



# Born to Win

## For the Souls of Your Children

by Ronald L. Dart

And a warm welcome to all of our visitors today. We not only invite you to visit with us any time, we invite you to come *join* us. We would be very happy to have you with us *all* the time.

I really want to welcome you, but at the same time, I won't exactly apologize for the fact that my message to you today is a *heavy* message.

It seems to me now that school shootings are becoming a routine part of our lives. We have statistics, you know, in our almanacs. (You can go buy an almanac down here that will carry statistics on youth suicide and murders and all the bad things that happen in our country year by year.) And I suspect in years to come our almanacs will show the number of school shootings we have had in any given year.

When I was a kid, I went all the way through 12 years of elementary, junior high school, and high school—and then on through college—and never, in all that period of time, can I recall *one* school shooting in the United States of America. And gun laws were much less restrictive then, I think, than they are in most places now. Now, we get two in one week; and, I think, some serious threats were also made in the same week. And the police are busy out running around right now talking to every kid they can find that somebody heard him even *talk about* having a shooting or bringing a gun to school and shooting somebody with it.

And, predictably, when the shooting happened, I sat down in front of my television set and I said to myself: Now all the talking heads are going to tell us why we need to *do something about the guns*. And maybe we do, I don't know. Maybe we need to do something about the guns. Maybe we need to do something about psychological counseling for the kids in school. Maybe we need to do all kinds of things. But I kept waiting for someone to say, "What are we going to do *about the kids*?" I mean the direction in which the kids are going; the things, the demons, that torment the minds of the young people today—that lead them to take such insane, diabolic actions; to carry a gun to school and, because somebody *made fun of them*, kill them.

Shucks, folks. You know, I grew up being made fun all of my school life. Didn't most of us? At one time or another, didn't somebody make fun of *all of us*? It's a part of growing up. It's a part of life. And for every kid that takes a gun and shoots somebody, there are probably hundreds who think about it and don't have the nerve. The youth of our country are descending into a spiral of violence and darkness that is absolutely frightening—in the movies they see, the television they watch, and the music they hear. You would be *shocked*; if you were walking through the mall some day and you see some kid walking along with a set of earphones on; to jerk the earphones off of him and put them on yourself; and hear what these children are listening to as they go about their play, shopping, whatever it is that kids do nowadays.

Robert Bork, in the book *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, in drawing the contrast on this, included the lyrics from a song, a romantic song, in the 1930s that I remember very well. (And I had my own little Philco radio, and my parents let me listen to at night after I went to bed.) The song goes:

Oh, but you're lovely,  
With your smile so warm,  
And your cheek so soft,  
There is nothing for me but to love you,  
Just the way you look tonight.

*The Way You Look Tonight (quoted by Robert Bork)*

I'll bet a lot of you have heard that song. *Some* of you are old enough to have heard it, at least.

And then what he did in his book was contrast this with two sets of lyrics from two different songs that are very popular, award-winning types of songs among young people today. I...I was shocked. Of course, in his book, he (with a certain amount of delicateness) put blanks all the places where the most offensive lyrics came. But I could not bring myself to read those lyrics to you *with the blanks*. They are *so vile, so violent, and so obscene*. I used to wonder a little bit...In fact, friends and I would sit around sort of commiserating about music. We would say, "Why doesn't anybody write good music anymore?" We would hear some beautiful love song from the 30s or the 40s and say, "Now, why doesn't somebody write a song *like that*?" You know, you think all the way back to...I forget, was it Kay Starr who sang "See the Pyramids along the Nile." You know, *You Belong to Me*? A gorgeous song, beautiful melody, lovely lyrics. And there were so many songs that were haunting in World War II because of lovers who were separated and yearning for one another, and the lyrics that they wrote to impress one another in that way. And I asked myself: Where has all of this gone? And then I read this section in Robert Bork's book, I read the lyrics of those two songs, and then I read what he said about it. He said:

The obscenity of thought and word is staggering, but also notable is the deliberate rejection of any attempt to achieve artistic distinction or even mediocrity.

