



Equipping the Generations: Raising Children, the Christian Way

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INTRODUCTION

Three texts in the Christian Scriptures are particularly significant for the topic of raising and rearing children: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Proverbs, and Ephesians 6:1-4. The selection of these texts is can be defended easily. The Book of Deuteronomy is the heart of the Old Covenant—this is the Romans of the Old Testament. Second, the Book of Proverbs as a whole is a handbook or manual for parents. In Proverbs, the king of Israel is instructing and training his own son to live skillfully and speak well *based on* the covenant instruction (*tôrâ*) given in Deuteronomy.¹ This instruction is written down for the benefit of every father and mother in the covenant community. Now all of God's people, both children and parents, can benefit from the instruction and teaching of this wise king (Solomon). In Ephesians 6:1-4, Paul crys-

tallises the teaching from Deuteronomy and Proverbs for members of the New Covenant Community. Since the entire book of Proverbs cannot be expounded here, this brief treatment will focus on 3:1-4, 4:1-4, and the well-known text, 22:5-6.

Basic Texts:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. 5 And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and that to the fullest extent. 6 These words that I am instructing you today shall be on your mind. 7 You must repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Bind them as a marker on your hand and let them be as a sign on your forehead. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."²

Proverbs 3:1-4

1 My son, do not forget my teaching,
 but keep my commands in your heart,
 2 for they will prolong your life many years
 and bring you prosperity.
 3 Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
 bind them around your neck,
 write them on the tablet of your heart.
 4 Then you will win favor and a good name
 in the sight of God and man. (NIV 1984)

Proverbs 4:1-4

1 Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction;
 pay attention and gain understanding.
 2 I give you sound learning,
 so do not forsake my teaching.
 3 When I was a boy in my father's house,
 still tender, and an only child of my mother,
 4 he taught me and said,
 "Lay hold of my words with all your heart;
 keep my commands and you will live."
 (NIV 1984)

Proverbs 22:5-6

5 In the paths of the wicked lie thorns and snares,
 but he who guards his soul stays far
 from them.
 6 Train a child in the way he should go,
 and when he is old he will not turn from it.
 (NIV 1984)

Ephesians 6:4

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for
 this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"—
 which is the first commandment with a promise—
 3 "that it may go well with you and that you
 may enjoy long life on the earth." 4 Fathers, do
 not exasperate your children; instead, bring them
 up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
 (NIV 1984)

A. EDUCATION: PASSING ON A WORLD-

AND-LIFE-VIEW

1. "repeat / teach ... these words" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)
2. "train" (Proverbs 22:6)
3. "bring up / rear" (Ephesians 6:4)

Before considering the individual contribution of each text, let us note key ideas or principles which are common to all of them and are taught throughout the Scriptures.

The first principle, according to the Bible, is that education is all-encompassing. The Bible does not divide up education into subjects, some of which are sacred and some of which are secular. When in Ephesians Paul says, "bring them up," this verb is referring to all aspects of education, whether we are talking about mathematics or about moral training. The words of which Moses speaks in Deuteronomy are the instructions of the covenant and as such, define a relationship with God and relationships with our fellow human beings characterised by loyal love and trust, and also proper relationships with the environment as good stewards of the earth's resources. Thus "these words" in Deuteronomy 6:6 entail all aspects of instruction in life and living, from boundary markers on farm properties to boundary markers in sex. The all-encompassing nature of the application of the covenant (in our terms, Christian worldview) to all of life is especially clear in Deut 6:8-9, "You shall bind them as a marker on your hand and they will be signs³ between your eyes, and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. This speaks directly to all that we do (*hand*), see and think (*between your eyes, forehead*), all business (*your gates*⁴) and all that enters our home life (*doorposts*). When in Proverbs 22 Solomon talks of initiating children according to the dictates of their way, this includes scientific study of the creation as well as potty-training and learning to speak well and relate well in all social situations. And it begins with a right relationship with God and acceptance of the parental teaching: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom—that is the beginning of all life skills (Prov. 1:7).

Some Christians who are concerned about Christian schools do not really understand the biblical teaching that education entails a world-and-life-view. Christian educa-

tion is not simply incorporating a course on the Bible into the curriculum. Nor is it even incorporating “biblical examples” into a discussion of history or of science. How would we teach arithmetic from a Christian point of view? Would we have examples from the Bible where we add the five loaves and the two fish? Yet Jesus Christ is the Lord of all Truth: the truth of $2 + 2 = 4$ as well as the truth that he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

How can we illustrate the fact that many Christians fail to see that the Christian faith is all encompassing. If we were inside a building looking out through a clear glass window, I might ask you, “Well, tell me what you see when you look outside?” You might begin by describing the grass and the trees and the vehicles on the street. Now wouldn’t you find it odd or strange if I asked, “Well, did you see the window?” One doesn’t talk about the window. Instead one sees the world through it. And yet, in the end, it is the window that is passed on and transferred to the child. They will see the world *through the window that we give them*. We must make sure that our minds are so filled and saturated with the Scripture that our world-and-life-view is completely shaped by the biblical teaching.

