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## THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

### CHAPTER 7: PARENTAL EXAMPLE

#### 1. What is the fourth I condition of successful training?

That the actual, everyday lives of parents should be formed after the pattern and in the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great model whom they wish their children to imitate, and how can they with any hope of success press their children to walk as he walked, and make their whole lives on the model of His, unless they do the same?

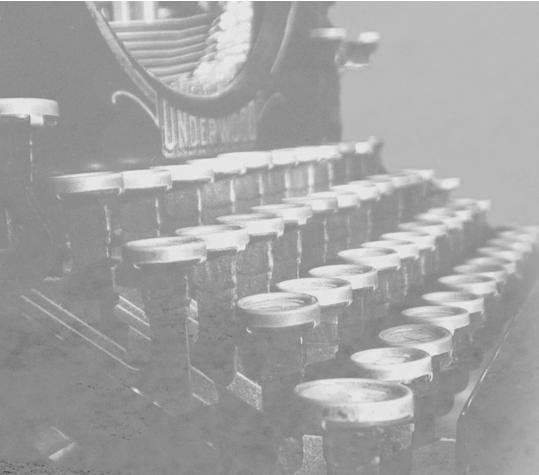
For a parent to set a good example before his children, therefore, involves—

(1.) Consistency. Everything must be in keeping with the profession made, the whole force of the example depending upon its being truthful. If the children once get the idea into their little heads that the religiousness of their parents is a cloak or a pretence only, no good impression will be possible on their hearts until that idea is removed.

If they see one spirit at the breakfast table, and another at family prayers; one spirit in everyday affairs, and another in the Barracks or the Church; if the religious exercises are not the natural outcome of what is in the parents' hearts, they will put the whole affair down, with their quick and merciless instincts, as a mere performance, and the example will, of course, lose all its weight. But if, on the other hand, they are made to feel—however imperfect the prayers and other religious utterances may be—that the ruling purpose of the soul of father and mother is to please God, keep His commandments, and shape their daily life according to the good pleasure of His will, such example cannot but have the most blessed effect upon the children.

(2.) To be the most effective, the example set before the children should be that of the whole family. Father, mother, and servants (if servants are kept), and everybody about, should all speak, act, and move under the influence of one spirit.

If the whole working, and eating, and dressing of everybody in the house are shaped and fashioned by this one spirit, and that is the spirit of love to God and man, the



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influence of such an example will be almost overwhelming. Seeing one member of a house doing one thing, another doing another, is distracting to children. They say, "Who is right? Mother says this, father says that, and the elder brother is doing something different still. Who is right? How can I tell?"

Children under such unfortunate circumstances are like rudderless boats floating where various currents meet – one hour driven in one direction, and another hour driven in another; now making towards the green shore, and now drifting out away towards the trackless ocean.

So these little ones one moment think there is a God whom they ought to love and serve with all their hearts, kneeling down and saying so by their mother's knee. Then at the breakfast table the next morning, when they see their father in a violent passion, taking the very name of the mother's God in vain, their heavenly emotions all change, and the good resolutions formed are all forgotten. And then when the big brother, as he departs to his daily business, laughs at the mother's wish that he would come to the religious meeting at night, the poor little souls vaguely follow out, not knowing what they do, in the direction of the bleak surging seas of infidelity.

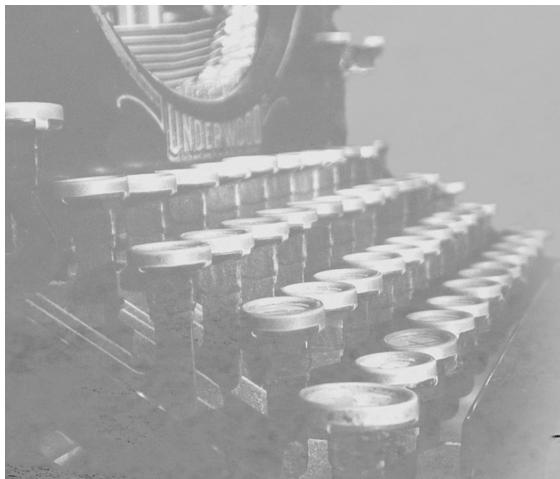
2. In view of what has been said about the evil of parents professing religion without the power of it, is it not better to have no form at all than to have forms without corresponding power?

