

NURTURE
AND
ADMONITION
COMMENTARIES ON EPHESIANS 6:4



JOHN BORUFF

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E-Mail: johnboruff146@gmail.com

Website: wesleygospel.com

**NURTURE AND ADMONITION:
COMMENTARIES ON EPHESIANS 6:4**

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*Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath:
but bring them up in
the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

—Ephesians 6:4—

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INTRODUCTION

In this booklet we have a survey of commentary on Ephesians 6:4 starting from the era of the church fathers until the time of the Great Awakening. We couldn't ask for a more traditional view of Christian parenting. You will find an amazing continuity and repetition in the interpretation of this overlooked text. I personally think it's important for parents to realize the value of their duties to their children, even more than the child's duty to "honor their father and mother" (Exodus 20:12). How important it is that Christian parents do their best to keep themselves from provoking their children to anger at them, and to nurture them in the Lord more than admonishing them in the Lord! The commentators show us just what this means. I also end the booklet with a review of a modern book on parenting which may open the eyes of those who take it to heart.

John Chrysostom

(349 – 407)

Homilies on Ephesians, 21

RAISING A SAINT

He does not say, “love them,” because to this nature draws them even against their own will, and it were superfluous to lay down a law on such subjects. But what does he say? “Provoke not your children to wrath,” as many do by *disinheriting them, and disowning them, and treating them overbearingly, not as free, but as slaves*. This is why he says, “Provoke not your children to wrath.” Then, which is the chief thing of all, he shows how they will be led to obedience, referring the whole source of it to the head and chief authority. And in the same way as he has shown the husband to be the cause of the wife’s obedience, (which is the reason also why he addresses the greater part of his arguments to him, advising him to attach her to himself by the power of love,) so, I say, here also, he refers the efficiency to him, by saying, “But bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.” Thou seest that where there are spiritual ties, the natural ties will follow.

Do you wish your son to be obedient? From the very first “Bring him up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.” Never deem it an unnecessary thing that *he should be a diligent hearer of the divine Scriptures*. For there the first thing he hears will be this, “Honor thy father and thy mother”; so that this makes for thee. Never say, this is the business of monks. Am I making a monk of him? No. There is no need he should become a monk. Why be so afraid of a thing so replete with so much advantage? *Make*

him a Christian. For it is of all things necessary for laymen to be acquainted with the lessons derived from this source; but especially for children. For theirs is an age full of folly; and to this folly are super added the bad examples derived from the heathen tales, where they are made acquainted with those heroes so admired amongst them, slaves of their passions, and cowards with regard to death; as, for example, Achilles, when he relents, when he dies for his concubine, when another gets drunk, and many other things of the sort. He requires therefore the remedies against these things.

How is it not absurd to send children out to trades, and to school, and to do all you can for these objects, and yet, not to “bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord”? And for this reason truly we are the first to reap the fruits, because we bring up our children to be insolent and profligate, disobedient, and mere vulgar fellows. Let us not then do this; no, let us listen to this blessed Apostle’s admonition. “Let us bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.” Let us give them a pattern. Let us make them from the earliest age apply themselves to the reading of the Scriptures. Alas, that so constantly as I repeat this, I am looked upon as trifling! Still, I shall not cease to do my duty.

Why, tell me, do ye not imitate them of old? *Ye women, especially, emulate those admirable women. Has a child been born to any one? Imitate Hannah's example* (1 Sam. 1:24); look at what she did. She brought him up at once to the temple. Who amongst you would not rather that his son should become a Samuel than that he should be king of the whole world ten thousand times over? “And how,” you

will say, "is it possible he should become such a one?" Why is it not possible? It is because thou dost not choose it thyself, nor committest him to the care of those who are able to make him such a one. "And who," it will be said, "is such a one as this?" God. Since she put him into the hands of God. For not even Eli himself was one of those in any great degree qualified to form him; (how could he be, he who was not able to *form* even his own children?) No, it was the faith of the mother and her earnest zeal that wrought the whole. He was her first child, and her only one, and she knew not whether she should ever have others besides. Yet she did not say, "I will wait till the child is grown up, that he may have a taste of the things of this life, I will allow him to have his pastime in them a little in his childish years." No, all these thoughts the woman repudiated, she was absorbed in one object, how from the very beginning she might dedicate the spiritual image to God. Well may we men be put to the blush at the wisdom of this woman. She offered him up to God, and there she left him. And therefore was her married state more glorious, in that she had made spiritual objects her first care, in that she dedicated the first-fruits to God. Therefore was her womb fruitful, and she obtained other children besides.

And therefore she saw him honorable even in the world. For if men when they are honored, render honor in return, will not God much more, He who does this, even without being honored? How long are we to be mere lumps of flesh? How long are we to be stooping to the earth? Let everything be secondary with us to the provident care we should take of our children, and to our "bringing them up

in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.” If from the very first he is taught to be a lover of true wisdom, then wealth greater than all wealth has he acquired and a more imposing name. *You will effect nothing so great by teaching him an art, and giving him that outward learning by which he will gain riches, as if you teach him the art of despising riches. If you desire to make him rich, do this. For the rich man is not he who desires great riches, and is encircled with great riches; but the man who has need of nothing.* Discipline your son in this, teach him this. This is the greatest riches. Seek not how to give him reputation and high character in outward learning, but consider deeply how you shall teach him to despise the glory that belongs to this present life. By this means would he become more distinguished and more truly glorious. This is possible for the poor man and the rich man alike to accomplish.

These are lessons which a man does not learn from a master, nor by art, but by means of the *divine oracles*. Seek not how he shall enjoy a long life here, but how he shall enjoy a boundless and endless life hereafter. Give him the great things, not the little things. Hear what Paul saith, “Bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord”; study not to make him an orator, but *train him up to be a philosopher*. In the want of the one there will be no harm whatever; in the absence of the other, all the rhetoric in the world will be of no advantage. *Tempers are wanted, not talking; character, not cleverness; deeds, not words.* These gain a man the kingdom. These confer what are benefits indeed. Whet not his tongue, but *cleanse his*

soul. I do not say this to prevent your teaching him these things, but to prevent your attending to them exclusively.

Do not imagine that the monk alone stands in need of these lessons from Scripture. *Of all others, the children just about to enter into the world specially need them.* For just in the same way as the man who is always at anchor in harbor, is not the man who requires his ship to be fitted out and who needs a pilot and a crew, but he who is always out at sea; so is it with the man of the world and the monk. The one is entered as it were into a waveless harbor, and lives an untroubled life, and far removed from every storm; whilst the other is ever on the ocean, and lives out at sea in the very midst of the ocean, battling with billows without number.

