

TEACHING INFANTS

IF YOU HAVE A NEW INFANT IN YOUR FAMILY, CONGRATULATIONS! If you want to give your child a head start on education, perhaps the following information will be of interest to you. Here is a teaching program as old as Moses. It is found in the Holy Bible and is called the “Shema”, which is the Hebrew word for “hear”.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And 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. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.” (Deut 6:4-9 KJV)

How simple! How profound! Moses wanted His people to teach their children. A major emphasis of this teaching involved giving God top priority in their lives. In the family, every day is a day of learning and parents are the primary teachers. Parents can play a positive or negative role in teaching children. If parents love God with all their heart, soul, and mind, their influence will be positive. Moses reminds us that it is not necessary to wait until kindergarten for children to be taught. Actually, the education of a child begins before they are even born. Yes! There is growing evidence that children actually learn in the womb. This helps us to understand why children raised by Russian parents speak Russian, and children raised by Chinese parents speak Chinese. Not only does the unborn infant hear their parent’s language while still in the womb, but God has given little babies a special ability to learn quickly. Learning a new language, for example, may be difficult for adults, but not for little children. One reason, of course, is that every day children are constantly exposed to the conversation of their parents. Infants also have the amazing ability to absorb like sponges what their parents are saying. This learning takes place while parents are sitting down, or walking, or going to bed, or getting up. It is not necessary for parents and grandparents to understand why little children learn so quickly, but it is important that we teach them well during this period of enhanced learning ability.

God knew that babies could learn in the womb long before modern science figured it out. Note, for example, this remarkable passage in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. **“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim 3:14-15 KJV)** This Scripture makes clear a truth that ought to be of great interest to every parent, and every grandparent.

The versatile Greek language has at least six different words all translated as “child” in the KJV of the Bible. They are: *huios*, *teknon*, *pais*, *paidion*, *nepios*, and *brephros*. The word translated as “child” in our text is “*brephros*”. Thayer, in his Greek English Lexicon, defines the word as (1) An unborn child, embryo, fetus; (2) A newborn child, infant, babe. The NIV translates this word as “infancy”. *Brephros* occurs eight times in the N.T. Scriptures. They are listed here for your convenience.

- Luke 1:41 - “. . . the *babe* leaped her womb . . . “
- Luke 1:44 - “. . . the *babe* leaped in my womb for joy . . . “
- Luke 2:12 - “. . . ye shall find the *babe* wrapped in swaddling clothes . . . “
- Luke 2:16 - “. . . they came with haste and found . . . the *babe* lying in a manger.”
- Luke 18:15 - “. . . and they brought unto him *infants* that he would touch them .”
- Acts 7:19 - “. . . they cast out their *young children* to the end that they might not live”.
- 1 Pet. 2:2 - “. . . as *newborn babes* desire the sincere milk of the word . . . “
- 1 Tim. 3:15 - “. . . from a *child* thou has known the holy Scriptures . . .”

TIMOTHY ACTUALLY BEGAN LEARNING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES WHILE HE WAS STILL IN THE WOMB! His faith dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice, but ultimately in him (1 Tim. 1:5). These women were obviously his primary teachers. His father was a Greek (Acts 16:1) and apparently did not help Timothy to “know the holy Scriptures”. His mother, and grandmother, however, taught him the holy Scriptures from the time he was a “brephos”. That is, they taught him the Scriptures before he was born, and from the time of his “infancy”. They apparently did precisely what God commanded all of His people to do. They taught Timothy as they were lying down, rising up. Teaching was a part of all their daily activities. Since the Word of God was in their heart they talked about it all the time. Remember! Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Lk. 6:45).

Reason compels us to believe that Lois and Eunice were also regular in worship at the synagogue and sought out the companionship of others who shared their faith. It seems that these godly women were teaching Timothy in much the same way that Jesus taught His disciples. Every moment with Jesus is a learning experience. Many of His greatest lessons did not come in a formal class, but as a result of interruptions. For example, in Mark 2:1 - 12 we are told that Jesus was preaching in a crowded house. Then He was interrupted. What Jesus was teaching fades into the background and the interruption becomes the story. Four men who couldn't get in through the door, broke a hole in the roof and lowered a paralyzed friend into the presence of Jesus. Nothing happened by accident to Jesus. God orchestrated His life and ministry so that everything was working together for good. The interruption provided Jesus a unique opportunity to teach eternal truth. As you reflect on the life of Christ you will observe that the Gospels reveal a pattern of constant “interruptions”. Following the example of Christ, parents and grandparents can also take advantage of “unplanned” interruptions to teach eternal truth. While we cannot be dogmatic about all the teaching techniques of Lois and Eunice, we can be dogmatic about the fact that Timothy knew the holy Scriptures from the time he was a “brephos”.

EVIL MEN AND SEDUCERS

But now let us return to 2 Timothy and consider the verse before and the verses after Paul's reference to brephos. In the verse before, Paul wrote: “**But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.**” (2 Tim 3:13 KJV). Unfortunately, Timothy, like many in our own day, was raised in a bad neighborhood. He grew up in the vicinity of Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2). These were pagan cities that worshiped false gods like Jupiter and Mercury. Not only were these people involved in the degrading immorality of paganism, they were also so unstable that they went immediately from wanting to worship Paul to wanting to kill him (Acts 14:12 -19). Timothy was therefore already familiar with evil men and seducers, but Paul warns of the stern reality that these bad social conditions were going to grow worse.

After reminding Timothy of his early training as a brephos, Paul declared that **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim 3:16 - 17 KJV)** How beautiful! How appropriate! How practical! The Word of God that Timothy had learned from infancy helped him to develop in every area of his life! Note also that the Scriptures do not merely provide “information”, they provide “wisdom”. From a “child” Timothy knew the holy Scriptures which were able to make him “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15).

It is doubtful that Lois and Eunice were able to completely shield young Timothy from the pagan influence around him. We assume that he saw the pagan temples, knew pagan people, and was subjected to the deceptive practices of evil men and seducers. Yet, the training he received in the home gave him a shield of faith to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. If Lois and Eunice could raise a godly child in a bad neighborhood with an unchristian father, so can we!

FACTS YOU NEED TO FACE

As you reflect upon the new child in your family, it is important to remember that all life ultimately comes from God! This is true of plants and animals, but of special interest to you is the fact that **THE GIFT OF LIFE IN YOUR CHILD HAS COME FROM GOD!** No child is born by accident. The life in every child is a gift from God!

Wise King Solomon helps us to understand this lesson. He was selected by God to inherit the throne of his father David. As a young man he married Naamah, an Ammonite princess, and they had a little baby boy named Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:13). By comparing 1 Ki. 11:42 and 14:21 we know Rehoboam was born before Solomon became king. The name “Rehoboam” means “the people (family) is extended”. This probably indicates that Solomon expected to have a large family.

Hebrew men were proud of their sons. Ahab had seventy sons (2 Ki. 10:1). Gideon had seventy sons (Judges 9:5). Rehoboam himself had 18 wives, 60 concubines, 28 sons, and 60 daughters (2 Chron. 11:21).

In this regard it is important to note that Scriptures only tell us that **“Solomon’s son was Rehoboam” (1 Chronicles 3:10)**. We therefore know that Solomon had a son named Rehoboam, but we are never told of any other son. This leads to the assumption that this was his only son. David, and other kings, had many sons. As we have already pointed out Rehoboam himself had 28 sons. At the risk of being redundant, the Bible only mentions one son born to the wise, rich, and powerful King Solomon. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3, but the Bible only tells of one son. Two daughters are mentioned in 1 Kings 4:11, and 4:15, but we are still faced with the intriguing statement of Scripture that Solomon’s son was Rehoboam. After sexual relations with a thousand women, and only one son, Solomon finally concluded, as all of us should also conclude: **“Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that built it . . .” (Ps. 127:1)**

Life in the womb is a miracle from God. It cannot be purchased with money or produced by science, and not even by repetitive sexual encounters. No child is an accident, for life in the womb can only be achieved by a partnership with God!

A CLOSER LOOK AT LIFE IN THE WOMB

We know that a child is formed in the womb when the sperm (seed) of the father, unites with the ovum (egg) of the mother. God grants this new life through the combination of 23 chromosomes and 15,000 genes from each parent. The medical term for this microscopic union is “zygote”. “Zygos” is a Greek word that means “joined”. Remember! Life does not occur without the involvement of God. Note these examples from Scripture. Sarah was barren (Gen. 11:30). All the women in the house of Abimelech were barren (Gen. 20:18). Rebekah was barren (Gen. 25:21). Rachel was barren (Gen. 29:31). The wife of Manoah was barren (Judges 13:2). Hannah was barren (1 Sam. 1:2). Elizabeth was barren (Lk. 1:7). All of these barren women gave birth to children, but not without the help of God. As we have said before, all life ultimately comes from Him. This is why we say with confidence that life does not occur in the womb without a partnership with God. The Psalmist said it like this: **“He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the LORD.” (Ps 113:9 KJV).** IT IS SOBERING TO REALIZE THAT THE MIRACLE OF LIFE IN YOUR CHILD HAS COME FROM GOD!

From the very moment of conception your new baby was given a unique identity by God. Gary Bergel and Dr. C. Everett Koop point this out in the booklet *“When You Were Formed in Secret”*. They state that *“the genes, like letters of a divine alphabet, spell out the unique characteristics of the new individual. The color of eyes, hair and skin, facial features, body types, and certain qualities of personality and intelligence are all determined by this genetic coding”*.

The complexity of this genetic coding is beyond human comprehension. God placed a divine blueprint in your baby when it was microscopic in size. That blueprint contained detailed instructions for the formation of all body parts like hands and feet, and eyes and ears. Just as one star differs from another star in glory (1 Cor. 15:41), so also God makes every child unique. Your baby, for example, has it’s own fingerprints that will never be assigned to any other person. God also placed in the zygote the blueprint for your baby’s brain, eyes, ears, and all the other intricate organs of the body. Written in this DNA code is the development of bone marrow capable of manufacturing new hemoglobin and kidneys that can purify 180 quarts of blood every day. God designed your baby with arteries that relax when the heart beats and contract between beats. This pulsing system provides a steady flow of blood to the tiniest branches of the circulatory system. This genetic code also provides for both baby teeth and permanent teeth. Written in the blueprint are instructions for puberty, even though they will not be implemented for years. All of this, and much much more, was given by God to your child through a physical seed that can be traced back to Adam. Truly we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

Perhaps it is appropriate at this time to introduce the subject of the new birth. The most important part of parental responsibilities involves the new birth and eternal salvation. Remember! The Bible speaks of two Adams. The Adam God created in Eden is the first Adam, and Jesus is the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Just as the first Adam produced a physical race, the Last Adam produced a spiritual race. Both races come from seeds. The physical seed produces physical life, and spiritual seed produces spiritual life. This means that as we have borne the image of the earthy, we can also bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:49). Remember! As Jesus said to Nicodemus, flesh gives birth to flesh, and Spirit gives birth to Spirit (John 3:6). The only way your baby can receive spiritual life is from a spiritual seed. This is why everyone needs to be “born again” in order to have eternal life.