This is a question difficult to answer, and I hardly feel called to attempt it, but I contend that if you are to train children to be good and godly, and to meet you at last at the right hand of the Throne, you must not only have the form, but the spirit in the form. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." – 2 Cor. 3:6.

3. Wherein does the importance of this example consist?

A holy parental example is of inestimable value, because—

(1.) Example explains more directly and clearly to the child what religion is, than any other method that can be employed. Men and women learn more from what they see



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than by what is taught them. Example with them is more instructive than precept. This is infinitely more so with children. It requires a cultivated intellect to be able to form a correct judgment of things from mere verbal instruction.

Who amongst us, if we had never seen a locomotive engine, would have as good an idea of what it was by reading a volume or hearing a course of lectures, as we should have by seeing it at work, especially if the exhibition were accompanied by a spoken explanation on the spot?

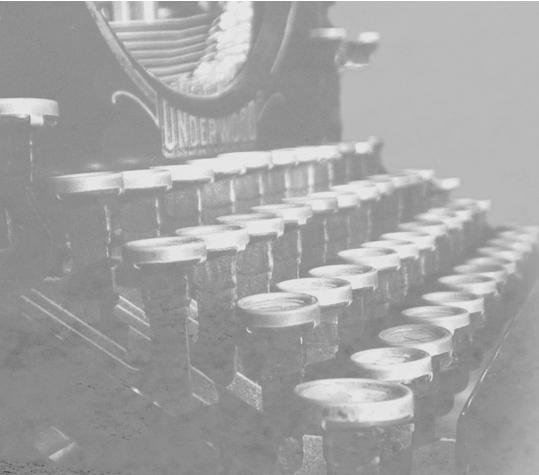
Just so, father and mother, if you want your children to understand what practical godliness is, let them see it exemplified and illustrated in your own life and in your own home.

I do not object to your lecturing the children. I am going to show you how to do it, further on. I do say, however, that no amount of talking, reading, or sermon-hearing, will make them understand the nature and value of religion as clearly as they will if you yourselves are living epistles, descriptive of the same. Nay, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for them to comprehend it in any other way. Did you ever stop to consider what those words of Paul's, "living epistles," signified? They meant that he, the Apostle, expected the lives of the saints to whom he wrote to be as a written communication, expressing the wishes and feelings of God towards men about their lives and work and warfare.

Your children are young, and perhaps cannot read their Bibles at present; but now, and as they grow older and all the way up to manhood, they ought to be able to read the will of God expressed in your life. So be sure you write it plainly, and in large letters. You will always be in sight, and they can read you by night and by day all the year round. Be sure, therefore, that your example truly explains to them what the nature of true religion is.

(2.) A good example is of untold value, because it impresses the minds of children with the importance and necessity of a life of godliness.

The great infidelity of the present age, and perhaps of all past ages, is not so much, it



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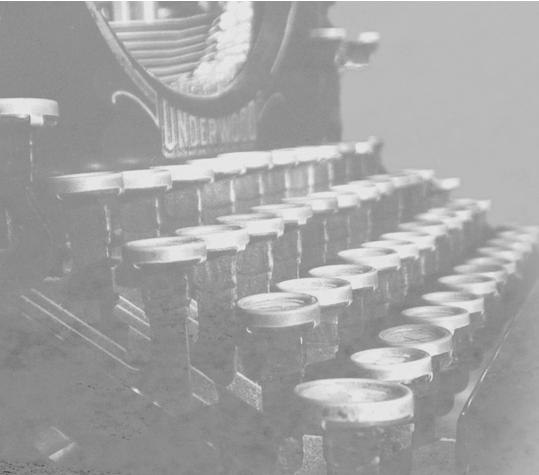
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seems to us, scepticism with regard to the existence of God, as it is UNBELIEF IN THE EXISTENCE OF GODLY PEOPLE. But if children see before their eyes their own parents acting from godly motives and godly principles, supported by Divine power, experiencing Divine consolations, revelations, and joys, such unbelief to such children is at once and for ever made impossible. When tempted by books, atheists, and devils in after days to doubt and question the reality of supernatural and Divine things, the sainted form of such a departed parent will rise before them, and the exclamation will unconsciously rise to their lips, " The example of my glorified father, or sainted mother, utterly forbids."

