

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

89 What Can We Learn About Children from the Bible?

Scripture: Psalm 127:1-5; Proverbs 22:6; Matthew 18:1-6

One of the things we can learn about children from the Bible is that they have a great potential for grief. Proverbs 10:1 informs us, *“a wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.”* A few pages beyond we read, *“A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.”* (Proverbs 17:25) Other verses which shed light on this matter are Proverbs 17:21, 19:13 & 26, 28:7, 29:15 and a verse out of the sad story of David and his son Absalom. II Samuel 18:33

We have been talking about home folks and the reasons for unhappiness in the family. The truth about children is that in most instances they cannot make an unhappy marriage happy. People with troubled marriages have been known to bring children into the world with the hope that a child would save the marriage. In most cases the problem is only enlarged while it is true that people decide to stay together for the sake of the children. It is also true that children can make a mess of a happy marriage. For financial, physical, emotional and other reasons, one of the most difficult problems which arises in marriage relates to children. This may seem a rather harsh way to speak of something as noble as parenthood, but we do so in reference to our thinking about the causes of marital unhappiness, and we want to understand from the Scripture that it is not the presence or absence of children in a family which is the important thing, it is our attitude toward and our understanding about children which is critical. Now, let us stay close to Scripture in this and try to discern the insights which the Bible affords having to do with the relationship of children to a happy marriage.

I. THE ABILITY TO BRING CHILDREN INTO THE WORLD IS GIVEN BY GOD: Genesis 1:28

There are many things recorded in the Bible which God asks man to do. The very first of these goes back to the first chapter of the Bible and is given in the words, *“Be fruitful and multiply...”* Following the flood of Noah which destroyed antediluvian peoples, the same command was reiterated to Noah, *“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”* (Genesis 1:28, 9:1) When Eve gave birth to her son she exclaimed, *“I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”* (Genesis 4:1)

There are many references in Scripture which have to do with the coming of children as an evidence of a kind of involvement God has with our lives. Psalm 127:4 reads, *“Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord...”*

One of the most powerful capacities man has been endowed with is the ability to bring children into the world, that of procreation. Few people realize that children are generated in the *“image of God.”* Children bear a human and divine likeness, they are a representation of God in the world.

In Genesis 1:26-27 we read that man was made in the image of God. Man is to a certain degree like God. The creation story informs us that God surveyed the result of His creatorial effort and pronounced that everything, including man, was good. (Genesis 1:31) What was good about man? Man was pronounced good because he was made in the image of God. An interesting verse is found in Acts 17:28 where the Apostle Paul quotes with approval certain poets who suggested people were like God. (Acts 17:28-29) This resemblance to God, though distorted by the dreadful effects of sin remains. James spoke of the severity of even cursing another person, because men *“are made in the likeness of God.”* (James 3:9)

Genesis 9:6 reads, *“he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image.”* Children thus bear the image of their earthly as well as their heavenly father. Normally, we do not assent to the Fatherhood of God outside of spiritual regeneration, but in terms of creating and sustaining all life, God is Father. Malachi 2:10 is a good verse to remember in this regard. *“Have not all one father? Hath not one God created us?”* See also Ephesians 3:14-15. What we are saying here is that children are the image of God on earth. Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6 and John records the statement He made, *“Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are Gods? If He called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken.”* (John 10:34-35) This is the kind of power God has given to us. To bring into this world children which are “gods,” is a very sobering realization. Just one aspect of this divine image is the fact of their immortality. They, like God, have an eternity about them.

II. THE HEIGHT OF JOY IS THE GIFT OF A CHILD, THE DEPTH OF SORROW IS THE LOSS OF ONE: Genesis 33:5; Psalm 127:3; John 16:21

In Biblical times the birth of a child was considered as the reception of a gift from God. In Genesis 4:1 we read of Eve exclaiming upon the birth of Cain, *“I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord.”* Genesis 33:5 records the response

of Jacob to Esau's question about those with him, "...children whom God graciously has given your servant," is the way he described them. Jesus referred to the joy which comes to a woman at the birth of a child by saying, "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." (John 16:21) The mother of John the Baptist, Elizabeth, kept herself in seclusion for five months, and then exclaimed, "He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men." (Luke 1:24-25) From the Biblical point of view children are never looked upon as accidents but as the heritage of the Lord. (Psalm 127:3) What greater heritage than the happiness and smiles of little faces, the sound of little feet, the touch of little fingers, the cooing of little voices? This is the Biblical view of children.

It is impossible to read the gospels without seeing Jesus as being in love with children. His rebuke of the disciples is classic and well known, "You let the children come to me." (Luke 18:15-17) He would take them in His arms. He had great affection for them. He was deeply moved by sorrow when death claimed a child, or when disease struck one down. The stories of Jesus' touch upon the lives of children cannot be taken lightly. There was the **nobleman's son** of John 4:44-54, the **Syrophenician's daughter** of Matthew 15:21-28, the **lunatic son** of Mark 9:14-29, the **daughter of Jairus** in Luke 8:41-56, and the **widow's son** of Luke 7:11-18. He always emerged as the sympathizing Savior willing to banish the sorrow of those whose child was in need. Children in the Bible are spoken of in terms of great joy and heavy sorrow.

