



The Education and Discipline of a Son.

By A. E. M.



G. MORRISH,
20, PATERNOSTER SQUARE,
LONDON, E.C. 4.

THE EDUCATION AND DISCIPLINE OF A SON.

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GOD has been pleased to reveal the fulness of His thoughts for His people, but the enemy would seek to hinder them from getting the full blessing which it is His pleasure to give. It is a great reproach to us if we fail to enter into the fulness of blessing, for God has been pleased to establish a marvellous system of education whereby everything in life is made to contribute to the building up of the sons of God. He has set us up in families. It is by no accident that the Lord's people are born into families ; He has set us there because He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Having chosen us from eternity, the Lord has taken very great care of all the circumstances of our lives ; what family we are born into, what circumstances surround us, where we live, and what meeting we are in, indeed, every feature of life is made to be contributory to the education of a son.

It is of all importance to understand spiritual things. It is the things that you do not under-

stand or apprehend that bring about enlargement. Do not be content to be served by ministry which makes everything simple and small, or you will fail to be enlarged. The time comes when God looks for us to be men, able to take a man's food, and with a man's understanding, so that we should understand the words of the wise and their enigmas and their dark sayings.

Now the Book of Proverbs contains instruction for the education of a son. The end of all God's ways with us on earth is that He might have sons who will dwell in the Father's house, who will know the manners of it, the affections of it, and the intelligence that is proper to it; sons whom God has personally educated and instructed, so that they might be near Himself and be companions of Christ. How marvellous is the thought !

We can thus see the necessity for moral and spiritual education, that in the coming day we might be capable of moving about with the Lord Jesus, able to sustain and support the position in which He will place us.

Proverbs iii. brings in two main thoughts in connection with this subject : one, the education of a son ; the other, the discipline of a son. The education of a son is very varied ; it is not accomplished in a moment, and the subjects concerned are many.

The first feature of this divine system of education is teaching, as it says here, "My son, forget not my law ; but let thine heart keep my commandments." Naturally we do not like to be taught ; we do not like the necessary exercise. People like what moves their souls and affections. They like what uplifts them when in pressure, or carries them over a heavy day ; but how few there are that are prepared to come under divine teaching ! Yet it is at that point we begin the divine education for a son, and the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of it.

The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge ; and it is also a fountain of life. The sense of the reality and greatness of having to do with God is the point where teaching begins. If we could but realise how marvellously great God is it would do away with all that is selfish and small.

It is a solemn reality to have to do with God, who is a consuming fire, and the realisation of this would help us to prepare our souls to come under divine teaching so as to learn the moral laws by which God regulates His universe. These two principles are the basis of spiritual education : to submit to God and His thoughts, and discard our own, and to learn to love what is right because it *is* right, that is, we have to keep the commandments in our hearts. There are many that seek to keep the moral law of

the kingdom of God in their heads ; who say, I cannot do that because of what the brethren would say, but the moral law by which the sons of God are to be regulated in a scene of evil is to be kept in the heart.

Then it says, " Let not mercy and truth forsake thee : bind them about thy neck ; write them upon the table of thine heart." Mercy and truth are the two great features of God's approach to man. Mercy takes account of our need ; truth maintains what God is. And so as we go through our life we are to have these two precious features of God's approach to man bound about our neck and carried in our hearts. God is prepared to deal with us in mercy, it is the ground of His approach to man. He did not come in as making demands, He came in in mercy, and also in truth. So the education of a son is to be marked by these two elements which were found in the life of Jesus—mercy and truth.

Then it says, " Trust in the Lord with all thine heart ; and lean not unto thine own understanding." God would have us confide in Him. Is it not wonderful that God, who is so great and has such resources, should look for confidence and trust on the part of His people ! In the lives of every one who has to do with God there is something they cannot understand ; some sorrow or pressure,

some strange inexplicable feature of life which cannot be understood, and that God never explains. If He explained it we should not come out of life having confidence in God, for that is developed when we do not understand, when we cannot explain. It is in these circumstances that we learn to trust Him.

Then another feature is, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Life is made up of many ways, junction points, where two roads meet and we have to decide which to take. These points arise in the home, in health, and in business. The affairs of life constantly call for some kind of decision as presenting alternatives. "In all thy ways acknowledge him"—business ways, association ways, home ways, we are to acknowledge Him, and He will direct our paths. What a simple course for a believer to follow! We are not to be driven about by this consideration or that. We are not to be moved by impulse, we are to acknowledge God. It is part of the education of a son that in all his ways he is to acknowledge God, and He will direct his path. Looking back we can see the hand of God; but looking forward we are called upon to acknowledge Him, and leave the directing of our path to Him.

"Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord and depart from evil." These may

appear to be simple things, but they are connected with the education of a son, and contribute in no small degree to our reaching spirituality. It is an easy thing to be wise in our own eyes, to think we know more than others ; and to be uplifted. But the moment we become uplifted we are no use to God. God can do great things with a humble person. Humility provides God with conditions in which He is free ; but a heart that is uplifted would limit God, and He has to resist it in order that pride may be humbled and brought down.

God will not tolerate pride ; it is distasteful to Him. He resists the proud, but the humble He can use. So this homely and valuable exhortation comes in, "Be not wise in thine own eyes," for all has been given to us ; the knowledge of God or of grace has been given to us not earned, or worked for, or attained. Everything in Christianity is on the basis of gift, and a gift makes much of God, the giver.

Now if these things are so, if we move on quietly through life, and humbly in the presence of the brethren, giving God His place in all things, we shall find that our barns are filled with food. The sight of a Christian whose barns are filled is very choice ! He is full of thoughts about Christ ; he is "full of matter," like Elihu. (Job xxxii. 18.)

If he has a spare hour, he can occupy it to spiritual profit. Many of us may get five, ten or twenty minutes of leisure, how are they going to be filled up? The things of life, the plans of to-morrow would crowd in upon our souls. But God wants a little time in our lives. It is these moments by day or night that God would use. We need to have our barns filled, to have matter; but we must study God's moral laws for this.

The point of spirituality is that we get away from ourselves altogether, and are wholly occupied with Christ. God is set to bring us to that point, that we might have the capacity to be wholly taken up with Christ. That is the place of a son, and that is the point that God would lead us to, indeed, He is set to bring us there, and is going to use all the education of life to contribute to that. He has the matter in hand, and all the means that He requires, and if we are prepared to go His way we shall all arrive at that point.

It is the most marvellous conception that has been given to man that we should be like Christ, that we should be conformed to the image of God's Son! That is what God had in view before ever we came into the world, that we should be like His Son. Can you conceive how precious and beautiful and delightful the Son of God was in the eyes of the Father?

Can you receive that conception into your mind ? It is in scripture—blessedly there. Any one who reads the Bible must finish with this impression, that Christ is everything to God.

Well, what He was in sonship, is the setting forth of what we are to be through grace. When I think of the Son of God, it is not as a long way off, nor in some condition upon which I cannot look ; but He is the setting forth of God's thoughts, and we are to be conformed to that image, and nothing less. It is that which makes life worth living ; it makes the pressure of the pathway worth while ; it makes the daily grind useful—valuable—for it is there we learn to come into the education of a son through the circumstances of life with an intense appreciation of Christ.

I now turn to our discipline.

It is suggested in this chapter, which is quoted in Hebrews xii., a passage which in a very beautiful way develops God's thoughts for His sons. The discipline of sonship is distinct from every other kind of discipline. It is distinct from the government of God, for that is related to what we do, either as sowing to the flesh or to the Spirit. The government of God is the marvellous system by which the power of God is brought it, so that everything should bear its own fruit. Sowing to the flesh or to the Spirit brings its own fruit, and

God takes account of our lives so that the sowing and the reaping are perfectly related one to the other.

But the discipline of a son has no relation to what we have done at all. It is not connected with sowing. Scripture says, "Whom the Lord *loveth* he chasteneth." But God would deal with us on a totally different footing when we come to Him as sons. It is no longer a question of faith.

Galatians deals with the position by *faith*: "We are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus." But there comes a time in our spiritual history when a longing desire possesses our souls to enter into the place and portion of a son. We turn to God then as we never have turned to Him before, and with the reality of things on our spirits in a deeper way than we have ever known. Do we want to be sons of God with the affections and conscience and intelligence of sons? Knowledge, understanding and wisdom are connected with that place of sonship.

What importance scripture attaches to the thought in chapter xxiii. 15, 16, "My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine." Think of God saying that! that it brings positive delight to Him that His sons should be wise, that their hearts should be full, and that their lips should speak right things!

This is not the delight that God has in meeting a repentant sinner ; that is very precious in its place, but this is the kind of delight that God finds in Christ—the deepest and fullest that scripture speaks of. God would find that kind of delight in us. With such marvellous blessedness in view, there must needs be the compensating testing. There must be something to keep us humble and lowly, and that is the discipline that attaches to the sons whom God receives.

The moment we come to God with these holy desires, His discipline with us is entirely different. Formerly we expected discipline if we failed, or to reap what we sowed to the flesh ; but now we must expect pressure, contradiction, scourging without any apparent reason, except that God loves us. He has a son, and He is going to chasten him. This discipline is connected with the place of sonship and the love of God. Now are we prepared for it ? That is a very pertinent question. Spiritual things of the most precious kind will take on a character which we have never known before, but we have to face the position. Are we prepared for it ?

