

Conquering the Will in Child-Raising - by John Wesley

"In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will, and bring them to an obedient temperament. To inform the understanding is a work of time, and with children it must proceed by slow degrees as they are able to bear it. The subjection of the will is a thing which must be done at once; and the sooner the better. But by neglecting timely correction, children will develop a stubbornness and obstinate attitude which is hardly ever after conquered; and never, without using such severity as would be as painful to me as to the child. In the view of the world such could pass for kind and tolerant. I call them cruel parents, who permit their children to get habits, which they know must be afterwards broken. Nay some are so stupidly fond of their children as in sport to teach their children to do things which later on, they have severely beaten them for doing.

Whenever a child is corrected, it must be conquered. This will be no hard matter to do, if the child be not grown headstrong by too much indulgence. And when the will of a child is totally subdued, and it is brought to revere and stand in awe of the parents, then a great many childish follies and accidents may be passed by. Some should be overlooked and no notice taken, while others should be mildly reprov'd. No willful transgression ought ever to be forgiven children, without chastisement, less or more, as the nature and circumstances of the offense require.

I insist upon conquering the will of children early, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education; without which both precepts and examples will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason and piety of its parents, till its own understanding comes to maturity, and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind.

I cannot yet dismiss this subject. As self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever respects this in children, insures their misery and ungodliness later on. Whatever checks and denies it, promotes their future happiness and piety. This is still more evident, if we further consider, that Christianity is nothing else than the doing the will of God, and not our own: Because the one grand obstacle to our temporal and eternal happiness is this self-will, no gratification of it will be insignificant, no denial unprofitable. Heaven or hell depend on this alone. Therefore, the parent who studies to conquer it in his child, works together with God in the restoration and saving of a soul. However, the parent who does not restrain it, does the devil's work, and makes Christianity useless, salvation unattainable; and does all that lies within himself to damn his child, soul and body, for ever."

(from John Wesley's Journal Aug 1742 Vol. 1; p. 389)

Proverbs 22:6 (HCSB)

“Teach a youth about the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:15 (HCSB)

“Foolishness is tangled up in the heart of a youth;
the rod of discipline will drive it away from him.”

Proverbs 13:24 (HCSB)

The one who will not use the rod hates his son,
but the one who loves him disciplines him diligently.

Proverbs 19:18 (HCSB)

Discipline your son while there is hope;
don't be intent on killing him.