THE INCORRUPTIBLE SEED AND THE NEW COVENANT

We remind you again of what Jesus said to Nicodemus: **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** (John 3:6 KJV) How simple! How profound!

It is a fact that your baby has physical life that came from a physical seed. Flesh and blood, however, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). If the Lord should tarry, your precious little baby will grow old and die. **“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:”** (Heb 9:27 KJV).

Many believe that the worst thing that can happen to a person is to die and go to hell. Unfortunately, there is something even worse than that. Just imagine how terrible it would be to die and go to hell and then discover that you brought your children with you!

It doesn't have to be that way, of course. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). God knew all about your baby from the moment of conception. David put it like this: **“For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”** (Ps 139:13-16 KJV)

If you are faithful in teaching your children the Scriptures they can possess eternal life and live forever and forever. Peter put it like this: **“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”** (1 Peter 1:23 - 25 KJV).

Since one of the eight uses of “brephos” is used by Peter in this passage, let us continue the quotation. After pointing out that the word of God is an incorruptible seed, Peter continued: **“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”** (1 Peter 2:1-3 KJV).

If a newborn baby is not hungry for milk something is wrong! If a newborn Christian is not hungry for the Scriptures something is also wrong!

MANNA FROM HEAVEN

The Hebrew people in the wilderness were fed by manna from heaven. Christians are sustained by the Bible, which is also like manna from heaven. The Scriptures teach that there is an association to be made between gathering manna, and studying the Bible. Please ponder these inspired words:

“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.” (Deut 8:3 KJV)

These words from Deuteronomy, as you know, were quoted by Jesus when He was tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4:4; Lk. 4:4). Please note that God fed His people with manna “that he might make thee know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

God did indeed humble His people. Their pride was greatly reduced when they had no food or water. God, however, also caused His people to hunger. Their hunger for food was a strong motivation to get out of bed and gather manna. The more hungry they were, the more diligent they were in seeking for food. If God had not caused His people to hunger, they would have died of starvation for manna was not easy to obtain. Please consider:

- The manna that fell from heaven was obviously gathered outside of the camp.
- The camp was large and contained several million people.
- Since the Hebrews owned cattle, sheep, and goats, we assume that they gathered their manna beyond the area where these animals were kept.
- There was only a small window of opportunity to gather manna. The manna did not appear until the dew was gone (Ex. 16:14) and it disappeared when the sun waxed hot (Ex. 16:21).
- The manna was like “thin flakes” or “hoar frost” (Ex. 16:14) and every person had to gather his own personal quota (about two quarts - Ex. 16:16).
- The manna had to be gathered daily. Anything left over would breed worms and stink (Ex. 16:20). An exception was made on the sixth day to honor the Sabbath day (Ex. 16:22 - 30).
- The manna had to be washed and cooked, but water and wood were scarce and difficult to obtain in the wilderness.
- The point is, even though manna was bread from heaven, it was still not easy to obtain. Only those hungry enough to seek the manna survived.

But now let us extrapolate this lesson to the study of the Scriptures. We are told that the people of Berea were more noble than those of Thessalonica because of their diligence in studying the Bible. The Bereans received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to see if Paul’s teaching was true (Acts 17:11). Please consider:

- As we have pointed out before, the printing press would not be invented by Gutenberg for over 1,000 years. Copies of the Bible were therefore extremely rare and expensive.
- Yet, just as the Hebrews gathered manna every day, the noble Bereans also studied the Scriptures every day.
- Just as the Hebrews had to leave their homes, the Bereans also would have to go to the synagogue in order to study the Scriptures.
- Just as the Hebrews faced competition in the gathering of manna, the Bereans also faced competition as many people lined up to study the Scriptures. Imagine how difficult it would be to study the Bible if each congregation had only one copy of the Scriptures.
- Just as the Hebrews had to gather, wash, and cook the manna, the Bereans had difficulty finding passages of Scripture. Remember! The Bible was not divided into chapters for 1,200 years, and not divided into verses for 1,500 years.

- Remember also that God fed His people with manna to teach us that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Parents and grandparents need to remember that during the formative years of infancy and childhood we have a golden opportunity to teach spiritual truth to our children. We have the promise that when we train up a child in the way they should go, when they are old they will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6). Dr. Garland Bare was a missionary in Asia. His daughter, though brain damaged at birth, could speak and understand three languages by the age of three. Other children in the same area could speak even more languages. It is undeniable that there is a time when children learn rapidly. It is wise indeed for parents and grandparents to take advantage of this window of opportunity to teach eternal truth. If we fail during those formative years we cannot turn back the clock for a second chance.

One way to graphically illustrate this truth is by citing examples of children who were raised without any parents at all. These children are called “feral children”. The word “feral” means “fierce” or “wild”. Even though this condition is rare, there are still dozens of well documented examples. Consider, for example, the sad story of a Ukrainian girl named Oxana Malaya who was raised by dogs. She was discovered in 1991. After many years of therapy, however, she has almost no language skills and as of 2010 was confined to a home for the mentally handicapped. Then there is the story of the bird boy in Volgograd, Russia.. The newspaper Pravda reported that his mother did not starve or physically mistreat him, she just never spoke to him. Since his primary companions were birds, he does not speak words like a human, but chirps and flaps his arms like a bird. He was first placed in an asylum, but later moved to a center of psychological care. Another well documented case is that of Rochom P’ngieng, also known as the “Jungle Girl”. She was first observed in northeastern Cambodia on Jan. 13, 2007. Her father identified her by a scar on her back and stated that she had disappeared in the jungle at the age of 8 while herding buffalo with her sister. She was captured, but despite the best efforts of her family to civilize her, she preferred to live like an animal and in May 2010 fled back to the jungle.

Not all “feral” children live in the jungle. Many live in the city and some even attend public schools. While they may wear clothes they have still passed through those critical formative years with little or no parental guidance. Often functionally illiterate and socially retarded, these unfortunate children gravitate to gangs. In this antisocial environment they learn the language of the streets and adopt the harmful habits of their mentors. Yes! They can be converted to Christ and forgiven of sins, but their formative years of easy learning are gone forever. There was a time when they could learn three languages by the age of three, but not any longer. There was a time, when like a tender twig, the direction of their lives could be easily changed. Unfortunately, those tender days do not last forever.

TODAY, DON'T HARDEN YOUR HEART

David wrote in the 95th Psalm: **“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted**

me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.” (Ps 95:6-11 KJV)

These words of David, as you know, were quoted by the inspired writer of Hebrews (see Hebrews 4:7 - 13). It seems that every generation faces the same danger. Just as the ancient Hebrews forgot God and hardened their hearts, we can also forget God and harden our hearts. The passage in Hebrews reminds us that the Word of God is quick and powerful. It is sharper than a two edged sword. It cannot transform those, however, who do not know it. That's why it is so important to teach the Scriptures to our children from the earliest moments of their lives. Please don't harden your hearts!

The greatest journey begins with a single step. You can take that step today! Here are suggestions for you to prayerfully consider.

1 - Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Once you have given diligence to make your own salvation sure, you will be in a much better position to teach others.

2 - Begin today to pray earnestly for wisdom. Before Samson was born, his father prayed to God for wisdom on how to raise him (Judges 13:8). If we ask in faith, nothing doubting, God has also promised to give us wisdom (Ja. 1:5)

3 - Even though Jesus was God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16), He advanced in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man (Lk. 2:52). It was His parents who made this possible. Please begin today to develop a well rounded program of development for your child!

4 - Please also closely monitor those outside influences that can adversely affect your child. Radio and television programs, for example, can infect the mind of your child as surely as a virus can affect his body.

5 - Note that most who have learned a foreign language as an adult, speak with an accent. This helps to emphasize the importance of giving proper training to your child from the earliest moments. It is not an accident that children born into a musical family have musical ability. They started their music lessons in the womb listening to the family play and sing. It is not an accident that Timothy became a great Christian worker. That's the way he was trained!

6 - Establish priorities that recognize the true importance of the child God has entrusted to you. Many children are placed in day care so that both parents can help pay for a nice house and a new car. We need to reexamine our priorities, for man does not live by bread alone.

7 - Even in single parent homes it is still possible to prioritize your child. Famous newsman, Paul Harvey, was raised in a single parent home. His police officer father was killed in the line of duty when Paul was only 2 years old. His mother chose to take in boarders so that she might spend more time with her child. With God's help we too can devise creative ways to spend time with our children.

Please prayerfully consider this information, and may the development of your child be as important to you as it is to God.

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THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN TEACHING

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-42 KJV)

THE CHURCH IS GOD’S SPECIALLY DESIGNED ENVIRONMENT FOR BELIEVERS

During the six days of creation it was imperative that God provide a proper environment for every new form of life. No living thing can survive without a proper environment. Before God created the orchid, for example, He had to create an environment suitable for it. Fish not only need water, they also need something in the water to eat. Animals too cannot survive on merely a precise mixture of nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide, etc., they need an entire eco system designed to meet all of their needs. Therefore, before man was created, God had to prepare an environment suitable for him. This is why the Lord planted a garden eastward in Eden. This garden was a paradise that included an ideal environment with the proper air, food, climate, and everything else man needed. Today, God is still creating (Jn. 5:17). This time, however, He is creating the “new man” (Eph. 4:24). Words are not adequate to properly describe the magnificence of this new creation. Isaiah predicted that it would be better than man could conceive. He wrote: **“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”** These words of Isaiah, quoted by Paul in 1 Cor. 2:9, are often thought to refer to heaven. While this may be true of heaven, in the next verse Paul wrote that this good news refers to something already revealed to believers. **“But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” (1 Cor 2:10)** The Bible is emphatic: **“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Cor 5:17)** The magnificence of this new creation is so great that it never entered into the heart of man. In the final analysis, becoming a new creature is the most important aspect of our life on earth (Gal. 6:15). As with all new life, it is essential for God to provide a proper environment for those who are born again. The environment for the new creation is the church of our Lord Jesus Christ! **“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33 KJV).**

This being true, we should not be surprised that the church began at the very time men and women were born again. This happened on the Day of Pentecost following our Lord’s resurrection. To better understand the nature of the church, let us take a closer look at the Day of Pentecost and also those first converts who were added by God to His church.

As you know, the devout Jew was required to appear before the Lord three times each year in Jerusalem (See Ex. 23:14ff., 34:23; Deut. 16:16, etc.) The three mandatory feasts were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The Feast of the Passover came first. It began on the 14th day of Abib, which was the first month of the Jewish religious calendar. The second feast was Pentecost which came 50 days later (Lev. 23:16). The word “pentecost” actually means “fifty”. This feast was also called the Feast of Harvest (Ex. 23:16); the Feast of Weeks (Ex. 34:22); and the Feast of First Fruits (Nu. 28:26). The third mandatory trip to Jerusalem was for the Feast of Tabernacles. It occurred on the 15th day of the 7th month (Lev. 23:34).

