

1ST Lesson: Deuteronomy 21: 18-21

18. If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, 19. then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. 20. And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' 21. Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.

2ND Lesson: Mark 3: 31-35

31. Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. 32. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." 33. But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" 34. And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 35. For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

3RD Lesson: Arcana Coelestia 5135:2

From infancy to childhood, and sometimes on into early youth, a person is absorbing forms of goodness and truth received from parents and teachers, for during those years he learns about those forms of goodness and truth and believes them with simplicity - his state of innocence enabling this to happen. When however the person grows older, when he starts to think for himself and not, as previously, simply in the way his parents or teachers do, he brings back to mind and so to speak chews over what he has learned and believed before, and then he either endorses it, has doubts about it, or refuses to accept it. If he endorses it, this is an indication that he is governed by good, but if he refuses to accept it, that is an indication that he is governed by evil. If however he has doubts about what he has learned and believed before, it is an indication that he will move subsequently either into an affirmative attitude of mind or else into a negative one. AC 5135:2

Stone Your Disobedient Son
A Sermon by
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If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother...then all the men of his city shall stone him [the son] to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.
Deuteronomy 21: 18, 21

Parental Love of Children:

If a father and mother had a stubborn and rebellious son Moses commanded the parents to hand the son over to the elders who would see to it that the son is stoned to death. This seems crudely incompatible with the love of parents for their children. A delightful gift from the Lord to parents is the special love that a father and mother have for their off spring. The Heavenly Doctrine teach that the spiritual cause of parental love for their children is this: “to bring about a proliferation of the human race and from it an enlargement of the angelic heaven, and so to give birth to those who will become angels, serving the Lord in the performance of uses in heaven and, by association with people, also on earth” (CL 404). Without exception each little boy and girl born here on our earth is predestined for heaven.

“God created man in His own image; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1: 27). And from the beginning the Lord instilled a tender love in the man and woman so they may come together and love each other as husband and wife. Power from the Lord’s Divine to carry forth the perpetuation of the human race is the underlying cause of this impulse within the masculine and feminine toward union with one another.

It is in the nature of things that husbands and wives engage in marital intimacies. From this union, and this union only, between a man and woman, a child is conceived, then carried in the womb, and eventually born into the world to experience endless possibilities to become an angel here on earth and continuing as such to eternity in heaven.

We learn from the Heavenly Doctrine that the “love of little children originates from conjugal love” as it is evident that implanted in the love between a husband and wife is the love of their offspring (CL 393, CL 385). From observation “people know that mothers have a very tender love for little children, and fathers a less tender one” (CL 393); but both parents share in contributing to the growth and development of their offspring. Together fathers and mothers play an important role in the guidance of their children. It is parents who stand in place of the Lord as they introduce their child into the Church.

Parents may accomplish this introduction in many ways. A few examples include teaching the child the Lord’s Prayer and Ten Commandments; reading the Word to the child; bringing the child to worship; and modeling by their behavior an example of what it means to live a heavenly life as prescribed in the Lord’s Word. As the months and years pass by, hopefully the child will appreciate the Lord’s truths. Hopefully the child will place value in serving heavenly uses in the church and in relationships with other people in the world.

Honoring Father and Mother:

The Heavenly Doctrine teach what is or should be clear to everyone: “Parents do good to their children from love, not for their own sake but for their children's sake” (DLW) 335. Parents therefore provide a home, clothing, food, and other natural comforts. At the same time parents, those who follow the Lord, provide spiritual comforts and guidance for their offspring. In His Providence the Lord has blessed parents to have children and has made provision for the care of these little ones. It is fitting and proper therefore, as the Lord encourages us in the Fourth Commandment, to “honor your father and mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20: 12).

Honoring your father and mother includes such things as showing them respect, obeying them, and perhaps caring for them in their golden years if necessary provided you have the means. Honoring your father and mother means to listen well to their teaching about life because parents possess a wealth of knowledge to pass on to their offspring. Yet when they're young, immature and so impressionable, every child during these tender years has moments of disobedience. This is typical in every parent-child relationship.

Punishing Your Child:

Before we consider the subject of punishing your child, let's turn first to the Heavenly Doctrine where we're taught that “children have no internal thought, for they do not yet know what is good and what is evil, or what is true and what is false, of which such thought consists” (HH 277). And moreover, children “have no prudence from their proprium, no purpose or deliberation, thus no intention of an evil nature. They have no proprium acquired from love of self and the world” (HH 277). It is true that children can repeat what we teach them, such as lying, stealing, hurting others, and other evils are wrong. They can also repeat what we tell them about what is good – love the Lord, your parents and your neighbor and live a heavenly life of charity. It is useful to teach our children about what is good and bad so that as they grow and develop a more mature understanding, hopefully they will make good choices in choosing to do what is right while refusing the evil.

