

Unconditional Love In The Context Of Child Rearing

[Part 1]

In God's Word, the Christian Bible, the book of Proverbs is well known for its praise of the rod in child rearing and is rejected by this society on this count.

But as with so many things in God's Word, there is a total misunderstanding of what is only a very small part of child rearing.

Proverbs 19:18 [Amplified Bible] *“Discipline your son while there is hope, but do not indulge your angry resentments by undue chastisements and set yourself to his ruin.”*

Proverbs 13:24 [New King James] *“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.”*

For us to understand what we are being told in this proverb we need to know the historical and cultural use of a “rod.”

Psalms 23:4 [New King James] *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”*

The shepherd used the “rod” to nudge the sheep in the right direction to avoid it ending up in difficult and dangerous situations. This is why the Psalmist said he was comforted by the rod and staff [the shepherd's crook that lovingly lifted the sheep back onto the safe path if it fell into a crevice.]

To withhold discipline, course correction is neither a showing of love and kindness to a child, for the opportunity passes all too soon.

There are two main reasons for this discipline early in a child's life.

Proverbs 22:15 [New King James] *“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.”*

It often takes more than words to get the desired result.

Proverbs 15:32 [Amplified Bible] *“He who refuses and ignores instruction and correction despises himself, but he that heeds reproof gets understanding.”*

Character, the end goal of child rearing, is embodied in wisdom and understanding.

Hebrews 12:6-11 [New King James] *“Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”*

The Creator God knows that the creating of godly character needs to start when we are young.

Proverbs 22:6 [New King James] *“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

It is when we are young that we are more receptive to correction and instruction.

Proverbs 29:15 [New King James] *“The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”*

Lack of discipline and instruction leads to a predictable outcome.

This “rod” correction is **no** panacea for it is **only** part of the whole programme of child rearing.

Proverbs 1:8 [New King James] *“My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother;”*

The parents’ chief resource is constructive action as a united team.

Their “law”, Hebrew word “*tôrâh*” meaning precepts or statutes.

This includes the Ten Commandments but **not** confined to them.

The aim is to foster wise habits in both thoughts and action.

The most important thing, that must be the basis of all child rearing, is that all correction must be in an environment of unconditional love.

There are three major areas in which we can express this love to our child, each beginning with the letter “L,” they are live, look and listen.

Live –

By this I mean try to consider any situation from the child’s viewpoint.

Every child at birth is thrust suddenly into a completely strange new world, this is a sudden and total loss of the security experience in the womb.

The first greatest need the child has is to regain the feeling of security, in other words, to be assured they are still loved.

The child needs to be held close, cuddled, feel warm covers tucked in all around them.

The child needs to hear, once again, the reassuring heartbeat of the mother, for this was a major feature of their former secure world in the womb.

The child needs to hear the recognisable voices of both parents, in calm and reassuring tones as they had in the womb before birth.

Warmth of surroundings is needed, for in the womb the child had a constantly regulated temperature of the mother’s body.

These physical expressions of love must be unconditional as they were in the womb.

All of the above expressions of love must never be dependent on performance, or any mistakes that the child makes.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 [Amplified Bible] *“Love endures long and is patient and kind. Love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy, is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily. It is not conceited, arrogant and inflated with pride, it is not rude, unmannerly, and does not act*

unbecomingly. Love, God's love in us, does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking, it is not touchy or fretful or resentful, it takes no account of the evil done to it, pays no attention to a suffered wrong. It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail. Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best in every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances and it endures everything without weakening."

Note there are **no** conditions attached to this kind of love, which covers the situations that parents will experience in the rearing of all their children.

This unconditional love is the ideal we should aim for and the nearer we come to it in our own approach to our child the more effective we will be in developing a right relationship with our children.

Without this attitude of unconditional love it is impossible to –

- a) Understand our children.
- b) Understand their needs.
- c) Understand their behaviour.
- d) Understand how to deal with their misbehaviour.

This unconditional love means loving our children no matter what, even when at times we may detest their behaviour.

Remember that there are things we do or attitudes we have that our Heavenly Father hates, yet He still loves us unconditionally, [**Proverbs 6:16-19**].

Romans 5:8 [King James] *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

This is the perfect example of unconditional love.

How do we have this unconditional love for our children –

It helps to constantly remind ourselves of certain things.

a) Our children are still children –

Psalms 103:13 [New King James] *"As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him."*

Thankfully this is how our Heavenly Father looks on us as immature children.

b) As children they will tend to act as children –

1 Corinthians 13:11 [New King James] *"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things."*

This is in the context of the unconditional love description.

Paul understood this fact that all of us are still *"childlike"* in the eyes of our Heavenly Father.

We still do **not** view life from His mature, eternal viewpoint.

Isaiah 55:8-9 [New King James] “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,*’ says the LORD. ‘*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*’”

Our Heavenly Father knows this and acts accordingly.

c) Much of this childish behaviour will be unpleasant from our adult viewpoint –

Isaiah 64:6 [New King James] “*But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags...*”

From God’s holy and mature viewpoint this is how we look.

