

LOVE HARD, DISCIPLINE HARD

“Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

- Eph. 6:4 -

Above the crib of my daughter hangs a 3x5 index card with the little phrase written in red: “Discipline hard! Love hard!” That was written by my wife, and I have put it in its proper order in the title of this article. Some of you will need it put to you in my wife’s order, and others in mine; nevertheless, it is my prerogative here to tell you that both will be needed in the rearing of your children.

My philosophy on child training is very simple, yet infallible, and that is: to behold how the Father deals with me (his child), and seek to deal with my children after the same manner. I say this way is infallible, as Christ said in John 5:30, “I can of mine own self do nothing: *as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just*; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” Christ’s secret to always pleasing the Father (John 8:29) was seeking first the judgment from God, then making that judgment himself, whereas men are inclined to move first, make judgments first, and then to inquire. Thus in the pursuit of knowledge on child training, you, child of God, need not go far – no need for seminars, conferences, gurus, books, etc. – you need only look up into the face of your heavenly Father and behold his ways, remember his acts, and grow in the knowledge of this God, and you have all things necessary concerning the raising of your children, as is written, “According as his divine power *hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him* that hath called us to glory and virtue” (II Pet. 1:3).

I have perceived since before I had children, how these two elements, love and discipline (*i.e.* “nurture and admonition”), are mingled together in the heart of God, manifest in his dealings with his children. The end result in God’s divine plan of child training is to bring “many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2:10); likewise, ours should be to bring all of our children into the direct care and covering of our Father. In executing His plan with us, he mixes our cup, *always*, with nurture and admonition. Sometimes the cup is bitter, and we are made to drink the dregs of chastisement; at other times, the cup is sweet, for we are made to suck the sweet nectar of our tender nurse. Nevertheless, the cup is mixed, so that we are not given one without the other. So likewise ought our discipline to be coupled always with love, and our love never at the expense of discipline.

Thus, my dearly beloved, I desire to open to you, God helping, the use of these two means in the holy art of child rearing. In order to best improve my point, I will begin by opening the nature and use of these two means, namely, nurture and admonition, then will close by showing how God would have us to couple these two in one.

First, I must say a word against extremes. God’s word is as sharp as a razor’s edge, yea, and sharper still! “For the word of God is *sharper* than any twoedged sword” (Heb. 4:12). As Christians we are called to hold this line day-by-day, being commanded to live the law. This road is narrow indeed! paper thin! The proverb says, “Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil” (Prov. 4:27). The pendulum may swing,

but the Christian mustn't. We must hold the middle ground, which to this world is extreme! To want moderation in regards to certain habits of life may seem a small thing to some, but when eternal souls come into the picture the situation becomes so much the more grave, for to lack temperance in the matter of training up a child is to jeopardize the eternal welfare of a soul. The scripture says, "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph.6:4); therefore, if we fail, as parents, to temper these two elements together, then we are held in direct responsibility for the eternal loss of our children's never dying souls. The scripture says that the children will be provoked *to wrath*. You may understand this in the case where the father (or mother) is ever admonishing his child – reproving, rebuking, correcting, *etc.* – and never administering the proper nurture, but you forget that your children can be provoked to wrath against someone beside yourself. If you are ever rebuking your child, and never tenderly bearing them along, then it should be no wonder when they, at last, turn in wrath against you; similarly, if you are ever nurturing, and never correcting your children, they will love you – sure – yet hate their God. May God in mercy forbid it.

I will mention, by the way, that this "bringing up" of our children is a process; it is not a sudden rising of impassioned vision. Jacob (the good shepherd) said to Esau, "My lord knoweth that *the children are tender*, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should *overdrive* them one day, all the flock will die" (Gen. 33:13). To fall suddenly upon our children with some new burden, though that burden be of the Lord, yet if not executed ever so *carefully*, may crush the narrow shoulders and bend the weak legs of our tender little ones. We must give it them in doses. A heart of charity will do so naturally, for it is always considering the other before itself, and so is always mindful of the infirmity of flesh that is in their children. Too much of a good thing often turns it to a bad thing. Just as a seed needs water to grow, yet that seed will be washed away if the water is not sprinkled sparingly.

