

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 5 September 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Rearing a Child after Christ's Image

In May of 2018, our country was shocked when it heard the news of two 15-year-old boys who had died while they were swimming in an old, condemned quarry near their homes in Ennis. Many large signs, posted clearly and prominently around the lake, clearly warn people, "Danger - Deep Water - No Swimming," and "Danger: Silt Pond, Deep Water, Keep Clear." Despite all these warnings, many local youngsters have, for years, swum in the quarry, without incident; but for these two boys, it was their *last* time to disregard the warning. In the weeks following their deaths, as the friends of these boys were taking their Junior Cert, they were shocked to find this grammar question in their English exam: "I was not aloud / allowed to swim in the old quarry." When asked to comment on the exam question, one local councillor in Ennis commented that "It is hugely unfortunate that some of the friends of the two boys were faced with a question like this in their English exam, especially when they are still grieving over the boys' deaths." However, what is far more unfortunate is that *disobedience to authority* has been permitted by parents all over the area, for many years. I don't know what kind of character these two boys had on any other given day of their lives; but what I *do* know is that on 31 May 2018, *one* failure in the character quality of obedience resulted in these boys' deaths.

Now, in contrast to these stories, I could tell many happy stories of children (including very young toddlers) whose lives were spared from certain death because they obeyed their parents' command *immediately*, without a second's hesitation or argument. Character literally is a matter of life or death. This morning I would like to talk about how parents can develop character in their children. The title of this message is *Rearing a Child after Christ's Image*.

I. You must fashion your child's character after the right model (*Christ's image*).

It is extremely important that we parents be men and women of character, and that we teach our children good character. God's Word is filled with instructions regarding character. Yet, as important as character is, the actual *word* "character" is not found in our King James Bible. If we're going to talk about the importance of character, it might be helpful to find out more about the word itself. Where does this word "character" come from, and what does it mean?

Well, our English word "character" is transliterated directly from the *Greek* word *charakter* (χαρακτηρ). This Greek word *charakter* is found in the New Testament; and it is found in one of the most important verses concerning the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's take a look at that verse, and see what we can learn about this word *charakter*.

Hebrews 1:1-3

In **verse 3**, the Apostle Paul says that Christ is the "*express image*" of the Father's person. This phrase "*express image*" is translated from the Greek word *charakter*. *Charakter* refers to the stamped image that was created in hot wax after a seal was pressed into the wax. It also refers to the image that was printed on a coin after the hot metal was poured into the mould. The stamp (or the coin) was the *identical image* of the original seal or mould.

Now, as I said, the Greek word *charakter*, here in **Hebrews 1:3**, is translated as “***express image.***” What is Paul teaching us by this? He is teaching us that the Son of God is identical to God the Father in every way—in power, glory, being, and essence. Everything that the Father is, the Son is. Everything that the Father does, the Son does also. Jesus said in **John 5:17**, “***My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.***” In other words, Jesus was saying, “Right up to this very moment, My Father is upholding and sustaining the universe; and I am working together with Him. I am doing the exact things that He is doing!” In being and essence, Jesus is identical to the Father. They are distinct persons; yet, they are one God (along with the third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit). In *moral excellence*, Jesus is identical to the Father, too. The Father is absolutely pure and holy; and the Son is absolutely pure and holy, as well. In holiness, justice, compassion, love, mercy, and in every other virtue, the Son is morally excellent, just like the Father.

Do you see how this Greek word *charakter* came to mean “moral qualities,” as we use the word today? Jesus *is* the “character” of the Father. In every moral virtue, Jesus is the *charakter* (the express, identical imprint) of the Father. You cannot talk about “good character” without talking about the Lord Jesus Christ, because He *is* the *charakter* (the exact imprint) of the Father’s holiness, in every way. *Furthermore*, because Jesus Christ is God *and* Man, we are able to look to *Him* to see what godly character *is!*

Now, this brings me to an extremely important point. The Bible says that it is God’s will for Christians to be conformed to *Christ’s* “image.” Let’s look at that Scripture.

