

GOD'S CHILDREN ARE LIKE OUR CHILDREN



The mere mention of children or grand children, especially our own, causes affectionate love to flood our hearts. Except when they leave a water faucet running and flood the floors or except when they walk in wet concrete. As someone once said, "I love kids in the abstract but not in the concrete." Or except as when one of our grand daughters "painted" the kitchen cabinets with a permanent black marker on a white surface. The only good thing about that incident was she "painted" the cabinets at our son's house, not ours.

Children come in both a package of affectionate love and in a package of foolishness. The Bible verifies the package of foolishness by the words of Proverbs 22:15: "A youngster's heart is filled with foolishness, but physical discipline (spanking) will drive it far away." (NLT) The Bible, especially the book of Proverbs, says a great deal about the value and necessity of loving our children enough to discipline them. One such bit of advice is the following: "Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them." (Proverbs 13:24 NLT)

God is no less affectionate toward His children than we are to our children. Likewise He is no less a disciplinarian to His children than we are to ours. Proverbs 3:11-12 (NLT) says this of God's discipline of His children: "My child, don't reject the Lord's discipline, and don't be upset when He corrects you. For the Lord corrects those He loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights."

It seems pretty clear then, that those who are God's children are an accurate reflection of our children. Believe it or not, children of God also flood the floor with water (but don't walk on water except when it is frozen); walk in wet concrete; and "paint" things that don't need painting. God's children even have hearts full of the same foolishness that is attributed to our children in Proverbs 22:15. And the remedy for this foolishness is the same for God's children: discipline, even punishment.

But please don't get the idea that God skips affection for His children in favor of discipline or punishment. God is affectionate for His people at a level that most of us have never experienced.

Jesus revealed that level of affection in His prayer of longing over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37) Imagine! Jesus was expressing an earnest desire to shower affection on those who mistreated and even killed His messengers. But they would not accept His offer of love to them. How many times have our children rejected the love of good parents who sincerely offered their love to errant children?

There are a number of things for which God disciplines and punishes His children – all for the purpose of drawing them to Him and His love, and for them to be prepared for productive service in His kingdom. It is very much the same strategy in disciplining and punishing our children – to draw them to ourselves as parents and prepare them for productive life in our society.

GOD DISCIPLINES COMPLAINING

As the nation of Israel left Egypt, they were identified in Scripture as the children of Israel. But all too soon, they became the spoiled children of Israel. There was very little about their desert journey that escaped their complaining. They complained about bad tasting water at Marah (Exodus 15:22-25), lack of water at Rephidim (Exodus 17:1-7) and at Kadesh (Numbers 20:1-13). They complained about the lack of food such as they had while still in Egypt (Exodus 16:1-3). This complaint took a turn toward meanness inasmuch as they said to Moses and Aaron: “For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Exodus 16:3) Ironically, this was the exact time God chose to give them manna for their sustenance. But in a short time, they didn’t like it either. The Israelites also complained about a lack of meat in their diet, even though their manna was probably much more nutritious. They craved meat! (Numbers 11:4-6, 18-23, 31-34) Imagine this: “They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved.” (Psalm 78:18 NIV)

But of all their complaints en-route from Egypt to the Land of Promise, probably those against God Himself and against His chosen leader Moses caused God the greatest anger. Their complaint about a lack of food was identified by Moses thusly: “...for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him.” “Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord.” (Exodus 16:8) In actuality, a good case could be made that ALL of these complaints were really made against the Lord.

Moses was the initial target of many complaints, including “no water” (Exodus 17:2) and “no food,” “no water” and “our soul loathes this worthless bread.” (Numbers 21:5) The latter complaint was also against God and caused Him to send poisonous snakes, killing many. (Guess they didn’t need the “worthless bread” anymore.)

Every now and then, the Israelites complained about how much better things were for them in Egypt:

Exodus 14:11-12: Why have you taken us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? We told you in Egypt to let us alone so we could serve the Egyptians because it would be better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

Exodus 16:3: “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Numbers 11:5-6: “We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!”

Numbers 11:18: “Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.”

Numbers 11:20: “Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?”

Numbers 14:2-4: The people were faced with a major decision to go into the Land of Promise. But the report of the 12 spies was “Go”: 2 “Don’t Go.” 10 . This discouraged the heart of the people; and whenever the people were discouraged and in fear, they reminisced about how great things were in Egypt. Such was the case in this situation as they began to speak nonsense: “If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this

wilderness! (verse 2b) Didn't they just say in Exodus 14:11 how degrading it would be to die in the wilderness? Now, at Kadesh-Barnea while they were faced with a major decision, they thought it would have been better to have died in Egypt or in the wilderness than to be stuck in their present place of decision. They seemed to find it hard to make decisions requiring faith and obedience to God and as a result repeatedly used Egypt as their comfort level for decision making. For Israel, in almost all situations during their desert journey that required a decision, Egypt was the known; faith and obedience to God was the unknown. It was therefore much more comfortable for them to speak longingly of Egypt (the known) and make excuses for refusing to press ahead into the unknown, the will and command of God. Verse 3: "Why did God bring us here to die, along with our families? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" Verse 4: "So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.' "

Acts 7:39: Stephen described the attitude of the Israelites in this way: "And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt."

GOD DISCIPLINES DISOBEDIENCE

When the Israelites refused to obey God's command to move toward the Land of Promise from Kadesh Barnea (as recorded in Numbers 13 and 14) the ten spies whose faithless, negative report discouraged the heart of the people (see Numbers 32:7-9) were killed by a plague from the Lord. These spies and their evil report overwhelmed the people with a fear that melted the hearts of Israel toward their enemies in much the same manner as the people of Jericho would later report a melting of their hearts toward Israel. Not only were the ten spies executed for their major role in causing Israel's disobedience, the entire congregation was sentenced to 40 extra years in the desert before God would grant the next opportunity to enter the Promised Land. Not only is disobedience to God the wrong thing to do. It isn't any long-term fun, either!

SUMMARY

Our children are guilty of trespass against us. God's children are likewise guilty of transgression against God.

Our children receive chastening when it is needed. God's children are under God's rod of correction when called for.

Our children, if wise, learn from the discipline and punishment they receive and become better persons for it. God's children, when receptive to God's discipline and punishment (chastening), are able to "be partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10); an essential "without which no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14)

Finally, chastening hurts (Hebrews 12:11); but it hurts good!