

Essay presented by Rev. M. L. Natterer
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Children are gracious gifts of God. The Psalmist declares, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord." (127:3) Christian parents will readily recognize this Scriptural truth and with the aid of God's Holy Spirit strive to carry out their specific responsibilities. The parents are to take care of the physical needs of their children by providing the necessities of life. And, above all, they are to make the necessary provisions for the proper spiritual training of the little ones whom the Lord has entrusted to their keeping. The material things of this world dare never be over-emphasized by the parents. Instead, they must inculcate upon the hearts and minds of their children the earnest warning given by the Lord Jesus Himself, "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36) Bringing their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, the parents will then remind their children that they should provide for themselves "a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth" (Luke 12:33). Yet, we dare not forget that the Lord not only places certain obligations and responsibilities upon the parents, but also upon the children! And Christian children should also strive to fulfil these duties which the Lord lays upon them in His Holy Word. Since the Scriptural duties of the parents, father and mother, have already been extensively discussed in two previous essays, let us then at this time direct our attention to the Scriptural duties of the Christian child, considering the theme -

THE PLACE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHILD IN THE CHURCH AND HOME

I.

First of all, let us consider the place of the Christian child in the Church.

In the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke we are told of the love which the twelve-year-old Jesus had for His Father's House. Mary and Joseph, in accordance with the Law, had gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. Jesus, of course, had also gone with them. "And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the Child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and His mother knew not of it. But they, supposing Him to have been in the company went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found Him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking Him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." To a Jewish boy of twelve a visit to the city of Jerusalem was no doubt one of the high-spots in his life. There were so many things to do and see - the buying and selling at the market place, the renewal of old acquaintances, the high pitch of excitement among the pilgrims - all this would certainly prove to be quite an attraction to a twelve-year-old boy. But there was only one attraction which occupied the attention of the Boy Jesus, and that was to be found in the temple! For it was there that His parents found Him. Jesus loved to be in the temple where the Word of His Father was proclaimed.

What an example for all Christian children! They, too, are to find their greatest delight in listening to the Word of their Savior. That means regular attendance in the Sunday School and the Divine Service where

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the Word of the Lord is taught and proclaimed in its truth and purity. Such Scriptural admonitions, exhortations, and warnings as "Search the Scriptures" (John 5:39), "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col.3:16), "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28), and many other such passages are certainly applicable not only to adults, but also to children. And that the Lord Jesus is pleased with the worship of children is surely evident from the Scriptures. We shall refer merely to two examples. In the 21st chapter of the Gospel of Matthew we find the Savior in the city of Jerusalem where He had just driven the moneychangers from the temple. While there the Lord Jesus also healed the blind and the lame who came to Him in the temple. "And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased, and said unto Him, Hearest Thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?" (v.15,16) Jesus accepts the confession and praise of the children with gladness. The other example is found in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10, where we read, "And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." (v.13,14) Jesus wants children to come to Him and He is well-pleased with their worship!

What should encourage and incite the children to be faithful in their attendance at Sunday School and the Divine Service? Unfortunately, there are ever so many who make use of inducements which are not in accord with Biblical principles. We are speaking, of course, of the use of "awards." Pins, books, games, gold fish, etc., are offered to the children in the hope that the children will be influenced by such awards to be more diligent in their attendance. But when a child attends merely in order to win the award, then the proper Scriptural motivation is definitely lacking. Not only is some kind of "award system" to be found in the Sunday Schools of the Reformed, but also in a large percentage of so-called Lutheran Sunday Schools. Is it not true that the use of the award system tends to foster the idea that the child thinks he is actually doing his Church a favor, as it were, when the very opposite is true? The award system relegates to the background the Scriptural truth that it is an undeserved honor and privilege to attend the House of the Lord! This does not mean, however, that the use of pins, outward Christian symbols, etc., as mere identification is hereby condemned.

The Christian child must constantly remind himself that he does not attend Church because of some temporal award or because his parents force him, but rather the love for his Savior and His Word are his only incentive. Surely, it cannot be otherwise, where the Christian child realizes what his Savior has done for him. Jesus has redeemed him, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won him from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death - all this, that the child might be the Savior's own and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Where the Christian child realizes the full import of such undeserved blessings, then he will cheerfully confess with the Psalmist, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Ps.122:1).

