

As The Twig Is Bent.

Text: Eph 6:1-4

Suggested Hymns:

613, 621, 588, 604, 609

- 1) As the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined
- 2) Discipline
- 3) Bend, not break
- 4) The joy of well-regulated homes

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 6:1-4, ¹ *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* ² *“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise:* ³ *“that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”* ⁴ *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Every boy and girl has a right to be born into a home in which love, attention, and care are given to them day after day. Each boy and girl has a father and a mother. To these parents belongs the child.

Before any other institution was established, before we had communities and cities, states and schools, even churches, the home was there. The home is the first unit in human society. All others have sprung from the home. Therefore the commandment says, *“Honor your father and mother.”*

Then, of course, we are to honour those to whom the home has delegated certain functions and duties which were originally found in the home. So the child belongs to the parents, and thousands of homes are filled with joy and laughter because of the boy or the girl who is in there.

The Bible places the child into the hands of the parents and tells them: This is your responsibility. You as parents are to give attention and nourishment and direction to the body and mind and soul of your boy and your girl.

However, many parents thoughtlessly turn the care of the bodies of their children over to the state, of their minds to the school, and of their souls to the church. Too many parents want to wash their hands clean of any responsibility of

their child's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. These they leave altogether to other people — those who are especially trained for the task.

That is the way the totalitarian state wants it to be. Its leaders say that the child belongs to the state — the body, the mind, and the soul. Such governments insist that they have the right to train the body, direct the thinking, and choose the religion. But God never intended it to be so. Scripture says, “*4 And you, fathers, ... bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*” That is God's directive.

Today we will see that *As the Twig is Bent, So the Tree is Inclined*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. As The Twig Is Bent, So The Tree is Inclined

The twig must be bent. As the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined. At the world-famous Shaw's Garden there are apple tree arbours which are visited by thousands of people each year. When the apple trees are in blossom scouts with their leaders go there to see what can be done with a tree if the twig is bent.

These apple trees are bent to go around an Arbor, like a vine, with the result that every part of the branch gets the sunshine and the tree gives a unique and fascinating display when in bloom.

In northern Europe this is done regularly, for the trees produce large crops and at the same time serve as artistic arbours.

However — and this is the point — if this is to be done, then the beginning must be made when the tree is a sapling. It cannot be done after the tree is older. You could never take an apple tree that is 10 or 12 feet high and bend its twigs around an Arbor. This is really an interesting story about twig bending.

Undoubtedly from this practice has arisen the proverb “As the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined.” So parents should “bend” their children by training them and bringing them up in the nurture of the Lord.

They are to train them physically. The child is entitled to a healthy body, fit for its lifework. Constant care and attention should be given to the development of the body that it might be sound, strong, and able to resist and withstand the hardships of life.

The child is to be trained mentally. If the mind remains undeveloped, if the child is given no education, its handicaps in life will be tremendous and frustrating.

The child must be trained spiritually. The heart must be educated. This is done neither by giving the boy and the girl wholesome food, nor by teaching it to read and write and calculate.

The child must be taught to know what is right and wrong in the sight of God and by God's standard. It must learn the behaviour laws of God. Only if the moral attitudes are right will the child escape the clutches of the law and not become a menace to society. The child from its infancy must learn what is morally right and wrong.

However, this is not enough. The child may be taught the principles of ethics and yet go through life unsaved. It must be taught the way to eternal life through Jesus Christ. The boy and girl must learn to know Jesus as their Saviour and from babyhood days be able to sing:¹

*Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.*

We can make out of the lad a decent citizen by teaching him certain behaviour laws, and yet he may not be a Christian because he does not know or does not believe that Jesus redeemed him as He died on the cross.

Most parents admit that the child must receive thorough physical and mental training. Much attention is given to the development of the body and mind. However, more than 50 percent of the people of Australia refuse to give their children Christian training. Even parents who want to be known as Christians often say, "*Let the child grow up and choose for itself its religion.*"

Those people who make such statements ought then to be consistent and let the child choose its own food, decide whether it wants to go to school. If the boy eats the wrong kind of food, it may only weaken his body; if he remains ignorant and dumb, the effect will only be temporary and earthly. However, if the soul is neglected, the loss is eternal.

The moral and spiritual training is far more vital than the physical and mental. The heart is desperately wicked. Your boy and girl may have a sound

heart, but by nature they are morally and spiritually inclined toward the evil and the sinful. This we dare say even though every mother thinks that she has an angel boy and an innocent, sweet girl.

Children need nurturing and training and disciplining in the Lord. Note well that Paul says, ***“in the Lord.”*** They need instruction in the Law of God. They must be taught the Ten Commandments and what they mean, and they must know that it is their duty to follow these instructions. These commandments of God tell us what is eternally right and what is always and at all times wrong and sinful.

