

➤ THE CHILDREN OF BELIEVERS. ◀

THEIR STANDING IN CHRIST.

THE REASON OF THEIR TRAINING FOR CHRIST.

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Believers' Children Holy.

“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.”—1 Cor. vii, 14.

A PRACTICAL difficulty had arisen through the spread of the Gospel. The Spirit of God went with the word, and people of various ranks, conditions, ages, and both sexes had been brought into the fold of Christ. Sometimes a man was brought to the knowledge of the truth, while his wife continued in her idolatry. At others, the woman was converted to Christ while the husband remained in his heathenism. This brought about many inconveniences, and at times much trouble. In consequence of these results, the advice of the Apostle had been sought. Some had asked whether such marriages might properly be continued, now that one of the parties had become Christian: whether it would not be better in the interests of peace, and in the interests of truth, that these relationships should be sundered. The Apostle's answer—based upon the broad ground that whatsoever touches the altar is holy—was, that, except in special cases which he proceeded to indicate, such relations ought to be continued. He declared that “the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.” He proceeded to state that if this were not so, the children of such parents would be unclean, that is, in the Jewish sense of the term—separated from the family of God; while as a matter of common

knowledge it was a fact that the children of a Christian were holy. "Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." Thus was their question answered, and in the answer we find one of the many warrants for the baptism of infants, and the great reason for Christian nurture.

The text declares that the children of believers are holy. It further asserts that this is true if only one of the parents is a believer and the other a heathen. Is the wife only a believer, then the children are holy. Is the husband only a believer, then the children are holy. Much more, then must this be true where both parents are Christian. Further, it places in contrast the position of such children with the position occupied by the children of unbelievers. It asserts that there is a real difference between them. The children of a believer are holy. The children of unbelievers are not so, they are unclean.

The appeal is made to all Christian parents—"Else were your children unclean, but now are they not unclean, not outside of the covenant, not alien from the Christian community—they are holy." With this agree the words of Eph. vi, 1—3. That Epistle was written to the saints (the holy persons) who dwelt at Ephesus, to the faithful in Christ Jesus. In the Epistle we find exhortations addressed to husbands and wives—to masters and servants—to parents and children—showing that amongst the saints which were in Ephesus were those who occupied the relationship of children, and who were bidden to obey their parents in the Lord, because it was right. So we see that Paul writing to the Corinthians and Paul writing to the Ephesians is consistent with himself: he holds and teaches the same doctrine—The children of believers are holy. They are not unclean, because of the bond of union whereby they are joined unto their Christian parents.

The children of Christians are holy. They are consecrated to God's service. They are set apart for Him. They are claimed by God as His own in a peculiar manner. A reference to the use of the word "holy" in the Old Testament will shew exactly what is meant hereby. There we learn that whosoever or whatsoever was set apart for God or for His service was regarded as holy. The word is as much used of inanimate things devoted to God, as to his rational creation, man, who is able to render voluntary service. The "temple" is styled a "holy temple," and the "altar" a "holy altar." The "garments" worn by the priests when ministering in the sanctuary, and the "oil" with which they were anointed for their work; the "place" in which they ministered, the "offerings" which they presented, and the "vessels" which they used in

their approaches unto God, all alike are spoken of as "holy." The gatherings of the people for his service were "holy convocations," and the days of such gatherings were "holy days." The "men" who served were "holy men," and the "habitation" in which His presence was manifested was holy also. His "people" were a holy people, and their "tithes" and their "sacrifices" alike were holy. The "linen coats," the "instruments" of service, the "water" used therein, and the "ointment" prepared for His work, all were designated holy. In short, the priests and the people, the house and its chambers, the mountain, the city, and the land, were all declared to be holy because dedicated to, or used in, the service of the Lord. So far is this principle carried out that the censers of the two hundred and fifty—the sinners against their own souls, who intruded into the priestly office and offered incense unto the Lord, and brought upon themselves swift destruction—are declared (Num. xvi, 37, 38) to have been hallowed by the fact that, though in so wrong a manner and so evil a spirit, they had been "offered unto the Lord." So we see that any person, or place, or thing separated to God's service, is spoken of in the Old Testament as "holy." And this conception of holiness is carried over into the New Testament. But of course it is plain both in the Old Testament and the New that a rational creature, as man is, cannot be holy in the fullest sense of the term, entirely consecrated unto God—cannot be sanctified wholly, unless his whole soul, and spirit, and body are blameless, and used altogether for God's glory. The children then are holy, set apart for God, in order that they may be holy, entirely devoted to the service of God.

