

The rough hewer

‘What shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth.’ Hosea 6:4–5

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING: 2 Chronicles 24:1–27

The love of approbation acts upon many with great force. Especially will young people follow each other and follow leaders, if they are praised for it. Converts may easily be made by mutual admiration. If it happens to be a religious time and it is the fashion to profess conversion, many of all ages go with the rush and yet are by no means truly called into the kingdom of God. That religion which lives upon companionship is apt to die when the company is changed. Beware of the godliness which is carried off its feet by the crowd: true religion is the personal conviction of one who has repented and believed on his own account. No man can be carried to heaven by the stream of outside influence—there must be a work within: ‘Ye must be born again.’ No doubt we have many who disappoint our hopes, because they are moving in the right way, but they are not going there from a force within, but are being compelled to go by an influence from without. One person of great strength of mind may have a vast influence over others, but subjecting to the best influence can never take the place of personal conversion. We read, in the Word of God, of a young king who ‘did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of’ the venerable high priest who had been his guardian, but when the gracious man was gone, then the king went his own way and that way was an evil one. Many persons are under the holy influence of godly relatives and friends, but they are by no means gracious themselves: their real character is concealed by the godly one who overshadows them. Oh, how sad, to be going the right way openly and yet in heart to be treading the downward road! We are before God what we are in heart, not what our surroundings compel us to be.

FOR MEDITATION: The loss of a father-figure is likely to expose those like Joash whose godliness is only skin-deep (2 Chronicles 24:15–19), but can confirm those like Elisha who are genuine (2 Kings 2:9–15). Paul and Peter prepared their true children in the faith for the time of spiritual bereavement (Acts 20:29–32; 2 Timothy 4:5–6; 2 Peter 1:12–15).

Jesus and the children

'And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.' Mark 10:13-14

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING: Matthew 18:1-14

The disciples did *wrong to the mothers*; they rebuked them for doing a motherly act, for doing what Jesus loved them to do. They brought their children to Jesus out of respect to him: they valued a blessing from his hands more than gold; they expected that the benediction of God would go with the touch of the great Prophet. They may have hoped that a touch of the hand of Jesus would make their children's lives bright and happy. Though there may have been a measure of weakness in the parents' thought, yet the Saviour could not judge hardly of that which arose out of reverence to his person. He was therefore 'much displeased' to think that those good women, who meant him honour, should be roughly repulsed. There was also *wrong done to the children*. Sweet little ones! What had they done that they should be chided for coming to Jesus? They had not meant to intrude. They would have fallen at his feet in reverent love for the sweet-voiced teacher, who charmed not only men, but children, by his tender words. The little ones meant no ill; why should they be blamed? Besides, there was *wrong done to himself*. It might have made men think that Jesus was stiff, reserved and self-exalted like the Rabbis. If they had thought that he could not condescend to children they would have sadly slandered the repute of his great love. His heart was a great harbour, wherein many little ships might cast anchor. Jesus, the child-man, was never more at home than with children. The 'holy child Jesus' had an affinity for children. Was he to be represented by his own disciples as shutting the door against them? It would do sad injury to his character. Therefore, grieved at the triple evil which wounded the mothers, the children and himself, 'he was much displeased'.

FOR MEDITATION: The Lord Jesus Christ condemned those who blocked the way to heaven (Matthew 23:13). As the only way to God (John 14:6), he quickly overruled any who tried to separate him from those he came to save (Mark 6:35-37; 9:38-39; 10:46-52; Luke 8:49-50; 13:14-16).