

**“STEWARDSHIP OF GOD’S GIFT OF CHILDREN:  
ROOTED AND GROUND IN LOVE AND OBEDIENCE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Ephesians 3:17-18; I John 3:1; John 15:9-12**

**Introduction.**

I want to take the Cadet theme this morning on being “Rooted and Grounded” and expand on it. First, I will describe Christ’s indescribable love for us and then second to consider how we should respond to this love.

**First, how big is God’s love.**

The apostle Paul is attempting to do the impossible, and whenever you try to do something impossible, the best thing to do is pray. The Cadet verse is part of a prayer that starts with, Paul saying, “I bow my knees before the Father and ask that according to the riches of His glory, He would give us the power of His Holy Spirit in our inner being, with faith that comes from Christ in our hearts, so we would be able to comprehend how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for us.”

Did you hear what Paul did there? He called on all the members of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to make us able to grasp how vast God’s love for us is. That’s what it will take. What is impossible for Paul to do, God is able to do.

How many of you kids have ever been to 3-D movies? You know, the kind where you put on those funny special glasses. How many of you all have? I did once with Phama at DisneyWorld. We saw the Muppets movie in 3-D. It was just incredible. The characters would come right up to you from off the screen.

God’s love is 3-D, it is bigger and better than anything you know in this life. Paul has a vision of the staggering dimensions of God’s love and he wants the same for all of us. Would you like to see all the dimensions of God’s love? Would you like to see it explode into life and thrill your heart and come closer than ever before? He uses language meant to fill us with wonder and awe, to show the unimaginable greatness of God’s love.

## **Breadth, Broad, wide**

There's a wideness in God's love and mercy. Sometimes a small child will say to his mom or dad, "I love you this much." And he spreads his arms out as far as he can. God spreads out His arms like a father or a mother and scoops up and gathers to Himself all His children. God's love is broad enough to include all the elect men and women from every tribe and nation and people group that has ever existed on the face of the earth (Rev. 5:9-10) in every age, in every place. "It is a love that embraces the whole family of God from the least to the greatest" (Pink, *The Ability of God*, p. 256). It reaches all the way around the world and includes you and me.

## **Length, long**

Some of us may have a little trouble with the breadth or width of God's love, but this next one is really tough. How long is Christ's love? Since you were born again? Since you said yes to Jesus and started loving Him?

Scripture says His love is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him. It is as long as eternity (Eph. 1:4-5; Jeremiah 31:3; Ps. 103:17). "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end" (Lam. 3:22).

Before anything existed, you were in His thoughts from eternity and as He looked down the corridors of time and history His loving intentions for you were always the same. Throughout all of history His thoughts never wavered, He saw you and His heart was stirred with great affection for you, so much so He died for you so He could take you home to be with Him to be in His love forever.

To all who are in Christ, God will never love you and me more than He does today, and He will never love you and me less. (Scotty Smith, *Objects of His Affections*).

## **Depth, deep**

Many times the Psalmist cries out and refers to his life as being mired in a deep pit.

God's love is deeper than the deepest pit of sin and rebellion or despair. His love is deeper than the most devastating effects of sin you have experienced or can imagine (Eph. 2:1-2; I Cor. 5:21; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:15).

Paul says, "I am persuaded that neither...height nor depth shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

No matter how deep your sin, despair, depression, doubt, no matter how far your spirit has sunk; whatever the depth, underneath are the everlasting arms of our God (Deut. 33:27).

## **Height, high**

The love of Christ is the highest height. Higher than Mt. Everest, as high as the highest heavens. His love is higher than we could hope for, ask for or imagine (Eph 3:20).

We say, “I love you to the moon and back.” That’s pretty high, but God’s love is higher.

The love of Christ cannot be measured, nor can it be fully understood. Well, what good is something you can’t know? I could say to you I know something you don’t know and I am not going to tell you. Well, what good is that? That this love surpasses knowing means two things.

*First*, we can never know this love on our own. We are powerless to know God’s love unless God, out of the riches of His glory and by the power and strengthening of His Holy Spirit in our inner being, and by the dwelling of Christ in our hearts, enables us to know that which surpasses knowledge.