As we have said, the church began on Pentecost. On that day there were devout Jews in Jerusalem out of “every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). Those who came from places far away, like Rome or Mesopotamia, would not have had time to return home during the 50 days between Passover and Pentecost. Consequently, many of these pilgrims had been many weeks away from home. Imagine, if you can, the stress of living away from home, without any income, for such an extended period of time. When the day of Pentecost had fully come, however, something happened that changed their lives forever.

The Holy Spirit descended with the sound of a rushing mighty wind. As the spectators drew near, they were amazed to hear uneducated men from Galilee speak in their own native languages. Some assumed that those who spoke were full of new wine. Peter, however, assured them that these men were not drunk, but rather they were witnessing the fulfillment of words spoken years before by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16).

The Gospel (or good news), involves preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1 - 4). This is precisely what Peter did on that first Pentecost after our Lord's resurrection. When the people realized that Jesus, Whom they had crucified, was both Lord and Christ, they were cut to the heart and wanted to know what to do. Peter told them: **"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."** (Acts 2:38 KJV) Then we are told: **"they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls"** (Acts 2:41 KJV)

Before continuing, let us make some important observations. First, note the contrast between the giving of the Law, and the beginning of the church. According to Jewish tradition the Law was given on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the Hebrews escaped from Egypt. When the Law was given, however, 3,000 died (Ex. 32:28). When the church began, 3,000 were saved. Second, as we have already pointed out, all life comes from God. No one can be born again without God. Before God bestows this new life He determines the sincerity of our faith. It is important to remember that only God can add people to His church (Acts 2:47).

But now let us return to Acts and consider again the role of the church in teaching, and bringing new converts to maturity in Christ. The church began with 120 in the upper room (Acts 1:15) and now, on this one day, about 3,000 souls were added to their number. The very next verse points out: **"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"** (Acts 2:42 KJV) These words should not be taken lightly as they reflect God's plan to protect and grow all those who are born again.

THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The church of Pentecost did not involve beautiful buildings with stained glass windows. Nor did it depend upon the Temple of Herod that had been under construction for 46 years when Jesus began His ministry (Jn. 2:20). Remember! That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit (Jn. 3:6). Nicodemus had physical life because a physical seed was planted in the physical womb of his mother. He needed a physical environment for his physical life. Spiritual life can only come from a spiritual seed. Peter wrote that we are **"born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."** (1 Peter 1:23 KJV) That's why the essence of the church is spiritual!

The book of Hebrews deals with the dramatic difference between Judaism and Christianity. It is quite possible that some of the "Hebrews" who received this letter were among the original converts to Christ. The spiritual contrast between Judaism and Christianity is first illustrated by reference to Esau. He despised his birthright, but sought the blessing with tears (Heb. 12:17). The "birthright" involved spiritual privileges like mediating at the family altar. The "blessing" involved physical rewards like the dew of heaven, the fatness of the land, and plenty of corn and wine (Gen. 27:28 - 29). Because Esau despised his birthright he is called "profane" or "irreligious".

The next illustration in the Hebrew letter involves the receiving of the Law at Mount Sinai. As we have already pointed out, both the Law and the Church were given by God on the Day of Pentecost. Note that the giving of the Law involved physical things. Christianity is not like: **"the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so**

much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)" (Heb 12:18-21 KJV)

The essence of Christianity is spiritual. In Christ, you have not come to something physical that can be touched. **"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."** (Heb 12:22-24 KJV)

Nine different spiritual realities are listed here. When the scope and magnitude of the church are understood it almost literally takes our breath away. To be in the presence of God, an innumerable company of angels, and the others in this rich assembly of eternal beings, creates an atmosphere of awe and worship too magnificent to be described by words. The awe invariably comes over those in the presence of Deity. The disciples of Jesus, for example, were afraid of the storm, but experienced an even greater awe when they realized that Jesus Christ could still the storm by the command of His voice: Jesus said to them: **"Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"** (Mark 4:40-41 KJV). This same awe is available today for all who understand the true nature of the church of Jesus Christ.

A GREAT VARIETY OF TEACHING METHODS ARE AVAILABLE TO THE CHURCH

Some might mistakenly assume that continuing steadfastly in only four areas would limit creativity. Quite to the contrary. We have almost unlimited freedom in Christ to meet the needs of His people. God has demonstrated in His first creation that simplicity does not stifle diversity. Consider, for example, that all the colors of the rainbow come from only three primary colors, red, yellow, and blue. Consider also that the human tongue can only discern four tastes (sweet, sour, bitter, and salt). Yet, as you know, we have an unlimited variety of things to taste. Or consider that all the music we hear comes from only seven notes, with a few sharps and flats. Thus continuing in the apostle's teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers does not limit the church from being creative and meeting all the needs of God's people.

The success of the Jerusalem church is reflected in these inspired words: **"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."** (Acts 4:32-35 KJV)

Since the focus of this lesson is on the role of the church in teaching, here are some thoughts about teaching to stimulate your thinking. Writing, as you know, has been around since the time of Moses. Moses wrote down the Law of God and gave it to the priests (Deut. 31:9). Writing is a tremendous aid to teaching. A short pencil is better than a long memory. For many years the Word of God had to be copied by hand, but around A.D. 1439 John Gutenberg invented the moveable type printing press. This new technology enhanced the church's ability to teach and enabled even poor people to own a copy of the Bible. The first known instance of recording a human voice came on April 9, 1860, and this made it possible for the church to more easily help the blind and illiterate to learn. Movie projectors appeared in the late 1800s, and this added another dimension to the church's ability to teach. What we "see" greatly enhances our ability to learn. Thomas Edison patented the mimeograph in 1876 and this enabled even small churches to print lesson material. Also in 1876, Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone. This new technology enabled church leaders and teachers to communicate with those who were many miles

away. Marconi sent and received radio messages by radio in 1895. Now the church could communicate with thousands at the same time. Vladimir Kosma Zworykin invented the first television camera in 1923. This was another great leap in teaching technology and the church has used it to advance the cause of Christ. In 1958 Chester Carlson invented the Xerox machine. The satellite Telstar was launched on July 10, 1962. The first FAX machine was invented in 1966. The Apple 1 computer was invented in 1976. The first cellular telephone service was in 1979. In 1994 the U.S. Government released control of the internet and WWW was born, making communication at light speed. Today our exploding technology involves blogs, twitters, photo sharing, video sharing, data sharing, digital story telling, iphones, ipads, and a host of other developments too numerous to mention. All of this technology, and much more, is available for the church of Christ to teach the disciples of Christ. As you know, new technology is being developed every day.

In spite of all this new technology, however, one of the most practical and effective methods of teaching is still utilized by parents and teachers in the environment of the home. As Jeremiah said, we should not forget the old paths (Jer. 6:16). What we talk about when we lie down, rise up, and walk by the way still makes an indelible impression on our children. Run the numbers! Children spend more time in the home than either the public school or the church. Remember! The Bible teaches that if we **“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Prov 22:6 KJV)**

TEACHING FAITHFUL MEN

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim 2:2 KJV)

Before making further comments on this verse it needs to be pointed out that the word translated as “men” in this verse is “anthropois”. It is the basis of our English word “anthropology” and refers to both men and women. Other Greek words such as aner, and arsen refer to males as opposed to females. The point is that faithful women can also be trained so that they can teach others also.

It is interesting to note that the church is growing much faster in those parts of the world that do not depend upon modern technology. The power of each one teaching another can easily be illustrated. If each convert to Christ evangelized one person per year, the world could theoretically be won to Christ in only 33 years. For the sake of illustrating this point, let us assume that there is only one Christian on earth. In year one we go from one convert to two. In year two we go from two converts to four. The progression of evangelism then goes to 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, and on the 10th year we have 1,024 Christians. To make the math easier, let us round off the number of believers to 1,000. Continuing at this rate of evangelism, by the 20th year there would be over 1 million Christians. By the 30th year there would be over 1 billion. And by the 33rd year there would be over 8 billion believers. This, as you know, is more than the entire population of the world.

So, while the church is free to use technology, it would be a mistake to depend on it. Note the growth of the early church, and remember that they had no modern technology.

- Acts 2:41 - 3,000 added.
- Acts 4:4 - the number of men grew to about 5,000.
- Acts 5:14 - multitudes added of both men and women.
- Acts 6:1 - the number of the disciples was multiplied.
- Acts 6:7- The Word of God increased and the number of disciples was multiplied and a great company of priests became obedient to the faith.
- Acts 8:4 - they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.
- Acts 8:40 - Philip preached in all the cities from Azotus to Caesarea.
- Acts 9:31 - the church was edified and walked in the fear of the Lord.
- Acts 10:1 - 48 - the first gentiles became Christians.
- While these Scriptures can easily be multiplied, the effectiveness of evangelism in the first century

is seen by the fact that in only two years all that were in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10).

- Further, by the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, the Gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven (Col. 1:23 b).
- Someone has observed that it is more important to win a “soul winner” than it is to win a “soul”.

MAKING DISCIPLES

Learning is an integral part of Christianity. Jesus said to His eleven disciples: **“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach (make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matt 28:18-20 KJV)**

This is generally called the “Great Commission”. Jesus gave other commissions that were limited in their scope. For example, as recorded in Matthew 10:5, Jesus sent out His disciples only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He specifically forbade them to preach to Gentiles or Samaritans. In this “great” commission, however, Jesus sent His disciples to “all nations”:

There are four commands in this passage and two of them involve teaching. Note! (1) Go (2) Teach (make disciples). (3) Baptize. (4) Continue to teach. In the second command the word translated as “teach” or “make disciples” is “mathateusate”. This is the 2nd per. pl. aor. 1 imper. act of “matheuo”. At the risk of being technical, this is the only imperative in the passage. While going, baptizing, and continuing to teach may have the force of commands, they are written as participles. As far as the grammar is concerned, making disciples is set apart as more important.

The Greek word for “disciple” is “mathetes”. It comes from “manthano” which means “to learn” and is the basis of our English word “math”. The word “disciple”, of course, is also associated with “discipline”. The Dictionary of N. T. Theology states that the noun “mathetes” occurs 264 times in the N.T. (Exclusively in the Gospels and Acts) It is interesting that the “disciples”, who were commanded to go and “make disciples” never used the word “disciple” in their epistles. A similar word “manthano”, which means “to learn” is used 25 times. (6 times in the Gospels and 1 in Acts). The words “disciple” and “disciples” are found 29 times in the book of Acts. Teaching and learning are an integral part of our Lord’s plan for His people.

Note that Jesus never commanded anyone to plant or establish a church. You can “establish” a church without “making disciples”, but you cannot “make disciples” without producing a church.

