

How You Must Teach Your Children to Behave in Church

Every member of God's Church around the world should read every word of this letter.

By Richard D. Armstrong



The following letter was written by my son, Richard D. Armstrong, four and a half months before he died from an automobile accident.

He was then pastor of the Fresno, Calif., Church of God. Destruction resulting from lack of training and supervision of children had occurred at the hall where the church met. One more infraction would have put the church out of the hall.

Such a thing as this could happen at any church. It was promptly corrected at Fresno, but it should sound a loud and emphatic WARNING to the members of all other churches that such an incident is never allowed to be repeated elsewhere.

As I reread this letter, the realization comes forcibly upon my mind that many of our brethren — especially those newer in God's Church — may not fully realize the SERIOUSNESS of strict training and vigilant enforcement of the behavior of children at Church services.

Brethren, we need to be REAWAKENED!

We need to realize the extreme seriousness of this matter. GOD IS HOLDING EVERY ONE OF YOU PARENTS RESPONSIBLE!

My son Dick, as we called him, *loved* the brethren at Fresno. Previously he had been pastor of three churches, at Houston, San Antonio and Corpus Christi, Tex.

**Editor's note from
Herbert W. Armstrong:**

He had told us with feeling how, although he was younger in physical years than many members, they seemed like his own *spiritual* children — and he loved them as a parent loves a child.

At Fresno it was the same. Possibly Richard D. Armstrong was the most *loved* minister in the Church of God — because he, himself, felt such deep love and concern for Christ's flock, over which he was a shepherd.

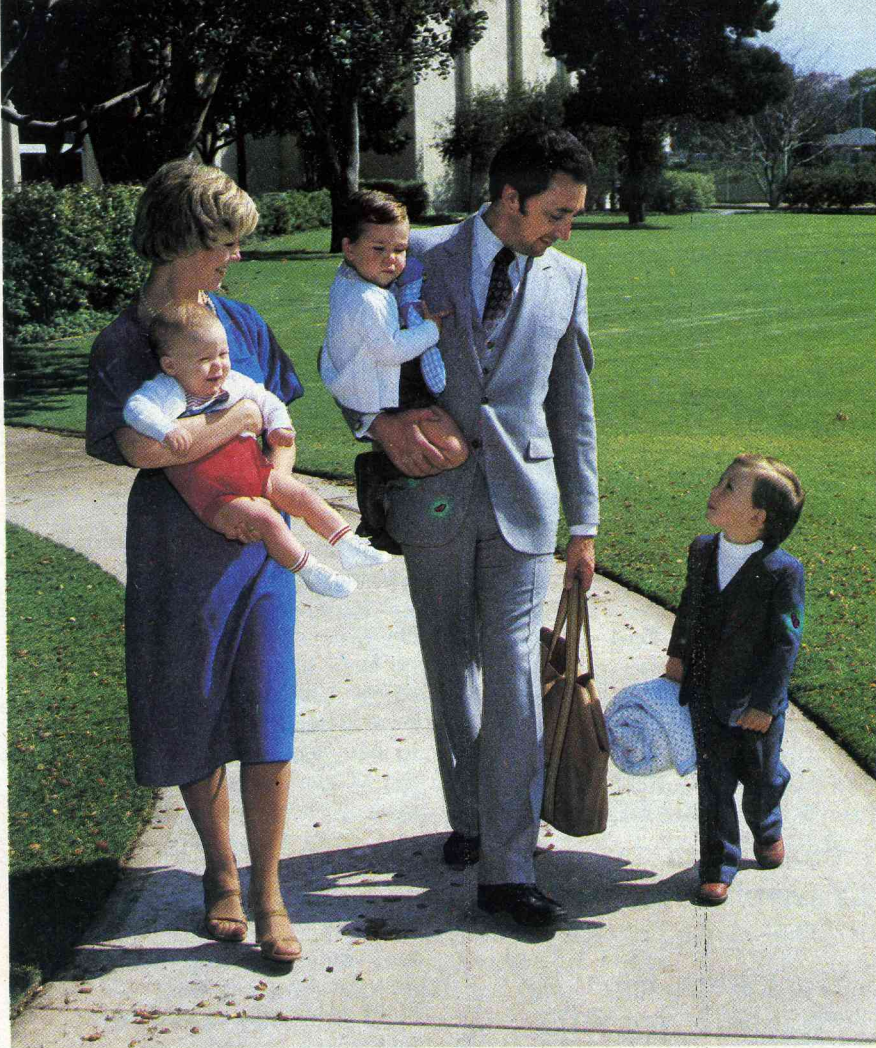
I do not think my son really wrote this letter, except as God's instrument. The living CHRIST, I feel, actually authored it.

But it contains a dynamic SERMON on the responsibility of parents for the training and the behavior of their children at Church services.

As the brethren at Fresno were his *spiritual* children, and God held him RESPONSIBLE for *their* behavior in controlling their children, this letter is also an example of how to deal with children. My son patiently made the truth PLAIN to them — explained thoroughly. But he also TOOK ACTION! He took such action as to prevent a recurrence of the mischief.

