

Christian Parents Are Really Foster Parents.

Text: 1 Sam 1:26-28

1) Our Children Are Not Really Our Own

Suggested Hymns:

2) Our Children Must Be Returned to God

171 R&S, 416, 588, 286, 867 LSB

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Samuel 1:26–28, ²⁶ *And she said, “O my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood by you here, praying to the LORD. ²⁷ For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. ²⁸ Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.” So they worshiped the LORD there.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A family was taking a stroll on a Sunday afternoon when the children found a nest of turtle eggs by the shore. They took the eggs home and attempted to hatch them in the backyard in a pan filled with sand. The attempt was a failure, but it led to a study of turtles and their habits.

They discovered some wonderful things about turtles. Did you know, for instance, that every turtle is born an orphan? The mother lays the eggs in the sand and promptly slips back into the water, never to return.

The rays of the sun warm the eggs, and in a few weeks they hatch. When the baby turtles pop out of their shells, they must immediately defend for themselves. They are orphans at birth.

Now that may be all right for turtles, but it is not all right for human beings. Children need mothers and fathers! They cannot manage for themselves. They need father and mother to care for physical needs, to protect them, hold them, love them, and feed them. They need parents to teach them, to guide them and lead them. So, in God’s way of doing things, fathers and mothers are all-important! And we are glad to honour our God-fearing fathers and mothers.

Probably one of the finest and best-known examples of godly mothers in the Bible and in all of history is that of Hannah, the mother of Samuel. In her case the saying was true, *“Mothers make preachers,”* for her son became one of the great prophets of the Lord.

Truly, she was a handmaid of the Lord, whose name, meaning *“gracious,”* described her personality and way of life. Very correctly she regarded her son as a child of God and saw herself as a foster mother.

She was right, you see, because in reality *Christian Parents Are Really Foster Parents.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

Christian Parents Are Really Foster Parents

1. Our Children Are Not Really Our Own

“Children are a heritage of the Lord,” says Psalm 127. Elkanah and Hannah knew this from bitter experience. They married with high hopes of having sons and daughters whom they could love and teach. With Peninnah Elkanah had children, but with Hannah they had no children.

With Sarah and Elizabeth and with thousands of childless wives she knew an ache which would not be quieted. Nothing could take away the pain in her heart. And when her husband tried to comfort her: *“Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?”*¹ she only smiled weakly and was determined to try to cover up her grief from him as best she could.

As she brooded and pondered over the problem, one fact became clearly etched in her mind: she had no children because God had withheld this blessing from her! She had always known that God gives children, but now the stark reality of this truth struck her with head-snapping force. Marriage and motherhood had been one and the same before, but now she saw that there was a significant difference.

Ask almost any woman who will get married this year if they expect to have children, and she will probably answer very quickly, *“Oh, yes! You see, that is one of the reasons I am marrying!”* We say that almost glibly, as though matrimony and motherhood were one and the same. We take it for granted that we will have children when we marry.

But we dare not take children for granted! They are a gift from God. He gives them to us; He withholds them also. Godly people, whom we might consider as ideal potential parents, often have no children.

Godless people, who tear and rip the souls of God's little ones, often have many children. Here is a great mystery, why God acts as He does. But there is no mystery in this fact that our children are not ours! They really belong to God.

Children Are Precious Gifts of God

We value things which are difficult to obtain. If some gift is withheld from us for a time, that thing becomes much more valuable in our eyes. Perhaps you have heard some childless husband or wife say already, *"Oh, if only parents knew how precious a gift their children are! I would give almost anything if I could have a son or daughter of my own."*

Our children are precious gifts, not only because God gives them as He wills but also because He cherishes them as His own. They are His infants, of whom Jesus says in Matthew 18:10 *that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*

These precious children are set before us as examples, for Jesus claimed in Matthew 18:3, *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*

God values children so highly also because He said of them in Matthew 21:16, *Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?* The Lord has a special regard for the hymns of children.

And if there be any further doubt as to the dearness of children to the heart of the Lord, He wants us to know that *Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.*² Very sternly Jesus says in Matthew 18:6, ⁶ *"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."*

God Provides for His Children

Because God places such a high value on children, Christian parents find their greatest joy in their children. How happily they greet the birth of a child, knowing that this child is God's gift to them!

Hannah's joy at the birth of her son is reflected in the name she gave the child. She called him Samuel, meaning "*Asked of the Lord.*" Every time she held him in her arms and called him by name, she reminded herself that this child really belonged to God.

And if the child belonged to God, God would care for him also. Christian parents are not to worry about the needs of their children. God seems to have a special concern for the wailing and whimpering of the child.

When Hagar was banished from the home of Abraham with her child Ishmael, she wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. She used up all the water she carried in the bottle and "*placed the boy under one of the shrubs.*"³ She removed herself from the lad and sat down several hundred feet away, saying: "*Let me not see the death of the boy.*" Then, as the Bible specifically tells us: "*God heard the voice of the lad,*" and both he and his mother were saved.⁴

Homes Are Blessed Because of the Children

How many mothers and fathers have experienced this, that God has given specific blessings because of the children in the home! An old German proverb says, "*Many children, many prayers; many children, many blessings.*"

Our prayers are multiplied by the number of children in our households. And these precious children are of special concern to our heavenly Father.