B. EDUCATION: A PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Another key principle found in all three texts is that education, in the broadest sense of the word, is the responsibility of parents. In Ephesians Paul addresses “fathers” and commands them not to exasperate or provoke their children to anger, but to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. In Deuteronomy, those entrusted with transmitting “these words” of the covenant by “repetition / teaching” are, in fact, the parents as verses 7-9 clearly show. Interestingly, it is not chiefly the responsibility of the king, the prophets, or the priests—the key officials in the covenant community. Thus the main responsibility for education falls to the parents.

By way of application to today we can say that education is not primarily the responsibility of the state, although the state may function as an arm of the parental teaching. In North America, *public education* was introduced many years ago to provide equal opportu-

nity for all, the poor as well as the rich. Education was not to be solely the prerogative of the elite. Public education was successful for a long time, mainly because everyone in the society shared roughly the same world-and-life-view. It is clear, however, that today, there are many world-and-life-views in our society that not only differ greatly but are, in fact, incompatible as windows on reality. In addition, in the 1920s, the universities got into bed with big business and now the big corporations have hijacked the educational priorities. This marriage between business and educators is expressed in the following limerick:

There was a young lady from Kent
Who said that she knew what it meant
When men took her to dine
Gave her cocktails and wine
She knew what it meant-but she went.⁵

Our purpose here is not to debate whether the Bible supports private versus public education. What we can say, is that even when we have public elementary schools, public high schools, and universities—all of these must be answerable first to Jesus Christ and then to the parents. If such ideas sound strange to some Christians, you may want to read further on this topic the little known, but extremely important book by Charles Habib Malik entitled a *Christian Critique of the University*.⁶

Nor is “religious education,” if we must use such a term, primarily the domain or responsibility of the church. To be sure, the elders, minister, or pastors of all Christian churches are concerned to provide instruction in the faith for all ages, both individually and together and in a variety of ways (i.e., not just from the pulpit on Sundays). But parents cannot assume that it is the church’s responsibility to teach their children the Bible. It is, in fact, the responsibility of every parent. And if you are a parent and you do not know the Bible, you should immediately begin reading and studying it, because at the Final Judgment, God will hold you as parents, and not the elders or leaders of your church responsible, for teaching your children the Christian faith.

In Proverbs 22:5-6 the command to initiate or train

children according to the dictates of their way is given to parents. We need to consider for a moment the background of the Book of Proverbs. This book is really a manual for parents. To be sure it is a book about living skillfully and speaking well. Indeed the sage or the wise man imparting this wisdom is the king of Israel. But it is the instruction which both king and queen as father and mother gave to their own son.⁷ Moreover this instruction was written down and published for the benefit of every father and mother in Israel. Chapters 1-9 is a series of instructions from father and mother to their son, to prepare his heart to embrace the teaching contained in the collection of proverbs or two-line sayings that begin in chapter 10. When we look at these lectures or serious talks to the child, we find much there that is similar to wisdom writings preserved from ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia. Some of the content is the same and even the form of the introductory sections of the homilies in chapters 1-9 can be matched in ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. But one thing that is absolutely unique to the book of Proverbs is the instruction or teaching of the mother. She is mentioned specifically in five instances: 1:8, 4:3, 6:20, 31:1, and 26. This is absolutely unparalleled anywhere else in all of the wisdom literature we have from the ancient Near East. In Proverbs, the teaching of the mother is placed side by side with the teaching of the father. It shows us the importance the Bible places on the mother's teaching and the fact that both parents must be believers in order to bring up the children in the faith.

Some Christian parents who are committed to a complementarian view of the role of husband and wife view the role of the father such that if a child asks a question about the Bible the child must wait until the father comes home to be given an answer. Such an approach is extreme and contrary to the Scriptures. The book of Proverbs honours the role of women more than the role given them either in ancient society or in many cases modern society by placing their teaching in the home alongside that of the father. In the case of King Lemuel (Prov. 31), the wisdom he offers is that specifically received from his mother. Think of the effect Susanna Wesley had on England through her sons, Charles and John. My own experience matches the biblical data in

that it was my mother, not my father, who led me to faith in Christ.

As already noted, in the Old Testament the Israelites were expressly instructed not to intermarry with the Canaanites. The reason for this instruction, however, was not to preserve the purity of the *race*. Rather, the concern was to preserve the purity of *faith* in Yahweh as creator God and covenant Lord. An example of this is Deuteronomy 7:3-4:

3 Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, 4 for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. (NIV, 1984)

The essential teaching here is that unless both father and mother are believers and have a biblical world-and-life-view, there will be an inadequate transmission of the faith. Paul continues and maintains this instruction for those in the New Covenant community: they must marry a believer (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:39).

