

Mother's Encouragement Group January 28, 2016

We are thinking again during these meetings about “loving our children into Heaven.” It is important to remember that we are not the source of all love—God is. We love because He loves. In fact, *God is love*. He loved us first; He made us like Himself and so we love the ones He has given to us. Our parenting style should mimic His as best we can, using everything that happens in our children's lives, happy things and hard things and everything we teach them, as vehicles for loving them, drawing them to ourselves and so to God and to godly behavior.

We spoke last time a little bit about who we are as women. We talked about how God has suited us for this job of mothering; He has given us the physical and emotional equipment that we need to care for our children, to nurture them and raise them up in godly ways. This ought to give us some confidence: if our Lord gave us this job on purpose and made our natures suitable for it then, as our trust in His ways grows our self-doubt ought to become less and less. Why would we ever question the wisdom of God?

Now just because the Lord has suited each of us to nurture children does not mean that every mother's mothering is going to look the same or that there is only one way to aspire to accomplishing what we want to see in the next generation. This is like what Rob says about preaching: preaching is the word of God mediated through personality. The same text preached by 10 different preachers will produce 10 different sermons, all helpful and useful for the Lord's people. So with mothering: every mother's personality is different, every child is different, every circumstance is different, boys are different than girls and so on. But there are principles that remain the same for each of us and for each and every child. For instance, obedience is the child's first and foremost obligation and that is what each and every mother must teach and insist upon no matter who you are or what is going on. But this principle is expressed and presented differently in each life so that nothing in this “business of mothering” is ever boring!

Second Principle: who are our children?

Part one: the bad news.

Children are born foolish and stupid; they have Adam's nature just like we do. Psalm 14:2 & 3: “The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.” Proverbs 22:15: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”

This is not always easy to see when children are born; the baby is so cute, so sweet, so darling and already you love him so very much; how could something so innocent be full of sin? But we ought not to let the love we have for our babies cloud our judgment and our understanding of the truth. The Bible tells us that every single one of us is born with Adam's fallen nature; **Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...”** We are born

this way—corrupt and full of selfishness—and it does not take very long before this nature shows itself in a child’s life. **Romans 3** quotes **Psalm 14**: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside...no one does good, not even one” and then goes on to say, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....” Our children are prone to sin, as we are, and the sooner we face this fact the better for them and for us.

The world does not believe this; unbelievers see that cute, darling baby and think that he or she is innocent—pure—and that it is what happens to him in life that makes him behave badly and become evil. Don’t be sucked into this deception! Any sin you see in your son or daughter he was born with the nature to commit and even to love. You shouldn’t be shocked or surprised the first time—or anytime—you see those expressions of anger, rebellion and self-centeredness, even in your baby, because you understand that this is the nature he was born with. Explains a lot, doesn’t it?

Think for a moment about your baby: when was the very first time you said to yourself, “There it is; that was sin”?

I remember believing this principle in theory when our first little girl was born but she was such a good baby that I really didn’t see her sin nature and was beginning to wonder if (you’ll be shocked) the Bible was really right about this! But I can tell you exactly where I was and how old she was—13 months as I recall—when she refused to do something I wanted her to do. There was no disguising her rebellion and there was no possibility of interpreting it another way; she was going to have her own way, not mine, period. I remember thinking it was a little early for the “terrible two’s!” She got her first real spanking that day. I got wiser as I went along, though, and became smart enough to start sooner than that when our other children came along. I know a very smart mom who told me that when her child was squirming impossibly while changing a diaper, she gave him a smart little whack with her hand on a bare thigh. She got that little one’s attention(!) and he learned his first lesson in obeying her—he needed to lie still while she changed his diaper.

This is one of the first things your mothering job needs to include and *it is a loving thing to do so: you need to teach your children that the nature they were born with, that is the desire to be selfish, to have their own way instead of yours or anyone else’s, is sinful and wrong.* I am not talking about crushing their sensitive little hearts or trying to change their personalities—far from it, their personalities will thrive and blossom when the illusion that each of them is the most important creature in the world, bar none, is driven from their minds.

Part two: the good news.

Our children also belong to Christ. I Corinthians 15: 22 “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” The strength of the Christian’s parenting is that it is full of the understanding of who our children really are: that, though they are born with Adam’s nature, that is, a nature full of sin, we know that they are also in Christ and redeemed from that nature *because they are our children.* This is the covenant promise: because they are our children

and we are Christ's they are Christ's too. God's promise to Abraham was the first expression of that covenant: **"I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."** Genesis 17:7 Then to Isaac: **"...I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father."** Genesis 26:3 God spoke to Jacob similarly, renaming him Israel. Acts 16:30, 31 gives us a New Testament example of covenant thinking: when the Philippian jailer was stopped by Paul and Silas from killing himself when the earthquake had freed them from their chains, he said to them, **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"** And they said, **'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'** So we understand that what God has done for us in saving us from our sins He has promised to do for our children and, He expects us to tell them.

