

Definition of "incubator":

1. An apparatus in which environmental conditions are controlled to providing suitable conditions to promote certain reactions.
 2. An apparatus for maintaining an infant, especially a premature infant, in an environment of controlled temperature, humidity, and oxygen concentration.
 3. A place or situation that permits or encourages the formation and development.
- The family is an incubator for children growing up within that home. The conditions and environment of that home play a large part in the future emotional, physical, and spiritual health of the person.
 - Another way to think about it is the home having a certain "atmosphere." This refers to the air or climate which surrounds and permeates a specific place. It also refers, such as in works of art or literature, as a *dominant mood or tone*. There may be many other things included, but there is still a kind of intangible "sense" which one has as to what the artist or writer is mainly attempting to communicate.
 - Seeing the home in this way, what is to be the dominant mood or tone of the Christian family? If we want to see children (and parents!) who are maturing to a healthy state, what is to be the predominant conditions which surrounds and encompasses our parenting?
 - In one word, it is LOVE. Is with many things, this is something so basic and fundamental that we may tend to overlook its important. I would like to do two primary things this morning. The first is to consider how 1 Corinthians 13 relates particularly to our parenting, and then to share some miscellaneous thoughts and observations I have made in my (so far) 8 years of parenting as well as counseling parents.

I. The Supremacy of Love – vv.1-3

- The primary context in which Paul is speaking is the dispute within the church at Corinth over spiritual gifts. Because some gifts were considered greater, evidencing a higher spirituality and influence, some had become more concerned with those things than the purpose of the gifts: the loving building up of one another.
- At the center of this controversy Paul speaks about the centrality of love. He begins by sketching a picture of someone who has certain qualities, but who lacks love, and how such a person is undermines by their actions the very purpose of Christianity towards others.
- He paints this hypothetic picture in this way: imagine someone who can speak with the tongues of men and of angels, has the gifts of prophecy, can understand all mysteries and has all knowledge, who has faith that can move mountains, who gives all their earthly goods to the poor, and who gives their body to be burned. Such a person we would tend to lift to the highest level of spirituality, and say such a person is closest to God.
- Nevertheless, Paul says someone could do all of this and yet be without real value as a Christian: "I am nothing", "it profits me nothing." This highlights just how important love is as a Christian.

II. A Description of Love – vv.4-8a

A. Two Positives

- Suffers long – To be patient, especially in the light of difficulty. It means to press through a difficulty. In relation to parenting, it is the realization that our children, like us, are a work in progress. But it is to press through with a certain attitude.
- Is kind – To act kindly. It is to be friendly and warm hearted. It is the opposite of harshness. It is to show sympathy and understanding, to be of a generous spirit. It is to recognize that they, like us, are struggling and learning and don't always do the right thing.

B. Seven Negatives

- Does not envy – As used here, it means to have a jealousy because of what they have or are. An example of this can be when a child gets attention from our spouse that we feel they don't give us. It can also mean resentment against a person because of their failing us in some way. We are personally offended because they don't respect us or give us the love or obedience we feel we deserve. It may be something that they should do, but the point is that we respond sinfully to it instead of the way God wants.
- Does not parade itself – To be conceited or to brag. It is to praise oneself by way of comparison. It may be seen in a comment like "I would never do that" or "why aren't you more like me."
- Is not puffed up – To be conceited or arrogant. One of the most frequent places this shows up is a parent's unwillingness to confess their sins and failures to their children. This may be out of a misunderstanding that if we show our weakness we undermine our authority. What is really is is a lack of humility and obedience to confess our sins to those we sin against.
- Does not behave rudely – To act shamefully. We are tempted, in our homes in dealing within our family, to act and speak in a way that we would be ashamed of if we suddenly realized that someone from the outside could see us. But love strives to live in a way that is honorable, and if done even before the church, there would be no shame.