We have made these observations to emphasize that Christianity must be learned. Paul put it like this: **“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ;” (Eph 4:17-20 KJV)**

When people learn about Christ and are converted, they will congregate together as God intends. It is in this environment that disciples continue to learn and grow to maturity. Peter wrote: **“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:” (1 Peter 2:1-2 KJV)**

LEARNING COMES BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER CONVERSION

Notice, in the Great Commission, that people are to be taught, or become disciples, before they are baptized. After they are baptized, the learning process continues, and they are to be taught everything

Jesus taught His disciples. Remember the four commands: go, teach, baptize, and continue to teach. God has provided spiritually gifted people to oversee this process. Paul put it like this: **“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:”** (Eph 4:11-13 KJV) Our goal, as this Scripture states, is to bring all believers to the “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”. We begin our spiritual journey as babes in Christ but our goal is complete maturity in Christ.

Becoming a disciple of Christ need not be a lengthy process. Every example of conversion given in the Scriptures indicates that new converts accepted Christ and were baptized the first time they heard about Him. Even a Gentile, like the Philippian jailer, learned enough about Jesus to be baptized in a single night (See Acts 16:22 - 34). As simple as the conversion process is, however, it is not for infants and little children. While little children can learn, even while still in their mother’s womb, they are not to be baptized before they are old enough to recognize their sins and repent. This highlights one major difference between the Old Covenant and the New. Under the Old Covenant little children had to be taught about God. Under the New you do not need to be taught about God for you must know God before participating in the covenant. Note: **“ For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. , In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”** *(Heb 8:7-13 KJV)

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD OF GOD

In lesson # 1 we reminded you that God fed His people with manna to teach us that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3). We also pointed out that manna was not easy to obtain, but required diligence every day to gather and prepare the bread God sent from heaven. This too underscores the need for diligence in our study of the Word of God. Just as each Hebrew had to gather manna every day, so Christians need to study the Bible every day.

One key to gathering manna was the fact that God caused His people to hunger. A day or two without food sharpens our desire to eat. Without hunger people might grow lazy and die of starvation. In this regard there is something dangerous and abnormal when a believer does not hunger for the Word of God. Again we remind you: **“ Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”** (1 Peter 2:1-3 KJV)

When the church began, the Bible consisted only of Genesis through Malachi. The “Apostle’s Doctrine”, however, included not only the Old Testament Scriptures, but also the teachings of Jesus. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach them “all things” and also call to their remembrance the things that Jesus had taught them (John 14:26). Further, Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). The Apostles were therefore aware that what they spoke and wrote were the very words of God. Note:

■ **“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother**

Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:15-16 KJV).

- “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” (Gal 1:8-9 KJV).
- “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal 1:11-12 KJV)
- “By revelation He made known unto me the mystery” (Eph. 3:3).
- “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (1 Thess 2:13 KJV)
- “For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:15).
- “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.” (1 Thess 5:27 KJV).
- “Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.” (2 Thess 3:12-14 KJV)
- “And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” (Col 4:16 KJV).
- “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).
- “I think also that I have the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 7:40).
- “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. (1 Cor 14:37 KJV)
- These, and other passages, show that the Apostles were aware that they were writing Scriptures. Since they were writing the “commandments of the Lord”, they expected their words to be read, taught, and obeyed. Thus, as the church continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine, they were continuing steadfastly in the doctrine of God.
- Remember! **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim 3:16-17 KJV)**
- **“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Tim 2:15 KJV)**

THE FALLING AWAY

The Scriptures are clear that there would be a falling away from the faith.

- Jesus said: **“And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.” (Matt 24:11 KJV)**
- Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” (2 Thess 2:3-4 KJV)**
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming**

themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.” (2 Cor 11:13-15 KJV)

- Paul warned the Ephesian elders: **“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:29-30 KJV)**
- Paul warned Timothy: **“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (2 Tim. 4:2-4 KJV)**
- Peter wrote: **“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;” (2 Peter 2:1-4 KJV)**
- John wrote: **“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3 KJV).**

The Bible has much more to say about a falling away from the faith, but these Scriptures should be sufficient to prepare you to accept the reality of apostasy. We should not be ignorant of Satan’s devices lest he have an advantage over us (2 Cor. 2:11).

Since the Bible is essential to Christianity, we should not be surprised that Satan would try to keep Christians from reading the Bible. As we have noted above, the inspired Apostles encouraged believers to read, to listen to, to study, and to obey the Bible. When the church in Jerusalem was scattered by persecution, they all went everywhere preaching the word. Soon, however, the privilege of preaching was removed from all believers and delegated to a special class of clergymen. Philip Schaff speaks to this point in his *HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH* (Vol. 2, page 124). *“In the apostolic church preaching and teaching were not confined to a particular class, but every convert could proclaim the gospel to unbelievers, and every Christian who had the gift could pray and teach and exhort in the congregation. The New Testament knows no spiritual aristocracy or nobility, but calls all believers ‘saints’ though many fell far short of their vocation. Nor does it recognize a special priesthood, in distinction from the people, as mediating between God and the laity. It only knows one high priest, Jesus Christ, and clearly teaches the universal priesthood, as well as universal kingship of believers. It does this in a far deeper and larger sense than the Old; in a sense too, which even to this day is not yet fully recognized. The entire body of Christians is called ‘clergy’ (kleroi) a peculiar people, a heritage of God”.*

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, but early in the Christian era translations of the Bible were made into Syriac, Latin, and Coptic. The reason for these translations is obvious. It was so the people of God could study the Word of God. Constantine became the Emperor of Rome in A.D. 312. He is said to be the first Christian emperor. In A.D. 331 he ordered that the Bible be copied and distributed throughout the empire. About 50 copies were made. It is a godly thing to distribute the Bible. It is generally believed that two of our most valuable manuscripts, (the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) were among those 50 Bibles commissioned by Constantine. Later other translations were made into Ethiopic, Gothic,

Armenian, Arabic and Slavic.

As Philip Schaff, stated however, early in the Christian era a special class of leaders arose that would ultimately forbid the people of God to have the Word of God. These men were called "clergy". The word **clergy** is not found in our English Bible. It comes from the Greek word "kleros" which is found 13 times in the N. T. Scriptures. It is translated 1 time as heritage, 2 times as inheritance, 3 times as lot, 5 times as lots, and 2 times as part. The word involves the idea of casting lots and indicates that certain people are "chosen" by God. God's chosen people, however, are not just a few leaders robed in priestly garments. Every Christian has been chosen by God and is therefore a part of God's clergy. This is made plain in 1 Pet. 5:3 where elders are told not to "Lord it over God's heritage". The word translated "heritage" is "kleros", from which we get our English word "clergy". The people being shepherded by the elders were called God's clergy. All of God's people are His chosen ones.

The word **laity** is not found in our English Bibles either. It comes from the Greek word "laos" which is found over 140 times in the N.T. Scriptures. Every time the word is found it is translated as "people". A careful reading of Scripture reveals that the Bible words kleros and laos both refer to the same group of people. The people of God are called His clergy and the clergy of God are called His people.

As the church drifted further and further away from the teachings of Scripture, powerful clergymen struggled for supremacy and ultimately one man came to be recognized as the **Pope**, or universal Father of the church. To show you the depth of apostasy experienced in the church, here is a brief resume of papal conduct as recorded by Henry H. Halley in his Bible Handbook.

Sergius III (904 - 11 A.D.) Had a mistress, Marozia. She, her mother Theodora, (wife or widow of a Roman Senator) and her sister, "filled the papal chair with their paramours and bastard sons, and turned the papal palace into a den of robbers." This is known in history as the PORNOCRACY, or RULE OF HARLOTS . . . "

John XII (955 - 63) a grandson of Marozia, was "guilty of almost every crime; violated virgins and widows, high and low; lived with his father's mistress; made the papal palace a brothel; was killed while in the act of adultery by the woman's enraged husband."

Boniface VII 984 - 5, murdered Pope John XIV, and 'maintained himself on the blood-stained papal throne by a lavish distribution of stolen money' . . . "

Benedict IX 1033 - 45, was made Pope as a boy 12 years old, through a money bargain with the powerful family that ruled Rome. 'Surpassed John XII in wickedness; committed murders and adulteries in broad daylight; robbed pilgrims on the graves of martyrs; a hideous criminal, the people drove him out of Rome' .

Remember this warning of Jesus : "**Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.**" (Matt 7:15-20 KJV).

THE APOSTATE CHURCH FORBADE THE READING OF THE BIBLE

Even though God ordained that the Bible be read by everybody, the apostate church forbade them from doing so. Pope Innocent III in A.D. 1199 believed that the Scriptures could not be understood by everyone, but only by "those who are qualified to understand them with informed intelligence". In A.D. 1229 the Council of Toulouse forbade that the "laity" "have the books of the Old or New Testament; unless anyone from motive of devotion should wish to have the Psalter or the Breviary for divine offices or the hours of the blessed Virgin; but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books."

John Wycliffe was he first man to translate the Bible into the English language. He died in A.D.

1384, but in 1415 the Council of Constance condemned him as a heretic. In 1428 his bones were exhumed, burned, and his ashes cast into the River Swift.

William Tyndale was burned at the stake on Oct. 6, 1536 for translating the Bible into the language of the common people. His last words were: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes".

On Oct. 16, 1555, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Cranmer were burned at the stake as heretics. Just before dying Latimer looked at his friend and said: "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man, for we shall this day light such a candle in England as I trust by God's grace shall never be put out".

Literally thousands of Christian people were put to death by the apostate church for the "crime" of reading the Bible.

As you probably know, there were a number of English versions of the Bible before King James authorized one: These versions include: Wycliffe's Bible (1380 - 1384); Tyndale's translation (1525); The Coverdale Bible (1535); The Great Bible (1539); Taverner's Bible (1539); The Geneva Bible (156); The Bishop's Bible (1568); The Rheims - Douai Bible (1582). While the Bishops' Bible and the Great Bible were authorized to be used by the churches, the people preferred the Geneva Bible. It was at this point, on June 30, 1604, that King James I of England authorized 54 learned men to translate an "Authorized" version. This version, known as the King James Bible, was completed in 1611.

Please seek out a church that encourages you to read, study, and put into practice the teachings of the Holy Bible, for man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

TEACHERS IN THE CHURCH

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph 4:11-16 KJV)

The words "one another" run like a beautiful thread throughout the fabric of the New Testament Christianity. We are to love one another (Jn. 13:34 - 35); edify one another (Rom. 14:19); admonish one another (Rom. 15:14); serve one another (Eph. 4:32); exhort one another (Heb. 3:13); comfort one another (1 Thess. 4:18); minister to one another (1 Pet. 4:10); etc.