Romans 8:28-29

In this verse, Paul says that God has predestinated Christians to be “***conformed to the image of his Son.***” Now, in this verse, the word “***image***” is not translated from the word *charakter*; however, it *is* translated from a similar word (the word *elkon*). The word *elkon* means “image, likeness, representation, or statue.”

Now, think about that for a minute. In what way can Christians be “conformed” to Christ’s image? Christ is God; and, as such, there are qualities of His that we will never share. We will never be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, or immutable, as God is. We will never become “gods.” However, there are qualities of Christ’s which we *can* imitate: and those are His *moral* qualities. In **Hebrews 12:10**, Paul says that the Father chastens His children so that they “***might be partakers of his holiness.***” God wants (and expects) us to be holy, as He is. In **2 Peter 1:4**, Peter says that God saved us so that we “***might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.***” When it comes to purity and holiness, God wants us to have His divine character. **First Peter 2:21** says, “***For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.***” In His sinlessness and complete truthfulness, Christ is our “Example.”

By the way, that word “***example***” is an interesting one. It comes from Greek word *hypergrammos*, which literally means “under writing,” or “something written underneath.” In Bible times, a *hypergrammos* was an alphabet outline upon which children could trace their letters. To this day, we use alphabet outlines with *our* children, don’t we? In school, children

are given sheets with lines of dotted letters; and the children have to trace the letters *exactly*. They aren't allowed to stray off the line. They are not allowed to get "creative." Their line must follow every curve and angle of the letter that he is tracing *exactly*. Should the teacher see a pencil mark straying off the line, he corrects it.

So it is with moral character. Christ's character is *not* a "basic model" that we can follow to whatever extent we please. His character is something that we must "trace" and mimic *exactly*. We parents must allow God to conform *us* to Christ's image; and it should be our goal to see our *children* being conformed to Christ's image, as well. If we want our children to have good character, then *Christ* is the model that they must follow. Of course, being conformed to Christ's image cannot even *begin* to take place until our children are saved. We *must* teach them the Gospel from day one, and pray that they will one day repent of their sin, and personally trust in Christ to save them. Only after our children enter into a relationship with God by faith can God begin the process of conforming them to His Son's image.

Yet, *how* does this process happen? After salvation, *how* do our children become more and more like Christ? Well, it's the same way that *we* must become like Christ. It is through the *Word of God*. It is through the Word of God that we are saved in the first place; and it is through the Word of God that we *become increasingly like Christ* after we are saved.

2 Corinthians 3:18

What is Paul saying, here? He is saying that as we look into the "glass" (mirror) of God's Word, we behold the glory of Christ in its pages; and as we behold Christ's image, we are able to be *changed* into His image "***from glory to glory***" (from one level of holiness to another). And how does this all happen? By "***the spirit of the Lord***." In other words, as we read God's Word, and fill our hearts and minds with the image of Christ and His holy character, the Holy Spirit is then able to *change* us into Christ's image, as we allow Him to do so. More and more, we take on Christ's character; and it is through the Word of God, and the Spirit of God, that this happens. (By the way, if you be not reading your Bible every day, yet you think that you are growing in Christ, you're fooling yourself! You *cannot* become like Christ by taking in a sermon for one hour every week!)

Now, as parents, we must realise that we are *not* the Holy Spirit. We can't do His job. Only the Holy Spirit can mould your child into Christ's image. However, you *are* a tool in God's hand. God is using *you* to administer His Word to your child, so that he knows what right character *is*. God is using *you* to teach your children habits of character.

Let's face it: Character is formed through *habit*. Godly character qualities develop as we make them into regular habits. This doesn't happen instantly: it is a process. It doesn't happen by default, either. Children will *not* develop habits of character on their own. Remember what Solomon said in **Proverbs 29:15**? He said, "***The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.***" *You*, parent, must actively teach your children right character; and you must teach them to *embrace* right character in their hearts. Now, you can't *force* them to embrace right character. (You can't even make them receive Christ as Saviour.) They will have to make these choices in their own hearts. However, you *can* open God's Book, teach them what right character is, and pray that they will invite the Holy Spirit to be their Teacher. You *must lead them* to the Teacher.

