

Freedom from Bondage

The more rules we have in our lives, the less freedom we have. We become enslaved to our world through rules. However without rules we would live in chaos. I would agree with that statement because of the moral state of our society. Let's focus on our families. Are you in bondage to rules in your home? Do you have a list of rules to prevent chaos? If you do, are you getting the results you want from these rules? My experience with families tells me that is usually not the case. The enforcement of rules becomes a bondage. There is a lesson we can learn from the Bible regarding the law.

This lesson starts in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is full of laws, rules if you will. Read the book of Leviticus, what a task to follow all of the laws. The Israelites were enslaved to the Egyptians for over 400 years. Through God's relationship with Moses they were led out of Egypt. God was with them by day and by night throughout their journey. Even though he was always there, the Israelites were disobedient. They complained and turned to idol worship. This put them out of relationship with God. The laws continued in the New Testament. The religious leaders thought that the harder you made the rules, then the more righteous you would become. They believed that the more rules you had, then all the more spiritual or holy you would be. These laws and rules continued to take man out of relationship with God.

I'm afraid that many families have fallen into this trap. They make rules because of pressure from society. They may make rules because their parents did it. The list goes on and on. I suspect that many times families don't even know why they have some of their rules. These rules can be either written or the silent but deadly "unwritten" rules handed down through the generations. Mazes of rules have evolved to cover any contingency. Contingencies are the "loop holes" our children find. Too many rules in families take parents out of relationship with their children. Parents then lose the influence created by a loving relationship and shift to control.

Some of the parents I talk with seem to take pride in their rules. I hear all too often that there is a reaction for every action. Unfortunately these reactions are usually fear based. I also hear that our children have to learn how to follow rules. If they don't, what will happen when they leave home? Along with laws and rules come punishments. Punishments are for retribution and not necessarily designed to teach. It doesn't take a rocket scientist or great theologian to quickly figure out that all the laws in the Old Testament did not work. All the laws in the New Testament did not work. They did not get man where man needed to go. Instead, man became enslaved and in bondage to the law.

God uses the law in his plan for man. The law has been and is very important. God's clever plan through out history is that the law takes us to the point where we can be changed. The purpose of the law is to point us to Jesus. We cannot become righteous by observing the law. We only become conscious of our sin (Romans 3:19-25). When we realize that we can't follow the law we can turn to Jesus. God's grace is sufficient. Jesus affords us the mercy and grace we need every day to live a joyous and free life. How does that happen? Jesus did the work for us. As Jesus hung on the cross, he said "It is finished." (John 19:13). What does that mean? These three powerful words mean that all we have to do is believe in Jesus (John 5:24).

We can receive freely the gift of salvation. We can receive the gift of grace. A life free from bondage and a life filled with love. Romans 6:14 tells us “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

How does the stress model fit with all of this? Our children certainly cannot follow all of the rules we have for them. I doubt that parents can even keep track of or follow all the rules. Rules bring parents to a point where they can be changed. Parents need to surrender the rules to get to a point to put love into action. This causes parents to change. When parents do that they are able to be in a state of love and have grace and mercy for their children. Parents then come into relationship with their children. As we regulate, we become quiet, calm, and conscious of God’s presence. We then offer a state of love for our children to join with us and heal. This is what God and Jesus do for us.

Parents need to change their expectations on their children. Children will not behave “correctly” all the time. Regardless if it’s a rule, a law, or just being respectful and responsible, they will fail. How often as a parent do you break rules and laws? The laws I’m referring to are moral laws. More than likely few people know when you do this. Many of the moral laws we break are of the mind and of intent. We silently know what we’ve done wrong. Parents’ expectations need to be in alignment with the expectation that Jesus has on us. He knows we will fail. When we do he is there in love to pick us up. What Jesus does for us, we need to do for our children. Parents need to stop making a spectacle out of children’s negative behaviors. Parents need to move into loving relationships with them. A relationship of love is a powerful influence. That influence facilitates change and responsible, respectful behavior.

Hopefully this is not too much to swallow. It may seem that way. I want to encourage you to remember that you are in a process. Your child is in process. You and your children are in process together. The apostle Paul talks about running the race in Galatians. In a race you don’t start out at the finish line. You take one step at a time. In life’s process you take one issue at a time. You take one challenge in the time. You take one step back at a time. When you start at “A”, one day you’ll realize you’re at “J”. Your life’s process is about healing. Once you start healing, you find there is more healing to do. Don’t be discouraged. Rejoice that you and your children are getting better.

Thank God that you’re not where you were. Realize that there will be disruptions and setbacks. Some days it may “feel” like nothing has changed. Feelings are our current perception of the way things are. Feelings are not static and are influenced by our level of stress. Remember that you have a choice to stay where you are or to work to continue the race. Keep your faith active and strong. Don’t let fear or negativity cloud your judgment. Act from a foundation of love, peace, and clarity. Romans 8:28 tells us that “we know all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” Be blessed and press on.

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