

Childrearing (Part One)

The Blessing of Children

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I am going to take the occasion of today, the blessing of the little children, to launch into a series of sermons on child rearing. Today we are just going to be covering the introductory remarks that I want to make. I want to set the stage for the sermons that are going to come along down the road a little bit. (And you might be turning to Proverbs 23.)

I hope that some of you who are older in the congregation do not automatically do somewhat of a turn off. I know that this subject is not as acutely needful to you as it might be to some who are younger and have children coming up. But you just remember that sometime in the future, you are going to be standing before a congregation and it is going to be your responsibility to teach these things too. So you at least may as well get Ritenbaugh's version of child rearing. I hope that it is completely in line with God's version of child rearing. And I hope that I am not misleading you in any way.

Proverbs 23:15 My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will rejoice—Indeed, I myself; yes, my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak right things.

Obviously, this is a father who is exulting in the growth and maturity of a son who is growing. In verse 24 and 25 it says,

Proverbs 23:24-25 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him. Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her who bore you rejoice.

Now, certainly God joins that group that rejoices in a son in whom He is well pleased as He certainly very clearly stated in Matthew the third chapter at the baptism of His Son. And I think that any one of us who have had children who have grown to at least a certain measure of maturity, I mean,

they are up out of high school and maybe in college, or out of college and they are married and they are beginning to have children of their own, and if we can look and see a life that is at least guided by stability. There is discipline and morality within it. And we begin to see bright-eyed and happy-faced children that we can say that we are exulting in that too. And I think that there is, probably, nothing in life that gives us more pleasure than experiencing something like that.

But how is this accomplished? How is it possible, it seems, that some seem to be able to do things right and their children turn out to be so nice, just models of stability. And on the other hand, there are people who do not seem to do a very good job at all and their children are always underfoot and they are making a lot of noise and they are making a lot of dirt, and they are just generally pests wherever they go into things. And you are always worried that your crystal or your china or something is in danger just because these kids are around.

Now somehow or another, this seems to have escaped a very large portion of the world, and maybe perhaps the majority of the people in the world. And we can very simply and generally answer that by saying that it is because they have somehow avoided the Word of God in regard to rearing their children.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong, in a broadcast that was made in early summer of 1983, stated that there is no evil being perpetrated on earth today that is worse than the way children are being reared. Now, we do not tend to think of child rearing as being in the same category as rape or murder, or fornication or lying or stealing. But Mr. Armstrong put it in a category that is certainly at least on the same level as those major sins, as we call them. And indeed, I think that if we look at it honestly, we would have to say that it is very likely that the poor child rearing practices were the spawning ground of the murder, the rape, the fornication, the adultery, the thievery, the lying, that is so commonplace in society today.

Now, do you think that you have done a good job? At this point, do you think that you have done a good job? Well, I hope that you have and that your assessment of what you have done is honest. But I want to ask you also this, "What do you mean "good job"? What is it that is good to you? What is

it that you have done to produce what it is that maybe is sitting at your side there today? Another question might be, what is it that you are even trying to accomplish with your child rearing practices? Is what you are doing in harmony with or similar to what God is trying to do with you? I mean, is your goal in life just to have a quiet child who never embarrasses you? Is that a sufficient goal?

In the United States, there is a birth about every 10 seconds, but there is a major crime every four seconds. And though teenagers only make up about 10% of the population of the United States, they commit 35% of the major crimes! Obviously, something has gone wrong somewhere. And the children, even before they leave the house, even before they are fully mature physically, are already committing the kind of crimes that we would normally associate with those who are adult.

In Isaiah the third chapter, I am going to be going over scriptures that all of us are at least reasonably familiar with. And what I am doing in this sermon is I am going to just cover not very deeply at all some basic principles in regard to child rearing, things that we will be expounding in a great deal more detail in the other sermons that come down the road.

