

SURRENDER TO LOVE

The other evening Elizabeth and I were out walking our dog Dolly. During our walk Elizabeth turned to me with a puzzled look on her face and asked “Why aren’t people nice to Christians?” The question seemed to come “Out of the Blue” so I asked her, “What makes you think that people are not nice to Christians?” She replied that “At her school (middle school), when other kids found out that she is a Christian, or if they talk about church, the comments always seem negative about the Christian faith.”

It was obvious to me that this disturbed Elizabeth as she is growing into her faith through confirmation. It was clear she was troubled and her question certainly deserved an answer. The first thing that came to mind was:

Matthew 10:22: “You will be hated by everyone because of me.”

So I said, “When Jesus was here on earth, he said, “People will hate Christians, because we do not compromise with worldly values.”

Although Elizabeth seemed to accept my answer and had no follow up, my mind continued thinking about this subject more. Was my answer correct to Elizabeth or are there other reasons?

Then while I was doing my daily devotion book I found it saying something very interesting. This is a book called “Jesus Calling.” This book is unique as the author wrote the devotion as if God is speaking to us. In the September 7 devotion it says:

*There is **no** condemnation for those who are clothed in Me! That is why I abhor the **use of guilt as a means of motivation** among Christians. Some pastors try to whip their people into action with guilt-inducing sermons. This procedure can drive many people to work harder, but the end does not justify the means. Guilt-evoking messages can undermine the very foundation of grace in a believer’s heart.”*

Using guilt as a means of motivation to follow Jesus. Have any of you ever encountered that kind of message?

SURRENDER TO LOVE

It still always amazes me how God works. Because if the message of that daily devotion was not enough, as I continued to reflect on Elizabeth's question, another book I am reading ("Surrender to Love" written by David Benner) gave more input. Here are some quotations from this book.

My own spiritual journey began with frantic steps to ensure that I escaped God's punishment.

I was told that salvation was a gift of love, but it seemed strange to ask me to accept a gift at gunpoint.

During my Spiritual journey, I have met some strong, dedicated Christians, but unfortunately some of them seem to produce more damage than good.

This is because their message about God is a message of condemnation and uses guilt feelings for people to follow Jesus.

I remember an experience I had at my former church. It was my first year there and with enthusiasm I planned to offer a special spiritual renewal program. I named this special event "Revival" and invited a well known guest speaker for the program.

But this program did not go well as many of the congregation did not show up. Later when we evaluated the program, some church members told me that they did not come because the name "Revival" turned them off. It is interesting to read what Adam Hamilton said in his book, "Revival" (which, by the way, is the upcoming Soup and Study book this fall). Adam Hamilton said,

We don't often use the word "revival" anymore. For many, this idea of revival is quaint at best; at worst, it calls up images of tent meetings where silver-tongued preachers take advantage of gullible believers.

Obviously, some damage has been done! If Christians are hurt by negative messages about God that have been received, how much more damage has been done to those who have never experienced God's love?

SURRENDER TO LOVE

How can we change this? Where do we begin to change this? How can we break people's false image of God? What could be my advice to Elizabeth and others who struggle with the same issues?

You may have some answers to this question, which I would love to hear from you. I do not have a perfect answer, but I do know we need to start somewhere to change, and perhaps changes begin with ourselves examining our own faith. Do we really know God or do we just know about God? Without knowing it, do I live under pressure from a false image of God?

From the book "Surrender to Love," I learned a very important lesson which I had never thought about before.

The word "Surrender" is not a strange word to me. How many times, have we sung the song, "All to Jesus, I surrender, all to him I freely give. I surrender all!" I love this song and I always imagine myself laying flat before God's majestic authority.

But David Benner has a different image of surrendering to God. He describes in his book that, "Surrender involves relaxing. Relaxing and letting go. It is floating in the river that is made of God's love. Floating as surrendering."

