

**HINTS TO PARENTS: A  
SERMON ON  
THE RELIGIOUS  
EDUCATION OF CHILDREN**

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Hints to Parents: A Sermon on the Religious Education of Children by Gardiner Spring

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SERMON

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

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BY GARDINER SPRING,

PASTOR OF THE BRICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE CITY OF  
NEW-YORK.

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## SERMON.

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EPHESIANS vi, 4.

"And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

WHOEVER turns his thoughts toward the construction of human society, will be convinced that the religious education of children constitutes one of the great means of grace and salvation. It is in the power of parents, with the blessing of God, to do more to prevent the declension of vital piety, to suppress the prevalence of religious errors, to advance the interests of truth and godliness, to reform and save the world, than can be accomplished by any other means.

I speak of a *religious education*. And yet there are so many things that ultimately go into the account of a religious education, and exert a powerful, though indirect influence in forming the moral character, that to confine my remarks to that course of education which is purely religious, would be to take a very limited view of the subject. The inquiry we present to your consideration is, *What is the nurture to which the Word of God and sound*

*experience direct us, that is most likely to result in the salvation of our children?* To answer this inquiry, as fully as it ought to be answered, would require a volume, instead of a single discourse. I can offer but a *few hints* on this important subject. My design in the following remarks, is to call your attention

To some particulars in the education of children, to which the efforts of parents should be specially directed;

To some of the measures to be adopted in the prosecution of these desirable ends; and

To some of the encouragements and motives to the faithful performance of this parental duty.

I. I will call your attention to some particulars in the education of children, to which the attention of parents should be specially directed.

And here I remark,

One of these is, *the habit of subordination*. Subjection to authority is the ordinance of God; and if there is a sphere where it ought to maintain its perfect and unbroken influence, it is the family. The God of nature has subjected the years of childhood and youth to parental control; nor can this wise and benevolent constitution be inverted, without jeoparding the best interests of our children for time and eternity. The habit of subordination is one of the happiest preservatives from a thousand evils. The spirit that consults a parent's wishes; that reluctates from violating a parent's authority;

that prefers to sacrifice its own gratification, to a parent's choice; is not only one of the strongest shields that can be thrown around the youthful character, but forms one of the links in the chain that often leads to early piety. Though it is not every dutiful child that is pious, yet it is much more probable that such a child will become so, than one of an obstinate, unbending temper. "If it be true, that there are more pious women than men, it is to be ascribed very much to this circumstance, that they are more habituated to restraint and subjection."

*A sacred regard to truth* is also a habit of the first importance to be instilled into the mind of a child. In this respect there is a great difference in the disposition of children. I have seen those who rarely, if ever, told a falsehood; and I have seen those who seem to be born with a lying tongue. It is wonderful to see how the early habit of extravagant and false representations cleaves to the human character; and it is mournfully affecting to know how strong a barrier it throws in the way of holiness and heaven. Children should be taught the immense importance of always speaking the truth; and should be made to feel, that love, confidence, and honor; or, detestation, distrust, and disgrace, will follow them, as they are observant or regardless of the claims of veracity. Every false declaration, every art of conceal-



ment and dissimulation, every strong statement, every broken promise, only hardens the heart, sears the conscience, and opens another avenue to the seductions of the adversary; while on the other hand, truth, pure truth, with all its simplicity and loveliness, forms the foundation of every moral virtue.

The *habit of industry* is also one which deserves early and particular consideration. Industrious habits exert a happy influence on the intellectual and moral character. Many a youth has been rescued from disgrace and ruin, because he had no time for amusements and dissipation; and many a one has been lost to himself, to his family, to the world, and to God, because he had nothing else to do, but yield himself a prey to self-indulgence. If we would guide our children in the paths of piety and peace; if we have our eye on their best interests, for this world and that which is to come; we shall educate them in some useful employment. Even in man's primeval integrity and innocence, he was not exempt from toil; and who, since the apostacy, can escape with impunity, the force of that universal sentence, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread, until thou return to the ground?" There is no small difficulty, especially in large cities, in educating children in the habits of industry. It is indeed one of the most serious difficulties with which families who reside in large cities are

called to contend. The great reason why vice so successfully allures the youth of large cities, is, that during their early education, and in seasons of relaxation from study, there is nothing to occupy their time. And hence the remark, that the great mass of men of character and standing in our large cities, are not native citizens. It deserves to be seriously considered, whether the wide difference existing between families brought up under the same religious instruction, may not be ascribed to the fact, that some are educated in habits of industry, and some in habits of idleness. It is a sad mistake in parents to educate their children, merely for spheres of splendid accomplishment. I am no enemy to refinement; nor am I insensible of the happy influence which courtesy and elegance exert on the intellectual and moral character. But I have yet to learn, that these may not be combined with habits of industry and enterprise. Dissipation or despondency uniformly take the place of active employment in the youthful mind.

*Rigid temperance* is inseparable from a good education. If a youth cannot be induced to abstain *utterly* from the use of ardent spirits, there is little hope that he will become a pious or respectable man. This is an indulgence which will eventually involve him in distress and ruin. The course of transgression may, for a time, be easy and pleasant enough, but the end must be disaster. The infatuated man who is gliding

down the stream that conducts him to a precipice, is not in a situation more dangerous, than the youth who ventures upon this allowed course. He may regale his eye with the beauty of the landscape; and his ear may be charmed with the melody of song; his little bark may glide over the bosom of the unruffled stream, and the soft gale of pleasure may gently fill his sail: but the roar of the cataract will soon fall upon his ear, and the yawning abyss will engulf him. Health, intellect, character, usefulness, comfort, property, conscience, and the soul, are all sacrificed at the shrine of this worse than pagan deity. No one sin of which a youth can be guilty, puts him at such an awful remove from the influence of motives; no one so completely obliterates the moral sense; no one renders its victim so unmindful of the sanctions and obligations of eternity as this. The mind is the medium of access to the heart. Our children must think, and feel, and consider, before they will repent, and pray, and love. But where is the individual who is so unpromising a subject for these reflections, as the youth, who "tarries long at the wine, and goes to seek mixed wine?" If the God of all the earth has constituted parents the immediate guardians of their children's happiness and virtue, and hopes, let them beware how they sow the seeds of intemperance in infancy, and nurture them in childhood; for they are fruitful seeds, and prolific in death.