

2. Fathers—Replacing Friendliness With Love

June 8, 2013

This is the second e-mail I'm sending to husbands and fathers of all ages as this Father's Day approaches. (Wives and daughters may find it helpful as well, especially as a discussion-for-application tool!)

From my years of working with Christian men from all types of faith backgrounds I've noticed how easily they deceive each other in their conversations. This is especially true when it comes to spiritual matters, since a man can easily put on a pleasant, learned front when he's talking about the Bible even if his private life is in shambles. He may well be hiding behind his store of Bible knowledge so that no one will hold him accountable as a brother in Christ to live what he's saying, especially with his wife and children.

In other words, all too many Christian men **fear confronting each other**. They can't stand the thought of being rebuked or even excluded by the men in either their extended family or faith community. So they just ignore whatever evil they see in each other—even if they know the wives and kids of the disobedient are being crushed by that behavior. Perhaps the demonic spirit of Jezebel has instilled in men this fearful reluctance to mutually help each other in the pattern of one-anothering that Jesus calls for. You seldom find *any* men who *mutually pursue becoming more like Jesus*. Not even Christian fathers and sons are doing this! Why the reluctance and resistance? Because that kind of mutual commitment and goal would require some level of **interpersonal confrontation**. The apostle Paul makes clear that admonishment is both biblical and necessary for brothers in Christ (see Colossians 3:16; 1Thessalonians 5:12; 2Thessalonians 3:13-15).

Wherever you encounter men who refuse to love one another as brothers in Christ by confronting the unbiblical attitudes and behaviors they see in each other, they are deceiving each other. This fear-based reluctance then puts intense emotional pressure on their wives to either live in martyr-like pained silence or to point out their husbands' unChristlike shortcomings. Sadly, neither approach brings about shalom in the home, and the ongoing apprehension deepens the division between the partners.

- Are you a man who avoids confronting others to discuss tolerated sin? Do you dodge being confronted yourself, whether by your defensive posture or avoidance of those you fear might speak up?
- Ask others who know you well to describe how you respond to confrontation.
- If you're in a faith community, how close do you let yourself get to the leaders so they can admonish you if and when it's necessary?

Male friendliness is a cover up for men who refuse to confront each other.
Outward affability can also be a relational fence that keeps men from mutually developing the humble, sacrificial love of Jesus.

Outward friendliness isn't love! As great as it seems to have congenial relationships with other people, friendliness is based on treating each other in a pleasant manner so that each party benefits from the relationship. The friendliness that's reciprocal—"I'll be nice to you if you're nice to me"—is still a standard by which much of the world lives. But friendliness in general is limited to a convenience factor, and falls far short of the **sacrificial love** which Jesus calls for in His followers and empowers through His indwelling Spirit. Sacrificial love means you seek to be a blessing others even when you derive no benefit to yourself. Our Lord leaves no doubt that following in His footsteps of love is both inconvenient and sacrificial:

- *"For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me" (Matthew 25:35,36).*
- *"Then Jesus said to His host, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous'" (Luke 14:12-14).*

In these examples our Lord Jesus is describing the actions which sacrificial love produces. To sacrifice yourself, you need to give up something you value for the sake of something else you regard as more important or worthy. The worth of your responsiveness is that it's our Lord Jesus Who wants you to lovingly bless others in His Name without needing to be benefited yourself.

- If you and the men close to you in the faith are going to acquire and mature in sacrificial love, you need to humble your heart, get on your knees, and ask the Spirit of Jesus for His empowerment to love sacrificially (John 15:13).
- Each of you must have relationships with other men who are willing to confront you as a brother in whatever areas you fall short of our Lord's character (Proverbs 27:17).

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2Corinthians 10:5).

