



## “MAY I BE EXCUSED?”

Jim Stauffer

I remember as a very young boy one of my first efforts in the sport of basketball was a lesson for a life time. The coach put me into the game to defend a much taller, heavier boy who was scoring too easily on our team. He subsequently challenged me during a time out, questioning why I had not stopped his scoring. I offered the excuse he was pushing me around in the lane. He then, before the rest of the team, asked if I wanted to be an Alibi Ike. An embarrassing way to learn the lesson but one that is remembered for life. Personal responsibility is not dismissed with excuses. Either we get the job done or we have failed.

There have been many apologists and excuse makers in the history of man. Adam was the very first when he blamed Eve for his sin. “*The woman whom thou gavest to be with me.*” (**Gen. 3:12**)

Saul was of a similar disposition over his failure to carry out God’s command to utterly destroy the Amalekites. (**1 Sam. 15:3**) When Samuel could hear the bleating of the sheep and lowing of the oxen, he asked Saul what that sound meant. Saul’s explanation and therefore the excuse for his failure to utterly destroy them was, “*for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen.*” (**1 Sam. 15:15**) Who had been given the command, and therefore was responsible? It was Saul and not the people. It was Saul who was later removed as king over this and subsequent incidents of disobedience. (**1 Sam. 15:23**)

God’s promise to His people has been consistent over the history of mankind. He promised to bring the children of Israel into the promised land and to bless them and curse their enemies if they would obey His voice. (**Deut. 30:5-10**)

When the remnant returned from Babylonian captivity, God was displeased with them for procrastinating the building of the temple. As a

result He withheld His blessings from them. **Hag. 1:6** *Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.* But when they turned to obey him by following the lead of Zerubbabel and Joshua, He promised to be with them. **Hag. 1:12** *Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of Jehovah their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Jehovah their God had sent him; and the people did fear before Jehovah. 13 Then spake Haggai Jehovah’s messenger in Jehovah’s message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith Jehovah.*

God and Christ have promised to be with us in the Christian dispensation when we obey the commands they have given. If we preach the gospel to the world, Jesus says He will be with us to “*the end of the world.*” (**Mat. 28:19,20**)

Paul made it clear it was he and Apollos who preached and taught the word in Corinth, but God that gave the increase. (**1 Cor. 3:6**)

He further states Christ is the strength behind every thing we are able to do and that we can accomplish all God demands because of that strength. (**Phil. 4:13**)

The author of the book of Hebrews relates God’s everlasting promise to the faithful, **Heb. 13:5** *Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. 6 So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: What shall man do unto me?*

So, you see, we may not be excused from our responsibility. But have no fear because God is with us even to the end of the world.

## Bringing Up Children in the Lord (Part 1): The Gift of Children by Andy Sochor

*“Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5).*

### Children are a Gift from God

Christians, more than anyone else in the world, need to see children as a blessing. This perspective is going to be different than many in the world who see children as being a burden, a hindrance, or expendable. Yet the Scriptures are clear – children are a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127:3-5).

When David ran into trouble trying to transport the ark in an unauthorized manner, he stored the ark at the house of Obed-edom. Because he kept the ark safely, “the Lord blessed the family of Obed-edom” (1 Chronicles 13:14). How did God bless this man? It is possible that He blessed him in many ways, but the Scriptures specify one way in which he was blessed.

*“Obed-edom had sons: Shemaiah the firstborn, Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, Sacar the fourth, Nethanel the fifth, Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh and Peullethai the eighth; God had indeed blessed him” (1 Chronicles 26:4-5).*

This man had eight sons. The Scriptures clearly indicate that these eight sons came as a result of God blessing Obed-edom. We need to recognize children as being such a blessing as well.

Besides being a blessing, children are also an example of God’s enduring providence. In the beginning when the first child was born, Eve acknowledged God in the birth of her son.