While there is a sense in which all Christians are to teach and admonish one another, God has "given" that some be teachers in a special sense. The Scriptures warn that not everyone should seek to be this kind of a teacher (James 3:1 - 12). Just as small bits turn a big horse, and just as a small rudder turns a big ship, one teacher can influence large bodies of people. For this reason God will hold teachers in the church to a higher standard. There are terrible consequences for anyone who causes the little ones to stumble (Matt. 18:6). Teachers have a very important role to play in the church of Jesus Christ. In 1 Cor. 12:28 we are told that God set apostles to be first in the church. After them were prophets, and then

teachers. Godly teachers are very important and rise in the congregation like cream on milk. These teachers need to be encouraged and supported. **“Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” (Gal. 6:6).**

Those who are elders are to feed the church of God which He has purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Elders must be capable teachers (1 Tim. 3:2), and also able to exhort and convince the gainsayers (Tit. 1:9). While all elders are teachers, all teachers need not be elders. Aged women, for example, are commanded to teach the young women (Tit. 2:3 - 5). You do not have to be an elder in order to be a teacher.

As we have already mentioned, teachers have great freedom to use a wide variety of tools and techniques to help believers obtain maturity in Christ. One technique of ancient origin, for example, is to adorn the message with music. Just as the Jewish people learned from their Psalms, Christians can also sing and admonish one another with Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16).

A PERSONAL CHALLENGE

No man knows the number of stars in the heavens. God, however, not only knows the number of the stars, He has given every star a name (Ps. 147:4). God’s understanding is infinite. Therefore, we can be confident that God knows your name and is aware that you are reading these words. Realizing this makes your response to this teaching significant beyond words. God knows you! He has numbered the hairs on your head. Not one sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge. (Matt. 10:29 - 31). God therefore knows every problem in your life, and He also knows every problem in your church. With His help you can be a problem solver. With the help of God you can solve problems in the church, and also in your own personal life. Will you let Him help you?

Jesus said: **“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” (Rev 3:20 KJV).** These words were not spoken to alien sinners, but to lukewarm Christians. Jesus wants to help you be an overcomer so you can sit with Him on His throne. Someone has observed that we cannot by our own will overcome our own will. We need help! Jesus has promised to provide that help if only you will let Him in. Even now He is standing at the door of your heart waiting for an invitation.

Remember! Our struggle is not against flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12). Anyone who bleeds is not the enemy! Those who appear to be enemies are merely tools manipulated by principalities and powers in the heavenly places. That’s why the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:4). With God’s help we will not be overcome by evil, but will overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). All the resources of heaven are on your side, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s. (1 Cor. 3:22 - 23).

Our challenge need not be complicated. Jesus reduced hundreds of laws, rules, and regulations to only two commandments. He said: **“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matt 22:37-40 KJV)**

Challenge # 1 is to love God in the proper way. He is a jealous God and will not be trifled with. When you truly love Him you will keep His commandments. You will take up your cross daily and do His will. You will read His word, attend His church, and pray to Him without ceasing. Whatever you do in word or deed, you will seek to do in His name.

Challenge # 2 is to love your neighbor as yourself. Love works no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. When you love your neighbor as yourself you will want that person to be saved

and you will do whatever is necessary to meet his needs. Remember that the fruit of the Spirit is love. When we allow the Spirit of Christ to dominate our lives you will follow after the things that make for peace and the things that will build up your brothers in Christ.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. And on these two commandments can be everything you need to make your life, and your church everything that God wants it to be.

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” (Acts 20:32 KJV)
“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” (Jude 24 - 25 KJV)

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THE ROLE OF THE FATHER IN TEACHING

“And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven . . . “ Luke 11:1-2 KJV)

These words of Jesus must have shocked His disciples. They never thought of God as a personal father. The Hebrew word for father is “ab”. It occurs 1,195 times in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is, however, only used 15 times in a religious sense. God was considered the Father of the nation as a whole (Deut. 32:6), and the Father of the king as in 1 Chron. 17:13. Not one of these references, however, indicated that the Hebrews ever saw themselves as a child of God or having a close personal relationship with Him. Moses might speak with God face to face, but everyone else kept their distance. Anyone who even touched the mountain of God, whether man or beast, was stoned or shot through with arrows (Ex. 19:13). The Hebrews considered God to be so high and lifted up that they would not even attempt to pronounce His name for fear that they might be taking it in vain.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, however, He taught them to pray to God like He was their father. Jesus even appealed to their own personal experience by saying: **“If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:11-13 KJV)**

We should not be surprised by the teachings of Jesus, for as you know, Christianity and Judaism are radically different. Though Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism, they still cannot be combined. Like new wine in old skins, or new cloth in an old garment, the two are not compatible. (Matt. 9:16- 17). While Jewish people would never dream of entering the Holy of Holies, Christians enter boldly into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19) While the devout Jew would not dare to pronounce the name of God, Christians are emboldened by the Holy Spirit to call Him “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The word “Abba” is a term of endearment like “Daddy”. The Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. 1, p. 216, offers this stunning insight into Judaism by stating: *“Nowhere in the entire wealth of devotional literature produced by ancient Judaism do we find ‘abba’ being used as a way of addressing God”.*

It is the purpose of this lesson to show that fathers have a distinct and important role in teaching their children. Unfortunately, there are some fathers who are abusive, and others who have totally abandoned their children. Children of such fathers have difficulty understanding God. It is the duty and responsibility of every father, however, to repent of his sins and to try and be as much like God as possible.

TEACHING IN EDEN

God, our Heavenly Father, was the original teacher. He created Adam in the Garden and then taught him. The chronology of creation is important. Adam was first formed, and then Eve (1 Tim. 2:13). The man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man (1 Cor. 11:9). Notice that God created Adam and placed him in the Garden to dress and keep it before Eve was created (Gen. 2:15). God also instructed Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil before Eve was created (Gen. 2:17). Next, God brought the beasts of the field and the birds of the air to Adam to see what he would call them. Eve was not present at this time and therefore whatever Adam called these creatures, that was their name (Gen. 2:19). There is no record that

God ever spoke directly to Eve, thus Adam was her teacher. It was Adam who explained to Eve how to dress and keep the garden. It was Adam who taught his wife the names of the animals and birds. It was Adam who warned Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field. The Scriptures are explicit, Adam was not deceived (1 Tim. 2:14). The wicked one therefore wisely avoided Adam and went to his wife. He suggested to her that Adam had not accurately represented the teaching of God, no matter what her husband said. The serpent promised her that she would not die by eating the forbidden fruit. The devil, of course, is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Further, he tempted her in three different ways. The tree was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desired to make one wise (Gen. 3:6). These same three temptations, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are characteristic of all that is in the world (1 Jn. 2:16). These are also the same three temptations that Jesus faced in wilderness (Matt. 4:1 - 11).

The point is that just as God taught Adam, Adam taught his wife and children. Nobody on earth was better qualified to teach than Adam. Thus the role of the father as a teacher dates back to the very beginning of time!

LAMECH AND ENOCH

When Lamech was alive, he was perhaps the most wicked man on earth. He was the first man with two wives. He was also a murderer who bragged about killing a young man who wounded him (Gen. 4:23). Enoch, by contrast, was the most righteous man on earth at the time. By faith he was translated that he did not see death (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5). Both Lamech and Enoch were in the seventh generation from Adam.

What was the difference between these two men? One major difference was their fathers! Lamech came from the family of Cain, and Enoch came from the family of Seth. Both Cain and Seth were fathers, but the Bible is careful to list their families in two separate genealogies. The genealogy of Cain is in Gen. 4:16 - 24 and the genealogy of Seth in Gen. 5:3 - 24. One family was bad, and the other was good.

First, let us consider Cain and his family. Cain, as you know, killed Abel, his brother. We are specifically told in Scripture to love one another and to not be like Cain (1 John 3:11 - 12). God cursed Cain for his crime in two ways. First, the ground would not produce good crops for him. Second, he was condemned to be a fugitive and a vagabond, wandering about the earth (Gen. 4:12). Cain feared that everyone who recognized him would kill him, but God promised to protect him. God even placed a mark upon Cain to ensure that no one would harm him (Gen. 4:15).

Cain, however, did not trust God to protect him and built a city to protect himself. The circumstances surrounding this event deserve close scrutiny. The Hebrew word for "city" is "aw-yar". It comes from the root "oor" which means to "open the eyes". Hence Strong in his exhaustive concordance defines city as a "place guarded by waking or watch". Cain was obviously physically strong and dominating as he was able to kill his brother. Now he used his physical strength to force others to watch for him as he slept. As time progressed cities built walls with watchmen to warn of danger. The book of Revelation reveals that God hates the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6). The original proponent of this doctrine might have been Cain himself. The word comes from "nikao" which means "conquer" and "laos" which means "people". This is precisely what Cain did, and God is not happy when strong men conquer the weak.

The first city, built by Cain, was an act of rebellion against God. Cain did not trust God to protect him and refused to be a vagabond. That's why he built the city and named it after his firstborn son (Gen. 4:17). The rebellious nature of Cain was passed to his firstborn son Enoch, and then to his grandson Irad. The Bible teaches that the descendants of Cain after Irad were Mehujael, Methusael, and then Lamech. Note that Jabal, Jubal and Tubalcain were fathers who

passed on their lifestyles to their children. The sons of Jabal lived in tents and cared for livestock as did their father. The sons of Jubal became musicians like their father. And the sons of Tubalcain worked in copper and iron as did their father (Gen. 4:20 - 22). It would be natural, therefore, for the rebellious nature of Cain to be passed on from one generation to another. This helps us to understand why Lamech was the way he was. The seven generations to Lamech are Adam, Cain, Enoch, Irad, Mehugael, Methusael, and Lamech.

After Abel was killed, God gave Adam and Eve another son to take his place. That son was named Seth. The firstborn son of Seth was Enos and in those days men began to call upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26). Note the contrast! Cain and his firstborn son were known for rebellion against God, and Seth and his firstborn son were known for calling upon the name of the Lord. The rebellious influence of Cain, and the righteous influence of Seth, both influenced their families for many generations. Jude 14 calls Enoch the seventh from Adam, but for your convenience here are the seven generations of Enoch: Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, and Enoch.

Men, it does make a difference what kind of a father you are. For the sake of your precious children you must endeavor to be a good father like Seth. The example you set will also affect your descendants for many generations to come! Remember! Through Abraham all nations on earth were blessed (Gen. 12:3)

THE SONS OF GOD AND THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN

“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose” (Gen 6:1-2 KJV)

While not all would agree, it seems that the “sons of God” were good men from the family of Seth, and the “daughters of men” were wicked women from the family of Cain. Regardless of what view you take of this verse, we know that it is not wise for good men to marry bad women. Whatever this verse refers to, it was a prelude to disastrous times on earth. As families degenerated the world ultimately became so bad that every imagination of the thoughts of men’s hearts was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). That’s when God determined to destroy the earth with a flood. Fathers, too, can learn from this, for believers, as you know, are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). To do so would be like putting idols in the temple of the Living God. The fact that Ahab, for example, married the wicked Jezebel was not good. Her evil influence “helped” Ahab to be worse than all who were before him (1 Ki. 16:30). Such was the case in the days of Noah. When the sons of God married the daughters of men it did not bode well for the future. The deterioration of the family precedes the deterioration of society.;

Fortunately, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He somehow maintained a right relationship with God in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation. Moreover, he also raised a godly family in spite of the evil society around him. Obviously, this was why God chose him to survive the flood and start a new race. Noah is indeed a good example for all fathers.