C. EDUCATION: ITS METHOD AND MANNER

While all of the biblical texts under our view share certain common principles, each contributes uniquely to the method and manner in which parents should raise their children.

1. Formal and Informal (Deut 6:4-9)

Deuteronomy 6:7 begins by commanding the parents: "you shall repeat them to your children and you shall speak about them..." The word which I have rendered "repeat" is translated as "impress" in the NIV (1984) and "teach" in the ESV. It comes from the root *šānan* which normally means "to sharpen." The rendering in the ESV and NIV is derived by comparing *einschärfen* in German and giving a meaning like "inculcate / teach." Although this derivation is problematic in view of the construction used with the verb in Deut 6:7, the meaning may be better determined from an exact parallel in Deuteronomy 11:19 where we read: "and you shall teach

them to your children by speaking about them...” Here the more common verb “teach” (from *lāmad*) is used as a substitute for *šānan*. It is probably better to analyse *šānan* as an alternative form of Hebrew *šānā* meaning “repeat,” also cognate with *tny* in Ugaritic, and not related to the root “sharpen.” Around 120 A.D. Aquila rendered Deut 6:7 by deuteroseis, another confirmation of the meaning “repeat.” Such a derivation suits and supports the meaning corroborated by the parallel in Deut 11:19. Teaching involves constant repetition, an idea promoted by the school teacher in the movie Hans Christian Andersen in spite of being decried by the cobbler turned story-teller. In short, the first command in the sequence probably refers to formal training.

The next part of the command in Deuteronomy 6:7 goes on to say, “and you shall speak about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Here, in contrast to formal training, we have informal training. The expressions “at home or on the road,” or “lying down or getting up” are examples of a figure of speech known as a merism. This is a way of indicating the totality by referring to two antipodes or opposites. It is like saying, “the country store sells everything from soup to nuts.” It sells soup on the one hand, nuts on the other, and everything else in between. So during all of our waking moments and activities, we are to use the opportunities at hand to speak of the creator God, of all aspects of his creation and also of the God who is in covenant relationship with his people.

An excellent example of this can be seen in the way that the Lord Jesus trained his disciples. There are examples of formal teaching such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). When a Jewish Rabbi *sat down* (Matt. 5:1), it was an hour of *formal* instruction. On the other hand, Jesus chose twelve men to be with him (Mark 3:13) so that they could see how he walked, how he talked, and learn from him on a day by day, moment by moment basis. As a result, many of the episodes in the gospels reveal how Jesus used different opportunities as teaching moments. The parable of the fig tree is an example (Matt. 21:18-21).

2. Grace and Truth in Balance (Eph 6:4)

Ephesians 6:4 makes a different contribution to the method and manner in which we ought to rear and raise children: Paul instructs parents and fathers in particular, not to exasperate their children but to raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Here Paul is addressing the way in which parents, and fathers in particular, instruct their children with a view to obedience, using correction by both word and deed. The word that is translated “discipline” or “training” is the Greek word *paideia*. This term is used in Classical Greek literature of “child-rearing” in particular and also of “education” in the broadest sense of the word as well as of the result of education. Nonetheless, this word is mainly used in the Septuagint, the Greek Translation of the Old Testament, to render Hebrew words that speak of discipline (e.g. in 37 instances for *mūsār*). The number of instances of *paideia* or the corresponding verb *paideuō* in the NT are not many, but most occurrences show the influence of the Greek Old Testament. Thus it is likely that Paul has the concept of discipline in mind rather than education or training in the broader sense of the word. The other term, rendered “instruction” in the NIV is the Greek word *nouthesia*. Again, the instruction may be neutral, but more often than not it has the flavour of “admonition” or “warning.” Paul’s teaching is based upon Proverbs where we learn that because we all enter this world (1) ignorant and (2) going our own way, we need instruction in the form of correction and warning—the instruction that is necessary for us cannot be just giving information. It must be stopping us from going down the road we are on, turning us around, and giving us a big push in the opposite direction. What we can say by way of summary then, is that in Ephesians 6:4, discipline refers mainly to actions while instruction or warning refers primarily to words. Parents rear their young ones by actions and words that may be characterised as the discipline and instruction or warnings of the Lord.