*Second*, we can never exhaustively know the extravagantly multidimensional love of God. His love is like Him, it is infinite, eternal, supremely magnificent and inexhaustible. We will never exhaust its supply or its limits even in heaven when we see clearly and fully. After we have beheld His love and glory a million ages, it will never grow dull or boring.

You can fill a bucket with the fullness of the Pacific Ocean but you can never put the fullness of the Pacific in a bucket. We can be filled with the fullness of God but never exhaust the fullness of God.

Of all the things worth knowing in the universe and of all the mysteries worth pondering and exploring, the one thing that matters most is to know the love of Christ. If you have this, you have enough. If you know this, you are rich beyond measure.

How great is the gift of God’s love lavished on us? Consider two evidence, one from natural revelation and one from special revelation.

Creation tells us how God's love is fathomless, limitless, immeasurable.

“Our planet earth is a small part of a solar system that is 7.3 billion miles across. This solar system is a little speck in the galaxy called the Milky Way, which is 80,000 light years across. A light year is how far light travels in a year (6 trillion miles). So our galaxy is 480,000 trillion miles across. The nearest star to us, Alpha Centauri, would take 4.3 years to get to traveling at the speed of light. The nearest neighboring galaxy would take 2.2 million years to get to at the speed of light.” (John Piper). And scientists say the farthest galaxy is 13 billion light years away.

God has revealed these things to us, not so that we will fall in love with stars, but so that we will see something of the magnitude of his love.

But even greater than creation is the special revelation of God's love, “How great is the love the Father has **lavished** on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth and died for us and then showed us another kind of love beyond all that. He might have rescued us, sacrificed for us, forgiven us, and not gone any further. But instead He showed us another kind of love—He took us into His family. He made us to be called children of God (John Piper).

This is the love Paul wants us to be rooted and grounded in, His love for us in Christ Jesus.

### **Our response of love for the love of God.**

What are we to do with this incredible knowledge of the immense vastness of God's love for us? This kind of knowledge of this kind of love calls us to make a response.

You Cadets understand this, it is all through your landmarks.

#### ***Cadet Verse:***

**John 14:15** If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

#### ***Cadets pledge:***

Thankful to God for his gifts to me, ***I pledge myself to be ready to serve God***, my parents, my country, my church, my neighbor, and my Corps.

***Cadets code:***

A Cadet must be reverent, ***obedient***, compassionate, consecrated, trustworthy, pure, grateful, loyal, industrious, and cheerful.

***Cadet Hymn:***

Living for Jesus a life that is true,  
Striving to please Him in all that I do;  
Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free,  
This is the pathway of blessing for me.

O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,  
For Thou, in Thy atonement, Didst give Thyself for me;  
I own no other Master, My heart shall be Thy throne;  
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ for Thee alone.

What is the best way you can show your love for God? By obeying Him. God created us in His image to belong to Him, to be His children who love Him and show our love in obedience.

What do you think our obedience should look like?

Should we obey God when we feel like it or when we like what He is asking us to obey?

Should we obey some of the time?

Should we obey after He has told us five times?

Should we obey but grumble and complain and whine and drag our feet as we do it?

Is slow obedience, obedience?

Is partial obedience, obedience?

Is obedience with a bad attitude, obedience?

Does any of that sound like the kind of obedience we give to God who loves us so incredibly much? What kind of obedience gives our Father in heaven the most joy?

But obedience isn't natural for us, we are sinners and as sinners we are selfish, rebellious, we want to do our own thing, we don't like being told what to do, we don't always want to obey.

Obedience is hard, it takes training, it takes practice, it takes discipline and self-control. And where do we get all of that? We learn how to be God's children by first learning how to be our parent's children.

Learning obedience to God begins very young, by learning how to obey our parents. Parents train their children to obey them so that their children will grow up with the ability and desire to obey God rather than their own selfish desires.

Parents, you need to keep the goal of your parenting clearly in mind. You are disciplining them not just to keep their behavior under control, rather you are training them to instill in them the ability to choose to obey God joyfully.