THE GOOD EXAMPLE OF NOAH

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” (Heb 11:7 KJV).

Noah reminds us that it is possible for a godly father to stand firm in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation. In spite of all the pressures to do wrong, Noah did what was right. No matter how much trouble it was, he obeyed God and prepared an ark to save his family. THIS PROVIDES A CHALLENGE FOR EVERY FATHER TODAY. IF NOAH PREPARED AN ARK TO SAVE HIS FAMILY, WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO TO SAVE YOUR FAMILY?

The ark was not easy to build. It was 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It had three stories, a window, and was coated within and without with pitch (Gen. 6:13 - 17). Conventional wisdom indicates that it took Noah 120 years to complete the ark (Gen. 6:3). Obviously, preparing the ark was not easy, but it was worth it. Noah saved his family in the ark he prepared! The ark not only had to accommodate Noah's family, but also thousands of birds, and animals. It also had to have sufficient room for food to last for over a year. Further, it had to be of sufficient strength to survive the stress and hydraulic pressures of huge waves and stormy seas. Noah only had one chance to get it right. If the ark sank, all would be lost. Fortunately, he did a good job in preparing the ark. The animals and birds survived as seed to populate the renewed earth. Noah's family also survived to bring forth a new generation of people. The Scriptures are explicit - only eight people survived the flood (1 Pet. 3:20). These eight persons were: Noah and his wife; their three sons and their wives (Gen. 7:13). The reason these eight people survived is because Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his house.

A careful reading of the text reveals that they were in the ark for one year and 17 days. The chronology of time in the ark is as follows:

- They went into the ark 7 days before it began to rain (Gen. 7:4, 10).
- The rain began on the 2nd month, and the 17th day of Noah's 600th year (Gen. 7:11).
- It rained for 40 days (Gen. 7:12).
- The waters prevailed upon the earth for 150 days (Gen. 7:24; 8:3).
- The ark came to rest on the 17th day of the 7th month (Gen. 8:4).
- They removed the covering of the ark during the 1st month of Noah's 601st year (Gen. 8:13).
- They went out of the ark on the 27th day of the 2nd month (Gen. 8:14 - 19).
- The ark floated for 5 months, and rested on the mountain for 7 months. Thus their total time in the ark was one year and 17 days.

Fathers, please ponder the trouble Noah went through to save his family. If Noah could prepare an ark to save his family, certainly no effort is too great to save yours. Saving the family ought to be a primary focus for every father.

As we have said before, there is something worse than dying and going to hell. It is dying and going to hell, and then discovering that you brought your children with you!

THE BAD EXAMPLE OF ELI

“And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor

offering for ever.” (1 Sam 3:11-14 KJV)

We have just studied the good example of Noah as a father, now let us consider the bad example of Eli. Here is a brief summary of his life, and his sons. Eli was the priest at Shiloh at the time Samuel was born. He judged Israel 40 years (1 Sam. 4:18). His sons were children of Belial and did not know the Lord (1 Sam. 2:12). Their sins were very great before the Lord and caused men to abhor the offering of the Lord (1 Sam. 2:17). They even laid with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle (1 Sam. 2:22). Eli knew the sinful nature of his sons but did nothing to restrain them. At the time his sons were killed in battle he was old and heavy and his eyes were dim. When he heard that his sons had been killed and the ark captured, he fell over backwards, broke his neck, and died (1 Sam. 4:18).

We mention Eli in the context of fatherhood because God expected him to correct and restrain their evil activities. Here is a sampling of Biblical wisdom for fathers from the book of Proverbs.

- **“In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding” (Prov 10:13 KJV)**
- **“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Prov 13:24 KJV).**
- **“Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Prov 22:15 KJV).**
- **“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Prov 23:13-14 KJV).**
- **“A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back” (Prov 26:3 KJV).**

Perhaps even more meaningful for fathers is this statement from Proverbs about the love of God: **“My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Prov 3:11-12 KJV).**

This quote, as you know, is found in Hebrews. Hebrews adds the following: **“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb 12:8-11 KJV).**

If Eli had been a good father, he would have restrained his sons! The leadership of fathers, however, involves far more than merely using a rod upon a disobedient child. Good fathers lead by example. Just as Timothy learned the Scriptures from the time he was a “brephos”, our children can also learn the Scriptures . Unborn infants, and newborn babies, are not taught in formal classes. They learn by hearing the conversations around them. If fathers speak about the Bible,

their children will learn the Bible. Peter wrote: **“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”** (1 Peter 4:10-11 KJV). These inspired words should be of special interest to all fathers.

THE AGE OF THE PATRIARCHS

The word “patriarch” comes from the Greek word “pater” which means “father” and the word “archein” which means “to rule”. The word literally refers to the rule of fathers. Just as God spoke to Adam, He also spoke to Job, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus the patriarchs were prophets who heard from God and spoke for God (Gen. 6:13). They were also, however, priests who built altars and offered sacrifices for the whole family (Job 1:5). The patriarchs were also kings who had the power of life and death over members of their own family (Gen. 22:2).

When the patriarch died, his oldest son assumed his position. The right of the “firstborn” therefore had a very important religious significance. Esau, as you know, was the firstborn son of Isaac. When Isaac died he was supposed to assume the religious responsibilities of his father. Since Esau despised his birthright he is labeled in Scripture as “profane” or “irreligious” (Heb. 12:16). While Esau despised his “birthright” he greatly desired his father’s “blessing”. The simple explanation of this fact is that the “birthright”: involved religious responsibilities and the “blessing” involved earthly power and wealth.

The spiritual leadership of fathers is not limited to the Age of the Patriarchs. It is an integral part of God’s plan for all time. Even today the standard for leaders in the church requires men to also be leaders in their family. Among other things, men who are spiritual leaders must be:

- Apt to teach (1 Tim. 3:2)
- One who rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (1 Tim. 3:4), for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? (1 Tim. 3:5)
- One whose children are faithful and not accused of riot or unruly (Tit. 1:6).
- One who is capable of exhorting and refuting those who oppose the truth (Tit. 1:9).
- These men must also demonstrate their ability as leaders and teachers by the way they lead and teach their own families.

EVERY FATHER NEEDS TO BE THE SPIRITUAL LEADER OF HIS FAMILY! When we assume this God given position we become spiritual role models to lead our entire family to serve God. Notice how Joshua was the spiritual leader of his family: **“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”** (Josh 24:15 KJV).

Notice that Joshua not only spoke for himself, but for his whole household. We repeat: **EVERY FATHER NEEDS TO BE THE SPIRITUAL LEADER OF HIS FAMILY!** Remember, when children honor their fathers and mothers, it bodes well for the future. It is the first commandment with promise. The promise is that by honoring parents the Hebrews would live long in the land that God had promised (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:2).

FATHERS AS PROTECTORS AND PROVIDERS

- As we have already pointed out, Noah was directly responsible for the salvation of his family.
- When Lot was taken captive by kings from the east it was Abram who came to his rescue (Gen. 14:14 - 16).
- When Jacob fled with his wives, their father Laban was ready to fight for their return (Gen. 31:22 ff.)
- When the Amalekites kidnaped the family of David he defeated them and rescued all of his loved ones (1 Sam. 30:1 ff.)
- If a damsel was mistreated by her husband, her father would take her case to the elders of the city (Deut. 22:15 - 18).
- David said: **“I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Ps. 37:25).**
- When a little boy was possessed by an evil spirit his father brought him to Jesus. Our hearts are touched when the father cried out with tears on behalf of his son (Mk. 9:14 - 29).
- Paul taught that fathers have a greater love than ten thousand instructors (1 Cor. 4:15).
- The role of the father as a provider is so significant that the Scriptures teach: **“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” (1 Tim 5:8 KJV)**

Because fathers were so important as protectors and providers, the fatherless and widows became symbols of vulnerability and need. Here are a few samples that are representative of many.

- **“Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child” (Ex 22:22 KJV).**
- **“Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge” (Deut 24:17 KJV).**
- **“Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isa 1:17 KJV)**
- **“And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.” (Zech 7:10 KJV)**
- **“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27 KJV)**
- Etc.

Queen Esther is a beautiful example of an orphan who became successful. We must hasten to add, however, that even though her father was dead, her uncle Mordecai raised her as his own (Esther 2:7). It was Mordecai, therefore, who provided food and protection for Esther that she might enjoy good health and develop the social skills necessary to be queen. It was his counsel and advice that helped her through the difficult vetting process and ultimately resulted in saving Jewish people from extinction.

Every father ought to be the protector and provider for his family!

SHINING AS LIGHTS

“Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and

harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;” (Phil 2:14-15 KJV)

We know that Godly people have always been in the minority. Few, that is only eight souls were saved in the days of Noah (1 Pet. 3:20). The way that leads to life is straight and narrow and only a few will find it (Matt. 7:14). Many are called but few chosen (Matt. 22:14). Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant shall be saved (Rom. 9:27). Paul warned that in the last days these horrible conditions would only grow worse (2 Tim. 3:1 - 5). Fathers, we must face the painful fact that we will probably have to stand alone. Most will go with the crowd and reject the call of God upon their lives. When we obey God, however, and dare to do His will, we will shine like lights in the world. Those who love the light will notice what we are doing and take courage from our example.

If you are willing to deny yourself and take up your cross daily, here are some inspired instructions from the Father of Lights with whom there is no variableness or shadow cast by turning (Ja. 1:17).

- First, love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk. 12:30). This is the most important command in all the Bible.
- The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth looking for those whose heart is perfect toward Him (2 Chron. 16:9). When you search for God with your whole heart you will find Him (Jer. 29:13).
- Fathers, when you love God in the proper way, you will love your wife as Christ does the church and be willing to give yourself for her (Eph. 5:25). This is one of the most important lessons you can teach your children!
- As we have already mentioned, it is important that fathers assume their proper role as spiritual leaders of the family. This too is an important lesson for all children. It will help young boys to someday be spiritual leaders in their own family. It will also help young girls to learn how to be helpers suitable to their own husbands (Gen. 2:20; Eph. 5:24).
- Once your heart is properly devoted to God, your speech will reveal that commitment. Remember! Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34). Every moment with father provides a teaching opportunity for children. That’s why we need to talk diligently about spiritual truth when we sit down, walk by the way, lie down, or rise up (Deut. 6:7).
- In addition to our daily devotions and spiritual conversations, we must also not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). Our efforts as fathers are enhanced and magnified by the church.
- We must remember that the crown of life is not presented to those who start the race, but rather to those who finish it (Rev. 2:10).
- Let us focus on these inspired words of Paul: **“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor 9:24-27 KJV)**

FATHERS! WHEN WE DO WHAT GOD WANTS US TO DO, WE WILL INDEED SHINE LIKE LIGHTS IN A DARKENED WORLD!

