

A MOTHER LOOKS AT THE FUTURE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on May 9, 1965 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Every thinking person often spends sometime in contemplating the future. We ask ourselves, "What will the future be like?" We study the trends and the tendencies of the day in order to predict the future. Occasionally, when talking with others along such lines, I hear a mother say, "Well, frankly, I am not at all sure I want to bring any more children into this world in which we live." Such a view holds that the tendencies of our time are in such a direction that one fears to think of the problems that children will face in the next generation.

There is a great deal to be said for this point of view. When you think of the new morality, or perhaps we had better call it the new immorality, so widespread in our country today, there is real reason to fear the future. Our generation has seen a strong drift toward sensualism. When you think of the pressures of our day to make money, with all of the attendant pressures to sacrifice honesty, integrity and truthfulness, there is further reason to fear the future. This emphasis upon materialism seems to be growing, and appears to dominate the thinking of millions of people.

Again, when you think of the instability of the home, with the divorce rate having risen to the point that one out of every four marriages ends in divorce there is also reason to be concerned about the future. When you think of the regular, continuing increase in crime in the United States there is further cause for alarm. According to Federal Bureau of Investigation reports, crime is increasing at the rate of about fifteen percent per year. It is not difficult to see what this means for future generations. When you think of the danger of war, or of political upheaval, there is still further cause for anxiety about the future. Add to all of these a concern about the dangers of physical nature that lurk about us all the time. More than 40,000 Americans will die on the highways this year. Thousands more will be stricken with serious disease and thousands more will enter life with birth defects or other crippling hindrances. These also are reasons why a parent might fear to bring children into this precarious, uncertain world.

There is still another concern that is of even greater moment to me. When I think of the threats that come to our children's faith in God, in Christ, and in the Bible, I feel my deepest concern for the future. There is no question but that the spirit of atheism, agnosticism, and infidelity are abroad in the world today. The godless, evolutionary explanation of the origin of the world and all its occupants is taking its devastating toll of Christian faith. While all of the dangers just mentioned are real and worthy of concern, this is the area of my deepest concern. How tragic it would be to rear a child and have that child miss heaven.

But while there is a great deal to be said for the idea of not bringing children into the world, in view of the precarious future essentially, this is a defeatist attitude. There is also a great deal to be said in the opposite side of the question. It is for this opposite view that I would speak boldly and confidently.

Ours Not the Worst Age

Our day is not the worst in history. For example, when Christ came into the world things were far worse than in our time. Sensualism was everywhere. Materialism had a clear field and spiritual values were almost unknown. Barbarism was common. Slavery was considered standard practice. The Roman dictatorship was so absolute and so ruthless that no modern dictatorship can rival it. There was a spiritual famine throughout the whole world. Even religion, though given by God, had become hypocritical and barren.

The early Christians, in the days of the apostles, were laughed at and persecuted. They were forced to meet in caves, in upper rooms, and at night in order to escape the critical eyes of their pagan over-lords. There was no religious freedom. Christians had no voice in public affairs. It was not possible to own church buildings, nor practice one's Christianity openly before the eyes of men.

Our generation, with all of its faults and all of its disturbing tendencies, is infinitely better than the age into which Christ came. The same can be said of other ages. The Dark Ages and other periods of human history do not compare well with our age. This is not to appeal for tolerance for the sins of our own day, for they are many and they are dangerous, but it is an effort to say that it is no time for Christians to leave the field of battle.

To Change The Times

It was precisely because the world was evil that Christ came into the world. He came to change the world, and it is his will that those who wear his name and call themselves his disciples shall be engaged in the same business of changing an evil world into a Christian world. In the great Sermon on the Mount he challenged his followers with the words, "Ye are the salt of the earth ... Ye are the light of the world ... Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5:13-16). In the opening chapter of the gospel according to John, Jesus is described as the light which came into the world to overcome the darkness. Christians are to be lights in an evil world.

In the night in which Jesus was betrayed he prayed fervently for his apostles, and mid-way in his prayer said, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one." (John 17:15). It has never been God's will that his followers should depart from the world or seek some secluded valley behind high mountain walls, insulating themselves against the temptations of the world. Rather, it has ever been God's will that his people stand in the open places and fight valiantly against the evils about them.