All too often men appear friendly to their relatives and those in their faith communities because the same prevailing demonic strongholds mutually control and/or influence them. They feel comfortable with the superficiality of their relationships and cringe at the idea of saying or doing anything that would shake that complacency. In our work-book *Demolishing Strongholds* we wrote, "Over the years we've found that people tend to marry others with the same demonic influences. The familiarity bred by the common spirits brings about a deceptive sense of acceptance and

compatibility [friendliness]. We've done Demolishing Strongholds Workshops in congregations throughout the country. The majority of those in each congregation are influenced by the same demonic spirits. In one congregation it may be bitterness, in another, pride, and still another, fear and insecurity. It appears that the demonic spirits bring these folks together because the people feel accepted and comfortable in their shared bondage!"

You need to recognize that men with similar strongholds shy away from the biblically based confrontation that's needed for them to become more like Jesus in their motive and character and obedience. Please, download our one-page list of strongholds so you can identify whatever may be keeping you and your family and close friends in the faith from walking in the responsive obedient trust of sacrificial love: <http://www.restorationministries.org/pdf/hebraicArticles/DemolishingQuestion_nonXn.pdf>.

"For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior" (Ephesians 5:23).

Wherever men are trapped by the friendliness that wards off relational vulnerability and intimacy, they fear to confront each other and shirk the loving authority our Lord has delegated to them in their own home. God-given authority requires the willingness of a husband/father to lovingly confront unrighteous attitudes and behaviors in his wife and children. Our Father has entrusted this responsibility of authority to a husband in his servant leadership role so that he can promote and maintain peace in the home.

The Hebrew letters for shalom, which means well-being and peace, stand for "authority that keeps chaos in check." Chaos is an atmosphere of **relational apprehension**—ongoing anxiety or fear that something unpleasant will happen. A wise adage corroborates the need for shalom in the home in particular: "Where apprehension exists, love doesn't grow." God intends that our home be a sanctuary and refuge from discord. Therefore, authority is the God-given responsibility to lovingly:

1. **Include** those people or practices that bless your home with peace.
 2. **Exclude** those people or practices that rob your home of peace.
 3. **Commend** those attitudes or behaviors that promote peace in your home.
 4. **Correct** those attitudes or behaviors that rob your home of peace.
- Have you sat down with your wife and/or children and asked them about the level of peace in your home? Do they consider your home to be a sanctuary and refuge, or a warzone and chaos?
 - Have you discussed with them what robs your home of peace? Have you considered what attitudes, habits and actions disrupt serenity and cooperation, and what each of you can do to promote peace together.
 - Are you one of the sources for ongoing apprehension in your home? Ask your wife and family. What changes of heart motives, goals and decisions need to be made so that the well-being of your household as a whole can be restored?

***"These things you have done and I kept silent;
you thought I was altogether like you.
But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face"***
(Psalms 50:21).

It's essential that Christian men stop deceiving themselves by thinking they're okay with God in their complacent friendliness. Their friendly self-deception makes them too comfortable to see the need to change, even if their families are suffering. When you have no holy fear of God, you don't sense any need to alter your path; if you're pleased with yourself (or at least think you're not any worse than other guys you know), then you figure God must have no problems with your choices.

But the Lord of the Bible is nothing like you, especially in your complacent self-satisfaction and pursuit of self-gratification. NOW is the time for change! He is calling you *right now* to seek Him as the Pearl of great price, your highest love, and to become increasingly transformed by His Spirit into His character as you respond in obedient trust. That takes the collective input of others who are significant in your life, and your willingness to hear them out without blame or excuses. If you don't have anyone who can or will admonish and rebuke you, then beware: the rebuke you so desperately need may be what you receive at the Judgment Throne. Then it will be too late to do anything about it.

This word of wisdom applies especially to fathers and grandfathers and ought to serve as a sharp warning to you: ***"What you allow in moderation, your children will excuse in excess."*** It's time to begin exercising that needful element of love that's so often overlooked in today's anything-goes view—biblical confrontation from a concerned heart of love. Confront sinful attitudes and behaviors, beginning with yourself and then with both your family and Christian friends! Don't let this be your identity from our Father's perspective: *"a man who never changes his ways and has no fear of God"* (see Psalms 55:19).

