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WELS Stewardship Sunday: Love Takes Time

St. Paul's (WELS) Moline, IL

3:41

## We Are God's Children

1 John 3:1-2

I. Today

II. Forever

Author Leonard Ravenhill in his book America is Too Young to Die tells a powerful and interesting story of two families in American history.

First is the family of Max Jukes, an atheist, who lived an especially godless life. Max married a like-minded ungodly woman and they had a family. Over a period of several generations the Jukes family produced 310 paupers, 150 criminals, 7 murderers, over one hundred drunks, and more than half of the female descendents were involved in prostitution. The family cost the State quite a bit of money incarcerating them.

What a stark contrast this is when compared to a contemporary of Max Jukes: the famous preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards. Ravenhill goes on to say of Jonathan Edwards that: "An investigation was made of 1,394 known descendants of Jonathan Edwards, of which 13 became college presidents, 65 college professors, 3 United States Senators, 30 judges, 100 lawyers, 60 physicians, 75 army and navy officers, 100 preachers and missionaries, 60 authors of prominence, one Vice-President of the United States, 80 public officials in other capacities, 295 college graduates, among whom were governors of states and ministers to foreign countries."<sup>1</sup>

How great of an impact is family? How great is the impact of a loving caring Christ centered father and mother on their children and grandchildren? The answer is tremendous. Yes, to be sure, the contrast between Max Jukes and Jonathan Edwards and their respective descendents is particularly great; however we all know that traits--good and bad--do follow in the family.

Today as we gather in our Lord's name we do so under our current synodical theme of "Christ's Love, Our Calling." Today's specific stewardship emphasis is on God's love as our Father. God is not just up and out there but He reveals Himself, He reaches out to us and He makes us His own. We turn our attention to the apostle John who writes:

**How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are**

**children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.** (1 John 3:1-2).

What John wants us to understand is that in Christ, when we believe and trust in Jesus' perfect life, innocent death and resurrection you are nothing less than a *child* of God. Like all children are we are tremendously influenced and changed by the family to which we belong. In the case of all Christians it is God's family of faith.

John tells two aspects about being a child of God. First, just like when a baby is physically born the baby is automatically a part of the family. So are we in Christ; when one believes in Jesus they are saved. What does John say? "Dear friends, *now* we are children of God." This is something that is real now.

Now we are saved because Jesus has lived, died and resurrected! Now we are children because God has given us the gift of faith. Now we are children of God because we have been baptized in His name! Now it is ours complete and whole because it is a gift from God the Father *lavished* on us!

But this isn't everything John says. John says that what we will be has not yet been made known. God has saved us but God is also changing us too. God doesn't just save us in baptism and let us go; rather He holds onto us and changes us from the inside out. John talks about this in verse three. **"Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."** (1 John 3:3). Just like our earthly families are—or should be—much more than sharing the same last name, families are about activity. Families are about loving sharing and growing together.

Did it matter to people whether they were born in the Jukes household or the Edwards household? Yes! Those babies born in either family once they were born were immediately part of that family--with all that entailed either good or bad. Christians who have been born again by the Spirit are part of God's family and that affects every part of their entire life as they grow up in the faith. Those born in the Jukes household had the odds against them but they had to grow into being thieves, scoundrels, and the like. Those born in the Edwards' household were especially blessed because of the faith of the family but the children needed to be baptized and taught the Gospel. In each instance it was a process which took time.

This is a main stewardship emphasis for us: Love Takes Time. We are called to spend time in God's Word and with each other encouraging each other's faith not with the hope of becoming children of God but because we are children of God.

What parent doesn't want great things for their own child? God has certainly promised great things for and from us. God wants us to grow up--in

<sup>1</sup> America is Too Young to Die by Leonard Ravenhill, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1979, p. 112

Him. That's why God calls us to continually listen to Him, to listen to His Word. When does that happen?

Of course it happens at church, but it should happen whenever and wherever Christians are, this includes our homes too. God's Word is powerful and effective: it not only gives us the gift of salvation but it continues to change us so we can be a blessing to others in every part of our lives.

Saint Paul's words to the church at Ephesus are particularly clear in this matter. In speaking of Christ's gift of church leaders to boldly preach God's Word for the purpose of salvation and spiritual growth Paul says: **Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.** (Ephesians 4:14-17).

Christians are left in this world but they are to live fundamentally different from it. Christians don't chase after the same things the world chases after. Christians don't deal with problems the same way the rest of the world deals with problems. Christians love differently than the rest of the world loves. Most powerful of all Christians don't handle death the way the rest of the world does. John tells us why: **"The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."**

Everything about us is different. With this is great blessings but with this also comes great responsibility and a price. When we are at work and we find ourselves in the midst of course joking people watch how we react. When we withdraw and not join in many roll their eyes and criticize us for thinking we are better than everyone else. Yet, if the Christian doesn't take a stand and goes with the group mentality the world loves it because they can say to themselves that Christians are no different than they are and that in the end everyone is the same.

Jesus reminds us of how much it hated him and what that means for us, His followers. **"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."** (John 15:18-20a).

How do we handle all this? First we look up to God. How powerful is it for every believer to be able to whenever and wherever lift up their spirits in prayer with the words, "Our Father." God promises to hear and answer every prayer for us in a way that is best for us. (see Romans 8:28).

It is simply not easy to live in this world. Sometimes it seems like everything is going against God and ever more vile and perverse. This is why John reminded his hearers as he reminds us today of the victory awaiting us all in Christ. **"Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."** (verse 2). Our standing as children of God here and now will spill over into eternity itself when we will see God with our own eyes and we will be like Him! We cannot lose.

We handle the struggles as the faithful in a hostile world first by turning to God but secondly by turning to one another. John says, "We" are children of God. The world hates us; but God loves us. Every Christian has the same spiritual Father and the same spiritual inheritance of heaven itself because we are all belong to the family of faith.

Remember the words of Jesus. **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** (John 13:24-25). We do this by spending time with one another, by listening to each other, by encouraging one another. St. Paul encouraged his listeners to: **"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."** (Galatians 6:2).

May God richly bless us all as we as the children of God continue to place our hope in Him as He continually changes us through His word which allows us to love one another. Amen.