

Rearing God's Covenant Children By Gerald W. Tritle

Many years ago, men routinely discoursed about theology, financial decisions, and, quite interestingly, child rearing. Today, however, men have radically changed that about which they discourse. Conversational topics among men usually center around news, weather, and sports. The zeal for discussing the rearing of covenant children is all but non-existent. This change in discourse is regretful, since the rearing of covenant children, a formerly frequently discussed topic, is a means of accomplishing God's cultural mandate as presented in Genesis 1:28—a mandate for a man to be fruitful, to multiply himself, to replenish the earth, to subjugate it, and to rule it. Christian men, as covenantal heads of household, bear the responsibility to train their covenant children to fulfill this continually-binding cultural mandate in the name of Jesus Christ.

To attain the goal of helping Christian parents fulfill their cultural mandate, this paper suggests what one ought to think about with respect to rearing covenant children. This paper also outlines how one ought to rear covenant children. In addition, it suggests some important instruction to those parents who want to recover lost ground as a result of not rearing their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Finally, this paper imparts some important and profitable parental attitudes which encourage one to persevere in the rearing of covenant children in order to obtain the promise of a godly seed.

I. What One Ought to Think Regarding the Rearing of Covenant Children

Rearing covenant children does not have as its end the production of moral, well-behaved children who operate in an educated manner within society. To the contrary, Christian parents must see as their goal the production of heirs of the covenant of grace, who are children—children of God—who glorify Him, enjoy Him, fear Him, and keep His commandments by virtue of their union with Christ Jesus. Robert Lewis Dabney said that child-rearing is the parent's opportunity to impart their creed to their children. Parents, as saints of God, should desire their children to be just like them. Their child-rearing activities should be honed toward that end. Dabney added that given this opportunity, parents will be held accountable for this work. To frame their biblical view of child-rearing, godly parents should understand these following biblical concepts:

1. The cultural mandate. Genesis 1:28 is still binding upon mankind, and, only in Christ, can man fulfill this mandate to the glory of God. Being fruitful and ruling in the earth is still the intended goal of the Christian man—he who by virtue of the new birth in Christ is a new creature. Therefore, covenant children must be trained to think about this mandate and to pursue its accomplishment by God's grace.

2. The marriage covenant: To fulfill this cultural mandate, parents must truly understand and impart a second concept, that is, marriage. From a boy's earliest days he must understand that he will one day take to himself a wife who is appropriate for him. Conversely, daughters must understand and should nurture a desire to be taken by a godly

husband. Parents should teach their children that marriage is good and honorable and that large families are desirable—a manifestation of the blessing of the Lord.

3. The covenant household: The covenant household is a primary means of fulfilling the cultural mandate. God speaks in Mal. 2:15 that God gives a husband and wife a godly offspring for the perpetuation of the covenant community. Parents must understand that to bear children, and as many as God would give, whether through natural birth or through adoption, is a great goal for the covenant household. The covenant household—consisting of a godly father, a godly wife, and godly and submissive children—is to embrace the promises of Is. 59:21 and Acts 2:39: that is, that God’s Spirit, who is upon the believing parent/s, will also be upon the children.

The father—as the head and prophet, priest, and king of his household (1 Cor. 11:3)—is responsible for the rearing of covenant children. God reveals himself to men, to fathers, that they may make His ways known to their children. God did this in the case of Abraham as recorded in Gen 18:19: “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice...” Al Martin has rightly noted that the father is the prophet, priest, and king of his covenant household. As a prophet, the father teaches the will, or word, of God to his children as Moses commanded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9: “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me...therefore be careful to observe them...Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.” As a priest, the father bears with and is sympathetic toward his children. He intercedes for his children in all things as did Job (Job 1:1). As king of his home, the father administers the rule of God in his home. Children should not rule the home. It is the father that sets the direction of the home under the Lordship of Christ. God’s Word is the standard of the father’s rule. This is a challenging task; however, by God’s grace and by obedience to His Word, fathers can succeed at accomplishing this task. Gary North has well said that a man learns the limits of that which is possible when he rules over a family. With God all things are possible. As the prophet, priest, and king of his covenant home, the father must recognize that by his plans, rulership, and actions he is establishing the course of his household for successive generations. Dr. David Gamble has quoted many authors regarding child-rearing in His book, Dr. Dad. One of the many quotes that I’ve used from his book comes from J. W. Alexander, who has said: “No man who is worthy of the name of a father, can be unconcerned in regard to the destiny of his children, or even his remote descendants.”