“He . . . scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” The word means to receive *by Him*, meaning *near Him*. It is a proof of love. *Only a son* could stand scourging as a proof of love.

Any one on a lower platform would say, I cannot understand love like this. In the beginning of our histories God deals with us very gently. As we grow older and learn more, He deals with us more firmly ; and as we are assured in spiritual things, His dealings are firmer still.

Did you ever see an old believer turn aside ? Oh, how severe are God's dealings with him ! You see, he has been in the place of a son, he has known the intimacy and sweetness and blessedness of that place, and to turn aside from that is a terrible thing. The scourging, the correcting that the love of God brings in, is because God loves you. At this point you will have to look at many sorrows in your life for which you could see no cause, and you will now see that it is evidence of God's *love* for you as a son.

The first book of Proverbs closes at chapter ix. It is for the instruction of a son. The second book, which closes at chapter xxiv., is the exercise of a son, one who has come under the instruction, and now takes up the function of a son. Both divisions end with a solemn warning. The first book closes with the record of the clamorous woman who cries on the streets to the simple to turn in, telling them "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But . . . *the dead are there.*" The

clamorous woman is Satan's opposition to the education of a son. The wise woman has a house, we read in chapter viii., but the foolish woman also has a house. That is, Satan has set up an alternative system which is designed to deceive the simple, that they might never learn what it is to be one of the sons of God !

I will only dwell on one thought. "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." That is the point where many are turned aside. They get mixed up with this satanic system and are turned away from wisdom's system. Are you drinking stolen waters ? Are you eating bread in secret ? It will destroy everything that you have learnt from God. It is the solemn warning of the first book.

The vast system of this world is working to-day to hinder the people of God from entering into sonship. You may think that all that is in the world has been designed to satisfy sinful man. But that is not so. The most attractive things, the masterpieces of satanic effort, are not to attract man, but to turn the saints of God away from their portion. The enemy has taken account of the things that minister to God's pleasure. If God has not got us as sons, with a son's affections, then He has been robbed of His portion, that is, His portion in the saints. He desires to accept

our service as from sons. Even to Pharaoh He said, "Israel is my son, my first born ; let my son go that *he may serve me.*"

God's portion on earth to-day is found in the saints ; when Christ was on earth God's portion was in Him. Now the many sons are on earth, and God's pleasure is in them. But I say again, the most skilled efforts of the powers of darkness are directed to keep the saints from entering into this portion.

These stolen waters, the bread eaten in secret, things which believers go on with, but dare not bring into the open—these will rob you of the very gain of the education with which God has served you that you might enter into the portion of a son.

Now take the warning of the second book. One is viewed as having passed through the school of divine education and having learned what it is to be a son, but looking over the wall of his vineyard we find that it is broken down and the places grown over with thorns and thistles. There has been "a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." Just a little, and it has spoilt the whole position. It is not that one has gone out of fellowship or caused the brethren concern, but there has been a slackening, a little folding of the hands, a little slumber, and the whole position has been lost.

In the beginning of our histories God is very tender, but as we move on in life His things are pressed home on us, and God expects an answer, He looks for definiteness. He looks for the zeal and energy that should mark those who know their place as sons before His face. And the vineyard must be cared for. It is the little patch that is under our control. The wall must be maintained, otherwise the whole position will be lost, and want and penury will come in like an armed man. God is not mocked, and when this comes there is no resisting it. It is spiritual catastrophe, and if we do not go on any one of us is liable to come to this.

Our only safety is to move on nearer to God, and as we move we realise more and more how great God is, and we fear Him. We learn to acknowledge Him in all our ways, and that the house of God is a most blessed place, and that to be near God in the relationship of sonship is the greatest blessing that can possibly be entered into on this earth.

Now are we all set for that? If I could encourage any heart along this line I should be thankful indeed, and I should like to encourage the young brethren as well as the old to take the things of God up seriously. Take them up now.

We cannot undo the past. What is past is gone; it is the present and the future that

present possibilities of spiritual gain. It may be but a few days ere the Lord comes, but God is not limited by time ; time never thwarts His end. He can compress a thousand years into one day ! If we could have one day with the Lord it would be like a thousand years of history, such is His power. And if we can only give Him a few moments when we are free from the cares of life, He can turn them to account to give us the feelings and sensibilities of a son. Then in that future day we shall be companions of Christ, not only like Him externally, but like Him morally, in intelligence and wisdom. These precious features that belong to the beloved Son would develop in the brethren, the brethren of the Firstborn from among the dead.

A. E. M.

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