

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Declaration of Independence

## Principle Two

### CHILDREN HAVE A DIVINE HERITAGE AND DESTINY

Probably the most basic consideration in all areas of human relations is the discussion of the nature of man. What is man? Where did he come from? What is his potential? Is man merely an evolutionary product--the result of millions of years of adaptation? Did he originate as a microscopic bit of protoplasm from the sea? Or is man the offspring of a Supreme Creator? Is there an immortal soul within the breast of man, or is he only physical matter that will cease to exist after the ruin of death?

Is man naturally good or naturally bad? If the child comes into the world naturally bad, is it the obligation of the parents to eradicate the bad and nurture good? Or does the child have inherent qualities of goodness, therefore making it the obligation of the parents merely to enhance the good? And what is bad, and what is good? Is mankind significant or important only as a group, or is each individual unique and precious? Should the parent hope to mold the personality of the child to conform to the acceptable standards of the group, or should the parent encourage the child's independence of spirit and personality?

These questions and their answers have profound implications for the parent. Our very desire to procreate or not to procreate is affected by our beliefs. Our goals and aspirations for ourselves, as well as our children are affected by our beliefs. Our methods of parenting are affected by our beliefs. And, most significantly, our vision of the grand perspective of parenting is affected by our personal convictions regarding the questions posed.

It has been said that there is a natural sequence to the importance of beliefs or convictions. Once again, beliefs--what we perceive to be true--affect our attitudes. Our attitudes affect our behavior. The sum of both affects our character--who we are, what we stand for. In the world of parenting, for instance, if a parent views the child as merely temporary life he is likely to adopt parenting practices that perhaps work temporarily but not on a long-range scale.

One evening my husband and I went to visit some friends. While we were in the living room talking, one of their children repeatedly got out of bed, wandered into the living room and stood watching us. Over and over the father of the child put him back into bed. Finally, in exasperation, he began spanking the child every time he entered the room. The little boy seemed unaffected by the spankings and continued to disobey; consequently, the spankings became more and more violent. I was amazed that the child would continue his erring behavior despite the pain. They were in a checkmate position; neither the father nor the child would back down. After approximately an hour, the little boy, sobbing and in pain, decided to stay in his bed.

Now, while eventually the desired behavior was achieved, the after effects may prove to be more detrimental than the original misbehavior. In other words, the parent who has internalized the belief that the child is an eternal being with unlimited potential will not be likely to use practices that violate the principles upon which growth and development in the child are predicated.

## **The American Perspective Of Man**

The Founding Fathers--those who fashioned the government of the American Republic, were men of faith. While they disagreed on

particular points of doctrine, they agreed on the existence and relevance of a Supreme Creator and the idea that man is the offspring of God. Whatever might have been their imperfections and weaknesses, their strength came from their conviction that God is a real and vibrant force in the lives of his children.

“No people,” said George Washington “can be found to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of Providential agency.”

There may have been questions or opinions regarding various doctrines, but there was no question about God’s existence. Based upon Benjamin Franklin's beliefs, which was representative of the others, certain conclusions regarding the origin and destiny of man are derived:

**One:** There exists a Creator who made all things, and mankind should recognize and worship Him.

**Two:** The Creator has revealed a moral code of behavior for happy living, which distinguishes right from wrong.

**Three:** The Creator holds all people responsible for the way they treat each other.

**Four:** All mankind will live beyond this life.

**Five:** In the next life, all will be judged for their conduct in this one.

These concepts stand out in stark contrast to our modern-day society of secular, humanistic, and relativistic philosophies. We can hear the voices cry out, “Old-fashioned! Antiquated! Unreasonable!” Yet, within each one of us is the power to discover for ourselves whether they are true or not.

The Founding Fathers’ philosophy regarding the nature of man was an eternal one, yet not without pessimism. They acknowledged that while man was indeed the offspring of God, in the present condition he was prone to hunger for power, greed, and the desire for

personal gain with a disregard for the welfare of others. Therefore, keeping in mind the realities of man's nobility and his depravity, they framed a government that would establish an environment of law and order so that man would be free to pursue his own individualistic idea of happiness and yet not hinder the same pursuit by others. They knew that while too much government would hinder man's personal quest, so also would too little government.