A father must also remember that his daily work is not done when his vocational work is complete. After his daily work, he must come home to disciple his household, and that with godly fear and patience. The Book of Ecclesiastes teaches that to enjoy his work, his wife, and his children is a father’s portion of grace under the sun.

A wife and Mother must help her covenant husband rear their covenant children. God’s covenant children, who belong to both parents, diligently and conscientiously and

unconsciously watch the lifestyle example of their mother. Mothers, today, need to establish themselves as determined child-bearing, home-making wives regardless of the small esteem the world places on these tremendous duties and opportunities.

Parent's example of godliness as displayed before their children greatly determines the success or failure of their training. Parents, particularly the father, are responsible. If you don't know how to train your children, then humbly learn from those who are training them successfully. Don't wing it. Your children's and grandchildren's salvation and their ability to glorify God in their lives is at stake. Read the Bible and do what is written by God's grace. Ask child-rearing questions from priests, friends, pastors, elders or parents who are training their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. More than enough ink has been spent printing child-rearing materials by Richard Fugate, Douglas Wilson, Greg Harris, and others. Parents must read these materials and then do what is written. Both father and mother must labor together to rear covenant children. Single parents, however, have an added challenge of not having a spouse to assist them. In these situations, grandparents should be ready and willing to assist. In addition, the priests or pastors, elders and/or members of the local church should be available to single parent households to oversee the child-rearing work of the parent and to provide assistance as necessary.

4. God's thoughts regarding covenant children: The Bible teaches that covenant children are, indeed, God's Children. They are His seed, and His offspring. They are covenant children of His covenant sons and daughters created to perpetuate His seed in the earth and to proclaim the virtues of His Seed—Christ. God has revealed in His Word that covenant children are a gift, are a blessing, and are holy. In addition, He says that they must be trained.

Covenant children are a gift from God, and, as God in Psalm 127:3-5 declares: "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full (i.e., has many) of them. They shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate."

Covenant children are a blessing (Ps. 127:3) and were known among the church, indeed, to be the mark of divine favor. Thomas Manton said, "The chief part of a man's wealth and prosperity are his children; the choicest of outward blessing." But one may say, "I can't afford them." "These be they which make a rich man poor," said a visitor to the home of the Puritan Joseph Hall as he motioned toward Hall's many children. "Nay, my lord," replied the Puritan, "these be they which make a poor man rich." Many today would respond cynically when hearing the words that many children are a blessing. They would perhaps say, "Surely one could afford children in a less populated age and in an agrarian culture. We don't live on farms today, therefore we don't need lots of children." One should reply saying, "What folly." Again, Charles Spurgeon spoke, "Where society is rightly ordered children are regarded, not as an encumbrance, but as an inheritance; and they are received, not with regret, but as a reward. If we are over-crowded in England, and so seem embarrassed with too large an increase, we must remember that the Lord

does not order us to remain in this narrow island [referring to England], but would have us fill those boundless regions which wait for the ax and the plow. Yet even here, with all the straits of limited income, our best possessions are our own dear offspring, for whom we bless God everyday.” Joseph Caryl adds: “Hence note, ‘tis one of the greatest outward blessings to have a family full of dutiful children. To have many children is the next blessing to much grace. To have many children about us is better than to have much wealth about us.” Charles Spurgeon has said that “What wonders a good man can accomplish if he has affectionate children to second his desires, and lend themselves to his designs! To this end we must have our children in hand while they are yet children, or they are never likely to be so when they are grown up, and we must try to point them and straighten them, so as to make arrows of them in their youth, lest they should prove crooked and unserviceable in after life. Let the Lord favor us with loyal, obedient, affectionate offspring, and we shall find in them our best helpers. We shall see them shot forth into life to our comfort and delight; if we take care from the very beginning that they are directed to the right point.” What a delight it is to have many children if they are trained to fear God and to keep his commands.

