

PARENTING: A PRIORITY

Ivan M. Nolt

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God is foremost to be praised, for by Him the tools were supplied, namely His Word, with the Holy Spirit furnishing an effectual handle for parenting.

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INTRODUCTION

As the years accumulated there was observance of the office of parenting, threatened with damaging influences. To strengthen and maintain this sacred calling some improvement methods need to be studied. Mechanically, when things do not function properly instructions from the manufacturer's handbook are applied. In the mechanical and technical world there is power awareness in various categories. The presence or absence of power greatly affects our travel, housekeeping, occupation, and other areas of life. In the twentieth century new powers surfaced, to which many of us have connections. It is also desirable to acquire connections with the power source for correcting malfunction in the parenting vocation.

The Biblical source is that it seemed good to St. Luke, "...having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write...that thou mightest know the certainty of those things..." (Luke 1:3, 4) Parenting: A Priority is based on words spoken by the angel, Gabriel, who appeared to Zach-

arias, the father of John the Baptist, when his upcoming birth was announced. Gabriel said that John the Baptist "...shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, ... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17) Luke records events to supplement the other three Gospels. The meditations of many on his declaration would create "perfect understanding" for effectual parenting.

Considering that the angel Gabriel was the first messenger from God in the New Testament, child training seems very important. This was a special assignment to Zacharias, for bringing up his son according to the specific prophecy of the angel, Gabriel. Should we not count it a special priority to "bring them (our sons and daughters) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," today? (Eph. 6:4b) The goal is a special message for parents, especially fathers, who are visualized as forerunners of Jesus Christ in families, even "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17)

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Priority Awareness and Urgency

The great assignment for fathers is recorded "from the very first" (Luke 1:3b) in the New Testament. Even an angel spoke, which brings this on the priority list. Angelic interest in this God ordained office of parenting is a beautiful thing. This should stir up the Christian's interest to look into the same. The angel, Gabriel, first messenger of the New Testament, proclaimed to Zacharias the future birth and life of John the Baptist. "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God, and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:16-17) Actually preparation for bringing up children to sainthood is a very first on the list in the New Testament.

Furthermore, bringing up children is the closing prophetic thought of the Old Testament. Meditate on this link between the Old and the New Testament. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (Mal. 4:5-6) Notice the words "turn" and "power" in the two quotations of scripture. Skillfully, Luke picked up words of Gabriel, identifying with those of the prophecy of Malachi, and made them part of his Gospel. Thanks to God for the harmony between the two on the subject of the "power" to "turn" hearts to each other.

There is clearly a vast difference between the last phrase of the prophecy of Malachi and the last

quoted phrase of Gabriel the Angel. Malachi promises, if that “turn” of heart does not develop, between both generations, being smitten of a curse results. Gabriel speaks positive promises about parenting, having fathers hearts and the disobedient “turn...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Just a few years later, Jesus teaches of a contrasting situation which is a curse fitting Malachi’s description, rather than Gabriel’s. “And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against the parents, and cause them to be put to death.” (Matt. 10:21) May God’s mercy spare us this experience and rather fulfill what Gabriel prophesied, which is making “ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Not many years later, toward the close of holy writ, Paul and other Apostles describe the perilous situation that came upon us end time earth dwellers. Saints must give diligence attention to these undesirable curse related warnings, both by Malachi and Jesus, with the Apostle’s prophecies included.

Last days - Perilous Times:

According to Scripture, Apostle Paul had known that these last days shall be accompanied with perilous times. We find Apostle Paul’s prophecies of almost two thousand years to be in its fulfilling. We behold domestic and street violence in current news articles. This is not only the world’s problem, but this unfavorable situation has lifted its disturbing presence with us. What causes unrighteousness to prevail today is the righteous being quiet. As watchmen, observe some of the words of Paul, which somewhat describe the present situation. “For men shall be lovers of their own selves,... disobedient to parents,...lovers of pleasures more then lovers of God; having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof; from such turn away.” (II Tim. 3:2,5) Again the words “turn” and “power” are in this quotation. During these last days, where is the “power” for parental influence to “turn” the hearts of both generations to each other? Priority awareness and urgency motivates sincere Christians who embrace holiness to find solutions to prevent behavior that corrupts and destroys our Godly relationships. Hopefully all join to escape the unfavorable curse spoken by the prophet and pursue the more favorable command by the angel “to make ready a people.” Youth delinquencies in our church threaten our spiritual health and spiritual health is a treasure worth strengthening.

