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HOW TO GROW CHRISTIANS

BY D.B. KNOX

THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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It is God's purpose in giving children to a christian couple that these children should grow up to be christians themselves. The Bible makes clear that God gives his blessing through families; (e.g. Acts 2:39; 16:31). Even in a home where only one parent is a christian, these blessings may still be claimed, for the children of a christian are especially related to God in the way that children of non christian parents are not (1 Cor. 7:14). Experience confirms that God blesses through families and many of the finest christians, both of the present time as well as of past generations are able to attribute their faith directly to their home.

However, God's blessings are never automatic. Just because we ourselves are christians does not mean that our children will be christians automatically. God's blessings come to us in accordance with our natures, and we have been created persons so that God's blessing will be in accordance with the laws of personality. Thus if parents desire their children to be christians all their grown up lives, they must shape their own lives and their own home so that their children are firmly established as christians during the years that they are at home, otherwise the temptations, that come to all of us in our 20's or in our 30's or in our 40's (and they are all different sorts of temptations) will erode and finally overwhelm a shallow christian faith.

There are six points to which christian parents must conform if their children are to be firmly rooted in faith. Firstly their own lives must be single mindedly christian. Their hope must be set on Christ's coming kingdom and on their heavenly inheritance. Their faith must be in God, and not be trusting in security of some other sort.

Secondly, their lives must be prayerful. Each day must be a day for prayer. If husband and wife are both christians then they should pray together for their children daily, and they should pray for all the other problems of the family and of their environment, and not only should they pray together but each must be prayerful individually.

Thirdly, they join with their children in family prayers each day in order that Christ might be publicly acknowledged in the family as the head of the home. This will also give an opportunity to the father informally to apply the reading of the Scripture to the circumstances of the family and their individual lives.

Fourthly we must teach our children the christian faith daily from their earliest years and we must train them to say their own prayers and as they grow older to read the Bible for themselves. It would seem that not less than half an hour is needed each day in this christian instruction of Bible teaching, at least until the children are, shall we say, ten years old. This may seem a burden on the mother but if this duty of teaching is not discharged we have no right to expect the child to grow up to be a christian in a way that will stand the strains of daily life and enable them to teach their own children to be christian.

Fifthly we should use the informal opportunities that family life brings to train a child's mind towards a christian understanding of life and society. The schools and the newspapers and their non-christian friends will put before them, a point of view that leaves God out of the centre.

If God is to be in the picture at all he is to be in the centre otherwise there is a radical contradiction. There are very many informal occasions, when driving together or in one another's company, for the father and the mother to show the christian implications of the situations which maybe under discussion. Parents should be alert to these opportunities and be sufficiently prayerful and spiritually minded so as to take these opportunities in a natural and human way.

Lastly, and this is of tremendous importance, Sunday, the Lord's Day, must be observed in the family as the Lord's Day. Other activities must be subordinate to fellowship with God and his people. God has created the day of rest to fit our physical needs and the first use we should make of the leisure which Sunday provides it to turn our thoughts and our hearts to God, both individually and in company with God's people. This is plainly the first priority of any leisure we have. If we thrust it into a subordinate place or omit it altogether this is so thoroughly contradictory to believing in Jesus as the Son of God and putting our hope in him, that it will be quite impossible for our children to accept a christian world view if we use Sunday firstly for ourselves and only secondly for God.

Since it is of such importance for the church as well as society that christian homes should nurture christian children one of the highest priorities of a christian minister and one of the strongest interests of a christian congregation should be to promote christianity within the family during the six days of the week. What are our ministers and our congregations doing about this?

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