As we consider Paul’s instruction further, what we may well ask, is meant by the phrase, “the discipline of the Lord”? It is interesting to note that this phrase occurs only three times in the Old Testament: Deu-

teronomy 8:5, 11:2-7, and Proverbs 3:11-12. In two of these (Deuteronomy 8:5, Proverbs 3:11-12), a comparison is drawn between the way a man may chastise, correct, or discipline his son and the way in which the Lord deals with those who belong to him, his people (Israel). These two texts, then, do not illuminate for us the meaning of the phrase in family life because they assume we know precisely what that is and use it as a point of comparison in explaining how the Lord may treat his people. The one remaining passage is particularly illuminating:

[2] Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; [3] the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; [4] what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and how the LORD brought lasting ruin on them. [5] It was not your children who saw what he did for you in the desert until you arrived at this place, [6] and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the earth opened its mouth right in the middle of all Israel and swallowed them up with their households, their tents and every living thing that belonged to them. [7] But it was your own eyes that saw all these great things the LORD has done. (Deut. 11:2-7, NIV 1984)

The people who are about to enter the land of Canaan were children at the time of the Exodus. Thus they, and not their children have experienced “the discipline of the Lord” in the events of the Exodus. To what does this phrase refer? Well, Moses explains in verses 3-6 that it is what God did in judging the Egyptians as well as rebellious Israelites, and what he did in rescuing, caring for and providing for his people during their arduous journey through the desert. The discipline of the Lord, then, is revealed in his acts of grace and truth. For the enemy, and for rebellious Israelites, it was

acts of judgement. For his people, it was acts of goodness and kindness. He brought bread from heaven and water from the rock. He prevented their clothing from wearing out. He used a cloud by day to protect from the burning sun and fire at night to keep them warm. If Israel was not willing to follow the direction of the Lord in the desert, without the cloud / fire she would either fry or freeze in the desert. In a real sense, the discipline of the Lord is the entire history of God “bringing up / rearing” his toddler Israel in the desert journey to the land of Canaan.

We could say, then, that if we are to bring up our children using the discipline of the Lord, we must not exasperate them but use a balance of grace and truth in calling for their obedience to the standards we set for them. We must know when to be firm, and also when to favour them with grace, compassion and pity. Finding this balance is the key to successful parenting.

How can we achieve a balance of grace and truth in raising our children? What does this look like in practice? I suggest we can see this displayed *par excellence* in the life of Jesus Christ. John in his gospel makes this plain. At the outset he claims that Jesus was full of grace and truth (1:14). As Craig Glickman explains:

He meant that Jesus had not only the warmth of love and grace but also the firmness of justice and truth in His character. Then first he highlighted the grace of Christ in the miraculous transformation of water to wine at the wedding feast of Cana (2:1-11). But then he immediately followed that with a graphic display of truth when he recounted the just anger of Christ in clearing out the profaned Temple precincts with a whip of cords (2:13-22).

With artistic balance, John proceeded to show this same grace and truth woven together in the tapestry of two private conversations that follow the two public events just described. In the first, Christ spoke with a man named Nicodemus (3:1-21). And in the second, He conversed with the unnamed woman at the well in Samaria (4:1-30). It appears that John intended us to contrast the two interviews. For he has set both private

conversations in contrast to the two preceding public events. And yet within the two talks, he has drawn artistic contrasts. Nicodemus was (1) a man, (2) at the top of the social ladder, (3) a leader in Israel, (4) who sought Christ, (5) by night. On the other hand, the encounter at Sychar was with (1) a woman, (2) at the bottom of the social ladder, (3) an unnamed outcast of Samaria, (4) sought by Christ, (5) at midday.

But not only are the scenes in stark contrast. More significantly, John has skillfully portrayed a gentle contrast in the grace and truth of Christ in these conversations. To both, Christ offered the gift of life. But to Nicodemus the firmness and strength of truth were shown initially. And to the woman the generosity and love of grace were shown initially. For Christ told proud Nicodemus, the ruler in Israel, that his accomplishments others thought were great, in reality did nothing to gain him eternal life. He must be born again, start over completely.

But to the defeated, lonely woman at the well the same message of eternal life was expressed initially in terms of grace. Eternal life, Jesus assured her, is a gift taken as simply as a drink of water to quench one's thirst.

However, it is not only in the beginning of the conversations that we see the contrast. For soon Christ would, in grace, offer to Nicodemus the gift of life through faith (3:16). And equally as soon He would, in truth, confront the woman of Samaria with her sin to awaken her to her need for forgiveness and new life (4:16-19). But Jesus knew exactly when grace or truth should be accented in the conversations, just as He knew with which one to begin.

At the wedding feast in Cana and the cleansing of the Temple, we see quite clearly the difference between grace and truth. But in these two private conversations, we are aware of the perfect symmetry with which they are woven together in the character of Christ.⁸

These scenes in John's gospel show parents in a very

practical way how to combine grace and truth in dealing with their children.