The Good and Wise Beginning:

Words of wisdom out of the Bible is the formula for the good and wise beginning. Take hold of the promises of God that produce quality outcome in child raising. Parenting is a faith venture, a trust

in God, a leaning on His word for direction. Why not take the example of John, the fore-runner, whom Jesus said is the greatest? (Luke 1:15) “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Matt. 11:11) Gabriel said of John, “for he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.” (Luke 1:16) Zacharias and Elisabeth were stricken in years. “And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” (Luke 1:6) During Mary’s visit at the house of Zacharias, “Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Luke 1:41c) John was born, “and his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied, ...” concerning the coming blessings of the Lord through John. (Luke 1:67) In this three member family all are filled with the Holy Ghost, something desired for all Christian families in the twentieth century. With such a dimension of the Spirit, parents and children are well equipped for their “turn of hearts” assignment from the Lord.

The Lord has honored parents with a sacred trust to raise these creatures after the likeness and image of Himself. The challenge is faithfulness to do it right from the beginning. In the beginning after creating Adam and Eve, “God blessed them, and God said unto them, ‘Be ye fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion’...” (Gen. 1:28) Support for having children is found in both Old and New Testaments. “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord.” (Psa. 127:3) Blessing little children was part of Jesus’ ministry. (Matt. 19:13)

The Making of a Parent:

The first opportunity for child training is in the parents’ hands. Parents influence their children first, which is a great advantage. A disadvantage is that a child is born an offspring of Adam, having that nature, fallen images and likenesses. The Adamic situation is “that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” (John 3:6a) Our own initial experience in the flesh proved that we were likewise. “For we ourselves also were sometimes, foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts, and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” (Tit. 3:3-6) Being saved from sin by such means as this is an essential in the making of a parent.

Proverbs 22:15 states; “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it from him.” We had earthly fathers which corrected us. Therefore, giving them reverence

saved us from many pitfalls. The Lord exercises correction to discipline both generations. Is it not acceptable with parents to have it from God, even from the loving “Father of spirits?” Yes, especially since it is “for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” (Heb. 12:5-11) Children receive correction from loving parents, who have grace to chasten in quality likened to that of the Lord. Here begins the influence for making of a new saint, by parents “of a full age” who are gifted with exercising discernment between “both good and evil.” (Heb. 5:14)

Consider the example of Zacharias, in his discourse with the angel, Gabriel. Zacharias doubted the angel’s announcement, which resulted in him being “dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed,”...(Luke 1:20a) Therefore his speech was taken away until the birth of John. By this lesson of correction from God, there was certainty that His “words...shall be fulfilled in their season.” (Luke 1:20b)

This act of God made a father out of a blameless full age saint. Zacharias made certain there is fulfilling of the angelic revelation concerning his son. Remember that John the Baptist was to “be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.” Speechlessness ended and prophesying accompanied “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” For good fathering to take place, preparation for the task is needful with us, as it was with Zacharias.

Any parent benefits from some manner of chastening, reflecting stronger faith. Divine correction erases doubt and causes greater zeal for commitment to His assignments. The purpose of the Lord is accomplished to His pleasure, resulting in the “peaceable fruit of righteousness.” Jesus said, “my Father is the husbandman...every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” (John 15:1b, 2b) Fathers and prospective fathers, have specific scriptural goals for the quality of sainthood you desire your children to become.

