

*How to Really Love Your Child*¹

TEXT: "That they may train the young women to love their husbands, to love their children" (Titus 2:4).

INTRODUCTION

When we think of love for children we think of it as being natural. Picture a mother and father with a new baby. See the pride and love shining in their eyes. Or, see the parents with their child at his first school play. Again, see that beaming love.

Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit, said that proper love for a child does not come naturally. The proper love for a child must be taught (2:4). One of the prime missions of John the Baptist was to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" (Luke 1:17). Many times when parents think they love their children, the child still *feels* unloved. As far as the child is concerned, the effect is just the same as being unloved. This lesson is not so much on loving children as it is on loving children in such a way that they will feel loved and accepted.

I. LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY

The word *love* in Titus 2:4 is *agape*. It is unconditional good will. God has this kind of love for us (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 8:38, 39). This is the kind of love Christians are to have for one another (1 Peter 1:22).

With unconditional love, parents will see beyond the deed to the person. They may hate the actions, but they will still love their child. We do grave harm to a child when we conditionally love them according to their good behavior or their accomplishments. Some parents love their children because they make good grades or are star athletes.

With unconditional love, parents will do what is best for the child, not themselves. Discipline can only be effective in an atmosphere of unconditional love. Parents should ask, "What does

my child need?" Spend time helping your child develop in his weaker areas.

II. LOVE BEHAVIORALLY

"To love their children" includes loving behaviorally. The words "I love you" are important and needed on both ends! A parent should not want a day to pass without telling his child, "I love you." A parent should not want a day to pass without hearing this phrase from his child.

But words are not enough. Read 1 Corinthians 13:48. Love is kind. Love is patient. Love does not behave rudely. Love is not easily provoked. Love rejoices not in iniquity but in truth. Love bears all, believes all, hopes all, endures all. Love never fails. Notice that these are not feelings; they are actions.

III. LOVE BY LISTENING

"To love their children" also includes loving by listening. Nothing is more frustrating than trying to talk to someone who has their mind on something else. Such lack of attention shouts, "I do not care about you! You are not important!" It takes time for a parent to listen to his child. A parent needs to set apart time to be with each child. Doing things together is invaluable.

IV. LOVE BY TOUCHING

"To love their children" includes loving by touching. Too many fathers think it is not manly to hold and hug their children. A child can be abused by hitting. We all abhor the idea of child abuse, and the idea of incest is horrible. But a child can also be abused by withholding touching, such as hugging. A father can help his child grow up with a healthy attitude toward the opposite sex by the attention and touching he gives his daughter. He can teach her that there is no need for promiscuity in order to get atten-

tion. A father can help his son know how to feel about others by how he accepts him and loves his wife.

CONCLUSION

Proper love for children is taught, says Paul. Love that is taught should be unconditional and

behavioral. It also should involve listening and touching. How important is a parent's love for the child!

—Leon Barnes

FOOTNOTE

¹This sermon idea is taken from a helpful little book entitled *How to Really Love Your Child* by Ross Campbell.

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