Covenant children are holy, or set apart, because of the believing parent or parents as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:14. Covenant children, being the stewardship and property of covenant parents, are those parents’ greatest disciples, their greatest and most visible work, and, perhaps, their most long-lasting contribution to the Kingdom of God. J. W. Alexander has said, “No man knows what God has made him for...No man knows when the great act of his life takes place. No man knows when he is doing the greatest good...Sometimes it is a child, and whom would a Christian more joyfully influence than the son of his bosom? It is for him that we labor, pray, suffer, and live. How do we know but the chief purpose for which God has spared our lives is, that we may form an instrument for his work in our own family?...How insignificant was Jesse, or Obed, or Boaz, compared with David; or Zacharias and Zebedee, compared with the two Johns and James. A due sense of what God demands of our sons, and an insight into his method of planning and bestowing for a series of generations, would make us importunate for gifts of the Spirit in our character as educators, and gifts on those who sit as loving learners at our knees.” Al Martin says that parents must keep the vision before them that they are rearing husbands, wives, preachers, deacons, salt and light in society. Under God, parents must see that their children are trained to take their God-given roles in their houses fulfilling parental, marital, and social roles biblically. Parents cannot blame Providence for children who are subject to vice because they are not trained.

Covenant children must be trained. Prov. 22:6 says: “Train/initiate a young man (young man being defined as a man from the age of childhood to around thirty years of age) according to his way, moreover, when he shall become an older man, he will not turn away from it.” Gleason Archer says that Prov. 22:6 reveals that the manner of instruction given to a child should be governed by the child’s age, and his personal “bent.” His bent is his way. For example, many tried to insist that Isaac Newton be a farmer, but being a farmer was not his bent; being a scientist was. Archer adds that “What this...adds up to, then, is the general principle that when a godly parent gives proper attention to the training of his child for adult responsibility and for a well-ordered

life lived for God, then he may confidently expect that that child...will never be able to get away completely from his parental training and from the example of a God-fearing home....One can interpret it as an iron-clad guarantee..." Keil and Delitsch commented upon Prov. 22:6 by stating that the instruction of youth was to be conformed to the nature of the youth. In addition, this parental instruction ought to regulate itself according to the stage of the youth's life (e.g., infant, toddler, pre-teen, etc.), and his peculiarities (e.g., soft-spoken, verbal, aggressive, gifted with regard to intelligence, etc.). The instructional methods ought to be arranged according to the degree of development which the mental and bodily life at which the youth has arrived. Also, since the Word of God is the primary standard of life and practice, it must be the source from which a framework for the child's training must come. With that precept in mind, the child's training must be applied according to the personal bent (way) of the child (i.e., child's age, ability, and desire).

II. How One Ought to Rear Covenant Children.

Although certainly not exhaustive, this section presents an orderly set of parental child-rearing responsibilities. It focuses on the essential and biblical facts that covenant children should be baptized, cared for, instructed, corrected, and, when necessary, punished.

1. Parents should baptize their covenant children. Based upon the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision, the covenant child should be baptized, for they are likewise set apart as partakers of the covenant (1 Cor. 7:14). R. L. Dabney, in his Parental Responsibilities, said that "...the very foundation of all parental fidelity to children's souls is to be laid in the conscientious, solemn, and hearty adoption of the very duties and promises which God seals in the covenant of infant baptism. It is pleasing to think that many Christians who refuse the sacrament do, with happy inconsistency, embrace the duties and seek the blessing. But God gives all his people the truths and the promises, along with the edifying seal. Let us hold fast to both."

2. Parents should provide for the physical and comfort needs of their covenant children. Even pagans perform this duty. Paul says in 1 Ti. 5:8 that, if one does not provide for the needs of his own household, he is worse than an unbeliever. Paul also says in 2 Cor. 12:14 that parents are, indeed, to lay up for the children. If this is a hardship for a parent, then that parent should consider the options of obtaining additional education (to secure a more lucrative job), obtaining additional part-time work, or working overtime to accomplish this responsibility.

3. Parents must instruct, correct, and punish their covenant children to train them in the way that they should go.

Instruct your children to fear and to love God. Parents should teach their children that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and that wisdom demands that the child confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord. This fear of God is a good fear (Ps. 19) that both reveres God and seeks to avoid His judgment. In addition, parents must teach their

covenant children to love God with all of their hearts and to be completely dependent upon Him. This means that their children must be taught to keep God's commandments. Parents should read the Bible to their children daily and speak the Word of God at all times expounding upon it at least once per day. Parents should strongly consider teaching their children to read early for the purpose of their reading the Bible as early in their lives as possible—by age five at the latest, as did the Hebrews. All parental instruction must be submitted to the knowledge and scrutiny of God's Word, the Bible.

