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APPENDIX:

Child Dedication

The dedication of children is a tradition which is practiced by many churches today. In this act, believing parents come before the church with the request that their pastor, together with them, pray for their child, dedicating him to God. In doing this they express two things; first their desire to raise their child for God, and second, their desire that their child always walk with and serve Him. Though child dedication is not commanded in the Bible, it is an honorable tradition because behind it is a honorable intention.

Dedicating things to God has its foundation in the Scriptures. Actually many things were dedicated to God as recorded in the Bible; things such as gifts (Lev. 22:2), money (2 Sam. 8:11), the spoils of war (1 Chron. 26:27), the temple (1 Kings 8:63; Ezra 6:16-17), the tabernacle's sacrificial altar (Num. 7:10), utensils for temple service (1 Kings. 7:51), the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27), houses (Deut. 20:5), people (Exo. 32:29; Num. 6:2; 18:6) and yes, even children (1 Sam. 1:28, Jud. 13:1-7; Luke 2:21-24). Therefore many things can be dedicated to God. The question is: "What does it mean to dedicate something to God?"



The word "dedicate" means to consecrate, to set something apart. Therefore, when something was dedicated to the Lord, that thing or person was set apart as the Lord's. And doing so had a cost related to it because either something of value was being dedicated (e.g., the temple) and/or utilized in the act of dedication (e.g., many animals). Therefore dedication was a serious matter and one that was to honor God because the item which was dedicated was set apart to Him, no longer to be considered as common or for common use.

In most cases when a child was dedicated, he was given symbolically to the Lord and never left the protective custody of his parents; Samson for example (Jud. 13:1-7; cf. Num. 6:2-8) and Jesus (Luke 2:21-24). Yet at times this act was more than symbolic, and the child was actually given away for God's service, such as Samuel (1 Sam. 1:21-28) and the daughter of Jephthah (Jud. 11:30-40). Yet in both cases the result was the same. The parents dedicating were setting their child apart to God, and the child became His.

When a parent or parents desire to dedicate a child to the Lord, their dedication is twofold: 1) The dedication is a vow that the parent or parents are making to God,

and 2) the parent or parents are responsible for carrying out their vow, that of raising a child dedicated to the Lord. These two issues associated with dedication are serious things to God, and therefore those who dedicate their child need to take them seriously as well.

The first issue, the vow parents make to God in the act of dedication; needs to be seriously considered. The following two passages make this clear:

1. Numbers 30:2

"If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

2. Matthew 5:33,37

"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil."

Obviously, God takes vows very seriously since they are a promise to Him. He expects those who make them to do as they have vowed. To vow something and then not do it is sin (cf. Jam. 4:17) and will have consequences for one day all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

The second issue, the actual process of raising the dedicated child, also needs to be seriously considered. When a child is given to God as His, the parents are to raise that child as God's child. And how is a person to raise a dedicated child of God? They are to raise him or her to live holy, to know God, His Son, the teachings of Scripture, and to live out His Word in their lives. These are the things which God would expect.

It should be obvious that the dedication of a child is not just a five-minute ritual that ends once the dedication is over. On the contrary, it is the beginning of a long process which will last many years and take much work. And though in the actual dedication of the child, the parents are declaring their intentions and asking God for His blessing and help in the ensuing process, there will come a day when the parents will have to answer to God for how they raised their child. Therefore dedicating a child ought to be done, not because it is a tradition of the church or because other people want the parents to do this, but because they as the child's parents desire to do it. This is key, otherwise they may make a halfhearted vow at the urging of others and one day have to answer for why they did not fulfill the vow they made.