***"If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life,
he was thrown into the lake of fire"*** (Revelation 20:15)

Far more than any worldly goal or purpose you have for yourself and your family, you need to ensure their names are in the Lamb's Book of Life. Everything else in this life is absolutely meaningless if you are not welcomed by name into our Lord's presence! It's when and if your name is read in heaven that's the moment of eternal salvation or damnation. Consider the biblical issues you and your family must embrace now if you're to experience salvation at the Judgment Throne:

Justification — Having repented by turning away from your sins and turning to God, you place your trust in, and continue to trust in, the shed blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

Sanctification — You persevere in the lifelong purifying process of the Holy Spirit Who changes your character, that is, your motivation, attitude and behavior, to conform to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

The pilgrimage of a Jesus follower:

- Begins with **Justification**, your spiritual rebirth;
- Continues in a lifelong process of **Sanctification**;
- Culminates ultimately in **Salvation** before the Throne where your name is read from the Book of Life.

A warning:

Since God's Word calls for a lifelong journey of sanctification — being made holy in the likeness of Jesus — make sure your close Christian friends are also seeking Christ-likeness. That way you can encourage and confront each other as you grow more like Jesus and bring Him praise through your mutual testimonies. The true sign of your heart's desire to become like your Lord is that each of you is glad when anything unlike Jesus is confronted because of your love for Him and for one another. If this is your mutual goal, it will in turn bless your wife and family. However, if you continue to spend time with Christian friends who don't have this goal, you will, in time, give up your quest to live for Jesus and may even fall away from living for Him. (See the sad warning in Hebrews 6:4-8.)

Immanuel — God with us

You're most likely aware that the various names given in the Bible to describe our Lord Jesus have significant meaning. For example, the title *Immanuel* which was prophesied by Isaiah and fulfilled in Matthew 1:23 means *God with us*. This particular name has a deep significance for us today which apperceives God's interaction with the Israelites:

*"As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement. **For the LORD your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that He will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you"** (Deuteronomy 23:13,14).*

In your conversations with other Christian men, do you reflect on the proximity of our Lord in your lives? He's not "out there" somewhere. If you belong to Him, then His Spirit is within you (Romans 8:9). And if His Spirit is within you, then your life should reveal His presence working in and through you. If this isn't happening with you or with others close to you in the faith, then you ought to consider that **strongholds, toxic memories**, and/or **your sin nature** are still ruling your mind, will and emotions. Their rule in those areas which you've yielded to their influence needs to be intentionally replaced by the Spirit of Jesus and how He would have you respond. Only then will your attitudes and behaviors be noticeably changed as they become more like our Lord's.

Again, it's important that as a man who has been born from above, you call upon the presence of our Lord at work within you to reflect Him through your attitudes and behaviors. Whatever blocks His rule in any area of your life, renounce and remove it by the authority of the name of our Lord Jesus!

- Does the Spirit of our Lord Jesus abide within you? Do others see Him at work in your life? Can they describe changes they've observed in you because of your yield-
edness to Him?
- Do you or any members of your family and/or Christian friends still have strongholds they've refused to renounce and demolish? If so, why?
- Have you earnestly sought to change the toxic memories which the strongholds have produced into healthy Christ-like ones? If not, why?
- Would our Lord feel comfortable and welcomed in your home?
- Are there things you do or have there that you would be ashamed of were He to visit? Do you realize that if His Spirit is living within you, He's already in the midst of what you have and do? What changes is He prompting you to make in your life, your family, and your home?

I'd like to suggest three of our materials for you to review and discuss with your family and faith family. All are available for free at our website under Reading.

1. Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character: *The Sin of Irresponsibility with God's Law: Intergenerational Failure To Instill Collective Wisdom*
2. Lifebyte 73. *Stop Toxic Thoughts—Replace Toxic Memories*
3. Chapter 5 of *Demolishing Strongholds*

Our families desperately need men who purposely seek God's will and have the sacrificial love of Jesus to lead them. Make sure you're one of them! The consequences and rewards are eternal.

Mike