

Unto Us a Child Is Born

"And they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed"—Acts 21:5

THE Bible has much to say about children. Men and women are told to consider children, and to learn from them in many ways. They are also told to observe in children many things that must be avoided, put away, grown out of, overcome. Unfortunately, our natural tendency is to cling to the faults of childhood and to quickly grow out of its virtues.

Children are the great type of our relationship to God, and God's to us—

"As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

The main purpose of our life is to grow up, to develop, to learn, improve, mature. We must be constantly growing up—

"Unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

In this respect we are always children—always growing and learning. When we cease to grow and learn, our lives cease to have any meaning or purpose. We become just another comfortable vegetable.

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From the beginning, The Child—the Seed of the Woman—was the heart of the promise of redemption and reconciliation—

"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders."

The birth of a child was always an occasion of great joy.

The children born to Israel received the token of the Covenant on the 8th day after birth. Here is emphasized the importance of the child in the national pattern, and their special position before God.

So we find the children of believers today stand in a special relationship to God, and therefore come under a special responsibility, for where much is given, much is expected. God blesses children for the parents' sake. What greater blessing than to be enlightened in the Truth, and to be invited to become sons and daughters of God?

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WE are taught, both by instruction and example, that children should be early and constantly brought into contact with the things of God, so that their minds will naturally develop in harmony with this atmosphere.

At the end of his long parting address to Israel, comprising the book of Deuteronomy, Moses instructs them that every 7 years there must be a national assembly for the reading of the Law. He says (Deut. 31:12-13)—

"Gather the people together, men, and women, and children . . . that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.

"And that their children, which have not known anything, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God."

Children are not ignored in the Scriptures. Their instruction is an important factor in the continuity of the purpose.

Similarly, in Neh. 8, where we have an example of the fulfilment of this command to assemble to hear the Law, the presence of the children is specifically referred to (v. 2)—

"And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding."

As soon as they were old enough to get anything out of it (which is quite young, if they are properly instructed at home) they should be there.

In Acts 21:5 we have a different type of occasion, but the same principle illustrated. It is when Paul took his departure from the brethren and sisters at Tyre—

"And they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed."

These incidents are recorded for our instruction. Children should be included in all aspects of ecclesial life. We cannot hope to reap what we do not sow.

Beside attendance at the assemblies of God's people, children are to be taught constantly at home. Israel was instructed through Moses, in Deut, 6:7—

"These words . . . thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

The application of the principle of these commands to our present time is clear. Children should be at all meetings possible, if we have any regard for their salvation.

They should always be given the good example of parents putting ecclesial activity first in their lives, attending and cheerfully supporting every ecclesial activity they possibly can.

Without a good consistent, personal example, instruction is powerless and meaningless hypocrisy which children will see through and despise. And the daily assembly around the Word for the Bible Readings will be carefully nurtured by all parents who have true love and concern for their children.

If we do our part, then—and THEN ALONE—can we reasonably expect God to do His. The Spirit commands through Paul (Eph. 6:4)—

"Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

This is a solemn charge and obligation, calling for much time, and effort, and dedication. This will not just happen of itself, if just left to itself. Nor is there any use in vain regrets when it is too late. The command is clear. The scriptural examples are clear. The Word of God leaves no doubt as to the greatness of the effort and devotion called for, for the promised blessing to be fulfilled—

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

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CHILDREN are spoken to directly in the Bible. Of the 10 commandments which God personally spoke to Israel with His Own Voice upon Mt. Sinai, one was especially for children—

"Honor thy father and thy mother."

The apostle Paul points out, in writing to the believers at Ephesus (Eph. 6:1-3) that this is the first command that has a promise connected with it. Actually it is the only one of the 10 with a promise.

It is thus especially suited to, and designed for, children. It gives a reason and an incentive for the command. It is always best to take the time and trouble to explain why, if possible. Then children can grow in comprehension and obey intelligently. Paul says—

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

"Honor thy father and thy mother (which is the first commandment with promise) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."

When he says—

"Obey your parent in the Lord."