I have never pictured surrendering as floating. Actually, my thinking was totally opposite. I was more focused and on full alert to make sure I was not taking anything back from God. That was the image I always had since I was child, and have never imagined it differently. There was fear!

But David Benner's understanding of surrendering was much different than mine. He said, "We are surrendering ourselves to God's unconditional and perfect love. In that perfect love we should relax and find rest. Surrender involves relaxing."

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (1 John 4:18)

About a month ago, I had an exciting adventure, ocean kayaking. Gary provided three ocean kayaks for the day. Liz and Gwyn had single kayaks for themselves while Gary and I shared a two seater. Gary knows how clumsy I can be and tried to protect me by seating me in the front. It was a beautiful late afternoon with a nice breeze. We paddled out into the bay watching the sun going down as dolphins were jumping all around us.

SURRENDER TO LOVE

Then I noticed I had gotten mud on my sandals. It must have happened as we were heading out, and we walked in the shallow water as we entered the bay. As soon as I discovered my muddy sandals, I had to clean them. Why not? I was surrounded by water and my sandals would not care that I was using salt water to clean them. As I bent over and leaned way down to put my sandal into the water, I heard Gary yell “What are you doing” ... and the rest is history!! The kayak turned over dumping Gary and me into the Bay. Oh, did I tell you that Elizabeth would not stay near the beach as Gary had instructed. No, she was headed for Delaware and we had paddled out after her to bring her back. Which means we were quite a distance from the shore!

Liz and Gwyn were great, immediately they rescued my floating sandals and dad’s straw hat. Gary turned the kayak back over and tried to figure out how to get back in. I meanwhile, was stunned to learn how awesome my life jacket was. I was floating effortlessly!! Gary and I tried to get back into our kayak but soon found out that it was rather difficult and we could not do it. After many attempts, we realized that our old bodies were not equipped to crawl back in, nor would the kayak cooperate by staying still or even up right. So we decided to go to the nearest beach. Did I mention we were already a couple miles off shore now. So Gary held onto Gwyn’s kayak with one hand and held our kayak with the other, and Liz tried to tow me in. At first I tried to help Elizabeth by pushing her kayak, but she kept saying not to do anything, that she could handle it. I tried to swim while holding her kayak, but that did not help her either. Actually, I got tired. Finally, I decided to just relax and float while holding onto Elizabeth’s kayak. The water was warm and the sunset was beautiful! And the Dolphins were still jumping all around us as if they were laughing at us (or with us)!

Now, as I read David’s Benner’s “surrender as floating”, I flashed-back to my kayak adventure remembering the power of the water surrounding me that day. It was much different than floating in the swimming pool! I found that floating in the ocean is so easy to do, and I imagined that the ocean is like God’s love!

There are a few other quotes from David Brenner I would love to share.

Surrender to God’s love offers us the possibility of freedom from guilt, freedom from effort to earn God’s approval, and freedom to genuinely love God and others as the Father loves us.

The abundant life promised us in Christ comes not from grasping but from releasing. It comes not from striving but from relinquishing. It comes not so much

SURRENDER TO LOVE

from taking as from giving. Surrender is the foundational dynamic of Christian freedom- surrender of my efforts to live my life outside of the grasp of God's love.

When your life gets tough whether from physical illness, anxiety or worries, then that is the time for you to float on God's love.

When your dream is broken and your heartache awakes you in the middle of the night, that is the time for you to relax and float in God's love.

When the world hates you because you are a follower of Jesus, or you feel rejected by your friends, that is the time to relax and float in God's love.

Whatever the situation you are in today, whether happy, sad, excited, confused, concerned, or alarmed, it is always time for you to relax and float in God's love.

The Bible says there is nothing that can separate us from God's unconditional love. What is going to happen if every Christian relaxes and floats in the ocean of God's love. If Elizabeth's school friends, who put down Christianity, learn about "floating in God's love", I am certain that their understanding about Christianity will be much different.

So I encourage all of you today to hold onto this passage and surrender yourself to God's love!!

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)