

THE FEAR OF REJECTION IS LOST IN CHRIST'S LOVE

Isaiah 49:15, Hebrews 13: 5, 6 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Self-consciousness is one of the great enemies of Christ and His cross. On Friday morning, in our Revival Prayer Fellowship, we read from Billy Graham's devotional book, "Unto The Hills." The July 15th devotional in the first paragraph states, "I believe unselfconsciousness is characteristic of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The person who says, "I am Spirit-filled," sets himself up for some pretty uncomfortable scrutiny. Did any apostle or disciple say of himself, "I am filled with the Holy Spirit"? But others would say of them, "They were filled with the Holy Spirit." The person, who is self-consciously loving, self-consciously joyful, and self-consciously peaceful, has about him the odor of self. And as one Christian sagely observed: "Self is spiritual B.O."

Many of us have all sorts of self-conscious issues in life that hamper our growth into maturity in Christ. Not one of us matures while walking in bitterness. Bitterness is selfish and we are robbed of growth in grace. Not one of us matures into freedom in Christ by living on purpose in loneliness and isolation. Selfish isolation robs us of maturity. Not one of us heals from past wounds by constantly rehearsing our past with endless testimonies of how we have been abused. Selfishly asking others to keep hearing our awful stories robs us of going forward for Christ. Not one of us learns to love or opens up to be willing to be loved by living in self-protection. Self protection is the hallmark of many Christian's lives. Who do we think we are and who do we think Jesus is? Self protection is a huge oxymoron. We are the only person in the world whom we do not have the potential to protect. God is our defender. He longs for us to lean hard on Him. He either protects us from heaven in a miraculous way or He arranges for people He appoints to raise up our defense on His behalf. Yet, once we hide from God and others, and fail to trust Him to be our Defender, we become infected with a cancer of selfish sin. This selfish sin inflames us; it is a sin we justify; it is a sin that makes us blame others, and it is a sin that makes us calloused and dry. In time, all our selfish sins focusing on us point us to answers that do not help or heal, but only temporarily ease our situation, but in the end, they are all robbers of us learning to make Jesus alone our focus. Today, God has turned my attention to a fear that can in time, become even a sin as it robs us of our focus on Jesus. It begins in a legitimate fear. I have a fear of heights that began way back in the sixth grade. Yellowstone School gave us 6th graders a field trip to Natural Bridge, near Cumberland Falls in eastern

Kentucky. Every student agreed with the teachers that we would all stay together as a group. But two girls decided they would run ahead and yell to us from up above. Now that act of selfish rebellion and disobeying of authority was costly. Up above us we heard voices yelling, as we were standing under the arched bridge. The arch is 78 feet in length, 65 feet high, 12 feet thick, and 20 feet wide. Two girls, Jacqueline Anders and Gwendolyn Cornet were high above us. I decided on Friday to Google Natural Bridge and I looked at the images of it. What I was looking for is still there today. I was looking for a gnarly pine tree growing out of the side of the bridge in the middle of it. There in the middle of the bridge in 2011 is the same place where Jacqueline and Gwendolyn were standing back in 1957. They began yelling to us right where that small pine tree is still growing out of the side of the bridge. It still shows up on the pictures.

Long story short, Jacqueline, a tall 6th grade girl leaned over the bridge to call to us and she fell. But as she fell she grabbed that pine tree, held on and screamed. We were 10 minutes behind the girls, so we were all paralyzed with fear. Then Gwendolyn, a tiny and wiry little girl, hardly half Jacqueline's size, grabbed Jacqueline as the teacher yelled, "No!" God gave Gwendolyn strength. She pulled Jacqueline up out of that most certain death. To this day, I shudder at heights and especially seeing children getting close to the edge of a cliff like the Grand Canyon. In itself, this fear is normal, natural, and I will carry that fear to my grave. But I have had to face this fear so that fear does not become a selfish fear that robs me of trust in the Lord. Most of our fears and struggles have roots. We need to surrender them all to Jesus. Today, God has placed on my heart the fear, the awful fear, which can become a terrorizing fear of rejection. I read today of a man who was employed and yet not making enough money to live. He told his wife he was going to ask his boss for a raise. The man felt nervous and apprehensive along with his wife. What if his boss said no, or even fired him? Finally, by the end of the day, the man got up courage, approached his boss, asked for a raise, and the boss agreed to it. When the man got home, his wife had the best china on the table, set up for a special dinner. Candles were lit. His wife had a festive meal prepared. He knew someone at his work had called her to tip her off. He embraced his wife, told her the good news, kissed her and sat down to a wonderful meal. Next to his plate was a beautifully lettered note. It read, "Congratulations, darling! I am glad you got the raise. These things will tell you how much I love you." On her way to get their dessert, a second card fell from her pocket. Picking it up, he read, "Don't worry about not

getting the raise. You deserve it anyway. These things will tell you how much I love you.”

