

## Grandparent Alienation

By Karen Spruill

“...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37 NIV).

Those of us who provide services to families of divorce, and forms of dysfunctional relationships, acquire painful insights. We are familiar with the problem of “Parental Alienation.” Most recently I have heard the tearful stories from grandparents who have been restricted from seeing their grandchildren.

Sometimes months or years go by without contact. These grandparents have heard ugly labels or judgments about themselves come out of little mouths. And the same babies who previously ran forward for hugs, now retreat with caution. Children are often used as pawns between feuding, angry or mentally unstable adults. And those who use children to withhold affection and time, know how to punish multiple relationships. Most of all, it hurts the children.

Just this week I looked over copies of court parenting agreement forms for a family divorce situation.

There are certain rights that children are supposed to possess. As summarized:

To be able to love both parents without fear of anger or guilt from the other,

To be able to have a separate and meaningful relationship with each parent, and to respect the differences of each parent and their home,

To be absent and protected from the parents’ arguments or discussions,

To be free from witnessing or hearing negative comments and behavior by one parent about the other,

To not be used as a messenger for either parent or be questioned about the other parent.

I am very much aware of how the disruption of these rights effect the “children sandwich.” With people unfairly fighting on both sides. Time with a grandparent who cannot find the courage or ability to address their own adult child, can result in verbal messages destined to travel home. Or adult children may be convinced that their children will not be contaminated by the values or influence that they experienced. I fully recognize that there are some grandparents who should not be left alone with little ones. Yet I would encourage all involved to set up reasonable boundaries, and not insurmountable walls. Grandparents often have very different (and enjoy) relationships with grandchildren than they did when parenting.

All of this distress reminds me of the alienation that the great Deceiver, has used with humans toward their Heavenly Parent. Satan has made it his expert practice to subvert the very rights that God put in place. He has lied about God, created an environment of fear and anger, disrespected our attempts to have a relationship with God, and peppered the media with negative, belittling messages about God. He does not fight fair and it wounds the children and grandchildren.