

GUARDING THE READING MATERIAL OF OUR CHILDREN.

The subject we have before us is guarding the reading material of our children and it could just as well apply to all of us. In the matter of discipline the scripture has a lot to say about it because it is something that has been around for a long time and so has reading. However we live in the middle of the information age and there are a lot more books around then there wherein Bible times or were in Jesus time and so there is more selection that needs to be done today. I do feel however, as an introduction, to say that guarding reading material does not mean eliminating reading. We can go off balance in a couple of ways here, we can be families of non-reading people but we don't want that, we are not interested in being non-reading persons. How many books have you read the last year anyway? How many have your children read? Do you ever read a book? I would challenge you to that. We are not looking at eliminating reading but looking at guarding what is being read.

Jesus expects us to be a reading people. I was impressed with how many times He asked; did you not read?

Matthew 12:3: "He said unto them: Have you not read what David did?"

Matthew 19:4: "And He answered have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female."

Matthew 21:16: "And Jesus saith unto them: yea, have you never read out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise."

Matthew 21:42: "Jesus saith unto them: Did you never read in the scriptures the stone which the builders rejected is the same come to the head of the corner."

Matthew 22:32: "Have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God saying I am the God of Abraham."

Matthew 4:4: "Jesus answered Satan: It is written man shall not live by bread alone,"

Matthew 4:7: "It is written thou shall not tempt the Lord thy God,"

Matthew 4:10: "It is written thou shalt worship the Lord thy God."

Jesus expects us to be a reading people and not merely a reading people but a Bible reading people. One of the interesting footnotes in Anabaptist history is that the Anabaptists were so desirous of reading the scripture that the first thing that they did, the new converts did, was to put forth all efforts to learn to read and they were so successful that their are enemies said: The devil must be teaching them, they are doing it by the devil's power." They were not doing it by the devil's power, they were doing it because of their own motivation in the power of God and it shows how they valued reading.

The Bible is our most important reading material and may we give the reading of the Bible more than lip service. It is easy enough to say: "Yes, the Bible, it is really important to read the Bible, we must read the Bible." But do we read the Bible? Do we read it every day, do we read it with expectation and with devotion? We read not only the Bible, I would like to impress upon us that we should be reading other things too, there is a lot of good reading. I think that reading books is our window on the world. If we knew only what we experience and what we see with our two eyes we would not know very much and we will never know very much, but we can know a lot more if we look through our windows, our books .Books make time travel possible. Time travel is something of science fiction but books enable us to travel in time and, in a sense, the only way we ever can. We can read into the minds of other centuries, we can see the happenings in other centuries through reading, we cannot do it any other way. Through books we can meet the best minds of the centuries. A man's character, and his personality as well as his thought is stamped on the printed page. We are to be a reading people.

It is interesting to me that when God wanted His creation to meet Himself, mind to mind, He sent Jesus on earth yes, but that is not all He did. When God wanted us to meet Him mind to mind, He

inspired persons to encode His thoughts in writing and then He directs us to give attendance to reading, and we meet the mind of God in the written word of God. We are to be a reading people.

The written word is a very powerful thing. We are talking about guarding our reading material because, while the written word has great power for good, it has great power for evil also, it is a two edged sword. It has power for good, it has power for evil. The written word has great emotional effect.

One author, E.B.White, said: "When a totalitarian dictator wants to take over a nation one of the first things he does is to corral the writers, because of the power of the written word."

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote Uncle Tom's cabin, 500,000 copies were printed in five years and it crystallized opposition to slavery to such an extent that Lincoln when he met Harriet Beecher Stowe said: "So this is the little lady that caused this Great War." The power of writing. The power of Uncle Tom's cabin came from a concrete experience, from experiencing vicariously through Harriet Beecher Stowe's writing the experience of slavery and feeling it, not merely by reading about it, but experiencing it and living through it. Experiencing empathy gives the written word great power.

