

SERMON UPON PSALM CXXVII. 3.

Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward.—Ps. cxxvii. 3.

THIS psalm beareth title, 'A song of degrees for Solomon.' In the margin it is 'of Solomon,' or concerning Solomon, that is, spoken in the spirit of prophecy concerning him. Indeed, the passages are in their intrinsic meaning applicable to him. He was a builder of the temple, and an enlarger of the state and dominion of the Jews. There is a plain allusion to his name, Jedidiah, and Solomon, in the latter end of the second verse: 'For so he giveth his beloved sleep.' For Jedidiah, see 2 Sam. xii. 24, 25, 'She bare a son, and he called his name Solomon; and the Lord loved him: and he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet, and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord,' *i.e.*, beloved of the Lord. And for his other name, Solomon, see 1 Chron. xxii. 9, 10, 'Behold a son shall be born to thee, and he shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon' (*i.e.*, peaceable), 'and I will give peace and quietness in his days. He shall build an house for my name, and I will be his father, and he shall be my son; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.' Well, now, it is in vain for you, Absalom and Adonijah, to set your wits on the rack, to torture yourselves with your own ambition. God will give Jedidiah the kingdom, and he shall be Solomon, have rest and peace. We read in the history, 2 Sam. xv. 2, 'Absalom rose early in the morning, and stood in the gate, to salute every one that passed by.' Adonijah made a great bustle. But God's will concerning Jedidiah shall stand. He was to be the builder, he was to be the son by whom the succession of the regal line was to be continued. Upon this David comforteth himself, and acknowledgeth God's mercy: 'Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward.'

In the words, children are represented as a blessing. In which are two things—(1.) The author from whom children come, 'From the Lord;' (2.) The quality in which we receive this blessing, set forth by a double notion—(1st.) As an 'heritage;' (2d.) As a 'reward.'

The word 'heritage' is often, by an Hebraism, put for a man's portion, be it good or bad. It is used in a bad sense, as Job xx. 29, 'This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed

unto him by God.' In the good sense, Isa. liv. 17, 'This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord.'

'Reward' is put for any gift that cometh by promise, or with respect unto obedience; because in a promise there is a contract implied; if we will do so and so, God will do so and so for us.

Doct. It is a blessing that we have from God, and so it should be accounted, that we have children born of our loins.

It is not only a bare gift, so it is to the wicked; but a blessing, one of the temporal mercies of the covenant: Ps. cxxviii. 1, 'Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord, that walketh in his ways.' One of the blessings is, ver. 3, 'Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thy house, thy children like olive plants round about thy table.' This is a part of our portion and heritage; the saints have so acknowledged it: Gen. xxxiii. 5, 'Who are these with thee? And he said, The children which the Lord hath graciously given thy servant.' Jacob speaketh like a father, and like a godly father. Not only given, but graciously given. As a father he acknowledged it a gift; as a godly father, coming from mere grace.

This may be gathered from the story of Job. Compare chap. i. ver. 2, 3, with 18, 19. Observe, when his blessings are reckoned up, first his numerous issue is mentioned before his great estate. The chief part of a man's wealth and prosperity are his children; the choicest of outward blessings. Children are first mentioned. But observe again, in the 18th and 19th verses, the loss of children is mentioned as the greatest affliction; to put the top-stone upon his trial, the last affliction is the saddest, and so giveth the dead stroke.

1. There is much of God's providence exercised in and about children.

[1.] In giving strength to conceive. It is not every one's mercy. Sarah obtained it by faith: Heb. xi. 11, 'Through faith Sarah received strength to conceive seed.' Though bringing forth children be according to the course of nature, yet God hath a great hand in it. Many godly parents have been denied the benefit of children, and need other promises to make up that want: Isa. lvi. 4, 5, 'Thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant. Even unto them will I give in mine house, and within my walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters, I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.'