Malachi 2:13 - 15 puts it very clearly: **"...You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, 'Why does he not?' Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring...."** Malachi is telling Israel that their marriages must be kept faithful because *God wants the children they produce!*

Part two has an edge:

Our children belong to God, and because they do, He cares about how we raise them! And worse than that, He will hold us responsible for what we did or didn't do for them. Ezekiel 16:20, 21 **"And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them (that is, to other gods) to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?"**

The psalmist said, **"Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked....For you, O Lord, are my hope...from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb."** Psalm 71:4-6. This man knew that before he was born the Lord had placed His mark on him and how do you suppose he knew that? His mother must have told him! and just like that man and countless others we can know that even before our children are born the Lord has placed His mark on them and He wants us to tell them that. He wants us to tell them that they already belong to God and because they do they need to behave like it.

The next part of our task then is to teach our children how to be *who they are in Christ*. We get to teach them how be little Christians! **"Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!...I will utter dark sayings from of old...that our fathers have told us. We will...tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and**

appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments....” Psalm 78:1-7. This is a great advantage; we need never be at a loss as to what to teach them—even as we work at obeying God’s law for ourselves so we show them how to obey God’s law at the very same time. We teach them that the real, true center of the universe is not themselves but the God who made that universe. Our children belong to God because we belong to God and they must learn to live like they belong to Him. You can demand it of them no matter how little they are and the sooner they learn that they have to deal with God directly the better it will be for them. They can trust Him because He loves them; they must love Him; they must obey Him and they do this by obeying you. It is our job to teach them who God is, who they are, and what He requires of them. God *loves our children* so we know that He will help us in our work of teaching them and that He will bless that work.

Applications: (I have some ideas, what are yours?)

- Because children are born foolish and ignorant you must tell them *everything*: how and when to sleep, how to eat, how to speak, how to dress, but most importantly, how to think and what to think about every circumstance that comes their way. They are not capable of drawing wise conclusions; they are not capable of making a lot of choices—only little ones and only a few. *They are happiest when you have given them all their boundaries* with little bits of freedom within those boundaries.
- Take all the questions out of your interactions with them: if you ask them whether they want to get dressed for the day the answer may very likely be “no!” Don’t ask them if they want a bath; tell them it’s time for a bath. They do not know what they want or what is best for them and will invariably choose the wrong. Doesn’t this “up the ante,” that is, give them more opportunity to disobey? Not necessarily; in fact, it ups the ante when you ask them the question and then they say ‘no’—*now*, what are you going to do? You must have your way in the face of their having disagreed with you! However, you can be sweet and nice about your demands, that is, not asking but telling them, because you know in your own mind that you are bigger (hello!), that you are stronger, that you are wiser *and that you will win!* which brings me to the next point.
- You must *insist* on having your way—Christ’s way—in their lives, not letting them have their way in yours. You make all the decisions about how any particular day will go, letting them have little bits of input as you go. You are the wise one; they are foolish and will always choose the wrong, if you let them, and may I say that a tantrum is, in the nature of the case, that little being asserting itself, wanting its own way, not yours and certainly not God’s. That is sin, plain and simple, and sin must be repented of. This too is up to you: repentance is a learned skill and unless you tell them children do not know what repentance is or that it is needed or how to do it—you must tell them and show them *everything!* Remember **Proverbs 22:15**: **“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”**

HYMN

Our song for this week is a prayer you can teach your children to sing before they climb into bed each night. It is full of theology: Jesus is the Shepherd; Jesus is your child's Shepherd; Jesus stays awake at night and watches over him, keeping him safe; Jesus provides him everything he needs every day; he is a sinner and needs Jesus to forgive him; Jesus can give him things he wants; Jesus lives in Heaven and when he dies—since everyone eventually will die—he will live with Jesus there.

Jesus, Tender Shepherd, Hear Me

by Claribel Barnard

from *Let Youth Praise Him* #102

Jesus, tender shepherd, hear me
Bless thy little lamb tonight,
Through the darkness be Thou near me,
Keep me safe till morning light.

All this day Thy hand has led me,
And I thank Thee for Thy care,
Thou hast clothed me, warmed and fed me,
Listen to my evening prayer.

Let my sins be all forgiven,
Bless the friends I love so well,
Take me, when I die, to Heaven,
Happy there with Thee to dwell.