

Foolishness in the Heart of a Child

By Alan Hitchen

Introduction: A relay race allows each team to build on the success of a previous runner. As the leader hands off the baton, the opportunity to keep or extend the lead is based on a smooth transition. If the baton is dropped, the lead will evaporate. Thus *“passing on the baton”* is an idiom to describe a smooth transition. As we will see in today’s article, it is also an excellent parable for how parents can see their role in raising their children and even their grandchildren.

God summed up our life as a Christian as a race. At the starting line we are *“conformed to this world”* and as we run we are *“being transformed.”* We are warned to *“lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, and run with endurance the race that is set before us”* (Rom. 12:2; Heb. 12:1-2). God wants us to run *“in such a way that you may obtain”* the prize. At the end of his life, Paul told Timothy *“I have finished the race”* and spoke of *“the crown of life”* that was laid up for him. (1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 4:7).

How much help can parents be to their children in this race? Can we really look at our race as a Christian as we do a relay race? Can our own hard work and toil be passed on our children to help them get ahead? When Paul commanded fathers to *“bring them. up in the training and admonition of the Lord”* (Eph. 6:4), it was made evident that the influence of godly parents on their children does indeed work exactly like a relay race. Parents have already run the race set before their children and contended with many of the pitfalls and detours that bring disaster. Through training and admonition we can help our children avoid the evil companionship that could corrupt them and work with them in removing their character flaws. This is actually part of the conditional promise God gave to all parents: *“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it”* (Prov. 22:6). Since children reflect many of the strengths and weaknesses of their parents, we will already have much of the wisdom necessary to help them succeed.

Among all the passages in Proverbs describing the effective tools God has given to parents, none is more comprehensive than the one quoted in the Title. *“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction drives it far from them”* (Prov. 22:15). The promise of helping to drive any foolishness out of their heart, should create both hope and determination. What is this foolishness? Since every child is unique, the foolishness they will exhibit as they grow up will be manifested in many different ways. Yet the root problem is always the same.

Every infant begins their life in a very self-centered vacuum. Infants feel no care or concern about the needs of their parents or anyone else. When they are hungry, tired, or need to be cared for, whether it be day or night, they will let it be known no matter how inconvenient it might be. Mom may be sick, weary from being up for a long time, or have a busy schedule in the morning, but none of that matters to an infant. They only care about their own needs. While we all understand the necessity of this in a new-born, it quickly becomes foolishness that must be removed.

The transition from the selfish and self-centered attitude of an infant to the loving self-

sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, is the race we are all running! ***“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame”*** (Heb. 12:1-2). Everything that now hinders us from progressing on this path is part of the foolishness that was bound up in our own heart as we were being raised. As we consider our own unique combination of folly, we can get a better understanding of everyone else. All the foolishness our own parents failed to remove with the ***“rod of correction,”*** must now be removed by our own efforts to ***“buffet our body.”***

Have we sat down and considered Paul’s words as they apply to us? *“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things”* (1 Cor. 13:11). What were these childish things we put away or are still putting away? They are what remains of the selfishness we possessed in our infancy. Every sin and temptation, every lust that originates in our flesh or in our eyes, and all the pride of life that we still contend with arises from this selfishness. Temptations and enticements only arise when we see other people as existing for our selfish use. Covetousness and the transgression of law cannot exist when the needs and desires of others are more important to us than our own. So when we find it impossible to turn the other cheek or go the second mile, it is because the foolishness that was bound up in our heart as a child is still there. We all need to give careful thought to how much we actually do for others when there is nothing to be gained for ourselves.

The apostles revealed a very critical aspect of this foolishness. When Jesus first observed it, He asked them about it and their own silence testified against them. ***“What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road? But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all’”*** (Mk. 9:33-35).

Only in the foolish eyes of the infant, does anything that can bring the right to subjugate others to our own will and force them to serve us be used in this manner. In the world, those who are stronger, smarter, more popular, or wealthier, often see these attributes as a means to bully and force others to serve them. This worldly attitude is seen in the schools, workplaces, and in politics. Jesus even pointed it out among the scribes and Pharisees. ***“They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogue greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’”*** (Matt. 23:6-7). But when Jesus sat down with the apostles, He revealed that there is no place for this in the kingdom of heaven. This foolishness must be driven far from us and replaced with the desire to serve and put others and their needs above our own. Any view of greatness that seeks dominance is just another manifestation of the folly of youth.

After a second attempt at dominance by James and John, Jesus again explained: ***“whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.”*** This time He also gave His own example: ***“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”*** (Mk. 10:43-44). Within these words the goal and aim of our race is revealed. Now as Paul we ***“run in such a way, as not without aim.”*** We are all looking unto Jesus as the author and perfecter of our faith. The ***“foolishness in the heart of a child”*** is competing ***“with the mind of Christ”*** (Phil. 2:1-11, see below). The mind of Christ is to serve and to give, while the folly of the heart of a child

wants to be served and to take.

The final time Jesus spoke of this was immediately after He revealed the Lord's Supper to them. Once again, they are arguing about dominance and control and once again Jesus points them to the choice of the Gentiles or Himself. In His kingdom every role is a role of service. There is no room for the folly of lordship and dominance. *“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves”* (Lk. 22:25-26).

Conclusion: Before we can pass on the baton to our children and help them run their own race, we must already be running our own. We cannot teach what we have not yet learned. We must remove the beam that is in our own eye before we can help them with the speck that is in theirs. When we truly understand the mind of Christ and have removed the folly from our own heart, we will be prepared to help our children.

“3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:3-9, NASB).