We solemnly believe in the impossibility of anyone who has ever been closely brought into association with a truly godly man or woman ever being at heart an infidel. How much more impossible will this infidelity be if the example has been that of a father or a mother!

What shall we say of the reverse of this? How shall we describe the disastrous effects flowing from the example of parents whose daily lives contradict all that God affirms or good men believe about truth and holiness, Heaven and Hell? Such examples stand like an impassable wall between the little ones and Salvation, a wall not only too high for them to climb, but difficult for anyone else to drag them over. The example of a holy father or mother makes it easy for the children to be saved and almost impossible for them to be damned, while a worldly, godless parent smooths the pathway down to perdition, and makes the road to Heaven all but inaccessible. We relate sometimes a parable which illustrates our meaning here:

It is well known that crabs and small shellfish of the same class walk after what the children would call a " sideways " fashion. Once upon a time this, it is said, greatly disgusted the fishes, and after due consideration they resolved to teach these mistaken fellow-inhabitants of the great deep the proper mode of locomotion, namely, to go forward. Accordingly they started a Sunday school and collected all the little crabs of the neighbourhood to receive instruction. At the close of the first day it is reported that the teachers were delighted at the progress made, and dismissed their scholars after obtaining the promise that they would come again on the following Sunday. Accordingly when the day came they were all in their places, but, to the great



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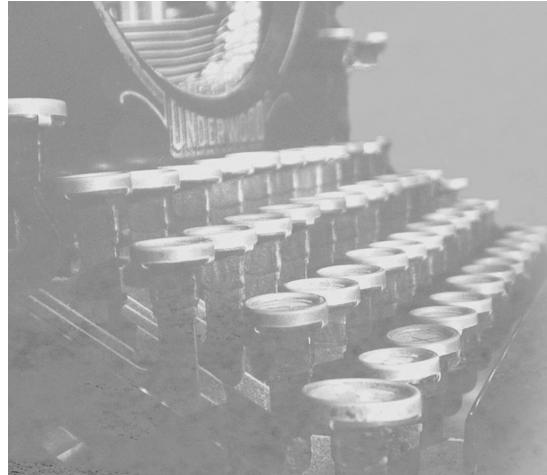
surprise of the fishes, their pupils were all going "sideways," as before. However, not disheartened, they set to work with a will to do the business over again, and by the end of the day not only was the error rectified, but the teachers were filled with the hope that their scholars were established in the habit of "going forward," and so they dismissed them a second time. Sunday came round again, and the crabs were once more in their places, but, to the utter dismay and disappointment of the benevolently-disposed fishes, the crabs were all going "sideways" as badly as ever. There was a complete return to their former bad habits. A teachers' meeting was immediately called to consider what was best to be done, and to enquire into cause of this backsliding. The problem was soon solved the and the reason of their failure readily explained by an elderly fish, who made a short speech to this effect:

"You see, my brothers and sisters, that we have these crabs under our control for one day only, whereas they return and watch their fathers and mothers the other six days, and the influence of their example in the wrong direction in the six days more than destroys any good we may be able to effect in the right direction in only one."

Even so, Teachers, or Ministers, Captains of Little Soldiers, or anyone else who may wish well to the children and desire to mold and shape them for goodness and Heaven, often have a very poor chance, however prayerful and persevering they may be. What lasting good can they do if there is set over against their toils and tears the overwhelming and almost almighty influence proceeding from the inconsistent or openly ungodly example of the parents themselves, exhibited before the gaze of their children every day of their lives?

"Do as I say, but not as I do," was the poor piece of counsel some minister once gave to his flock, a member of which had been complaining that his life did not square with what he taught from the pulpit. It was a very useless piece of advice for a minister to give to his people, but it would be still more useless and less likely to be followed if given by a parent to his children, for, far more than grown-up people, they work to pattern and write from copy.