In Isaiah the third chapter, Isaiah is describing a period of time that he is living through and it is not a very happy period of time. He is describing this as happening in the Kingdom of Judah. In verse 1, see, God takes away from Jerusalem and Judah. And when we get down to verse 12, He says,

Isaiah 3:12 As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your path.

Now, children in the United States of America have power far out of proportion to their numbers. Not only to their numbers, but I might also add here, to their physical strength. We would think maybe if they were physically stronger, they would be able to lead their parents around, but indeed, they do not have to be any physically stronger. They can be a little tyke that is less than five years old and only weighs about 40 or 50 pounds and the parents are cowed by that child far out of proportion to their numbers, far out of proportion to their physical strength or their mental

capacities. What are the mental capacities, what are the mental abilities of a five or a six year old child? And far, of course, out of proportion to their contributions to society.

The oppression comes in a number of ways. For example, children are permitted to decide things for themselves and for the family that ought not to be decided by them, they ought to be decided by the parents. And all the parents decide to do is to decide to do it the way the children want to do it. Is that proper? Is it right? A disproportionate amount of money, according to advertisers, is spent on them, that is, on children. The parents' income is spent on children because parents feel pressured. So what this verse says, children are their oppressors because parents feel pressured to provide things for their children. Otherwise the children will feel deprived.

I was telling the morning congregation that this past week my wife and I and Sharon went to see the *Princess Bride* and the movie opens up in the bedroom of an eight year old boy. I think he is about eight, somewhere between 8 and 12. But let us say that he was eight years old, he probably was very close to that age. And if that room was any example of an average eight year old child, why it was loaded with things, all kinds of things, all kinds of stuffed animals. The kid was in bed, there was a Chicago Cubs sign on the wall, which of course is nothing wrong in itself, and he had a Chicago Bears jersey on, I guess he was to be portrayed as a typical Midwestern boy interested in sports. And the room was full of toys, gadgets, and things that he was playing with. I think the producers intended to portray someone from a middle class family living in suburbia. And they portrayed it by showing a room full of things.

(We will get into other ways in which children oppress. I do not want to go into anything too deeply right now.)

Now, there is a secondary application to this verse that we also need to think of because it also indicates that there is something wrong in the child rearing area, and that is that the oppression is coming from people who, regardless of their age, are acting like children. See, their bodies are fully developed physically, their body is mature but the people have not matured. They have not grown up mentally, emotionally, morally, or spiritually. And so they are still basically children, but now they have the power of an adult.

Either way it indicates a lack of maturity, either coming from children who are truly young, or children who are grown up in body but they are still acting in the capricious and unstable manner of a child.

So here we have an example from back in Isaiah's day that I am sure is intended by God to be at least somewhat of an indicator of what it is going to be like in the nations of Israel as we come to the end.

I want you to turn now back to II Timothy the third chapter, where we have something that is very definitely applicable to the end time.

II Timothy 3:1-3 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good.

I want to concentrate on several of these terms because beginning with the term disobedient to parents, there are another four terms after that that appear to be linked to the disobedient to parents. That is, that all of these things are taking place within a family environment. Please understand here that the apostle Paul is not describing how things got this way. He is only prophesying that they will exist at the end. And that is what we want to get from them.

Now, you might think that disobedience to parents, though it might be somewhat bad, is something that you can maybe live with, that it is really of no great consequence. However, in the Bible, it is of *great* consequence. And you will begin to find as we go through this that disobedience to parents is second in seriousness only to disobedience to God. You need to understand that.

And indeed, in the book of Leviticus (again, sections that we may cover in the future), there are two laws that are part of the civil law of Israel. God said that if any child smites his parents, hits, abuses in a physical way, that that child should be stoned. Capital punishment! That is how serious it is. A few verses later, God says that if a child speaks evil of his parents, curses his

parents—this is not hitting, but the abuse is verbal—that that child is also to be stoned. That is pretty serious.