One qualification for fathers is to be saved from sins and yielded under His workmanship as written in Rev. 1:5b-6a. “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.” Kings are anointed and crowned to reign, “ruling their children and their own houses well.” (I Tim. 3:12b) Priesthood is essential in families for spouses to sanctify one another, for developing children who flourish in an environment of holiness, “else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.” (I Cor. 7:14c) The making of a saint is a process “by the spirit and power of Elijah the Prophet,” through sanctified husbands and wives. Qualities of the virtuous woman fulfill the helpmeet and mother role. “Who can find a virtuous woman?...The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life...Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land...Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.” (Prov. 31:10a, 11-12, 23, 28) Let every husband “...in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.” (Eph. 5:33) Husbands and wives, be righteous before God, walk with Him blameless, creating an environment as did Zacharias and Elisabeth.

Set Thine House in Order:

The Bible refers to families as a man and his house. The Philippian jailer inquired, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (Acts. 16:30-31) Applying such promises to fathers’ hearts today creates a foundation for saving their houses. All parents have a house to save and guide, being priests of little congregations. God commanded Noah, “Come thou and all thy house into the ark.” (Gen. 7:1) Man of God today, have your family involved in the covenant of God, in building an ark for yourselves, and be saved, while the world perishes. Observe Abraham before he had a child. God promised “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3b) “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.” (Gen. 18:18b-19a) What is done today in child training will be a blessing or a curse for our children and those in the generations following.

Prospective fathers, be known of God. Have Him see the potential in you for good fatherhood. Both in today’s families and those in the scriptures, we can observe the raising of children under the influence of “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Josh. 24:15) God commanded Israel through Moses, “And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.” (Deut. 11:19-21) Israel was to teach the glory of their history to their offspring, day and night. What assurance of the beauty which was likened “as the days of heaven upon the earth.” These and other Scriptures about houses with children should be meditations for obtaining desired goals. Parent of today, does the Lord know you for the parenting qualities that are to happen in your house?

House Rules and Standards:

Christ is the Head of this home. The unseen guest at every meal. The silent listener to every conversation.

Establishing a home setting on Jesus Christ, the foundation is a priority. In Colossians 3:16 exhortations are to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Christian nurture and admonition is needful for the making of a new saint. Right from wrong shall be taught early so awareness develops at the start of the child’s growth. House rules and standards need to be set up, including the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. As a child grows in intelligence, submissiveness to the house rules is a life style. There will be times when parents need to exercise the detective aptitude to track down falsehood. Correcting misbehavior in the bud is profitable for both the development of child and parents. The children should grow up to understand that they are members of this particular house and shall be subject to its rules. There should be no giving in to other families which have laxity. Having children left to themselves brings mothers to shame. (Prov. 29:15) Having sitters should be a rarity, giving exceptions to emergencies only. Children should be attended by at least one parent as much of the time as possible, until the age of seventeen. Thereafter, use discernment on the basis of behavior inclinations. Beginning courtship should not be permitted at an earlier age to afford a stage of maturity for making wise choices. There should be an understanding of what chastity means and how to live it.

1. To avoid juvenile sprees disallow unchaperoned slumber parties, including mountain cabins. Allow no card playing.
2. Enforce curfew time for junior driver’s license and acknowledge local civil ordinances on this. Impart to youth to obey traffic rules for safety and conscience sake. Moral and spiritual safety is equal in importance as physical safety.

Honesty should be a virtue implanted in the child’s personality, avoiding cheating and lying. Openness of the whereabouts and activities of the children to parents is ideal. Children’s activities should be a conversation piece between them and parents, in activated “turn” of hearts to each other. If started early, such precious settings are still effective when the child is grown.

Personal Glimpses

While our children were growing up we did not want them engaged in Haas-Pinochle type card playing. One weekend evening two dating couples were visiting together in our home. At the suggestion of the visitors, card playing was the choice for entertainment. The conscience of our daugh-

ter, as the hostess, inquired for approval from her parents. In asking her mother's counsel, the answer was, "We allowed no card playing before, neither will we now." An activity was chosen that eliminated the moral risks of taking the deck of cards in their hands. The meaning of each card being what it is, requires steering clear of this game by all. That the labels of each card is of Satanic origin is the knowledge of the informed. Worldliness is attached to this game. Specifically such evils as gambling, drinking, immorality, family conflict and leadership embarrassment are on this list. Unfavorable results from this game has involved church ministry intervention.