THE ROLE OF THE MOTHER IN TEACHING

“The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother.” (Prov 29:15)

The influence of a mother is indeed proverbial. Her strictness and discipline, though sometimes resented by children, are seldom resented by adults. The older we get the more we understand that the rod of correction was a manifestation of our mother’s love. Whom the Lord loves He chastens (Heb. 12:6), and our mothers disciplined us for the same reason. They loved us! Even though our mothers disciplined us, the love we have for our mothers is legendary. Here is an example of an unknown author and a beautiful tribute he wrote about his mother. He speaks for many when he writes:

MY MOTHER

She carried me under her heart and loved me before I was born.
She took God’s hand in hers and walked through the valley of shadows that I might live.
She bathed me when I was helpless and clothed me when I was naked.
She fed me when I was hungry and rocked me to sleep when I was weary.
She sang to me with the voice of an angel and held my hand when I learned to walk.
She suffered with my sorrow, and laughed with my joy.
She glowed with my triumph, and while I knelt by her side she taught my lips to pray.
Through all the days of my youth she gave me strength for my weakness,
courage for my despair and hope to fill my hopeless heart.
She was loyal when others failed.
She was true when tried by fire.
She was my friend when my other friends were gone.
She prayed for me through all the days,
whether flooded with sunshine or saddened by shadows.
Though we lay down our lives for her, we can never pay the debt we owe to our mother!

We can say emphatically that no one has more influence on a child than the mother. This is why it is such a disgrace when a mother does not care for her children!

Note how many times the Bible associates a king with the name of his mother.

- Zeruah - the mother of king Jeroboam (1 Ki. 11:26).
- Naamah - the mother of king Rehoboam (1 Ki. 14:21).
- Maacha - the mother of king Abijam (1 Ki. 15:10).
- Azubah - the mother of king Jehoshaphat (1 Ki. 22:42).
- Athaliah - the mother of king Ahaziah (2 Ki. 8:26).
- Zibiah - the mother of Jehoash (2 Ki. 12:1).
- Jehoaddan - the mother of king Amaziah (2 Ki. 14:2).
- Jecholiah - the mother of king Azariah (2 Ki. 15:2).
- Jerusha - the mother of king Jotham (2 Ki. 15:33).
- Abi - the mother of king Hezekiah (2 Ki. 18:2).
- Hephzibah - the mother of king Manasseh (2 Ki. 21:1).
- Meshullemeth - the mother of King Amon (2 Ki. 21:19).
- Jedidah - the mother of king Josiah (2 Ki. 22:1).

- Hamutal - the mother of king Jehoahaz (2 Ki.; 23:31).
- Zebudah - the mother of king Jehoiakim (2 Ki. 23:36).
- Nehushta - the mother of king Jehoichin - (2 Ki. 24:8).
- Hamutal - the mother of king Zedekiah (2 Ki. 24:18).

This association of mothers with their children is by no means accidental. Everyone knows that mothers have a profound and lasting influence upon their children. The above references from the Bible only state what is obvious. When the Scriptures introduce a king we find out immediately whether he was good or bad. At the same time we are given the assessment of his life we are also given his mother's name. In this way the Bible associates the mother with the honor or shame of her son. For example, king Asa did what was right (1 Ki. 15:11) and king Ahaziah did evil (2 Ki. 8:27). For either good or bad, each mother has a part to play in the development of her children.

The fact that God associates a mother with the behavior of her children is a sobering fact. It is worthy of serious consideration. May God help every mother to assume the serious responsibility given to her by God.

LIFE IN THE WOMB

Dear mother, the following information regarding life in the womb has been condensed from the booklet *"When You Were Formed in Secret"* by Gary Bergel and Dr. C. Everett Koop. Perhaps this information will help you to appreciate even more the miracle of life that God placed within you. This information, of course, is only a brief overview of the beautiful and profound experience of pregnancy.

Day 1 - As we pointed out in the previous lesson, when the egg and sperm unite a new life is formed. The unique identity of this new baby is determined from day one. Like letters of a divine alphabet the genes and chromosomes of both parents combine and determine whether the baby will be a boy or a girl. Further, every other aspect of the physical body, and its future development, is written by God like a microscopic blueprint in the genetic code of the unborn baby. This divine blueprint not only includes the parts of the body we can see, like the facial features, color of the eyes, etc. but it also includes building instructions for those parts of the body we cannot see. Imagine, for example, how difficult it would be for a human engineer to design a circulatory system with arteries that relax when the heart beats and contract in between beats. The fact that the body has a pulse ensures a constant and reliable flow of blood to the tiniest arteries and veins in the extremities of our bodies. Even though the baby develops and grows, its unique genetic coding never changes. The DNA of an unborn child remains the same even if it lives to be as old as Methuselah.

Week 1 - During the first 3 to 4 days of life the fertilized egg journeys down the fallopian tube and enters the womb. At the end of 7 days this living "child", still no bigger than a dot, takes root on the soft wall of the uterus.

Week 2 - As the cells of the new baby continue to grow they form a liquid filled bubble called the "amnion". This is a Greek term meaning "little lamb".

Weeks 3 & 4 - By the end of the 3rd week the spinal column and nervous system are already

forming.

Month 2 - During this period, in addition to continued development in every part of the body, the unique facial features of the new baby now form with clarity.

Month 3 - The unborn child has been able to experience pain since the 6th week, but now research has proven that it can be taught conditioned responses. The new baby, still in the womb, during the third month sleeps and wakes and “breathes” amniotic fluid.

Month 4 - By now the new baby is 8 - 10 inches long and the mother can feel the baby’s movements.

Months 5 & 6 - At this point in the pregnancy the baby knows to curl up when the mother is moving, and stretch out when she is resting. God has also provided a way to protect the tender skin of the new infant from fetal waters by covering it with a white greasy substance called vernix. This is the Latin word for varnish.

Months 7 - 9 - The unborn child can now use the four senses of vision, hearing, taste, and touch. It can also relate to the moods and emotions of the mother. Approximately one week before birth the baby stops growing and drops, usually head downward, into the pelvic area.

As we have already pointed out, children experience life in the womb from the moment of conception. While a full term pregnancy lasts approximately 9 months, it is not uncommon for babies to be born prematurely. With new advances in medical science, premature babies are surviving at increasingly earlier ages. For example, Amilia Sonja Taylor was born in Florida Oct. 24, 2006. She had been in the womb only 21 weeks and 6 days. At the time of her birth she weighed only 10 oz.

If premature babies can survive at an early age, it is reasonable to assume that they can also learn at an early age. Professor Peter Hepper of the School of Psychology at the Queen’s University of Belfast has made extensive studies regarding prenatal learning. He found that unborn babies can be influenced by many factors in the life of the mother, including the TV programs being watched. Psychologists Anthony J. DeCasper and William P. Fifer have demonstrated that unborn babies can recognize their mother’s voice. Dr. Makoto Shichida concludes that learning takes place in the “right brain” during gestation. The “right brain” he states, is the center for extra sensory perception. He believes the “left brain” does not become dominant until the age of 6 or 7 years. Lisa Jarrett, President of BabyPlus Prenatal, states that brain waves in an unborn infant are detectable from 13 - 16 weeks. For Bible believers, however, such expert witnesses are not necessary. The success of Lois and Eunice in training Timothy while he was a brephos is all the evidence we need.

FIRST MOMENTS

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity

or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.” (Ezek 16:3-5)

The birth of Jerusalem was not a happy occasion. Ezekiel described her as a child abandoned by her mother. Her cord was not cut, she was not washed, rubbed with salt, or wrapped in cloth. Her first moments were terrible! God, however, passed by and found her wallowing in her own blood. It was God Who washed and anointed her and caused her to live. It was God Who clothed her with the finest raiment. Even though she was abandoned at birth, she grew up to be a beautiful woman. Unfortunately, she used her beauty to become a prostitute. (Ezek. 16:6 - 19). How sad! In this instance the sorrow of her birth continued throughout her life. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Ezekiel connects the apostasy of Israel as an adult, with her abandonment as a baby. A child's first moments are indeed important. As Solomon said, a child left to itself is indeed a disgrace to its mother.

It is possible, as you know, for little children to overcome the negative influence of an ungodly family. Abraham came from a family of idolaters (Josh. 24:2). Noah overcame the influence of a wicked world and found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). Rahab and Ruth overcame their pagan roots to claim places of honor in the family of Jesus. Optimism is an essential ingredient in evangelism. Those who serve the Lord rejoice in the fact that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). We know by experience that God has the power to transform the most wicked sinners and will ultimately reward all those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). Everyone who follows Christ has been called out of darkness into light. Because the whole world lies in wickedness (1 Jn. 5:19), it is quite common for converts to renounce family ties and traditions in order to follow Christ. Jesus Himself warned : **“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.” (Matt 10:34-38 KJV)**

It is more common, however, for godly leaders, like Timothy, to reflect the faith of their family. While the Bible is filled with examples of godly families with godly children, let us focus on Moses and his mother. Her godly influence had a profound influence on her son. It even caused Moses to place more value on a right relationship with God than all the treasures of Egypt. Here is a brief review of this beautiful story.

- The Pharaoh of Egypt feared the Hebrews and ordered that all their little boy babies be put to death (Ex. 1:16).
- His parents were not afraid of the king's command and hid baby Moses for three months (Ex. 2:2; Heb. 11:23).
- His mother put baby Moses in a basket and set him afloat in the Nile River. She wisely chose to put her precious baby in the part of the river where the Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe (Ex. 2:2 - 6).
- The mother apparently also instructed the older sister of Moses to watch from a distance and care for him (Ex. 2:4).
- The Pharaoh's daughter felt sorry for baby Moses and his sister had the courage to arrange for the mother of Moses to take care of him (Ex. 2:7 - 9).

- After Moses was weaned he went to live with the Pharaoh's daughter and was raised as her son (Ex. 2:10).

Please note that the few formative years that Moses spent with his mother were decisive in providing direction for his life. The Bible is quite clear: **“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”** (Heb 11:24-27 KJV)

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE INFLUENCE OF HIS MOTHER DID MORE TO DIRECT THE LIFE OF MOSES THAN ALL THE WISDOM OF THE EGYPTIANS (ACTS 7:22).

Yes mothers! A child left to itself is indeed a disgrace to its mother. First moments are profoundly important and significant!