3. Initiate with Celebration (Prov. 22:6)

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (KJV)

Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it. (NASB)

Train [Margin: or Start] a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. (NIV 1984)

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. (ESV)

This particular proverb has brought either anxiety and guilt or encouragement and hope to many believing parents.⁹ There is one group of parents who, having worked hard to maintain proper priorities and balance family responsibilities with careers and community involvements, find encouragement in this verse that their efforts to bring their children up properly will eventually be rewarded. Hildebrandt notes, "this verse has also provided rays of hope to those who, having reared their child in the best way they knew, have had their hearts broken as their child rebels and goes astray. They agonize under the pain that God recognized to be one of the deepest sorrows of human existence."¹⁰ Isaiah's prophecy begins with the words, "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." Isaiah (as well as Jeremiah and Ezekiel) expresses the pain of God as a parent whose child rebels and goes astray. To parents who experience hurt like this Proverbs 6:22 has provided hope that one day the prodigal will return. Another group of parents are keenly aware of their inadequacies and experience intense anxiety over possible long-term damage to their little ones caused by themselves and their own policies. If the child does not respond to discipline and instruction this verse seems to point the finger of guilt at them. What does this text really mean?

PROVERBIAL WISDOM

Many fail to realize that this verse is a proverb, not a promise. A proverb is a brief, lively and pithy statement which seeks to encapsulate and portray an aspect of reality. It has the purpose of sharpening in the hearer a sense of what is real as distinct from what is illusory. It aims to correct misconceptions and to compel the reader to form a judgement on his or her conduct, character and situation. A proverb is not an iron clad rule like the laws of the Medes and Persians. Moreover, it does not describe all contingencies, exceptions, or nuances possible.

THE MEANING OF THE VERB (TRAIN?)

(a) to stimulate desire

The verb commonly rendered “train” occurs only four other times in the Hebrew Old Testament. An associated noun only occurs eight times. Since the word is so rare, some scholars have over-emphasized the meaning of the root in an attempt to find an explanation. They have connected this word with a related verb in Arabic where a mother prepares date jam which is gently rubbed on the gums of a newborn baby to enhance the infant’s appetite for and ability to digest succulent condiments. Yet describing where a word comes from may not in any way reveal its meaning at a later time. The English word ‘nice’ comes from the Latin term *nescius* which means ignorant. This does not tell us anything about the meaning of the word today. None of the five occurrences of this verb can be connected with the meaning of the word in Arabic.

(b) to train

Most commentators accept the translation “train up” without any discussion. By “training up” is meant the careful nurturing, instructing and disciplining of a child to develop a wise and moral character. This kind of instruction and training is frequently mentioned in Proverbs (19:18). We cannot emphasize enough in North American society where parents are either absent or preoccupied the importance of early child training. But is this the teaching of our verse?

Different forms of the verb in Proverbs 22:6 occur in later Aramaic and in Modern Hebrew with the

meaning “to train.” But likely these meanings were developed from an interpretation of this verse. There is no evidence for the meaning “train up” anywhere else in Classical Hebrew. If instruction is the main point, there are many other words in Hebrew frequently used in Proverbs with this meaning. One wonders why they were not used here.

(c) to dedicate / initiate

The four other occurrences of this verb in the Old Testament appear in contexts of dedicating or initiating the use of buildings (Deuteronomy 20:5, 1 Kings 8:63 and 2 Chronicles 7:5). Clearly the verb involves a *celebration* marking the *use* of something *for the first time*. It may also indicate *consecrating* something for a particular use. Similarly, the eight occurrences of the noun related to our verb all involve dedicating or initiating something in the religious worship of Israel: either an altar or a temple. Yet how do these texts relate to our passage? All of them involve the initiation of things, but our passage is speaking about the initiation of a person. Here we can find help in Genesis 14:4—an important use of the word we are studying, since it has an adjective from this root. There Abraham rescues Lot by sending out his 318 “trained” men. It would be a mistake to think of these men as novices. Rather they seem to be sent out as men who were strong, experienced and already *initiated* into military affairs.

There are also some ancient letters from a Canaanite city called Taanach.¹¹ These letters are in Akkadian but have some Canaanite words in them. They date from the 15th century B.C. The same word occurs there that we have in Genesis 14:4. In the context of mustering troops for war this same word is used and means military cadets or retainers.

The emphasis in the verb ‘to initiate’ seems to be not so much the process of training as the responsibility and status of the person initiated.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD ‘CHILD’

The Hebrew word translated “child” is *na’ar*. The question we must now consider is this: who was this *na’ar* who was to be initiated with celebration, responsibility and status?¹²

First, the word applies to a wide variety of ages: a baby just born (1 Sam 4:21), an infant not yet weaned (1 Sam 1:22), or a baby of three months (Exod 2:6). However Joseph at 17—already a man in that culture—is also called a *na'ar* (Gen 37:2). When he is 30 years old he is still called a *na'ar* (Gen 41:12, 46). Thus age is not the primary focus of the word.

Second, the *na'ar* is frequently active in strictly adult activities (war [1 Sam 17:33]; cultic priestly duties and functions [Judges 18:3-6]; special spy missions [Josh 6:22]; personal attendance on a patriarch, prophet, priest, king or son of a king [Gen 18:7; 2 Kgs 5:1-27; 1 Sam 1:22, 24-25; 2 Sam 9:9, 2 Sam 13:17]; or supervision of the whole Solomonic labour force [1 Kgs 11:28]).

