

Lord! Save Our Children!

Conrad Murrell | *The Gatepost* - Vol. 4, No. 4 | October, 1978

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“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly and gave sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8).

The meanings of the Holy Scriptures are not always obvious to everyone. Hence the preacher’s responsibility to “give sense” and to cause his listeners to understand the true meaning of what is written. Because some Scriptures are not understood rightly, especially some of these we are about to discuss, many people suffer three harmful consequences. 1) A wrong view of evangelical salvation. 2) Trust the subject of the Scripture to deliver something it does not promise, and consequently neglect other means. 3) When the expected result does not materialize, they lose confidence in the Scriptures.

Their wrong conclusions are sometimes arrived at by a person’s own search of the Scriptures for an answer to his problems. Indeed, Christians ought to do this, but they ought to learn something about rightly interpreting and applying the word of God. At other times these errors are the result of the “dogmatic proof text” method of preaching. The congregation is assaulted with a barrage of Scripture quotations, which though carefully selected and isolated so as to drive home the preacher’s point, are given without any attempt to soundly exegete them as to their true meaning.

How Are We to Go About Saving Our Children?

A subject of grave concern to all of us today is how we are to go about saving our children. How shall we deliver them from the corrupting influence of a decadent society, the rebellious spirit of the age, a concentrated assault by demons, and their own depraved nature?

Often the wail of a distressed parent over wayward offspring sounds something like this: “What have we done to cause them to turn out like this?” The answer to that, of course, is nothing. Children are all born bad, and will become worse. If they are not restrained by some means, they will naturally behave badly. The idea that children are born good or neutral is a myth that ought to be put out of the mind as quickly as possible.

I am not going to waste your time refuting the psychological and sociological theories of how to guarantee good attitudes and behavior in children. Multitudes of cases prove them all wrong. Many children turn out to be solid, well-behaved citizens (and many become Christians) who have been victims of the worst sort of environment and psychological abuse. At the same time, others, who are given all the right things,

taught the right things in the right way, brought up in an ideal environment, become the worst sort of hoodlums. The world's formula for raising good kids just don't work.

When They Are Old, They Will Not Depart From Our Training?

Our concern now is with those Scriptures in the Bible which seem to promise something on that order.

Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Many suppose that this passage asserts that if you teach a child to be a Christian and to follow the Lord that he will always do so. When one, then, in his teens or his early twenties, begins to live and behave like a heathen, they try to comfort themselves with, "He will come back, because I trained him up right and the Bible says he will not depart from it."

Actually, this passage makes no such guarantee. It does not even contemplate evangelical obedience to the faith. These are wisdom sayings, having no direct bearing on salvation . . . regeneration, repentance and conversion. They may be applied equally as well in a heathen household as in a Christian one.

The proverb only applies to mean the principle, "as the tree is bent, so shall it grow." If the proper measures are taken and impressed sufficiently upon a child's mind, he can be molded to a pattern of life. He can be trained to be lazy or industrious, frugal or a spendthrift, stingy or generous. He can be made to be courteous or rude, neat or sloppy, fearful or secure, kind or mean. He can be trained to be law-abiding or to be an outlaw, virtuous or sexually promiscuous.

But all of this is only the shaping of the outward behavior. Even this is not always certain, for sometimes when the best of methods and means are employed, a person will pursue a corrupt life. That is because there are forces in human depravity and in demonic influence that no human device can handle. Some trees cannot be bent with human hands.

Even if the measures taken work beautifully, and the child grows up to be a model citizen, and a fine, up-standing church member, the parent has only succeeded in subduing the Adamic nature and turning out a magnificent hypocrite. He has imposed his morals and convictions upon his offspring in such a powerful fashion that his behavior can be counted upon almost as certainly as a puppet on a string; but unless that person is born from above by the mercy of God, and comes to evangelical repentance freely and volitionally from his own heart, he will be in the same hell with drunkards and harlots.

We are, of course, to train up a child in the way that he should go. We must bring the truth of God's word, the stern rod of discipline, the love and wisdom of a parent to bear on his personality, that he may behave rightly . But sooner or later, if he has not been brainwashed and broken and subdued into a zombie, he

is going to do what he pleases. Then it will be known what he is. It is vain to hope that these things will insure his salvation. They are only instruments to that end and will avail nothing except he is reached with the special grace of God.

What About Proverbs 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15?