Instruct and exhort your children to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Dr. Greg Bahnsen has said that the covenant child should be evangelized as early as they can believe in Christ and understand that Jesus died for their sins. He adds that there are two mistakes that believing parents often make: 1) they presume that their children are regenerate; and, 2) they presume that their children are unregenerate. It is true that the Bible says that the wicked go astray from the womb, however, too many Christians erroneously believe that this Scripture passage teaches that all children unregenerate. Today's parents, as have the covenant people of old, should raise their children as sons and daughters who are consecrated to God. Bahnsen suggests that parents should presume that their children are owned by God. Raise them as covenant children! Parents can have the greatest confidence that their labor in the Lord of diligently teaching and living as an example of godliness before their children is not in vain. Bahnsen compassionately notes that parents should believe the early professions of faith of their children. If parents disbelieve them, God is displeased with them. As we labor toward the end of our covenant children's embrace of Christianity, let us then teach them how to glorify God in this world so as to attain that world which is to come.

Instruct your children and model before them biblical character traits. Covenant children should be taught to pursue and to obtain wisdom. These children should also be taught to nurture the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. Parents should teach their covenant children to be diligent in all things. Teach them that diligence is man's prized possession (Pr. 12:27); that the hand of the diligent will rule (Pr. 12:24); and in accordance with the wise Puritans, "An idle mind is the devil's playground." Parents must teach and model diligence before their children. Remember, children will never grow out of idleness and laziness if you don't provide for them a model of diligence. Idle children grow to be idle adults. Also, J.C. Ryle said to teach them to be diligent even at play. Parents must teach their children to nurture the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Although the fruit of the Spirit is a grace of God that flourishes in a Christian's life, the believer has the responsibility to act, to speak, and to think in love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, mercy, and self-control in all situations. Christian children should not be morose, gloomily silent, slothful, unthankful, bitter, discontent with their station in life, simple with regard to intelligence, and out of control. Christian girls should dress modestly and respect authority. Conversely, Christian boys should not dress as vagabonds or gang members. What ridiculous and tragic folly! To avoid this, parents must teach and model the appropriate behavior and dress for their children. Instead of allowing these horrors of behavior and dress, parents should, as stated earlier, encourage their children in word and in deed to love, to be joyful, to be at peace, to be kind, to be good, to be gentle, and to be self-controlled in every situation. As covenant children bear this Christian fruit, they are,

at the same time, developing biblical and proper social skills. These skills translate into socially acceptable manners. For example, well-ordered children wash their hands before eating, don't pick their noses in public, and do not interrupt the conversations of their parents. The fruit of self-control is one of the first and most important characteristics of a godly child. Self-control should be taught and modeled by parents. Bruce Ray, author of Withhold Not Correction, has said that if children cannot control themselves, they are vulnerable to being led astray from the truth and from wisdom. Richard Fugate rightly notes that parents must maintain control over their children from the beginning, even from age 6 months when covenant children should be taught the meaning of the words, "No!," "Stop!," "Come!" This submission toward the words of the parents nurtures within the child submission toward and respect of the Word of God. Control must be accompanied with teaching. Control without teaching is not good. Providing a child with regimented days promotes self-control within the child.

Instruct your children to honor household authorities. As children grow, they must learn by word and by parental example that they are to submit to all authority: whether in the home, in the church, or in the civil government. All authorities are to be honored by covenant children. Speedy submission to authorities with a good attitude prepares a child to honor authorities in the church, in the workplace, and in society at large. This enables the child to build and to maintain a good and godly reputation before God and men (as did Jesus as recorded in Luke 2:52)

Instruct your children to be members in and to have a high view of the church. J.C. Ryle in his, Duties of Parents, calls parents to train their children diligently in the public means of grace. He says that they should sit near their children, especially at the Lord's Supper. Parents should worship and pray with their children. Christian parents should work to sit with their young children in a worship service. This goal certainly requires much work from the mother. Children's Church, a phenomenon in many contemporary churches, performs a great disservice to the child's developing a proper view of the worshipping household of God. B. M. Palmer has said, "...On each recurring Sabbath, when the father and the mother sit at either end of the family pew, with their offspring between them, does not the great congregation appear as a collection of smaller churches aggregated in one large assembly of worshippers?...Each pious household is a separate fibre of those roots by which the church of the living God takes hold upon the earth, and preserves its existence in a sinful world."