Third, the word *na'ar* seems to point consistently to an adolescent on the threshold of maturity, emphasizing his role in society and the responsibility that goes with it as well as his dependent relationship to a superior, e.g. elder. There are at least six Hebrew words which focus on a young male when age is the point. The word *na'ar* is associated with words stressing status, something which is not normally the case for the words which stress age.

(a) Personal Attendant

One area where the word *na'ar* is frequently used is the domestic realm. It refers to the personal attendant of a great man. Abraham's *na'ar* was called upon to prepare the special meal for the heavenly visitors (Gen 18:7-8). Joseph is the *na'ar* who is in charge over Potiphar's household (Gen 41:12). Joshua, as the personal attendant of Moses, was called a *na'ar* (Exod 33:11). What is very interesting is that the trained men of Genesis 14 are also called the *ne'arim* of Abraham in Gen 14:24 (plural of *na'ar*).

(b) Military Cadet

Another area where the word *na'aris* often found is in military reports. The *na'ar* is one category above the regular troops, but not yet a mighty warrior such as Joab or Abner. Gideon, the "mighty man of valour" (Judges 6:12) is told to take his trusted *na'ar* and go down to scout out the Midianite camp. Thus the seasoned warrior, Gideon, is accompanied by a squire, who judging from the importance of the mission, is quite skillful

and trustworthy. Jonathan, climbing the cliffs of Wadi Suwenit, took a trusted *na'ar* to face the formidable Philistine host. There are many such uses.

(c) The *na'ar* in Proverbs (1:4, 7:7, 20:11, 22:6, 15, 23:13, 29:15)

The word *na'ar* occurs seven times in Proverbs. The evidence here fits what we have seen already. The advice given to the *na'ar* is sexual advice, economic counsel, political instruction, social graces, and military advice. All of this seems more suitable for a young adolescent than a child.

THE MEANING OF "ACCORDING TO HIS WAY"

Several widely differing views have been taken of the meaning of the phrase "according to his way." The following is a summary of Hildebrandt's evaluation of the various views.

(a) the moral view

The first view is that 'his way' refers to the path of morality, righteousness and wisdom. Usually, however, when the word 'way' is used in this manner it has a qualifier or adjective: i.e. the way of life (6:23), the way of understanding (9:6), the good way (2:20), the way of righteousness (16:31), or the evil way (2:12), the way of the wicked (4:19). Since there is no qualifier in our verse, this view is unlikely.

(b) the vocational view

The second view is that 'his way' refers to the child's vocation. This is unlikely because in the ancient Near East children were normally trained to follow the father's footsteps. Choosing a career or vocation is a modern problem that arose only after the industrial revolution.

(c) the personal aptitude view

The third view is that 'his way' refers to the child's developing capacities, interests, and inclinations. I have heard preachers say that since the word 'way' comes from a verb which can be used for bending a bow, that we should understand here the idea of a child's 'bent'. This

is bad linguistic methodology. Some scholars like Bruce Waltke, however, do use appropriate linguistic methodology and argue that the initiation has to fit the mental and physical abilities of the child.¹³ This view is incorrect, however, because it is based on understanding *na'ar* as a child. It also does not fit well with the notion of 'initiation' rather than 'train' as the meaning of the verb.

(d) the personal demands view

A fourth view is that we should understand 'his way' ironically or negatively. They suggest that the verse is saying that if you rear a child by acquiescing to his desires and demands, when he is old you will never break him out of it. Thus the child, left to himself, will become irretrievably recalcitrant—spoiled, continually demanding his own way. But giving up on the *na'ar* is opposed to the optimistic outlook that Proverbs has on the teachability of the *na'ar* (Proverbs 1:4). This view is probably attractive to modern mind because we are ruggedly individualistic and developmentally sensitive. Gordon Hugenberger, who argues for this view, does not provide persuasive evidence that this "ironic" approach to interpreting proverbs can be paralleled elsewhere in Proverbs.¹⁴

(e) the status view

Franz Delitzsch, a 19th century evangelical scholar, was surely right in stressing that the meaning of "the way" must be determined by the noun to which the pronoun his refers.¹⁵ If *na'ar* is understood as a high-born squire, then it may be suggested that "according to his way" means according to the office or role that he will occupy. He is to be broken in as a *na'ar* with the dignity and responsibility that goes with this role. The phrase actually should be translated "according to the dictates of his way." It indicates the measure or standard of who he is and what he is to become.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of Hildebrandt is worth citing:

This verse also teaches that when someone engages in an activity for the first time, a celebra-

tion of the event would encourage him in the correct path (e.g., Jewish Bar-Mitzvah celebrations). Thus, a word or deed of encouragement (recognition and celebration) that bestows respect and responsibility commensurate with status is one of the most powerful aspects of parental involvement in the life of an adolescent. ... If given that type of recognition, he will willingly continue his services when he gets older because he has gained in that position the dignity, respect and responsibility which provide him with a healthy level of satisfaction.¹⁶

