

THE POWER OF A CHRISTIAN MOTHER'S INFLUENCE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on May 8, 1966 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

We live in a world in which the principle of cause and effect functions in every sphere of activity. There is no cause without an effect. There is no effect without its antecedent cause. With this principle in mind let us look at several Biblical stories.

In Hebrews 11:24-26, we read of the courageous decision made by Moses when he turned his back upon the glitter and the glamour of Egypt to cast his lot with the down-trodden people of Israel. This text reads, "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward." This is the effect. Now, what was the cause?

Because the story of Moses is so well known, I need not tell the details of his story. You will remember, the account in Exodus tells us of a man by the name of Amram and a woman by the name of Jochebed, both of whom were Levites. When Moses was born, it was illegal for a male Hebrew child to live, so his mother hid him for a time, then took him in an ark of bulrushes to the edge of the Nile River. There he was found by the princess and was taken home with her. By God's providence the princess then sent him to his own mother for care and training. During these early years of Moses' life in this unusual way his mother was permitted to teach him concerning God and the truths of God. Later, when he returned to the palace and faced the greatest decision of his life, his loyalty remained with God's people. The influence of his godly mother and the training which she gave him made the difference in his life.

Naomi and Ruth

Our second example begins with the matchless statement of Ruth, "Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die and there will I be buried; Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." (Ruth 1: 16-17). This great expression of love on the part of a daughter-in-law for Naomi is the effect. Now, again, let us seek for the cause.

The story begins with Elimelech and Naomi who, because of a famine, moved from Canaan to Moab. Their sons Mahlon and Chilion married daughters of the land. Not long thereafter all three of the men died. During this interval, however, Naomi had to have endeared herself to her daughter-in-law Ruth so that instead of bidding Naomi farewell and returning to her own people, Ruth claved to Naomi. It is good for us to remember in this day of great names, great fame, great power, great prestige, and great wealth, that God is not impressed by any of these. In this story, in a remote village one thousand years before Christ, a peasant woman achieved real greatness as she showed her love for her daughter-in-law. This is the cause behind the wonderful effect reflected in our text.

Timothy

Our third example is found in the New Testament as the apostle Paul begins his first letter to Timothy. He writes, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus ... unto Timothy, my true child in faith ..." (I Tim. 1:1-2). The same apostle begins his second letter in a similar fashion, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus ... to Timothy, my beloved child. (II Tim. 1:1-2). This is the effect. What was the cause?

We first learn of Timothy in Acts 16 when we read in the opening verses that Paul knew this young man of Lystra so well and so favorably that he wanted him to travel with him as his regular companion. Timothy left home and followed Paul, thus growing spiritually into the great evangelist that he eventually became. As we look back to find the cause of this young man's character, we hear Paul say, "I thank God, whom I served 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). Here, then, is the origin of his faith. This is further emphasized in II Tim. 3:14-15, where Paul writes, "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." Timothy owed his start in both the physical world and the spiritual world to a godly mother and grandmother.

The Crucial Early Years

A child's early years are the most impressionable of his life. This is why Solomon wrote, "Train up a child in the way he should go and even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6). We also have an adage which says, "As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined." In the early years at home, years which are largely under the direction of mother, a child's attitudes and habits of life are developed. These are the crucially important foundation years. These are the years when the basic philosophy of life is developed.

Sometimes we look through the hospital windows at the newborn infants. While they have some differences of appearance, they are essentially alike. Let us look at them again ten years later. How different they appear. The differences are largely determined by the mothers whom they have had. Let us look at them again after twenty years. Now, some are great assets to society, while others are already liabilities to society. Again, the mothers that have reared them are in a real sense responsible for the different directions that these children have taken. The Christian mother's influence is a great and wonderful power for good.

I have chosen this particular theme because I feel that the problems of our world today can best be solved if we begin with the influence of Christian mothers in the earliest years of life. Never before has the crime rate in America been so high. Never before have there been so many alcoholics, nor so many drug addicts. Never before has there been so much pornographic literature available. Never have morals been so low. Never has there been such a widespread spirit of rebellion against authority. We do not blame mothers for this present situation, any more than the rest of us, for the influences that have brought us to this sad national state of affairs have often originated in the minds of evil men, who have misused their fellowmen for their own material gain. However, we do feel that the beginning place for changing the unhappy situation of our day lies largely with the mothers of America. It is in the home that attitudes and habits of life are developed, and mothers are the chief molders of these attitudes and habits.

Faye Scott Baxter

Even at the risk of being overly personal, I want to read to you material which the editors of the *20th Century Christian* asked me to write concerning my own mother for the January 1959 issue of that magazine. Her life was relatively short, only half a century, yet it demonstrated many of the virtues that are needed so greatly in the mothers of our land today. The article begins, "Allowing for the natural inclination which may lead a son to overestimate the virtues of his mother, I still believe that I had an unusually wonderful mother. Here are some of the reasons why.

"She loved her son and never allowed a barrier to come between herself and him. Even when I had done wrong and needed to be disciplined, she stood with me and helped me fight against Satan and his temptations. I never felt the parent-child antagonism that often comes when a parent must say no to a child. She was always in my corner, helping me fight the battle against my own weaknesses and faults. She placed such confidence in me that it was actually harder to do wrong and disappoint her than it was to do right.

"She loved people and seldom met anyone for whom she did not have a genuine love. In her early years before marriage she taught school. Her first assignment was a small, rural school from which several previous teachers had been "run off." She loved those children, even the big, rowdy ones, and the result was that they loved and respected her. When she left to get married, the whole school was visibly saddened at her leaving.

"She loved the world about her--its natural beauties, its daily routine tasks, its responsibilities and its opportunities. As a child, I remember a vacation trip through the western states. To her each new sunset was the most colorful we had seen. Each new lake the most beautiful we had passed. Each mountain scene was more spectacular than any before it. Actually, it was an attitude of mind. Each moment brought some new joy. Perhaps that was why so many people sought her company. My childhood friends came not so much to play with me, as to visit my mother. Her stories were eagerly listened to by grown-ups, as well as by children. Her advice was sought by scores and even hundreds of college students--the boys as well as the girls. She was always interested in the problems and the successes of everyone.

"She loved her husband. His place of prominence in the field of Christian education was due in part to her help. She shared each problem and helped in making each major decision, yet was never more than "a help meet for him." His preaching and her visiting made them welcome guests in hundreds of congregations. She often read and loved the tribute to a worthy woman in Proverbs 31. Through the years many of these attributes were to be found in her life.

"She also loved God very much. She did not miss an opportunity to worship. She went out of her way to encourage young preachers and their wives, to visit the sick and bereaved, and to help in training the young. In the early years each afternoon found her reading the Bible to me, and to other boys of the neighborhood when they came to visit. A childhood friend who is now a missionary in Germany told me not long ago, 'I learned to pray at your house when I used to come to visit you, and your mother would call us into the living room for refreshments and some Bible stories.'

"Fay Baxter was born of Scotch-Irish ancestry in Sherman, in northeast Texas. She lived only half a century, but it was a good half-century--one, that will bear fruit for generations yet to come."

Conclusion

The greatest need of our day is not for more inventions, or better products. It is not for more professional training for more and better experts in the various fields. The greatest need of our day is for more men and women who have deep respect for God and for the needs of our fellowmen. This begins in the home, and it begins largely with mothers.