[2.] In framing the child in the womb. It is not the parents, but God. The parents cannot tell whether it be male or female, beautiful or deformed; they know not the number of the veins and arteries, bones and muscles. See Ps. cxxxix. 13-16, 'For thou hast possessed my reins; thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.' There is a great deal of workmanship in the body of man; it is a curious piece of embroidery. Angels sang at man's creation: Job xxxviii. 7,

‘When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;’ and they admire at his resurrection. What is God about to do?

[3.] In giving strength to bring forth. The heathens had a goddess which presided over this work. His providence reacheth to the beasts. It is by the Lord that hinds do calve: Ps. xxix. 9, ‘The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve;’ and there is a promise to them that fear him, 1 Tim. ii. 15, ‘She shall be saved in child-bearing, if they continue in faith and charity, and holiness with sobriety.’ It must be understood, as all temporal promises are, with the exception of his will; but thus much we gather, that it is a blessing which falleth under the care of his providence; and that by promise, so far as God seeth fit to make it good. Rachel died in this case; every godly woman hath not this deliverance. So did Phinehas’ wife, 1 Sam. iv. 20. God might have taken this advantage against you, to have cut you off. If deliverance were not so ordinary, it would be accounted miraculous. The sorrows and pains of travail are a monument of God’s displeasure: Gen. iii. 16, ‘Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children.’ Women’s pains are more grievous than the females of any kind, to preserve a weak vessel in great danger; and for the child, a sentence of death waylaid it as it was coming into the world.

[4.] The circumstances of deliverance. In every birth there are some new circumstances to awaken our stupid thoughts to consider the work of God; for God doth all his works with some variety, lest we should be cloyed with the commonness of them.

2. They are a great blessing in themselves; and the more of them the greater blessing; and therefore should they be acknowledged and improved as blessings. Certainly there is a more special favour showed us in our relations than in our possessions: Prov. xix. 14, ‘House and riches are the inheritance of fathers, but a good wife is from the Lord.’ So for children. By them the parent is continued and multiplied: they are a part of himself, and in them he liveth when he is dead and gone. It is a shadow of eternity, *nodosa eternitas*; therefore the outward appurtenances of life are not so valuable as children. Besides, they are capable of the image of God. By them the world is replenished, the church multiplied, a people continued, to know, love, and serve God, when we are dead and gone. We read of Christ’s ‘rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men,’ Prov. viii. 31. In the habitable parts of the world there are great whales; but men were Christ’s delight. Especially to God’s confederates, or parents in covenant with God, are children a greater mercy. David was such an one; there are ‘sons and daughters born to him,’ Ezek. xvi. 20. These are visibly the children of God, and in a most proper sense an heritage from the Lord. It is said, Gen. vi. 12, ‘The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they choose.’ Seth begat sons and daughters to God. See Gen. x. 21, ‘Unto Shem also, the father of the children of Eber, the brother of Japhet the elder, even to him were born children.’ The Persians, Lydians, Assyrians, Syrians, those who were possessed of the empire of the world, and all the rich spices