The reason is that the parents stand in the place of God. And that until the child reaches the maturity where God is a reality to him, that He is a concept that is something far greater than just an idea, something that mom and dad talk about, the parents stand in the place of God and they are as God to the child. And the disobedience to the parents is exactly the same as disobedience to God. They are equated as one and the same thing.

It is the same principle as you will find in other parts of the Bible. For instance, in Matthew the 25th chapter where Christ said that if you do this unto the least of these My brethren, you have done it to Me. If you kill the ambassador of Christ, it is the same as attempting to kill God. And so it is in the relationship of a parent and child. Disobedience to parents is equated with disobedience to God. And so it is very serious indeed, it is nothing to trifle with.

Now, the four words that follow disobedience to parents begin with the word unthankful. That follows naturally because disobedience grows out of unthankfulness. If a child feels no sense of obligation, no sense of responsibility, if he does not feel an indebtedness to his parents—because his parents have given him life, they have fed that child, they have clothed that child, they have given that child a place to live, they have provided education for that child, all kinds of extras and things that that child can find enjoyable, they have gotten affection from those parents and on and on, all of the things that would be within the context of a family unit—if a child does not feel a sense of thankfulness to his parents, disobedience is going to follow right on its heels.

Why should he obey someone that he feels no sense of obligation to? That is the principle that produces the disobedience. Shakespeare saw this and he said in *King Lear*, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a child who is unthankful." You know, they would bite you and poison you. An unthankful child is the same as poison as far as Shakespeare was concerned.

The next word is unholy. This is an awful word. But again, Paul is describing it within a family environment. This describes a person who does

not even recognize the fundamental decencies of life. It describes a person who is completely secular and the reason it is translated unholy is because of the effect of that kind of an attitude. The effect is that the person will have absolutely no fellowship with God. There is no meeting of the minds between God and the person and so they are completely secular, and because they are completely secular, they are totally unholy.

Again, we might say that a major portion of this responsibility for the child being in that kind of an attitude would undoubtedly fall upon the parents because they did not enforce upon the child or impress upon the child a knowledge of God, an understanding of His way, and the responsibilities that that child has, not only to the parents but also to God. So the child becomes unholy.

The next one is without natural affection, as it says in the King James or in my Bible here, unloving. Or without love, it may say in another translation. Now this is a word that is very infrequently used in the Bible. It is the Greek word *storge* and in this case, it is *astorge*, the "a" in front of it making it the opposite of what it is originally intended. This is the kind of love, affection, or attachment that one would have by nature. It has nothing at all to do with God, but simply should be there because, for example, a mother gives birth to a child. It is hers, it came out of her body, see. And so there is a natural attachment to that child simply because of the circumstance. What Mr. Armstrong used to describe as the empirical self. See, this is part of me, it is part of mine.

What Paul is describing here is a situation where that kind of love is lacking, even within a family. Now, this is an outgrowth of the other two that preceded it. It begins with being unthankful, having no sense of obligation to the family. It slowly begins to evolve into being without any kind of fellowship with God, being unholy. And the next step is natural. Even the affectionate family ties that one would normally expect to be there begin to disappear.

Now, it is interesting when you begin to look into this where we might say that little things like this begin to appear, little cracks in the dike, precursors of the full blown attitude later on. When the child does not feel a sense of responsibility to the family, let us say, in the conduct of his life. He does not

care about the family name, does not care about the family's reputation, and so they bring displeasure and embarrassment upon the family by the conduct of their life in some other area, you know, where other people can see.

It even begins to get into areas where the child will not take care of his room. It is an absolute mess. He feels no sense of obligation to the family to keep things orderly. Mother and father give him duties, obligations, responsibilities, to carry out. Take out the garbage, wash the car, maybe they have to clean the sidewalk off, or cut the lawn. And they let those things slide by, and you see what is at the base of it, there is no affection even to the family, to feel the sense of obligation of carrying those things out in order to uphold the family name and reputation, and the sense of order and stability that ought to be there.

