

Motives for a Holy and Careful Education of Children.

By Richard Baxter

Editor's Note: Richard Baxter recognized the fact that conversion is God's work, not man's. He also recognized that children sometimes reject even the best biblical instruction and training. The strong language in the following piece is not directed toward those parents who have diligently instructed and trained children who nevertheless remain unconverted. It is also not intended to cause profitless remorse for parents who feel they have failed in this area, and who wish they could go back and start over. My hope in providing this piece is that Baxter's words will prompt those who have remaining opportunity with their children to use the time wisely, and to encourage others to do the same.

Parents: Consider how strongly God motivates you *by nature* to the greatest care and diligence in the holy education of your children. They are, as it were, parts of yourselves, and those who you naturally find yourselves obliged to love, protect, and provide for.

Will you in no greater ways show your love to your children, than every beast or bird will to their young? It is not dogs or beasts that you bring into the world, but children who have immortal souls. Therefore it is a care and education suitable to their natures which you owe them, even such as most effectively works to bring about the happiness of their souls. They have an everlasting inheritance of happiness to attain, and it is that which you must bring them up for.

They also have an endless misery to escape, and it is that which you must diligently teach them to avoid. If you do not teach them to escape the flames of hell, what thanks do they owe you for teaching them how to get by in this life? If you do not teach them the way to heaven, and how they may be sure of their salvation, what thanks do they owe you for teaching them how to make their livings a little while in a miserable world? If you do not teach them to know God, and how to serve Him and be saved, you teach them nothing, or worse than nothing.

It is in your hands to do them the greatest *kindness*, or the greatest *cruelty*, in all the world. Help them to know God and be saved, and you do more for them than if you helped them to be kings or princes. If you neglect their souls and breed in them

ignorance, worldliness, ungodliness, and sin, you betray them to the devil, the enemy of souls, even as truly as if you sold them to him. You betray them to the one who will deceive them and abuse them in this life—the one who will lead them only to eternal torment in the next.

If you love your children, show your love in those things on which their everlasting welfare depends. Do not say you love them, and yet lead them to hell. And what more could you possibly do to damn them, even if you *studied* to do it as maliciously as the devil himself, than to bring them up in ignorance, carelessness, worldliness, sensuality, and ungodliness? There is no other way to hell than this. No man is damned for any other things but these.

And yet you will bring them up in such a way of life and then say, "God forbid! We did not desire to damn them!" You do like the man who sets his house on fire and then says, "God forbid! I did not intend to burn it down!" Or like one who casts his infant child into the sea, and then says he did not intend to drown him. Or one who trains up his son to be a robber and a thief, and then says he did not intend to have him hanged. But if you intended to make a thief of him, it is all one in effect as if you *intended* his hanging. For the law determines hanging as the penalty for robbery and theft, and the righteous judge will enforce it. In the same way, if you train up your children in worldliness and ungodliness as if there were no righteous Judge, as if they had no eternal souls to care for, you may as well admit that you *intended* to have them damned.

Is not the devil more excusable for dealing cruelly in these ways with your children than you who are their parents—you who are bound by nature to love them and prevent their misery? It is inexcusable for ministers, men who are charged with the care of men's souls, to then betray them by their negligence and be found guilty of their everlasting misery. But in parents it is more unnatural, and therefore, more inexcusable.

Condensed from: *A Christian Directory*, by Richard Baxter (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), pp. 427-428; from Part II, chapter 6, entitled, "More Special Motives for a Holy and Careful Education of Children." Condensing and editing by Daryl Wingerd, using some contemporary language and grammar. Richard Baxter was a 17th century Puritan pastor and writer.