*Robert H. Bork - Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline*

In other words, what is *really* notable about this stuff is not only that it's obscene, not only that it's trash, but there is not even an *effort* to reach up to a level of art or artistry (or even mediocrity) in the course of writing it. And when I read that, it suddenly became clear to me. The idea had lurked in the back of my mind for a long time, but it became crystal clear when I read that.

It is not merely that they can no longer write music, as such. It has come to the point where they actually *hate* beauty and despise art. It's a loathing of beauty. There is a spirit of *pure hatred* in what is called art and what is called music today. From the obscenities in rap and hip-hop, to the excrement and urine now featured in what is called art, it reflects consistently a contempt for beauty and also a contempt for love. For love is something *passé*; it's not important. Even all of the sex that has entered into music nowadays is violent. It is violent and degrading; there is not even a question of love. For decades now, artists and musicians have tried to shock the bourgeois—the middle class—with trash, only to find the bourgeois *adapting its taste to trash*. And so they had to go *further* to shock people and then *further* to shock people. And Bork concluded that we now have become like a strain of bacteria that are resistant to all kinds of drugs. We can no longer be shocked by anything that they present to us.

And I don't want you to kid yourself. You have not been unaffected by this. You are not *nearly* as shock-able as you were 10 years ago, much less 20 years ago, much less 30 years ago. For us to have heard some of the things that are heard commonly today in prime-time evening television, say 30 years ago...I mean we would have been *totally* shocked out of our chairs to have seen it.

The objective is not to advance art. It is to trash art; it is to make art ridiculous. Where once one might have looked at a painting of a Madonna and child, now we see a picture of the Virgin Mary with *elephant dung* all over the picture, and the preoccupation with excrement becomes a dominant feature of art. Where once we saw a sculpture like Michelangelo's *Pietà*... which to this day touches me right to the core of my being. It is a statue (if you don't know what it is) of Mary holding the dead Jesus across her lap and gazing down at him. It is one of the most touching, most profound works of art ever done by anyone—and it was done in *marble*, if you can imagine it. The work, the time, the effort, and the love that Michelangelo bestowed on that piece of marble is beyond my comprehension.

Where once we had that, now artists will display a crucifix in a jar of urine. This was, I believe, actually in a display of art sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts—the NEA, actually paid for by your tax dollars. Where once we might have been touched by a painting of a rose with a drop of rain, of moisture suspended on a petal (I remember a painting like that was so real you could almost *touch it*, I saw some place once.) now the artist gives us a fruit jar of his own feces to consider as his entry into the world of art.

Not long ago, I had reason to ponder the incredible love of music that led a deaf Beethoven to continue to write music he could no longer hear. And having thought about that, then I watched a half-time show (I think it was probably the Super Bowl this year. I didn't watch all of it, but I think I saw the half-time show.) and they had this rap band up there on the stage. And they kept going in on this one fellow. (I heard this sound and I didn't know what it was.) They kept going in on this fellow. He had a phonograph there, with a needle on the phonograph record, and with his finger he would move the record back and forth making a screeching sound in the grooves of the record, and he used it as a rhythm instrument to create rhythm for this rock band that was up there.

And I wondered when I saw that: Who is the bigger fool? The one making the music or the people who applaud it? You can, I think, take your choice. Somebody somewhere is laughing his *head off* as he watches people spending millions of dollars on total trash. And I have an idea that the people who are producing this stuff are laughing the loudest—all the way to the bank—and thinking, “What *fools* these people are to buy the stuff that we are producing.”

Now, you know, I understand making music from what's at hand. You know, back in the old days people would sit around and have a washboard. Get a washboard out. We'll use that for the rhythm section of our little band while somebody plays on the banjo or something. Or maybe we'll use spoons. You do whatever you have to, kind of, put together a little music session for a family that's getting together. But, you know, you would think with nearly 100,000 people in the stands for a Super Bowl, and with millions of people seeing it around the world, they could have found somebody somewhere who could actually play a real musical instrument. One would have thought.