Dr. Martin Luther had a quaint way of expressing the same thing. He said, "*Our children do not eat with us, but rather do we eat with our children.*" The attitude of Christian parents is best reflected by the words of a Christian mother who had spent long hours caring for a sick child but uncomplainingly said, "*What I have done for my child is nothing compared with what my Lord Jesus suffered and did for this child.*"

Need we say it again? Children belong to the Lord. They are precious gifts which He gives into our care and keeping. Christian parents are not to regard them as their property, as chattel with which they can do as they please. We are

guardians, to whom the custody of children has been entrusted; we are foster parents, all of us!

2. Our Children Must Be Returned to God

Parenthood according to God's way of dealing involves the care of children on a temporary basis. Children are the protege of their parents until God suspends the relationship.

As easily as the state or social agency can remove a child from a foster home, so easily can God remove a child from its earthly home. As surely also as the state demands certain standards on the part of foster parents, so surely God requires certain standards of all parents. He wants them back again!

Hannah prayed to God for a child and vowed that the child would be returned to God. The Lord would get the child back, uninjured in soul, unharmed in spirit. Our text says, ²⁷ *For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him.* ²⁸ *Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.*

So Samuel went to live in Shiloh and served God all his life. Hannah's love for the lad was intense, but it did not burn itself out in selfish glow, excluding others. It was fed by a love for God and His will. It focused on God and His gift to her. This was God's child. She made sure he remained God's child.

Parents Must Provide for Their Children

Hannah could still give tokens of love to her son, as year by year she went up to Shiloh and presented him with a new cloak. How delighted she must have been as she worked the loom and spun the threads. Each stitch was probably accompanied by a prayer and a happy remembrance, *"This child is God's child."*

She provided for this child in the best way she knew, she gave him for service in the Lord's house. And every year, as she presented her gift to Samuel, she reminded herself and the boy, of the miracle that took place.

Love for children will show itself in our care and concern for their needs. Children do have needs which must be met. Basically those needs must be met by the parents. These children are not born orphans!

Had God so desired, He could have provided for them in other ways besides parents. But now He works through us. And physical neglect of children is not

only a crime against the state, but a crime against God. Listen, Scripture says in 1 Timothy 5:8, ⁸ *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

We Must Provide for the Needs of the Soul

But above these physical needs are the needs of the soul. Already before birth, Christian mothers and fathers will commit their unborn children to the care of the Lord.

How eagerly also the parents will make plans for Holy Baptism for their new-born infant, knowing that here God will wash away all sin which clings to man by nature.

And at an early age, the parents will teach the toddler to fold stubby fingers and to pray simple prayers. At a tender age, when childhood impressions can be deeply imbedded into the consciousness, the child will accompany the parents to God's house.

What warmth of feeling surges in the child's heart as he sits with mother and father in the intimacy of the church, joining along in the most important function of life, worship! Then come the hours when mother and father teach the child, showing God's will for conduct and life, but demonstrating also God's love and forgiveness in Jesus. What a moment of happiness when the child can be taught to say and believe: *"Jesus is my Saviour, who loves me and died for me."*

Mothers and fathers, these children are God's children. Let them grow up in a home which is God's, where Christ is the unseen Guest, where He dwells in love and mercy. How often we sin against these children! Bitterness and anger flashes between husband and wife. Often the nagging worries which beset us are thoughtlessly thrown into the arms of children.

Treat Children as Guests

When our children invite their friends into our homes, we are most cautious and careful to show our *"good side."* We are kind, interested, careful not to offend them in any way, treating them as little guests who are welcome. Really, now, should we not treat our own children in the same way?

They are guests who have come from God to stay with us for a time, oh, so short a time! While they are in our homes, let us make them feel welcome, knowing that God will call for them again.

The task of bringing up children in God's nurture is indeed difficult. We are to be labourers together with God, but we are also to remember that God is labouring with us. He provides the tools in His Word and sacraments. He has given us His Spirit for His work. He provides the incentive in His promise of eternal life to these children who believe in Him. As difficult as the task may be, His strength is equal to it. We seek that strength.

Thank God for Your "Adoptive Parents"

Oliver Wendell Holmes was asked one time what he thought was the most important ingredient for success. His reply was simple: "*Choose the right parents!*" If you and I have had the right parents, mothers and fathers who have rightly viewed us as God's children and themselves as foster parents; who have accepted the birth of their children as a temporary "adoption procedure" by which they have a short custody of our lives and souls, then we surely should set aside time to honour such parents.

We do well to observe days like Mother's Day and Father's Day in honour of these God-fearing parents, but we ought to think of this daily, remembering that as children are the greatest earthly gift which God can grant to husband and wife, so also God-fearing parents are the greatest gift God can give to a child.

We need more mothers like Hannah; the church needs them; our country needs them. We need parents who will pray for the blessing of children whom they can love, parents who will regard their children as God's own, parents who will do their level best to return those children to God unscathed in body and soul.

You boys and girls, you teenage sons and daughters, you young adults, thank God for your Christian parents. As a speaker once said to a group of college graduates on commencement day, "*Your parents are twenty years ahead of you.*" Do not despise them as being old-fashioned. Do not dismiss them as being out of date. Remember that in the finest sense of the word they are really "god-parents," as you are God's children!

God Multiplies His Blessings!

One final note! Hannah went up to Shiloh one year to visit her son. Eli the priest met her, and blessed her and her husband Elkanah because of her godliness and said, *“The LORD give you descendants from this woman for the loan that was given to the LORD.”*

And Hannah bore three more sons and two daughters. So I say to you, Christian mothers and fathers, May God bless you for all that you do in His name for your children, or more correctly, for His children. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Samuel 1:8

² Matthew 18:5

³ Genesis 21:15

⁴ See Gen. 21:9-20