And though he may not need it himself, still he ought to be so prepared as to stop the mouths of others. Thus the more distinguished he is in the present life, so much the more he stands in need of this education. If he passes his life in courts, there are many heathens, and philosophers, and persons puffed up with the glory of this life. It is like a place full of dropsical people. Such in some sort is the court. All are, as it were, puffed up, and in a state of inflammation. And they who are not so are studying to become so. Now then reflect how vast a benefit it is, that your son on entering there, should enter like an excellent physician, furnished with instruments which may allay every one's peculiar inflammation, and should go up to every one, and converse with him, and restore the diseased body to health, applying the remedies derived from the Scriptures, and pouring forth discourses of the true philosophy.

For with whom is there to converse? with his wall and his ceiling? yea, or again with the wilderness and the woods? or with the birds and the trees? He therefore has not so great need of this sort of discipline. Still, however, he makes it his business to perfect this work, not so much with a view of disciplining others as himself. There is then every need of much discipline of this sort to those that are to mix in the present world, because such an one has a stronger temptation to sin than the other. And if you have a mind to understand it, he will further be a more useful person even in the world itself. For all will have a reverence for him from these words, when they see him in the fire without being burnt, and not desirous of power. But power he will then obtain, when he least desires it, and will be a still higher object of respect to the king; for it is not possible that such a character should be hid. Amongst a number of healthy persons, indeed, a healthy man will not be noticed; but when there is one healthy man amongst a number of sick, the report will quickly spread and reach the king's ears, and he will make him ruler over many nations. Knowing then these things, "bring up your children in the chastening and admonition of the Lord."

"But suppose a man is poor." Still he will be in no wise more insignificant than the man who lives in kings' courts, because he is not in kings' courts; no, he will be held in admiration, and will soon gain that authority which is yielded voluntarily, and not by any compulsion. For if a set of Greeks, men worthless as they are, and dogs, by taking up that worthless philosophy of theirs, (for such the Grecian philosophy is,) or rather not itself but only its mere name, and wearing the threadbare cloak, and letting

their hair grow, impress many; how much more will he who is a true philosopher? If a false appearance, if a mere shadow of philosophy at first sight so catches us, what if we should *love the true and pure philosophy*? Will not all court it, and entrust both houses, and wives, and children, with full confidence to such men? But there is not, no, there is not such a philosopher existing now. And therefore, it is not possible to find an example of the sort. Amongst *recluses*, indeed, there are such, but amongst people in the world no longer. And that amongst recluses there are such, it would be possible to adduce a number of instances. However, I will mention one out of many.

You know, doubtless, and have heard of, and some, perhaps, have also seen, the man whom I am now about to mention. I mean, the admirable Julian (d. 305). This man was a rustic, in humble life, and of humble parentage, and totally uninstructed in all outward accomplishments, but full of unadorned wisdom. When he came into the cities, (and this was but rarely,) never did such a concourse take place, not when orators, or sophists, or any one else rode in. But what am I saying? Is not his very name more glorious than that of any king's, and celebrated even to this day? And if these things were in this world, in the world in which the Lord promised us no one good thing, in which He hath told us we are strangers, let us consider how great will be the blessings laid up for us in the heavens. If, where they were sojourners they enjoyed so great honor, how great glory shall they enjoy where their own city is! If, where He promised tribulation, they meet with such attentive care, then where He promises true honors, how great shall be their rest!

And now would ye have me exhibit examples of secular men? At present, indeed, we have none; still there are perhaps even secular men who are excellent, though not arrived at the highest philosophy. I shall therefore quote you *examples from the saints of the ancient times*. How many, who had wives to keep and children to bring up, were inferior in no respect, no, in no respect to those who have been mentioned? Now, however, it is no longer so, “by reason of the present distress” (1 Cor. 7:26), as this blessed Apostle saith. Now then whom would ye have me mention? Noah, or Abraham? The son of the one or of the other? Or again, Joseph? Or would ye have me go to the Prophets? Moses I mean, or Isaiah?

However, if you will, *let us carry our discourse to Abraham, whom all are continually bringing forward to us above all others*. Had he not a wife? Had he not children? Yes, for I too use the same language to you, as you do to me. He had a *wife*, but it was not because he had a wife that he was so remarkable. He had *riches*, but it was not because he had riches that he pleased God. He begat *children*, but it was not because he begat children that *he was pronounced blessed*. He had three hundred and eighteen *servants* born in his house, but it was not on this account that he was accounted wonderful. But would *you know why it was? It was for his hospitality, for his contempt of riches, for his chastened conduct*. For what, tell me, is the duty of a philosopher? Is it not to despise both riches and glory? Is it not to be above both envy and every other passion? Come now then, let us bring him forward and strip him, and show you what a philosopher he was. First of all, he esteemed his fatherland as nothing.

God said, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred” (Gen. 12:1), and immediately he went forth. He was not bound to his house, (or surely he would never have gone forth,) nor to his love of familiar friends, nor to anything else whatever. But what? Glory and money he despised above all others. For when he had put an end to war by turning the enemy to flight, and was requested to take the spoil, he rejected it (Gen. 14:21-23). Again, the son of this great man was revered, not because of his riches, but for his hospitality: not because of his children, but for his obedience: not because of his wife, but for the barrenness inflicted on his wife (Gen. 25:21).

They looked upon the present life as nothing, they followed not after gain, they despised all things. Tell me, which sort of plants are the best? Are not those which have their strength from themselves and are injured neither by rains, nor by hailstorms, nor by gusts of wind, nor by any other vicissitude (change) of the sort, but stand naked in defiance of them all, and needing neither wall nor fence to protect them? Such is the true philosopher, such is that wealth of which we spoke. He has nothing, and has all things: he has all things, and has nothing. For a fence is not within, but only without; a wall is not a thing of nature, but only built round from without. And what again, I ask, what sort of body is a strong one? Is it not that which is in health, and which is overcome neither by hunger nor repletion, nor by cold, nor by heat; or is it that which in view of all these things, needs both caterers, and weavers, and hunters, and physicians, to give it health? He is the rich man, the true philosopher, who needeth none of these things. For this cause it was that this blessed Apostle said,

“Bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.” Surround them not with outward defenses. For such is wealth, such is glory; for when these fall, and they do fall, the plant stands naked and defenseless, not only having derived no profit from them during the time past, but even injury. For those very shelters that prevented its being inured to the attacks of the winds, will now have prepared it for perishing all at once.

