

Teaching E-mail 55

It's Time For The Righteous To Take A Stand (Part 1)

*"This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit,
and trembles at My word"* (Isaiah 66:2)

(November 25, 2011)

Introduction

Everywhere you look today, people are rising up in protest *against* one thing or another. Yet where are the followers of Jesus who are standing up *for* Him and His Word? This isn't the first time in which greed and a disregard for God and His Word have brought this nation into such chaos. When conditions get like this, our Lord is looking for His followers to *take a stand*: to disciple people, to baptize them, and to teach them to obey His commands (Matthew 28:18-20).

Taking a stand for the Name and honor of God has much biblical precedent. Consider these men who stood up to unrighteousness and were given the victory by their God:

Jonathan (1 Samuel 14);

David (1 Samuel 17:40-52);

David's "mighty men" (2 Samuel 23:8-12).

In this Teaching E-mail and the next we'll discuss various issues you'll encounter that will strengthen your determination to live with Jesus as your *Lord*. His Lordship in and through you is revealed as you resolutely take a stand for Him with unwavering resolve. Think of Jesus as your Commanding Officer filled with the Light of life. You're his steadfast soldier (to borrow Paul's analogy), intent on representing Him to a world imprisoned in sinful darkness. You may not have been raised in a home or among relatives who displayed this stalwart love of Christ so that *His* will was *your* will. Even so, this is the life of *immovable purpose* to

which He has called you as His own. And in these two Teaching E-mails, we hope to help you *take your stand for Jesus*.

"Like father, like son": not always!

Years ago an extensive study was conducted to test the validity of the old adage, "Like father, like son." The research revealed how inaccurate the saying was. A son was just as likely to follow the goals and values of his mother, his favorite grandparents, a trusted coach or teacher, or even his peers—depending on who was closest to him. "Like father, like son" may not be as credible as it sounds!

How should this insight affect you as a follower of Jesus? First, make sure you don't make false assumptions by imparting to one generation of a family (or Christian ministry, for that matter) the level of faith that was demonstrated in a previous one. The "acorn" can fall a long way from the tree. And, the "acorn" that becomes a tree may not be anything like the tree from which it came.

Don't Gauge Someone's Faith By the Rest of His/Her Family

Our Father intends that if you marry, you'll follow his injunction to partner with a fellow Jesus follower and raise up a godly generation (Malachi 2:15). But biblical history demonstrates how hard it can be to pass along a viable love for God that's evidenced by obedient trust. In no uncertain terms God's Word makes clear that one generation can differ significantly from another in matters of faith.

For example,

- The fearful King Saul had a son, Jonathan, who was courageous for the Lord.
- The repentant King Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was one of Israel's most evil kings.
- Manasseh's son, Amon, ruled after him and "*did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done*" (2 Chronicles 33:22).
- Yet Amon's son, Josiah, was a king who feared God and brought the nation back to Him.
- God's faithful prophet Samuel had two sons who did evil in the sight of God.

Even within the same family, children don't all grow up with the same conviction about God. Consider the dissimilarities between Joseph and his brothers; David and his brothers; Jesus and his brothers. The same is true with people who minister together. Even among Paul's companions we find faithful Timothy, Titus and Silas as well as disloyal Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20) and Demas (2 Timothy 4:10).

So even if one generation or one family member lives in trust-based obedience as our Lord's beloved slave and friend, that may not reflect the spiritual walk of the rest of the family. The same may be said about many Christian institutions and ministries. In the late 1970s a friend studied the history of institutions of higher learning such as Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, which had originally been established to propagate Christian values and the Gospel. Sadly, the vibrant trust in God which had impelled the founders was lost by the second generation of those who presided over the schools. The quest for academic achievement quickly overruled the trust-based obedience to the Lordship of Jesus which the founders had hoped to pass along.

I (Mike) experienced this same dramatic shift in purpose in two educational institutions when I worked at a Christian college and later for a seminary. The original faith and devotion to Jesus that so stirred the founders had all but disappeared from most of the faculty and staff.

We grieve that so many attend these spiritually dead "Christian" institutions and become inoculated to the Lordship of Jesus by adopting worldly techniques and self-promoting performance. Those who allow themselves to be disconnected from the "Head" in this way find themselves deceived into promoting palatable religious teaching that pleases self-absorbed crowds.

"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"
(Luke 15:10)

In the late 1980s we were administering a retreat center in eastern Connecticut. Mike and some men who were dear to him in the Lord visited a church building in Enfield, Connecticut where Jonathan Edwards had preached his pivotal sermon, "*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*" on July 8, 1741. Edwards emphasized the rashness of living in sin apart from the only Redeemer Who could save humanity from the just consequences of God's wrath. The response was profound. Edwards was interrupted time and again by people moaning and crying out, "*What shall I do to be saved?*" (This oration, by the way, continues to be the leading example of a Great Awakening discourse and is still used today in religious and academic studies.)