A word is in place concerning the child's behavior and decorum in the House of the Lord. (Eccl.5:1) About 12 years ago while the essayist was still a student at the Seminary, he was required together with the members

of his class to attend the services at a local Reformed Church for the express purpose of observation. How shocked we were to see some of the children in the back of the Church reading the Sunday comics during the pastor's sermon. How even more shocking to find similar instances in the Lutheran Church! Fortunately, however, as far as the essayist knows, such extreme behaviorism is confined to isolated cases in the Lutheran Church. Nevertheless, we must still maintain that the decorum of the children in the Lord's House is not what it should be! Boisterousness and unnecessary noisiness - are they not also to be found on the part of many children in our own congregations? In many cases, sad to say, the children do not always receive the necessary correction from their parents. But, be that as it may, this still does not excuse the children. In our Sunday Schools the children are taught that the Church is the House of God; this truth is also brought out in sermons and again in the Confirmation Class. Christian children are to take to heart the words of their pastor and Sunday School teachers and show the proper respect in the House of the Lord. The old Lutheran custom of folding the hands and offering a prayer upon entering church ought still to be encouraged among us. The 1st verse of Hymn 5 is most fitting to be used as a prayer at the beginning of the service: "Lord, open Thou my heart to hear And through Thy Word to me draw near; Let me Thy Word e'er pure retain, Let me Thy child and heir remain." Where the child has asked God the Holy Spirit to open his heart for the reception of the Word, that this Word may take root, "spring up, and bear abundant fruit," there the Christian child can be sure that his prayer is not only heard but that it will also be answered.

Christian children are not to forget that the Lord wants them to be present in the Divine Service: - they are not to hurry home after Sunday School instead of going to Church! One writer expresses this thought quite adequately, declaring, "Our children should be encouraged to attend also the adult worship. The Church is one big family, and this should be evident on Sunday when adults and children gather together in the main service to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Even if the children do not understand everything, they derive benefit from the service. They become familiar with the liturgy and the hymns and form the habit of worshipping with the adults. Their understanding will increase with the years, and having been trained for church attendance, they will later as parents be more likely to see that their children form the church-going habit. It is not even ideal for adults to be the sole occupants of the pews on Sunday morning. How cold and formal is a service at which the worshipers are exclusively adults! One senses that something is wrong here. How different the atmosphere in a service at which children, young people, and adults are present! Instead of the coldness and aloofness, there is a certain warmth, a kind of family spirit, that leads one to feel that here all of God's children are gathered together to praise and thank their heavenly Father."

Christian children also have a definite responsibility toward their Church in the way of giving. The essayist does not feel that this subject is out of place here in our discussion of the Christian child's place in the Church, since the majority of children today is in possession of far more money than the children of yester-year. Many of them are given a weekly allowance from their parents. The older children often have their own jobs, such as delivering newspapers, mowing lawns, working in the fields, etc. Should not the children learn right from the outset that a certain portion of their money is to be given to the Lord? There are those parents who think that the Savior does not expect the children to contribute for the extension of His kingdom. But this is not correct. As we have already heard, the Lord Jesus is well-pleased with the worship of the little ones.

(Compare Matt.21:16) Now then, as the Savior accepts the praise from the lips of children, so also is He honored by the gifts of their hands. Moreover, teaching the children to give unto the Lord certainly belongs in the admonition which the Apostle Paul writes to the fathers, saying, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph.6:4). If there are some older children in the congregation who do not have any outside jobs nor receive any allowance from their parents, there are still various ways in which they can reveal their love for the Savior and His Church. The older boys, for example, could see to it that the Church lawn is kept mowed and the snow shoveled from the sidewalks in the winter. Yes, where Christian children really have the interest of their Church at heart, they can always find something to do which will benefit their Church.

No Lutheran child should be ashamed to speak of his religion, his Church, his faith. Where he realizes that he has been saved by the grace of God through faith in the precious blood of Christ, the Christian child will speak out of the abundance of his heart (Matt.12:34). He will also make a concentrated effort to win others and enable them to share in the great joy of redemption. The children have ample opportunity to do this missionary work in the school, on the playground, and wherever else they might come into contact with unchurched children. The children should always be conscious of the fact that they are missionaries by their words and deeds, that the unchurched children with whom they might associate be invited to the Sunday School and Church for sound Lutheran instruction. May every Christian child bear in mind the words of Solomon, "He that winneth souls is wise" (Prov.11:30).

II.

In this second part of our discussion we should like to focus our attention upon the place of the Christian child in the home.

"Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord," writes the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians, chapter 3:20. Obedience is demanded from the children in all things; nothing is excluded, except the limitation which the Lord Himself has set, namely, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). When the children are commanded by their parents to do something which is contrary to God's Holy Word, then Christian children must refuse. For, "he that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt.10:37), says our Savior. When king Saul commanded his son, Jonathan, to bring David to him so that Saul might kill David, Jonathan refused. (1 Sam.19) Whenever parents tell their children to do that which God's Word forbids, then there can be only one answer for a Christian child, and that is - obedience to Christ and His Word! In all other things children are to be obedient unto their parents, for this is right and proper. The Apostle Paul says in his Epistle to the Ephesians, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (6:1-3). The perfect example of obedience is that of our Savior of whom we are told in the Scriptures that He went down with Mary and Joseph and "came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them" (Luke 2:51).