And so wealth is injurious rather, because it renders us undisciplined for the vicissitudes (changes) of life. *Let us therefore train up our children to be such, that they shall be able to bear up against every trial, and not be surprised at what may come upon them;* “let us bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.” And great will be the reward which will be thus laid up in store for us. For if men for making statues and painting portraits of kings enjoy so great honor, shall not we who adorn the image of the King of kings, (for man is the image of God,) receive ten thousand blessings, if we effect a true likeness? For the likeness is in this, in the virtue of the soul, when we *train our children to be good, to be meek, to be forgiving, (because all these are attributes of God,) to be beneficent, to be humane; when we train them to regard the present world as nothing.*

Let this then be our task, to mold and to direct both ourselves and them according to what is right. Otherwise with what sort of boldness shall we stand before the judgment seat of Christ? If a man who has unruly children is unworthy to be a bishop (Titus 1:6), much more is he unworthy of the kingdom of Heaven. What sayest thou? If we have an unruly wife, or unruly children, shall we have

to render account? Yes, we shall, if we do not with exactness bring in that which is due from ourselves; for our own individual virtue is not enough in order to salvation. If the man who laid aside the one talent gained nothing, but was punished even in such a manner, it is plain that one's own individual virtue is not enough in order to salvation, but there is need of that of another also. Let us therefore entertain great solicitude for our wives, and take great care of our children, and of our servants, and of ourselves. And in our government both of ourselves and of them, let us beseech God that He aid us in the work. *If He shall see us interested in this work, and solicitous about it, He will aid us; but if He shall see us paying no regard to it, He will not give us His hand.* For He does not vouchsafe us His assistance when we sleep, but when we labor also ourselves. For a helper, (as the name implies,) is not a helper of one that is inactive, but of one who works also himself. But the good God is able of Himself to bring the work to perfection, that we may be all counted worthy to attain to the blessings promised us, through the grace and compassions of His only begotten Son, with Whom together with the Holy Ghost be unto the Father, glory, might, and honor, now and ever, and throughout all ages. Amen.

Observations:

PART 1: Parents can provoke their children to wrath in a number of ways; for example, Chrysostom says, "Disinheriting them, and disowning them, and treating them overbearingly, not as free, but as slaves." Another

way, which is a main part of his emphasis, is a lack of Biblical teaching, catechizing, and theological formation. The command to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” is seen as the positive command to fathers, which is what would be lacking in the lives of fathers who do nothing else than provoke their children to get mad at them. While raising up your children to get an education and good job skills are a given, those things are worthless if Biblical training in righteousness is not the emphasis (2 Tim. 3:16). Children should be taught to hate luxuries and love God, to have no interior need for luxuries, and be entirely capable of being happy in life without them. While children should be trained to be productive employees and to gain money to take care of their needs and reasonable wants, they should also be taught that their financial surplus should be given in a spirit of philanthropy. If the child of an ungodly father grows to be a Christian, he will struggle with feelings of resentment that he did not have a man of God to raise him and provide him with Biblical wisdom for this life. God, who is the creator of this world, and of all men, even of this child's life, he will find to be his Lord, but then realize that his non-Christian father spent 20 years or so raising him outside of the will and ways of God, and this will provoke the child to wrath.

PART 2: Parents should not only teach their children the basics of theology, the Bible, and holy living--they should teach them even more. They should also teach them apologetics: they should be equipped with many arguments to refute the heresies of liberal theology, antinomians,

universalists, cults, the New Age, world religions, etc. I can think of nothing better than Josh McDowell's materials or Norman Geisler's *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* to arm the parent with material to simplify and teach to their children. By the time their children advance in years, and find themselves in places of influence in the workplace, they might find that a word fitly spoken in due season will save a coworker (Prov. 25:11), or at least guard your child's faith against the lying arrows of the devil (Eph. 6:16). Children should be trained to be saints, even as the Desert Fathers were, even though they must live in the world: then their minds will be raised up to the most high and holy things: for this, I would start off by recommending some guarded readings of Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* to your children, something which Teresa of Avila loved to read as a child, and was likely responsible for her desire to pursue sainthood. It is Catholic, so evangelicals will find some objectionable things in it, but there is still a lot of experiential Christian wisdom in its pages.

PART 3: Abraham, the father of the faith, is chosen out from all of the Biblical saints as a supreme example of the Biblical family man. Abraham was considered blessed by God (Gen. 12:2; 22:18), not because he was married, had children, had riches, or had servants. He was called blessed "for his hospitality, for his contempt of riches, for his chastened conduct." He was not attached to his family, friends, or house; and because he was a man of faith, he instantly obeyed the voice of God, after he was told, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred" (Gen.

12:1). Abraham, a prophet, was guided by dreams, visions, and voices sent from the Holy Spirit (Gen. 20:7).

PART 4: By training up your child to scorn the luxuries enjoyed by the rich, they will be hardened against the unstable lifestyles of the rich and famous, and they will be ready for any trials and tribulations that God may throw against them in this life, to train them to be saints. Riches and money can fade away, but wisdom is most precious and provides stability. We automatically “train our children to be good, to be meek, to be forgiving, (because all these are attributes of God,) to be beneficent, to be humane; when we train them to regard the present world as nothing.” This does not mean we shouldn't train our children to take care of themselves financially; but it does mean they should be taught to hate “luxury and self-indulgence” (James 5:5). Those children who learn to despise greed will make room in their hearts for all the wisdom and righteousness of God found in the Scriptures. All things are possible with God (Matt. 19:26); and we should expect that if we are training our children according to the Word of God, then the Spirit of God will help them to obey it.

The Duties of Parents

1. Don't disinherit them, or disown them, or treat them overbearingly, or as slaves.

2. Teach your children the Bible, Christian theology, apologetics, and holiness.
3. Teach your children to provide for their needs, to hate luxuries, and be generous.
4. Teach your children self-control, hospitality, and detachment from earthly things.
5. Teach your children how to be guided by the Holy Spirit.
6. Teach your children to be good, meek, forgiving, benevolent, and humane.
7. Teach them to rely on the Holy Spirit for holy living.

John Calvin

(1509 – 1564)

Calvin's Commentaries

NURTURE MORE THAN ADMONITION

And, ye fathers. Parents, on the other hand, are exhorted not to irritate their children by unreasonable severity. This would excite hatred, and would lead them to throw off the yoke altogether. Accordingly, in writing to the Colossians, he adds, “lest they be discouraged” (Col. 3:21). Kind and liberal treatment has rather a tendency to cherish reverence for their parents, and to increase the cheerfulness and activity of their obedience, while a harsh and unkind manner rouses them to obstinacy, and destroys the natural affections. But Paul goes on to say, “let them be fondly cherished;” for the Greek word, (ἐκτρέφετε,) which is translated *bring up*, unquestionably conveys the idea of gentleness and forbearance. To guard them, however, against the opposite and frequent evil of excessive indulgence, he again draws the rein which he had slackened, and adds, *in the instruction and reproof of the Lord*. It is not the will of God that parents, in the exercise of kindness, shall spare and corrupt their children. Let their conduct towards their children be at once mild and considerate, so as to guide them in the fear of the Lord, and correct them also when they go astray. That age is so apt to become wanton, that it requires frequent admonition and restraint.

