

“Raised in the Church”

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How many times have we heard or used the phrase “raised in the Church?” Someone may ask, “Were you raised in the Church?” Or, someone might say, “I was not raised in the Church.” The expression is typically used to describe our religious background: whether or not a person grew up attending worship.

This phrase has been used in a mainly harmless way; however, this concept frequently creates tension among Christians. The tension may be subtle, but it can sometimes be felt. For example, Christians who were not “raised in the Church” feel disadvantaged or less than Christians who were “raised in the Church.” Or, some Christians who have been “raised in the Church” may feel their faith is less than Christians who came to faith without having been “raised in the Church.” For these reasons, I have always been uncomfortable when Christians ask me if I was “raised in the Church.”

Several years ago, I was preaching near Atlanta. An older lady in the congregation walked up to me and introduced herself. After we met, she proceeded to ask if I had been “raised in the Church.” I hesitated a bit as I started to answer her question. As I stumbled, she interrupted me and said, “David, you can’t be raised in the Church, but you can be raised in the pews!”

I smiled and told her that I loved that expression! We can be raised to know about God; however, this does not mean that we will be obedient. Regardless of our backgrounds, we must all make a decision about relationship with God.

In this article, we will explore the idea of being raised in the Church. Hopefully, the Bible will give clarity to understand how we become part of the Church.

1. No one is born into the Church. This is a critical aspect of the Church. No one is a Christian/member of the Church by natural birth. There was a time when a person could be born into the family of God. Israelites were Israelites by natural birth. Regrettably, this fact caused them to be inflated with pride. They felt because they were God’s “special people” that they could do no wrong. Of course, this was not true.

Nevertheless, Jesus spoke of a time when people from all over the world would become part of God’s family through teaching. Jesus quoted from Isaiah and said, “It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (John 6:45).

2. Becoming part of the Church requires a new birth. Jesus emphasized the need for people to be reborn into the family of God. This is precisely what Jesus taught Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5).

Jesus said this to a man who had been naturally born as an Israelite. Yet, Nicodemus would have to be reborn. The new birth is the result of an obedient faith in Jesus and the new-life-giving work of the Spirit. Unless and until Nicodemus sought rebirth, his ethnic background and formal training as a rabbi were not enough to bring him into the family of God.

3. All Christians are being raised in the Church. As already stated, the construct of the phrase “raised in the Church” creates tension in the Church. One of the points that Paul emphasizes in his letters is how despite the diverse backgrounds of Christians, all come into the family of God on equal footing. Paul wrote, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:27-29).

As Christians, we have been reborn into the family of God. Now, like newborn babies, we are being raised in the Church. As our Father, God teaches and disciplines us by His Word. Humility is of the utmost importance for us to grow in the Church. If we think that we have an upper hand since we were “raised in the Church,” we have not come to maturity. This mindset has more in common with Nicodemus and his generation than Jesus.

4. Raising our children in the pews. While we cannot be raised in the Church, we can raise our children in the pews. As parents, we are charged with the responsibility of teaching our children the Gospel. God always intended that the knowledge of Him would be transmitted through the family (Deut. 6:4-6). Fathers are commanded to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

The local church is partly designed to aid and support the development of faith in our children. Bringing our children to worship and Bible classes is vital for the sake of their future faith. Eventually, they will reach maturity and decide for themselves whether or not to be reborn into the Church. As parents, we must give our children every opportunity to learn about God.

Conclusion

We must be thoughtful in how we express ourselves. If we were raised in the pews, we must be grateful for the opportunity. If we were not raised in the pews, we should be grateful for opportunities that came later in life. Regardless of our backgrounds, we must treat one another with equality. The grace of God welcomes everyone into the family of God equally by faith.

No one in the Church is superior or inferior to another. Christ alone is supreme. Paul wrote, “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:15-16). We are privileged to be raised in His family as we seek to be more like Him.