The final one is really another awful one and it is translated in my Bible, unforgiving. It means irreconcilable. Unable to come to terms. It is talking about a situation where mother and daughter, father and daughter, father and son, mother and son, are so at odds with one another, where there is constant arguing within the family: You did this, I expected you to do that. No, I did not do that. I did this other thing. You are a beast. On and on hot words flying back and forth, and there is no meeting of the minds.

Finally, you see, because of the complications of all four of those things together, we begin to have things like runaway children where the children just bomb out because there is no reconciliation that can take place between parent and child. And so it indicates a mind that is bitter and harsh in its assessment of other people. And especially, of course, here within the family. So it is a harshness of mind that separates.

Certainly brethren, I think that we can say that we are moving into a situation like that in the United States of America. We are not there yet. We are certainly going in that direction and certainly what God prophesied through the apostle Paul is beginning to show all around us.

Now, let us go back to another familiar scripture in Malachi the fourth chapter, verses 5 and 6. Toward the end of the sermon, I will begin to tie this all together.

Malachi 4:5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."

Again, I want you to see there that this is a responsibility that is incumbent upon the church at the end time because God certainly understood, as is shown in II Timothy 3, what family life is like at the end time. So He is calling people into His Family and family is very important to God. And so it then becomes incumbent on the church of God at the end time that we do what it says in verse 6. This is part of the commission that has been given to the church.

Malachi 4:6 "And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

Most of us are aware from having heard sermons in the past or having read articles in the *Good News* or *The Plain Truth* that that word curse means utter destruction. And God means what He says. He does not lie. And of course He is going to be working in behalf of His own prophecy in order that this does not have to come to pass. He will make every effort that He possibly can.

But I want to add something to this by way of explanation so that you will understand what God means by utter destruction. This is the same word that is used in other cases to indicate something that is irrevocably devoted to God. That means that whatever is given to God and is irrevocable, cannot be redeemed, it cannot be bought back. Once it is given to God, it is His to use and as He sees fit.

Now, its most frequent usage is in the sense of things devoted to God to be burned on the altar. You know what happened to those things that went on the altar? They were completely burned up. See, utter destruction until there was nothing left but ashes. That is certainly sobering and God is very serious that He intends to bring to pass what He said if we will not yield to Him and bring out of marriage the things that He wants to be brought out.

I am totally convinced that God intends that there be a break by children away from families. Indeed, He says, does He not in Genesis 2 in regard to

marriage, He said, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife." certainly indicating that He expects a young man and woman to break away from the family, break away from the parents, and begin their own unit. We have today the term "generation gap" which indicates a break from the family in which there is estrangement and hostility. That is not the kind of break that God intends that there be whenever a child reaches that point that he is going to marry. He is intending a break that has been preceded by a relationship between parent and child in which everything has been preparation for an even more mature relationship that will enforce upon both parts' minds of their interdependence. You never stop being a parent and you never stop being a child. There is a break, but yet God never wants the break to be absolute.

What does God want? I think that has to be established. What does He want out of marriage? What does He want in terms of child rearing? Well, it is interesting that this same prophet addressed this subject in chapter 2, verse 10. In the next five verses, 10 through 15, He actually touches on three different subjects overall. It is marriage, but it is marriage outside the church or in this case, outside of Israel, which was both church and state. Then He addresses the subject of divorce and then He addresses the subject of one of the major purposes of marriage.

Malachi 2:10 Have we not all one Father? And has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?

This was something that was taking place in Judah. In starting out here He says, "Look, there ought to be able to be a reconciliation here. Do we not all have the same God?" He is trying to establish that there is a common ground here that all of us can relate to or in this case, all of these Jews could relate to. And he said, "If we have this common ground because we all have the same God, we all have the same father, should we not be seeking also, then, a righteous, common solution to this problem that we have?"