Observations: Calvin warns against “unreasonable severity,” an expression borrowed by Poole below about

one hundred years later, and by Henry a bit later. Strict rules and overbearing punishments are definitely going to make children irritated against their parents; in fact, it will make them HATE their parents passionately and cause them to reject all of their commands and teachings. It will also make their children discouraged: from following Christ, from thinking the best, from taking care of themselves, from pursuing stable careers, from all stability. It will ruin and damage their minds in every area that is essential, so that even in the most important areas of their lives, when they need encouragement the most, they can only find discouragement in their hearts--because their own parents, from whom it is only natural to expect they would receive encouragement--have abused them so much and have been the greatest cause of discouragement in their lives. Calvin well said, "Kind and liberal treatment has rather a tendency to cherish reverence for their parents, and to increase the cheerfulness and activity of their obedience, while a harsh and unkind manner rouses them to obstinacy, and destroys the natural affections." Perhaps this means that Christian parenting should be 60% permissive and 40% authoritative in its style; or maybe even 70/30. Law is still needed; but before admonition is mentioned, nurture is: "nurture and admonition of the Lord" indicates that *the parenting style emphasis* should be on tenderness, sweetness, God's love, attention, grace, forgiveness, kindness, encouragement, and friendliness; whereas, laws, rules, corrections, the fear of the Lord, teachings, spankings, and punishments should only be used when absolutely necessary, and at that, with gentleness, self-control, and patience.

The Duties of Parents

1. Don't be mean or unreasonably authoritarian.
2. Don't be a depressing, pessimistic, and discouraging influence.
3. Emphasize nurture more than admonition.

William Gouge

(1575 – 1653)

Domestical Duties, The Sixth Treatise, “Duties of Parents”
ECONOMIC AND BIBLICAL FORMATION

Gouge’s work on the Biblical duties of parents is the most comprehensive on the subject that I have found. I will only be using extracts from his treatise, and follow up with my own observations. Each of Gouge’s extracts will have a section number. I have changed some archaic words.

23. Of parents providing things needful for the life and health of their children.

Many distinguish the whole course of a man’s life into four parts. 1. Childhood, 2. Youth, 3. Manhood, and 4. Old age. Childhood from his birth to 14 years. Youth from 14 to 25. Manhood from 25 to 50. Old age from thence to his death.

The childhood of a child is reckoned from the time that it begins to be of any discretion and understanding till it be fit to be placed forth: even so long as ordinarily it lives under the parent’s government.

The duties which parents for this time must perform to their children may be drawn to these two heads.

1. Care to bring them up.

2. Care to place them forth. For their well training up, respect must be had both to their *temporal* and also to their *spiritual* good.

Two things are required of parents, in regard of the *temporal* good of their children.

1. To *nourish* them well.

2. To *nurture* them well.

Children must be well *fed* and *taught*.

Feed them in discipline, saith the Apostle.

Under *nourishment* are comprised all needful things for *health* and *life*: which parents ought to provide for their children, as

1. *Food*, which Christ taketh for a ruled case. Whence he draws his argument to show that God will provide for His children. “What father if his son ask him bread would give him a stone,” etc. (Matt. 7:9-11).

2. *Apparel*, for it is expressly noted, that Israel made his son a coat (Gen. 37:3).

3. *Recreation*, which in young children especially is needful for their health. In that Zechariah told the Jews, and that in way of blessing, that “boys and girls should be playing in the streets” (8:5), he implies that it is a lawful

and meet thing, which parents should permit unto their children. But yet the time, and measure, and kind of recreation must be well ordered.

4. *Means for recovery of health* when they are sick: for this end was it, that Jeroboam sent his wife to the prophet, in behalf of his son who was sick (1 Kings 14:2): that the ruler came to Christ for his son also who was at point of death (John 4:47); and that many others came to him for their sons and daughters being ill. Whatsoever other things are needful, parents to their power must provide for their children; else the Apostle counts them worse than infidels (1 Tim. 5:8). Both equity and necessity require thus much of parents. *Equity*, in that children own all their pains and service to their parents while they are under them, and are wholly at their command, and in that regard have no means to provide needful things but by their parents' help. Parents therefore in all right must herein be helpful to them. *Necessity*, in that, if the life and health of children be not well provided for, no duty, no service can be expected at their hands.

31. Of parents training up their children to some good calling.

The second branch of *good nurture* is a training up of children unto a good calling. This charge, "train up a child in the way that he should go" (Prov. 22:6), directly tends to this purpose. This duty hath from the beginning of the world been performed by parents, and their performance thereof commended by the Holy Ghost. Adam brought up

his sons to several callings: one was a *keeper of sheep*, another a *tiller of ground* (Gen. 4:2). The like is noted of Jacob's sons (Gen. 37:12), Laban's (Gen. 29:9), and Reuel's daughters (Exod. 2:16), and many others.

35. Of directing parents how to teach their children true piety.

1. Whatsoever principle of piety, parents do teach their children, they must be sure that it is grounded on God's Word: thus much this phrase "admonition of the Lord" implies. Thus shall parents be sure to feed them with good wholesome spiritual food, such as shall make to their spiritual nourishment, and eternal life. In this respect principles of religion grounded on God's Word are called *sound* (2 Tim 1:13), or *wholesome*, or *healthful words*: and that both in regard of their matter and substance, and also in regard of their effect; they cause and preserve good, sound, spiritual health. We know that natural men have a care to give their children such food as is wholesome for their body: "for will a father that is evil, give his child a stone, or a serpent, and not that which is good?" (Matt. 7:9-11). Conscience must move religious parents, to have the like care of the souls of their children, as nature teaches all parents to have of their bodies. If parents are careful to draw those principles, wherein they instruct their children, out of God's Word, they shall be sure not to poison their souls with any error, heresy, superstition, or idolatry.

2. *When children begin to read, let them read the holy Scripture*: so was Timothy trained up from a child (2 Tim.

3:15). Thus will children suck in religion with learning: for there is a secret virtue lurking in the holy Scripture (which is God's own Word) more than in any books of men: so as through God's blessing there may by this means be an inward work of grace in children even in their young years. Besides, no books are more easy than many parts of Scripture; and no histories more admirable and delightful, than *the histories of the Scripture*. It is the advice of an ancient church father, that young children be made acquainted with the words and names of holy Scriptures and that, instead of tales and fables, choice histories of the Bible be made known to them: and that they be instructed in *the Proverbs of Solomon*.

3. Let children be catechized constantly from day to day: "rehearse them continually unto thy children," saith the law (Deut. 6:7). That which is *daily* done, is in Scripture said to be done *continually*: as the sacrifice which was daily offered was called *a continual offering*. Here let this caveat be noted, that in giving this spiritual food, parents deal with their children, as skillful nurses and mothers do in feeding infants: they will not at once cram more into their mouths, than their stomach is able to digest, but they will rather *often feed them with a little*: so it is not meet, that parents be too tedious; that will but dull a child's understanding, and breed wearisomeness, and make it loath to be again instructed: but "precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little" (Isa. 28:10). Thus shall they learn with ease and delight: and *this being oft performed*, in time a great measure of knowledge will be gained thereby. If a

vessel have a little mouth, we use not to fill it by pouring whole pail-fulls upon it, for so all may be spilt, and it receive little or nothing: but we let the liquor fall in by little and little, according to the capacity of the mouth; so is nothing lost, and the vessel filled the sooner. Thus are children to be dealt withal.