and treasures of the east, he hath not his denomination from them, but from the children of Eber; a people a long time kept under, before they could grow into a nation, but they were the people of God, who retained his true worship; theirs were the promises, the adoption, and the glory. See that place, 1 Cor. vii. 14, 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unholy; but now are they holy.' Reasons are *a notioribus*, from some things plainer than the things they are to prove. The scope of it is to hold forth some privilege to believers not common to others who are infidels; for it is for the believer's sake that the other is sanctified. If it were a common privilege, the unbelieving husband had been as much sanctified in himself as in his wife. Well, then, it is some special privilege, not common to the marriage of an unbelieving couple. Again, whatever this privilege be, it is something of importance; for therefore is it mentioned negatively and positively, which the Holy Ghost useth not to do but in weighty cases. Negatively, they are not as other children, unclean; but positively, they are holy. Again, mark the gradation: 'The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unholy, but now are they holy.' To be sanctified is more than to be lawful, and to be holy is more than to be sanctified. All things, as meats, drink, marriage, estate, are lawful to an infidel, but not sanctified, for they are sanctified by the word and prayer; and many things are sanctified which are not holy; as gold, silver, goat's hair, when they were dedicated to God; they were changed in use, not in nature. The unbelieving husband, to whom all things are impure, he is sanctified, that is, set apart to serve God's providence to this holy end and use, that the believing wife may bring forth children to God; as a nobleman marrying a beggar conveyeth nobility to the children. Now, having laid this foundation, let us see what is the meaning of 'not being unclean, but holy.' The unclean under the law were those that might not come into the sanctuary or into the temple. Holiness qualified for worship, and made capable of ordinances: 'What God hath cleansed call not thou common or unclean,' Acts x. 15, saith God to Peter, speaking of the gentiles as capable of gospel privileges. And so we have found out the sense. The children are holy; though sinners by nature, yet dedicated to God, and by virtue of the parents' covenant accepted into the visible church. This agreeth with the exact rules of friendship, to be a friend to us and our families; as David was to Mephibosheth, for Jonathan's sake: 2 Sam. ix. 7, 'Fear not, for I will show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake.' So Rom. xi. 28, 'As concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but as touching the election they are beloved for the fathers' sake.' For so many thousand years. This is a friendship like God, whose kindness is expressed in a way becoming himself. Well, then, every child is capable of dedication to God in the solemn way of an ordinance. It was a grief to Gehazi to have the leprosy cleave to him and his posterity; it is a comfort to you that your children are holy; another leper was born of him, another child is born to God of you.

More especially when the covenant breaketh out, then children are

a blessing indeed, an heritage from the Lord: Gen. ix. 25, 26, 'Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem.' Ham is cursed in the person of Canaan, whose progeny was excluded from the grace of the ordinances. Instead of blessing Shem, as he had cursed Ham, Noah blesseth and praiseth God: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Shem.' God is his God; that is happiness enough, which is to be ascribed to his grace. But to return: God hath implanted an affection in parents to their children; he hath a Son himself, and he knoweth how he loveth him, and he loveth him for his holiness: Heb. i. 9, 'Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.' So many times, in a condescension to good parents, he bestoweth this privilege, that they shall have godly children. Look, as to a minister, those whom he converts to God, they are 'his glory and his joy, and his crown of rejoicing at the day of the Lord,' 1 Thes. ii. 19, 20; so as to those whom we have been a means to bring into the world, if they are in the covenant of grace, it is a greater blessing than to see them monarchs of the world.

3. It is a gift and a blessing dispensed as a reward and heritage, with respect to the obedience or disobedience of their parents. God would by all ways and means engage us to godliness. Now because our temporal happiness or misery much dependeth upon our relations and children, he would make this one motive to invite us to walk in his ways. This is one way or means to let in happiness or trouble upon us. Sometimes he promiseth children, and flourishing children, as a reward of piety; and threateneth no children, or unhappy children, as a punishment of disobedience. See Job v. 4, compared with 25. Of the wicked it is said, ver. 4, 'His children are far from safety; they are crushed in the gate, and there is none to deliver them.' It is promised to the godly, ver. 25, 'Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great, and thine offspring shall be as the grass of the earth.' So the second commandment: Exod. xx. 5, 6, 'I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments;' and many other places. Though not all the godly, and only they, have the gift of prosperity, and a successful posterity, yet God is pleased in express terms to adopt this blessing into the covenant. Wicked parents are ordinarily great snares and plagues to their children, and the godly prove great blessings. Because this is an argument often pressed in scripture, I shall a little state it, how far wicked parents may procure a judgment, and godly parents a blessing, to their children.

[1.] How far wicked parents may procure a judgment to their children. *Ans.* Punishments are either temporal or eternal. For eternal, no man is punished with eternal punishment for another's sins properly and directly; there we stand upon our own personal account: occasionally a child may be punished eternally for his father's sin, as being deprived of the means of grace by the parent's revolt from the true religion. As for external means, the parents, who are a kind of

trustees, may put away the means of grace from their families. When God cometh to tender grace to them, he tendereth it to them in the name of their whole house : Luke xix. 9, ' This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch also as he is the son of Abraham.' As a believer, he had an interest in Abraham's promises : Gen. xvii. 7, ' I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and thy seed after thee.' So Acts xvi. 31, ' Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house ;' that is, put in a way of salvation. If a family reject the strictness of profession, and give up themselves to cursing, swearing, uncleanness, gaming, hatred of reformation and of a lively ministry, the children born in the family may be justly left to be wicked by these examples, and prejudiced against the ways of God.

