

**DISCOURSES ON  
CHRISTIAN  
NURTURE**

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Discourses on Christian Nurture by Horace Bushnell

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CHRISTIAN NURTURE.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE argument of the following discourses was read before an Association of ministers, who requested their publication. The view of Christian education maintained in the discourses, is certainly different from that which is commonly held by our churches, and yet it is confidently believed to be inconsistent with no scheme of doctrine generally held or accepted. For it is a somewhat singular phenomenon that the current view of Christian nurture is no necessary or even proper inference from any current doctrine or opinion.



# CHRISTIAN NURTURE.

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## DISCOURSE I.

*Ephesians 6: 4.* Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

THERE is then some kind of nurture which is of the Lord, deriving a quality and a power from Him, and communicating the same. Being instituted by Him it will of necessity have a method and a character peculiar to itself, or rather to Him. It will be the Lord's way of education, having aims appropriate to Him, and if realized in its full intent, terminating in results impossible to be reached by any merely human method.

What then is the true idea of Christian, or divine nurture, as distinguished from that which is not Christian? What is its purposed aim? What its method of working? What its powers and instruments? What its contemplated results? Few questions have greater moment,



and it is one of the pleasant signs of the times, that the subject involved is beginning to attract new interest, and excite a spirit of inquiry which heretofore has not prevailed in our churches.

In ordinary cases, the better and more instructive way of handling this subject, would be to go directly into the practical methods of parental discipline, and show by what modes of government and instruction we may hope to realize the best results. But unhappily the public mind is pre-occupied extensively by a view of the whole subject, which I must regard as a theoretical mistake, and one which must involve, as long as it continues, practical results, systematically injurious. This mistaken view it is necessary, if possible, to remove. And accordingly what I have to say will take the form of an argument on the question thus put in issue; though I design to gather round the subject, as I proceed, as much of practical instruction as the mode of the argument will suffer. Assuming then the question above stated, What is the true idea of Christian education? I answer in the following proposition, which it will be the aim of my argument to establish, viz :

**THAT THE CHILD IS TO GROW UP A CHRISTIAN.**  
In other words, the aim, effort and expectation

should be, not, as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a mature age, but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years. I do not affirm that every child may, in fact and without exception, be so trained that he certainly will grow up a Christian. The qualifications it may be necessary to add, will be given in another place, where they can be stated more intelligibly.

This doctrine is not a novelty, now rashly and for the first time propounded, as some of you may be tempted to suppose. I shall show you, before I have done with the argument, that it is as old as the Christian church, and prevails extensively at the present day, in other parts of the world. Neither let your own experience raise a prejudice against it. If you have endeavored to realize the very truth I here affirm, but find that your children do not exhibit the character you have looked for; if they seem to be intractable to religious influences, and sometimes to display an apparent aversion to the very subject of religion itself, you are not, of course, to conclude that the doc-

trine I here maintain is untrue or impracticable. You may be unreasonable in your expectations of your children. Possibly, there may be seeds of holy principle in them, which you do not discover. A child acts out his present feelings, the feelings of the moment, without qualification or disguise. And how, many times, would all you appear, if you were to do the same? Will you expect of them to be better and more constant and consistent than yourselves; or will you rather expect them to be children, human children still, living a mixed life, trying out the good and evil of the world, and preparing, as older Christians do, when they have taken a lesson of sorrow and emptiness, to turn again to the true good? Perhaps they will go through a rough mental struggle, at some future day, and seem to others and to themselves there to have entered on a Christian life. And yet it may be true that there was still some root of right principle established in their childhood, which is here only quickened and developed, as when Christians of a mature age are revived in their piety, after a period of spiritual lethargy; for it is conceivable that regenerate character may exist, long before it is fully and formally developed. But suppose there is really no trace or seed of holy