



Truth Matters

A Publication Discussing Matters Related To Truth Because Truth Matters

Scripture Reading
Week of
March 27th - April 2nd



Monday

- ❖ Deuteronomy 15, 16
- ❖ Psalm 61
- ❖ Luke 17

Tuesday

- ❖ Deuteronomy 17, 18
- ❖ Psalm 62
- ❖ Luke 18

Wednesday

- ❖ Deuteronomy 19, 20
- ❖ Psalm 63
- ❖ Luke 19

Thursday

- ❖ Deuteronomy 21, 22
- ❖ Psalm 64
- ❖ Luke 20

Friday

- ❖ Deuteronomy 23, 24
- ❖ Psalm 65
- ❖ Luke 21

Saturday

- ❖ Deuteronomy 25, 26

Sunday

- ❖ Deuteronomy 27, 28

Reading Our Children: Is There Somebody Alive in There?

By Jim Elliff

I have tried to say with as much clarity as possible, and often, that the assurance a person has that he or she is actually a Christian does not have to do with praying a prescribed prayer, being affirmed by a Christian leader, walking an aisle, signing a card or raising a hand, but whether that person has *life from God*.

An unregenerate person does not have this life, even if he is religious. A child who is unregenerate, for instance, one who has attended church, memorizes verses of Scripture, participates in his Sunday class, and knows his Christian music, is just as dead as Saddam Hussein spiritually. In fact, he is as dead as a corpse.

But when this child is regenerated, God is saying that he is now made alive from the dead. That could even happen to Saddam. After Paul describes the nature of believers *before* they were converted with some gross detail, beginning with the fact that they were once "dead in trespasses and sins," he then turns the discussion on its head by saying: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, *made us alive . . .*" (Ephesians 2:1, 4). That divine conjunction ("But God . . .") makes all the difference.

So *life* is what you are looking for.

Sometimes life is more noticeable to an experienced believer than to the

newly regenerated person himself.

Read this revealing anecdote from the Second Great Awakening in the early 1800s. The writer is Ebenezer Porter, a New England Congregational pastor and first President of Andover Theological Seminary (*Letters on Revival*):

During a powerful revival in Hartford, I called on Rev. Nathan Strong. While he was absent for a little time after my arrival, I fell into conversation with a young lady of his family about the state of religion among the people, and about her own feelings on the subject. Her remarks in respect to her own heart, and the way of salvation, gave me very satisfactory evidence that she had become a subject of renewing grace, though she indulged no hope respecting herself. When Dr. Strong returned from his visits, and spoke of those concerning whom he thought there were hopeful evidence of saving change, he mentioned this young lady in his own house as one of the number, though she saw no ground of hope in her own experience. I told him that I had conversed with her, and did not at all regret this want of self-confidence, for I had often found it to be among the best evidences of genuine conversion.

"A father and his son," said I, "were digging a well. The son had descended into it to prosecute the work, when the sides of the well caved in, and covered him with timbers and rubbish. The father,

after a moment of agony, cried out, "My son, are you alive? My son, are you alive?" "No, sir," was the answer from beneath. It was enough; it was evidence of life which the father desired."

"Now," said Mr. Hallock to me, "during my experience in revivals, I have often found that a man who is but recently born of the Spirit, would often say, "No, Sir," should you ask him if he is converted. And yet I may have much better evidence of his real change than I have of another, who has an early and confident hope."

The parents of the interested child should move the emphasis off the externals mentioned earlier—praying a "sinner's" prayer (that is not even found in the Bible), walking an aisle, talking to the pastor, raising a hand, signing a card—to a look at life.

When your five year old child comes home from a children's meeting with a card in his hand saying that he has "prayed the prayer" of salvation and been converted, what are you going to do? If you have always emphasized that coming to Christ means that you "pray the sinner's prayer, and that once a person prays a prayer to receive Jesus he will be saved because God does not lie," then you are in a very difficult position. Now that he has prayed this prayer, how are you supposed to lead him?