Malachi 2:11 Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution [marriage] which He loves. He has married the daughter of a foreign god.

In New Testament parlance, that would be he married someone out of the church, someone of a different spirit, someone under the authority of Satan the Devil.

Malachi 2:12 May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, . . .

In other words, if a person does this, knowing what he is doing and he goes ahead and does it, Malachi pronounces a curse on that person.

Malachi 2:12-14 . . . that person who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts! [it is done in hypocrisy] And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying; so he does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. And yet you say, "For what reason?" [why is God not hearing my prayers?] Because [the answer comes] the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

The Jews evidently were divorcing their wives with impunity and leaving them high and dry. And as we look into the history, we find that what they were doing is that these tended to be older men (by that I mean 45-50 years old) they were dumping their wife and going for a younger woman. There is nothing new under the sun. God says, "You're bringing a curse on your own head for doing that."

Verse 15 is the one that I am aiming for. Now, we here see why God is so against this.

Malachi 2:15 But did He not make them one [it is a question], having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? [Why did He make a man and woman one? Well, here comes the answer.] He seeks godly offspring.

He does not want just children. He wants *godly* children. That is so plain; that a major reason for the institution of marriage, an institution that God says that He loves, that a major reason is that we bring forth godly children.

Malachi 2:15 Therefore [he says] take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

Let me give you that verse as it is in the Revised Standard Version. It is a little bit clearer.

Malachi 2:15 (RSV) Has not one God made and sustained us for the spirit of life?

Interpreted that means, has not God kept us alive? Has not God called us into His church? Has He not done this in order that we might receive the Spirit of God, which is the real Spirit of life—eternal life—the quality of life that God wants all mankind eventually to have? Certainly He has!

Malachi 2:15 (RSV) Has not one God made and sustained for us the Spirit of life. And what does He desire?

Why has He sustained us? Why has He called us into His church? Why has He granted us repentance? Why has He caused us to receive His Spirit? What is His desire?

Malachi 2:15 (RSV) He wants godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth.

Now, some feel that their only responsibility is to discipline and that the only thing that really counts is obedience. Maybe they really work hard at making sure that their child is always obedient. So they bark at him: sit down, stand up, stay over there, stay on that blanket. Do not move till I tell you, get up and go to bed, shut the door after you, on and on and on. I am not saying that some of these things are wrong. But what would life be like for you if God

had the same attitude toward you as some of you who may be rearing children have in your attitude toward the child, if it happens to be that kind of an attitude.

What if every time that you stepped out of line, even just a little bit, whack! God hit you on the back of the head, a knuckle job, you know, right there where it really hurts; what if every time that you had a selfish or an evil thought, what if it resulted in so many swats? "That's the third time I've told you. And now you're really going to get it!" Whack, whack, whack, whack! You know, that would be pretty hard to take, would it not?

What if the only example that you had of God's concern for you, that you even existed, was a continuous round of swats? Well, do you know what would happen? What if you constantly had a "no!" booming in your ears? Well, I can tell what will happen to your children. One of two things will happen: either they will be moved to rebel because they will eventually find they can take anything you can dish out and they will completely disrespect any power that you might have and they will rebel. Or if it happens to be maybe someone of a little bit weaker personality or whatever, they will turn in on themselves and their personality will become completely shriveled. You will have somebody with no self-worth, no self-esteem, no confidence, unable to do anything that would ever please anybody.

It is obvious that God does not treat us like that, does He?

Let us go back to Mark the 10th chapter, verse 14.

Mark 10:14 But when Jesus saw it. . .

