of them, and to dislike those that speak evil of them and to hear such preachers, and to wish themselves such Christians; so that in this and the foregoing point it is that the first stirrings of grace in children are ordinarily felt. And therefore on the other side, it is a most pernicious thing to children, when they hear their parents speak contemptuously or lightly of holy things and persons, and irreverently talk of God, and Scripture, and the life to come, or speak dispraisingly or scornfully of godly ministers or people, or make a jest of the particular duties of a religious life: these children are like to receive that prejudice or profane contempt into their hearts betimes, which may bolt the doors against the love of God and holiness, and make their salvation a work of much greater difficulty, and much smaller hope. And therefore still I say, that wicked parents are the most notable servants of the devil in all the world, and the bloodiest enemies to their children's souls. More souls are damned by ungodly parents (and next them by ungodly ministers and magistrates) than by any instruments in the world besides. And hence it is also, that whole nations are so generally carried away with enmity against the ways of God; the heathen nations against the true God, and the infidel nations against Christ, and the papist nations against reformation and spiritual worshippers: because the parents speak evil to the children of all that they themselves dislike; and so possess them with the same dislike from generation to generation. "Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter," Isa. 5:20.

Direct. VIII. Let it be the principal part of your care and labour in all their education, to make holiness appear to them the most necessary, honourable, gainful, pleasant, delightful, amiable state of life; and to keep them from apprehending it either as needless, dishonourable, hurtful, or uncomfortable. Especially draw them to the love of it, by representing it as lovely. And therefore begin with that which is easiest and most grateful to them (as the history of the

Scripture, and the lives of the martyrs, and other good men, and some short, familiar lessons). For though in restraining them from sin, you must go to the highest step at first, and not think to draw them from it by allowing them the least degree; (for every degree disposeth to more, and none is to be allowed, and a general reformation is the easiest as well as absolutely necessary;) yet in putting them upon the practice of religious duties, you must carry them on by degrees, and put them at first upon no more than they can bear; either upon the learning of doctrines too high and spiritual for them, or upon such duty for quality or quantity as is overburdensome to them; for if you once turn their hearts against religion, and make it seem a slavery and a tedious life to them, you take the course to harden them against it. And therefore all children must not be used alike; as all stomachs must not be forced to eat alike. If you force some to take so much as to become a surfeit, they will loathe that sort of meat as long as they live. I know that nature itself, as corrupt, hath already an enmity to holiness, and I know that this enmity is not to be indulged in children at all; but withal I know that misrepresentations of religion, and imprudent education, is the way to increase it, and that the enmity being in the heart, it is the change of the mind and love that is the overcoming of it, and not any such constraint as tendeth not to reconcile the mind by love. The whole skill of parents for the holy education of their children, doth consist in this, to make them conceive of holiness as the most amiable and desirable life; which is by representing it to them in words and practice, not only as most necessary, but also as most profitable, honourable, and delightful. Prov. 3:17, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace,” &c.

Direct. IX. Speak often to them of the brutish baseness and sinfulness of flesh-pleasing sensuality, and of the greater excellency of the pleasures of the mind, which consist in wisdom, and in doing good. For your chiefest care must be to save them from flesh-pleasing; which is not only in general the sum of all iniquity whatsoever, but that which in special children are most prone to. For their flesh and sense is as quick as others; and they want not only faith, but clear reason to resist it; and so (besides their natural pravity) the custom of obeying sense (which is in strength) without reason (which is in infancy and almost useless) doth much increase this

pernicious sin. And therefore still labour to imprint in their minds an odious conceit of a fleshpleasing life; speak bitterly to them against gluttony, and drunkenness, and excess of sport; and let them often hear or read the parable of the glutton and Lazarus in the sixteenth of Luke; and let them learn without book, Rom. 8:1, 5-9, 13; 13:13, 14, and oft repeat them.

Direct. X. To this end, and also for the health of their bodies, keep a strict guard upon their appetites (which they are not able to guard themselves): keep them as exactly as you can to the rules of reason, both in the quantity and quality of their food. Yet tell them the reason of your restraint, or else they will secretly strive the more to break their bounds. Most parents that ever I knew, or had any good account of in that point, are guilty of the great hurt and danger of their children's health and souls, by pleasing and glutting them with meat and drink. If I should call them devils and murderers to their own children, they would think I spake too harshly; but I would not have them give so great occasion for it, as by destroying (as far as lieth in them) the souls and bodies of their children. They destroy their souls by accustoming them to gluttony, and to be ruled by their appetites; which all the teaching in the world will hardly ever after overcome, without the special grace of God. What is all the vice and villany in the world, but the pleasing of the desires of the flesh? And when they are habituated to this, they are rooted in their sin and misery. And they destroy their bodies, by suffering them to please their appetites, with raw fruits and other hurtful things; but especially by drowning and overwhelming nature by excess; and all this is through that beastly ignorance, joined with self-conceitedness, which maketh them also overthrow themselves. They think that their appetite is the measure of their eating and drinking, and that if they drink but when they are thirsty, (as some drunkards are continually,) and eat but when they are hungry, it is no excess; and because they are not presently sick, or vomit it not up again, the beasts think it doth them no harm, but good. You shall hear them like mad people say, I warrant them, it will do them no harm to eat and drink when they have list, it will make them strong and healthful; I see not that those that are dieted so strictly are any healthfuller than others. Whenas all this while they are burdening nature, and destroying digestion, and vitiating all the humours of the body, and turning them