- Does not seek its own – Self-seeking, self-serving. One of the traps is to feel the pressure of “what is someone going to think about me” when our children do something wrong. This is different that seeking first and foremost the honor of the Lord, and then of our neighbor (i.e. the child). In dealing with our children they become an accessory of our life, and what upsets us is when they get in the way of our goals, our desires, our peace, our comforts. One of the most painful (but true) things Kimberly has ever had to tell me is that I treat other children better than our own. Hopefully there has been progress in this area, but the motivation was self-centered.
- Is not provoked – To be sinfully irritated or greatly upset. This doesn’t mean that we are passive or indifferent, but rather that we are moved to a righteous response to help direct them as opposed to sinful anger in attitude or words.
- Thinks no evil – Keeps no account or record of evil to use against them. This doesn’t mean that we don’t look for patterns of behavior so as to help them correct them, but rather that we don’t allow their failures to build up in us a bitterness by a spirit of unforgiveness. As we teach them how to confess their sins, we respond to them with genuine forgiveness and putting away their sin.
- Does not rejoice in iniquity/but rejoices in the truth – We aren’t happy about the consequences of their sin (i.e. “see, told you”), but rather taking delight in truth as they and we learn together to honor God.
- Paul concludes his description by speaking of the enduring nature of love: it bears, believes, hopes, and endure all things. Love never fails – this doesn’t mean that if we love we never fail. It means that it continues on, even in the light of failure. It doesn’t give up. It continues to hope in God’s mercy, believing that He is working all things for good.
- As we deal with our children, we are to constantly keep in mind that this is ultimately a description of God’s love for us as His children. Often, patterns of people’s thoughts about God’s relationship to them will be reflected in their relationship with our children. If we see God as a heavenly Father that deals with us in a context of nitpicky, exact, unbending, lacking pity, distant, and harsh, then that will often reflect itself in our dealing with our children. But if we believe in live in the light of God’s love, mercy, compassion, pity, and grace, then we are more likely to deal with our children (and others) in that way.
- It isn’t that we as parents (or God as our heavenly Father) doesn’t bring about correction, zeal for righteousness, sorrow for sin, but that this comes with the surrounding atmosphere of the other.
- At this point I would like to make some miscellaneous fatherly and pastoral observations related to parenting. In some things you might see a direct connection to some of Paul’s points, in others it may be a more indirect outworking of this principle of love.

1.) Our relationship with our children must be just that, relational.

- God’s relationship with us is more than legal, it is personal. It takes time to develop that relationship, in His speaking to us (in His Word) and our speaking to Him (in prayer).
- Likewise, our relationship with our children takes time and effort. This is especially true if they come to periods of their life where they begin to shut down. If we don’t have a relationship already, it will be very difficult to gain it.
- This relationship must be based on communion/communication. It must not be event-based. This is a particular challenge in our lives of busyness.
- If we do not have their hearts, then we will lose them. We are, in the words of Tedd Tripp, to be shepherding their hearts, not just regulating their behavior.

2.) We must remember that children are just that, children.

- God deals with us as we grown in Christian maturity, which includes knowledge and practice of what is right.
- We must study our children, know their strengths and weaknesses. We realize that they are in the process of maturing, and recognizing where they are not as little adults, but child-like in their thinking and acting.
- We must learn to discern what for them is childishness and foolishness.
- We must carefully measure our expectations. We can set standards of expectations that are insensitive to who and what they presently are. It takes wisdom to move them in that direction by loving motivation and instruction.
- This point must be particularly kept in mind as we see our children experimenting and learning about language (curse words that they may hear) or physical. We must not “freak out”, but lovingly instruct them.
- This is a particular struggle with new parents who have high expectations. It is a great temptation for those who don’t have children to make such judgments, and the “I’ll never let that happen” attitude.
- We should not let the pendulum swing to the opposite extreme, that of not expecting anything and making excuses for them.

3.) We must seek to treat our children with dignity.

- We have seen in the past that children too are created in the image of God and are ultimately God’s possessions. This should have a huge effect on how we speak to them, how we respond to them.
- They are among our closest neighbors whom Jesus says we are to do to them as we wish for them to do to us, and to love them as ourselves. Just because we are in an authority position, doesn’t mean that they are our slaves or that there should not be closeness.

- This includes verbal encouragement. At one time I believe I was afraid of encouraging them and complimenting them, lest I should “inflamm[e] their little rebel hearts with pride.” But then I considered more fully how God deals with me. God says things about us that are almost embarrassing in their greatness. He doesn’t say things that are untrue, but it is in that context that God brings correction. If we don’t encourage them and speak well of them when we can with obvious acceptance, then they will be vulnerable to the deceptive words of others.
- This is also true of physical affection. If we don’t hug them, take them into our arms, kiss them, then they will look for that somewhere else. There are many indications that homosexual men did not have appropriately affectionate fathers. There are even more indications that where fathers do not give appropriate physical affection to their daughters, that they look for it in other men. We come again to the huge influence that God has given to fathers for good or ill.
- This is to be fostered in the context by the verbal and physical love in the parents. I have spoken with people that have never heard their parents say “I love you” or show physical affection. This is a tragedy.
- Many of us are called to break the cycle of our parents and grandparents who have not done things God’s way. We must not perpetuate the errors that we were taught either with words or actions.
- These things are not only true and applicable in the home, but I believe also in the church. In our dealing with others, in our dealing with you as we seek to shepherd you, my prayer is that correction, discipline, admonition will all come in the atmosphere of demonstrable love.
- The spiritual health and well being of our homes and our church will be largely influenced, if not almost determined by the atmosphere of love. Parenting, and ultimately Christianity, is either this as I have sought to describe it or its opposite: hate.