Accordingly, one indispensable task of parents is the imposition of disciplinary sanctions to punish their child when the child's attitude or behavior falls outside of acceptable standards of society and especially those of the church. Parents must discipline and punish their child when the child has misbehaved. Otherwise parents love the child's evils. If you say you don't love your child's evils we must be careful not to excuse their evils while condemning others for the same things. Nonetheless, punishment is not only to “punish” the child for a wrongful deed, but to also modify and gently redirect the child's attitude and behavior. This is necessary so the child can grow into becoming a civil and moral citizen of the world and also a spiritual citizen of heaven, a developing angel of heaven even now while living on earth.

Children eventually begin to realize when they've committed some misdeed that gives rise to their parents' disapproval. Often a child unintentionally makes a mistake such as misplacing an article of clothing, or accidentally breaking something by dropping it, or wandering off when they should remain close by. Parents may address their child's mistakes differently than those behaviors that can lead toward evils. Evil is different. Evils are sins against the Lord and the neighbor.

As previously mentioned, children have “no intention of an evil nature” (HH 277); they simply do not know what evil is. But all the while, parents must remain vigilant in teaching their child what evil is and also gently encouraging the child away from attitudes and behaviors that are wrong. Evil accumulates and grows like a contagion. One evil provides a breeding ground for other evils and misdeeds. Every parent knows or should know that their child must be taught not to commit sins. Inasmuch as parents love and care for their offspring, the case often is that a child may resist their parents’ instruction. And what might a parent do? We turn now to instructions Moses gave to fathers and mothers.

Stone Your Son:

It is true that a disobedient son may become stubborn and rebellious to such an extent that he drifts toward incorrigibility. Moses commanded parents to hand their son over to the elders and then the men of the city shall stone that son to death with stones. The imagery of men stoning a person is horrendous. But this is what the Lord commanded and permitted the people of Israel to do, the reason being “so you shall put away the evil from among you.” The stubborn and rebellious son must be stoned.

Surely indeed the Lord has no pleasure in the act of parents turning over their son for death by stoning. Still, the Lord permitted this for the sake of the Word. The Heavenly Doctrine explains that the Old Testament history about the Israelite-Jewish nation as recorded in the Word represent “the Lord Himself, His kingdom, and consequently the Church in general and also the Church at an individual level; they were accordingly representative of a person’s regeneration, for regeneration is the means by which a person becomes a Church at the individual level” (AC 5275:2).

While we might not know the frequency of such deaths by stoning or the age of any particular son, we know from the Heavenly Doctrine that children who die in childhood are educated and grow up in heaven (HH 345). While stoning a child or anyone for that matter, shocks our conscience, and contradicts our notions of decency in a civilized society, the Lord permitted stoning for the sake of the internal sense of the Word. And so, yes the Lord wants you to stone your stubborn and rebellious son.

The Lord teaches in the Heavenly Doctrine that “sons” signify truths (AE 684:5) and with people who do what is good sons represent people “who are in truths from good” (AE 710:13). The son within us is our genuine desire to search out the Word and learn truths. We may pray to the Lord for understanding of the Word’s meaning. We may as-of-self strive each day to obey the Word as we understand it. Through it all we may also seek the Lord’s guidance to help us to see more clearly especially when we stumble and fall. And when we’re diligently in obedience to the Lord we may ask Him to strengthen our resolve. But this good son is not the son to be stoned.

We know from the Heavenly Doctrine that “the endeavor of every man is continually toward evil, and this both from what is hereditary, into which he is born, and from what is actual” (AC 2406:2). Humanity by nature is resistant to heavenly influence from the Lord. The tendency of each person is to rebel against their spiritual father and mother. We are commanded to honor our father and mother. In the spiritual sense to honor your father and mother “signifies love for good and truth, in the supreme sense for the Lord and for His kingdom” (AC 8896). Our father is the

Lord's good with us; this is what we should love. And our mother is the Lord's kingdom, His church within us. We worship and love the Lord Jesus Christ, our "Father" and love our "mother" our spiritual church where we serve heavenly uses. When we're doing these good things we're like a good son who should live and not be stoned.