God designed virtually all creatures to require parental assistance, but none is more vulnerable than the human infant. Many creatures can survive on their own after only a few weeks. Baby Jesus, by contrast, needed the help and guidance of His earthly parents for many years. The parents of Jesus were so poor they could not even afford to offer a lamb as a sacrifice (Lev. 12:8; Lk. 2:24). In spite of their poverty, however, they provided Jesus with everything He needed to develop in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man (Lk.2:52). It is also worthy of note that Jesus was obedient to His parents (Lk. 2:51). Jesus did not leave home until He was about 30 years of age (Lk.3:23).

Mothers need to remember that God chose Joseph and Mary in spite of the fact that they were poor. How sad it would have been if Mary had left baby Jesus with a baby sitter so she could get a job and make more money.

DON'T BE LIKE THE OSTRICH

Job pointed out that God can teach us by means of animals, birds and fish. He wrote: **“But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.”** (Job 12:7-10)

As you know, God's creation involves parental responsibility. If all mothers neglected their babies, their little ones would die and their species become extinct. Surely mothers can learn something from animals, birds, and fish. Most examples from these lower creatures are positive. Jesus, for example, made reference to a hen gathering her chicks under her wings (Matt. 23:37). Mother hens are a good example and every mother needs to shelter and protect her children. Mother bears are also good examples. A bear robbed of her cubs is a proverbial way of describing anger and danger (2 Sam. 17:8; Prov. 17:12; Hosea 18:3). Every mother should be like the bear and fight for the safety and well being of her children. The mother lion is also a good example and teaches her young ones to hunt (Ez. 19:1 - 3). Human mothers can also learn from the lion and

teach their children how to survive in a hostile world. The mother eagle stirs up her nest and teaches her little ones to fly (Deut. 32:11). There also comes a time when human mothers need to encourage their children to leave the nest and fend for themselves. It is abnormal for any mother to abandon her little ones. The Philistines knew this and utilized this principle to determine if Jehovah was responsible for the curses they experienced (1 Sam. 6:7 - 12). As we have already pointed out several times, a child left to itself is a disgrace to its mother.

There is at least one creature, however, that is an exception. God created the ostrich to be a bad mother. For some reason, God deliberately deprived the ostrich of wisdom and understanding. Note: **“The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with the pinions and feathers of the stork. She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in beginning vain, for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense. Yet when she spreads her feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider.” (Job 39:13-18)** When the mothers in Israel became irresponsible the Scriptures accused them of behaving like an ostrich. Note: **“Even jackals offer their breasts to nurse their young, but my people have become heartless like ostriches in the desert.” (Lam 4:3)**

Job was still right about learning from animals, birds, and fish. Usually the lesson is positive, but we can even learn from the negative life style of the ostrich. Her bad example and lack of wisdom, can help modern mothers to be more diligent in their parental responsibilities.

CONFORMATION OR TRANSFORMATION

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Rom 12:2 KJV)

The Bible word translated as “transformed” is quite familiar. It is the Greek word “metamorphoo” which is transliterated into English as “metamorphosis”. It literally means to be changed into another form. One familiar example of metamorphosis is the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. The word is used 4 times in Scripture. Two times it refers to what happened to Jesus on the Mount of Transformation (Matt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2). Two times it refers to the transformation of believers (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Understanding the difference between “conformation” and “transformation” is important for parents. It is common for mothers to restrain little children with barriers. Little children can be placed in a play pen to keep them in one place, and older children can be restricted by fences. Soon, however, our children learn how to climb over these barriers. Many concerned parents erect barriers that are higher and more difficult to overcome.

It is possible, however, for children to be restrained without fences. It is possible for children to learn obedience so that physical barriers and restraints are not necessary. Jesus was the Good Shepherd. His sheep heard his voice and followed Him (Jn. 10:27). The Good Shepherd can care for sheep without fences, and good parents can do the same. Jesus goes before the sheep and calls them by name. They obey Him because He has trained them and they recognize

His voice. The obedience of animals to a shepherd is not limited to stories from the Bible, it is common in many countries of the world. Such obedience, however, does not happen by accident. It is the result of much effort and intense training. Often those who own animals let them graze along the highway. Trained animals, of course, know to stay out of the traffic. Trained animals obey instructions and do not eat from fields and gardens that belong to others. Even the mighty elephant can be trained to obey instructions. **IF ANIMALS CAN BE TRAINED TO OBEY, CERTAINLY OUR CHILDREN CAN ALSO BE TRAINED TO OBEY!**

Fortunately, God works with parents in the process of transforming children. Just as the rain and snow come down from heaven and cause the earth to bud and flourish, so also the Word of God is alive and active and will accomplish His purpose (Is. 55:10 - 11). Lois and Eunice taught Timothy the Word of God and it made him wise unto salvation. Remember! **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim 3:16-17 KJV)**

COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM AND BE SEPARATE

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor 6:17-18 KJV)

Mothers! ~ If you want to raise godly children it will require radical action on your part. You cannot allow others to assume your responsibility. You cannot permit ungodly people to influence the values of the children God has entrusted to you. The city of Corinth, like many modern cities, was filled with immorality. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, was the patron saint of Athens. People went there to hear or tell some new thing. If you wanted to gain wisdom you went to Athens. Aphrodite was the patron saint of Corinth. She was a goddess of lust. Her temple was filled with prostitutes. Since Corinth was a commercial center these temple priestesses consorted with travelers from all over the world. By doing so they received in their own bodies a just recompense for their behavior. Sadly they were victims of venereal disease and abuse. Godly mothers in Corinth had to protect their children from the degenerate influence of the society around them. So do we! The warning of Scripture that evil companions corrupt good morals was not just for the people of Corinth (1 Cor. 15:33). This warning is for all believers.

A similar thought, of value to all mothers, was written to the church at Philippi. Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome, the church is a colony of heaven (Phil. 3:20). Believers in Christ do not belong to this world. We are not to talk like the world, dress like the world, act like the world, or think like the world. Mothers, of course, play a key role in protecting children from the evil influence of the world. If we train them up in the way they should go, when they are old they will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6).. Without holiness, no man will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

THE HIGH CALLING OF MOTHERHOOD

The Scriptures note that Adam called his wife “Eve” because she was the mother of all living (Gen. 3:20). **HOW UTTERLY PROFOUND! EVERY PERSON WHO HAS EVER LIVED HAS A BIOLOGICAL CONNECTION WITH THE ONE WOMAN GOD CREATED IN EDEN!** Just as all

believers have a spiritual connection with the Jerusalem from above, all humans have a physical connection with Eve. She is the mother of us all (Gen. 3:20; Gal. 4:26).

Every other mother after Eve also has a physical link with every descendant born to her children. Matthew, for example lists four mothers in the genealogy of Jesus: Tamar (Matt. 1:3); Rahab (Matt. 1:5); Ruth (Matt. 1:5); and Bathsheba (Matt. 1:6). The fact that each of these women overcame obstacles to be part of the bloodline of Christ is a beautiful reminder that God is forgiving and merciful.

No woman on earth has received more honor than Mary, the mother of Jesus. "All" generations from that day until now have called her blessed (Lk. 1:48). Those women not privileged to be biological mothers can still be mothers in a spiritual sense. Jesus promised His disciples that those who left their biological homes and mothers for His sake, would receive a hundred times as many homes and mothers in a spiritual sense (Mk. 10:28 - 30). That fact that women are saved by "childbearing" (1 Tim. 2:15) does not mean that barren women cannot be saved. It merely states the obvious. Men will be saved as they obey God's teaching for men, and women will be saved as they obey God's teaching for women.

ALL HAVE SINNED

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Rom 3:23 KJV)

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be a compassionate Savior (Is. 40:3). Matthew quoted the words of Isaiah to describe what he witnessed in the ministry of Christ. **"A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory" (Matt 12:20 KJV)**. Reeds, as you know, are plentiful and inexpensive. That's why poor people use them to make baskets, and matts, etc. When a reed is "bruised" it is normally discarded. A reed in good shape has almost no value, and a "bruised" reed is worthless. Jesus, however, would not break the bruised reed. The point is, everyone has value to Jesus. The same truth is also expressed by stating that Jesus would not quench a smoking flax. When the lamp is out of oil and the wick puts out smoke and not light, Jesus does not quench the wick. Jesus binds up the bruised reed and causes the smoking flax to burn brightly. Jesus touched the lepers and showed compassion on prostitutes. Surely He will also have compassion on mothers who have made mistakes.

Unfortunately, some mothers who read these words have had abortions, or given their children up for adoption. Perhaps others were away from Christ during those important formative years for the children. We cannot go back and rewrite history, but we can take comfort in the fact that though our sins be as scarlet, our God can make them as white as the snow. Moreover, our God can also raise up helpers to care for our children when we are unable to do so. Remember, angels are ministering spirits who are created by God to minister to those who are heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). We are not saved by our own goodness, but we are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24). While the sins of parents often bring hardship upon the family, no child will be eternally condemned by sins committed by his parents. (Ez.18:20)

When the disciples of Jesus saw a man born blind they assumed that his handicap was a result of sin (John 9:2). Jesus explained: **"Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."** (John 9:3 KJV) Let us pray that the works of God will be made manifest in our children wherever they may be. Many children have given their hearts to Christ because God answered the prayers of their mother. Mothers, please pray every day for the eternal welfare of your children!

An unknown author has penned this beautiful meditation. Perhaps it will have a special significance for mothers.

JUST FOR TODAY I will try to live through this day only, not to tackle my whole life problem at once. I can do all things for 24 hours that would appall me if I had to keep them up for a lifetime!

JUST FOR TODAY I will be happy. This assumes what Abraham Lincoln said is true, that "most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be". Happiness is from within; it is not a matter of externals.

JUST FOR TODAY I will try to adapt myself to the present, and not attempt to adjust everything to my own desires. I will take my family, my business, and my licks as they come and fit myself to them.

JUST FOR TODAY I will take care of my body. I will exercise it, care for it, nourish it, not abuse it nor neglect it, so that it will be a perfect machine for my bidding.

JUST FOR TODAY I will try to strengthen my mind. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort, thought, and concentration.

JUST FOR TODAY I will exercise my soul in three ways: I will help somebody by a good turn and not get found out; I will do at least two things I don't want to do, as William James suggests, "just for exercise".

JUST FOR TODAY I will be agreeable. I will appear as well as I can, dress as becomingly as possible, talk low, act courteously, be liberal with praise, criticize not at all, nor find fault with anything and not try to regulate nor improve anyone.

JUST FOR TODAY I will have a program. I will write down what I expect to do. I may not follow it exactly but I will have it. It will eliminate two pests - hurry and indecision.

JUST FOR TODAY I will be unafraid, especially I will not be afraid to be happy, to enjoy what is beautiful, to love, and to believe that those I love, love me.

JUST FOR TODAY I will have a quiet half hour all my myself. In this half hour I will give thanks to Almighty God for the abundance that is mine.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Eph 3:14-21 KJV)

Mothers! God certainly has a special role for you in the teaching of children.