Hildebrandt's analysis is thorough; we can evaluate his assessment as follows. The phrase in Hebrew is *'al pi darkô* which means "according to the dictates of his way." The meaning of the phrase is not in doubt. The main problem is that the proverb lacks context and it is difficult to be certain as to whether it is speaking of a child, an adolescent at the threshold of maturity, or a social class such as a cadet, retainer, squire, or servant.¹⁷ If a child is in view, early training is in view and the mental or physical abilities of the child must be accounted for in the education.¹⁸ If a social class is in view, then Delitzsch is right. Since Proverbs is by and large a manual for parents and the word initiate suits an adolescent rather than a child, the main teaching of this proverb is that we should consecrate and initiate young people into their adult roles and responsibilities with celebration.

A Piece of Plastic Clay

I took a piece of plastic clay
And idly fashioned it one day,
And as my fingers pressed it still,
It moved and yielded at my will.

I came again when days were past;
The bit of clay was hard at last,
The form I gave it still it bore,
But I could change that form no more.

I took a piece of living clay,
And gently formed it day by day,

And molded with my power and art
A young child's soft and yielding heart.

I came again when days were gone;
It was a man I looked upon;
That early impress still he wore,
And I could change it never more.

(Author Unknown)

THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP (PROV 3:1-4)

Proverbs 3:1-20 constitutes the Third Homily in a series of Ten Homilies given by the father to the son in what we may call "the Father's Praise of Wisdom." This homily or serious talk, in contrast to the First Homily, shows the right way to acquire and gain the good life. In both the Introduction (vv. 1-4) and the Main Body (vv. 5-12) of this Third Homily, the odd verses contain commands while the even verses contain promises.

The essence of verse one is a command to preserve the parental teaching. The father calls his teaching 'instruction' (*tôrâ*); he calls his instructions 'commands'. These are the same words used for the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai which was recapitulated on the Plains of Moab in Deuteronomy. Therefore, when the parental teaching is based on Scripture, it is as authoritative and as important as God's Instruction (*tôrâ*) through Moses.

The first verb is "Do not forget!" This word does not refer to absentmindedness, but speaks instead of a moral lapse (cf. Deut 8:11-14). It speaks of the danger of self-sufficiency when things are going well. The second verb is "Keep!" It is used in Isaiah 5:2 of guarding the vineyard from the watchtower. Proverbs 3:2 = Exodus 20:12.

The essence of the second command in verse 3 is to maintain a right relationship to our parents: "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart." Two things are striking in this verse. First, the words "love and faithfulness" render the Hebrew terms *hesed* and *'emet*. These two words describe a covenant relationship. The same pair of words is used in Exod 34:6 of the relationship between Yahweh and his people, Israel, and

in Joshua 2:14 of a covenant or agreement of human friendship (between Rahab and the spies). The assumption, here, is that the child has a covenantal relationship and covenant responsibilities to their parents.

Second, the command "bind them ... write them ..." remind us of many places where the commands or words of the Mosaic Torah are to be written down (Exod 12:14; 13:9, 16; Deut 6:8-9; 11:18; Jer 31:33; Prov 1:9; 6:21; 7:3). Normally the objects of this pair of words are the individual commands or instructions of the covenant. Here in Prov 3:4 the 3rd person masculine pronoun clearly refers to *hesed* and *'emet*. Kindness and faithfulness speak of the character / manner of our obedience, i.e. the quality or way of performing our covenant responsibilities. Thus, Prov 3:4 is equivalent to the parallel passages, but the emphasis *here* is on the manner in which children render obedience to their parents: the motivation for obeying parents is covenant loyalty, not duress. As children, our beauty lies in obeying parents (1 Pet 3:3-6). We must internalise the home teachings and thus maintain a right relationship to our parents.

THE MODEL HOME (PROV 4:1-3)

The Introduction (Prov 4:1-3) to the Fifth Homily (Prov 4:1-9) which deals with the priority of wisdom, gives us a glimpse or vignette of the model home.

First we see the focus on sound teaching. The father says, "I give you sound learning." The Hebrew word is *leqah*. It comes from a root meaning "to receive" and refers to something received and handed down, i.e. tradition in the good sense of the word. It is the teaching that is proven from generation to generation. By definition, divine revelation only occurs once and is not repeated. God does not "do Sinai" for every generation of Israelites or repeat the incarnation for every generation of Christians. So the divine instruction must be passed on from generation to generation and the family is the divinely chosen means for this to take place. This word from the parents must be received by faith in the heart and confessed with the mouth (Romans 10:8-10). Thus the parents are custodians of the Mosaic Torah or Instruction and must be accurate in transmitting it and also faithful to practise it.

