

Sunday May 8th, 2022

Mother's Day

John 15:9-17

“Chosen to Love”

Chuck Swindoll tells of a cute Mother's Day card he saw. It was a big card that the illustrator had written the words in the form of a small child's printing. On the front cover was a little boy with untied sneakers. He had a wagon, and toys were everywhere. He had a little cut on his face, and there were smudges all over this card, as if a child had handled it. On the front it read, “Mom, I remember that little prayer you used to say for me every day.” Then inside it read, “God help you if you ever do that again.”

This little story reminded me immediately of that comic sensation that ran for several decades, “Dennis the Menace”, created by Hank Ketchum. If you will remember, Dennis, who was a precocious little boy, was always getting himself into trouble. He was particularly adept at making things difficult for his neighbour, Mr. Wilson. Dennis' antics were reckless, but Dennis always came off as naïve, and not sure what he had done wrong. He always had the best of intentions in whatever he was doing, no matter the outcome.

One thing I noticed, however, is that no matter how bad Dennis's behaviour was, he was still loved by his parents, and certainly by Mrs. Wilson who adored him, and I believe even Mr. Wilson as well. No matter how dirty, how banged up, or what he had broken, Dennis was always loved, and always wanted. The love he experienced was not dependent on his behaviour. Dennis did not have to earn love; instead, it was given freely and without qualification.

I also don't ever remember, but maybe some of you can recall a time, that Dennis was ever beaten for being bad. He may have had to sit in the corner for a time out, but no one threatened him bodily harm. Part of the charm of Dennis the Menace was that he did things we all wish we could have tried, but we didn't. Why, did we hold back? I bet it was because of fear. Fear of retribution, and frankly, rightly so.

How many of you saw the amazing video from Baltimore, a few years back, of a mother who became a folk hero for unmasking her son, when he participated in the riots? The mother is even filmed smacking her son across the head. The mother is now a folk hero, some called her “mother of the year”. The local police force even praised her efforts. The only question I have is, what tool was she using to discipline her son? Fear!

For many people growing up, discipline was based on fear. “Don't do that or I will spank you, or ground you, or throw you out on your ear.” So much of our developing character was formed by fear of consequences. No wonder so many Christians see God in this same fashion. They cultivate a morality based on avoiding God's displeasure. Actually, it boils down to a works theology. We become convinced that we have to earn God's good favour, just as we had to earn our parent's good favour.

While, maintaining good behaviour out of fear may benefit the parent's goal of control, it is exhausting and demoralizing for the child. Children grow up believing that they are never good enough; so, two things can happen.

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One, the child can rebel, against parental and any other authority just like the young man in Baltimore. Second, they could become so defeated by their own sense of failure, they stop trying to live any kind of independent life. Both situations are undesirable.

In 1 John 4:16 we read John's observation that "Perfect love casts out fear." So important are these words, that I actually have them on a plaque on my office wall where I can see these words every day. These words remind me that intimidation, coercion, blackmail, and threats are never, ever, based on the kind of love God requires of us.

If we think of our character, or our approach to life as a location, Jesus says to us, "Remain in my love." In Jesus', sacrificial, all-encompassing love, is where we should live our lives. When we live in his love, there is no fear, and we would never turn to fear to coerce anyone. Perhaps we may wonder what this place of love is like, so we can identify it and stay there.

Jesus tells us, that the place of perfect love is a place of overflowing joy. We also know we are in this place of love, when we are willing to lay down our lives for others. This of course means the ultimate sacrifice of dying for someone else, but it is so much more than this. It means setting aside our needs, our wants, our resources, our egos, and to put the other person first. Was this the nature of the home you grew up in? Is it what your home looks like now?

The consequences of a home not operating out of a place of perfect love can be devastating. Many years ago, at about the turn of the last century, a long-term project began, where two families from the State of New York were studied very carefully. One was the Max Jukes family, and the other was the Jonathan Edwards family. What the study found, is remarkable, as it is cautionary.

Max Jukes was an unbelieving man, and he married a woman of like character. Both Mr. and Mrs. Jukes lacked good character. Followed for several generations, the researchers found 1,200 descendants. Of these know descendants, 310 became lifelong vagrants, 440 physically wrecked their lives by living a debauched lifestyle, 130 were jailed for an average of 13 years, and 7 were in jail for murder.

There were over 100 that became alcoholics, 60 became habitual thieves, 190 prostitutes. Of the 20 who learned a trade, 10 did so while in prison. This training cost the taxpayers \$1,500,000 dollars and they made no contribution to society.

In the same year, the family of Jonathan Edwards came on the scene. Jonathan Edwards, a man of God, married a like-minded wife who was of outstanding character. Out of their descendants, 300 became ministers, missionaries or theological professors; over 100 became college professors; over 100 became attorneys, 30 of these became judges; 60 became doctors, 60 became noted authors, 14 became presidents of universities.

From the same family there arose several giants of American industry. Three became United States congressmen, and one became a vice-president of the United States. (J. Oswald Sanders, A Spiritual Clinic)

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Which, of these two families do you think was at least partially residing in Christ's love? I am sure that the parents of the Edward's clan would say they were not perfect parents, but they knew where they had to remain.

