

Finding Family Unity

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I was driving home after a day of appointments with parents and teen-agers who were concerned mostly with strained family relationships.

As I thought about the day's conversations, and watched solitary figures walking down the streets of my favorite city, I knew the time had come to find a purer and broader sense of family. It had to be one that would foster respect for the spiritual individuality of its members, as well as one that would find room in its heart for more than just the "relatives."

The words of Christ Jesus rang in my thought over and over: "Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven."¹ Here was the answer! By accepting the fatherhood and motherhood of God we find not only our true parentage but our brotherhood with our fellowmen. How incredibly simple that is! Yet many are quite familiar with those words and still face family hassles. What keeps us from living these spiritual facts of being? Isn't it really a false, personal sense of creation?

How accurate Mrs. Eddy is when she writes in *Science and Health*: "The foundation of mortal discord is a false sense of man's origin. To begin rightly is to end rightly."² Perhaps what are surfacing as strained relations in the family are nothing more than the effects of a mistaken concept of the origin of man, for as long as we continue to see ourselves as originators and creators of our children, we can expect to struggle with a false responsibility for them.

I've found that in most families both parent and teen-ager are asking for respect. The adult wants respect for his position as parent; the adolescent wants respect for his or her emerging independence. Frequently parents wrongly interpret that emerging independence as rejection of themselves, rather than recognizing it as youth's serious evaluation of society—and, at times, revulsion from some of its crass goals.

We get free from personal contention and personal responsibility as we respect the spiritual origin of each other. Actually we come from the same infinite Principle, God. We are God's spiritual ideas living in harmony. The materiality and hostility of parent or child is a fiction. Man expresses perfect love and integrity.

The parent may ask, "How can you trust the spiritual integrity of someone who seems to express so little of it?" We'd be better off if we didn't wait until the teen-age years to consider how to respect a child's spiritual integrity. That's a joy that ought to be cherished and developed as soon as the parent accepts the prospect of having children.

But even if such an acknowledgment has not accompanied the growth of the child, there is an effectual answer. It is well to remember that no problem, whatever it is, is any more than a mistaken sense of the reality of the situation. To correct things, we begin reasoning along spiritual lines. We see that the true cause or source of each individual is divine Principle. This wholly good Principle produces no error of thought or action in man. Being omniscient, the all-informing Mind, Principle, communicates no evil. Being omnipresent, Principle produces all communication. None goes on outside of

1 Matt 23:9

2 *Science and Health*, p. 262

God. We might call this production of harmony, this divine communication of God to Her/His idea, man, the spiritually scientific dynamics of parenthood.

In *Science and Health*, in what she calls the Christian Science “Declaration of Independence,” Mrs. Eddy speaks of our God-given rights: “God has endowed man with inalienable rights, among which are self-government, reason, and conscience.”³ Our rights are nontransferable and never to be surrendered. It will enhance the spiritual progress of every member of the family to be allowed to grow and progress free from the well-intentioned but merely interfering efforts of anxious onlookers. On the same page Mrs. Eddy warns about trying to usurp another’s rights to self-government. “Man’s rights are invaded when the divine order is interfered with, and the mental trespasser incurs the divine penalty due this crime,” she says. As radical a departure from the protocol of parent and child as this may appear to be, the parent can accept this declaration of independence, realizing that it will protect as well as nurture his child, because it comes from the diving Principle, Love.

To explain why I think mental trespassing relates to the relationship of parent and child, it might be well to recognize that from a human standpoint there exists a peculiar connection between the two that requires the utmost in integrity of thought Mrs. Eddy refers to this relationship when speaking of the role of mother: “Her thoughts form the embryo of another mortal mind, and unconsciously mould it, either after a model odious to herself or through divine influence, ‘according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount,’ Hence the importance of Christian Science, from which we learn of the one Mind and of the availability of good as the remedy for every woe.”⁴

How vital it becomes for the parent to be absolutely sure that any molding of a child’s thought that goes on is through the divine influence alone! By recognizing that in reality one Mind, God, sufficiently governs man, the parent may successfully reject feelings of anxiety, fear, doubt, personal opinion, or human will, which would turn his child against him.

The teen-ager needs to learn how to exercise the right of self-government by declaring his independence from human will and his complete dependence on God’s will for him. As he discovers the perfect truth of his being, he has a sound criterion for evaluating his own attitudes and actions. To experience family harmony requires that we yield our selfish pride and plans and conform our lives to the ultimate, divine Truth. What supports respect and unity is the childlike willingness of each member of the family to stop thinking of himself as a mortal, playing a role of anxious parent or willful child (or willful parent or anxious child), and to seek impartially and meekly the divine direction. We need radical obedience to God, who is our supreme authority.

Christ Jesus explained family unity on this basis. When told that his mother and brothers waited to speak to him, Jesus turned to his disciples with whom he had been meeting, and defined the pure and broad sense of family with these words: “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”⁵

3 *Science and Health*, p. 106

4 *Ibid.*, p.236

5 Matt 12:49,50