How do you lead them to the Teacher? It's simple. Get them out of Facebook, and get their face *into* the Book! Make sure that they read their Bible every single day! Don't let them go to bed until they have read it. Have *family* devotion time every day, as well. As you read the Bible together, take time to point out and discuss character qualities that are exemplified in the passage—character qualities such as truthfulness, compassion, meekness, humility, honesty, diligence, and perseverance. Encourage them to think of practical ways that *they* can practice these qualities. Make godly character the constant theme of your home!

II. You must teach your children about character all day, every day.

Character is what you are when no one else knows what you're doing. A person of godly character does what is right even when no one else is encouraging him to do right, and when no one else is watching. This precept *must* be taught to our children all day, every day.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

I could spend a year preaching on all the character qualities that our children should have; but this morning, I would like to focus on a few important ones. The most important character quality that a child needs to learn is **obedience**. Our children must learn that obedience is doing what your parents tell you to do immediately, completely, and with a good attitude.

Now, let's look to our Example, the Lord Jesus Christ. *Obedience* is probably the first and foremost character quality that we think of when we think of our Lord. In the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament, Jehovah constantly emphasised the fact that His righteous Servant would be *obedient* to His voice. From earliest childhood, Christ's life was one of constant, relentless obedience. Let's take a look at the first recorded instance of Christ's life after He had reached an age of understanding, and see what we can learn.

Luke 2:41-52

In this passage, we see two obvious, shining truths about Christ's character when He was a twelve-year-old boy. First, we see that Christ was obedient to His Heavenly Father. He said, ***"I must be about my Father's business."*** The Father's will, on this occasion, was for Jesus to impart the true meaning of Scripture to these rabbis, whose spiritual understanding was darkened. Already, Christ was laying the groundwork for His future ministry. Obeying His Father was more important to Him than eating, sleeping, or playing! For hours, he taught these educated, yet confused men God's truth by asking them polite, respectful questions.

Secondly, we see that Jesus was obedient to His earthly mother, and to His foster father, Joseph. Scripture tells us that he was ***"subject"*** unto them. He was obedient to His parents. Now, think about that. We know that Jesus never sinned, or had imperfect character. Yet, the Bible tells us in **Hebrews 7:8** that Jesus ***"learned...obedience by the things which he suffered."*** Now, what does this mean? How could Jesus "learn" obedience, when He had never sinned to begin with? Did He *improve* in obedience? No. What this means is that Jesus learned *by experience* what it is like to obey human authority. As God, Christ had always obeyed His Father; but as a Man, Jesus now "learned" obedience *experientially*.

As a child, Jesus was no different from any other boy (except for the fact that He never sinned). He had to go through all the things that other children go through. Think of that! As God, Jesus is “the living Word.” He is the one who *spoke* the words of Scriptures to the prophets of old. Yet, as a Man, Jesus didn’t rely on His divine knowledge; instead, He subjected Himself to human experience. He actually had to *learn* the Scriptures. As a child, had to *learn* to read and write, and then He had to *work* to memorise the Scriptures! He didn’t just “tap into” His divine nature, and blow everyone away with His infinite, divine knowledge: He actually *learned*, as every other child must do. Yet, look at His diligence! By age 12, He astounded the rabbis with his knowledge of Scriptures, and His questions. Yet, despite His great knowledge, Jesus subjected Himself to the authority of His mother and his step-father. Jesus *obeyed* God, and human authority, in all things. Do you want to know what a 12-year-old child should look like, parents? Then look at Jesus as a 12-year-old! Teach your child to be conformed to *that* image. Have them “trace” over the letters of the boy Jesus’ character.

What other character qualities should we teach our children? **Respect.** First of all, they should be taught to respect and honour God. From earliest childhood, our children should be taught to bow their heads and close their eyes when they pray, or when others pray. They should be taught *never* to take God’s name in vain. They should be taught *never* to say “O my ---,” unless they are directly addressing God in reverent prayer. They should also be taught respect for others—and especially for elders, and people in authority over them.