Who is the bigger fool? I think both artist and public have lost their ability to love. And when I pondered all of this, a terrible realization dawned on me: that we are in the latter stages of a war for men's souls, and the war is all but lost. It was started a long, long time ago. And I'll take you back to Ezekiel, the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter, to tell you where I think the whole battle and the whole war actually started. Ezekiel 28 and verse 12.

Now, you've got two individuals talked about in this chapter. One is the prince of Tyre and the other is the king of Tyre. And the prince of Tyre—a man very arrogant, a man whom God decided that he was going to take down—is dealt with in the first part of the chapter. But in verse 12 comes a section that I think is universally understood by Bible students and scholars to be a switchover to talk about Lucifer—about the one whom you and I have come to know as Satan. He says:

## Ezekiel 28

AKJV

<sup>12</sup> Son of man, take up a lamentation on the king of Tyrus, and say to him, Thus said the Lord God; You seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.

<sup>13</sup> You have been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold [...]

You've got to understand something about this person. This person—this being—was *created by God*. He was a work of art, because he was created by God. He was *incredibly* beautiful *because* he was created by God.

**Ezekiel 28**

AKJV

<sup>13</sup> [...] the workmanship of your tabrets and of your pipes was prepared in you in the day that you were created.

Not only was he beautiful, he was *talented*. He was a musician—a *real* musician who could create beauty, who could present art, who could create something really worth listening to. And that's the reason why God made him as he did. Here is one gifted of God and created perfect—not only beautiful, but an artist, a musician, gifted to create music. Verse 14:

**Ezekiel 28**

AKJV

<sup>14</sup> You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I have set you so: you were on the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the middle of the stones of fire.

Which I presume has something to do with his presence in the throne room of God, with the fiery gemstones that were there.

**Ezekiel 28**

AKJV

<sup>15</sup> You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

<sup>16</sup> By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the middle of you with violence, and you have sinned: therefore I will cast you as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy [*expel*] you, O covering cherub, from the middle of the stones of fire.

“You are out of here.” One who, because of vanity...interesting: The trade, the merchandise and what that means is not entirely clear. But nevertheless, it seems to have been a factor. He says in verse 17:

**Ezekiel 28**

AKJV

<sup>17</sup> Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness: I will cast you to the ground, I will lay you before kings, that they may behold you.

<sup>18</sup> You have defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the middle of you, it shall devour you, and I will bring you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all them that behold you.

<sup>19</sup> All they that know you among the people shall be astonished at you: you shall be a terror, and never shall you be any more.

Rollo May... And I remember the first time I read this sentence in his book, I was stunned. He said in his book (I think *Love and Will* is the title of the book). He said when men lose the power to love, they often substitute what he calls “power over”.

And having actually witnessed that in *human* beings, I think I at last understand to some extent what happened in this *inhuman* being that we have come to know as Satan—one who became corrupted. His wisdom was corrupted and, presumably (it seems absolutely inescapable), that he lost the power to love—that the love that he had turned toward the self, and he was no longer able to love God. And when he lost the power to love, all that was left for him was power over. And there can be no doubt that for Lucifer, who lost the power to love, anything that was beautiful he came to hate. Because those things that were beautiful were things that were made by God.

It doesn't take a very vivid imagination to grasp what is going on when an artist wants to *urinate* on Christ, and to throw dung on the picture of the mother of Christ, does it? You don't have to really think very far before you can see where the author of such sentiments is, in his heart and in his mind. There is a hatred there of *staggering* dimensions that none of us, I think, would even quite understand. We have never felt anything like the *kind* of hatred that is expressed in these things. And it is a hatred that is very old. It is probably a hatred that predates man's presence on the planet.