Nathan the prophet got through to David in a similar way to what Harriet Beecher Stowe used to get through to people about slavery. When Harriet Beecher Stowe wanted to get through to people about slavery was like, she did not write an essay describing it, she wrote a story that they could live through, and when Nathan the prophet wanted to get David to understand what Uriah the Hittite and Bathsheba had experienced, he did not go to David with a sermon on adultery but with a story. He told a little story about a rich man and a poor man and a sheep, you are familiar with that story, and he involved David's sympathies and David entered into that story and identified and condemns himself. (read 2 Samuel 12:1-7) The power of writing. It wasn't the written word there but the spoken word, same idea, the power of the word.

Someone has said; give me 26 lead soldiers and I will conquer the world. What they meant by that was the leaden movable type of 26 letters, give me the printing press and I will conquer the world. There is a lot of truth in that, a tremendous power in the written word.

Now the written word can be dangerous, as I said it is a two edged sword, it may cut for good or it may cut for evil. I have experienced that kind of thing in myself, in my own life, I remember when I was 17 or 18 and studying a correspondence course. One of the things I needed to study through was the literature course. I remember the tremendous power of the 20th century short story writers and how they could create a world in which black was white and white was black. It made right seem foolish, right principles didn't work, there is power in that, power for evil when black becomes white and white becomes black and confusion and deception set in. Now because literature is so powerful, because the written word is so powerful, we need to select carefully what we read and thus guard our homes.

I would like to give five principles for selecting reading material. I know that censorship is a bad word today in the news, nobody likes to hear about censorship, but some books deserve only burning and the first principle I would like to say is:

Number One: Reject the clearly evil.

Consign to the flames or the trash heap that which is clearly evil. We have a wood stove at home and it has been used to burn several books this winter, they heat about as well as wood. In Acts 19 we have something like that as well, some books that were clearly evil, Many that believed came and confessed their deeds in many of them which used curious arts also brought their books together and burned them before all men and they counted the price of them and found it 50,000 pieces of silver, so mightily grew the word of God unto them.(Acts 19:18-20) It was the battle of

the books, and the word of God prevailed, the clearly evil books were burnt. That was a victory for God.

Number Two: Select only the best.

As someone has put it; do not read good books, life is too short for that, read only the best books. There is a lot of truth in that. Books which are good, and there are a lot of them, but the Bible tells us to approve of those things that are excellent, so select even among the good. Somebody said: How can you read 50,000 words a minute? and the answer is that you can decide in one minute if a 50,000 word book isn't worth reading, we need to select. There are far too many books to read, far too much reading material. In the United States alone there are 80,000 new titles a year, worldwide half a million, contrast that with the 16th century when there were about half a million books printed in the whole century. In the 17th century about 1 and 1/4 million, in the 18th century about 2 million, in the 19th century about 8 million and now we get about half a million a year in the 20th century. Solomon said of the making of many books there is no end. (Ecclesiastes 12:12) Daniel said in the end times knowledge shall be increased. (Daniel 12:4) The library of Congress has about 16 1/2 million books and that's some years ago, there are millions more by now. 327 miles of bookshelves and most of them are not worth reading. Select only the best. Insist on value in your reading and in your children's reading. What value does this reading material have? Does it have a historical value, does it help you understand the past and present and the future, history has that value. Does it have a spiritual value, does it make you a better Christian or does it cool your affection for God? Does it have the social value is it help you to do understand others better, or get along better? Select only the best.

Number Three: Choose that which is true.

Reading is engaging the mind, the New Testament tells us what will be very familiar to us all; "Think on that which is true." (Philippians 4:8) Truth is the ultimate test of worthwhile reading and a test of truth is does it square with God's word? Does it square with God's word? If it does not square with God's word it is not good writing, it is not good literature, it might be clever literature, it may be powerful literature, it may be effective but it is not good because it is not true, to us it is bad literature and the better it is in those other things the worse it is, the more effective it is. If it does not square with the word of God the more dangerous it is to us. Choose that which is true.

