# GRATEFULLY ACCEPTING THE CHILDREN GOD GIVES

*by Miss Jessie Dykstra*

*Miss Jessie Dykstra is a former teacher in our schools and has most recently been active in educational counselling.*

To the measure that one can accept himself, to that extent he may be able to accept others. Parents who are content with themselves, their place in society, in their larger family, in their church community, in their financial stratum, are content with themselves as people; these can be expected to be able to accept their own children. One who is ashamed of his place in society, is dissatisfied with his work and financial situation, is not content with himself, is the person who may be expected to find it very difficult to accept his own children, especially as he sees that they are reflections of himself. Such a one may either tend to withdraw from being an active, involved parent, or may dedicate his life to the effort of trying to prove that he is really other than he feels himself to be and to desire to try to manipulate his children to be different that he perceives them to be.

We probably all find ourselves in between these two extremes, and some days are more confident and accepting and on other days more dissatisfied. At those latter times we may either be depressed or may feel the need to pressure ourselves. We exert pressure to be more than we perceive ourselves to be, i.e. more successful, able, active, producing and even more spiritual. The pressures on ourselves may overflow to pressures on those close to us or may be focused on one or two people who seem to

irritate this gnawing feeling of incompetence.

Sometimes our perception of ourselves is almost entirely based on our accomplishments rather than on what we are. Then we feel compelled to work feverishly and to require the same of those near us. We feel the need to prove our worth by what we do, not by what we are.

When we are in this state, we tend to look at children in terms of what they will become or do rather than at who they are and how they are growing. We tend to see our duty to be that of task master or manipulator. How to get the kids to perform to their utmost at all times. Get on them. Bargain with them. Nag them. Anything to try to move them to achieve! We may even scheme and plan what kinds of rewards to hold out to them in order to spur them on to greater heights.

When we see that they are trying to advance, we may find ourselves eager to tell or show how a task is done instead of allowing them to experiment and learn from their failures, and delight in their own independent learning.

Questions like these are asked. "What can I do to prepare my child for kindergarten?" "What activities should I encourage my pre-schooler to engage in so that he will begin school with a running start?" To me, these questions may suggest that the parent may be trying to manipulate the child to be a high achiever.

Sometimes while the children are still pre-schoolers, we try surreptitiously to teach them the beginnings of academic skills like the numbers and letters. That these symbols may be very foreign to them and unrelated to their everyday life, seems unimportant. If we get them to remember the symbol names, we may feel very accomplished. If the child appears to be picking up academic skills at an early age, we look forward with hope and pride in our accomplishment. We lose sight of the fact that there are reasoning skills that must be developed before reading skills are really beneficial.

One little girl who was just beginning kindergarten came home and announced that she now knew how much one and one was. For this she was praised effusively and the next day she announced that she now knew how much two and two was. This fact was again recognized with abundant praise. Later, when her parents were not around, the girl asked me how much three and three was. When I furnished the answer, her retort was, "No, that can't be, because one and one are two, and two is right next to one. Two and two are four, and four is not that far from two,

but six is not even near to three''. She had obviously learned by rote that one and one is two, and that two and two are four, but she hadn't learned to add.

This seems to me to be a good example of children learning by rote what they do not have a background of experience for. It is a nice concise example, but of course this can happen in every field of learning and at various levels. The child who feels that acceptance is dependent on accomplishment can be too motivated toward accomplishment and the 'learned' material is not integrated into a larger body of knowledge and is therefore not used but easily forgotten. When this happens, the child may excel during the early primary grades and then find difficulty in the later grades, because he is not able to generalize from what he was supposed to have learned, but does not recall.

If acceptance were closely associated with accomplishment, the child may feel compelled to find acceptance in some other way than the kinds of accomplishments recognized by the adults in his life. Peer approval may become the important avenue toward acceptance and academic achievement may be relegated to lesser importance, to be a thing to be disregarded, or even to be an area of tension and associated with feelings of guilt. Parents (and teachers as well) may tend to feel disappointed, let down and discouraged. They begin to feel rather negative about the child that had showed so much promise, and they could find themselves encouraging seldomly, and reprimanding often. This situation is not conducive to nurturing growth.

Trust seems to be the answer. It tends to exclude worry and anxiety. It fosters contentment. Contentment with God's way for one's life and confidence that God will surely guide and control all circumstances so that His church will be gathered and children will grow up and take their places in the church.

If one has the faith to trust that God does all things well and that God accepts him for who he is, an elect in Christ, rather than for what he does or accomplishes, then one can accept himself and be at peace. He can accept the children God gives and delight in their unique development. When he shows that delight, he furnishes a nurturing environment in which the child is able to develop to his full potential. Our Heavenly Father does not accept us on the basis of what we accomplish. We are accepted because we are in Christ. It is proper therefore that children should be accepted because they are covenant children. They need to grow and learn at their own rate, not in order to find acceptance or be able to compete.