Even the first efforts of our children to change may still result in unpleasant results, we have to be patient even as our Heavenly Father is patient with us.

d) If we do our part as parents by unconditionally loving our children they will be able to give up their childish ways –

1 John 4:19 [New King James] “*We love Him because He first loved us.*”

Only when our children know this unconditional love we have for them can they begin to reflect that love in their behaviour.

1 Corinthians 13:11 [New King James] “*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*”

The last part of this verse only happened in Paul’s life after Jesus Christ had expressed His love for Paul at the time of Paul’s conversion.

If we only love our children when they please us, they will **not** feel genuinely loved, and this will hinder them from moving towards a more mature way of life.

e) Every child comes into this world with an amazing ability to perceive things emotionally –

Children are extremely sensitive to any emotions expressed by those who are in their world.

Since children have a very little fund of knowledge by personal experience, their way of communicating is primarily on the “*feeling*” level.

A child is constantly asking their parents “*do you love me*” **not** in words but on an emotionally behaviour level.

It is what we do, not what we say, that will be understood by our children.

For a personal example, when Esther, my granddaughter, was young, when she saw me at any time or any place, if I ignored her headlong rush to be hugged by her granddad, her little world would be shattered.

Even when a schoolgirl, she would rush into my office after school, brushing past staff and customers, into my arms to get a needed hug.

Even now as a grown-up woman with her first child, every visit involves many hugs and kisses for her granddad.

Rachael, my handicapped grandchild, who was wheelchair bound, could not run to me, but at the sound of her granddad’s voice she would chuckle and gyrate in her wheelchair until she received her love-assuring hug.

Hebrews 4:14-16 [New King James] *“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

Jesus Christ knows that we, even as adults, react on an emotional level, for He did when He was in human flesh, often we read of His compassion for those in pain or with handicaps, and He wept at the disbelief of those close to Him, [**John 11:35**].

Children, [and other human beings in measure as God’s children] can finely sense how we are feeling by the way we act and react.

So if we want our children to know that we love them, we must act as if we love them unconditionally and at all times.

Our emotional tanks –

Children [and all other human beings as God’s children] have what I call as a way of illustration, figuratively but very real, an “emotional tank,” that needs to be constantly “topped up.”

Only when their “emotional tank” is full can a child be expected to do their best to respond to our guidance and requests.

We as parents are the ones who need to ensure that this “emotional tank” is full and brimming over.

I remember an example of this filling of an “emotional tank” by a servant of God.

Even before I was ordained as a deacon, the local pastor took me with him to visit a young lady who had requested a visit from the ministry. I went along as a spectator, because ministers in my church did **not** visit single women living alone without another man or woman being present.

This young woman had left home and had a casual affair with a man who left her with a child to bring up by herself.

She was mini-skirted to an embarrassing degree, had a “beehive” hairdo and was made up like Cleopatra.

There were other very obvious things that needed to be changed for her to feel at home in a church service.

The minister ignored all these glaring things and concentrated on helping her from special church funds to ensure that she and her young child had enough food and warmth in her rather bare and tiny council flat.

This was expressing the love of God for her in a very practical way.

You could see and feel the tension this young girl had when we first arrived melt away, and an eagerness to respond to our guidance replaced this tension.

The minister asked me to give her a lift to Sabbath Services with another family I was already giving a ride.

Then casually, as we left, the minister mentioned that her mini-skirt would be a slight embarrassment to some of the members of the church.

Just that, no more.

It was with slight intrepidation that I called the next Sabbath to give her a lift, not knowing what would assault my eyes.

You know what! She came to the door and invited me in, asking “*am I dressed ok?*”

The mini-skirt was replaced by one that came just below her knees, that she had bought from the Oxfam shop, the “*beehive*” hairdo was replaced by long and softly waved hair and the makeup had gone completely.

All that she associated with the mini-skirt in her mind had been changed as well.

All this because we had expressed God’s love for her in a way she could understand, and our visit had filled her “*emotional tank.*”

For the first time we had shown her that there were people who really loved her, not by what they had said but by what they did for her in a practical way.

She responded with love and concern for other people in the church by not embarrassing them in any way.

Philippians 4:19 [Amplified Bible] “... *and my God will liberally supply, fill to the full, your every need ...*”

This includes our emotional needs.

How is this done by God?

- a) Fellowship with likeminded people at Sabbath Services and social events.
- b) Annual Holy Days that give us assurance of His great love for us through an understanding of His plan for all humanity.
- c) Feast of Tabernacles, a concentrated “*vision maker*” that will, through remembrance, help to fill our “*emotional tanks*” when life gets hard.

Malachi 3:16 [New King James] “*Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.*”

Fellowship with other Christians will keep our “*emotional tank*” constantly filled up.

John 14:16-18 [New King James] “*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.*”

This scripture indicates that Jesus Christ had up to that moment been their helper.

The Greek word translated “*helper*” is “*paraklētos*” meaning advocate, consoler, one near at hand.

John 14:27 [New King James] “*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*”

Such a “*helper*” will give us peace of mind.

When we love our children in this way they will have the same peace of mind.