Now does this rule out all fiction? Fiction is that which is not true by definition is it not? Are you going to throw out the Wee Lambs after that? [Wee Lambs is a Christian children's publication] The stories in Wee Lambs are not literally true but they are true to life and I think much fiction is ruled out by the criteria of selecting that which is true but some fiction is not literally true but it is true to life. I think of the story that Nathan told David about the poor man and his lamb and the rich man, it wasn't literally true, but it was true to life and it was true to the principles of right and wrong, and if it was not literally true in fact, it was most certainly true in meaning and there is some writing that is like that. It is not literally true in fact but it is true in meaning. We recognize the possibility of truth in symbolic or allegorical literature. One author told a parable in which trees represented persons or classes and spoke to each other and Aesop told fables in which animals converse and teach truth, often profound, and there is some worth in those things. We choose that which is true, not that which is fanciful, not that which is not true to life nor that which especially teaches principles that are not true. A powerful writer can write a story that would make what others say sound like a bunch of nonsense, truly that could be done, because he could create a world in which truth and other good qualities don't work. A lot of caution needs to be exercised.

Number Four: We prefer selected authors.

In our selecting we should prefer authors who share our worldview, our view of the world. Every author has a worldview, it permeates his writing, it bleeds through, it is what he writes between the lines instead of on the lines. We see the world ourselves as proceeding from God, a product of His creative thought, sustained by Him and answerable to Him. We see ourselves as created in His

image but distorted by sin and so forth, that is our worldview. Authors who write with an evolutionary view, a God ignoring, God dishonoring worldview, generally are unacceptable to us even though they may be completely silent on the subject of God or religion. Silence sometimes speaks with a loud voice.

The President of Boston University in his 1951 report said; (he might say the same today but other people today would not say that.) "When we leave religion out of our educational program we practically announce that life can be explained without God, which is the same thing as saying that either God does not exist or is of no consequence" Silence speaks loudly. Sometimes people question whether children, or whether they themselves, will be influenced by the understated positions of the author. Author Jack London is evolutionary but does that mean if I read "Call of the North" that I will become an evolutionist? Well not necessarily, but I do think that we should understand that readers are unconsciously, we and our children, are unconsciously influenced by an author's viewpoint. That's the way it is, it really is.

And I would quote from C. S. Lewis in "The Abolition of Man" and that is a recommended book for you, he is talking about school books but it applies to any writing, he says; "The authors may never have given the question five minutes serious thought in their lives, I am not concerned with what they desired but with the effect their book will certainly have in the schoolboy's mind. I do not mean of course that the schoolboy will make any conscious inference from what he reads to a general philosophical theory. The very power of the authors depends on the fact that they are dealing with a boy, a boy who thinks he is doing his English and has no notion that ethics, theology and politics are all at stake. It is not (and this is the crux of it here) it is not a theory that they put into his mind but an assumption which 10 years hence, its origin forgotten and its presence unconscious, will condition him to take one side of a controversy which he has never recognized as a controversy at all. The authors themselves I suspect hardly know what they are doing to the boy and he cannot know what is being done to him."

Number Five: Principles of selection.

Rejected the frivolous and silly, maybe they are not clearly evil. But such things as romance novels are unrealistic, fosters discontent in daughter and mother alike, it treats marriage as an end rather than a beginning, treats marriage as the mountaintop rather than the foothills from which the ascent begins, stops the beginning.

Detective and mystery. The mystery we need to solve is how to untangle the twisted strands of simple life, and the trail we need to follow has been blazed by Jesus Christ and leads not to a culprit but to a Saviour. Let us reject the frivolous and the silly.

Now some policies for our homes that will safeguard our children and ourselves.

Number One: Regulate the time and place spent reading.

This is to safeguard our children especially.

On the place: there should not be too much reading done in bedrooms and out of the way corners where no one observes, because we as parents are responsible to know what our children are taking in and we need to have it set up so that we can tell.