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If you persist in holding to your idea that praying a prayer, or some other external and additional (usually manmade) accoutrement to faith is the pivotal act that makes a Christian, then you have to accept his experience as inviolable. But if you are a more biblical thinker, you will not at all believe that doing such a thing invariably makes your child a Christian. With genuine respect for any movement and interest your child has shown toward God, you will nonetheless bring him to this reality: "When God saves a person, he makes him alive from the dead. When God makes you a true Christian you will see signs of this life that will increase until you can be sure that you are alive."

What are these signs of life? First, there is the sign of repenting and believing itself. The dead boy or girl now trusts Christ as his or her only hope for heaven. There is no mixture of trust in self or works or religion, but only in Christ and what He has done and will do.

Second, there is a new valuing of the Scriptures. I cannot say this clearly enough. If I am to know you, I will know you principally by your words as you express yourself and communicate your thoughts. God's Word is His principal communication of Himself. But it is more than just the words themselves that is important in this change. It is the Spirit working in the words that gives understanding and that "knowing" of Christ. Christ said, "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me" (John 6:45). This is granted-and not to all (Matthew 13:11).

Third, there is obedience from the heart. All kids may be taught to obey like Pavlov's dogs. If there is enough discipline and incentive, any child can straighten up. And, it is right for parents to expect this obedience even from unconverted children. Yet, when a child is made alive there is a new sensitivity to sin and a new and higher motivation and inner compulsion to obey. You will see obedience from the heart as if the child were newly constituted. In fact, he is. I am not saying that he will be perfect, any more than you are. But something has taken place on the inside that is unmistakable. My children have all asked the same question: "Dad, how can I know if I am a Christian?" I answered them all just as I answered the first.

"Suppose we went to the seed store to buy some flower seeds. We intended to grow a chrysanthemum. So we put the seed into the ground. That seed looks like a mum seed, but we know that it could look like the seed of a lot of other flowers as well. Some time later a little green shoot comes up. It looks right, but we are not sure if it is a mum. It could be a weed, for all we know. More time passes and the green stalk bears some leaves. These look just like mum leaves, but they could be leaves of some other flower. Then the bud comes out. We have more assurance. But when the flower blooms, then we

know for sure. In the same way we will watch your life and see if we can tell what God is doing. If you have the life of God, you will bloom in such a way that you will one day be very satisfied that you are a true Christian and will have no need to doubt. Often this is most clear when you are a teenager and make the choices between your friends and Christ. Your job is to seek Christ, to trust and follow Him."

It is the job of the church to baptize every true convert as "an outward symbol of an inward reality." But we must emphasize in the case of children and really every professing believer that it is *valid* converts we baptize, not just anyone who says he has believed. We find that knowing this is more difficult with children because they cannot express themselves as an adult would and because their experiences in life have not as clearly demonstrated that they have life from God. But we still cannot baptize those we only *hope* are Christians. So we must wait until we know, and then we will baptize as immediately as possible.

We are not saying to our child that we know he is a believer but he has to wait to be baptized, but that we are waiting to see that there is true fruit so that he will not be deceived, and then we will baptize as soon as possible. Again, children are in some ways a different category in that they are less able to demonstrate that they are true Christians. We all know that it is easier for children to be deceived than adults. Yet, if they happen to face difficulties, such as serious illness, or other trials of faith, they may express life as obviously as anyone possibly could (1 Peter 1: 5-7). So, there is no law about what age life manifests itself. For many children, however, it may take some time to be sure. And they can be brought to appreciate this in many cases. You cannot "unsave" them if they are already belong to Christ.

Your child can understand the principle I've given you. If others in the church begin to see things the same way, it will be even less of a problem to communicate it. The Bible does not describe early childhood conversions. In fact, the only childhood conversion described in the Bible, Samuel, was between 11 and 15 years of age when he met the Lord (look over the chronology of 1 Samuel 2-3 to arrive at this age period). There is reason both to preach the gospel to our children and to do all that is possible to not be moved to baptize prematurely. There are millions on the rolls of churches-people who thought they became believers as children-who show no signs of spiritual life at all. You do not want your children to have such false assurance. It is not worth it for him or for you. And it is not the business of the church to aid in their deception, but to bring people to the light. There are millions (and I'm conscious of the meaning of that word) on the roles of churches who were baptized as children and yet have no signs of life. May God give you grace to act as carefully as your child's soul deserves.