That is, the children being refused admission into His presence. Remember, this is God. There is no more important Being that ever trod the face of the earth. There is nobody whose time was any more important than the time that Jesus Christ spent. There is nobody who can give us a better example of God's reaction in any kind of a given situation. He was in such harmony with the mind of God that He acted and reacted in the same way that God would in such a similar circumstance. And so we see that when Jesus saw it,

Mark 10:14 . . . He was *greatly displeased*. (emphasis added)

Our God is showing us that children are not unimportant. They are *very* important. And indeed, we have got to begin to look at them in a different way. They are merely little people. Their size is not as great as yours. Their experience is not as long as yours. Their age does not add up to the same figures as yours. But they are nonetheless every bit human and have as great a potential as you do. Can we treat them any less than God, whose time was so valuable? They are not unimportant.

Now, back in the book of Titus. In chapter 2 we find a series of instructions by the apostle Paul to Titus, things that Titus should be teaching to the congregation. And so he begins by saying that the older men need to be taught to be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience. That is in verse 2. In verse 3, the older women, likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanders, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.

And then in verse 4 is a very, very interesting statement. That these older women in the congregation need to be taught that they in turn pass on to the younger women in the congregation and admonish the younger women to love their husbands, *to love their children*.

There is hardly anything in this world that is more highly respected than mother love. Yet this verse indicates that mothers need to be taught how to love their children, that it is not something that comes naturally, but rather something that comes by means of experience and that that experience can be short circuited. And in this case, helped by getting the experience from the older women in the congregation, their experiences passed on to you younger women.

Let us carry this a little bit further. To really love in the biblical sense, is not something that comes naturally. In fact, it is not something that we have within us. Indeed, it is something to be learned. And in its strictest sense that it is not something that is possible unless the Spirit of God is also present. Now that makes child rearing very interesting. And it means that apart from the Spirit of God, by which the love of God is imparted to you and me, we cannot really have the love necessary to properly rear children. That begins to help you to understand I Corinthians 7:14 and why only those children

who are the children of baptized people can come under that blessing. Because the proper kind of love is not even there.

Let us leave that thought and go back to the book of Proverbs, chapter 29. We are going to add another principle that is needed in child rearing, another very familiar scripture. In verse 18, my Bible says:

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.

Now even as it is impossible to properly rear children without the love of God in oneself, we also find that without having the proper vision, without having the revelation of God, it is also impossible to properly rear children. I might ask the question. Is it possible to properly rear a child without knowing, at least in a general sense, what God has in mind as a goal for that child? Put in other words, is it possible to properly rear a child without a knowledge, a belief in and a living of the gospel of the Kingdom of God? I say the Bible is showing that to be true. I am not saying that parents cannot rear children well apart from that. I am saying they cannot fit the biblical context without it.

We might ask the question this way. Mr. Armstrong so frequently quoted Amos 3:3 which says, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Or another translation to that, in fact, one that is actually a little bit more accurate and that is, "Can two meet at the same place unless they agree on the time and place?"

Now, if you apply those two principles about where there is no revelation, the people are not restrained. If there is no revelation, if there is no revelation from God of what the goal for life is, if there is no revelation of what the goal for child rearing is, is it possible that we are going to end up at the end of our life or the end of the child's life, that God and the child are going to come together at the same time and at the same place, if we do not even know where we are supposed to be heading?

I can remember reading years ago of some famous athletes who from the time that they were practically born, their fathers were training them to be an athlete or a musician. It really does not matter. Now, there is nothing wrong

with being an athlete, nothing wrong with being a musician. But if all of the parents' efforts are funneled in that direction, are they going to meet up at the same place as God is going to be at the end of all of this? And so the child grows up without restraint in many, many areas of life and all of his energies are focused into one area.

[unclear] . . . others were out there playing ball with them. And every day, you know, day after day after day and those boys of course, grew into men, they got into the major leagues, they made names for themselves, earned a great deal of money, but they did not have the revelation of God. And the way things stand right now, they are not going to be in the Kingdom of God, the first resurrection. Later on, it will come. But we have a greater responsibility because of our calling right here and now.

And so we are beginning to see that without the love of God, without the revelation of the purpose of God, we cannot really rear a child in harmony with God because despite our best efforts, we are not going to come out at the same place as God is going to be. It will be a different time, different place.