Instruct your children about courtship and marriage. Parents must teach their children about marital courtship. Courtship is that relationship wherein parents mutually permit a suiter and his potential bride to engage in fellowship under the oversight of their parents (or that of an appointed chaperone) for the purpose of determining the suitability of a marriage covenant between them. Courtship should take into consideration the desire (e.g., personality, looks, mannerisms) and the characteristics (i.e., the quality of their Christianity and the fruit that either bears witness of the truth within them or betrays it) of the potential spouses. Regarding marriage, parents must show their children an example of a covenant couple living in Christ. Covenant children must consistently see how their parents apply the Word of God when dealing with problems, frustrations, tragedy,

challenges, opportunities. Parents shouldn't pretend that married persons don't make mistakes, have challenging days, or periodically feel overwhelmed. Parents should disciple their children to fulfill their marital obligations in the midst of life's frequent challenges. Boys should be taught to lead a household. Daughters should be taught to strengthen and manage a household rather than learning to destroy one. Fathers should lead their houses in family worship. Dr. Gamble has said, "It is remarkable, that where family-worship, and the due observance of the Sabbath, have fallen into disuse, error and worldliness prevail;..." Furthermore, parents must teach their children to marry only in the Lord, to perform marital duties such as lawful sexual relations, and to materially provide for a household. In a marriage covenant, a father gives away a daughter. Both parents prepare this daughter to be a help suitable to a godly man. A career woman that cannot cook meals, clean and administrate a home, manage a budget, help rear children, and serve her husband's needs is not worthy to be the wife of a godly man. Likewise, a man who is not interested in working diligently in a vocation to build his estate, in fathering children, in leading his household in the private and public worship of God, and in nurturing his wife (his crown) is not worthy to receive a godly daughter as a wife. It should be noted that church fellowship gatherings and family dinners and outings provide excellent opportunities for those who are courting to discourse for the purpose of determining the suitability of potential marriage partners. Godly parents with suitors or available daughters should network with one another to find potential spouses. Church priests, pastors, or elders should work together with parents to facilitate the courting process.

Instruct your children in academics from a biblical worldview. Fathers and mothers are stewards of their children and are responsible for giving them an education that glorifies God. McGuffey (1800-1873), in an excerpt from a book called, McGuffey and His Readers, said that indolence (laziness) with respect to education brings disappointment instead of fulfilled hopes. This saying refutes the erroneous street philosopher who says, "experience is the best teacher." McGuffey said that "Necessity may be the mother of invention, but wisdom must never be the result of experience." Even as early as the 1800's, McGuffey, an expert on education, said that the poorest can educate their children if they will labor. It should be noted that Christians have the liberty to employ a multitude of educational options for their covenant children: public or government schools, private schools, Christian schools, tutors, home-schooling, or a combination of any one of these or other methods. With regard to sending one's children to government schools, this act is in and of itself not sinful. The medieval schools were an example of such schools. The pre-Reformation Reformers, more specifically, the Brethren of the Common Life, took over the State schools to introduce Christianity and excellence in academic prowess. However, Statist schools that exalt the State, degrade Christianity, and are made up primarily of pagan teachers will produce children that reflect that discipleship. The late Dr. Greg Bahnsen said that Luke 6:40 applies in this situation: A disciple, if thoroughly trained, will become like his teacher, a situation that will occur when statist teachers become the delegated authority for instructing covenant children. If at all possible, God's covenant children should not come under the teaching authority of teachers who don't honor God and are aggressively opposed to Him and His Word. Moffat said that placing covenant children under the authority of unbelievers

contributes to their unbelief, heresy, and disorder. R. J. Rushdoony has interestingly and rightly noted that boys' academic performance degenerates in today's feministic, statist schools. He adds that a Christian philosophy of education restores masculinity to boys and femininity to girls. J. Gresham Machen warned, "If you give the bureaucrats the children, you might just as well give them everything else." With so many options of education available worldwide, Christian parents are accountable before God to educate their children to think God's thoughts after Him and, as did Augustine, reinterpret the world according to the framework of God's Word.

Instruct your children in or provide for them to have a vocation. The Hebrew community of the Old Covenant knew that if a man did not prepare his child for a vocation, he, then, was preparing his child to steal. Covenant parents are to provide vocational skills to their children, but not necessarily a college education. Parents have the vocational training options of apprenticeships, trade schools, community colleges, and training programs. Covenant children can also be trained to take over the family business or to become entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, a covenant child should learn a lawful skill, trade, or profession so that he can support a house and his church to the glory of God. Covenant children should be taught to diligently prepare for and to labor in a godly vocation in which they may glorify God with all of their strength.