Recently Sue read a book which gave us a disturbing insight into Jonathan Edwards' grandfather, who was also a

minister. From *Forged in Faith* by Rod Gragg (New York: Howard Books, 2010):

By 1740, "**prosperity, security, and the distractions of a progressive culture** had dulled Christianity in the Colonies... and the American people had grown **lukewarm** in their faith... A minister from Vermont concurred: 'The **difference between the church and the world was vanishing away,**' he lamented. 'Church discipline was neglected, and the **growing laxness of morals** was **invading the churches.**' The spiritual decline even affected Puritan New England. There, some blamed the slippage on Jonathan Edwards' grandfather [**Solomon Stoddard**], who led a movement within the Congregational Church to adopt what was known as the **Halfway Covenant**.

"Church membership was required for many civil rights in Colonial America, which leavened the church rolls with members motivated less by faith and more by a desire to obtain **political rights**. The **Halfway Covenant met lukewarm aspiring members halfway...** by granting church membership to people of moral reputation, children of members, and those who had been baptized as infants—**without requiring a personal testimony of faith in Christ**.

"Stoddard believed that the Halfway Covenant was an **act of grace** that could lead the lukewarm to salvation. Edwards, however, saw the Halfway Covenant as an **unbiblical compromise of faith**, and he rejected it. ... Salvation, he taught, did not come by good works, moral living, or intellectual knowledge. Jonathan Edwards taught that **salvation came from a changed heart, and not merely by intellectual assent...** Salvation, he preached, came by God's grace through personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior—**a salvation experience.**" (pp. 95,96, emphasis added)

Clearly, two generations of a family can have a completely opposite view of what comprises *God's grace*. Today westernized Christendom is dominated by the man-centered "Stoddard mentality" of doing whatever is needed to draw people to the pew. The "welcome mat" deceives them into thinking that they're also accepted by God no matter what their spiritual state. But their self-imagined deity has nothing in common with the righteous and holy God of the Bible Who has provided *only one way* to enter His Presence: through repentance and obedient trust in His Son as Lord of their life.

The Hebraic foundations our Father gave us to share align with the biblical convictions of Jonathan Edwards: **A holy fear of God and readiness to repent are essential for the communal righteousness He calls for to share authentic fellowship together.**

Our Lord's primary issue for each individual in each generation is whether or not they will *repent*: to *turn away from sin* and *turn toward God* for forgiveness and rebirth. This is made perfectly clear by the apostle who understood so well how a *changed heart* produces a *changed life*. The walk matches the talk:

"And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved [agape] the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil things hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever practices the truth comes to the light, so that his deeds may be seen plainly as having been done in God" (John 3:19-21; see also Matthew 5:14-16).

The way in which you or anyone else responds to Jesus is THE critical distinction between the *repentant* and the *unrepentant*, between those who *seek*

truth and those who live *deceived*, and between those who *belong to God* and those who *don't*. Jesus declares that He came to set His own against those in their own family who refuse to repent and love Him as their highest love (see Matthew 10:35-38). In fact, He warns those who turn to the Light that their own family will *become their enemies*.

There's a clear dividing line between the repentant, whose loving obedience is seen in the fruit they produce as they do Father's will (Matthew 3:8), and the unrepentant, who hide out in religious systems to benefit only themselves and appease their conscience (2 Timothy 4:3). Our Lord's people abstain from wickedness so they can be vessels of honor, prepared for every good work (2 Timothy 2:19, 21). The distinction in God's sight is as plain as darkness and light.

Consider again how Jesus identifies those who are *His* true family: *"Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" Pointing to His disciples, He said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother'"* (Matthew 12:49-50). Here again is the critical line of distinction between those who belong to Him and those who don't. Where you spend all eternity rests on this. Those who *do the will of their Father in heaven* have been identified by Jesus as His intimate family members.

Throughout the Bible our Lord differentiates between the *repentant* and *unrepentant*. It's a line of polarity that has become fuzzy for far too many followers of Jesus. This distinction dramatically influences your interaction with unrepentant relatives and friends! Any interaction with them must be *outreach motivated* by the love for Jesus in you toward

them. It's powered by the hope that through you they'll yearn to turn from sin and run to Him as Lord. But *you're* deceived if you think you can give those who are currently enemies of God because of unrepentance the same devotion as those who belong to Christ (Colossians 1:21). Jesus never confused those who were known by Him as His own with those who listened for awhile but wanted nothing to do with His Lordship.