A good and holy example lives forever in the memory of the child. How is it possible that the beloved face and form, the sayings, and doings, and plans, and purposes of



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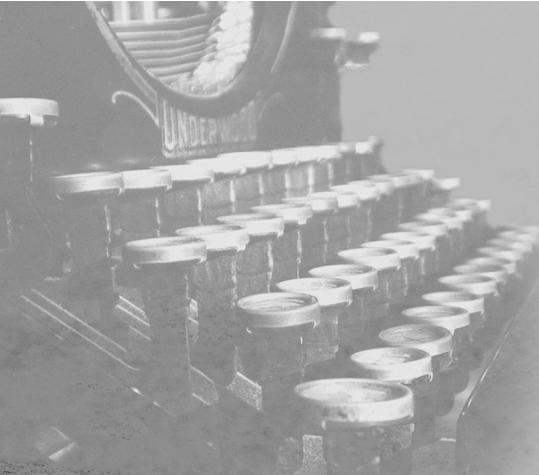
father or mother should ever be forgotten? True, in the first rush and whirl of man and womanhood life, there may be some sort of waning of interest in the home of childhood and the memory of those who filled the largest measure of space in it. New scenes and associations and employments for a time create new interests, which occupy and absorb the attention. But as the journey of life goes forward, memory reasserts itself, and the influence of the holy example of good and godly parents is felt again with perhaps greater power than ever, giving additional meaning and force and feeling to the operations of the Divine Spirit, and in a majority of cases having a particularly powerful influence in the great work of personal Salvation.

We have heard hundreds of people, from youth to hoary age, when publicly narrating the means by which they were led to the Saviour, connect their conversion with the recollections of a sainted mother or father. Consequently it seems to us that no means or agencies employed by God are of equal force, or can be calculated upon with such certainty for accomplishing the Salvation of the children as the example of godly parents. Father, mother, mind how you live!

4. Can you account for the enormous influence for good or evil which the example of parents has over children?

You see, parents are everything to their children. The father and mother of a little child are like God and king, and Lords and Commons, and schoolmaster and mistress, and companion, and lover, and friend all in one. Parents are all the universe to children – for the first part of their lives at least. In their estimation parents are actually infallible, and a long way on for being almighty. Only think of this! What a reverential looking up! What an admiration! What a feeling there is that the parents must be right whoever says they are wrong! And what a preparedness all this creates in the children to follow in their track! The children begin life by loving their parents with all their hearts, admiring them with all their powers, and consequently, imitating them all their time.

5. Does this love and reverence and admiration for parents continue as the children grow in years?



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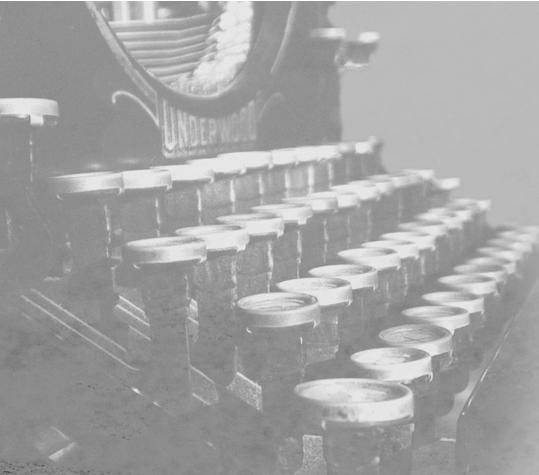
Yes, we believe it does. When parents continue to deserve it, we are sure it does; that is, the measure of it which is suitable to the altered intelligence of the children and their power to think and act for themselves. In those instances where children wake up to find that their parents have not deserved their generous love or their unquestioning admiration, there will no doubt be a revulsion of feeling somewhat in proportion to the attraction felt before. Especially will this be the case where children make the melancholy discovery that the religious professions and zeal and formalities of their parents have been nothing more than a hollow sham. In such painful circumstances there is in deed and of a truth a danger that instead of the parental example being ever afterwards a force to draw the children God-wards, it will become a repellent power, driving them off in the opposite direction – to the world, to atheism, to Hell! But on the contrary, if a holy, self-denying life is lived before the children, when the years of reason are reached, the children will become acquainted not only with the outer life but with the inner motives of their parents. They will then discover that they are really as true and good and disinterested as they seemed to be in their childhood's eyes, and they will find, moreover, that to the instinctive affection and childish reverence of their early days there is now to be added the obligation under which they are laid by the sacrifice, and watchings, and labours, undergone in their behalf. And so this influence, strengthened by this sense of indebtedness, will become a still greater power to mould and fashion the character of the children's maturer years.