Instruct your children about traditions. Paul said in Gal. 4:18 that it is good to be zealous in a good thing. Traditions are good things. Therefore, parents should teach their children the linear history of God's people, of their local congregation, and of their family.

Instruct your children to bear children. Solomon has taught that children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children are their fathers (Proverbs 17:6). Children must have a long-run perspective with regard to life. They must understand that they are being trained to be parents and then grandparents. Covenant children must be taught how to train their children. In addition, covenant children should be comfortable with the fact that their parents will be part of their child-rearing support structure. According to the Bible, grandparents have the responsibility to diligently train their grandchildren in the laws of God. This is the epitome of synergy in the extended covenant household. Christian grandparents and parents should delight in serving the youngest members of their families for the glory of God and the perpetuation of the church.

Instruct your children about leaving an inheritance. Again, Solomon says in Pr. 13:22 that a wise man leaves an inheritance to his children's children. Leaving an inheritance requires prudence, thrift, self-denial, and self-control. Certainly this proverb is speaking primarily of material wealth, but the principle that it suggests can also be applied to a spiritual inheritance. If a man were to impart and leave only wisdom to his children, this inheritance, according to the Scriptures, should lead to material wealth in the long-run.

Pray that God prosper your instruction. It is God that will give the increase to your labor. John Flavel spoke, "What a mercy was it to us to have parents that prayed for us

before they had us, as well as in our infancy when we could not pray for ourselves.” As one instructs his children, one should pray for God’s blessing upon that instruction. Parents then should expect obedience (Eph. 6:1), honor (Eph. 6:2, 3), and respect (1 Pet. 2:17) from their children.

What if my covenant children disobey? If parents don’t instruct their covenant children, they should remember that, as the Bible says, children left to themselves will bring their parents shame (Pr. 29:15). It is important to note that even covenant children will occasionally disobey instructions and sin. Fugate offers three suggestions as to why children sin against their parent’s instruction: 1. They forgot the standard (forgetting can be choosing not to remember), 2. They misunderstood the instruction (children could be tired or hyperactive due to sugar intake), 3. Willful and outright rebellion (intentional). When children disobey, regardless of the reason they must be corrected.

Correct your children when they misunderstand or disobey your instructions. Pr. 19:17 states, “Correct your son and he shall give you rest, yes, he will give delight to your soul.” Correction is an exhortation or an admonishment to obey the instruction previously given. Correction is also a clarification of the instruction. Parents bring correction, or reproof, to re-instruct the child and to promote the desired, godly behavior. Parents must teach their children to delight to do their parent’s lawful bidding. Parents should pray for God’s prospering of their correction. This step of correction should be dropped and punishment administered when the child rejects or abuses authority or inflicts injury upon someone. Correct thy son while there is hope (Pr. 29:17)

Punish your children when they disobey after instruction and correction has been administered. If a child’s disobedience persists after having been instructed clearly and biblically, and after having been corrected, then parents should punish their children while assuming that foolishness has entered into their children’s hearts. The Bible says that parents should not set their hearts upon their children’s destruction (Pr. 13:24); that stripes that wound are for their good (Pr. 20:30); that foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction drives it far from him (Pr. 22:15); and that the rod and reproof give wisdom (Pr.29:15). It should be noted that punishment is not: verbal abuse, requesting or begging for submission, speaking rhetorical words (What do I have to do to get you kids to obey?), or psychological manipulation. The intensity of the punishment should match the extent of the disobedience. Parents should remember to train their covenant children according to their child’s way, and not to punish their children for inability (true inability) to fulfill their requirement. A child’s physical, mental, and spiritual maturity must be taken into account. We apply the rod of correction for wickedness, not childishness. Since the Bible tells us that foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, parents must spend time with their children to understand their behavior. Only by knowing your child (spending time daily with them) can you know the expressions (words and deeds) of the heart of your child, whether he is being immature, foolish, or wicked. Again, if sufficient, understandable instruction has been imparted to a child (not instruction laden with whining, rhetorical questions, or a fainting attitude of, “what’s the use”), and after sufficient correction has been presented, a parent must

assume that the disobedient child is being foolish. If a child forgets to do be obedient, then that child is choosing not to obey—this is foolishness and deserves punishment.