III. THE SALVATION OF CHILDREN IS SECURED BY THE GOD WHO LOVES THEM:

Christians believe that human beings are different from other creatures living on earth because they possess a dimension of being known as "spirit." Man is thus material and immaterial which elevates man to the highest place on the scale of created beings. Children are born into this world possessing body, soul, and spirit. There is a disjunction between soul and spirit according to Hebrews 4:12 and I Thessalonians 5:23. The soul is generally considered to be the seat of reason, affection, and will. Another word is personality which means that man has the power of perception, self-determination, fixative thought and self-consciousness. The spirit links man with the highest intelligence, and when this faculty is quickened by God's Holy Spirit, communion with the Most High is made possible. Children are born with a little diamond within them which is neither

visible nor mortal, it will not disintegrate as material things do. Soul and spirit are closely related and may be inseparable in their function. When body-man dies the body goes to the grave to await the coming of Jesus while the spirit wings its way into His presence. Ecclesiastes 12:7 reads, *"The spirit shall return unto God who gave it."* Other related verses in such a study are Zechariah 12:1; Isaiah 42:5, and Psalms 139:14-16.

At what point does a child receive a soul and spirit? There are some fascinating verses in Scripture which suggest that an individual becomes a complete person or human being at the time of conception. Obviously not fully developed, but no less human, certainly not sub-human. We have one example, mysterious as it may be, in the case of Elizabeth who was filled with the Holy Ghost and said to Mary, *"Lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy."* (Luke 1:41,44) If words have meaning, the suggestion is that of some kind of pre-natal awareness. Another verse is found in Ecclesiastes 11:5, *"As thou knowest not the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all."* Clearly, there are areas which have to do with the development of a child in the womb which are shrouded with mystery, the infusion of spirit and soul being one of these. The medical world tells us that biological life is a distinct and complete genetic entity which comes into being at the moment of conception. The Christian world tells us that the same is true of the spiritual life, that is, of soul-spirit existence. Otherwise, such a placement would take place at another time which would demand an equal miracle. An old Testament example of infant (unborn) consciousness is found in Genesis 25:22-23. The twins to be born to Rebekah were described in this way, *"the children struggled together within her,"* because as the Lord said, *"Two nations are in thy womb...and the one people shall be stronger than the other people."* Interesting, that God should cause such truth to be recorded for our edification. Whether the child survives birth or childhood, or infancy, there is good reason to believe that the child or human embryo possesses complete personhood, that is body, soul, spirit.

The Christian's concern with all of this is in what happens to babies when they die or with children who die before reaching what we call the "age of awareness or accountability." Anyone familiar with the Bible knows that there is no direct statement concerning the status of such persons.

How often I have wished when asked about the death of infants or young children that there was a specific Scripture verse which would spell it all out to our complete satisfaction. However, there are verses which we can compare with one another and which are able to satisfactorily ease our concern in this area. Years ago I suffered the loss of a baby sister, and my sorrow was very great at just a boy. I believe with all my heart that I will see my sister someday in the glory on the grounds of the following verses. Let me say **first**, from God's point of view we know that my sister was not born in "innocence." She was born as everyone else is, she was *"by nature (among) the children of wrath, even as others."* (Ephesians 2:3; Psalm 51:5) **Secondly**, "without the shedding of blood is no remission." (Hebrews 9:22) Clearly, there is no way to be rid of original sin outside of the blood shed at Calvary by the Savior, Jesus. **Thirdly**, from man's point of view we know that the shedding of Christ's blood only becomes effective as it is applied by faith to one's life, something an infant, child, or mentally incapacitated person is unable to do. Now, these are the issues we have before when one comes to talk about an infant sister being with the Lord.

The classic passage in the Old Testament dealing with this problem is found in II Samuel 12:15-23. David has suffered the loss of his son by Uriah's wife. David was crushed with grief for he had earlier prayed, wept, and fasted. At the death of the child David bathed, put on clean clothing, and ate the bread placed before him. His servants were curious? How come you wept when the child was alive and now that the child is dead, you rise and eat bread? (II Samuel 12:21) David's answer is most important. He said, *"Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the Child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."* I believe that David had this conviction given to Him by the Holy Spirit and it is a conviction we may have in such a time of sorrow.

New Testament verses which apply are found in Matthew 18:1-11. The whole passage deals with children. Asked who is the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus responded by placing a child in the midst of the inquirers. I realize that the primary reference is that of being like a child, childlikeness in humility, simplicity, and integrity. But there is something about that question, "Who?" It seems as if Jesus was saying, "That's who." In verse 5 we read, *"Whoso shall receive a little child in my name receiveth me."* It is very plain that it was Jesus intent to identify with children, to be thought of as being with them. In verse 11 we read, *"For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."* Matthew

in quoting Jesus omits the word "*seek*" which Luke records. In the context of His conversation about children Jesus does not use the word seek. I believe the omission is significant. Jesus simply said, he was come to save children.

Oh, how we wish there was a verse which would just say it for us, that would state it clearly. There is no such verse; however, these incidents are recorded for our comfort. I believe that somehow God is able to apply the work of Christ on the cross to babies, children, and those who are unaware of the exercise of their sinful will and incompetent toward trusting Christ. God is able to do this without doing violence to His justice or holiness. Why should it be thought that anything is impossible with God? The Lord is able to give peace in this matter. I have that peace. May you have this confidence also if you have suffered the loss of a loved one or friend.

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