



Lively Stones | PETER 2:5

Holding forth the word of life

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Children's Day Message

The celebration of Children's Day (1st October) is always tagged with a caption "protect our next generation from abuse." Campaigns have been on-going to protect children against psychological, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. These are legitimate campaigns to address the growing concern over the abuse of children under the hands of adults who unfortunately abuse their authority over children. As much as we are angry with the abuse of the vulnerable children, we are to ask ourselves, as believers in Christ are we also abusing our children spiritually? Are we an offence or a stumbling block to them to hinder them from knowing Christ?

Spiritual Abuse

Under the covenant of God, every child born into a believer's family is a child of promise (Acts 2:38, 39) and a heritage of the Lord (Psalm 127:3). Our Lord Jesus knows that children are in the covenant of God and in Matthew 19:13 rightly rebuked the disciples for reproofing the parents to bring their little children (which means toddlers in Greek) and infants (Luke 18:15) to Jesus Christ. But Jesus' response is found in Matthew 19:14, when he chided the disciples to "suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Every child to Jesus was precious in His sight. Likewise this attitude was seen in Matthew 21:15-16, when the children shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David", the chief priests were annoyed. But Jesus saw that it was proper for the children to rejoice. Jesus wants them to be interested in religion before the evil principles of the world get fast on them. Jesus hence appealed to Psalm 8:2, "Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"

Thus, we see the parents who brought these children who have no infirmities unlike the lame, the blind and the sick. These parents showed their genuine desire for God's blessings upon their children and their dependence upon God to save their children. So we who treasure our children have to commit them to the Lord and with prayer and resoluteness to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4b).

Let us be reminded that our children are growing each day and their spiritual awareness and their mental faculty increase. Are we examples for them in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith and in purity (1 Tim 4:12)? Or are we a hindrance to them to come to the Lord Jesus Christ?

In Matthew 18:6, Jesus gave a warning to those who stumbles their children, But whoso shall offend one of these little ones

which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

In its context, the disciples had been clamouring for pre-eminence in the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord calmly responded by making use of a nearby little child who was standing by, to present a powerful aid to show the disciples the importance of a childlike humility, "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:4). But having made the point about humility, the Lord continued to pursue on the subject of children. In verse 5, He emphasized that "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me". The word "receives" suggests receiving an honoured guest with reverence and with great kindness. Every child shall be treated with tenderness, kindness and love.

Thereafter, He gave a stern rebuke that whoever offends (skandalizo in Greek, which we get the word scandal) or stumbles or cause to fall that leads the children to sin commits an offence against the child and also against Christ Himself. Whoever is a stumbling block to believing little ones lies under a horrible judgment of God. Jesus declared that a person committing such a deed, it would be better for him, in fact, that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea. A millstone in Jesus' times was used to grind grains and weighs hundred of pounds. The Romans sometimes carried out their judicial execution of criminals by tying a millstone around their neck and push them overboard in deep water. It was a fearful sentencing of death which is comparable to crucifixion. Jesus said that suffering such a petrifying death would be better than causing even one of the little children to sin.

In Matthew 18:7, the Lord states that "Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" the Lord states that the world is a sinful place and that offenses (to little ones) will come—but woe to that man through whom they come. Of whom is He speaking? Christ is speaking generally but primarily applying to parents.

Parental Influence

Under God's providence, when a man and a woman have a child, they have kindled a spark that can never be put out. That child, blessed or cursed will exist forever and ever. No peaceful oblivion waits for poorly reared

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children. God has made the world in such a way that parents have a tremendous influence over the direction of their children either it for good or evil.

How serious are parents' role? In Matt 18:8-9, "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." The Lord Jesus spoke these stern warning still in the context of children of the Lord's teaching of children as in v. 10. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

When are the occasions when we should be hung with a millstone round our neck and to despise our children?

Firstly, when they are neglected, overlooked and shoved aside for larger, more adult concern like careers, condominiums, cash and keeping up with the Joneses. There is so much focus on giving material blessings to our children that we have neglected to meeting their spiritual needs as commanded by the Lord in Deuteronomy 6:4-7, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

As God's representatives, we are to commit ourselves to instruct our children in the fear of the Lord that they may arise another godly generation for the Lord. There are times when we underestimate their capacities for spiritual things. There are reservations to catechize them and instruct them on God, Christ, Salvation, Sacraments etc. We teach them profane and irreverent little rhymes, not psalms and hymns. We give them moralistic little stories, not biblical doctrine and ethics. We pile on top their table with school assessment books and test papers from top schools in Singapore and warned them not to spend too much time on their Quiet Time with God. Parents,

therefore are to ensure that the Bible is read to the children and praise and prayers are uttered to the Lord. Any discipline discharged has to be biblical and godly that the children may not be provoked to anger and get discouraged (Col 3:21 cf. Eph 6:4).

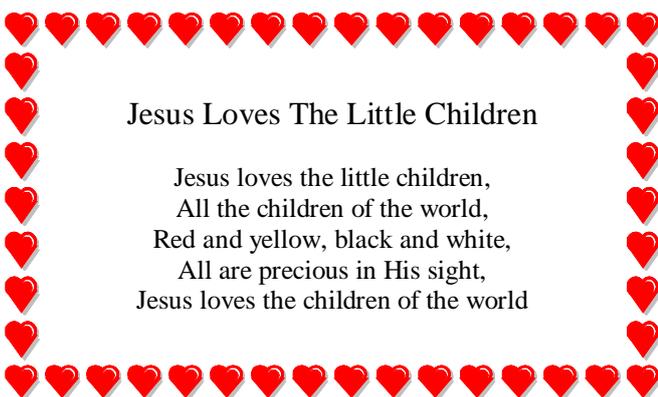
Secondly, as parents we are not to overindulge in them. We pander to their whims and fancies and we have prevented ourselves from disciplining them for fear of what psychologists propounded, the rod will drive their self esteem out of them. I have witnessed at the hospital maternity ward how a four-year old boy was kicking his father's legs because his mother refused to let him enter the nursery where all the babies were held. He wailed so loudly and yelled, "I hate mommy, I don't like mommy!" To my consternation, his father just stood there nonchalantly saying, "It's up to you to like or dislike mommy". What does the Bible says about godly discipline? God's measure is found in Proverbs 23:14, "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell."

Finally, our children are stumbled when we suffocate them with television programmes or computer games. We allow the television and computer games to become a "shepherd" to them. This is done to the extent that filth and violence are not filtered out. Thus, the child is inclined to be saturated with the evils of the world that God has no place in their hearts.

Conclusion

As we celebrate together with our children on Children's Day let us be reminded by the sober warning of the consequence of stumbling our children. Let us not stumble or despise them by our selfish living, our neglect of instructing God's Word, our laxity in our discipline and allowing the evils of the world to saturate their mind. Proverbs 22:6 has a positive and negative promise. If we are training up the child the way he should go in the Lord and training him right, he will not depart from it. But if we train him not in the way of the Lord, when he grows old, he will also not depart from it. Let us teach our children when their hearts are tender.

Preacher Quek Keng Khwang



Announcements

- There will be NO Sunday School on 23rd October in lieu of our Church 55th Anniversary.
- The Editorial team welcomes contribution from the congregation. Please send contributions to **koh-julia@starhub.net.sg**. The editorial team reserves the right to edit any articles to be published.

Editorial Team:

Mrs Julia Koh, Mrs Selina Lee