For temporal punishments. These may be supposed to come both on those that continue in their wicked parents' paths and courses, or on those who do break them off by repentance.

(1.) If they continue in them, then both parents and children are considered as one body and society . Isa. lxxv. 6, 7, ' I will recompense, even recompense into their bosom, your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together.' There is a cup still filling ; and when we add more water, then it runneth over. As by a figure added to a number already set, the value is increased to a much greater sum than the single figure would bear if it stood alone, so the personal sins of the child are made much more heinous by the foregoing offences of the parents ; or, as a fire that is already kindled, when it meeteth with more combustible matter, the flame is the more increased, so by the addition of the children's sins to their ancestors', the judgment is made more exemplary and remarkable ; nay, it may be the judgment may begin with the children, when the parents in this world do escape and go unpunished. The parents kindle the fire, and the children come and cast in more fuel ; and then no wonder if the burning be the greater.

(2.) If they be godly. The judgments may continue, though they be sanctified, to their holy posterity. Thus God's quarrel for the sins of Manasseh continued in the days of good Josiah : 2 Kings xxiii. 26, ' The Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations wherewith Manasseh had provoked him.' Thus godly children may bear in their bodies the fruits of their parents' uncleanness and intemperance ; and their estates, which they had from their parents, may moulder away in their hands. And this may teach parents, as they love their children, to beware of leaving such sad debts upon the heads of their posterity. Their children shall smart for the fruits of their sin. We often see that the godly children of wicked parents are ruined for the sins of their families, both in their persons and estates. If you ask, For what sins ? Perversion of God's worship, as in the second commandment ; persecution of God's children ; so Ahab's posterity was rooted out : 1 Kings xxi. 29, ' I will bring the evil in his son's days.' Ill getting an estate : *hereditates transeunt cum onere*—the inheritance passeth with its burden. There is a curse goeth along with it. Parents sell their own souls to make their children great, and

God will show the fallacy of it by blasting that greatness: Job xx. 10, 'His children shall seek to please the poor, and his hands shall restore their goods.'

[2.] How far godly parents are blessed in their posterity.

(1.) Good men convey many a temporal blessing to their relations; as God blessed Ishmael for Abraham's sake: Gen. xvi. 10, 'And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude;' Gen. xxi. 13, 'And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.' They have the blessing of Ishmael, if not the blessing of Isaac.

(2.) They are without scruple children of the covenant, in visible relation to God, and in better case than the seed of infidels; not merely as the offspring of your bodies, nor as deriving grace from you by generation; but because you have dedicated yourselves and all that you have to God. They are capable of ordinances: Rom. ix. 16, 'For if the first-fruit be holy, the lump also is holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches.'

(3.) If they die before they come to the use of reason, you have no cause to doubt of their salvation. God is their God. Gen. xvii. 7, 'I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee;' compared with Gal. iii. 14, 'That the blessing of Abraham might come on the gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.' And they never lived to disinherit themselves. As we judge of the slip according to the stock, till it live to bring forth fruit of its own, so here.

(4.) If they live to years of discretion, they have greater advantages of being godly than others. Partly as your dedication doth oblige you to greater care in their education: Eph. vi. 4, 'Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' Partly as God tendereth them more means with respect unto the covenant: Acts iii. 25, 26, 'Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed; unto you first, God having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you.' You are 'children of the covenant,' therefore 'unto you first,' &c. Partly as the grace of the covenant runneth most kindly in the channel of the covenant: Rom. xi. 24, 'How much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive-tree?'

(5.) If they take to their parents' covenant, and fear and love God, their blessings are increased. David urgeth that: Ps. cxvi. 16, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant: I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid.' When they are serious, they have a greater holdfast upon God: 2 Chron. vi. 42, 'Remember the mercies of David thy servant.'