Whence comes this chaotic, destructive, hateful, violent, excrement-obsessed spirit in the world today? And, I think more importantly, where is it going? I will tell you where it is going: It's going for your children. It is going after your children. It's been after your children for hundreds of years. Generation after generation have had to civilize their children lest they grow up as savages. They come into the world as little savages, and one by one we civilize them and change them. But there are those who believe that we lost the battle to civilize the next generation of savages in the 1960s—when there just came to be too many of them, when they *overwhelmed* the previous generation. (Which is an interesting theory all by itself.) But a lot of damage had been done before that time to parents and to families and to homes, and the whole thing finally came to a head in the 1960s.

What also makes a difference is the extreme affluence of these years (and those years back even at that time, but more so now); and the idleness and the boredom that go with it; *and* the indifference of parents who are so caught up in these affluent times, and to what it takes to get ahead, that they no longer give the consideration to loving their children and taking care of families. Children today have too much money, too much time, and too little adult attention.

It's really a very simple combination and a recipe for disaster. *Nothing* drove that home to me like watching the video of *The Lost Children of Rockdale County*. I was so stunned I could hardly move after I sat and watched that video. Normally, I have a hard time sitting still through a video; I didn't even budge through the entirety of that one.

If you were the devil, then, and you wanted to destroy what God was doing, where would you start? It doesn't take a rocket scientist. You start with kids. Where else would you start? My question: If you decide you want to fight back, at long last, where would you start? With kids; the same place.

I want you to turn back to Proverbs chapter 4, verse 14. Solomon, a man who gave great attention to wisdom (and who managed to lose it in his old age) learned something from his father. He said in Proverbs 4 and verse 14,

#### Proverbs 4

AKJV

<sup>14</sup> Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.

<sup>15</sup> Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.

<sup>16</sup> For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they

cause some to fall.

<sup>17</sup> For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

What does that mean, “They eat the bread of wickedness and they drink the wine of violence”? In our language, don’t we have an expression that we use for a person’s total immersion in what he is doing? We say he eats, drinks, and sleeps music. He eats, drinks, and sleeps writing. He eats, drinks, and sleeps whatever it is that a person is obsessed with. What he is saying here is that these people eat, drink, and sleep (or don’t sleep, in this case) whatever it is that they are obsessed with. And their obsessions are wickedness and are violent.

*Kids* today eat, drink, and sleep mischief, wickedness, and violence. It is with them *all the time*. They are totally immersed in it in our society. It is on television. It is in the movies. It is in books that they read (if they happen to read any books). And it is in those little things they have stuck on the side of their heads all day long destroying their hearing. In a way, it would almost be as well if their hearing was destroyed to start with so they could no longer hear that stuff any longer; but it stays around long enough, just long enough to immerse them in it. It’s in their music. It’s in their entertainment. Unless they get too far away from it, they plug into it—in their little Walkman—put their headsets on, and off they go around the mall listening to Violence and Sex-Obsessed and Ugly World.

And one of the things that has really struck me is that what all of this is (including the pornography that they see) it is *ugly*! It is a denial of beauty. It is a denial of love. For it takes love to produce beauty. And when the love is gone, the beauty is gone, and what is left is just plain ugly. Why, when the kids are immersed in it, in our society day and night, why should anybody be surprised that it breaks out in school shooting? I am not surprised at what I see. What *worries* me, what *dismays* me is that there are so few parents who seem to have a mind to fight back.

“It is just one of those things.” “Can’t help it.” “Don’t know why the kid did that.” “I can’t imagine what caused him to do it. He seemed like such a normal kid.” How is that civilized parents—ordinary, middle class, live in the suburbs, upper-middle class parents, normal people, civilized, live good lives—*why* do they produce this kind of children? Why? Well, one of the reasons is that children are *immersed* in this society. And these parents don’t realize that there is a *war* going on—that there is a *battle* to be fought. And if you don’t fight, you lose, and your children lose. Maybe (and I think this is true of many parents) they think the battle is *already* lost.