Leviticus 19:32

This is a teaching that you don’t hear much of these days. God says that when you are in the presence of an elder (someone with a “*hoary head*”), you should *stand* in respect. Parents, teach your children to stand up in honour to their elders, and look them in the face.

A few summers ago, our family went to a picnic with some missionary friends; and while we were there, I was refreshed when a 12-year-old missionary kid came up to me, shook my hand, addressed me as “Mr. Finley,” and asked how my family and I were doing. He didn’t call me “Stephen”: He called me *Mister* Finley, as he ought to do. Around that same time, I was at Victory Youth Camp; and while I was there, a 13-year-old young lady came up to me, introduced herself, shook my hand, and asked my name. She then spent about 5 minutes asking me about my family, my church, and so on. While most of the kids at camp barely acknowledged my presence (if at all), this girl showed respect to an adult, and genuine interest in my family. Did these things happen by accident? No. The parents of these children have taught them to respect adults and authority figures.

Children should be taught to say “Sir” and “Ma’am” to adults. (To this day, I *still* cannot address people who were adults and authority figures over me while I was growing up by anything other than “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” “Sir,” or “Ma’am”!) Children should be taught to say “Yes, sir,” or “Yes, ma’am” (not “yeah”). This concept is all but forgotten; yet, it is biblical. Now, lest you think I’m “over the top” here, consider what “sir” means. The word “sir” is another form of the Medieval word “sire,” which was used to address kings, or people of high rank. And where did the word “sire” come from? From the Latin word *senior*, which means “elder,” or “someone in authority.” Do you know what all this reminds me of? It reminds me of how Sarah addressed her husband. In **1 Peter 3:6**, the Apostle Peter points out that Sarah called Abraham “lord.” If Sarah called her own husband “lord,” how much more should

children show respect to their elders by calling them “Mister,” “Mrs.,” “Sir,” or “Ma’am”? Children should rise before the hoary head, both outwardly, and in their hearts.

Now, I mentioned earlier that as you read your Bible together as a family, you should seek for character qualities (both good and bad), and discuss them. Let’s look at an example.

John 6:1-15

What good character qualities do you see exemplified in this story? First, you see the **sensitivity** and **concern** that Jesus had for others. He didn’t just finish His preaching, and send the people away; He was concerned that they needed something to eat. We also see the **respect and generosity** of the young boy, who willingly sacrificed his lunch for the Lord. We see the **orderliness** of the Lord Jesus, as He split the people into groups of fifties. The Bible says that we are to do **“all things decently and in order.”** (By the way, this is why you teach your child to pick up his room!) We see the **resourcefulness** of Christ, as well. He did not waste one shred of food. We see the **humility** of Christ, and His **obedience to His Father’s will**, as He refused to allow flatterers to crown Him as King of Israel.

As you read Scripture with your children, you can also discuss *bad* character qualities. For example, in **Acts 15**, we are told that John Mark abandoned Paul and Silas in the middle of their missionary journey, and went back home to Jerusalem. A parent might pose the question: “What character quality did Mark lack?” Perhaps it was faith, boldness, endurance, or perseverance. Perhaps he lacked commitment, faithfulness, loyalty, or even submission to authority. It could be asked, “What did the disciples lack in the Garden of Gethsemane when they kept falling asleep, when they were supposed to be praying?” Perhaps they lacked faith, endurance, selflessness, or prayerfulness. Perhaps their pride earlier that evening (as they argued about who would be the greatest) had weakened them spiritually.