It's obvious that people *don't* have unlimited emotional or physical capacity to meet the needs of everyone around them. That's why you need to *prioritize your relational responsibilities*. So many followers of Jesus don't recognize how our Lord distinguishes levels of relationship. Thus they get emotionally drained by perceived allegiance to the unrepentant who *don't* want to turn to His light and have their sins exposed. Through all this misplaced energy they rob those who've embraced the light of Jesus of the quality time and affectionate support they have a right to as the family of Christ.

Are *you* one of those plagued by false loyalty? Then know this: If you're overly involved in your heart and mind with those who enjoy the darkness of unrepentance, then you'll gradually lose the light you have. Over time you'll begin to make excuses for your compromise and be seduced back into darkness (Galatians 6:1). Why do you think Paul issues such a stiff warning?

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial [Satan]? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14,15).

If Jesus, the “Light of the World”, is Lord of your life, please take a close look at where your emotions are being expended. Make sure Satan (Belial) isn’t using those who choose to live in his darkness to wear you down because of your misplaced loyalty. Everyone who remains in the darkness of unrepentance is a pawn in Satan’s schemes to both keep you from doing Father’s will and undermine your ability to emotionally support His children—your brothers and sisters in Christ.

In light of your limited capacity to emotionally come alongside everyone in your relational arena, God commands a man to place his wife above all other earthly relationships: *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”* (Genesis 2:24; apperceived in Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7; Ephesians 5:31). Father intends that a husband lead the way in ensuring that his marriage covenant with his wife fully reflects the Covenant they have with their heavenly Father in union with Jesus.

The *spiritual* intimate union *in Christ* is mirrored by the physical “one flesh” relationship that’s consummated in intercourse. In other words, you can’t get any closer than that! A man can’t let himself be torn between family loyalties to unrepentant relatives and fully bringing to fruition the devotion God requires of him for his spouse. Rather, his parents and close relatives should purpose to live repentantly in Jesus so they can support him in God’s goal for his marriage. (The same goes for the wife’s family as well.)

Our Father created marriage as a permanent and loving union between a man and a woman. He purposed that an unbreakable bond be formed between a husband and wife, an enduring love-

grounded relationship that grows over time. Establishing this bond is critical to a couple, and needs to take place early on so that trust can grow. That’s why God commands, *“If a man has recently married his wife, he is not to be subject to military service; he is to be free of external obligations and left at home for one year to make his new wife happy”* (Deuteronomy 24:5,CJB). The proliferation of divorce today testifies that too few men make time for that necessary bonding to develop a Christ-like marriage covenant.

The pursuit of worldly success and the misplaced loyalty to unrepentant relatives and friends hinders this needed bonding between a husband and wife.

If your parents have loved Jesus and lived according to His Lordship in their lives, then they can be valuable role models for the development of Christ-like love in your marriage. If they *haven’t* loved and followed Him as Lord, then don’t get frustrated or angry with them in their poor marital relationship. Just realize that by choosing to live in the darkness, their marriage will have little light for you to emulate. And know this: You can never satisfy people who enjoy the darkness of their unrepentance.

Many of the younger followers of Jesus we’ve helped over the years have unrepentant parents and relatives who regularly attend weekly services and complacently enjoy their lukewarm convictions and unbiblical religious practices. (We’ve also talked with older parents who have unrepentant adult children in this same situation.) **Misplaced faith** is at the center of much of this disparity, as discussed in *Parade* magazine 11/13/11 in an article, "Ask Marilyn" by Marilyn vos Savant. A reader asked, "Why do we cling

to beliefs even after seeing facts that contradict them?" Vos Savant responded,

"Because people get freaked out by the notion of being wrong about anything. It makes them feel insecure. If you can be wrong about this or that, what about all the other stuff you think you know? And **the more important the subject, the more unnerving the emotion...** Your question goes to the heart of much **unsound thinking**. After we leave school, we tend to head down one of two roads: 1) We **close our minds** to new or different information while becoming more and more sure of ourselves; or 2) we watch, listen, and **learn as we get older**. The second road has way more bumps and curves, but it's also the **path to wisdom**." (emphasis added)

Isn't it amazing how frequently the Bible esteems wisdom? *"For wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her"* (Proverbs 8:11). Wisdom grows through a questioning mind that's bent on knowing the truth. A Jesus follower who is intent on living by His Spirit of wisdom will not rest until it's found and put into practice.

Think of God's wisdom as seeing everything through His eyes. His wisdom is ALWAYS different from your own limited human understanding.

Earlier we cited the opposing views of God's grace between Jonathan Edwards and his grandfather. Today's trend toward religious ecumenism would maintain that both views are okay. But God's Word proclaims, *"No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval"* (1 Corinthians 11:19). If you purpose for your faith practices to be built on God's truth alone, you need to be willing to question your *prior* beliefs to determine if

they align with His Word or are in opposition to it (see Acts 17:11). And when you do establish a conviction of faith, you need to be able to show the biblical basis for it when others ask. And know this: Your convictions will be tested!