4. To the set times of *catechizing children*, let other occasions of teaching them piety be added: as *at table*, by resembling the spiritual food of their souls, to that corporal food, whereby their bodies are nourished: *when they are walking abroad*, by shewing them the stars, how they remain steadfast in their course; the trees, how they bring forth fruit in their season; how all things are for the use and benefit of man, and thereupon make spiritual uses: note the direction which for this purpose the law giveth to parents, “Thou shalt talk to thy children of My Words, when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:7).

5. Let parents open to their children the mysteries of those outward rites which God hath ordained in His church, as of *preaching...administering the Lord's Supper, ceasing from work on the Lord's day*, with the like (Exod. 12:26; 13:14). This was expressly commanded under the law. Visible rites are great helps to the weak understanding of children, when they are plainly opened and applied: yea they are also especial means of keeping in memory the mysteries contained under them: as coarse threads or wires are means to preserve pearls put upon them. So often as

they see the rites they will be put in mind of the mysteries implied under them.

6. To this may be referred a declaration of such great and admirable works as God in former times hath done for His church: especially such works as have been done in their time: and if any *memorials* be remaining of them, make them known to children. This direction was also given under the law, concerning the monuments which were set up of the great deliverances that God gave to His people (Josh. 4:6, 21)...And as God doth any great works of mercy or of judgment, point them out to children. When there is a great famine, plague, or any mortality, instruct children in the causes thereof: when victory, plenty, peace, or the like, teach children from whence these come. Outward sensible things do best work upon children.

49. Of parents' too much severity in correcting their children.

They who offend in the other extreme of severity, of the two are the more unnatural parents; they offend directly against the first branch of this text: "provoke not to wrath." *Nothing more provokes than immoderate severity:* for

1. It argues no love in the parent, but rather *hatred*, at least wrath, and other such like distempered affections.
2. It softens not the child's heart, but *hardens* it rather.

3. It makes him dull, and *stupid*, and clean perverts the right and true end of correction.

4. It often makes a child think of doing some *mischief* to his parent or himself. That parents may the rather take heed of this extreme, I will briefly note wherein excess in severity is shown.

It is shown, when correction is given:

1. *For no fault.* In this case, though correction be never so light, it is too severe.

2. *For small faults, in wrath and fury,* though the stripes be few and light, yet the parent's behavior is too much severity.

3. *To children that are young and tender,* or soft, mild and ingenuous, as if they were in some years, the most obstinate and perverse that could be.

4. *Too often:* for everything done amiss: whereas parents should seem not to see or hear many things which they see, and hear.¹

¹ Instead of showing more slack and grace to children. Such parents keep their children in a continual dread of punishment, and might say, "I've got eyes in the back of my head; I can see you even when I'm not looking, so you better behave or you're getting a spanking." A gracious parent will *overlook* many of the *petty misdemeanors* committed by children every hour. To refuse to be this way is too "strict" or what Calvin and the Puritans called "unreasonably severe."

5. *Too sorely*: so as the child is lamed, or some way so hurt as he shall feel it as long as he lives.

Observations:

PART 1 (on Section 23): *Nurture* is the first and foremost responsibility of parents. The dictionary defines nurture as “the process of caring for and encouraging the growth of” a child. From the time they are babies, and are incapable of learning anything, the only thing they need is nurture from their mother and father. This need for nurture will continue throughout their whole lives, but will lessen in its intensity as the years progress. Especially from childhood to adulthood, when the child comes out from under its parents’ supervision, either through marriage, or through getting a career to be able to provide for itself, it is the duty of parents to nurture their children: this involves providing food, clothing, playtime with friends or entertainment, medicine and prayer for healing and doctor’s visits when the child becomes sick, and teaching, and discipline. It should also be within the frame of teaching that children be pointed towards their futures, so that they will grow out of foolish ideas, and begin to formulate realistic and *wise views and plans*, especially in the areas of career development and personal sanctification. It is not only a duty of moms and dads to provide food and clothing, entertainment and healthcare, but also education, career coaching, Christian counseling, and both economic and spiritual formation.

PART 2 (on Section 31): *Career coaching* is a modern form of *apprenticeship*, which is the way fathers raised up their sons to the same occupations they themselves had skill and expertise in. Gouge is very emphatic on this subject as part of the nurturing process, he has many other sections about this *ad nauseum*. But suffice it to say that many fathers in the Bible raised their children to be in the exact same occupation they were in, or something similar, because they knew how to guide them in that way (but may not know much about any other occupation). If you find your child inclined away from the same occupation as its father, then the father should take special care and study to be its career coach, so that by the time it is approaching 16, 17, and 18, it will have settled ideas about a solid money-making job. For this I would recommend the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (bls.gov/ooah), David Montross' *Career Coaching Your Kids*, and other similar career and vocational resources often found in public and college libraries; children, I would think in this time in the West (America, the UK, Canada, etc), would benefit to get involved in some *volunteer internships* as soon as they can to build job skills, whether its with inside sales, customer service, or something else in an office environment, so that job skills can be added to the child's resume. Do not be hasty to spend thousands of saved dollars on a *college degree* if the child hasn't settled on any job skills and experience; keep a tuition fund available. As the child develops, it will sharpen its own career ideas; but it is the responsibility of the parents to nurture them into their own career launch. It generally takes 3 years of office work in a specific area with at least 1 year served per

company; recruiters or “Employment Agencies” should also be brought to the awareness of the child so that he can learn to call them by the hundreds, and learn how to land interviews on his own, etc.

PART 3 (on Section 35): Gouge is intent on *teaching the Bible to children*. Especially when they are of the ability to read, it is better for them to *read Bible stories*, Biblical history, and the book of Proverbs than all the fairy tales of pagan literature. From the time of Adam to Moses, have them read Genesis and Exodus; then have them read from Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings (explain, summarize, and overview with them as they go through these books); Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel (during the time of the Babylonian exile and return); when it comes to the New Testament, have them read Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. When they are young (ages 4-7), have them read *The Beginner’s Bible*, then have them read from the New Century Version (NCV) translation (reading level: ages 8-9); and then to the Good News Bible (GNB; TEV) (for ages 10-11); and then to the New International Version (NIV) (for ages 12 and up); and finally, encourage the growing child to move on to the King James Version (KJV), not only because of its literal translation from the Hebrew and Greek, its usability for an in-depth study with *Strong’s Concordance*, its powerful Puritan language and theological expressions, its fear of God, and its poetic beauty, but because it contains words that are literarily advanced and will build the child’s vocabulary (for ages 14 and up): using Alexander Scourby’s recordings might help the growing

child read through the KJV easier. Gouge says *children should read the Bible every day, little by little*; that parents should take any and every occasion to teach their children about God and their duty towards Him; and that whenever holidays call for it, use these also as opportunities to teach children about God (for example, Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, etc).