I am no sociologist, but I am pretty sure that one of the leading causes of dysfunction in families is fear. Parents: fear a loss of control, fear a financial collapse, fear their children might embarrass them, or fear their children will not love or care for them when they get older. Children fear being failures in their parent's eyes, fear being physically punished, fear their parent's marriage ending and so much more.

Fear, fear, and everywhere fear. And we know fear makes us say things, and do things we shouldn't. Jesus has commanded that we should love one another and surely that includes our families. If you don't think there is a problem in our society because of what's going on in families, then you haven't been paying attention. Dr. James Dobson in his book, *Love Must be Tough*, talks about the consequences of instability in families on children. Dobson recalls a conversation he had with a sixth-grade teacher in an upper middle-class city in California.

As a creative writing assignment, the teacher asked her students to complete the sentence that began "I wish". Being sixth graders, the teacher expected things like, "I wish for a bike, dog, trip to Hawaii etc." Instead, what was returned was heartbreaking as 20 of the 30 children made reference instead to their disintegrating families. A few of the actual responses are as follows:

I wish my parents wouldn't fight and I wish my father would come back.

I wish my mother didn't have a boyfriend.

I wish I could get straight A's so my father would love me.

I wish I had one mom and one dad so the kids wouldn't make fun of me. I have had three moms and three dads and they botch up my life.

And finally, this very disturbing response. *I wish I had an M-1 rifle so I could shoot those who make fun of me.*

It is so naïve to think there isn't a problem. Even if we do a great job of raising our children in love and not fear, the same cannot be said for the children they go to school with. The problem doesn't end when high school is over either. In every work place, every community group, every time any number of human beings gathers together, there are going to be people who were raised, and maybe currently live, in a place of fear and not love.

You see the consequences of this all the time. People governed by fear: resist change, lash out at the least little irritant, and defend their positions no matter how irrational. People governed by fear are always wanting: affirmation, attention, and power. You meet grown adults, who are still trying to please their parents, even if the parents have long since died. In the secular world of business, and academia, one would not expect love to govern.

Love to the secular world is irrelevant. What matters, are tangible things like money and accomplishment. So, if we cannot find the place of love we need, to be a whole person, in the work place, where are we to find it?

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Why, the only place that ultimately matters, in character development, and sustainability; the home. A child, a husband, or a wife, who cannot find perfect, sacrificial love at home, will seek cheap substitutes out in the world.

It happens all the time, and dare I say that some here today have experienced this tragedy. Even people, who believe that they are safe from such things, find themselves blindsided when their happy home wasn't so happy after all. Many years ago, the pop group The Bee Gees had a song entitled "How Deep is Your Love." It is maybe more of a profound question than one would expect from a 70's music group.

There is, I believe, a hidden danger today, and I hesitate to raise it, but I believe it must be done. Today, we will offer our mothers, grandmothers, and other significant woman in our lives, tokens of our appreciation. It is expected of us today, and Hallmark is counting on it for their bottom line. But I wonder how much of it is just, window dressing. Do we delude ourselves into thinking that a bunch of flowers, or brunch with mom, means everything is okay?

That by taking care of social expectations today, everything is all right at home. Perhaps it is easier to pretend we have joy today, as a family, rather than question whether we reside in a place of love. But please do not fret. We are not without hope. If we sincerely believe all is not right in our families, Jesus offers us a refuge. If we remain in his love, we will find true joy, and perfect love that casts out fear.

When we remain in his love, like Dennis the Menace, we find that even if we make mistakes, we are still loved and still wanted. Why, because the more we reside in Christ's love, the more our earthly family resembles the heavenly family of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Whether a family is dysfunctional or not is not by chance. Whether a child grows up to be a well-adjusted adult is not because of a throw of the dice.

The Houston Police Department has circulated a memo for years entitled, "Twelve Rules for raising Delinquent Children." Here they are.

- 1) Begin with infancy by giving the child everything he wants; in this way, he will believe the world owes him a living.
- 2) When he picks up that vulgar word, laugh at him; this will make him think he is cute.
- 3) Never give him spiritual training. Wait until he is twenty-one and then let him decide.
- 4) Always avoid the use of the word "wrong". It may develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later, when he is arrested, that society is against him and he is being persecuted.
- 5) Pick up everything he leaves around the house. Do everything for him so that he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility upon other.
- 6) Let him read any printed matter he gets his hands on. Be careful that the silverware and drinking glasses are sterilized, but let his mind feed on filth.
- 7) Quarrel frequently in the presence of your children; this way they won't be shocked when the home is broken up later on.
- 8) Give the child all the spending money he wants. Never make him earn his own.

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- 9) Satisfy his every craving for food, drink, and comfort. See that every sensual desire is gratified; hold back nothing.
- 10) Take his part against neighbours and officers of the law and teachers. They are all prejudiced against your child.
- 11) When he gets into trouble, apologize for yourself by saying, "I never could do anything with that boy anyway."
- 12) Prepare yourself for a life of grief; you will likely have it!
(Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations)

The point is that we can do something for the next generation, and maybe for previous ones, by challenging each other to a life of Christ centered love, in our families. For when we honour God, by remaining in Christ's love, Jesus tells us that God will give us whatever we ask for, including the family life we all need and long for.