into a dunghill of phlegm and filth; which is the fuel that breedeth and feedeth almost all the diseases that after seize upon them while they live; and usually bringeth them to an untimely end (us I have fullier opened before, part i. in the directions against gluttony). If therefore you love either the souls or bodies of your children, use them to temperance from their infancy, and let not their appetites or craving wills, but your own reason, be the chooser and the measure of their diet. Use them to eat sparingly, and (so it moderately please their appetite, or be not such as nature loatheth) let it be rather of the coarser than the finer sort of diet; see it measured to them yourselves, and suffer no servant to give them more, nor to let them eat or drink between meals and out of season; and so you will help to overcome their sensual inclinations, and give reason the mastery of their lives; and you will, under God, do as much as any one thing can do to help them to a healthful temper of body, which will be a very great mercy to them, and fit them for their duty all their lives.

Direct. XI. For sports and recreations, let them be such, and so much, as may be needful to their health and cheerfulness; but not so much as may carry away their minds from better things, and draw them from their books or other duties, nor such as may tempt them to gaming or covetousness. Children must have convenient sport for the health of the body and alacrity of the mind; such as well exerciseth their bodies is best, and not such as little stirreth them. Cards and dice, and such idle sports, are every way most unfit, as tending to hurt both body and mind. Their time also must be limited them, that their play may not be their work; as soon as ever they have the use of any reason and speech, they should be taught some better things, and not left till they are five or six years of age, to do nothing, but get a custom of wasting all their time in play. Children are very early capable of learning something which may prepare them for more.

Direct. XII. Use all your wisdom and diligence to root out the sin of pride. And to that end, do not (as is usual with foolish parents, that) please them with making them fine, and then by telling them how fine they are; but use to commend humility and plainness to them, and speak disgracefully of pride and fineness, to breed an averseness to it in their minds. Cause them to learn such texts of Scripture as speak of God's abhorring and resisting the proud, and of

his loving and honouring the humble: when they see other children that are finely clothed, speak of it to them as their shame, that they may not desire to be like them. Speak against boasting, and every other way of pride which they are liable to: and yet give them the praise of all that is well, for that is but their due encouragement.

Direct. XIII. Speak to them disgracefully of the gallantry, and pomp, and riches of the world, and of the sin of selfishness and covetousness, and diligently watch against it, and all that may tempt them to it. When they see great houses, and attendance, and gallantry, tell them that these are the devil's baits, to entice poor sinners to love this world, that they may lose their souls, and the world to come. Tell them how much heaven excelleth all this; and that the lovers of the world must never come thither, but the humble, and meek, and poor in spirit. Tell them of the rich glutton in Luke 16, that was thus clothed in purple and silk, and fared deliciously every day; but when he came to hell, could not get a drop of water to cool his tongue, when Lazarus was in the joys of paradise. Do not as the wicked, that entice their children to worldliness and covetousness, by giving them money, and letting them game and play for money, and promising them to make them fine or rich, and speaking highly of all that are rich and great in the world; but tell them how much happier a poor believer is, and withdraw all that may tempt their minds to covetousness. Teach them how good it is to love their brethren as themselves, and to give them part of what they have, and praise them for it; and dispraise them when they are greedy to keep or heap up all to themselves: and all will be little enough to cure this pernicious sin. Teach them such texts as Psal. 10:3, "They bless the covetous whom the Lord abhorreth."

Direct. XIV. Narrowly watch their tongues, especially against lying, railing, ribald talk, and taking the name of God in vain. And pardon them many lighter faults about common matters, sooner than one such sin against God. Tell them of the odiousness of all these sins, and teach them such texts as most expressly condemn them; and never pass it by or make light of it, when you find them guilty.

