

# Children And Worship

by Bobby Witherington

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth” (Ps. 127:3,4).

It is evident that the writer of Psalm 127:3,4 did not regard children as inconvenient, unwanted accidents of nature. To the contrary, he viewed children as "a heritage of the Lord." This seems to have been the attitude which Eve, the first mother, possessed, for when she conceived and bore Cain she said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord" (Gen. 4:1). Hence, in both instances the children are spoken of as being "from the Lord." However, as we re-focus on Psalm 127:3, 4, it becomes apparent that children who are "from the Lord" are to be reared for the Lord. They are likened to "arrows in the hand of a warrior" . arrows which are to be aimed in the right direction.

The intention to aim his children in the right direction was evidently possessed by Abraham for, concerning Abraham, God said, "I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He had spoken to him" (Gen. 18:19). This was certainly the intention of righteous, barren Hannah who, "in bitterness of soul," tearfully petitioned God for a man child and then vowed - if God answered her prayer - to "give him to the Lord all the days of his life" (1 Sam. 1:11). In his rich providence, God gave Hannah a man-child, and she honored her vow. God gave Samuel to Hannah, and he became as it were an arrow in her hands, having consistently been pointed in the right direction.

The fact that children are from God and are to be reared for God is abundantly taught in both the Old and New Testaments. Concerning his "statutes and righteous judgments" to the children of Israel, God said "teach them to your children and your grandchildren" (Deut. 4:9). God later was even more specific, saying: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:6,7). In Psalm 78:5-7 the sacred writer said that God has "appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, That they may set their hope in God." In the New Testament, to the saints at Ephesus, Paul said, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Timothy was a man who possessed "genuine faith," but that faith "dwelt first" in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5). They were the ones who made it possible for Timothy, "from childhood," to know "the holy Scriptures" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Other passages, from both Testaments, could be cited which time and again prove that parents are responsible for the spiritual direction and development of their children. To bring a child into the world and then neglect to give that child any spiritual direction is a sin against God, a sin against the child, and a sin against the society which (for good or bad) will ultimately be affected by the child!

Without minimizing the importance of in-home spiritual training and direction, we affirm that one very important aspect of the process of aiming one's children "toward heaven involves public worship. A healthy baby, at least as early as two weeks old, should regularly be brought to Bible study and worship. Such should become a part of the atmosphere in which the child grows from infancy to adulthood. Little by little, as the child begins to learn about God, he becomes impressed with his (or her) parents' reverence for God, and he gradually concludes that all good people believe in God; they love God, they seek to serve God, and they live for God on earth because they plan to live eternally with God in heaven.

However, small children (at first) do not comprehend what worship is all about. As one brother (now deceased) said: "Sometimes children feel bad and they twist, wiggle, and squirm. And sometimes children feel good and they twist, wiggle, and squirm." This is true, and this is one reason why God gave children to parents, and instructed parents concerning how to rear their children. Parents of young children have the very challenging task of bringing their children to worship, and making them behave in such a fashion as to not overly disturb the worship of others in the assembly. And this is no small task!

### **SOME RECOMMENDATIONS:**

*1. Bring your children to worship!* To all the services! Even though you are tired, stressed out, and apprehensive as to what embarrassing "stunt" your child will "pull this time." If you do your job right, it won't be long before the child learns how to act and how not to act.

*2. Use the Nursery.* If you need to take the child out to nurse, change diapers, or to apply some psychology on that part of the anatomy which the diaper covers, do so.

*3. Don't abuse the nursery.* The nursery is not intended to become a play room for spoiled children who have learned to misbehave so they can then be taken to a more fun atmosphere. If it becomes necessary to take the children to the nursery, then please take them. But do what has to be done, and then return to the assembly - the children must learn that they come together to worship God, not to play.

*4. Go easy on the food.* Yes, babies should be fed on schedule. But as children get older, they can learn (if they are required to) that we have "houses to eat and drink in" (I Cor. 11:22). Give a child everything he wants, every time he wants it, and he will become a "spoiled brat." Youth is a good time to learn both patience and the meaning of no.

5. *Avoid hard, noisy toys.* On the one hand, these items can be very disturbing to others. On the other hand, the church house is not intended to be a play house. For that matter, attention focused on toys could be better focused on all worship activities, including listening to the sermon - especially as the children begin to get a little older.

6. *Avoid needless distractions* - such as unnecessary trips to the rest room or the water fountain. Children must learn that the worship hour is sacred, that God is to be honored, his word learned, and his will obeyed.

7. *Keep your children under control after worship is concluded.* Children unsupervised can actually be dangerous, especially to older people, who are feeble, who use walkers, who have had knee surgery, hip replacement, etc. A small child can fall a thousand times and not feel a thing; an elderly person can fall one time, break a hip, and never recover. In a sense, the pulpit area and the location of the Communion table should be regarded as "holy ground" the place where God's saving message is proclaimed and where the great sacrifice of Jesus is commemorated. Using Old Testament terminology, our children ought to learn to "distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean" (Lev. 10:10).

## CONCLUSION

Some subjects are very "touchy." This topic fits that category, so I have touched it. However, I have written out of concern, and in what I perceive to be in the best interest of all concerned. Our children are our future. They are often precocious; they are always precious and priceless. You and I cannot change our ancestors, but we can do something about our descendants and the place to begin is with our children. Thank God for parents who recognize and honor their parental obligations! We are thrilled to see babies and children in worship - the more the merrier. Parents, we do not want to discourage you, nor add to your burdens. To the contrary, we have your best interest at heart and we sincerely believe "an ounce of prevention" now is worth "a pound of cure" later on. In other words, if you bring your children to Bible Study and worship, monitor their conduct, and set the proper example before them, then they will more likely grow up to be obedient, happy, and respectful. They will make you proud and fill your heart with gladness. Most importantly, you received them from God, and you will be rearing them for God.