In the first place then, we are called to "Bring them up in the *nurture* of the Lord." This is first, not only in importance, but in nature as well. A child naturally depends upon the warmth and comfort of its mother's breast, before learning to feed itself from the cold, hard metal of a spoon. Before a strict discipline can be built, a foundation of tenderness and affection must first be laid. David knew the nurture of God when he said, "Thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great" (Psa. 18:35), and the same is true of every Christian with a measure of acquaintance in the dealings of God with their soul. Without his goodness we would have never been brought to repentance (Rom. 2:4), without his lovingkindness we would have never been savingly drawn to his side (Jer. 31:3), and if God so deals with his children, ought we to behave ourselves any differently? Our children should know that with us (for they cannot as yet know it towards God) is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. They must rest secure in the love of both the mother and the father, and this love must not be only in theory, or word, but in deed and in truth. This love must be an actual affection and tenderness shown. A nurse is the picture that we have of someone given to the nurturing of another, and this is a picture, foremost, of tender compassion, kind regard, selfless

pursuit of their patient's well-being, a warm and friendly countenance, *etc., etc.* May God grant this to be the nurture our children experience from us.

But this alone is not sufficient for the successful rearing of our children. There must also be present a firm and fixed standard of discipline. Thus, in the second place, we have the commandment, "Bring them up in the *admonition* of the Lord." This is equally as necessary as affection in the grand scheme of bringing our children unto God. If this is wanting there will be a heart prepared to go the road to heaven, and yet no direction how to get there. How terrible the words, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18), yet this is precisely what transpires when we cause our children to pass on under our hand without the stroke of the rod – for nothing gives a clear vision like reproofs of instruction. It is no surprise then, that one of the foremost marks of sonship given in the scripture is chastisement. "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. 12:8).

This is supposed to be "the *admonition of the Lord,*" and so it should be as *he* has dealt with us, and not as *we* would deal with our children. We would err, if left to ourselves, to either be too severe, or too soft. God has been neither to us. Though many times it seemed like he set us up as his mark, and made all of his arrows to stick fast within us, yet this was not too severe. And when it seemed if ever there was a time suitable for your chastisement, you were rather laden with benefits and blessings from the right hand of your loving Father, all this was not too soft. God has such an eye and perception to know just what we can handle, and thus never errs, though his mercies often surprise us, as well as his strokes. We must ever be looking to Jesus on how we are to nurture and admonish, for it is not left to our own fancy, as if the apostle were to say, "bring them up in the admonition of your own heart's contriving," no, for the apostle under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost knows all too well just how fickle our hearts are, and that we, if left to our own devices, would be ever striking, or ever petting, but never doing the will of God.

Thus you have set before you what appears to the carnal eye to be two extremes – love and discipline. It is not so, my brother. As two elements, each lethal of itself, when cunningly compounded together make a sweet commodity of life, so are the two parts placed before us just now. We must, as ever we hope to see our children savingly healed of their soul disease, mix up this tonic, and not leave one part missing. We must not deceive ourselves and accuse these principles of being contrary one to another. Brother! if you would look upon things with a clearer eye you would see this as nothing to be excused, but exercised. You must love your children hard, yea, with all the heart the Lord has given you, you must pour your affection upon them, till their little hearts learn to melt at the mere sight of you. And you must not be negligent to discipline them just as hard, and not one wit under. You must direct them, teach them, and chasten them as for their very lives, for it is certainly the case. Brethren, you must take these two and you must never let one go for the other, so that when you are chastening them sore, you feel as though you are loving them as much as when you shower your kisses upon them, and when you are holding them tenderly, you would, in the same love, willingly admonish and rebuke them in the fear of God. So shall our children be safely guided to their desired haven. Amen.