Then on the matter of time: there should not be too much time spent reading, especially reading stories. Someone called reading the great waste, and I don't like that. Francis Bacon said: "reading makes a full man" and why call it a waste then? Why we call it a waste is because in Bacon's day reading was different from reading today, back then there were fewer books and those that did exist were of a serious nature, they were not frivolous, they were not silly, and people took up a book with a purpose. They took up a book with a serious intention to learn something, books were expensive, not many existed and the quality was good. But now today, in contrast, people read to kill time rather than to redeem time. They read for fun rather than for benefit. They read to escape reality rather than face issues. They read to avoid thinking rather than reading to stimulate thinking. Now you just think about that. There is a time to stop reading and there is a time to start thinking,

People who are brought up on a diet of lot of light reading, and know that reading is a way to have a good time, the more exciting the book the better the time they have, these are people that have not learned some things that they ought to have learnt. We regulate the time and what is read in order to prevent that damage from being done.

Number Two: Parents should read first what the children are reading.

In your family you should have the policy of the children submitting to you the book or the material that they want to read. And it doesn't matter a whole lot where that comes from, maybe if they come from their ministers or something like that it may be a little different, but even if they come from church and say Jane gave Mary a book and wants Mary to read it, that book needs to go through the parents hands. Books should be submitted to the parents for review. You should read them, of course you could read them very rapidly and you could decide in one minute if it is not worth reading, that can be done very rapidly, but you may need take more time at it than that.

Number Three: Public libraries and bookstores are not good places for children to browse.

They are not safe places to turn children lose, as a matter of fact I don't think libraries are safe places for adults to browse in. It is a good place to go on a specific mission but it is full of a lot of temptations for the aimless browser and so much the more for our children. Make it a policy.

Number Four: Encyclopedias and reference books require editing.

Especially on the matters of pictures and somewhat in the articles too. Most encyclopedias have things in that our children should not be looking at, and it is difficult, I know, to say that they must be edited and yet I don't see any real way around it. Let's be willing to put something into it to safeguard our homes.

Number Five: Magazines are not free reading for youth.

Now let's take for example the National Geographic. I have known about National Geographic from the time I was a little boy and I know what about to expect in it and it has not changed a great deal, there is a lot of good things in it, a lot of very interesting and informative reading in it but it needs to be safeguarded, and it can be safeguarded. You cannot take all the evolution out of it but you can certainly do a job on the pictures. Things like the Reader's Digest, generally that is what we consider more innocent and yet about every issue has things in it that our children should not see. I would not recommend getting the Reader's Digest, and yet some people do. It is like a brother told me in our congregation he said: "We used to get it but when our children started getting older we stopped getting it because of the difficulty of safeguarding it." And it must be safeguarded. Take a good look at it, it is not just the articles on subjects that they are too young to be reading about, but it is the permeation of some of the looseness in society today that just bleeds through and the little anecdotes and whatever else might be in there.

We get a news periodical but we do not turn it free or turn it lose and let the children at it, sometimes I'll read an article from it, sometimes I'll say they may read this or that in it, that might be possible, I think it is good to share some items from the news but I do think we should be safeguarding, it is very important that we are looking at these things and that we are aware of what's happening with our children. I get the US News and World Report, because I am under the impression that Time and Newsweek are worse because they cover the cultural scene more thoroughly and the cultural scene is degenerate.

Number Six: Check out the family bookshelf especially for books that you have not read for years.

Reminds me of a little story I read one time, I think it was in one of James Dobson's books, a man came to him and said: "How can I get my daughter to read this book?" And he said: "Put it on the top of the bookshelf and then forbid her to read it." We had better know what is in our bookshelves and to say; "Do not read!" it is sometimes not enough, sometimes maybe it is, I don't know, it

depends may be on your family. Let us be cautious. Newspapers must be used with supervision. The comics, the singles ads, movie ads and so forth, and even the general mail, the family mail. Some of the catalogues are full of filth, or mail flyers, some catalogues seem to delight in the suggestive and vulgar, I think our policy should be that the mail should go to the parents.

Perhaps a zero tolerance of newspapers and magazines in your home may suit your requirements better than having to constantly police their use.

These are some policies that with the Lord's help will help us to safeguard our homes.

May God help us to be careful what we stock our minds with and what we allow our children to stock their minds with.