Direct. XV. Keep them as much as may be from ill company, especially of ungodly play-fellows. It is one of the greatest dangers for the undoing of children in the world; especially when they are sent to common schools: for there is scarce any of those schools so good,

but hath many rude and ungodly ill-taught children in it; that will speak profanely, and filthily, and make their ribald and railing speeches a matter of boasting; besides fighting, and gaming and scorning, and neglecting their lessons; and they will make a scorn of him that will not do as they, if not beat and abuse him. And there is such tinder in nature for these sparks to catch upon, that there are very few children, but when they hear others take God's name in vain, or sing wanton songs, or talk filthy words, or call one another by reproachful names, do quickly imitate them: and when you have watched over them at home as narrowly as you can, they are infected abroad with such beastly vices, as they are hardly ever after cured of. Therefore let those that are able, either educate their children most at home, or in private and well ordered schools; and those that cannot do so, must be the more exceeding watchful over them, and charge them to associate with the best; and speak to them of the odiousness of these practices, and the wickedness of those that use them; and speak very disgracefully of such ungodly children: and when all is done, it is a great mercy of God, if they be not undone by the force of the contagion, notwithstanding all your antidotes. Those therefore that venture their children into the rudest schools and company, and after that to Rome, and other profane or popish countries, to learn the fashions and customs of the world, upon pretence, that else they will be ignorant of the course of the world, and ill-bred, and not like others of their rank, may think of themselves and their own reasonings as well as they please: for my part, I had rather make a chimney-sweeper of my son, (if I had any,) than be guilty of doing so much to sell or betray him to the devil.

Quest. But is it not lawful for a man to send his son to travel?

Answ. Yes, in these cases:

1. In case he be a ripe, confirmed Christian, that is, not in danger of being perverted, but able to resist the enemies of the truth, and to preach the gospel, or to do good to others; and withal have sufficient business to invite him.

2. Or if he go in the company of wise and godly persons, and such be his companions, and the probability of his gain be greater, than of his loss and danger.
3. Or if he go only into religious countries, among more wise and learned men than he converseth with at home, and have sufficient motives for his course.

But to send young, raw, unsettled persons among papists, and profane, licentious people, (though perhaps some sober person be in company with them,) and this only to see the counties and fashions of the world, is an action unbecoming any Christian that knoweth the pravity of human nature, and the mutability of young, unfurnished heads, and the subtlety of deceivers, and the contagiousness of sin and error, and the worth of a soul, and will not do as some conjurers or witches, even sell a soul to the devil, on condition he may see and know the fashions of the world; which alas, I can quickly know enough of to grieve my heart, without travelling so far to see them. If another country have more of Christ, and be nearer heaven, the invitation is great; but if it have more of sin and hell, I had rather know hell, and the suburbs of it too, by the map of the word of God, than by going thither. And if such children return not the confirmed children of the devil, and prove riot the calamity of their country and the church, let them thank special grace, and not their parents or themselves. They overvalue that vanity which they call breeding, who will hazard the substance, (even heavenly wisdom, holiness, and salvation,) to go so far for so vain a shadow.

Direct. XVI. Teach your children to know the preciousness of time, and suffer them not to mispend an hour. Be often speaking to them how precious a thing time is, and how short man's life is, and how great his work, and bow our endless life of joy or misery dependeth on this little time: speak odiously to them of the sin of those that play and idle away their time; and keep account of all their hours, and suffer them not to lose any by excess of sleep, or excess of play, or any other way; but engage them still in some employment that is worth their time.

Train up your children in a life of diligence and labour, and use them not to ease and idleness when they are young.¹ Our wandering beggars, and too in many of the gentry, utterly undo their children by this means, especially the female sex. They are taught no calling, nor exercised in my employment, but only such as is meet for nothing but ornament and recreation at the best; and therefore should have but recreation hours, which is but a small proportion of their time. So that by the sin of their parents, the), are betimes engaged in a life of idleness, which afterward it is wondrous hard for them to overcome; and they are taught to live like swine or vermin, that live only to live, and do small good in the world by living: to rise, and dress, and adorn themselves, and take it walk, and so to dinner, and thence to cards or dice, or chat and idle talk, or some play, or visit, or recreation, and so to supper, and to chat again, and to bed, is the lamentable life of too many that have great obligations to God, and greater matters to do, if they were acquainted with them. And if they do but interpose a few hypocritical, heartless words of prayer, they think they have piously spent the day; yea, the health of many is utterly ruined, by such idle, fleshly education. So that disuse doth disable them from any considerable motion or exercise, which is necessary to preserve their health. It would move one's heart with pity, to see how the houses of some of the higher sort are like hospitals; and education hath made, especially, the females like the lame, or sick, or bedrid; so that one part of the day that should be spent in some profitable employment, is spent in bed, and the rest in doing nothing, or worse than nothing; and most of their life is made miserable by diseases, so that if their legs be but used to carry them about, they are presently out of breath, and are a burden to themselves, and few of them live out little more than half their days. Whereas, poor creatures, if their own parents had not betrayed them into the sins of Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness, they might have been in health, and lived like honest Christian people, and their legs and arms might have served them for use, as well as for integrality and ornament.