## **Fallen Nature of Man**

Those who acknowledge the divine heritage of man without understanding the fallen condition will be shaking their heads in bewilderment when they or their children exhibit characteristics that are diametrically opposed to the nature of God. It is important to recognize the earthly conditions that play a part in the nature of man, particularly the affects of the fall.

There are those who say that the fall has brought man to a condition of total depravity; then there are those who seem to dismiss the story of the fall altogether. To do either is to disregard vital information regarding the nature of man--and of each individual child.

I am convinced that understanding the fallen nature of man can explain and comfort us as we attempt to battle with and understand our inadequacies.

The fall is the process by which mankind became mortal on this earth. The event is recorded in Genesis 2-4. The fall of Adam is one of the most import occurrences in the history of man. Before the fall, there was no sin, no death, and no children. With the eating of the 'forbidden fruit,' Adam and Eve became mortal, sin entered, and death became a part of life. After Adam fell, the whole creation fell and became mortal.

There are three affects of the fall upon man: one, that man is in a weakened condition; two, that man is separate from God; and three, that man is under the influence of the Adversary. In addition, past experience and knowledge has been erased from the mortal mind; therefore, man is then left to live by faith.

There are three reasons for sin: ignorance, weakness, and willful disobedience. Since we are weak, we lack strength to do right; we lack knowledge, therefore, we error inasmuch as we are subject to the down pull of the Adversary we are prone to fall.

Understanding these basic truths helps us to better understand our children and ourselves. It should come as no surprise that we or our children have difficulty in keeping goals; it should come as no surprise that however we try to go forward, there's a constant force pushing us back; it should come as no surprise that without the powers of God we become an enemy to even ourselves; it should come as no surprise that we have feelings of insecurity, and that we lack self-esteem and confidence.

We are not alone; we are in company with the prophets. Moses said, "I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?" (Exodus 6:30). Paul said, ". . .the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Romans 7:19).

Away from God man is in a weakened condition and only with and through the powers of heaven can he rise to his full stature. Paul wrote, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power. . ." (I Thessalonians 1:5). There are those who accept the "word" without realizing that the word cannot be lived without the power. The Gospel is not just a list of laws to adhere to in order to receive a final grade. It is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16)--or the way in which man receives the power to be saved.

Little children come into this world with the sweet scent of heaven upon them; infants radiate a spirit of peace, faith, hope, and charity; little toddlers are loving, keenly sensitive to the hearts around them; they sense the presence of evil and shun it. As they grow and go through puberty, it is as if their eyes are opened; childlike faith gives way to curiosity; unquestioning acceptance evolves to sophisticated mental experimentation; blind trust in parental authority changes to suspicious inquiry.

Though little children are in a transitional phase--with the glory of godhood still upon them--as they grow up, they--like us--require the additional strength of the Spirit in order to overcome the weakness that is a part of the mortal condition.

Without the fall, there would be no reason for the atonement of Jesus Christ, which makes it possible, as well as imperative, that men rely upon his strength. "The atonement of Jesus Christ redeems all mankind from the fall of Adam and causes all to be answerable for their own manner of life." (Bible Dictionary, p. 617)

Though a child of God, man has the option of either going towards God and acquiring the power to overcome the effects of the fallen nature, or he has the option of surrendering to the degenerate powers of darkness.

C. S. Lewis, a great Christian writer, recognized this possibility when he wrote:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which. . .you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, and civilizations--these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit--immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the onset, taken each other seriously--no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. (*The Weight of Glory*, pp. 18-19)

## **Children of Light**

“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” (1 Thess. 5:5)

The importance of this principle cannot be overestimated--it is the foundation upon which all attitudes towards the task of parenting are based. If we and our children are of divine parentage, with eternal possibilities, then we ought to capture a reverence for life that lifts one's vision beyond and above the mortal grays of lethargic and comatose insensitivity. We would regard ourselves and our children as truly children of God. We would aspire to assist them to become all that they can become as children of God. We would be filled with faith and hope, realizing that, although a child may exhibit offensive behavior, he has within seeds of Deity, who is all good, all-wonderful, almighty. We would, most significantly, see them as eternal beings.

