

Mothers' Encouragement Group

February 25, 2016

We are talking about “loving our children into Heaven” during this season of meetings and trying to figure out just how that is, and ought to be, done. My goal has been to try to set out for you the most basic and important principles of good parenting, not because I know them so well or have read so widely that I have been able to come to my own conclusions about these matters *or* because I have put them to such perfect use in the lives of my own children but because they come from the Bible, God’s book of wisdom and knowledge that He has given to the Church, that all Christians ought to know—and can know—from cover to cover. I told someone last week about the analogy of a choir director “putting pressure” on singers to sing the right notes at the right time in the right way and the response was that the comparison between my telling you about good parenting and being “your old choir director” breaks down when one talks about parenting because when one is singing a piece of music there are specific directions in it for every part: e.g. loud here, soft there, faster here, slower there, etc. etc. but when one looks in the Bible things do not seem so specific and spelled out for us. However, even in a piece of music there is much room for the interpretation of the director and/or the performer; so it is with the biblical principles of parenting. The Bible’s directions in fact *are very specific*, even tailor-made, for the situations we face as parents *and* there is much room for personal interpretation as parents apply those principles to each child and each situation that comes along—as long as those principles are not “interpreted away” because we do not have the courage to follow them. The trouble is that the Bible is such a big book and its lessons are everywhere in it—all throughout its pages—which makes it much harder to know and to follow than one small piece of music. But if we are true believers and trustees of our Savior we understand Him to be *our* Father, our parent, and we all have experience of Him parenting each of us as we go about our lives, do we not? (How many times has each of us come to Him, asking forgiveness *for the same sin* we had to ask forgiveness for yesterday?! Surely, this one fact can, and ought to, give us patience with those of our children who seem *oh so very slow* to learn!) This, too, is a way to understand how we should be with our children; our parenting style ought to mimic the Lord’s parenting style as much as it is within our power to do so.

So far we have mentioned: 1) that the Lord made women—and suited them—for the job of mothering children 2) that children are born foolish and stupid, that is, they are born with Adam’s fallen nature and are prone to sin; that, because they are our children, they are Christ’s children; and because they belong to Him He cares about how we raise them.

Today we talk about the third principle, a much more fun one, or is it??!

Third Principle:

Your child should know that you are absolutely, unquestionably, unconditionally on his or her side--you are FOR him; you, in fact love him. We see this principle stated everywhere in Scripture and modelled in it by our Lord Himself. **I John 4:8-10** says: “**Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live**

through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." We see it modelled negatively too—God's love has teeth: **I John 3:12 "We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."** But in reading the account of Cain's terrible deed in **Genesis 4** we see how the Lord, though He was angry with Cain and punished him took pity on him, even after he *lied to Him*. "**What have you done?"** God said, "**The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground!**" Cain answered God belligerently, "how do I know where my brother is," "**am I my brother's keeper?**" God did punish Cain but when he had the gall to complain that his punishment was too hard God put a mark on him so that no one would come along and kill him. This is the Lord showing His merciful heart: after Cain committed murder and then lied about it the Lord still had compassion on him. So God is love. How do we know? We know it from His book that He gave us to read, in which He has told us about Himself.

It may seem obvious but in today's societal climate I think it is important to say *out loud* that God does not—and cannot—love *everything!* He did not love the murder Cain committed, nor his lie. Remember, God had created Cain, and Abel and Adam and Eve, to be like Himself, to bear His image and God cannot love things that do not belong to His own nature. Murder is not loving, therefore Cain did not love his brother. Lying is loving oneself more than the truth; God cannot love what is not true. There is much food for thought here as we think about our children: what nature, what "set of values," are we wanting to build in them and how?