However, don’t just talk about the character of people in Scripture. Make it personal. Talk about what character qualities might be lacking in *their* lives. For instance, if they have a messy room, you might ask them what is lacking. (Orderliness, perhaps?) If they have trouble doing chores, perhaps responsibility is missing. If they hesitate to tithe or give to missions, perhaps faith and generosity are lacking. You might hypothetically ask, “If, when you are grown up, you start skipping church, what is lacking?” Perhaps *obedience* is missing—or *love for God, commitment, or concern* for others’ spiritual welfare. If they have trouble with complaining, they are missing *contentment*. If they have trouble finishing a job, they might lack thoroughness, or persistence. If they have trouble with giving in to peer pressure, they might lack boldness and resolve. If they have trouble being on time, they lack commitment and faithfulness. (You might point out that if they are late to work someday, they’ll lose their job—and that if they are late to church, they will lose blessing from God, treasure from God’s Word, and needed Christian fellowship. They also are telling God that He isn’t all that important.) If they have trouble listening, they lack attentiveness. (The Bible says, **“Hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.”**) If they tend to argue with dad and mum’s instructions, they lack submission.

III. You must praise your children for their good character.

There are many ways to teach good character in our kids; but one of the best ways to develop character in children is to praise them for their good character qualities. Praising them for the character that they already have encourages them to develop *more* character in their lives.

Proverbs 27:21

Praise (when used in the right way) can *refine* a person—just as fire refines silver, and gets rid of the dross. Now, it may seem strange that God would liken praise to a refining fire. When we think of “fire,” we usually think of hard trials in our lives, which expose sins such as pride and self-will. However, *praise* can refine a person, as well. How so? Because it encourages a person to develop *more* character in his life, and to get rid of the bad character.

Now, praising others doesn’t come naturally to us. Why? Because of our pride. Pride and self-righteousness cause us to be picky, harsh, and critical of others (including our children). We can easily forget what it was like when we were in our children’s shoes, and were still learning things. Also, we can get the notion that because it’s our children’s *duty* to do their chores, they don’t need to be praised for doing them. However, is this attitude biblical? Once again, let’s look to our Example, Jesus Christ.

Luke 17:7-10 / 19:11-19

What was Jesus’ point in His parable of service in **Luke 17**? His point is that when His servants stand before Him someday, they will not be “*thanked*” for their service. Why? Because serving God is our *duty*. (We are *not* doing God a favour by serving Him!) However, as we saw in **Luke 19**, God will *honour, commend, and reward* us for our service. He will say, “***Well done, thou good and faithful servant.***” If *Christ* can say “well done” to us unprofitable servants, and reward us for what we *did* do for Him (even though we were so often *unfaithful*), can we not praise our own children when they do right?

Now, as we praise our children, we need to be sure to praise them for the *right things*. We need to praise *character* in our children—not achievement, knowledge, talent, position, physical beauty, or physical strength. It’s not wrong to *affirm* that your child did a great job on a test; but don’t praise his *intelligence*. That will engender pride in him. Instead, praise his *diligence* and *hard work* in studying for that test—even if he didn’t get the highest grade.

A child should be praised for his initiative in practicing his instrument, instead of for how well he actually played. A girl should be praised for her godly behaviour, rather than for being pretty. (Praising her beauty will make her vain!) Praise your child for taking a stand for what is right, even though other kids laughed at him for it, or treated him cruelly. Remind your children of people in the Bible (such as Daniel), who purposed in their hearts to do right, even when everyone else was doing wrong. Praise them for the respect they showed when they gave up their seat for an older person. Praise them for when they patiently waited for you to get done speaking, and didn’t interrupt. Praise them for being thankful for something they received. Praise them when they demonstrate humility. Of course, you don’t want them to become proud of their humility, or else they will no longer be humble! However, you *can* say, “You know, Jesus is “***meek and lowly in heart***”; and, son, today, I could see that you were meek and lowly in your attitude, just like Jesus. Don’t ever let that change!

Conclusion: Rearing children of character is all about teaching your child to be like Christ. Parent, should *you* be failing to allow Christ to conform you to His image, it will be very difficult for you to teach your *child* how to be conformed to His image. Are you allowing Christ to mould *you* into His likeness? Are you reading His Word every day, and submitting to His Holy Spirit? I would also ask this question: **Are you saved?** If you have never responded to God's call to salvation, you cannot even begin to be conformed to Christ's image. Repent of your sin and believe on Christ alone to save you!