Recently, we gathered our family together for a thought and prayer. After everyone quieted down, I asked, “Look around you. What will still be in existence in twenty years?”

They agreed that the room and house would probably still be in existence, but that the furniture would most likely be changed. I then asked, “What will still be in existence in five thousand years?”

They again looked around them and in silence realized that nothing in that room--or the house itself--would last that long. Then our seven-year-old little Micah said, “We will!”

I was pleased with his insight and added, “That's right! Our bodies will go through a remodeling process, but it's true, we will be the only things that will exist forever. Now, when you think about it in that way, what are the most important things in the world?”

Jennifer, twelve, said, “People are.”

For a brief, rare moment, we all seemed to catch the fantastic vision of the worth of the human soul.

## **The Value of Man**

In our society people are categorized according to the visuals. Those who have not been endowed with a handsome face and body

or who have not achieved wealth or fame are inferior to those who have. Inanimate objects--cars, houses, jewels, and such--are given more attention than fellow human beings. Millions of little ones are cast aside because their mothers deny their right to life. Around us we see children who are ignored, teenagers who are barely tolerated, and the aged resentfully endured. We watch motionless while people are humiliated, tortured, or killed on movie and television screens. Everywhere we are surrounded with that haunting look that cries, "I am nothing. . .nobody." While the schools scramble for curriculum on "self-esteem" we all recognize that education will do little to resolve the problem until each one of us determines to reverence the life around us.

For several years my husband and I have been friends with a well-known professional athlete. His face is recognized the world over. Whenever we are together people recognize him. They honor him with their looks of admiration, their requests for his autograph. Now, it is right that he should receive such recognition--he spent years developing his skills --but how wonderful it would be if every one of us received such acknowledgement from others! There would hardly be one who would feel worthless and insignificant. Think of it: You walk out your door in the morning, and the neighbor beams with joy at seeing you. The mailman greets you with, "Good morning, John! How are you? Is that headache gone that you had the other day?" When you enter an elevator, the people look at you with a smile. When you speak, people listen. When you change your mind and decide not to purchase an article of clothing, the clerk says, "Well, it's been great to spend a few minutes with you. I sincerely hope that you find what you're looking for." A society that plays such value upon the human soul would be a utopia and more--it would be a society where gods would dwell. And if our concerted individual efforts could bring about such change in our society, why not in our individual natures?

## **Summary**

Parents who comprehend intellectually and spiritually the divine nature of the child will radiate qualities of hope, faith, appreciation, patience, and eternal perspective. Using the descriptive terms used by Lewis, they would not see their children as “mere mortals” or “ordinary” children. They would not regard themselves as superior to their children--as to importance--but rather chosen by God to be stewards over them. They would regard with seriousness the honor and responsibility of parenting children of God. They would have faith in their children, knowing that children of God manifest the characteristics of their Heavenly Father--kindness, compassion, love, tenderness, and gentleness. They would be optimistic with the realization that there is meaning to life and the possibility of eternal life in the hereafter, through the merits of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Finally, they would not despair over the frustrations of parenting, for with the awareness that there is a God comes the comfort that they are not alone.

## **The Principle in Action**

Marva Collins, a well-known teacher who left a poorly run, low-morale public school and started her own private school in Chicago, has been tremendously successful not only in changing minds from dull to brilliant, but in changing lives from despair to dreams come true. She began her school in a room over her apartment. She invited only children with learning disabilities. Often, she would overlook tuition if parents were unable to pay. Yet, she has been so successful that reporters clamor for interviews to learn her secrets. She has been called “Super-teacher” and “miracle on Adams Street.” Some were offended when she stated that she did not need money to teach children---just the basic materials of books, chalk, and a blackboard. How has she been so successful? Her formula begins with the principle of faith and ends with the principle of love. She hugs and

holds hands; she never gives up. In one incident a little boy refused to do his work.