Think about this: was it not a loving thing for God to have created us in the first place and to have given us life in an absolutely beautiful world? He certainly didn't have to! "**In the beginning God...**" was all by Himself. Imagine with me: God did not need anything; He was perfectly self-sufficient, had perfect fellowship and perfect love among His three persons. He was happy! The biggest mystery to me is that we are here at all! Why did the Lord bother? The angels, we know, are also created beings and we know that as soon as (or, who knows—*whenever!*) they were created at least one of them was not satisfied with his created, subservient state and wanted to be like God and equal to Him. Evil, that is everything that was *not* in God's nature, was born. This was something God could and would not tolerate. Jesus told His disciples, "**I saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven.**" **Luke 10:18** I suppose you could say (I say this reverently) that God's first creation was not entirely successful! He made these creatures with wills of their own—why did He do that? And after Satan and his followers were cast out of Heaven why did He proceed to create the earth and to make man? But He did and He made us to be like Himself and to rule over the beautiful world. Our catechism says He made us "for His own glory." But after His creation of man the battle over the souls of men really began as Satan tempted and deceived, trying to wreck God's beautiful world. I ask you again, why did God bother? After Adam and Eve made their fateful choice to listen to Satan and not to God, the Lord could have said, "Forget you; I'm outa here! You made this mess, now live in it!" Aren't we often tempted to say such things to each other and even to our children? But God did not do that: He could have wiped us all out and started over or He could have decided the experiment was not worth the trouble and just have gone back to the happy and holy state He started with. Instead, He gave Satan—*Satan!*—time to rule in His beautiful world—our beautiful world and

then He sent a Savior—actually, He sent Himself since no one else was strong enough to win against Satan—to redeem our lives from our terrible messes and to give us eternal happiness.

Zechariah 3 gives us a little picture into the heavenly battle that continually rages while we remain blissfully unaware: “**Then he** (the man in Zechariah’s vision) **showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?’** Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ And to him he said, ‘Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.’” vss. 1-4 Here is God telling Satan to go “blow it off the old wazzu!” Satan had cause to complain since Joshua was a filthy mess but God said, “I’ll take care of that—this man is *mine!*” If this isn’t love I don’t know what is! Here it is, clearly spelled out, in **Deuteronomy 7:6-8** “...**The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers...**” We are told that God’s love is not motivated by anything in us—IIsrael did not earn it and we do not earn it. It is not because we are so lovely or so obedient or so strong that God loves us and has chosen us, but only *because of who God is* and what He has decided to do—and *God can do anything He wants!* Here it is again in **Deut. 10:14-15** “**Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples....**” And again in **Jeremiah 31:1-4** ““**At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people.’ Thus says the LORD: ‘...when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”**”

Now how is all this discussion relevant to the raising of our children? First of all, I think it is of utmost importance that we as parents keep in our minds as true a picture as we can of who God is and just what kind of Father He is to us. Many of us begin with false views of God as Father because our own fathers were (are) so imperfect and may have sinned against us badly when we were children. Even the best of fathers make mistakes—even bad ones—and fail to love their children in careful, nurturing ways and, let’s face it, our first view of God as Father we get from the earthly father the Lord gave us. This is also a mystery: that God, the perfect Father, would give to us, his imperfect children, the task of raising His own precious little ones that He loves and gave to us to love! But He did, in fact, give us that task and the fact that He did ought to give us some courage that we *can* do this job, though imperfectly, and also a determination to learn how to do it right. So, yes, we may start with poor examples, maybe even damaging ones, but the more we fill our minds with the character of our perfect Heavenly Father and see how He has and continues to parent us the more we actually can know what good and loving parenting is.

Jesus said, “**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends**” **John 15:13** and then He did it.

This is truly what we are doing for our children aren’t we; we are laying down our lives for them and, though they will not fully understand this until they are much, much older, yet they need to know—to be learning more and more—that this is what we are doing. They need to know that *we love them* all the time, no matter where we are, what else we may be doing or what may be going on in our life or theirs. This may seem an easy thing to do; it is certainly what we want to do but when demands on us are great and seem endless, sleep is scarce, (that whole list we mentioned the first day, hello!), this is not as easy as we hoped it would be. *What we want is to build their trust in us so that they can relax in what we tell them*; they will be able to obey without questioning because they know we have only good things in mind for them. We, in fact, *love them*, all the time, no matter what.

So how do we do this? How do we show our children that they are loved *no matter what*, that we will never leave them and that we have only good, happy, loving things in mind for them?

Here are some of my ideas:

First—this may seem obvious but it amazes me that there are moms out there of whom this is not true—that your child’s needs are anticipated and fulfilled by you and that *he knows* you are happy to do it: loving him gives you pleasure of the keenest kind, and *he knows it*. This manifests itself in cheerfulness and times of play, even entering into the play of your child. (My grandmother, who had eight babies before she was 32 said to me after my first baby was born, “Enjoy her, Honey; it’s so fun when they are little. It’s just too bad you can’t play with the babies all day long! Too bad they grow up and the discipline has to begin.”)