But then again if your son drifts toward becoming stubborn and rebellious, Moses says he must be stoned to death. We find relief in the fact that in these modern times we are not to take this command of Moses literally. We know better because the Heavenly Doctrine dispels any confusion by teaching us that "not obeying the voice of father or mother signifies in the spiritual sense to live contrary to the precepts and truths of the church, therefore the penalty for it was stoning" (AE 655:5). If we're disobedient we become like the son who must be stoned to death. Therefore, if you discover within yourself an idea encouraging you toward sin, that son must be stoned. If you perceive within yourself a desire - whether strong or faint - toward anything wrong, then stone that son to death. It is true that you've committed your life to the Lord and the church. But all the while there's that nagging feeling inside, a constant inclination toward what is wrong. You must not allow that stubborn and rebellious son to live.

And so again, if a father and mother had a stubborn and rebellious son, Moses commanded the parents to hand that son over to the elders who would see to it that the son is stoned to death. We may also know from the Lord's teachings when He was in the world not to take this command literally. You have heard that it was said to those of old, that the men of the city shall take a stubborn and rebellious son and shall stone him to death with stones. But now the Lord says unto you "let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Luke 18:16).

Stoning takes on its character based upon who it is that engages in the act of stoning. Consider from the Heavenly Doctrine that stoning signifies "to extinguish and blot out falsities; but in the opposite sense, when done by the evil, as being to extinguish and blot out the truths of faith" (AC 7456). And so, a good person who listens to the voice of his father and mother (good and truth) stones his son (himself) by willingly purging himself of bad loves and false ideas that are contrary to the Lord's commandments. On the other hand, a bad person who does not listen to the voice of his father and mother stones his son (himself) by rejecting the Lord's commandments.

If your son (you) refuses to heed the voice of his father and mother (that which is good and true) hand your son over to the men of the city so that he may be stoned to death. As taught in the Heavenly Doctrine "the men of the city who were to stone him [your son] signify those who are in the doctrine of the church" (AE 655:5). Stoning in this circumstance takes on a good representation and character because it is the men of the city who stone the stubborn and rebellious son. When we've gone astray we may turn back and seek guidance from the doctrine of truth in the Word. It is the doctrine of the church that we use to blot out what we know is not good within us. It is the doctrine of the church that we use as the guiding, spiritual principles to govern our life.

We may willingly allow our submission to the men of the city (our acceptance of the doctrine of the church) to stone and put an end to the hurtful attitudes and behaviors that try to rule over us. It is the truths of the church that stone (blot out) false notions that tend to lead us astray. We

must shun evils as sins against the Lord and neighbor. We must repent when we've fallen down. Yes, stone your stubborn and rebellious son to death.

Why should you stone your son to death? The Lord teaches in the Heavenly Doctrine that "death signifies resurrection and continuation of life" (HH 445). In the context of stoning your stubborn and rebellious son to death, death and resurrection can take on a new meaning. This is especially so when we do not allow hostility, meanness, and a whole range of bad attitudes and behaviors to lead us to transgress the Lord's Word. The death of sin and its ugliness within us can mean resurrection to living a new life in such a manner that we are born again. Shedding ourselves of this stubborn and rebellious son is like expelling from ourselves any preferences toward what we know is wrong and false.

With the death of this stubborn and rebellious son you may arise each day to new life as you "put away the evil from among you." And yet if you want to be stubborn and rebellious, there is a good use to these states. We may take a stand in support of the Lord's truths of the church. We may be stubborn and rebellious by refusing to yield to sin. We can refuse to compromise in the face of challenges but remain committed to the Lord's Word. We may be stubborn and rebellious but in a manner that says we will follow the Lord.

New Life:

If your son is stubborn and rebellious hand him over to the men of the city that he may be stoned to death. Stoning your son to death is disciplining your self. Stoning your son takes place when you seek truths from the Word, then acknowledge and live according to them so that in cooperation with the Lord you may be cleansed. Stoning your son brings about the death of what is sinful and false within you. Then free from the bondage of sin, you may arise to new life.

The Lord teaches in the Heavenly Doctrine that "from infancy to childhood, and sometimes on into early youth, a person is absorbing forms of goodness and truth received from parents and teachers, for during those years he learns about those forms of goodness and truth and believes them with simplicity - his state of innocence enabling this to happen" (AC 5135:2). But a child eventually reaches adult age.

It is during adulthood that a person of himself (not from parents, teachers or ministers) either continues to accept the truths or entertains doubts about them or rejects them. But if you perceive something within urging you to live contrary to the truths of the church, seek strength from the Lord to resist. Compel yourself to shun evils and obey the truth. The Lord will send help so that stubborn and rebellious son within you may be stoned to death. All the while, the Lord has no pleasure in the stoning of a person, whether someone who is good or bad. The Lord seeks to help us bring evils and falsities within us to their death so we may not die but live.

"As I live" says the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways" (Ezekiel 33:11). *Amen.*