These proverbs encourage us to use the rod of correction upon the growing child. As God chastens and scourges all His children that they may learn obedience, eschew evil, and walk in holiness, so is the earthly parent to afflict his offspring at times to impress upon him the seriousness and necessity of obedience. But the Holy Spirit has not intended us to believe that the rod alone will drive out foolishness (Proverbs 22:15), make one wise (Proverbs 29:15), deliver from the danger of death (Proverbs 23:13), or save a soul from hell (Proverbs 23:14). Else why do we have the law in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 telling Israel to stone a son who when chastened will still not obey? Surely one would not be so superstitious as to think the rod of Proverbs 23:13 will protect a child from death! Yet, if no “sense” or understanding is given to the passage, that is exactly what it literally says. The sense is this: There are deadly dangers which a child can avoid if he is taught to stay clear of them with the chastening rod.

Nor should we trust Proverbs 23:14 to the point of making it a religious ritual of beating our children, expecting such to save his soul. What a tragic perversion of truth! The hell (Hebrew Sheol) of verse 14 is simply the grave that goes with verse 13.

Surely evangelical Christians must never forget that we are saved by God’s grace through faith, not of works. We are born, not of the will of flesh or of the will of man, but of God. It is the birth from above which brings the sinner to evangelical repentance, not the parental rod of correction.

Now, let us just suppose that it were within the power of parents to cause their children to become Christians. Here is a couple who have skillfully and diligently taught their children. They have provided for them and chastened them in such a way that they effectually got the job done. Here is another couple, not quite so smart. They have not had the advantage of attending a seminar on the home. They are not quite as spiritually strong or faithfully consistent as the former couple. They did quite a bit and almost succeeded, but their children, or some of their children, turn out badly.

What should we then say? Why, the successful parents are to be commended, and if no one else commends them, they will surely commend themselves. “Look what a great job we did. We did it! We raised them right. We got them all saved.” Along with that self-congratulation will also be a disdain and contempt for any who come short of their excellent performance.

On the other hand, the couple who were not quite so successful are filled with the misery, the grief, the condemnation and the guilt which is the inevitable lot of all failures. Not only must they mourn over

their wayward children; they become victims of accusations of, not only the Accuser of the brethren but the brethren themselves.

Is this right? Is it in accordance with the truth of the Scriptures? Not a bit of it! It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy (Romans 9:16) Be assured, dear friend, if your children are saved, you have nothing to be thankful for but the mercy of God. Any concept of redemption which kisses anything other than the Savior's feet is a robber of God's glory, and not a whit short of idolatry. Know this, O parent: God enjoins you to correct, love, lead, constrain, teach, exhort, reason and plead with your children. If you do not do all in your power to restrain their wickedness, He will surely hold you accountable. But after all of that is done, if God does not have mercy on them, they will surely go to hell. You cannot lift one finger to prevent it. The knowledge of that will keep you on your knees for them in desperation until you have sound reason to believe they are safely in the fold of God's grace. And when they are, you will never cease to lift up your hands in praise and adoration to Him for saving your children.

What About Acts 16:13 and 1 Corinthians 7:14?

Two other passages that give false hope we will touch on briefly. The first is Acts 16:31. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." This has been erroneously held as a proof text for "household salvation." It is nothing of the sort. The scriptures make it plain that every person must believe for himself. No parent can rest his child's salvation in his own faith. His faith can and should be an instrument unto the faith of his household by his prayers and witness, but each must be brought to personal faith else he will certainly perish. The passage should be understood as an answer to the jailer's question as the way of salvation. If he believes, he will be saved. The same is true of all his house. If they believe, they will also be saved.

The other passage is 1 Corinthians 7:14. The Apostle declares the children of parents of which at least one is a Christian to be "holy." This cannot mean the children are saved in the gospel sense, because the same passage says the unbelieving spouse is "sanctified." This spouse cannot be saved, since he is declared to be an unbeliever. The Apostle is simply stating that one believer brings the influence of the gospel and the church to bear upon the whole family. He also makes it clear that the marriage is legitimate and the children therefore legitimate. But in no way are we to consider such justified, for the next verse speaks of the possibility of the unbelieving spouse's conversion through the instrumentality of the Christian.

Conclusion

One might wonder, then, if the Christian has any more hope for his children than the unbeliever. What advantage does he have, if any? If we may paraphrase Romans 3:1-2, "What advantage hath the Christian?" Much! In every way!

An unconverted mother who has had much grief over a hoodlum son recently remarked to me, “We don’t go to church much, but I notice that people who do have trouble with their kids also.” “The difference is this,” I replied. “They have a God to cry out to and you do not. All you have is yourself and all you can do. That will not comfort you much when you see that you have failed. But we have a merciful, almighty God Who hears the distressed cry of His people, Who is of tender compassion and Who hears us for the sake of His Beloved Son.”

It is to Him we make our cry. It is in Him that we put our trust. Our bowels yearn within us; and with our faces turned upward to Him we make our plea . . . “Lord! Save our children!”