*“Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, ‘I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord’” (Genesis 4:1).*

Since that time, women have continued to bear children as Eve did – not through some direct miraculous action by God, but through the natural process of childbirth that God providentially gave since the beginning. From now until the end of time, “women will be preserved through the bearing of children” (1 Timothy 2:15). This process will not change or be taken away by God.

While we understand that children are gifts from God, we must also realize that not all will be blessed with children. Notice the conversation that is recorded between Jacob and Rachel after Leah gave birth to her fourth son (Genesis 29:31-35):

*“Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or else I die.’ Then Jacob’s anger burned against Rachel, and he said, ‘Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?’” (Genesis 30:1-2).*

The fact that Rachel had no children to this point was not her fault, nor was it Jacob’s fault. She had simply not been blessed with children (at least not to this point).

There are two lessons we should learn from this. First, those who are childless need to have patience and contentment. They should not become jealous of others as Rachel had become of her sister. Second, we all should have compassion and respect for those who are childless – not as Hannah’s rival who would “provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb” (1 Samuel 1:6). We should practice the “golden rule” and “treat people the same way [we] want them to treat [us]” (Matthew 7:12).

In all of this, it is important to remember that children are a blessing. However, no one is guaranteed to have this blessing from the Lord. Therefore, we must recognize children as the gift that the word of God describes them to be.

### Many in the World Have a Contrary View

Sadly, many do not see children as being a gift from God. Instead, they think of children as being a burden. Certainly there are important responsibilities that come with raising children. Parents must be willing to sacrifice self, money, time, etc. However, the joy that comes by being blessed with children should outweigh any hardships that come from our sacrifices.

The example of Jesus provides us with a parallel to our study of parenting. The Hebrew writer said, “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus was willing to sacrifice His life “for the joy set before Him.” What was this joy? It was the salvation of man. Or, as the Hebrew writer described it earlier, “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). As Jesus was willing to sacrifice for our sakes, parents ought to sacrifice willingly for the welfare of their children. Yet too many focus on the burden. Let us notice two extreme examples to illustrate this mentality.

*“And the king said to her, ‘What is the matter with you?’ And she answered, ‘This woman said to me, “Give your son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.” So we boiled my son and ate him; and I said to her on the next day, “Give your son, that we may eat him”; but she has hidden her son’” (2 Kings 6:28-29).* When Samaria was under siege, the people became desperate. This woman made an agreement with another woman to kill and eat her son in order to survive the famine.

While we often hear that desperate times call for desperate measures, this is a line that no parent should cross.

It indicates that one lacks “natural affection” (Romans 1:31, KJV) that all people – even those who have not been taught the word of God – should have. While cannibalism is not common today, the mentality of the mother in this passage is. She was willing to sacrifice her child for her own welfare. Parenting ought to lead one to do the opposite – sacrifice self for the welfare of the child.

*“They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin” (Jeremiah 32:35)*

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These people were guilty of what was almost unthinkable – sacrificing their children as burnt offerings for a false god. It is easy to draw a parallel between this and the practice of abortion (which we will address in a moment), yet I want us to consider the broader application of this text. An idol is not necessarily a graven image like we often see described in the Bible. Instead, an idol is anything that rivals or replaces God for our allegiance and devotion. Paul said that greed is idolatry (**Colossians 3:5**). Today, people have made idols of money, their career, a desired lifestyle, etc. Many parents are willing to sacrifice their children for the sake of their idol (pursuing their earthly goals). Children are seen by many as a hindrance or an obstacle to one's personal fulfillment.

Furthermore, the view of many people that children are not a gift of God is a consequence of evolutionary thought. The Scriptures tell us that man is made in God's image (**Genesis 1:26-27**). But if this were not true, then man is no different than the animals. Notice what the wise man wrote:

*"For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?" (Eccl. 3:19-21).*

Those who ignore spiritual things and the fact that there is life after death for us will see the fate of men and animals as being the same – both die and return to the dust. However, the wise man noted that *"the breath of man ascends upward"* to God (**cf. Ecclesiastes 12:7**) and *"the breath of the beast descends downward."* Man has life after death. Animals do not. But the evolutionist believes that humans are essentially no different than the animals. If man does not have a soul, then a child is soulless, expendable, and unimportant. This is contrary to what the Scriptures teach.