This wife was prepared to meet her husband with total acceptance and total love. Her love was not contingent upon his success at work. It was just the opposite. If he failed to get the raise, getting rejected at work, he would get all the more acceptance at home. She stood behind him to rejoice if he got the raise, or to soften the blow if he didn't. She was there to heal the wounds, believing in him and loving him. We can bear rejection from almost anyone if we know we are loved by one. Yet, recent statistics say 67 of first time marriages and 77 of second marriages after divorce end in divorce courts. That means that the fear of rejection that rips and tears at millions of Americans has a grim beginning in being rejected in the one of the most vulnerable spots in life. Is fear of rejection a sin? Let me say it doesn't start out as a sin. But beloved, I see it as one of the major sins now in America. It is a justified sin that means that millions of couples in America reject the truth of the word of God. The Word of God teaches us in I Corinthians 6: 9-11 that pre-marital sex and sex outside of marriage is sin. Listen as I read. Yet, when Christian pastors and counselors speak with couples about living pure lives, they smile and say, “Maybe, one of these days we will consider marriage. For now, we are committed to each other, plus everyone is doing it. We'll take our chances.” What a horrendous sin to let the fear of a second rejection lead us into a life of lust and sexual sin? The fear of rejection can become a monstrous sin that robs the Word of God of its power and of its boundaries. Today, beloved, God has called me to announce to you all, that the fear of rejection is lost in the love of Christ. We can risk even human rejection if we know we are loved by the Lord who never will forsake us.

God has given us in His Word the boundaries of living for Him. We are never to reject others—our spouse, our children, or our parents. But if we have been rejected before, God does not want us to live in petrified fear that what happened once to us will happen again. How is the terrible fear of rejection lost in Christ's love? I see in our two texts today, Isaiah 49: 14-16 and Hebrews 13: 5-6 three assurances which can break the back of our fear of rejection and heal us so we can risk loving God and others again. What are these three powerful assurances that deliver us from the fear of rejection? Two assurances are from Isaiah. One is from the Book of Hebrews. All three assurances will enable the fear of rejection to be lost in the love of Christ.

GOD KNOWS YOUR CHARGES AGAINST HIM THAT HE HAS REJECTED, FORSAKEN AND FORGOTTEN YOU, BUT HE STILL KNOWS YOUR ADDRESS. (I.)

Isaiah 49: 14, 16b “But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me...Behold, your walls are continually before Me.” Beloved, almost all our charges against God are founded in something we are blaming Him for—something He has allowed in His sovereignty to happen to us. Remember Job—that most righteous man on earth falsely charged the Lord. Here in Isaiah, the disobedient Israelites are blaming God for not protecting them, for allowing their enemies to have victory against them. The time is 698 BC, and the first deportation into Babylon was in 609 BC where Judah stayed in exile until the first wave of restoration in 539 BC—70 long years. The issue at stake is that God was in the process of beginning the chastening and disciplining of His rebellious people. Rather than confess sin and repent, the people of God were using the discipline of the Lord as their “thought to be” legitimate charge that he had forgotten Zion was on the map.

How many times, beloved, have we concluded before God that He doesn't have us on His Google Map—His Map Quest. We say, “Look at what has happened in our family, what has happened to our children—they are becoming prodigals, to our marriage, we are in the process of disintegrating as a couple or we are divorcing or are divorced. God, You could have stopped all this, but apparently, You are too busy with what you think is more important. You have left us behind to fend for ourselves. You don't seem to care. You have forsaken my wife and me and our children. You have forgotten me. You left me get this terminal disease. You don't ease my pain from this awful medical problem. You let me lose my job, and I can't find work. You let me fail my test. You let my house get foreclosed on. You let our engine blow up, and you didn't lift a hand to stop it.” On and on and on we go. Our fear of rejection based on so many others rejecting us, it is now projected on God, that what others have done to us, now He is doing. It sounds so plausible and right, but it is dead wrong.

God's first assurance is found in Isaiah 49: 16b, “Behold, your walls are continually before Me.” I know your address. I haven't missed a thing. I knew what you were thinking before you verbalized it. I laid out the city of Jerusalem. Zion, you are dear to My heart. You jumped to a wrong conclusion. You thought that My chastening hand meant I have forgotten You. Never, child! It is My hand and My heart that has purposed to use your enemies to wake you up. I wouldn't have done so had I forgotten you.

