

**Mothers' Encouragement Group**  
**The Dialectic Again**  
**September 24, 2015**

**“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” Proverbs 26:4 & 5** So which is it? Which is the way not to be foolish? **“Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—” I Peter 3:3** But in **Ezekiel 16** the Lord Himself clothes His bride this way: **“I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose(!) and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.” Ezekiel 16:10-12** So are we supposed to think about how we look or not think about it? We know that in regard to our salvation all has been determined before God made the earth. **“...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world....and he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, ‘according to the purpose of his will...” Ephesians 1:4 & 5** But we also know that we must decide, we must desire to be saved. **“The spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’...And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.” Revelation 22:17** We know that our God is completely sovereign and that nothing can happen without His allowing and controlling it. **“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you...” Exodus 7:3 & 4** If God hardened Pharaoh’s heart how could he be held responsible for all the damage that he did? But we know that, though this is true, he was and we are completely responsible for our own actions. We all must live out the consequences of the decisions we make every single day. **“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.” Revelation 22:12**

Understanding that all these things are true, along with many other things like them, allows all of the Bible to speak to us, not just some of it. Listening and pondering both sides of any subject, realizing that the Bible is a complicated book and that truth itself is complicated allows its voice to be heard in all kinds of ways and in all areas of our lives. It allows each side of truth to be declared without qualification: *God is absolutely sovereign and in control of absolutely everything and we are absolutely responsible for every decision that we make.* This is difficult! It would be so much easier if we could simply dismiss the fool that shows up in our lives and not have to make a decision about how to treat him; if we could simply not worry about how we look at all and work on our hearts all the time—or better yet, just think about how we look and never worry about the hard work that needs done inside! Life would be so much easier if the Lord just lived our lives for us, taking all decision-making out of our hands...and because it is so much easier this is what many Christians do. Each of us does this in one way or another at one time or another: we hold to one side of a truth and forget that the other side is also true and we ought to let that other side have its effect in our lives. That’s why there are Amish folk in the world who are seeking to remain “untouched” by the world. Trouble is, they got stuck in one time period that came with its own problems and they have made themselves look weird to others and so spoiled their witness.

So why am I bringing all this up again? I have two reasons. The first regards hospitality, the seeking out of others and making them feel welcome and loved. Mrs. Schaeffer refers to a family as a home that has a door with hinges. That door is often closed for the protection of the family members who reside behind it but it is also often open to welcome in the stranger, offering to that one the comforts and benefits that the family members enjoy all the time. We have talked a lot in this room about how to make our families places of love, nourishment, and teaching for our children and for our husbands but we have not talked very much about extending the blessings of our homes to those who do not reside within her walls. Remember the last remark Rob made in a Sunday morning sermon not long ago? He ended with the comment “*the Church is the only organization that exists for the benefit of its non-members.*” I have been struck over and over in thinking about that remark. How many times have you heard someone say he or she “got nothing out of that service” or “I wasn’t ministered to” or “no one spoke to me”? In many ways we all think of the gathering of the church as nourishment for ourselves, for the benefit of our souls and for the instruction of our children and so it is. But that is only one side of the dialectic; it is also for the showing of love and the caring about the benefit of the souls of those who are also in desperate need of that nourishment. Truth be told, I think it is much easier for us to close the door of our Family and of our families than it is to open it.

Yes, you are in a hard time of life; it’s busy (there’s an understatement!); it’s exhausting; it’s the time when you *must* be giving your children and your husband what they need from you. You are Mother but you are also Christian. You love your family and you love God’s Kingdom and want to see it grow. A mother’s love ought to be big enough to encompass her whole family; a Christian’s love needs to be big enough to love even those who are not in her family. It is easy to close that door and say, “I just don’t have what it takes to love one more person today.” But what then? We have not only not shown love and understanding and welcome to someone that may have needed our care but we have shown our children that our own comfort is more important than obeying God. You have actually shown them by your example that *their* own needs are more important than loving someone else. Instead we ought to be building the habit of obedience in the area of hospitality.

Families are important; they are the means of working out our Covenant theology. God has put us in families on purpose and expects us to keep them together, strong and happy—and if they are not, there is not much of worth to share with others anyway. But we need to keep that door swinging open with a willingness to share the bounty of love our Lord has showered on us over and over. And here’s another side to the subject: you are children of your parents’ families and the Bible says over and over that we are to respect our parents, honoring them, loving them, showing them gratitude for all that they poured into us when we were children. BUT now you have a family of your own which is not your parents’ family and there are moments when *your family* needs to show its own hospitality to others that has nothing to do with your parents! This is easier when your parents don’t live in the same town but I am here to tell you that it is not only physical separation that helps children build their own families, their own traditions for things, finding their own way to hospitality but there has to come a mental and emotional—note that I do not say ‘spiritual’—independence, a willingness to think through Scripture for yourself and apply it, with your husband, for yourself. This can be hard on parents, though it is a most important thing to do!

So this group of young women—our little MEG, if you will—has become a sort of ‘family,’ which I love. Dawn & I are your, sort of, ‘mothers’ and we have come up with a new rule to help our little family to show hospitality to any and all that come through these doors: we want you all to sit in a different place each time you come! And I am no longer going to sit in this rocking chair! It is up for grabs! This is us swinging our doors open wide. And for the nourishment of the family within we are going to, each time, share *one thing* with each other that we can pray for. These things will stay ‘in the family’ so you may feel easy about sharing your heart with us, if you so desire.

Now for the other reason I wanted to talk about the dialectic today: that is, the tension between having high standards for ourselves, for our children and for our mothering alongside the ability to be gracious and forgiving of ourselves and of them. This is a little like trying to put two of the early principles of parenting together. If you remember we said that children are born foolish and stupid, with Adam’s nature, which is prone to sin. This means that, given the choice and the opportunity children will nearly always choose the wrong thing, the foolish thing, the selfish thing; it is up to us as parents to correct them and to teach them the right thing, the wise thing, the loving thing. Accepting correction is not easy for anyone and it certainly isn’t generally easy for children, especially when it is happening *all the time!* But the flip side of this principle is that our love of them and for them needs to be *unconditional* and unwavering and *they need to know that it is!* In fact, if we did not love them we would not take the trouble of disciplining and correcting them. BUT, how does one communicate this love while at the same time one is constantly correcting, disciplining and teaching? It’s not easy.

I mention these things because of the book Perfecting Ourselves To Death by Dr. Richard Winter that Rachel Nicoletti is going to present to us for discussion during our first few MEG meetings. It would seem, at first glance, that Dr. Winter might possibly want to suggest that we relax our standards of behavior or rather relax the expectations we have for ourselves and our children in order to enable us to apply ‘grace and forgiveness’ to ourselves and others. This is not really so and in fact ‘the dialectic’ (or tension) is right there from the get-go. I will leave the rest to Rachel to present his valuable material. (If you weren’t able to come to our first meeting, ask Rachel to tell you what Suzan’s remark to us last spring [“If anything is worth doing it is worth doing poorly!”] has to do with the discussion of this book.)