

# A Father's Letter to his children (c. 1670)<sup>1</sup>

My Dear Children,

Having little of this World's Goods to leave with you after my decease, I thought it my duty to leave to each of you a small Portion or Legacy of such Treasure as the Lord hath bestowed on me; So that I may truly say in this Case, (as Peter once) Silver and Gold have I little; yet such as I have, give I unto you. And I humbly bow my knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, That together with it, he would give his Blessing.

And as for my writing this little Piece or Counsel to you in this kind of Language, which possibly some may except against; take this account: I having a little spare time from my more serious Studies, took my Pen, and began to write a Verse or two as it were in jest, and by way of Recreation (though I had seldom or never formerly wrote anything in that way.) And as I was writing, I found God, as I thought, very present with me, and my spirit on a sudden made very serious, and deeply engaged in that thing which at first I so carelessly took in hand: So that now I had a greater work lay before me than I was at all aware of when I first begun; neither could I at all decline from it, till I had perfectly waded through the same.

Now before I had fully ended what I was about, a sense of Death began somewhat strongly to seiz upon my heart; and withal, this was impressed upon me, That it might be very good and necessary, that I should write something by way of Instruction and Counsel, to leave both with your Mother and you. And as I had found the presence of God in this manner, and way of writing before, and now again I found my spirit most inclinable to go on in the same, in this little piece of my Advice and Counsel unto you; although I confess for want of practice I was very raw and unskilful in it.

Again, upon farther consideration, I thought also that the matter herein contained would stick and dwell the better upon your minds; Verse being always a friend to weak Memories.

And lastly, I thought of the president (in the Book of Acts and Monuments) of that blessed Martyr Robert Smith, who wrote his godly Instructions to his Wife and Children in this way; which you may also read at your leisure.

And thus (my Children) I have given you an account both of my ends and inducements of writing this to you, as also of the manner and way wherein I have done it: Which I the rather thought convenient to do, both that the matter itself might be the more seriously

<sup>1</sup> This is the introductory epistle to the second part of William Wheeler's *Spiritual Portion of Heavenly Treasure*. For an account of this work see the *Baptist Quarterly* (Vol. XXII, no. 1, p 30).

weighed by you; as also, that if any dissatisfied spirit should, by any Providence, come to read the same, they may hereby be induced to look a little, before they leap; and weigh the Case, before they pass Sentence.

I have yet another word, which is this; if you should show this little Piece to some, they may perhaps tell you, I have been too too sharp against the Ministry, and that I have chalk'd you out a very narrow path in that respect to walk in. But for that, I here tell both you and them, that I know not where to abate a little of what I have spoken: For the carnal and corrupt Ministry (which especially I have here aimed at, and cautioned you against) are I am confident the very Pest of this poor Nation, and the great Obstructors of the Gospel of Christ, and those that murder thousands of poor Souls amongst us; and how can I then with the discharge of my duty to God and you, say less than I have said?

My Children, It is not the advancing the way of Independency, nor the debasing the way of Presbytery (as some possibly may think) that I contend so much for; though I do judge (as you may well perceive in this little Discourse) the latter in some particulars to be much more faulty and discrepant from the Rule, than the former; especially in the way of constituting Churches, and in Church-Communion, and in the business of their pretended Uniformity, with other like things: Yet I say again, it is not these things that lie with so much weight upon my Spirit; but it is this carnal and dead Ministry; because they are a company of blind Guides, as our Saviour calls them; and indeed, the very Enemies of the Gospel, and all good; that neither (as he saith) enter into the Kingdom of God themselves, nor suffer those that are entering. And had I but as able a Pen as some men have, I think I should lay them open to the Worlds view, a little more than yet I have done; that all might see, if God would, the great danger that their poor Souls lie in, whilst they sit down and content themselves under their Ministry.

Yet (my Children) whilst I thus speak, I would not have you think that I judge all the carnal Ministry to lie onely amongst those of the National Way; No, no; there indeed I believe lieth the greatest bulk of them, though there be here and there a good man amongst them: But yet there are doubtless some carnal Ministers and Preachers that want the Spirit of Christ, and the lively Word, even amongst those that are called Independents, and amongst all other distinct ways of Profession. There be Jades of all colours, if I may use that proverbial expression. And truly, I must give you the same Counsel concerning the one, as the other; that is, to take heed how you commit your immortal Souls to the trust and care of either of them.

For (my dear Children), 'tis the power of Godliness and the sweet anointing of the Spirit of Grace, both in Ministers and Professors, that I would have you to prefer, before all Forms, Out-sides and distinct Ways of Profession; as Episcopacy, Presbytery, Independency, Anabaptism, and such-like. And though it must needs be that some