Never. I have disciplined you to draw you back to me. It's not Me who has moved. It is you. Come back to Me." The truth in this first assurance is that God never takes His eyes off of us. He never rejects, forgets, or forsakes us. His sacred regard for His own is moment by moment. He doesn't turn His loving eyes from us for a nanosecond. David wrote in Psalm 139: 7-18 precious words that seal the deal, that prove the truth. The charge against God of rejecting us is bogus. We are loved by Him. There's a 2nd assurance:

GOD KNOWS WHO HAS REJECTED AND FORGOTTEN YOU, BUT HE WILL NOT FORGET YOU AND HE CAN PROVE IT. (II.)

Isaiah 49: 15, 16a "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands..." In counseling, I want you to tell me who has rejected you and what they have done. It is important for you to have an ear, a listening ear—even a human ear. I don't know until you tell me, but God knows every detail, more than any of us know. God knows about mothers who even forsake a nursing infant or parents who reject their children, or husbands and wives who forsake each other and their sacred marriage vows. What's the point or the proof or the reason for such words as these in Isaiah 49: 15? "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you." The point is simple. God is showing us that His love for us is stronger for His people than the precious love of a mother for her children. Normally, the most tender ties in the world are those of a mother for her child—no matter what age that child is—a baby, a teenager, a doctor, a lawyer, a nurse, or a convicted felon awaiting execution. The love of a mother for her child is the strongest attachment in all the world in human terms. It is extremely unusual and pitiful to see a mother who has little or no compassion for her child, her children, her teenage or college-career age son or daughter, or her adult child. Have I seen mothers without this natural affection and compassion and tender feelings toward their children? Yes, remarkably, I have seen such missing love of a mother. But God tells us, "Don't judge me by your own standards. My love for you is stronger than the strongest bond on earth." God's love for us has no earthly comparison. His love is constancy that is unwavering. I take these next words as prophetic and yet true when Isaiah spoke them in 698 BC. I believe this engraving of us on the palms of His hands is pointing to the hands that all our sins have pierced. Since Jesus is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, I believe with all my heart, that when Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden, they and you and I

were already engraved on the palms of God's hands. What happened at Calvary only further engraved us on the outstretched palms of Jesus' hands.

So what difference does this make for me when I am afraid of my wife rejecting me, or my children or grandchildren, or my flock rejecting me? Bill and Gloria Gaither sing a song I love: (Chorus) I am loved, I am loved, I can risk loving you, For the one who knows me best loves me most. I am loved, you are loved, won't you please take my hand? We are free to love each other, we are loved. I said, "If you knew, you wouldn't want me; My scars are hidden by the face I wear." He said, "My child, my scars go deeper; It was love for you that put them there." Forgiven! I repeat... I'm forgiven! Clean before my Lord I freely stand. Forgiven, I can dare forgive my brother; Forgiven, I reach out to take your hand." There's a 3rd assurance:

GOD KNOWS YOUR FEAR OF REJECTION AND WHAT OTHERS WILL DO TO YOU, BUT HE HIMSELF IS YOUR HELPER AND HE HAS PROMISED NEVER TO FORSAKE YOU. (III.) Hebrews 13: 5, 6

states, "Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?" Beloved, I cannot take away your fear of rejection, but Your bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ can. Jesus can take us past the snare of our fears to the security and safety of His arms. Personally, haven't many of us found this a very comforting verse in the New Testament? God will never reject us or desert us or forsake us or forget us. In this life, haven't we all had times when people and things of this world have violated us, molested us, and tried to turn my soul away from God and from ever trusting another human being? Haven't we, many of us had people here on earth who have rejected us and despised us? Haven't we even had friends, close friends who have forsaken us? Rest in Jesus, beloved. Let the hope and help of Jesus sink deeply into your soul and spirit. We can put our hope in the God who says, in both Isaiah and Hebrews, "I Will Not Forget You." In 1889, the marvelous composer Charles Hutchinson Gabriel wrote a song we are going to conclude by singing. This song is "Sweet Is The Promise, I Will Not Forget Thee." Look in your bulletins; "Sweet is the promise, "I will not forget thee," Nothing can molest or turn my soul away; E'en though the night be dark within the valley, Just beyond is shining an eternal day. I will not forget thee or leave thee, In My hands I'll hold thee, In My arms I'll fold thee, I will not forget thee or leave thee; I am thy Redeemer, I will care for thee. Trusting the promise "I will not forget thee,"

Onward I will go with songs of joy and love, Though earth despise me,
Though my friends forsake me, I shall be remembered in my home above.
When at the golden portals I am standing, All my tribulations, all my
sorrows past; How sweet to hear the blessed proclamation, "Enter, faithful
servant, welcome home at last." Bow your heads.