There is a complacency about this that is *wondrous* to behold. You know, I am an odd one, I guess, to be telling you all of this, because I don’t have any children. But then, maybe again, that is why I’m the best one to tell you: because I don’t have anything to justify. But when I watched the *complacency* of parents, the *inattention* of parents, I just watch in complete *amazement and wonder*. They don’t seem to have any awareness of the *precious treasure* that they had been given by God and the responsibility that goes with that precious treasure that they have been given by God. There is a war going on, right now, *for the souls of your children*. And what do I see? I see parents who are as apathetic as a bunch of Jews lining up to get on a train to go to Auschwitz: beaten, unable to fight, unwilling to fight, confused, distraught, without any idea of where to go.

And the usual response when somebody lists off all the stuff that I listed off for you today, you say, “Boy, thy Kingdom come. We are just going to have to pray, ‘Thy Kingdom come.’” Yeah, and we do need to pray for God’s kingdom. But if you expect to be there, if you expect your children to be there, you are going to have to *learn to fight*. I’m sorry. You can sit around all you want to and just say, “Well, God will take care of it”, but that’s not the way the Bible presents it to you. The Bible presents it to you that if you expect to *be* in the Kingdom of God, you are going to have to fight. You are going to have to stand up for things. You are going to have to stand *against* things. You are going to have to stand *for* your children. You are going to have to fight *for* your children. They were given to you for you to protect them, for you to teach them, for you to train them—to bring them up in the nurture and the

admonition of the Lord—and to teach them *how to love God*, and one another, and their mother, and their father, and their sisters, and their brothers. We aren't born with that. We aren't born with love. Love is something we have to learn.

I have said it; I will say it again: God does not intend to spend eternity surrounded by a bunch of losers. We were put here to *overcome*. How many times in the Book of Revelation, those seven churches... seven times, right? It tells you again and again, "To him that overcomes..." And you are left to wonder what happens to the person who doesn't.

I have already said: If I were the devil, I would start my war in the schools. Once God and the Bible are banned from the schools (which was managed a long time ago) the battle is well joined. It is harder to do this—it is hard for him to work his work in the home—unless he first does his work in the schools and produces parents that make it possible in the home...which has been pretty well done most of the way across our society.

You hit the kids at their most vulnerable periods: when they are changing, when they are a little bit rebellious, when the hormones are raging through their body, when they want to spread their wings and fly. You hit them *right then*—in puberty, in the natural rebellion of early teens. You hit them again in college, when you can destroy the last vestiges of any faith they may have brought with them to college. You can generally get rid of it in college. When I was teaching Communication at the University of Texas, some years ago (20 years ago now), I was very struck by the fact of this (I asked the students to give speeches for evaluation in our Communications class): that several of them chose to give speeches *defending their faith*. And it was obvious that those kids, in the discussions after their speeches, were *profoundly disturbed* by many of the classes they were going through, and they felt that they had to *fight* for their faith and for their belief in God. And they did. That was a war; and if they didn't fight, their faith would simply be gone.

You hit them from every possible angle—entertainment, education, music, affluence, boredom—and then you leave them as much to themselves as much as possible without any kind of parental guidance. That's how it is done. It's deceptively easy.

It seems to me that the strategy to fight this war becomes fairly clear when you understand what the adversary is up to. In the first place: Without God, without the Bible, without the absolute moral authority that that gives you, you don't have a leg to stand on. You have no weapon to fight with. You've got no where to go. *Reason* is not good enough. Somebody else's—some moral philosopher's—ethical standards are just not going to hack it. I mean, if there is no God—if there is no moral authority in this world—then there is no reason for you not to do what feels good, as far as you can see ahead of you what might happen.