This is usually not hard when your baby is first born, is it? The Lord builds into women that wonderful place that welcomes children and finds their nurture the most fulfilling thing in life. I remember, when our first child was born thinking to myself, “Oh, this is what my life is all about.” But when sleep deprivation begins to crop up and so many questions raise their stinking heads that you don’t know the answer to, you begin to wish he or she might go away just for a second...but, of course, he never does and, in the end, you don’t want him to.

Second, you defend your child against all comers whenever you can, letting him see that you are on his side. But when he is wrong you will show him, not defending his sin, but letting him know how important he is to you—so important that you can’t stand it when his behavior is not right and is not pleasing to the Lord.

Third, you look him in the eye and try to read his heart—what is going on in that little mind? Typically, this is not too hard since children are mostly unsophisticated and transparent. What you don’t do is look above him or around him or at someone else who

might be nearby while you are talking to him. This establishes a line of communication between you and your child that is shared by NO ONE ELSE—not friends, not strangers, not father, not even other siblings. (But if the truth be told it is seen and shared by the Lord which you acknowledge and your child will learn.) Doing this not only ministers to your child's little heart and makes him feel he is important in your life, and so cared for tenderly, but also helps when you are in public and need him to respond quickly for one reason or another; that communication between you has already been established and it ought to take very little for you to grab his attention and get the response you need.

Fourth, you NEVER laugh at your child as though he were a source of entertainment; always treat him with the utmost seriousness, meeting his or her little heart right where it is. Our granddaughter Bryonie was a flower girl several summers ago in a family wedding and, granted she was only 2 ½, but when it came time for her to walk down that long aisle with a couple of other little girls that she did not know, she balked and wouldn't go at all until she saw her other Grandma waiting for her in the front. She later told her mother that she saw everyone looking at her and laughing. I'm sure they were all simply responding to how cute she was but they did not think about the effect of that laughter on her little soul, making it hard for her to obey and do what she knew was expected of her. Dawn remembers how irritated I used to be with her sister, Robin, who laughed at our kids all the time and goaded them into saying things or doing things that she thought were funny. This kind of thing turns children into little objects for our own pleasure and amusement and does not respect the real little people that they are. Even Dr. Reymond from Covenant Seminary, when he was out here to speak for a presbytery family camp, was so tickled with our own little Bryonie's young knowledge of the catechism (I think she was 2 or maybe 3 years old) that he would ask her its questions over and over again just to hear her perform.

Loving our children also means remembering who they are and what they are; their sacred little beings are fallen and sinful, even though "chosen," just as we are and so we must put our second and third principles together. The fact that children are born foolish and that we must be *for* them no matter what, means that we are left with the task of hating the sin and loving the sinner, which is *exactly* what our Savior did and, in fact, does all the time. How much does God hate our sin? Enough to send His own precious Son to suffer excruciating pain, alienation from all, and agony of soul on that cross so long ago. How much does God love the sinner? Enough to send His own precious Son to suffer excruciating pain, alienation from all, and agony of soul on that cross so long ago. He did this because He loved us and could not stand our sin! Here is our pattern, Girls, and our example. We hate the sin in our darling children but love those darling children to pieces!

Hear God's own message to His people: "**Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and**

by his name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen.” Deuteronomy 10:16-21 Teaching our children about God *their* Father is the most loving thing you can do for them.

HYMN

This little Sunday School song is one of the ones my mother taught me when I was a girl; I can remember singing it in the car with her and my sister. Its message went “home” and stayed there: I knew that God loved me.

He Loves Me Too

Maria Straub/S.W. Straub

#5 in *Let Youth Praise Him*

God sees the little sparrow fall,
It meets His tender view;
If God so loves the little birds,
I know He loves me too.

CHORUS: He loves me too, He loves me too,
I know He loves me too;
Because He loves the little things,
I know He loves me too.

He paints the lily of the field,
Perfumes each lily bell;
If He so loves the little flowers,
I know He loves me well.

God made the little birds and flowers,
And all things large and small;
He'll not forget His little ones,
If they obey His call.