When the children are small and rely upon the parents for care, nurture, instruction, and training, then absolute obedience is required on the part of the children. This matter of absolute obedience is quite thoroughly set forth in a special article in the Popular Commentary from which we would like to quote the following words, "A command given by either parent

during the period of early childhood must be given immediate and unquestioning attention on the part of the children. ... Where such continuous training in obedience has been the rule in childhood, where the children have learned to be subject to their parents 'in the Lord,' where the spirit of love, wrought by the Lord of love, lives in their hearts, there Christian parents will be able to use proper wisdom in building upon this foundation during the youth of their sons and daughters. It is at this time that the young people are being trained for their calling, for their life-work; it is at this time that the mental faculties and abilities will be developed. Wise parents, during this period, although still insisting upon unquestioning obedience, will consider it a matter of the proper training for their children to discuss matters pertaining to their interests with their growing boys and girls, to permit them, with all respect, to submit arguments for and against a certain matter." (Vol.II, page 339)

Christian children are to learn to obey their parents in the Lord; they should be motivated by the Spirit of Christ! And whenever children obey their parents, they are actually obeying God, for the parents are, after all, the representatives of God. Therefore only Christian children can render obedience which is well-pleasing unto the Lord. Let Christian children constantly remind themselves of this Scriptural truth, especially, when they are tempted to be disrespectful to their parents by talking back to them and disregarding their authority. Such utter disregard for the authority of the parents is one of the signs of the last days heralding the final coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his Second Epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents," etc. (3:1,2).

Anyone who even remotely keeps up with the current events must readily acknowledge that, generally speaking, there is an alarming lack of respect on the part of children for ALL those in authority (Parents, teachers, law enforcement officials, etc.). In a series of articles on Juvenile Delinquency, J. Edgar Hoover, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, brought out some startling facts to substantiate his "get tough" policy. He writes, "Since 1952, our juvenile population has increased approximately 22 per cent. Juvenile arrests in the same period have risen 55 per cent! And the offenses committed by young people are characterized by more violence, more contempt for law and order. In every one of our cities terror runs down the street as youthful hoodlums grow increasingly bold and vicious. This is the scope of the problem, a problem which cannot be dismissed as affecting only one area or one class. Juvenile delinquency and juvenile crime are not restricted. No child - rich, poor, city dweller or suburbanite - is inherently immune to delinquent behavior." Yes, even the Christian child is subject to such temptations because he still has his sinful flesh, and his sinful flesh is not one whit better than the godless, unbelieving child of the world. With the great Apostle Paul the Christian child must confess, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom.7:18). But the Christian child can overcome such evil temptations by placing all of his confidence and trust in Christ Jesus, his dear Savior, and using the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God!

And that Word of God tells the Christian child that he is to obey all those whom God has placed over him. Christian children should always keep in mind that their parents are gifts of God to be held in the highest love and esteem. Children and parents are not on the same level; rather, the parents are above the children. Some of our modern child psychologists would place children on the same plane with their parents. But this is contrary to God's established order. The Apostle declares, "Children, obey

your parents in all things" (Col. 3:20). And Dr. Luther writes, "In our days this corruption of morals, the disrespect toward superiors, is everywhere gradually creeping in. But a difference must exist between a person in a higher position and one in a lower one, between parents and children. By his authority and of necessity a father holds greater power and a more exalted position than a son. This is why the son should never act toward the father as the father may act toward the son" (St. Louis Ed. Vol. 2, 231 f). Even though the parents, according to the standards of the world, may not be deserving of such honor, nevertheless, the Lord makes no such distinction in His Word. Parents are not to be deprived of their honor because of their conduct or their failings.

Christian children should never forget all of the blessings which the Lord has bestowed upon them through their parents. In his Large Catechism, Dr. Luther urges children to think of this when he writes, "It is our duty before the world to be grateful for benefits and every good which we have of our parents. But here again the devil rules in the world, so that the children forget their parents, as we all forget God, and no one considers how God nourishes, protects, and defends us, and bestows so much good on body and soul; especially when an evil hour comes, we are angry and grumble with impatience, and all the good which we have received throughout our life is wiped out from our memory. Just so we do also with our parents, and there is no child that understands and considers this what the parents have endured while nourishing and fostering him, except the Holy Ghost grant him this grace. God knows very well this perverseness of the world; therefore He admonishes and urges by commandments that every one consider what his parents have done for him, and he will find that he has from them body and life, moreover, that he has been fed and reared when otherwise he would have perished" (Con. Trig. p. 617). Those children who consider the matter in this light will certainly show their parents every honor without being forced, and they will dearly cherish their parents as those through whom God has bestowed everything good on them.