Well, then, out of all, you see it is such a blessing as is dispensed in the way of a reward, yet it is such a blessing as may be turned into a curse. It is a door whereby God may let in blessing or cursing upon us; and though they are an happiness, yet not our main happiness, but dispensed sometimes as rewards and sometimes as punishments.

Use 1. To reprove those who are not thankful for children, but do grudge, and look upon it as a burden, when God blesseth them with a numerous issue. These murmur at that which is in itself a mercy. When we want them, we value them; when we are full of children, we are full of distrust and murmuring. It was counted an honour to be a father in Israel. Surely those that fear God should not count an happiness to be a burden: Ps. cxxviii. 3, 4, 'Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house, thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.' God maketh his people 'families like a flock,' Ps. cvii. 41.

Use 2. Reproof to those who do not acknowledge and improve this mercy.

1. Those who do not acknowledge this mercy. Surely parents should acknowledge God in every child given to them. Much of his providence is seen in giving and withholding children. We have songs of thanksgiving very frequent in scripture upon this occasion. It is a thing wherein God will have his bounty taken notice of by solemn praises; and for every child God should have a new honour from you. What hath been done to the Lord for this? Therefore do not look upon the birth of a child as a natural thing; see God in it. When Rachel fell out with Jacob about her barrenness, 'Am I,' saith he, 'in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?' Gen. xxx. 2. Specially confederate parents should acknowledge this mercy. It is a mercy that, when a sinner is taken into favour, God will accept of our actions, which are the fruit of our souls, that the evil that is in all these should not outweigh the little goodness which is in them; nay, that they should not only be accepted, but rewarded. But further, that he should make a covenant with the fruit of our body, if you consider your natural sinfulness, it is wonderful that your children should be holy and God's portion. Grace, like a mighty river, will be pent within no banks, but overflow all that a man hath. God loveth not to take a single person, but grace cometh to our houses: Acts xvi. 31, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house.' Doth the faith of the master of the family save the family? Occasionally it doth, as it giveth a title to the means of grace. Therefore this should be acknowledged with all thankfulness: 2 Sam. vii. 19, 'Thou hast spoken also concerning thy servant's house, for a great while to come.'

2. Those that do not improve the mercy, nor endeavour to make children blessings indeed, by an holy education. Oh! it will be a great happiness to be parents to such as shall be heirs of glory! As children ought to be looked upon as a great mercy, so also as a great trust, which as it is managed may occasion much joy or much grief. If parents doat upon them, they make them idols, not servants of the Lord. If they neglect education, they will surely prove crosses and curses to them, or if they taint them by their example. Young ones are very apt to follow the example of those they see or converse with, or are related to them. Those forty-two children, 2 Kings ii. 23, 24, that were devoured of two she-bears, and cried bald-pate to the prophet of the Lord, were children of Bethel, which was a nest of idolatry. Therefore parents had need see what example they give, or suffer to be

given, to their children, in contemning the servants of the Lord, or in any other kind of sin.

3. Reproof to children born of godly parents, and, notwithstanding dedication and education, break out into unseemly and wicked courses. For children born in a godly family to be naught is the greatest degeneration that can be. Ungodly children of godly parents, these wrest themselves out of the arms of mercy, and instead of a blessing, become a burden and a curse. They cast off their father's God : Prov. xxvii. 10, 'Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not.' But what shall be said of them that forsake their father's God ? They break off and interrupt the course of the blessing : Jer. ii. 12, 13, 'Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord ; for my people hath committed two evils, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that will hold no water.' He would have the sun to look pale, the spheres to cast out their stars. Wilt thou be a traitor to thy father's God ? Solomon continued alliance with Hiram because he had been a friend to David ; and wilt thou break off the grace of the covenant ? Cain excommunicated himself : Gen. iv. 16, 'Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.' Ishmael, for scoffing malignity against the power of godliness, was cast out of Abraham's family, Gen. xxi. 9 ; Esau for sensual profaneness, Heb. xii. 15, despising spiritual privileges for sensual satisfactions. The Jews were cast off $\tau\eta\ \acute{\alpha}\pi\iota\sigma\tau\iota\alpha$, for unbelief, Rom. xi. 20, or positive rejection of the gospel. Christ made them the first offer.