I want every minister of Christ, in all the churches, to take the same action, that parents may FEAR to neglect the discipline of their children, lest they be publicly and severely rebuked and held to account before all.

I want every member to read every word.



Photos by Warren Watson

March 12, 1958

I received some very sad news just as I was leaving church last week. Mr. Kelly, the janitor who sets up the chairs for our meetings and through whom we rent the hall, came to me visibly shaken and very nervous, but he had a very great problem he had to tell me about. Mr. Kelly has always been most courteous and friendly to all of us.

He said that he hated to tell me, but our children had torn apart one of the toilets on the third floor where we hold our meetings. They had torn the float clear out of the toilet, taken all of the paper from several of the toilets and poked it into one and tried to flush this toilet and flooded it all over the floor.

He said that they had left it in a

complete, total, disgraceful mess and that furthermore, several of our children had gone down to the second floor and gone into a meeting. The lodge members who own the building were complaining and asking Mr. Kelly to make sure that it didn't happen again, or we will be thrown out. We shall not be allowed to meet here any longer ***IF THIS EVER HAPPENS AGAIN!***

The Church of God Almighty, the very Body of Jesus Christ, must not suffer such a humiliating thing because we are not obedient to God's commandments. We shall not allow such a condition to continue. I hope you can imagine how I felt after the joy of having the chorale and such a wonderful meeting, and then to have a blow such as this.

I hate to have to give an answer for the church, and I feel that I should go to those who are responsible — you, the parents. We don't know which child was responsible. But we do know that this type of

incident happens when we have children left *unrestrained* to play about on their own before, during and after church.

God says in Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

Brethren, I have to give an account to God when something like this happens and it is up to me to see to it that it doesn't happen again.

Go right on in your Bible and read through the first chapter of James. We are having our trials of faith that we should count all joy, because it works out patience and builds stronger character in us. We do have these problems. They must be solved, and they must be solved by the Scriptures — God's way.

In verse 13 of this first chapter of James, God says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." We are tempted of our own lusts, and even so is a child, and if there is no parental control any child, and every child, does get into mischief.

I want to make this clear. There is no child who is specifically at fault, but all the children without exception have been too noisy, have been left to run free to themselves at services, and this must cease. God says in Hebrews 12:14-15: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby **MANY** be defiled." It is up to us to settle this particular problem according to God's will and from the Scriptures, and not let any root of bitterness spring up in us.

Notice James 1:22: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." It is not taking you into the Kingdom of Heaven if you simply agree with everything that God's Church teaches concerning such doctrines as heaven and hell, the Holy Days, paying of tithes and training your

children if you do not do these things. You have to live it.

You may be very familiar with God's laws, but if you don't obey them, you will go into the lake of fire for the knowledge that you do have. You may agree on every doctrine that is preached in the Bible, but if you don't live by them you will be burned as so much refuse in hell.

Many of you have felt that perhaps it would be better to leave your children at home, but the Bible COMMANDS you to bring them into the services and it commands them to **BE QUIET!** Let's read the Word of God.

In Exodus 20 are the Ten Commandments. Notice the commandment about the Sabbath. "Remember the sabbath day, to *keep* it HOLY" (verse 8). *God made it holy; we keep it that way.* "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God" (verses 9-10). Now notice how you are to keep the Sabbath: "In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, **NOR THY SON; NOR THY DAUGHTER**, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates" (verse 10).

So as you are to keep the Sabbath holy and keep what God has made sacred time, so are your son and daughter, your children. The Sabbath is holy time, sacred to God, and as such our children should not be allowed to run loose like so many wild animals.

I think that most of you know, as I have said before, that at home I have a little dog. My brother gave him to me as a wedding present. I have to teach that dog. I have to teach him to sit still, and to stay still. I have to teach him there are certain pieces of furniture that he dare not touch or come near. I also have to teach him that though he smells food, every nerve in his body quivering, while my wife and I are eating at the table he cannot sit and

beg, but must lie in the other room with the door open.

I don't have to pen him or cage him like a wild animal, because he is tame. He has been trained. If I can train my dog, you can train your children, and I mean this sincerely. Two hours a week is not too long for your children to sit STILL and listen to the services, and to *stay* still **AFTER** the services are over. It is the Sabbath day and it is holy, and your children are to keep it holy as well as you.

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children must be IN CHURCH, and they must keep the Sabbath HOLY the same as you do. This is a part of the Ten Commandments, and there is no use in kidding ourselves. You are just heading for the lake of fire if you don't obey this. Remember it is the parents who are held responsible.

Notice the next command: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (verse 12). It is a dual command. It is not only to the child, it is certainly understood that the parent must teach the child obedience to that command.

These are the commandments of God. Have you ever wondered why in Exodus 21:15 Jesus Christ, the Logos, the Spokesman, says, "He that smiteth his father, or his mother,

shall be surely put to death"? And in verse 17, "He that curseth [the word here means "reviles," not curses, or as it should be even more correctly rendered, "sassess"] his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death"?

I think most of you remember the example in II Kings 2:24, when Elisha looked back and cursed these children who were sassing him and God caused two she bears to come out and tear 42 of them in pieces, but have you ever stopped to realize why?