Use the rod to punish your covenant child when you perceive that foolishness has entered their hearts. According to the Bible, the rod is the primary instrument of punishment for disobedient children. Fugate correctly maintains that the rod (i.e., a narrow stick or reed) is God’s delegated tool of punishment. It should be noted that, as a secondary measure, one can deny the disobedient child privileges in some circumstances, especially as he grows older. Modern discipline strategies such as “time-out” (a strategy whereby a disobedient child is commanded to sit and calm his heart after sinning) and “going to one’s room” mimic the modern penitentiary system that requires no accountability to authority, no instruction in righteousness, no restitution to the victim, and no restoration to the sinner/offender.

One shouldn’t chasten their child with hot displeasure, especially if one is out of control (Ps 6:1; 38:1); let the child know that he is chastened because he is loved and because God has issued a commandment for you to do so for his good (Heb. 12:10-13). One should never let convenience inhibit one’s duty to drive foolishness away from the heart of the child with the rod as soon as possible. One should not use the rod unjustly (i.e., as an anger stick). One should not make excuses for not using the rod. Once the rod is administered, parents should teach their children not to despise it (e.g., “I hate the rod”), nor to faint (e.g., “Oh, I can never do anything right”) at their chastening (correction or punishment) Heb. 12:5-11), but to endure their chastening because it yields righteousness.

Bruce Ray has identified some questions that parents might consider asking their child prior to administering the rod. What did you do? What does God say about this? Was what you did right or wrong according to the Scriptures? What happens when you disobey? What must I do to you as a parent under God’s authority? What ought you to do in the future?

After punishment, forgive and restore the child to proper fellowship with God, yourself, and any other offended party. Parents must ensure that the child is restored and forgiven every time following the administration of the rod. Parents should also ensure that the disobedient child provides restitution to the party he has offended. For example, if the child broke a window, then he should be required to pay the owner of that window at least twice the window’s cost. If the child dishonored someone, then require him to ask for forgiveness. If he stole something, he should be required to restore to his victim four to sevenfold the value of what was stolen. By providing restitution, the child learns justice. He must also learn that if he were to repent and to ask God for forgiveness, then he must be taught that God forgives him. Restitution is not to be confused with penance, a work used to obtain forgiveness. After administering the rod, parents should then pray with their child, asking God to forgive them, and telling their covenant child that both God and they forgive him. Emphasize the fact that repentance unto life means turning away from sin. Parents should help their children read and understand Ps. 51: a wonderful expose regarding repentance unto life and restoration.

If parents will instruct, correct, punish in accordance with God's Word, then they can expect God's grace upon their children. As God has spoken: A wise son makes his father glad (Pr. 10:1); A father of a righteous child rejoices (Pr. 23:24, 25); Correct your son and he will give you rest (Pr. 29:17); and Your children will rise up and call you blessed (Pr. 31:28).

God's Word, on the other hand, promises bitter herbs to those who do not train their children; that is, to those who do not consistently instruct, correct, and punish their children. These parents will have shame, heartache, unrest, and trouble unless God intervenes in their lives or the lives of their children (see Pr. 10:1b; 17:21; 29:15b).

III. Some important instruction regarding recovering lost ground

As just stated, covenant children who are not trained; who have neither understood nor obeyed the gospel of the Kingdom of God; and who do not glorify God in their thoughts, words, and deeds bring shame upon their parents. Modern parenting philosophies try to displace the shame and guilt that parents should rightfully experience to some other supposed culprit, such as, "not having enough time in one day to teach the Bible and to perform character training." The displacement of this guilt stems from the philosophy of so-called "no-fault" parenting—no one is at fault for a wicked child in a covenant household. There is, however, no such true type of parenting. If one's children bring one shame, then one needs to repent and to begin to honor God by living a godly example before one's children and/or grandchildren today. If, on the other hand, one's children bring praise to God, then God should be glorified since He prospered the child-rearing efforts in spite of one's sin. Dr. Gamble has rightly noted that men today have neglected Flavel's warning: "If you neglect to instruct [your children] in the way of holiness, will the devil neglect to instruct them in the way of wickedness? No; if you will not teach them to pray, he will to curse, swear, and lie; if ground be uncultured, weeds will spring." To recover lost ground a parent must humble himself before God. Parents must not justify themselves before God by saying that they trained their children if they did not speak God's Word to them when they rose up, when they lived throughout their day, and when they retired to sleep at night. Busy mothers need to know that simply managing a child through the day is not by any means training the child toward godliness. Dr. Bahnsen offers some hopeful advice to parents who need to recover lost ground with their covenant children. He states that even if one's children are 17 years old and ready to leave the home, one should not be afraid to repent and, by the grace of God, correct one's self. Parents should begin to train their children the moment they have knowledge about biblical child-rearing responsibilities. Parents should pray for God to give them entrance into the lives of their children and for God to prosper their training. Also, parents must pray and instruct diligently so that your children embrace Christ as Lord. Notably, parents should enlist the help of church or parish priests, pastors, elders and members to the end of restoring their covenant household. We should take heed to the wise words of Cotton Mather, who has stated that we parents bore them into this world with a depraved nature, and that we may now by God's grace bring an eternal cure to them lest they perish eternally from our neglect.