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse"

(Malachi 4:5,6).

God is making sure that the hearts of fathers are turning to children and children to fathers. Now consider this passage from the perspective of spiritual family who belong to Jesus.

If you're to be part of this God-ordained restoration of intergenerational relationships, it's vital that each of you who is involved truly desires to live with Jesus as your Lord and discern His distinction between light and darkness. Don't think the unrepentant are like the repentant in goals and values! The deceiver wants to blur those lines and weaken your devotion to Jesus and to your family in Him.

Make sure you aren't squandering the emotional support those in your family of Jesus need from you. People who choose the darkness of unrepentance so they can compromise their lives with ongoing sin will try to solicit your approval and participation.

We've recently encountered a number of followers of Jesus who are being chastised by Father because they're not resisting old loyalties to unrepentant relatives and friends. As a result, their own life

and that of their family are filled with **apprehension** and **infighting** because they're failing to uphold our Lord's distinction between good and evil.

That "father/child" relationship found in Malachi 4:5,6 clearly reflected the fatherly feelings in Paul's heart for his spiritual sons in Christ who were authentic family to him:

*"For you know that we dealt with each of you as a **father deals with his own children**"*

(1 Thessalonians 2:11).

*"To Timothy, **my dear son...**"* (2 Timothy 1:2).

*"To Titus, **my true son...**"* (Titus 1:4).

Paul's fatherly devotion to his spiritual sons was so strong we're told, *"Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia"* (2 Corinthians 2:12,13). How many people do you know would leave a place of effective ministry to find someone they loved?

As a father Paul both encouraged and confronted his spiritual sons in his letters to them. We hope that you recognize from His Word that our Lord's family shares intense, committed "family" feelings for each other (John 15:13). Those heartfelt emotions flow from the sacrificial love His Spirit within provides (Galatians 5:22; Philippians 2:3,4).

Please consider these suggestions:

- If you're an older person who loves and serves our Lord Jesus as His devoted disciple, find some spiritual children in the Lord who need you to role model and help develop in them the growing Christ-likeness of character they see in you. Just keep in mind that you need to love them enough to provide correction when it's needed.

- If you're younger and your own relatives live in the darkness of unrepentance, prayerfully seek an older person or married couple who lives with Jesus as their Lord to be your spiritual parent(s). In order for this relationship to prosper, you need to be humble enough to accept correction. Keep these important guidelines at the center of your relationship:

*"We ask you, brothers, to **respect** those who are **working hard** among you, those who are **guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change**"* (1 Thessalonians 5:12,CJB).

*"Obey [literally, let yourself be persuaded by] the ones leading you and **submit**. They **keep watch** on behalf of your souls as men who must render an account. Obey [let yourself be persuaded by] them so that they may **do this with joy** and not groaning, for this would be profitless to you"* (Hebrews 13:17, literal).

- If you're a parent of adult children who live in the darkness of the world's ways, make sure you're not squandering too much emotional energy on them. Don't be plagued by false guilt because of your past parental failures. You need to allow the Spirit to bring them to conviction and lead them to repentance (John 16:8; Romans 2:4). You are *not* the Holy Spirit. Instead, use this time to pray and seek out those in whom you can reproduce your love and obedient trust in Jesus.
- As an adult child, don't try to "honor" unrepentant parents to the extent that your own spouse and children are robbed of the affectionate support they need. Don't let unrepentant relatives cause such apprehension in your home that they hamper God's requirement for your home to be a sanctuary of peace (see Luke 10:5,6).
- Refuse to fellowship where sin isn't confronted and communal righteousness isn't upheld.

Throughout Christendom many deceiving clergy excuse sin and mislabel it “grace”. But God’s definition of grace is **the desire and power to do His will.**

So many clergy use the word “grace” as a buzzword for *law*-lessness. They misrepresent God by stressing His loving mercy and forgiveness but minimizing and even eliminating the holy standards of His Word. Grievously, their quest for worldly success tolerates sin among the congregants and brings down the holy name of Jesus to a mocking world.

Conclusion

In the midst of the ever-increasing chaos it’s time for followers of Jesus to take a stand as His ambassadors—children of His light. As you’ll see in our next Teaching E-mail, an entire nation can be changed when those who love our Lord above all else stand up for Him and His Word.

The first testing of the authenticity of your conviction often comes in the relationships close to you. Our Lord calls for His people to make a distinction between the repentant and unrepentant, between righteousness and wickedness (see Malachi 3:17,18). If you can’t stand for Jesus among those you know, you won’t stand for Him anywhere!