One wintry Sunday noon our daughter's girlfriend appeared at our door requesting her company in ice skating that afternoon. There was inquiry of parental discernment. The conclusion was, "No skating today. The ice isn't thick enough." This answer was founded on the short duration of the freezing period which created the exposure to the risk of unsafe social activity. Clashing with our decision was the earlier approval from the friend's mother. Negotiations between both mothers resulted in no skating. Questionable approval, with second thought, gave occasion for the friend's mother to change her position on the safety risk. United effort of all parents minimizes, or even eliminates, the unfavorable situation in both youth and parent performance.

Christ and Church First:

Church centeredness has high priority in a well ruled house. Christ and the Church are a conversation piece, "when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up." Possess the crown of parental masteries for training, teaching and testimony. There should be a home library or other means to supply good reading material. Any child is blessed in a home where there is involvement in relief work. Have spiritual mindedness in action which demonstrates love in the Spirit of Christ.

Children should observe parental interest in missions. The church ministry should be esteemed "very highly in love for their work's sake." (I Thes. 5:13) There should be awareness that church administration is of God. Ministry and missions personnel should be occasional guests that children meet in the home, if not there, at church or elsewhere. To avoid sowing discord, give no room for discussing the preacher's or the teacher's faults in the children's presence. The scripture states that through preaching people become saved. (I Cor. 1:21) By Peter's preaching, Cornelius and all his house were saved. Parents should have houses where the evangelistic influence is promoted, allowing utterance of "words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." (Acts 11:14)

As priests, parents have a head start to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of

the Lord. Other influences will confront them as they grow up. Leave on them your good impression in a living example by obedience to the church rules. 3 “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Pro. 22:6) The child’s first influence prevails by maintaining a home environment where holiness exists. (I Cor. 7:14)

A People Made Ready:

In a child’s salvation experience the parents’ part is limited, even with the best endeavors. The time finally appears when “the Lord will take me (him) up” (Psa. 27:10) for further raising and developing. “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ,... And hath raised us up

together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:5-6) When an accountable child comes into such “places” the need of parental correction is minimized. Much progress has been made in the making of a saint. Wonderful if a child acknowledges the atonement of the blood of Christ in his soul while still at home with parents. Children with the new birth experience can bring times of refreshing to spiritually cooled ones in the family and church. Dormant gifts can be stirred up and ministered “one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (I Pet. 4:10)

Nowadays, may many such favorable situations be, “as the days of heaven upon the earth.” Consider “the house of Philip the evangelist...And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.” (Acts. 21:8b-9) We can make comparisons of scriptural accounts and covet such situations. Have our children learn as Timothy did in childhood. “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (II Tim. 3:15)

Up to this point the object of emphasis was on the father’s role. During Timothy’s childhood the influential element came from his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. The daughters of Philip must have had a favorable influence from their father.

The Apostle John’s epistle is beautifully addressed to various people. Observe the absence of the generation gap. “I write unto you, little children, (babes in Christ) because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, (mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers) because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, (sons and daughters, some are fathers and mothers) because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye

have overcome the wicked one.” (I John 2:13b, 14) John’s written message speaks to us today “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Comparison Conclusions:

Earlier, reference was made to Apostle Paul’s writing, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be...covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers,...unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded,... Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” (II Tim. 3:1-4a,5) Jesus continues with a similar situation as referred to earlier. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” (Matt. 10:34-36) In both the New and the Old Covenants, inclinations are and were to stray from the perfect will of God and not consent to His commandments.

From these two contrasts presented, let us choose that spoken by the angel, Gabriel, “from the very first” of the New Testament ministration. Thank God for those who have activated, “the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.” Apply the formula laid out in the scriptures, resulting in an environment “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Our goal is set for the favorable, even in these “perilous times,” and escape from being smitten with a curse, spoken of by the prophet Malachi.

1 “The Moral Purity Imperative,” page 80, Aaron M. Shank, Rod and Staff Publishers, Inc.

2 “The Hazards of Card Playing,” Paul Hoover, Home Messenger, December, 1990, “Share Your Thoughts”

3 “The Moral Purity Imperative,” page 108, Aaron M. Shank, Rod and Staff Publishers, Inc