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THE CHILD SAMUEL.

– OCT. 27. – 1 SAM. 3:1-13. –

**Golden Text – "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."
– 1 Sam. 3:9.**

IT HAS been truly said that the education of a child should begin a hundred years before it is born. Wholesome parental influences are potent agencies in the formation of character. Samuel was the son of godly parents, a child desired and requested of the Lord, the request being accompanied with a solemn covenant that, should it be granted, he should from earliest infancy be dedicated to the Lord. Thus he came into the world richly endowed with an inheritance which only godly parents can bestow, – with a mind tending toward God and righteousness.

As soon as it was possible to do so, Hannah took her son to the temple and there left him to be trained and used in the Lord's service under the care of the high-priest Eli, who was a devoted servant of the Lord. That Samuel was prompt, obedient, teachable and easily led in the right way, because his heart was right and well-disposed, is manifest from his readiness to obey the supposed calls of Eli.

Eli's mild disposition and gentle manners and his [R1882 : page 244] righteous life and teaching were all that were necessary in the way of human training and restraint to keep this well-disposed child in the way of righteousness from infancy up to manly vigor. Under his influence the child grew and waxed strong in a noble and righteous character, and was active and diligent in the service of the Lord. But it was not so with Eli's own family. His own sons were wayward, disobedient, unthankful, unholy and profligate. Eli sought to correct their waywardness by the same mild measures that were natural to him, but when these measures failed he did not further restrain them by the severer measures so necessary in their case; and so they continued to

bring disgrace upon their father and upon the cause of God which he as high priest represented.

This negligence was culpable, and it displeased the Lord. Hence the warning message to him through the child Samuel, as recorded in verses 11-13.

It was hard for Eli to realize the displeasure of the Lord, the waywardness of his sons, and his own unfaithfulness and culpable negligence; but he received the reproof with becoming meekness and humility, saying: "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." And when the tidings came of the fulfilment of this prediction – the tidings of the defeat of Israel before the Philistines and the death of his two sons in the battle, it was a terrible blow; but not until he heard that the ark of the Lord was in the hands of the enemy did his deep sorrow overwhelm him, and he fell from off the seat backward and broke his neck, and died. (Chap. 4:18.) But notwithstanding his weakness, his heart was always loyal and true to God, and the cause of God was dear to him; and God who is merciful and gracious and slow to anger, though he thus severely punished Eli's negligence, will doubtless remember in mercy and forgiveness his servant in the day he judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. – Rom. 2:16.

This incident brings forcibly to our attention the estimate which the Lord places on strength of character. After reasonable instruction in the ways of righteousness the Lord expects, and has a right to expect, strong characters. Wherefore the Apostle says, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might....Quit you like men, be strong." (Eph. 6:10; 1 Cor. 16:13.) We should be strong in faith and strong in character: so shall we be pleasing and acceptable to God. If weakness and indecision be a natural failing with us, we are not excusable in failing to strive against it. Some of the noblest characters are those achieved through earnest striving against inherited weaknesses. God is also always ready to supplement our efforts with his strength, if we invoke his aid.

One lesson to be drawn is respecting God's view of parental responsibility in training up children in the knowledge and reverence of the Lord. We here emphasize the fact that duty always *begins* at home, however far it may reach beyond it. It is the mistake of some, to be less zealous in preaching and exemplifying the gospel in their own families, than among those outside of them. Charity (love, care, benevolence) should begin at home, and should continue there. That field, more than any other, should be prayerfully and patiently worked, even though it be slower than others to yield fruit.

Another good lesson is found in the Golden Text – Samuel's answer to the Lord: "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." Too often the uninstructed or wrongly instructed "servant" wants to do all the talking, and to have the Lord hear him and perform his will. How few of God's children are quick to learn the lesson that God has a message to communicate to them through his Word by which their thoughts, words and deeds are to be directed.

Let us never forget that the Bible is God's Word to us. And while prompt to acknowledge the channels and agencies honored by the Lord in bringing to our attention the things of his Word new and old, let us never forget that the Word itself is the final arbiter, and that if any teaching fails to harmonize with that Word it is because there is no light in it. (Isa. 8:20.) Then, as the Apostle says, we are to be not only hearers, but also *doers*, of the Lord's Word. (James 1:22.) And "He that hath my Word let him speak my word faithfully" (Jer. 23:28) – not uncertainly, doubtfully, but "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." – 1 Pet. 4:11.