PART 4 (on Section 49): Ephesians 6:4a: “Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.” Gouge was convinced, as were Calvin, Poole, and Henry, that the most direct meaning of this text is *a warning against fathers punishing their children too severely*. Gouge said, “Nothing more provokes than immoderate severity.” To avoid this grievous error, parents are cautioned against *hating* their children; against *hardening* their hearts; against making them *dull* or *stupid* so they are not able to understand why they are being punished and they are none the wiser for it; against making defiant and *mischievous* children; against *punishing children when they have done nothing wrong*; against punishing a child with *extreme anger* when it was *at fault for something small*; against being harshly unjust in *extremely punishing very small children* (like babies and toddlers) as if they were of the age of accountability² and knew they were doing something wrong (however, sometimes they do know, and this does not exclude the need for moderate

² James Dobson thinks that spanking should start around 3 years old and stop around 6 years old, and taper off and stop, between the ages of 10 and 12 (see *The New Dare to Discipline*, p. 65).

spankings³ or time-outs); against *punishing too often*, or using *physical abuse*, causing bruises, cuts, and permanent damage to the child's body and mind. Parents who "discipline" like this are child abusers; and should either bring themselves under control or be reported to the police. Proverbs 29:15: "The rod and reproof give wisdom," but only if done by a nurturing and loving parent. No child will remember valuable information, or view it as wisdom, if the parent punishes the child with a hateful spirit.

The Duties of Parents

1. Provide food, clothing, and education.
2. Provide healthcare, entertainment, and career coaching.
3. Provide Biblical teaching and Christian counseling.
4. Avoid severely punishing your children.

³ The government has ruled: "*Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child*" ("What Is Child Abuse and Neglect? Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms," p. 3 <childwelfare.gov>).

Matthew Poole

(1624 – 1679)

Commentary

WARNINGS AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

Provoke not your children to wrath; viz. by unreasonable severity, moroseness, unrighteous commands, &c.

But bring them up in the nurture; or correction, as the word signifies, Hebrews 12:6-8.

And admonition; this denotes the end of the former; instruction in their duty must be, as well as correction to drive them to it.

Of the Lord; the Lord Jesus Christ; and so it is either that admonition which is commanded by him, or whereby they are brought to be acquainted with him.

Observations: *Authoritarianism*, or tyranny, could be defined as an unreasonable exercise of authority over another person, as with ungodly leaders who “lord it over the flock” (Matt. 20:25; 1 Pet. 5:3). An authoritarian parent will always be unreasonable, because the very idea of an excessive use of authority is unreasonable, irrational, and insane. There could be absolute foolishness being espoused by the parent, but the abuse of its authority over children will cause them to resent the parent not only for its meanness and hatred, but also for its various illogical statements. Adam Clarke said, “Cruel parents generally

have bad children.”⁴ God did not create the mind of a child to develop into something unreasonable and irrational; a child is perfectly capable of rational thought, it’s just that it has to accumulate information (or learn) in order to arrange the information in such a way that it understands (this is the natural use of its reason). But when a parent says the child should do one thing, and then tells it to do something that contradicts the first thing--this is unreasonable, and there is no order, and only chaos in the child’s mind. When mixed with insane hatred and child abuse, what will happen to the child? In some cases, the child develops schizophrenia (which some have defined as double-mindedness, Jas. 1:8).

Moroseness or continual misery, depression, and peevishness (irritability; or the inclination to have pet peeves), pessimism, and the like, when found in a parent, can only have a destructive influence on a child; the emotional and psychological abuse of the child will manifest in all kinds of discouraging speeches, demeaning and belittling sayings, and things that wound children’s hearts for years to come. Things like, “You’ll never amount to anything,” “You talk a good game, but you’re not a go getter,” or telling a child that it is ugly. Such people are not really parents in the way the Bible teaches. They might be the physical progenitors of the children, but when they cross the line—“misery loves company”—they have unwittingly become the tool of the devil, and they provoke their children to wrath.

⁴ Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Christian Theology* (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishing, 1990), p. 274.

When *unrighteous commands* are issued forth from parents to their children, it is a gross perversion of the created order. God made man to be an image and representation of Him in the world (Gen. 1:27), so when parents become the image of the devil to their children, they can only invite demon-possession, and extremely troubled children who will have to be left to the grace of God at some future date.

Hebrews 12:6-8: “The Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.” A Biblical father will imitate the picture of God in this passage, in which God the Father is displayed as 1. A loving father. 2. A holy disciplinarian. 3. A legitimate father. The good parent is all of these things: loving, holy, disciplinarian, and legitimate (passes muster as a quality parent). On the subject of discipline, “nurture and admonition” are extensions of the Gospel (the message of law and grace) held in perfect balance by the righteous teachings and example of Jesus--and the Atonement that He provided for us on the cross. Nurture and admonition balance each other out, so that the Biblical parenting style is neither meant to be permissive nor authoritarian. Correction, teaching, training, and discipline fall under the category of God’s law: whereas nurture, grace, forgiveness, and love fall under the category of the cross. All of these thoughts need to be mixed together to make a good parent.

The Duties of Parents

1. Don't be mean or unreasonably authoritarian.
2. Don't be a depressing, pessimistic, and discouraging influence.
3. Don't give your children unrighteous commands.
4. Be a loving and holy disciplinarian.
5. Balance out nurture and correction.

Matthew Henry

(1662 – 1714)

Commentary

NURTURE, TEACH, AND PUNISH

The duty of parents: *And you fathers*, Ephesians 6:4. Or, you parents, 1. “*Do not provoke your children to wrath*. Though God has given you power, you must not abuse that power, remembering that your children are, in a particular manner, pieces of yourselves, and therefore ought to be governed with great tenderness and love. Be not impatient with them, use no unreasonable severities and lay no rigid injunctions upon them. When you caution them, when you counsel them, when you reprove them, do it in such a manner as not to *provoke them to wrath*. In all such cases deal prudently and wisely with them, endeavouring to convince their judgments and to work upon their reason.” 2. “*Bring them up well, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*, in the discipline of proper and of compassionate correction, and in the knowledge of that duty which God requires of them and by which they may become better acquainted with him. Give them a good education.” It is the great duty of parents to be careful in the education of their children: “Not only bring them up, as the brutes do, taking care to provide for them; but bring them up in nurture and admonition, in such a manner as is suitable to their reasonable natures. Nay, not only bring them up as men, in nurture and admonition, but as Christians, in the admonition of the Lord. Let them have a religious education. Instruct them to fear sinning; and inform them

of, and excite them to, the whole of their duty towards God.”