So before your children get exposed to the world, expose them to God—*persistently, systematically, intensely*—when you get up in the morning, when you go to bed at night, when you walk with them by the wayside, when you sit down at the table, and when you get up from the table. The scriptures are very explicit in this regard to parents [**Deuteronomy 6:7, 11:19**]: Teach your children all the time—morning, noon, and night. Lay a groundwork of faith from the very earliest age so they *cannot even remember* a time when they did not see themselves as children of God and being loved by God. And that's me; you're looking at one like that right now. I cannot remember a time in *my life* when I did not know who Jesus was; that I did not know that Jesus *loved* me, that he *cared* about me; when I didn't know there was such a thing as sin, that there was right behavior and wrong behavior. I remember because my father was a gospel singer in a gospel quartet. And if I didn't learn it any other way, I heard it in *song after song after song*. And you can argue all you want to with the theology of some of that music, but the core value was still there: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for me.

should not perish, but have everlasting life.

I mean, I have known that, folks, as long as I could remember anything; because it was inculcated to me, not so much by my parents, but by the *songs* that my dad sang and by the church across the street from where I lived where my parents made me go.

From the time they hit school, you have to realize that you are in a war and you will have to fight that war with intelligence, with subtlety, discipline, perseverance, knowledge, and any other weapon you can get your hands on—fair or foul. You will need *support*—support from other parents. You'll need support from your church. You'll need support from people like we at CEM who provide the tools that you can use to train your children and teach them, and the books that we provide. Take help *wherever you can find it*, folks. And whenever you have a chance to help someone else, help them. Don't *lose* this war because of inattention, because of no care, because of apathy, because you're not willing to put forth some effort for it anymore.

Have we become *so dull* that we can no longer respond to the word of God on these things? This is no time for fatalism. What will be will not necessarily be, contrary to the old song. And contrary to the other song, *que será* is not necessarily *será*. That's not the way it's going to go.

But there is one thing—one thing above all that I say to you today—that you must understand: Increasingly in our society sex has been substituted for love, and they are *not the same thing*. And I think a lot of kids don't know that, have no understanding of it.

Now, it is *easy* to teach sex. Nothing to that. You get in a classroom and start showing them pictures and so forth and talk. You can teach them sex like falling off a log. It is not *all that hard* to teach the Bible as a moral code. Really. But the hardest thing of all to teach is that which has been lost first. The hardest thing to teach is that which has really been lost: the ability to love. And I don't know of any way a school can teach that. I think that they can *destroy* it. I think that they can do a lot to hurt. But a school, at it's best, probably all they can do is just not do any harm in this particular area.

You don't teach love in a classroom. The schools are helpless to teach love. In fact, they could probably get in a lot of trouble trying to teach love. There is no Agape 101 in college. There are no Principles of Romance. There is no Introduction to Affection. You learn this at your mother's knee and in your father's lap. That's where we learn love. And when the father isn't there, and when mother isn't there, you're not learning very much about the most important thing in all your life.

You learn about love by watching your dad hold your mother *real tight*. You learn about love by seeing the fear in your dad's eyes when he picks you up when you've fallen out of the tree—scared to death, feeling around trying to see if there are any bones broken. How, as a parent, can you teach your children the meaning of love?

One: You marry someone you really do love, not just someone you have the hots for and looks good in a convertible. It's a difference, you know. There's a difference. And it's something that a few voices in our society keep reminding people, but oftentimes they're a voice crying in the wilderness. Marry somebody you really love, and take the time to find out if you really do. *And* be sure that that person loves you.

Second: You enter what they nowadays call a "covenant marriage". You understand, you agree going into this marriage that, "We're not in this just to see if it works. We're in it for keeps. We're in it for the kids. And we'll be here until that last kid is gone." And generally speaking, when you've been there that long together, you can manage to tough out the rest of the 50 years.

Third: You bring children into this world when you are ready to *give yourself to them*, and I think most parents here will tell you that's really what it takes. You have got to give yourself to these children; they have got to become the center of your life.

Fourth: You shower them with affection while controlling their behavior with discipline.

Fifth: You introduce your children from the very start to the fountain of all love—to the Father and to his Son. And you help them to understand what it means when you say, “God loves you”—to really understand the *depth* of what’s involved in this; to understand that the reason that Mommy and Daddy can love each other, and the reason that we can love you, is that God loves us and gave himself for us.