So wrote the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:3-16, "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becometh saints; nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, or jesting, which are not befitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know of a surety, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ or God. Let no man deceive you with empty words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience. Be ye not therefore partakers with them; for ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light ... Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." The Christian's role is that of "buying up the opportunity of the times," which means simply to live and to teach in such a way as to fight against the evils about him and to make the world a better place in which men are to live. The Christian way of life is a warfare against evil. Christians are at their best when they are fighting the evil influences of the world about them.

Need for Christian Homes

Rather than withdrawing from the field of battle, retreating in the face of fear of the future, the Christian confidently lives his life, bringing children into the world and rearing them to carry on the fight in the name of the Lord. There is no greater need in our day than for Christian homes. It is in this connection that I always feel a thrill when I read the story of the young man Timothy as we find it in Paul's second letter to this young gospel preacher. "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers in a pure conscience, how unceasing is my remembrance of thee in my supplications, night and day, longing to see thee, remembering thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; having been reminded of the unfeigned faith that is in thee; which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice; and, I am persuaded in thee also." (II Tim. 1:3-5).

While the apostle Paul could speak of Timothy as his true child in the gospel, Paul found him after the original seeds of faith in God and God's way of life had been planted in his heart. The foundation for Timothy's greatness began with a godly grandmother and a devoted mother who planted the truths of God in his young heart. In II Tim. 3:14-15, we read, "But abide thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." What our world needs today is more Christian mothers (and fathers) who will rear their children to be God's servants. In this case there was proper example, plus proper teaching and the result was the great young Christian, Timothy.

We are not told exactly what instruction Lois and Eunice gave to young Timothy, but we do know that it came from the Old Testament scriptures. Recently I was reading with a college-age class of young people a few of the great sentences of the Proverbs of Solomon. These statements constitute the kind of foundation that the lives of the young people of our 20th century need. Notice a few of these great foundation stones: "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge; but the foolish despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck." (Prov. 1:7-9). Or again, "My son, despise not the chastening of Jehovah; neither be weary of his reproof, for whom Jehovah loveth he reproveth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." (Prov. 3:11-12).

Still another passage is that found in Prov. 13:12 and 34, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death ... Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people." Still another fundamental teaching is found in Prov. 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it." The importance of parental discipline is also seen in Prov. 13:24, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." The same emphasis is also found in Prov. 23:13-14, "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol." These are just a few of the many passages in the Old Testament which emphasize the importance of training and discipline in order that children may grow up to be successful in this life and in the life to come.

Value of Christian Mothers

The great need of our day is for more dedicated, Christian mothers who will begin the training of their children early in life in the home. Christian fathers are no less needed in this greatest of all undertakings. Rather than saying that we will bear no more children because of the dangers of the day, let us say that as God gives us the ability to bear children and the resources to care for them, we will bend the efforts of our lives toward the training of them to be valuable disciples of the Lord. This means periods of prayer and Bible study in the home. This means a discussion of the principles of righteous living and the planting of these principles deep in young hearts while they are yet pliable.

There are tendencies and trends in our day which are deeply disturbing, but there are also bright spots as well. For example, on a Sunday morning when I look about and see the hundreds of young people who have been brought from fine Christian homes to the place of worship and Bible study, I see solid grounds for rejoicing. When we are present again on Wednesday evening for prayer meeting and Bible study I am further encouraged. As I watch them go out to their classes on Wednesday evenings and then return to their parents when the classes are over with a sparkle in their eyes, I feel that we need not fear the future. We would pay a tribute of respect and appreciation to the Christian mothers who have produced these fine children and who are leading them in the way of the Lord. No more important work is being done anywhere in the world than that being done by Christian mothers and fathers in the rearing of their children to know and love Christ's way.

As I watch these youngsters from their baby days develop into their childhood years and then see them as they come to the age of accountability, it is a great and inspiring experience. To watch them as they confess their faith in Christ and are baptized into his family breeds a confidence that cannot be shaken. Then, to watch as they choose Christian companions and marry, and ultimately have families of their own, when the whole process of carrying on Christ's kingdom from one generation to the next begins all over again, is one of the greatest experiences of my life.

The greatest need of our day is not for more inventions or better products, it is not for more engineers, scientists, businessmen, doctors, teachers and the like, but rather it is for more men and women who are dedicated to Christ and his Cause. These dedicated Christians may well be engineers, scientists, businessmen, doctors, teachers, and the like, but their first and most important quality is that of belonging to Christ. It is to the rearing of such children and delivering them into the Lord's service that we set our hands in this great 20th century.