Observations: Parents, but especially fathers, should not abuse their authority over their children, but should express tender love to them; they should not be impatient with them; they should not give them impossible rules or extreme punishments. When parents speak correction to their children, they should do so gently and compassionately; and with the aim of teaching them what is right from wrong: and have such an attitude so as to not provoke them to become angry. You should be reasonable with them, explaining thoroughly, not with angry rants, but with a cool, calm logic that teaches them and provides a thorough explanation for everything they need to know. Everything you correct them on should be in point of reference to obeying God and the Bible, not just you: because it is not an unreasonable authoritarianism that you are trying to exert over them. It is not that they need to choose “obedience” or “rebellion” towards you, but towards God; all Biblical parenting is aimed at this: to cultivate obedience to Jesus in your children. It’s not about you.

Homeschool them if possible, so that they may be educated for everything they will need for their economic and spiritual welfare in the future. I would recommend the “A Beka Book” curriculum for their classical education; and various theological books for their spiritual education, which after having been read and distilled by their parents and taught them on Sunday after church: Adam Clarke’s *Christian Theology*, P. C. Nelson’s *Bible Doctrines*, and

other Puritan and Wesleyan books; after they have been trained by these things, then go on to read and explain the Bible to them chapter by chapter as they approach the age of twelve. In traditional Puritan fashion, do as Matthew Henry says, and “instruct them to fear sinning; and inform them of, and excite them to, the whole of their duty towards God.” Share your spiritual experiences too.

The Duties of Parents

1. Be patient with your children and show them love.
2. Don't give your children strict rules and excessive punishments.
3. Gently teach your children right from wrong.
4. Teach your children to obey Jesus and the Bible, not just obey you.
5. Homeschool with “A Beka Book” if possible.
6. Catechize your children on Sunday afternoons.

Review of Dr. Forward's *Toxic Parents*

In 1989, Dr. Susan Forward, a therapist and psychiatrist, published her case studies that she had accumulated after years of counseling adults who grew up with abusive parents. The title of the book was *Toxic Parents: Overcoming Their Hurtful Legacy and Reclaiming Your Life*. It was a New York Times Bestseller on the subject of self-help; and from what I can see, has a very liberating and truth-telling character about it. From a Christian perspective, I would not recommend kids to read this, because it has some profanity that come out in the case studies. This is more appropriate for people in their 20s or 30s or older. She records the words of some very angry adults: men and women who feel like their childhoods as well as their adulthoods have been ruined by miserable, controlling parents. Profanity is an all too natural reaction for angry, unsaved people trying to blow off steam when reminiscing about the way they have been treated; and then having to come to terms with the fact that their parents really are to blame for their cruel behavior. There is a show on RLTV that comes on occasionally called *Outlaw In-Laws* and it touches on similar themes.

Much of the book seems to revolve around the theme of *identifying inappropriate parental behavior*, judging it, condemning it, and blaming parents for wrongs they have committed, yet continue to do without acknowledging. The path to emotional healing from such hurtful behavior, Forward says, is in identifying the wrongs of your parents and not blaming yourself for their wrongs. Abusive parents lack sensitivity and usually do not apologize for hurtful

behavior; they also tend to blame their children for the hurtful things they say, so they feel justified in acting meanly to them.

Forward spends several chapters on subjects that would not apply to the masses, such as alcoholic parents (ch. 4), physically abusive parents (ch. 6), and sexually abusive parents (ch. 7). These are less common situations, but for those who might have been in those situations, she has answers for you too. My main concern here is on the subjects of controlling parents (ch. 3) and verbally abusive parents (ch. 5). I think that if there is a more popular type of toxic parent, then it is the *psychologically abusive* one that uses control, manipulation, and verbal abuse to keep even adult children under their thumb, and ultimately ruin their lives, and potentially break up their marriages. If we want to be good parents who do not provoke our children or adult children to wrath (Eph. 6:4), then I think it would be great to keep some important things about parenting in mind. And it can help to break any generational curses of bad parenting that we might have inherited from our parents and grandparents. Curses can't be broken without repentance from sin and faith in the blood of Jesus; and Forward does a great job at identifying such parental sins.

In the Introduction, Forward shows the types of behaviors and character traits that you might find in an abusive parent:

1. Bad temper and relentless criticism.
2. Career idolatry.
3. Extreme physical punishment for small failings.
4. Intimidation and constant fear in children.

5. Jokes about child being ugly, stupid, or unwanted.
6. Manipulation with threats, guilt, or money.
7. No matter what, the child can never please them.

At one point Forward breaks and says, “Our parents plant mental and emotional seeds in us—seeds that grow as we do. In some families, these are seeds of love, respect, and independence. But in many others, they are seeds of fear, obligation, or guilt” (p. 5). It’s not hard to figure out which are seen as the good and bad parents in this quote. She takes an anti-spanking stance which I disagree with (Prov. 23:13-14), but she is doing so in the context of loose-cannon fathers beating their kids with belts for getting “Bs” on their report cards instead of “As.” She also admits that even good, healthy parents get angry at their kids and yell at them sometimes, but they are quick and sensitive enough to apologize to their kids when they go overboard. Again, the good parent is loving and sensitive enough to *balance out nurture with admonition* (Eph. 6:4), unlike the abusive parent who entirely neglects nurture, and only practices admonition in the most extreme and hateful ways. I would encourage the saints reading here to note that Martin Luther and Francis of Assisi had fathers like this; as did many Christian saints throughout church history...too many to name. Know that you are not alone: God is willing to adopt you as a Father! (Rom. 8:15). She nearly ends her Introduction with (p. 11):

*You are not responsible for what was done
to you as a defenseless child!*

*You are responsible for taking positive steps
to do something about it now!*

How sad it is that parents can do such a bad job at raising their kids, so that when they grow up, the only way they can move on with their lives, is to go get counseling from a therapist, who helps them to realize that their whole lives up until now, their parents have been mistreating them! They had known in their hearts something was wrong, but they fell under the illusion that this was how all parents are with their kids, and that they just needed to accept the negative behavior. Not anymore! Dr. Forward is forward enough to point out those wrongs and right them. But if parental wrongs are not identified as sinful, then no measures will be taken to avoid them or repent from them for future generations.

In chapter 3, which deals with controlling parents, and is titled, “Why Can't They Let Me Live My Own Life?” she shows the specific motives that lie behind the actions of controllers. At the bottom of it, *controlling parents feel inadequate about themselves and try to “feel needed” by their children*. When the children become adults, the immaturity of this mentality comes to the surface, as they try to make their children feel insecure without them. No matter what they choose or think, it is made out to look like they are going to fail without their guidance. The children are meant to feel like morons who cannot think for themselves and need their parents' wisdom all the time. Misery desires company: “I'm doing this because I'm so afraid of losing you that I'm willing to make you miserable” is the basic mentality of a controlling parent (p.

51). This can cause depression, schizophrenia, and even suicide!