If any person ask why the children of Christian parents are holy, we answer that the reason is tacitly assumed from the example of the Jewish Covenant. The Christian is holy. All that he is, and all that he has, belongs in a special manner unto God. Hence his children are holy. They specially belong to God, because strictly depending upon one who is God's. The Covenant was made with the Jew and with his children (Gen. xvi, 7). The promise of the Holy Spirit is unto the people of God and their children. In few words, in both Covenants the principle is the same—the root is holy, and so are the branches likewise (Rom. xi, 16).

We see, then, in this fact, first, a warrant for the baptism of infants. It gives us one out of the many reasons for that ordinance which God's Word supplies. They are holy. They are holy objectively that they may become holy subjectively. They are claimed of God as belonging unto Him. They are

consecrated to His service, that they may be sanctified wholly—that every thought may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ—that their whole soul, and spirit, and body may be sanctified wholly, and may be preserved blameless till the day of Christ. This was the real purpose in both dispensations, the Jewish and the Christian. In the former, although the child, as the offspring of those in the covenant, was clean, it needed the typical purifying of circumcision, and the sacrificial atonements of the law, and had right to the sign of circumcision and, as it grew up, to all the privileges of the Jewish Church. In the present dispensation, though declared by God to be holy, the children of Christian parents need the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. They have right, as they grow up, to the privileges of the Church, because they are included in the Church, and because God teaches that they are so to be regarded. In short, the Church of God is the same in all ages, and under all dispensations. The child of a Jew was a Jew, and was treated accordingly; the child of a Christian is a Christian, and is to be regarded and treated as such.

Hence they have right to the outward sign of consecration to God. In the Old Testament this was the subject of express divine command, and the command was enforced by the sanction—"The uncircumcised man-child . . . , that soul shall be cut off from his people, he hath broken my covenant." This regulation was never repealed; and the threat, terrible as it was, was never revoked. It was designed especially to show that infants were proper members of the Church of God, and to warn parents against neglecting the rite of initiation and dedication. Remembering this, who can forbid water that the infants of believers should not be baptized, when God Himself declares that they are holy—that they belong to him in a special manner?

Then comes the question. Does the rite of Baptism make us Christians? and if so, in what sense are we thus made? The Catechism teaches each child to say, "In my baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." In what sense did baptism make us such? We believe, from the text, that, on the one hand, it was the outward declaration of a previously existing reality. And from other passages of Scripture, we gather that in those who came rightly it was the means whereby, as by an instrument, we were grafted into the Church; and had God's promises of forgiveness of sins, and of our adoption to be the sons of God visibly signed and sealed. An illustra-

tion from our national life may help us to understand this. Our gracious Queen—was she crowned because she was already really the queen, or did she become our queen only because she was crowned? In other words, if any other of the millions of women then living in England had gone through the whole ceremonial of coronation, would that other woman have been the Queen of England or not? Of course we see that she would not have been the ruler of our people, because she was not queen by right; and (spite of the coronation) submission and obedience would have been refused to her. Victoria was made queen when she was crowned—outwardly consecrated to her high office, because she was already queen in fact, by right? As queen by right she needed the outward and full investiture of regal office, in order that she might exercise the powers and discharge the duties of royalty. Hence she was crowned, and in that sense was made queen by the act of coronation. She was crowned because she was the rightful queen, and not queen because of the coronation ceremonial only. So in answer to the enquiries—Are the children of believers baptized because they are holy? or are they holy because they are baptized? We reply: They are baptized because they are holy, and because they need the grace of baptism in order that they may lead the Christian life. And in God's declaration of the fact that they are holy we find not only the warrant for the application of the outward sign which declares the same, but the obligation to bring them to the baptismal font that they may grow up with the knowledge that they belong to Him—that God claims them as His own.

In this declaration of God we see also the reason for Christian nurture. Our children are holy. They belong to God. They are specially consecrated to His service, and must be trained accordingly. Is it objected that they are not perfect, and therefore it is hard to realize that they can belong to God? The objection comes with an ill grace from us elder Christians, who are so far from being what we ought to be. How patiently and faithfully God has dealt with us all our lives long! How lovingly and graciously has He taught us by His word and by His Holy spirit! How gently and carefully has He disciplined us by the providences of daily life! Yet how far are we from the standard which He has set before us! Do not we still need further teaching, direction, and guidance to make us "like Christ!" And if so with ourselves, how much more must it be with the weak, the babes, the utterly immature! Hence the little ones need training at our hand—Christian nurture and admonition, the teaching, direction, and influence of the Holy

Ghost—in order that they may grow up into Christ in all things and attain unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

For this purpose amongst others, but for this purpose chiefly, God has placed us in families. Hence He bids us train up a child in the way he should go, and for our encouragement in this work assures us that if we do, he will not depart from that way. He adds to us the most precious promise in Deut, xxx, 6, "The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, AND THE HEART OF THY SEED, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul." Let Christians believe the promise, and act upon the direction—train their children as now holy, as now belonging unto God, and the result is certain, because made so by the faithfulness and truth of God Himself. Let them be trained not for future conversion, but as already holy, consecrated unto God, never knowing themselves to be other than belonging unto God; and the end will vindicate the means. Train them—that is, tell them what to do, show them how to do it, see that it is done. The habit will be formed by the repetition of acts, and while they themselves are blessed, God will be glorified.