We cannot leave this section without mentioning the plague of abortion. Since the legalization of abortion in this country, tens of millions of babies have been killed in the womb. Why have they been aborted? In many cases, the financial burden seemed too great. In other cases, the parents simply did not want the responsibility of raising a child. Often abortions were performed to save a young mother and/or her family from the embarrassment of an out-of-wedlock birth. Whatever excuse is given, ultimately, the reason why babies are aborted comes down to this: people do not recognize the great gift that children are.

Abortion does not just terminate a clump of cells; it kills one who was made in the image of God. Notice the following passages:

*"Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations'" (Jeremiah 1:4-5).*

*"For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from*

*You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them" (Psalm 139:13-16).*

These passages remind us that the unborn are known by God, formed by God, and that their lives are useful to God. We need to recognize this as well. We must never allow the world to shape our thinking when it comes to children.

#### **How to Treat Children as a Gift**

Understanding what the Scriptures teach about children being a gift from God, we need to know how to treat children as a gift.

First, we must be thankful for them. Hannah prayed to God that she might be blessed with a child (**1 Samuel 1:10-11**). The Lord granted her request. *"It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, 'Because I have asked him of the Lord'" (1 Samuel 1:20).* She then offered a prayer of praise to God, thanking Him for her son (**1 Samuel 2:1-2, 5**). We are to be thankful to God for all things (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**) – the blessing of children is no exception. We must not take them for granted or be ungrateful for the gift God has given us.

Second, we must value them. In speaking of God's judgment against Ephraim, the prophet said, *"Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they will bear no fruit. Even though they bear children, I will slay the precious ones of their womb" (Hosea 9:16).* Though this passage speaks of God's punishment for disobedience, note that the children were described as "precious ones." Though the people rebelled against God, they still recognized the value of children. Each child is made in the image of God and is therefore valuable and special.

Third, we must deal with them appropriately. We often consider how to be good stewards of the blessings God has given us. In a sense, we are to be good stewards of the children with which God blesses us. We are not to neglect our parental responsibilities, but are to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (**Eph. 6:4**). This will be discussed more later in the series.

#### **Conclusion**

Our view of children must be shaped by the Bible, not by society. Of course, this is true for everything. Paul said, *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).* Children are a gift from God. While there are responsibilities that come with parenting – and these must be taken seriously – children should not be seen as a burden, but as a blessing.

**Andy Sochor is a gospel preacher in Morgantown, Ky. He has written a series of articles that we will feature over the next few weeks on rearing children. In these articles, those currently rearing children can learn and put into practice the principles set forth in the Bible. The rest of us can grasp these same principles in order to teach them at each and every opportunity we have. We trust you will take advantage of this opportunity**

**Eph. 2:19** So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord;

**1Pet. 2:9** But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

**Psa. 1:1** Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.

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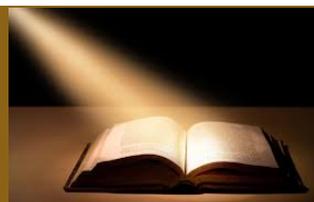
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JAN PATRICK, MARY CZIRR AND CANDISS CASON. J.R. DANIEL CONTINUES HIS RECOVERY AT HOME. LILLIE KEECH IS NOW ABLE TO WORSHIP WITH US AGAIN. PAT CLOTHIER, THE WIFE OF GRANT CLOTHIER HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER. PLEASE REMEMBER HER IN PRAYER AND ANY HELP YOU CAN OFFER.

OUR BIBLE CLASS ON SUNDAY AND WEDNESDAY IS IN THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH.



### **What Must I Do To Be Saved?**

**Hear** the gospel - Romans 10:17

**Believe** in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

**Repent** of sins - Acts 17:30

**Confess** Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

**Baptism** for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

**Be Faithful** unto death - Revelation 2:10