Controlling parents will use an endless array of guilt-trips on their adult children. It is expected that you are to show up at Christmas,⁵ and every other special occasion that Mother wants you to attend—regardless of your geographical location, and regardless of your personal commitments to your wife and kids. If you don't comply, things can be said such as, “You're killing your mother. She was up all night crying. I'm afraid she's going to have a stroke” (p. 52). Since they have developed a lifelong pattern of disapproval, controllers often reject the fiancés or spouses of their adult children. This is usually the breaking point for the adult child, when he/she either realizes that something is seriously wrong with the parents; or when the realization comes that it causes strain on the marriage relationship, sometimes concluding in divorce.

Rather than being happy at seeing their adult child find a good spouse and be happy, they spite the child, and try to make him feel miserable and inadequate. They are parasitic and negative almost all the time; and very self-centered, only projecting their own unhappiness onto others, assuming that *if they can't be happy, then nobody deserves to be happy*. This, of course, strikes at the very

⁵ Under a heading that says, “’Tis the Season to Be Melancholy,” she says, “Manipulative parents have a field day on holidays, spreading guilt as if it were Christmas cheer. Holidays tend to intensify whatever family conflicts already exist” (p. 61). *Merry Christmas!* seems like a mockery to people who live in families like this. *Wary Christmas!* would seem more fitting.

purpose of marriage: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). They are ashamed to admit that they are jealous of their children's marriages, that they are so happy and things are turning out so well for them: at least they can try to make them unhappy a little bit through rude, controlling, and demeaning behavior, and “even the score” a little. The reality is, nobody is perfectly happy. Even in the best marriage relationships, husbands and wives still have to face financial, medical, and social struggles. Purposely trying to make anyone's life worse is never justifiable. What is worse to think about, is when toxic parents are wasting their years acting like bratty eight year olds, their adult children are sitting there waiting for the day when they will grow up and provide the love, encouragement, support, respect, and guidance that they would expect out of any normal, healthy parent; but instead they get ripped off from this privilege, often waiting in vain for change.

One thing that Forward warns about at the close of chapter 3 is the error of “self-defeating rebellion” committed by adult children. It's one thing to rebel against parents in order to avoid the influence of their sins on you, it's quite another to overreact and rebel against their excesses in such a way that it would hinder your own happiness and independence. For example, if you have a controlling parent that is obsessed with your financial security, and he is obsessed with money all the time, and is greedy, and miserly, and snobbish—it would be a big mistake to overreact and intentionally live in total poverty just to spite the parent. That would have a lasting effect on your own personal happiness. That would be a self-

defeating rebellion; or, a form of rebellion that actually ends up *hurting* you in the end, rather than *helping* you out.

In chapter 5, which deals with verbally abusive parents, and is titled, “The Bruises Are All On the Inside,” she shows in laymen’s terms that in the psychiatric community, the term “verbal abuse” generally means *insult*. The word *insult* can be defined as “speaking to or treating with disrespect or scornful abuse.” When parents insult their children, they are verbally abusing them; they are attacking them, wounding them, hurting their psyche, their sense of value, self-worth, and self-esteem. Often when these emotionally battered children grow up, they have difficulties working with managers in the workplace, because they overreact to corrections and interpret them as insults: this is called having an “authority problem”—being unable to tell the difference between a respectful and disrespectful use of authority (p. 109). In the minds of such victims, all authorities are disrespectful and insulting, and should be disrespected in return. But this is not reality. While Lord Acton’s dictum rings true, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” it is also true that there are some people in places of authority that know how to respect those under them; but this is usually due to the grace of God working in their lives, and them having suffered personally from other tyrants in their lives. Such men have been healed from their wounds; and long to show others how proper authority can be exercised.

Verbally abusive parents insult their children openly and indirectly. They might make brash out-in-the-open statements about the child being ugly, stupid, worthless, or

unsuccessful in something. More often they might make indirect statements out of the corner of their mouths, in order that others in the family don't recognize it as abuse—such as teasing, sarcasm, insulting nicknames, put-downs, or cracking cruel and belittling jokes at the child's expense (which goes against Ephesians 5:4). This sounds a lot like Proverbs 26:18-19: "Like a maniac shooting flaming arrows of death, is the one who deceives his neighbor and says, 'I was only joking!'" Forward says, "Positive humor is one of our most valuable tools for strengthening family bonds. But humor that belittles can be extremely damaging within the family" (p. 98).

If a father treated his son this way all the time growing up, wouldn't it sound like a joke to him, if God expected him to "honor his father," without hesitation? (Exodus 20:12). How can he do this? He can *bear it patiently, get out of the house as quickly as possible, and pray for him*; but he doesn't have to pretend that his father has behaved honorably; nobody is saying that God wants you to honor men who have shown you nothing but disrespect and stirred up hate in your heart. God would expect you to remove yourself from them—"Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, *nor sits in the seat of the scornful*" (Psalm 1:1)—but God would want you to say, "I forgive my dad, because he didn't know what he was doing," and try to move on with your life without his negative influence (Luke 23:34). Of course, the same thing applies to mothers and daughters.

Verbally abusive parents often feed off of a sense of personal failure and personal inadequacy. They often get it

from their own parents' ideas of perfectionism and competition; and as their children grow older, they also hold them to these unreasonably high standards, which are often impossible to measure up to, and the kids are then belittled for their constant failures to meet these standards, which are often vague and locked up in their parents' minds. This is why these parents need to be forgiven, at least in the hearts of their victims: because they are acting foolishly: they literally don't understand what it is they are doing wrong. They have been *brainwashed* to think perfectionistic and competitive, and to harshly judge and evaluate their children based on those so-called high ideals (which are often not based on the Bible and certainly not on the Gospel). I agree with Forward when she says:

People *can* forgive toxic parents, but they should do it at the conclusion—not at the beginning—of their emotional housecleaning. People need to get angry about what happened to them. They need to grieve over the fact that they never had the parental love they yearned for. They need to stop diminishing or discounting the damage that was done to them. Too often, “forgive and forget” means “pretend it didn't happen” (p. 189).

Confronting toxic parents is the only road to personal independence in your life. If you want to forgive them, and get your anger out, then you need to frankly tell them what they did that hurt you, how it bothers you now, and that you want them to change—if not, oh well (p. 239).

But there also needs to be a sense of closure. If there isn't, the problems of abuse, unforgiveness, and forgiveness will continue indefinitely. Take this advice from John Wesley:

*Parents are almost as nearly connected with their children (as husbands and wives). You cannot part with them while they are young; it being your duty to "train them up," with all care, "in the way wherein they should go." How frequently you should converse with them when they are grown up is to be determined by Christian prudence. This also will determine how long it is expedient for children, if it be at their own choice, to remain with their parents. In general, **if they do not fear God**, you should leave them as soon as is convenient. But wherever you are, take care (if it be in your power) that they do not want the necessaries or conveniences of life. As for all other relations, even brothers or sisters, **if they are of the world** you are under no obligation, to be intimate with them: you may be civil and friendly at a distance.⁶*

⁶ John Wesley, "On Friendship with the World," 1.25.