Second, we see the focus on discipline: "Listen,

my sons, to a father's instruction." The word translated "instruction" is *mūsār*, the general word for discipline in Hebrew. The book of Proverbs reveals two types of discipline: (1) discipline by word, i.e. preventative and (2) discipline by the rod, i.e. corrective discipline. We warn our children that if they pursue a certain course of action it will bring destructive consequences. If they disregard the warning, then we bring corrective discipline through some type of penalty. The rod (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15) is common to all ancient Near Eastern literature. Since in these texts the rod is related usually with the *na'ar*, we can conclude that the Bible is not speaking about beating small children harshly, but rather recommending that rebellious 15-16 year olds may be given some good corporal punishment to bring them back on track. Anyone who has taught this age group in school today would know that this is sound recommendation.

Thirdly, we note in this text the attitude towards children by the parents. The father recalls a time when he was a boy and he was "tender" and the "only child" of his mother. The same word rendered "tender" is used in Gen 33:13 of the children and the cows and ewes who are nursing young. They are exposed to danger and must not be driven hard as Jacob moves his flocks and herds from Haran back to Canaan. The term "only child" is a term in Hebrew which does not mean that the child is the only offspring of the parents, but refers to the way in which the child is valued by the parents. Each child is viewed as if they are unique. The parents account for the fact that their children are weak and exposed to danger and they give them a sense of inestimable worth so that they know they are valued. Bruce Waltke reported on a study done at Columbia University many years ago. The study concluded that for twelve year olds the influence of parents was 53%, peers 46%, and social agencies 1%.¹⁹ The mood of the family was set at the breakfast table and the chief influence at the breakfast tables was set by the father. Today there is no family breakfast and few fathers who teach as the one in Proverbs 4.

CONCLUSION

Deuteronomy 6, Proverbs, and Ephesians 6 explain the divine righteousness in raising children and bring these

truths across to the New Covenant by which we are related to God through the work of Jesus Christ. Educating and raising children entails a world-an-life-view that embraces everything and the task is placed primarily on the shoulders of both father and mother in the covenant community defined as family. The training is to be both formal and informal and communicated through a fine balancing of firmness and kindness. Young people are to be consecrated to and initiated into their adult roles with celebration. In the model home, love that makes children feel unique and care that attends to their weaknesses trains them through attention to discipline and sound tradition. Children respond with an obedience motivation by covenant loyalty, not duress.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Commonly known as "the Law of Moses," but the Hebrew word *tôrâ* is not well served by the translation "law." It is neither a law code in the Graeco-Roman sense nor modern sense of the word. The document describes a covenant between God and Israel of love and loyalty, and *tôrâ* refers to the instruction given in the covenant relationship to Israel. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).
- ² Unless otherwise marked, all translations are the author's.
- ³ For the meaning of this difficult word, see R. Meyer and H. Donner, *Wilhelm Gesenius Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch das Alte Testament*, 18th ed. (Berlin: Springer, 1995), Lfg. 2, s.v. "oth".
- ⁴ The city gates in ancient Israel corresponds to our Town Halls of today, i.e. the centre of business and commerce for the city or town.
- ⁵ Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 69. See Stephen G. Dempster, "Knowledge for What? Recovering the Lost Soul of Higher Education in the West," *Faculty Dialogue* (1992): 37-57.
- ⁶ Charles Habib Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982).
- ⁷ The evidence for public schools in ancient Israel is slim, so that the view that father = teacher and son = pupil in the book of Proverbs is not warranted.

- ⁸ S. Craig Glickman, *Knowing Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 139-140.
- ⁹ The analysis of Proverbs 22:6 is heavily influenced by Ted Hildebrandt, "Proverbs 22:6a: Train Up A Child?" *Grace Theological Journal* 9.1 (1988): 3-19.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ¹¹ Daniel Sivan, *Grammatical Analysis and Glossary of the Northwest Semitic Vocables in Akkadian Texts of the 15th-13th C.B.C. from Canaan and Syria* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 214, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 233, s.v. *annāku*.
- ¹² The best lexical study is that of John MacDonald, "The Status and Role of the Na'ar in Israelite Society," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 35.3 (1976): 147-170.
- ¹³ See Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15-31* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 203 - 205.
- ¹⁴ See Gordon P. Hugenberger, "Train Up a Child," in *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* by Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. van Pelt, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001, 2007), 162-163.
- ¹⁵ Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Proverbs, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 86-87.
- ¹⁶ Ted Hildebrandt, "Proverbs 22:6a: Train Up A Child?," 3.
- ¹⁷ See R. Meyer and H. Donner, *Wilhelm Gesenius Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch das Alte Testament*, 18th ed. (Berlin: Springer, 2007), Lfg. 4, s.v. and David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Vol. 5: -* (2001) (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), s.v. .
- ¹⁸ See Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15-31* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 203 n. 59 and 205.
- ¹⁹ Class Notes, 1988, Ontario Theological Seminary, Toronto, Canada.