Use 3. To exhort parents to bring up their children for God ; for if they be an heritage from the Lord, they must be an heritage to the Lord. Give them up to him again, as you had them from him at first ; for whatever is from him must be improved for him. Dedicate them to God, and educate them for God, and he will take possession of them in due time. Hannah, though her son were a Levite born, and her eldest son, yet she solemnly dedicateth him to God : 2 Sam. i. 27, 28, 'I prayed for this child, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him, therefore I have lent him to the Lord ; as long as he liveth, he shall be lent to the Lord.' Give God his portion. Now, if the dedication be sound, it will engage you to a serious education. God dealeth with us as Pharaoh's daughter did with Moses' mother : Exod. ii. 9, 'Take this child away, and nurse it for me.'

Motives.

1. The express charge of God, who hath made it your duty : Eph. vi. 4, 'Fathers, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ;' Deut. vi. 7, 'These words shalt thou teach diligently unto thy children ; and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up ;' Prov. xxii. 6, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' Now we should make conscience of these commands, as we will answer it to God another day.

2. The example of the saints, who have been careful to discharge this trust. God presumeth it of Abraham : Gen. xviii. 19, 'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after

him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.' Observe, God reckoneth upon it; and disappointment is the worst vexation. And it is a means to obtain the promise and the blessing: 2 Tim. iii. 15, 'And that ἀπὸ βρεφῶν, from a child, thou hast known the holy scriptures.' How? By his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice, as is expressed elsewhere. Surely they are unworthy to have children that do not take care that Christ may have an interest in them.

3. The importance of this duty. Next to the preaching of the word, the education of children is one of the greatest duties in the world; for the service of Christ and of the church and state dependeth upon it. Families are the seminaries of church and commonwealth. Religion dwelt first in families, and as they grew into numerous societies, they grew into churches. As religion was first hatched there, so there the devil seeketh to crush it. The families of the patriarchs were all the churches God had in the world; and therefore when Cain went out of Adam's family, he is said 'to go out from the presence of the Lord,' Gen. iv. 16. If the devil can subvert families, other societies and communities will not long flourish. Towns and nations are made up of families. A fault in the first concoction is not easily mended in the second; here is the first making or marring. And Solomon telleth us, Prov. xx. 11, that 'even a child is known by his doings.'

4. To countermince Satan, who hath ever envied the succession of churches, and the growth and progress of Christ's kingdom, and therefore seeketh to crush it in the egg, by seeking to pervert persons while they are young, and, like wax, capable of any form and impression. As Pharaoh would destroy the Israelites by killing their young ones, so Satan, who hath a great spite at the kingdom of Christ, knoweth there is no such compendious way to subvert and overcome it as by perverting youth and supplanting family duties. He knoweth that this is a blow at the root. Therefore what care should parents take to season children with holy principles, that they may overcome the wicked one by the word of God abiding in them: 1 John ii. 14, 'I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' And cleanse their hearts by a regard to scripture direction: Ps. cxix. 9, 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto, according to thy word.' They are defiled already, not as vessels taken out of the potter's shop, but as vessels tainted and polluted.

5. To make good your dedication of them to God in baptism. It is a mockery to dedicate them to God, and to breed them up for the devil, the world, and the flesh. God complaineth, Ezek. xvi. 20, 'Thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, which thou hast born to me, and these thou hast sacrificed unto them to be devoured.' It is as disingenuous to offer them to God, and train them up for the world or the flesh. If they prove openly sensual, we are troubled; but if they secretly please the flesh, we mind it not, but rather are secretly helpful to them in it; if worldly, we applaud them. Thus do we betray those souls which we should be a means to save.

6. If they prove naught, the affliction will be double if you have not used the means to prevent it, if by your carnal fondness you have borne with their sin, and given them their wills, or indulge it by the evil example of your careless walking, or out of sloth have neglected unwearied endeavours to instruct them in godliness. But when you have done your part, you can the better submit to the will of God.