However, children need to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ also. Only then do they know the answer to the most important question of life: *How can I be saved from sin and obtain salvation?* The Bible alone gives the answer in Acts 16:31, ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”***

They may not walk that way at all times, but parents ought to make sure that the child knows the way. Someday when life is bitter and they are facing death, maybe despair, they may remember what they have learned in childhood days and turn once more to the Saviour and plead, *“Lord, remember me, and have mercy on me!”*

2. Discipline

The tree is bent by discipline. ***“bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord,”*** says the apostle. The first step in the discipline is taken by curbing the natural appetites. This is done every day. No parents let the children eat whatever they want. They do not let them drink anything they desire. Daily food and drink is planned to develop muscles and clean blood.

Children, therefore, should thank God if they have parents who are eager to give them a healthy body by giving them the right kind of food. This may mean that the mother will not always let the child eat ice cream and cake, but will insist that vegetables and meat be eaten first.

The second step in discipline is taken by curbing the emotions. The temper must be curbed. Both boy and girl must learn to control their temper. If not, conditions will become intolerable and living together almost impossible.

This discipline, above all, includes the curbing of sinful inclinations. Children will be disobedient; they will lie, cheat, deceive, and even steal. When

they are little this may seem cute. However, if such tendencies are not checked, life will be full of trouble, tears, and heartaches.

In a well-regulated home the child should assume some responsibilities. Certain so-called chores should be assigned. Children should be taught to be neat, helpful, and orderly. They should look around to see whether they can do something for their parents to make the home run smoothly.

Such godly bending of the twig develops Christian character. No one can deny that there is nothing finer in life than seeing young men and women have Christian principles and live according to these. Every youth should thank God if he has parents who have taken time to discipline their children *“in the Lord.”* Such homes are spared many heartaches, as they have been built upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. Bend, Not Break

Bend the twig, but do not break it. Paul says, *“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath.”* Parents can break the twig. How do they do this? By shattering the ideals of life. The home is to be Christian. The principles of the Gospel are to be carried out in daily life.

If the love of Christ does not dwell in the home, one tragedy will follow another. The Gospel of Jesus keeps the wheels of homelife well lubricated. Quarrels and the unforgiving spirit shall find little room in such a Christian home.

Undesirable men and women brought into the home can break the twig. Children are great imitators. If the friends you bring into the home use indecent language, or by their drinking to excess demoralise the home, the parents cannot expect their sons and daughters to do otherwise. Actions speak louder than words.

Again, the neglect of prayer and family worship retards, yes, undermines, the spiritual life in the home. *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”* says the apostle in Colossians 3:16. Prayer and the reading of Scripture and Christian literature should be the order of the day. All this bolsters the morale and the thinking of youth in the home.

Parents often break the twig by making unreasonable demands. Our text says, *“Do not provoke your children to wrath.”* In other words, “Do not

exasperate them.” This is done by rude manners, by tyrannical tactics, and by humiliating youth before others. Such conduct is exasperating. Such action does not bend, but break the twig.

On the other hand, children also become frustrated by unreasonable demands. How often they come home to say complainingly: *“John can do this. Mary’s mother never objects when she does not come home at once to do her lessons. His mother does not make him do any chores. Her mother does not make her do the dishes. His father gives him all the spending money he wants.”* That is the way boys and girls often talk to their parents.

By way of suggestion, as Christian boy or girl comes home, why not say at times: “Dad, Mum, I am glad you do not let me do everything I please. You ought to see how things go on in John’s home because he can do whatever he wants to do.”

Why not come home and offer to give a helping hand to a tired mother? Why not surprise Dad by having the car washed? Frustrated children, unruly children, disobedient children are causing much irritation and friction in the home.

4. The Joy of Well-Regulated Homes

Bent by proper nurture and discipline, the tree does well. The apostle says, *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”*² *“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise:*³ *“that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”*

The twig, properly bent, grows right. The boy or the girl who has been properly trained respects the parents. *“Honor your father and mother,”* says Paul. Show them the respect they deserve. They do more for you than anyone else in the world. They stick by you even when the whole world turns against you. Appreciate them and all they have sacrificed for you.

Bent properly, the child grows up obedient. *“This is right”* our text says. The Lord demands this of Christian children. As they obey their parents *“in the Lord,”* they obey the Lord Jesus and follow in His footsteps.

“This is right.” It is reasonable. It is good, for our good. Not only is it right, but it makes for our well-being as we go through life. This commandment

has a special promise; in fact, it is the only commandment that has a promise, ***“that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”***

The twig that is properly bent is going to find fewer regrets and less bitterness in life. God promises that it shall be well with you. Christian conduct is going to pay off. Christian youth will enjoy the respect of the community. They will be welcome in the best circles.

“That ... you may live long on the earth,” adds the apostle. You will live out your God-appointed time. It will not be cut short by sin and the penalties of sin. The joy of the Lord is going to fill your day through the years you live on the earth. Even though there maybe be troubles at times, the peace of God shall be in your heart, the hope of salvation makes life and the journey along the Jericho road easier.

As we bring up boys and girls in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as both boy and girl are brought up properly, trained in body, mind, and soul, let us one and all thank and praise God for each and every Christian home in our community. Then each one can say sincerely, Be it ever so humble, there is no place like a Christian home. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hymn 609