Let us go back a few chapters actually into the book of Psalms to chapter 127 and just pick out one verse there and add another factor here.

Psalm 127:3 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord [the King James says that they are a gift from the Lord], the fruit of the womb is His reward.

Heritage means something that God gives to us, like an inheritance. It is something that He gives to us. With that in mind, go back to Genesis the 33rd chapter, verse 5. Here, in this context, Jacob is being reunited with Esau. They have not seen one another for quite a number of years. In verse 4,

Genesis 33:4-5 But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him [that is, Jacob], and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And he lifted up his eyes [that he there is Esau] and saw the women and children, and said, "Who are these with you?" And he said [this is now Jacob speaking], "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."

These verses are just an example of a principle that is shown in many, many places in the Bible. And that is that our children are gifts from God. They are His heritage, with the emphasis on the word *His*, they are His, but they are gifts to you and me. They are put in our care for a period of time for the purpose of development, but not really in the strictest sense as belonging to us. Yes, they are ours in the sense that they are our flesh and blood and they come from our bodies. But in the biblical sense, they are from God, they are His, even as He says, all the silver and all the gold is Mine, the earth is Mine, all the people on it are Mine.

Children are given to us for a specific purpose. And that purpose is to be the primary teacher at the beginning of that potential God's life. There are two reasons for that. 1) It gives us practice in governing. 2) It gives the child a head start so that if he is trained, by the time that he grows up he will never depart. And he has such a tremendous advantage over other children because, you see, of the calling of God.

Now God says, again, this is a general principle, in Genesis 2 when He gave the charge to Adam and Eve. He told them to dress and to keep. They are an overall responsibility that is given to whatever comes into our care. Whether it be a piece of property or in this case, a child's life, that we are to dress it and keep it. Dress means to embellish, to make more beautiful, to develop. And to keep means to guard from degeneration. And so we have a double-barreled responsibility to provide for the child's embellishment and growth and development, and also to provide a bulwark for him in any way trying to go back to the world or whatever; to keep him from degenerating or deteriorating physically, mentally, spiritually, morally, in whatever way to dress and to keep.

In Ephesians the second chapter, we need to add another factor.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, among

whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of even as the others.

Now, this factor has to be included because this is what makes our responsibility so difficult; and he does not wait until children are grown. Mr. Armstrong again, quoting from him in an article entitled, "Our Children, Future Gods." He said,

As soon as a baby begins to use the reasoning process in the first year, Satan pumps into the child through the human spirit, attitudes of selfishness, competition, and strife, the desire to get.

So here we see two things that we need to understand. 1) It is Satan the Devil that makes the responsibility so difficult. 2) We cannot wait. We have to begin training a child right away because Satan will not wait. He will begin to pump his spirit into the spirit that is in that little child. So it is a responsibility virtually from the time that a child comes out of the womb that we begin to work on that.

Let us go to I Corinthians 7 and we will add another factor. And this is very wonderful.

I Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband. [Remember that word sanctified means set apart, consecrated.]; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

I will read that last phrase to you from the Moffat translation, "Otherwise, of course, your children would be unholy instead of being consecrated to God."

Now, this makes all the sense in the world, really, once you begin to see it in the light of Psalm 127 that children are a gift from God and they indeed are given into our care. They do not really, in the strictest sense, belong to us, they are consecrated to God. This does not mean that our children are saved or that they are converted, but rather they are set apart. They are in a special category, once again.

What this amounts to in practical fact is this that our children are not cut off from God as other children are. They have access to the Tree of Life, a wonderful thing. Because of the converted parent, our children can be taught the truths of God and that those truths will then lead that child to conversion and thus their chances of conversion are significantly multiplied because of that access that they have to God.

