

From: Baxter's Practical Works, Vol. 1, *A Christian Directory*,
on Christian Economics, Chap. XII., pp. 457-458

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPECIAL DUTIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH TOWARDS GOD.

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THOUGH I put your duty to your parents first, because it is first learned, yet your duty to God immediately is your greatest and most necessary duty. Learn these following precepts well.

Direct. I. Learn to understand the covenant and vow which in your baptism you made with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, your Creator, Redeemer, and Regenerator: and when you well understand it, renew that covenant with God in your own persons, and absolutely deliver up yourselves to God, as your Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, your Owner, your Ruler, and your Father and felicity. Baptism is not an idle ceremony, but the solemn entering into covenant with God, in which you receive the greatest mercies, and bind yourselves to the greatest duties. It is but the entering into that way which you must walk in all your lives, and avowing that to God which you must be still performing And though your parents had authority to promise for you, it is you that must perform it; for it was you that they obliged. If you ask by what authority they obliged you in covenant to God, I answer, by the authority which God hath given them in nature, and in Scripture; as they oblige you to be subjects of the king, or as they enter your names into any covenant, by lease or other contract, which is for your benefit; and they do it for good, that you may have part in the blessings of the covenant; and if you grudge at it, and refuse your own consent when you come to age, you lose the benefits. If you think they did you wrong, you may be out of covenant when you will, if you will renounce the kingdom of heaven. But it is much wiser to be thankful to God, that your parents were the means of so great a blessing to you, and to do that again more expressly by yourselves which they did for you; and openly with thankfulness to own the covenant in which you are engaged, and live in the performance and in the comforts of it all your days.

Direct. II. Remember that you are entering into the way, to everlasting life, and not into a place of happiness or continuance. Presently therefore set your hearts on heaven, and make it the design of all your lives, to live in heaven with Christ forever. O happy you, if God betimes will thoroughly teach you to know what it is that must make you happy; and if at your first setting out, your end be right, and your faces be heavenward! Remember that as soon as you begin to live, you are hasting towards the end of your lives: even as a candle as soon as it beginneth to burn, and the hour-glass as soon as it is turned, is wasting, and hasting to its end; so as soon as you begin to live, your lives are in a consumption, and posting towards your final hour. As a runner, as soon as he beginneth his race, is hasting to the end of it; so are your lives, even in your youngest time. It is another kind of life that you must live for ever, than this trifling, pitiful, fleshly life. Prepare therefore speedily for that which God sent you hither to prepare for. O happy you, if you begin betimes, and go on with cheerful resolution to the end! It is blessed wisdom to be wise betimes, and to know the worth of time in childhood, before any of it be wasted and lost upon the fooleries of the world. Then you may grow wise indeed, and be treasuring up understanding, and growing up in sweet acquaintance with the Lord, when others are going backwards, and daily making work for sad repentance or final desperation. Eccl. 12:1, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, (of all things here below,) I have no pleasure in them."

Direct. III. Remember that you have corrupted natures to be cured, and that Christ is the Physician that must cure them; and the Spirit of Christ must dwell within you, and make you holy, and give you a new heart and nature, which shall love God and heaven above all the honour and pleasures of the world: rest not therefore till you find that you are born anew, and that the Holy Ghost hath made you holy, and quickened your hearts with the love of God, and of your dear Redeemer. [1] The old nature loveth the things of this world, and the pleasures of this flesh; but the new nature loveth the Lord that made you, and redeemed and renewed you, and the endless joys of the world to come, and that holy life which is the way thereto.

Direct. IV. Take heed of loving the pleasures of the flesh, in over-much eating, or drinking, or play. Set not your hearts upon your belly or your sport; let your meat, and sleep, and play be moderate. Meddle not with cards or dice, or any bewitching or riotous sports: play not for money, lest it stir up

covetous desires, and tempt you to be over-eager in it, and to lie, and wrangle, and fall out with others. Use neither food or sports which are not for your health; a greedy appetite enticeth children to devour raw fruits, and to rob their neighbours' orchards, and at once to undo both soul and body. And an excessive love of play doth cause them to run among bad companions, and lose their time, and destroy the love of their books, and their duty, and their parents themselves, and all that is good. You must eat, and sleep, and play for health, and not for useless, hurtful pleasure. [2]

Direct. V. Subdue your own wills and desires to the will of God and your superiors, and be not eagerly set upon any thing which God or your parents do deny you. Be not like those self-willed, fleshly children, that are importunate for anything which their fancy or appetite would have, and cry or are discontent if they have it not. Say not that I must have this or that, but be contented with any thing which is the will of God and your superiors. It is the greatest misery and danger in the world, to have all your own wills, and to be given up to your hearts' desire. [3]

Direct. VI. Take heed of a custom of foolish, filthy railing, lying, or any other sinful words. You think it is a small matter, but God thinketh not so; it is not a jesting matter to sin against the God that made you: it is fools that make a sport with sin Prov. 14:9; 10:23; 26:19. One lie, one curse, one oath, one ribald, or railing, or deriding word, is worse than all the pain that ever your flesh endured.

Direct. VII. Take heed of such company and playfellows, as would entice and tempt you to any of these sins, and choose such company as will help you in the fear of God. And if others mock at you, care no more for it, than for the shaking of a leaf, or the barking of a dog. Take heed of lewd and wicked company, as ever you care for the saying of your souls. If you hear them rail, or lie, or swear, or talk filthily, be not ashamed to tell them, that God forbiddeth you to keep company with such as they, Psal. 119:63; Prov. 13:20; 18:7; 1 Cor. 5:12; Eph. 5:11.

Direct. VIII. Take heed of pride and covetousness. Desire not to be fine, nor to get all to yourselves; but be humble, and meek, and love one another, and be as glad that others are pleased as yourselves.

Direct. IX. Love the word of God, and all good books which would make you wiser and better; and read not play-books, nor tale-books, nor love-books, nor any idle stories. When idle children are at play and fooleries, let it be your

pleasure to read and learn the mysteries of your salvation.

Direct. X. Remember that you keep holy the Lord's day. Spend not any of it in play or idleness: reverence the ministers of Christ, and mark what they teach you, and remember it is a message from God about the saying of your souls. Ask your parents when you come home, to help your understandings and memories in any thing which you understood not or forgot. Love all the holy exercises of the Lord's day, and let them be pleasanter to you than your meat or play.

Direct. XI. Be as careful to practice all, as to hear and read it. Remember all is but to make you holy, to love God, and obey him: take heed of sinning against your knowledge, and against the warnings that are given you.

Direct. XII. When you grow up, by the direction of your parents choose such a trade or calling, as alloweth you the greatest helps for heaven, and hath the fewest hinderances, and in which you may be most serviceable to God before you die. If you will but practice these few directions, (which your own hearts must say have no harm in any of them,) what happy persons will you be forever!

[1] 2 Cor. v. 17; Rom. 8:9, 13; John 3:3, 5, 6.

[2] 1 Cor. 10:31.

[3] Psal. 81:10-12.