



How to Parent

“Give Them Grace”

But ye are come unto mount Sion...

And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling...

Hebrews 12:18-24

If there is one thing I wish I had known about parenting our children from the very beginning it is how to give them grace. During the first years of our marriage, I was not a believer. My wife and I were Christian by upbringing and profession; I even was a Christian school teacher and principal for several years. But in reality I was a moralist, and taught my students and children in that way.

Since I did not grasp God's way according to the gospel as it is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, I could not live it or teach my children about it. So I brought our children to Mount Sinai instead of Mount Zion. I knew we as parents and children could not earn God's favor by our works, yet in many subtle ways we pursued this path.

The main problem in this pursuit is that though we may teach children all about the gospel in theory, in practice we teach them to “be good.” When your daughter behaves well, you praise her and tell her that she has “been good.” On the other hand, when your son does not behave well, we tell him that he should not “be bad.” It does not take long for children to catch on, in how they think both about others and about themselves.

Both children are in need of grace. The “bad” child needs grace to understand that he has not only just been bad towards you or his sibling but also towards the Lord. He must be taught to first of all confess his sin and plead forgiveness, both with you and with God, then trust the sufficiency of Christ's blood and the power of the Holy Spirit for cleansing. Having done so, he may be assured by God from His Word that there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared (Ps. 130). If dealt with this way, both we and our child will be humbled by God's goodness and grace in forgiving us, and so desire to serve Him together and with heartfelt gratitude.

The “good” child also needs grace – grace to understand she does not have a credit with God but rather a debit or a debt to God, because she owes her good behavior to the goodness of God. Though we as parents may and must be thankful for her good behavior and express that to her, we should not do so without seeing God's grace in having done any good at all. If dealt with this way, both we and our child will be humbled by God's goodness and grace in keeping us from breaking out into sin, and so desire again to serve Him together and with heartfelt gratitude.

In the parable of the prodigal son, both sons were in need of grace. The Lord Jesus clearly had the “good” son in mind in this parable. In other words, we and our children always need grace, and ultimately it always is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). So as we stand every Sunday morning at the foot of Mount Sinai, we all stand guilty of all the commandments of God; but thanks be to God, the reading of the Holy Law of God then is followed by the preaching of the gospel, leading us to Mount Zion, Golgotha, and the blood of the Lamb of God.

The more we begin to see how the Lord bears with us parents as sinners by nature and yet as saints by grace in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, the more we will bear with the sins and shortcomings of our children. This by no means excuses any sin in them or in us, but it does put all in the realistic and gracious perspective of 1 John 1:9-2:3:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

As God our heavenly Father addresses us as *“little children,”* even so we as fathers and mothers approach our children. We use firm language as we warn them not to sin, yet when (not if!) they do, we immediately tell them not to despair but to flee to Christ with their sins, trusting He will forgive them, as He does with us.

This amazing grace which the Lord extends to sinners who repent of their sins, even in their best deeds, and believe in the Savior, will produce a Spirit-worked and heartfelt desire to love and serve Him. This will then be observed by our children, both in the way we deal with our own sins as well as theirs. Even so, the more we and our children do what is right, the more we will be filled with gratitude for His grace at work in us.

So we may find ourselves “grow(ing) in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever.”

(2 Peter 3:18)

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