Because God was so kind that He was not going to let them go on and live building the wrong kind of character that would lead them to the lake of fire. God had them destroyed before it was too late so they could be resurrected in a better world, where if their parents had not taught them any better God would use His force to keep them in line and keep them from living a long life of disobedience that would finally imbed so deeply the wrong kind of character that they would have to be destroyed in hell fire, and would be totally unable to ever live by every Word of God and build good and honest character into themselves.

Your children are living under a different dispensation. You know and understand the laws of God in a way that they couldn't then, and you are held responsible and so are your children. I want you to notice that the same Christ who gave these laws said later, "Suffer little children to come unto me" (Luke 18:16).

You have to shape and mold and develop the character of your children so they will learn to love God and hate evil. Turn to Leviticus 19:32. Starting in verse 30, God says: "Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord. Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God. Thou shalt **RISE UP** before the *hoary head*, and **HONOUR** the *face* of the *old man*, and **FEAR THY GOD**: I am the Lord."

How many of our children are so quiet and obedient that when an elder comes into the room they will rise? How many of our children address
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Humility?

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contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2). That is teachable humility!

Modest conduct

Humility is knowing when to be inconspicuous. Jesus said we should not call attention to ourselves every time we do a good work. We should give alms, pray and fast anonymously — in secret. God is watching. That's all that counts. "Thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:1-18).

We should not be exalting the self by always trying to outdress everyone else, showing off, boasting, exaggerating, always telling the funniest joke, talking the loudest, getting ahead of the Joneses, always winning every game just for vanity's sake. "Let us not be desirous of vain glory," Paul instructed (Gal. 5:26).

It must be pointed out that meekness is not weakness. Jesus was meek and lowly (Matt. 11:29), but He was not weak. He was the Son of God, yet He came to earth to serve, not to be served (Matt. 20:26-28). Study His actions — how He lived — and observe the perfect combination of strength and humility.

The rewards of humility

"Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the wrath of the Lord" (Zeph. 2:3, RSV).

Did you notice that the humble are told to seek humility? That's because humility is something we grow in by degrees. Humility (meekness), one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23), must be developed.

But it will be rewarded. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (I Pet. 5:6).

A humble person — one whose self is abased — is the raw material the Almighty Creator can take and form into a Member of His Family. "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life" (Prov. 22:4, RSV). □

Your Children

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their minister as "Mr." rather than by his first name? How many of them address you as "Father" and "Mother," and not just as "Pop" or "Mom," or by your first name? They should literally obey this command in Leviticus to rise before those who are elders and learn to show honor and respect them.

This is the *Word* of GOD! Are you willing to *obey* it? Are you *LIVING* by it?

Notice Deuteronomy 6:7. God gives us commandments and judgments, and one of them is that we teach *DILIGENTLY* all of these unto our children.

You know . . . the laws of God . . . and you are held responsible and so are your children. . . . You have to shape . . . the character of your children so they will . . . love God and hate evil.

Frankly, brethren, one of the major reasons that we are having these problems is the fact that you are not holding Bible studies in your own homes with your children. You are not fulfilling your responsibility, your duties toward them to teach them to live by the Word of God. You should not try to wheedle and plead them into looking at it your way. You should *COMMAND* them. You are the *AUTHORITY* of *God Almighty* to your children. God has given you that authority. It is up to you to exercise it.

Notice Leviticus 20:9: "Every one that curseth [the King James says *curseth*, but this should be rendered "sasses"] his father or his mother shall be surely put to death . . . his blood shall be upon him." Brethren, I have seen children stand and sass their parents right here in the hall where we meet. This should not be, but I can't correct it — only you can.

There is one thing that I can correct, and that is the situation of the children running loose and wild during church. Now I have asked one of the men of the Fresno church to get

up and go out several times during the services and see if there are any children outside, and if they are running around playing on the stairs or in the toilets, he is going to bring them in and we will stop the services — interrupt them right there — and ask you, the parents, to give an account.

We are the Church of God. We bear the name of God Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. We cannot destroy property that does not belong to us, but that God blessed us with. Again, let me say that this shall not happen again. I have given this man instructions to grab any child he sees misbehaving during church by the nap of the neck and haul him right in to me and I am going to ask *you*, the *PARENT*, what is wrong. I am

also requiring henceforth that *EVERY CHILD STAY INSIDE THE ROOM WHERE WE MEET UNTIL YOU THE PARENTS ARE READY TO LEAVE* the building.

Now, I wish you to understand that this is done in love, but I am trying to live by every Word of God. I am trying to fulfill what God has said in Hebrews 13:17, watching for your souls as one who must give account to God Almighty, and I do not intend to have the Church of God suffer the humiliation of being thrown out of the place that God has given us to meet because we cannot keep our children in check. So henceforth, your children will stay inside the meeting room and *KEEP QUIET*. They shall not play. It is the Sabbath, sacred, holy time to God, and your children are commanded to keep it.

Sincerely,

In the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ,

Richard D. Armstrong,
Pastor,
Church of God,
Fresno, Calif. □