Your means and methods need to work together toward that end. Discipline is for the purpose of joyful godliness.

The world will not help you with this goal. The world long ago turned against God and God's ways. Too much parenting today is done according to the world, according to the experts who don't know God, according to the internet and social media and peer pressure.

The world gets it wrong from the very beginning by not believing in sin and that we are sinners. The world thinks we are basically good and we just need to draw the good out. No, we are born sinful sinners and sin is bound up in all our hearts, sin is rooted in our very nature.

This is what makes parenting such hard work. We are to train our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Notice there are two parts to that command, discipline and instruction. One without the other will be ineffective and will not fulfill God's wisdom in training children.

**Proverbs 29:15** says the rod and reproof give wisdom. The rod gets their attention to hear clear correction and patient instruction. This helps both the parent and the child. It makes the parent keep their emotions in check, so the discipline is for the child's sake and not their own sake.

**Proverbs 31:26** She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

The goal is not better behavior, the goal is a better heart, from which better behavior will flow. Someone has said you might be able to spank folly out of a child, but you

can't spank wisdom into a child. Remember discipline is not punishment, discipline is for correction and training in love.

I gave examples earlier of ungodly obedience or poor obedience, so let's set three goals or standards for the kind of obedience we want to train our children to have.

I have taken these from an excellent little book, Don't Make Me Count to Three!

***Obedience should be all the way, not sometimes for some things.***

The kings in Israel were notorious for obeying God, but keeping some of the idols around. Like the way we try to love God and other things, or hang on to a few of our favorite sins.

This means not letting some sins or some disobedience go undealt with, or winked at.

***Obedience should be right away, slow obedience is disobedience.***

Jonah is a classic example of delayed obedience. God told him to go to Ninevah and he took the long way around.

If a parent makes threats, repeats himself, starts yelling or counts to three, he is teaching his child obedience is optional until the parent finally overreacts or loses it. Train for right away.

***Obedience should be with a joyful heart.***

The Cadet Hymn says: Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free, This is the pathway of blessing for me.

Our emotions are a choice, we can chose to be angry, happy, and have good or bad attitude. We know no one else makes us angry, we chose to be angry. For a child learning to control their emotions takes training, discipline and patient instruction.

If we obey but with complaining, whining, dragging our feet, unwillingly, is that obedience?

What gives God joy? Obedient children who joyfully love and obey Him. You know this is true because that's what gives you parents the greatest joy. The joyful obedience of your children. It is what they are created to do and to give.

Obedience and joy go together. The fruit of love and obedience is joy, for everyone, all the way around. Love is expressed in obedience and the fruit is joy.

Luke 19 Zacchaeus, Jesus confronted his sin with grace and he responded with glad obedience and joy.

Luke 18 Rich Young ruler, Jesus confronted his sin and he responded with no obedience and he went away very sad, and it was a very great sadness indeed. There is no joy in disobedience.

Parents pursue your joy, and pursue the joy of your children. Discipline not to punish, not to be punitive, but to reap the harvest of joy and godliness.

**Hebrews 12:11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

## **Conclusion.**

The purpose of discipline is to train our hearts to love God, love righteousness, love obedience.

Are we training our children to love and obey God the second or third time asked?  
Are we training our children to love and obey God later or partially or grumbling?  
Are we training our children to love and obey God only in the big things?

The reason God has children is for His joy. What does God do to His children to get this result? He disciplines and corrects and rebukes and admonishes. He trains us through discipline to show our love through obedience and the result of this is joy, His joy and ours. Obedience is the root of happiness for us and for our relationship with God.

The reason we have children is for our joy. Set the standard and train to the standard with patience, love, faith and lots of prayer, and asking forgiveness along the way, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit and faith in Jesus.

I have flown over this topic at thirty thousand feet, there is so much more. Parents, equip yourself to train your children. Push back against the world's ways and equip yourself with godly, Biblical tools, tools that take what Scripture says and helps you put it into practice. There are many, and I will put out a list this week.