6. Should not the sight of their children daily stir every parent's heart to see to it that theirs is a thoroughly God-like example?

Certainly; and woe to the father or mother who, after reading this, shall be content to live a half-hearted, inconsistent life before the keen eyes of their little ones!

7. If a holy example, then, exerts so great an influence over the hearts of children, why is it that so many who have had this great advantage are not saved in childhood?

It is simply because that training is not given which is quite as intimately connected with Salvation as a holy example. You might as well row a boat with one oar and expect it to go straight forward, as look for a full blessing on your children in the



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separation of good example from right training. Or again, though the example be excellent, if the training is the reverse, it is like rowing forward with one hand and backward with the other. Or, to take a Scripture illustration, it is like the man of whom the prophet speaks, who "earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." (Hag. i. 6.) What is gained on one side is lost on the other. There can be no question that the training given by many parents who are themselves good and sincere is, through ignorance or mistaken notions very imperfect. Such parents may long with unutterable desire for the conversion of their children, and in many instances would no doubt be willing to lay down their lives to gain this end. But the training they give is calculated to have just the opposite effect, positively tending to keep the children away from Salvation rather than lead them into it, long years of discipline being often required to undo all its ill effects, even when the children are saved through some other agencies.

8. Is it not a great calamity when parents are divided in example, purpose, and effort, with regard to the training of their children?

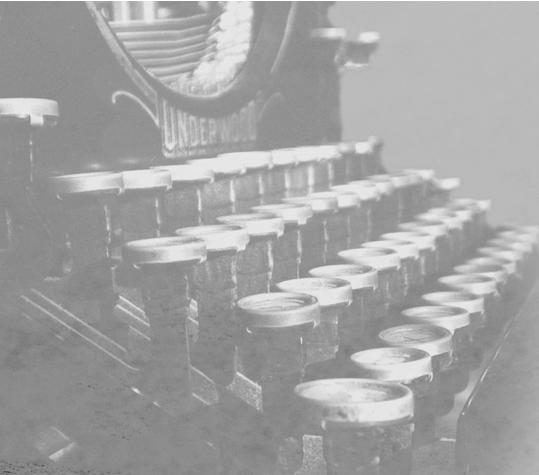
Yes; it is a great calamity indeed – too great to be described in words; for when one parent is not in the enjoyment of a full salvation, and is walking inconsistently before the children, the influence of that one must of necessity tend to destroy that of the other.

9. What is best to be done in the painful event of one parent being saved and fully given up to God, and the other not?

(1.) The saved parent should impress on his or her own heart the responsibility of making their children good, and attempt the task, no matter what it may cost. If it be the mother who is converted she has an enormous advantage, the children, especially when young in life, being almost exclusively in her hands; and she must use this advantage to the uttermost.

(2.) The saved parent must 'pray earnestly for and with the children, and must speak to them in the name of God, making them understand that lie or she is on the side of Jehovah. This will greatly increase the authority of the parent with the children.

(3.) Every means must be taken in public that seems likely to help forward the



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Salvation of the children, such as taking them to Salvation services as frequently as possible.

(4.) The saved parent must set aside the wishes and authority of the other, if absolutely necessary in the interests of the everlasting welfare of the children. A bold stand for God and goodness will often overawe the unconverted partner, and so make the attainment of the end in view possible.

(5.) The saved parent should get the children as early as possible openly pledged to the service of God. If the conversion of only one can be secured, the saved parent will obtain a very effective ally, and may then go forward with more confidence, determination, and enthusiasm to the rescue of the remainder.

(6.) Under these most trying circumstances, the saved parent should encourage himself with all holy confidence in the fact that the Lord Jesus is on his side, co-working with him, and sure, sooner or later, to fulfill His promises, and to do "exceedingly abundantly above all" that such a parent can ask or think.

(7.) There should be the constant maintenance of a meek, patient spirit before the unsaved partner. It should be made plain, so far as possible, that the Salvationist is not actuated by any selfish feelings in thus acting contrary to the wishes and feelings of the other parent. Every consideration consistent with the duty owed to God and the children should be shown to the wishes and feelings of the opposing parent. The cherishing of this spirit will go far towards winning over the unconverted husband or wife.