Sixth: You teach your children the Law of God as a guide to life, as a lamp to their feet and a light to their path, as something to give them an edge in life. You don’t teach the Law as shackles and chains. Because the first impulse of your child will be to throw off the shackles and throw off the chains and rebel against it. The Law should be taught as a light in a *very, very* dark place. You are surrounded by darkness in this world, and there is a lot of dangerous stuff in this darkness, and if you have a light to shine on a path and a lamp to carry with you, you are not going to bang your head and fall over things like other people are doing all the time in their lives. You *need* this light. It gives you an *edge* in life. It puts you *ahead* of other people in life. Trying to teach the Law as a control on behavior is just not strong enough to hold. It won’t hold.

Seventh: You never let your attention to your children lag. Not for a moment. You have to love your children as God loves you. Tall order, but *nothing less will do*.

Now, like I said, this is all easy for me to say since I have no children. And perhaps that is why it is *left* for me to say. Maybe it’s because it is *too hard* for anyone else to say. But it has to be said, because the stakes are *life itself*.

You know, I really wanted to give you today a more upbeat sermon. I really wanted to give a cheerful worship, “upward and onward” type of sermon, but the Spirit would not let me. This was all that would come. This was all that would work. And I figure that, kids or no kids, somebody has got to say these things.

And the truth is that if your children cannot learn to love, nothing else matters very much at all—not prophecy, not speaking in tongues, not knowledge, not even faith. Without love, all the works in the world go nowhere. But if they can learn from you the meaning of love, the foundation has been laid for all the great virtues in life. (If you listen, you will know where this comes from.) Because the great virtues in life are patience, kindness, humility, good behavior, confidence, hope, unselfishness, endurance. Which of you wouldn’t want your children to have these? Well, these are the things that Paul in **1 Corinthians 13** describes as the characteristics of love. They are imparted by love. They are founded in love. Out of love grow *all* the great virtues in life, and without love those virtues aren’t worth a plugged nickel. Count on it. Nothing else will *hold* unless the love is there.

Your greatest temptation, both as a parent and as a church (which is why I am speaking this before the church and not just to a group of parents), your greatest temptation is to let this great duty slide.

Many years ago, when Allie and I realized we weren’t likely to have any children, an opportunity came our way to adopt two *very sweet* little children—two cute children. (I don’t remember at this point what happened to their mother and father. I think it may have been an automobile accident that killed both of them; I’m not sure.) For various reasons, we did not adopt them, and another couple in the church did—for which I am very grateful—and they turned out to be very fine young people.

We have had a full life, and we never pursued adoption after that. We’ve ended up with a full and satisfactory life for us without any children. We have no regrets... except one. Having children would no doubt have made our lives a lot richer, but we can live with that. Our one regret is when we consider what our adoption of a couple of kids would have meant to the kids—what we could have given them; what love we could have put in their lives; what a difference we might have made in the road ahead for them, depending upon where they were and what they were doing and... you see what I’m driving at: That there is a duty often that comes our way, and responsibilities that are often too easy to let go.

We're too old to do anything about that now, but I honestly believe that we let a duty slide by us, and that is the one regret that I have about our never having any children.

Never forget: We are in a war. It is a battle for the souls of children, and we face an *unmerciful* and an *implacable* foe, and God *does not expect us to be doormats*. He does not expect us to lie down and let this spiritual bastard *roll over us*. Can we get that straight? He does not expect us to be placid like a bunch of people lining up to get in box cars to go off to Auschwitz or Birkenau. God does not expect us to pray that his will be done and then *do nothing about his will*—that, sooner or later, we've got to *put up or shut up*. We cannot just wander through this world waiting on God to do something, when he is sitting up there waiting on *us* to do something.

I do not know what *you personally* or your church should do *specifically*; but for the love of God, *do something*.

Transcript of a  
sermon by  
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*For the Souls  
of Your Children*

DATE: 3/10/01

ID: 0110