"We should fear and love God that we may not despise our parents and masters, nor provoke them to anger, but give them honor, serve and obey them, and hold them in love and esteem." So writes Dr. Luther in his explanation to the Fourth Commandment. Despising is the opposite of honoring. It is a sin of the heart which eventually reveals itself in words and deeds: disobedience, impudence, resistance, and rebellion. When children refuse to hearken to the Word of God and fight against such sins, they will sink ever deeper and deeper into all manner of wickedness and thus cause their parents untold grief and sorrow. We need but think of the sons of Jacob. The culmination of their jealousy and hatred was the selling of their very own brother, Joseph, into slavery. Having committed this evil deed, they returned to their father and told him that some evil beast devoured him. What unspeakable grief and sorrow they caused their father, Jacob! The Bible tells us, "And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him" (Gen. 37: 34, 35). Behold what bitter anguish and torment Absalom caused his father, David, with his evil and wicked ways. And finally when the news is brought to David that Absalom had been slain, we are told, "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 18:33). And Dr. Luther says, "I myself have seen many very sincere parents die of broken hearts because of wicked children. Youth does not think of this or understand it. But children must be taught and admonished lest they turn into murderers of

mothers and fathers" (St.Louis Ed. Vol.2, 327f).

How careful the Christian child must be in the selection of his friends! His close friends should be those who share the same faith with him. By all means, evil company is to be avoided! No matter how strong a Christian child may think that his faith is, the words of the Apostle Paul sound the warning, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor.10:12). And these words were written not to the unbelieving children of the world, but to those who believed in Christ as their Savior from sin, death, and hell. Therefore, "enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall" (Prov.4:14-16). "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners," writes the Apostle Paul (1 Cor.15:33). "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not" (Prov.1:10). The ways of the unbelieving world also seek to invade the home by means of obscene books and magazines, objectionable radio and television programs, and sinful amusements such as the modern social worldly dance. In fact, the various ways in which the devil, together with the flesh and the world, seeks to lead the Christian away from his Savior are so very many that the Christian child can never let down his guard for one minute.

The Lord has some very earnest warnings for those children who refuse to heed the Word of God in this matter and bring shame upon their parents with their evil and wicked ways. "The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it" (Prov.30:17). It seldom happens that such evil and wicked individuals die a natural or timely death. Absalom, the evil son of King David, was slain by Joab, David's general (2 Sam.18). The two wicked sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain as the Lord had foretold through the prophet (1 Sam.2:12,34). On the other hand, however, we know from the Fourth Commandment that godly and obedient children have this blessing, that they will live long in pleasant quietness and see their children's children to the third and fourth generation. "Thus experience also teaches, that where there are honorable, old families who fare well and have many children, they owe their origin to the fact, to be sure, that some of them were brought up well and were regardful of their parents. On the other hand, it is written of the wicked, Ps.109:13: 'Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out.' Therefore heed well how great a thing in God's sight obedience is, since He so highly esteems it, is so highly pleased with it, and rewards it so richly, and besides enforces punishment so rigorously on those who act contrariwise." (Large Catechism, Con. Trig., p.621)

The high regard which the children are to have for their parents does not cease when they are older. "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old" (Prov.23:22). When the parents are old and no longer able to care for themselves properly, then is the time for the children to take care of them. Christian children will try to repay, at least in part, the parents for all the care, love and devotion which they experienced from their parents. No better example could be given than that of the Lord Jesus Himself. While hanging on the cross He commended the care of His mother, Mary, to His beloved disciple John. (John 19:26) And in the Old Testament pious Joseph provided for his aged father, Jacob, during the famine by giving him some of the finest land in Egypt. (Gen.47) Christian children who really want to abide by every Word of the Lord will not cast off their parents when they are old but will see to it that the parents are taken care of in a God-pleasing way.

What our Savior says in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven," also applies to Christian children. "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right" (Prov.20:11). The fruits of faith are to be in evidence also in the case of the Christian child. For "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26), writes the Apostle. Where the Christian child strives with the aid of God the Holy Spirit to obey his parents cheerfully and willingly, honors and esteems them as God's representatives, lives in peace and harmony with his brothers and sisters, there we find that the outsiders will sit up and take note of such conduct. The unbelievers are fully aware of the old adage, "Actions speak louder than words." The children of the world closely observe the behavior of those who call themselves Christians. When a person claims that he is a Christian and then shows otherwise in his speech and conduct, then the unbelievers immediately know that he is not sincere in his Christianity, yea, that such an one is nothing else than a hypocrite. But when Christian children strive to follow the Word of Christ, then the unbelievers can see the effect of the Gospel and it may encourage them to learn about that Word which can do such wondrous things. May our dear heavenly Father grant all Christian children a rich measure of His Holy Spirit, so that they may bring forth the fruits of their faith in ever richer abundance and thus extol the blessed name of Christ our Savior!