Nourish them for God. Mould them unto His will. Supply them with food fit for their infant and imperfect state. Surround them with wholesome influences. Give reasons for your directions, as occasion may require. Give warm and loving encouragement to every effort they put forth. Warn them against the way of evil. Thus bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Let the counsel and the warnings be enforced by example in word and deed. Believe the fact that your children are holy, are God's; live it out in your life; and the result will bring gladness to your heart, because it is assured by the promises of God.

But the objection at once arises that this teaching seems to contradict the facts of Christian experience. It will be urged that the children of pious parents are often far from good; that as a matter of common notoriety they are frequently distinguished for the contrary habits and dispositions to those which characterized their parents. We admit with sorrow that there are too many instances which may be thus opposed to us; but on the other hand we are quite sure, from careful consideration of the matter, that the number and the proportion are not nearly so great as is commonly supposed. And for those who are unhappily thus, in how many cases is there not a reason for the sad decline. How few parents train their children as belonging to God! How many discourage their

weak and imperfect efforts after good. To us it seems that many break the bruised reed of desire, and quench the smoking flax of endeavour. Many of us are over-exacting. We expect too much from our children, and because they do not answer our expectations, conclude that they are yet aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and treat them accordingly. With others, the training is altogether repressive. Instead of watching for the buddings of Christian life, which may give place to the flower and the fruit of Christian action, and doing what we can to foster and to cherish them, too often we are found repressing them as ill-timed, ill-judged, or out of place. Many, too, are ever finding fault with their children, acting in opposition to the good old rule. "Don't be always don'ting"—giving them very much admonition, but very little of warm loving nurture. The evil results necessarily follow. The parents refuse to trust God to fulfil his promise because they cannot see how or when He does it, and according to their unbelief is it unto them. They discredit His simple, naked word, and they reap the consequences of their sin.

In reply to the inquiry, Does this training which we advocate answer? we say: It must answer, because it is founded upon God's words, it runs along the lines which He has marked out. But at this late stage of the history of the Church we are not left to mere supposition. Proofs come to us from many sides that this Christian nurture by parents has the blessing of God. I suppose that as a community there is no body of Christians in the world who have been more distinguished for eminent piety and missionary zeal than the Moravian Brethren. These people, it is said, rely on this mode of training as the Divine means of bringing blessing to their young. They expect salvation to come to their children through the instrumentality of Christian nurture. They expect their offspring to grow up as trees of the Lord's own planting in His vineyard. We have been assured that as the result in a body which is so greatly distinguished for Christian grace not one in ten of them can recollect the time when he first began to be religious. Our own observation agrees with this experience. Where this truth has been received (sometimes even with much of error joined), where God's assurances have been believed and acted upon, according to their faith it has been done unto them.

Richard Baxter, the author of the "Saint's Rest," renowned for his devotion to God, is said to have been greatly troubled for a long period because he was unable to remember the time when a gracious change took place in his heart. He feared the absence of such a change was an indication that he had never

truly been brought to God. But he goes on to say that, as a result of consideration and prayer, he had come to the conclusion that "Education is as properly a means of grace as preaching itself."

Christian Parents: God declares that your children are holy, He claims them in a special manner as His own. Will you dare to contradict His Word? Will you rob God by refusing to train them as such? Will you mislead your children by teaching them that only at some future time they may belong in this special manner to Him. Will you not rather most thankfully recognize the grace which He has conferred upon you in thus making a difference between your children and the children of unbelievers; and in humble dependence upon His word and reliance upon His promises, train them accordingly? It is the only safe way.

Children of Christian parents, thank God for the distinguishing mark which He has placed upon you. Remember always that you belong unto God—that He claims you as devoted unto Him, and that your life, which is His, should be occupied in His service; that whatsoever you do, it belongs to you to do all to the glory of God! You need the Holy Spirit to enable you to live to him. You need the Holy Scriptures to nourish you in divine things. You need the means of grace which he has provided, that you may grow up into Christ in all things. Use the ordinances. Pray for the Spirit. Study the Word, and your profiting will appear unto all. Men will take note of you that you have been with Jesus. You will be holy not only in the sense of belonging unto God, as claimed by Him for His service, but your lives will show that you have not received the grace of God in vain, you will be "holy in all manner of conversation."