¹ It was one of the Roman laws of the twelve tables, *Filius arte carens, patris incuria, eidem vila necessaria De prastato. Alioqui parentes nutrire cogitor*. A son that is taught no trade to live by, shall not be bound to keep his parents in want, but others shall. Ezek. 16:49.

Direct. XVII. Let necessary correction be used with discretion, according to these following rules.

1. Let it not be so seldom (if necessary) as to leave them fearless, and so make it uneffectual; and let it not be so frequent as, to discourage them, or breed in them a hatred of their parents.
2. Let it be different according to the different tempers of your children; some are so tender and timorous, and apt to be discouraged, that little or no correction may be best; and some are so hardened and obstinate, that it must be much and sharp correction that must keep them from dissoluteness and contempt.
3. Let it be more for sin against God (as lying, railing, filthy speaking, profaneness, &c.) than for faults about your worldly business.
4. Correct them not in passion, but stay till they perceive that you are calmed; for they will think else, that your anger rather than your reason is the cause.
5. Always show them the tenderness of your love, and how unwilling you are to correct them, if they could be reformed any easier way; and convince them that you do it for their good.
6. Make them read those texts of Scripture which condemn their sin, and then those which command you to correct them. As for example, if lying be their sin, turn them first to Prov. 12:22, "Lying lips are abomination to the Lord, but they that deal truly are his delight." And 13:5, "A righteous man hateth lying." John 8:44, "Ye are of your father the devil, -- when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." Rev. 22:15, "For without are dogs -- and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." And next turn him to Prov. 13:24, "He that spareth his rod, *hateth* his son; but he

that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” Prov. 29:15, “The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.” Prov. 22:15, “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.” Prov. 23:13, 14, “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.” Prov. 18:18, “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.” Ask him whether he would have you by sparing him, to disobey God, and hate him, and destroy his soul. And when his reason is convinced of the reasonableness of correcting him, it will be the more successful.

Direct. XVIII. Let your own example teach your children that holiness, and heavenliness, and blamelessness of tongue and life, which you desire them and to learn and practise. The example of parents is most powerful with children, both for good and evil. If they see you live in the fear of God, it will do much to persuade them, that it is the most necessary and excellent course of life, and that they must do so too; and if they see you live a carnal, voluptuous, and ungodly life, and hear you curse or swear, or talk filthily or railingly, it will greatly imbolden them to imitate you. If you speak never so well to them, they will sooner believe your bad lives, than your good words.

Direct. XIX. Choose such a calling and course of life for your children, as tendeth most to the saving of their souls, kind to their public usefulness for church or state. Choose not a calling that is most liable to temptations and hinderances to their salvation, though it may make them rich; but a calling which alloweth them some leisure for the remembering the things of everlasting consequence, and fit opportunities to get good, and to do good. If you bind them apprentices, or servants, if it be possible, place them with men fearing God; and not with such as will harden them in their sin.

Direct. XX. When they are marriageable, and you find it needful, look out such for them as are suitable betimes. When parents stay too long, and do not their duties in this, their children often choose for

themselves to their own undoing; for they choose not by judgment, but blind affection.

Having thus told you the common duties of parents for their children, I should next have told you what specially belongeth to each parent; but to avoid prolixity, I shall only desire you to remember especially these two directions.

1. That the mother who is still present with children when they are young, be very diligent in teaching them, and minding them of good things. When the fathers are abroad, the mothers have more frequent opportunities to instruct them, and be still speaking to them of that which is most necessary, and watching over them. This is the greatest service that most women can do for God in the world: many a church that hath been blessed with a good minister, may thank the pious education of mothers; and many a thousand souls in heaven may thank the holy care and diligence of mothers, as the first effectual means. Good women this way (by the good education of their children) are ordinarily great blessings both to church and state. (And so some understand I Tim. 2:15, by “child-bearing,” meaning bringing up children for God; but I rather think it is by Mary’s bearing Christ, the promised seed.)

2. By all means let children be taught to read, if you are never so poor, and whatever shift you make; or else you deprive them of a singular help to their instruction and salvation. It is a thousand pities that a Bible should signify no more than a chip to a rational creature, as to their reading it themselves: and that so many excellent books as be in the world, should be as sealed or insignificant to them.

But if God deny you children, and save you all this care and labour, repine not, but be thankful, believing it is best for you. Remember what a deal of duty, and pains, and heart’s grief he hath freed you from, and how few speed well, when parents have done their best: what a life of misery children must here pass through, and how sad the fear of their sin and damnation would have been to you.