She walked over to him, placed a hand on each shoulder, and whispered, "I'm not going to leave you alone. I care about you. Let's try to do some work."

"I'm not gonna do any damn work!" he shot back.

"You are too important to be left all alone. You are the most important child in this world, and people have left you alone for too long already. The Lord gave you a head to use, and if you care about yourself at all, and I know you do, then you will use it. I am not going to give up on you. I am not going to let you give up on yourself. If you sit there leaning against this wall all day, you are going to end up leaning on something or somebody all your life. And all that brilliance bottled up inside you will go to waste." For a time the child merely observed, then when he was convinced that she would not give up on him, and that she really cared, he joined in the learning experience. (*Marva Collins' Way*, p. 87.)

Once as I was telling a friend the frustrations I was experiencing with one of our children, she answered, "His actions were destructive, but don't let that destroy your relationship." I thought for months on that statement--that the actions of my children and myself were somehow separate from the relationship itself. Nothing a child does wrong makes it right to dump the relationship. Oh, was I blundering with that one! I alienated myself from children when they were misbehaving--how could I do otherwise? I held onto the thought that a good relationship between parent and child happened when the child did everything the parent expected. Wasn't a good relationship a reward for obedience?

I later heard another related idea--if we drive our children from us when they have done wrong, they will naturally learn to run from us when they have done wrong. In other words, small children who err are harshly spoken to, sometimes spanked, and put in the corner or

restricted to their rooms. A pattern develops: when you have done wrong I do not want you around. Then as children progress through the often-painful journey to adulthood and stumble along the way, they feel compelled to run away--to leave home and to hold within them the anxiety that could be released through open communication and love. How can we help our children with our experience, love, and counsel if we have taught them to run away when they have made a mistake?

This is not to say that justice cannot enter into the picture. Neither am I suggesting that there are not times when children must be invited to leave the home for the benefit of all. What I am exploring is the proposition that children need parents more, not less during the difficult periods of growing up. There have been times when my erring children would not listen. There have been times when they would not even look at me, but if I persisted--sometimes only indirectly in prayer--in trying to influence their lives, they have come back. I do not mean that they have come home to live, but they have come back into my life.

Children's lapses into temporary insanity are usually just that--temporary. I have observed children who were for a time rebellious, arrogant, and indifferent turn around almost overnight to become obedient, sweet-natured, and loving. We would not cast off a child who is going through a bout with the flu; neither should we cast off a child who is going through a time of mental or spiritual weakness. Recently, my husband said to one of our children, "We are prepared, if necessary, to do battle for your soul." Many parents give up and give in when they are on the brink of success.

I have come to believe that there are two times when we labor for our babes. The first is the physical labor to give birth to the body; the second is the mental and spiritual labor that we endure as our babe comes forth to be independent and full of personality. The second is sometimes not too painful; there are around us those who seem to go through it without incurring too many scars. Then there are those who seem to suffer with this labor all their lives--hoping and praying for their child.

The second labor process can be exhausting and frustrating, as we are forced to look beyond the moment--to look beyond the thoughtless behavior and cutting words to look beyond the immaturity and insensitivity; to maintain faith that there will be sun after a dreary storm--and to continue in faith when the sun never does rise. I am not suggesting that parents become doormats for children to walk on, rather they should become springboards for them to fly from, using the tools of enduring faith, fairness and firmness. Does this mean that parents who are going through the second labor process must be perpetually sad and suffer vicariously for their children's sins? No, for faith is not only a principle of influence, but also a principle of life. When one has this principle firmly rooted in his nature, the natural fruit is contentment and peace--not peace after the storm, but peace in the midst of the storm. Indisputably there is anguish as we watch our beautiful little ones being tossed to and fro by the storm, but oh, what sublime joy there is when they emerge from the murky mist into the light, to become not child, but friend forever.