—he does not mean that parents must necessarily be in the Lord before we must obey them. He means the **obedience** must be in the Lord—for the Lord's sake— in harmony with his will. We must be subject to our parents because the Lord has appointed it.

In the same place he has a very important instruction for parents (V. 4)—

"Ye fathers, PROVOKE NOT YOUR CHILDREN TO WRATH."

Discipline, to be beneficial, **must** be in the spirit of love and kindness and self-restraint. We must control ourselves first, before we can presume to control anyone else. A harsh, hasty, bad-tempered parent cannot expect to develop a gentle, reasonable, good-tempered child.

But the child must obey the parent—whether kind or unkind, just as the servant must obey the master whether he be fair or unfair. Why? Because this is what God has appointed, and this is well-pleasing to Him, and manifests a living faith in Him. Peter says (1 Pet 2:18, —

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the perverse.

"For this is acceptable if a man for conscience toward God suffer wrongfully."

This is a deep and searching precept, and is one of the many that are designed to manifest the difference between those who are shallow and fleshly-minded, and those who are deep and spiritually-minded.

So obedience to parents is a direct obligation to God. Obedience will bring happiness and benefit, disobedience will bring only sorrow upon ourselves. It is foolish to think for a moment that we can get happiness and satisfaction in any other way than the way God tells us. Is it not obvious foolishness to think that we can prove that God is wrong?—that we can outwit Him? There is only one way to true peace of mind and full enjoyment of life as God intends us to have it.

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THE Scriptures say many things about children. They teach many lessons by means of children. One of the most significant is the occasion on which Jesus said (Matt. 18:3)—

"Verily I say unto you . . ."

—this expression is used to emphasize vital and fundamental truths—

"Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted—changed—transformed—and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven."

The distinction is between natural childlike humility and false grown-up pride—between a recognition of complete dependence and a false assumption of self-dependence and independence.

A little child is completely dependent—leans upon and looks to the parent for everything in the fulness of faith, quite naturally and without any thought to the contrary, without any illusions or assumptions of self-sufficiency, without any thought of proud independence.

But as soon as there is any development of personal awareness, there is a beginning of pride and self-assurance. The serpent nature, the "pride of life," soon becomes manifest.

Pride is the ruling passion of human nature, and it is considered a great virtue to be self-dependent. Small-minded people take great pride in not being dependent upon others. But how fleshly; and foolish this is, when examined in the light of the Spirit's teaching!—

"No man liveth to himself."

"The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee."

"What hast thou that thou hast not been given? And if thou hast been given it, why dost thou glory?"

Even Jesus himself said—

"I can of mine own self do nothing."

We of ourselves can do nothing that is really worth anything. We must reverse the world's proud folly, and become as little children—recognizing our utter dependence upon God and upon one another—our utter natural helplessness and uselessness, of ourselves. Every breath we take is the gift of God. If He should withdraw His sustaining power from proud man for a moment, man would perish like a crushed worm.

It is hard to unlearn the habits of a lifetime—to shake ourselves free of the ugly mould into which the whole fleshly world endeavours ceaselessly to shape us like itself.

There is so much pride in our position, in our ability, in our accomplishments, in our possessions, in our appearance—so much time and effort lavished on decking and draping these poor, corrupt, perishing forms of clay.

How pitifully empty all these things are in the light of eternal truth! Most of the world's interest and activity and effort is wrapped up in empty-headed glorification of the flesh and human appearance and accomplishments, but—

"Unless ye become as little children—humble yourselves as little children—ye **cannot**—ye CANNOT—enter the Kingdom of God."

We have to go to VERY little children for the example, because the trend of pride starts early.

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BESIDE obedience to parents, we find other divine instructions especially addressed to children. Solomon says (Eccl. 12:1)—

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

This is the only true wisdom, and yet how far the world is from it! God, if He exists for them at all, is some vague, far-off conception.

But God must be an ever-present reality with us. There must be a continual consciousness of God in all our thoughts. An effort to be in harmony with God in all our thoughts. To develop this, it helps to keep reading the Psalms of David, which reflect the mind of Christ.