IV. Parental attitude

Rearing covenant children is a long-run task. As noted earlier, child-rearing requires two diligent parents who are willing to learn the Bible, interpret the world according to it, and impart the Bible and their worldview to their children in the hope that the children become as they. Child-rearing also requires parents to adopt proper biblical attitudes to succeed in this complex, routine, and long-range effort. This discussion concludes with a short list of important attitudes for parental consideration and adoption. The first six attitudes originate from J. C. Ryle's understanding of child-rearing.

1. Train your children with tenderness and affection: show feeling for them and desire to do them good, punish for their profit, train little by little. This is contrary to modern child rearing techniques that identify children as terribly selfish and as those who steal "me" time or "couple time" from parents because of their needy cries. Shame on this selfish generation for believing such nonsense. Children are investments that require hard, prayerful work before one can expect to yield a bountiful return.

2. Train your child as if success depends upon you: God's grace and parental nurture and education work together. Bruce Ray, Pastor of Juanita Community Church in Southern California in his book entitled, "Withhold not Correction," quotes J.C. Ryle as saying, "Beware of letting small faults pass unnoticed under the idea it is a little one. There are no little things in training children; all are important. Little weeds need plucking up as much as any. Leave them alone and they will soon be great." Failing to use manners, to immediately obey parental commands, and to honor authorities are several sins that parents are tempted to let slip by in their child-rearing. Ray says that it is the accumulation of little things that cause major problems that require pastoral counseling in later years. For example, mom picks up after the child, and, when the child gets married and acts like a slob, this very thing that was overlooked by the parent becomes the acute source of serious marital difficulties.

3. The soul of your child is first priority: Salvation is the goal. Remember that education is not messianic nor effectual unto salvation.

4. Train toward the Bible: Understanding the Scriptures must take first priority. God-glorifying curriculum and other books must take second place. The Bible must be read reverently and regularly.

5. Train them toward prayer: Before covenant children can read, they must be taught to kneel.

6. Train them in hope: Parents must believe that the Lord will be delighted to send their children forth into this world as arrows in their quiver against the enemies of the Lord.

7. Persevere in your child-rearing: Besides the aforementioned attitudes, perseverance is the most important of all. Parents must persevere and never cease instructing and praying, correcting and praying, and punishing and praying. Parents must pray for God to prosper their instructing, correcting, and punishing, and for Christ to be formed in their children. Child-rearing with a persevering attitude is a labor that is commanded of parents by God. It is a parent's responsibility, not the church's, not other families', and certainly not the State's. It does not take nor should parents require "a village," from the statist's viewpoint, to rear their children. It does, however, take perseverance in doing good. To our comfort, we must remember that our labor in the Lord of rearing covenant children is not in vain for it has with it the promise of a godly seed. Jonathan Edwards has said, "Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by His rules. And family education and order are some of the chief of the means of grace. If these fail, all other means are [likely] to prove ineffectual. If these are duly maintained, all the means of grace will be [likely] to prosper and be successful." Parents must see that they have a promise, the seeds of which, as Calvin has said, reside in the baptism of their covenant children. Paul said in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved and your house." God uses the means of godly, diligent, and faithful parents who instruct, correct, and punish their children according to His Word to build His church in the earth, to perpetuate the Kingdom of Christ, to bless their seed with salvation, and to subdue His enemies until those enemies are all made a footstool for His feet. We need to believe these words, act upon them as though they were true, stand upon these words perseveringly, and expect, by God's grace, to see the salvation of our God on behalf of our covenant children. As Robert Lewis Dabney has declared: "The education of children for God is the most important business on earth. It is the one business for which the earth exists."