That can be the counterbalance to Satan the Devil. If we are carrying out our responsibility, Satan the Devil is not going to get to our children, at least very effectively, because they are going to have the equipment to be able to deal with Satan the Devil too. That even though they do not yet have the Spirit of God begetting them, they are nonetheless taught and trained in that way. They believe it. They put it into practice as much as a child can, and they are protected from the attitudes, the spirit, of Satan the Devil. So you are a most important element in the life and the potential of that little child that is beginning to come along.

Now, I am just going to mention Psalm 45:16. That is a psalm that applies to the Millennium. When you read it, you will find that what is being described there is God the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, the woman is the church. And then when you get to verse 16, he suddenly mentions sons. They are the sons of the Bride, they are the sons of the church. They are our little children who are sitting out here now. And what we see there is the first step in the awesome potential that they have, because God says that they are going to be princes in the land. And that is important because the kings are going to be the changed spirit beings, you and I, certainly hopefully.

What this means is that we have to rear them in a way that is worthy of that potential. We find in Ephesians 4:13-15, that our responsibility—yours and mine—is to grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Now that will not happen until we are in the Kingdom of God, but we are in the flow, we are going in that direction. That is our children's potential. They are people, they are little people, they have exactly the same potential, but it has fallen upon you and me, because God has given them to us as gifts, it has become our responsibility to aid them in that development and thus give them a head start actually over the rest of the world, the rest of the children who share their age.

Let us go back to I John 3, verses 1 through 3. John very clearly shows us what our potential is.

I John 3:1-3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be [that is, specifically revealed what our job is going to be], but [and this is in a general sense] we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

Jesus of Nazareth is now God. We are going to be like Him, equal to Him as a son of God in the Kingdom of God. And this is exactly the same potential as our little children.

Now, let me give to you seven things that were in this sermon. I did not number them until this point and so this will summarize. These are the things that we are going to cover as we go through the messages from here on.

1. In an overall sense, what God wants is godly seed from our child rearing practices. He wants godly seed.
2. We find out that we have to *learn* to love our children. It is not something that comes naturally. As wonderful as mother love is, it is not often by itself sufficient to rear a child in the godly sense.
3. We found that we have to have vision. Unless there is the revelation from God, we are not going to end up at the same place at the same time as God. We are not going to be restrained in our practices to the form that God would have us use.
4. We have to understand Satan's part in this, that he is the one that makes things so difficult. He is the destroyer of the brethren, that he is broadcasting, as it were, his mind, his attitudes throughout the entirety of the world. And this is what we are responsible for protecting our children from.
5. You have to understand that your children are not cut off from God. That because of your conversion, because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, your

children have access to God through you. This begins to encompass things like example, attitude.

6. If we are going to properly rear children, we have to see God as the model parent. That is why He is called the Father in the Bible. He is the model Parent. And so we will be seeking child rearing practices that He Himself is using.

7. We have to see ourselves as the primary teacher. It is not somebody else's responsibility. It is not the school, it is not the church, it is not Aunt Tilly or grandma or grandpa. It is not society, it is not anybody else. It is you! You are the child's primary teacher. Now, we are the primary teacher in a process that brings our children from knowing nothing to as much maturity as we can possibly assist them in developing.

Brethren, the greatest expression of our love for our children is to prepare them for life—human and godly—because that is the ultimate in relationships within the God Family. That is our responsibility, to bring them as close as we can to that point.

So what do our children have to be developed in? What does a prince need? What does a king need? What does a future king need? Well, the very same things as you are trying to develop: the ability to make right decisions, the ability to internalize God's values, self-control, the major principles of rulership, service and selflessness.

How about something like patience? How about the proper use of power? Money is a power. How about facing trials bravely? How about facing up to the world and living a life that is exemplary of God, regardless of the peer pressures that are around? How about training and developing and things that will bring to them a good self-esteem, where they have the right kind of confidence and feel assured about themselves and know that they can do things well? How about things like that?

And then finally, we might say, what about obedience? Certainly, all those things and more are needed. So that is our job to bring them, prepare them, for life.