God is the very source and center and purpose of life. We do not begin to live at all, in any true sense, or to know the meaning of life, until we have established God as its center. Until we have established God in our lives we are merely animals, living just by the natural motions and feelings of the flesh, like dogs. Most people in the world never rise above this natural, animal condition. They never really live at all.

But God in His love calls us to rise up to a much higher and more beautiful life—a life with depth and meaning and purpose and future.

"Remember NOW thy Creator in the days of thy youth"
— remember — constantly keep in mind.

This is the best and most helpful advice anyone could possibly receive.

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BESIDE obedience to parents and always remembering God, children are instructed to learn wisdom and understanding. As babies we are born knowing nothing—our mind a complete blank. We must gradually develop an understanding and a character. Solomon says again (Prov. 4:1-13)—

"Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.
"Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.
"Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee; Love her, and she shall keep thee.
"Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: Keep her, for she is thy life . . ."

Wisdom is to learn about the world around us—not just the world of itself, but where it came from, why it is like it is, what its purpose is, what the end is to which God is bringing it, and above all, how we may shape our lives so as to fit into that great purpose of God.

We see people being born, and we see them dying. We see ourselves in the midst of the same process. Is that all there is to it?

For most people, that IS all there is to it. They run their sad little course, so quickly over, mostly weighed down with problems and disappointments, and then like sheep they are laid in the grave forever. They live and die mere animals. How sad it all is!

But God does not desire it to be that way. He wishes men to have life and have it more abundantly, and endlessly. He wants them to seek true wisdom and understanding, and He wants them to begin as children—as early as possible, that their lives may be full and rich as possible.

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THERE is one very important occasion in the life of Jesus when children suddenly come into prominent notice, and are found fulfilling a necessity wherein the most prominent of their elders fell sadly short. In Matt. 21:15-16 we read—

"And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were sore displeased, and said unto him,
"Hearest thou what these say?
"And Jesus saith unto them, Yea, have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?"

The children, though limited by their natural ability as to detailed depth of comprehension, were far more in harmony with the broad sweep of circumstances than the intensively learned doctors of the law.

There is a great lesson here. It is so easy to get things out of balance, and become so immersed in self-glorying technicalities and intricacies that we miss the great and living realities. Doctrine truly is essential, but the Truth of God and the Way of Life is so infinitely **more** than mere doctrinal definitions. It is the power of godliness and the spirit of holiness, the perfection of love and the perfection of beauty.

This incident directs our attention to another instruction especially addressed to children. They are called upon to PRAISE GOD. David says (Psa. 148:1, 12)—

"Praise the Lord . . .
"Both young men and maidens, old men and children...
"Let them praise the Name of the Lord, for His Name alone is excellent, His glory is above
the earth and heaven."

What is praise? What does it mean to praise the Lord?

Praising is not just a form of words or an outward exercise. It is no praise for God just to have words of praise coming out of a tape recorder or a record player.

Praise is a LIVING CONDITION—a joyful and thankful state of the mind and heart.

We may remember God, we may keep Him in mind as the central reality of life, we may acquire knowledge and understanding of Him, but if all this does not lead us to be filled with praise and rejoicing in God, it is no good to us. It is mechanical. It is lifeless.

We must be filled constantly with the joyful spirit of praise. It must be the air we breathe, the influence we radiate. God is a Person, a Father, a Center—not only of wisdom and power and righteousness and truth—but of love and goodness and kindness and joy.

The people of God—the TRUE people of God—are a glorious, joyful family, rejoicing in love for one another and for the Father of Love Who has called them all unto Him.

Most people are too wrapped up in themselves to praise God. Their own little circle of activity is all their cramped little minds can reach out to.

They never learn how to live in the largeness and fulness of life. Their potentialities for spiritual growth and expansion lie dormant and useless, like the wings of a caged bird. They are the miserable prisoners of their own self-centeredness. This can happen to any of us.

But the spirit of praise opens the doors of the cage, and lifts us up to the vast heavenly expanse, and all the petty problems of the present shrink below us into insignificance.

Praise to God is the mind's great healer and purifier. It is no meaningless coincidence that the last 7 Psalms are all dedicated to this glorious theme, and that the final words are —

"Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord! PRAISE YE THE LORD!" —G.V.G.