

“Beyond the disciplinarian”

6/19/2016

Galatians 3:23-29

LGVCOB



When we moved to Long Green Valley twenty six years ago, the stewards of this church graciously erected a fence in our back yard, at our request. At that point, we had a four-year-old and a two-year-old, with another child well along the way... My, how things have changed! That third was followed by a fourth child, who (can you believe it?) just graduated from college. Yes, there was a divorce – but that has not stopped this brood from being a loving, growing family! Next January, we’ll officially add another through marriage. Somewhere along the way, that back yard fence was removed, since it wasn’t needed anymore.



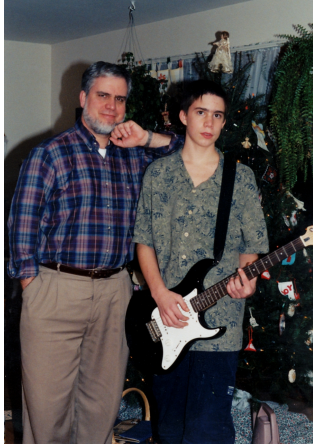
However, back when these now grown-ups were little, this boundary was an important safety feature. It kept my children inside a play area big enough to allow them space for play. It also kept them from wandering too far afield. A stream and a pond not far away may be a delight, but they also hold danger for little ones who could fall in and drown.



Children need boundaries, and I’m not just talking about fences. It’s nice to say that children need unlimited horizons, but the truth is that without boundaries they may never reach their potential. Rules are an important part of life. Children know that. In fact, at a certain stage of growing up, they can be the most ardent proponents of the rules. Of course, not too much later in the game they become the biggest detractors of



rules, fighting them every inch of the way. Without rules, what would they complain about? Even then, boundaries are necessary, if only to give something to bounce against in defining who you are as a person, let alone for safety.



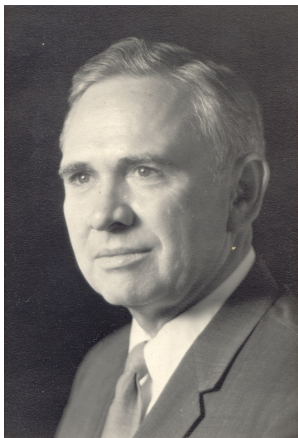
However, boundaries need a person behind them, and when it comes to families - that person is a parent. As this is “Father’s Day,” allow me to phrase things with Dads in mind. Now, I know that families today come in all shapes and sizes. Furthermore, especially when it comes to discipline (which is usually the word we use in relation to boundaries), parenting needs to be a shared responsibility. How it happens differs from family to family.



Growing up, my father was the authority my mother conjured up when we transgressed a boundary. “Wait till your father comes home,” she’d say. Do those words sound familiar to any of you? In actuality, though, Mom was the true disciplinarian. I wonder if she didn’t invoke Dad’s



name just to make sure we lived through the rest of the day until he arrived home. When he took over,



he usually said something like, “this is going to hurt me more than it’s going to hurt you,” which - at least when it came to me (I can’t speak for my older sisters) - it was true. The look of pain on his face hurt me more than his hand on my rear.

When I speak of a father as being a “disciplinarian,” a human face behind the boundaries, I’m making a connection to this morning’s scripture. The reference in this



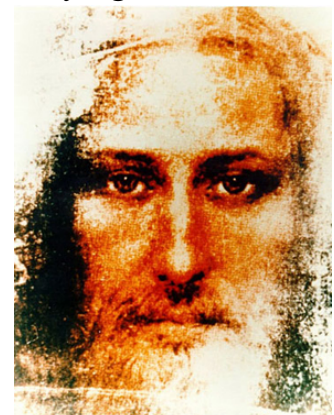
passage is not about parenting, however. Instead, it's about the boundaries themselves which are found in the Bible. The Torah, the law of Moses is like a fence erected around the children of Israel. Such boundaries are an important safety feature. The space within is big enough to allow for growth, yet it also protects.

God's children need the Torah. Jesus himself said, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*" (Matthew 5:17). Boundaries are important. However, they are not an end in and of themselves. Now, in this morning's scripture lesson, the apostle Paul wrote of the law of Moses as being a "disciplinarian." That's how the New Revised Standard version of the Bible translates the Greek word *paidagogos*, which is not altogether accurate. Other versions have translated it as *tutor*, *teacher*, *guide*, *schoolmaster*, *supervisor*, *guardian*, or *custodian*.

Those who originally received this letter from Paul would have recognized this word as referring to a slave in a well-to-do family who was responsible for the well-being of a child. A *pedagogue* was not, strictly speaking, a *teacher*, which is the meaning you will find if you look the word up in Webster's dictionary. Instead, *pedagogues* back then were those who (as it accurately states in Peterson's paraphrase:) "*escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for.*"

Sometimes, a *pedagogue* protected and guided children through dangerous streets. Other times he instructed in good manners along the way, applying discipline when necessary. The role, however, was a temporary one, for the child would grow up, and this servant would move on to other charges. In referring to the law as a *pedagogue*, the apostle Paul was saying that the Torah was a servant not the master. He also lifted the eyes of those to whom he was writing that they might see the face behind the law, beyond the boundary - the face of Jesus.

It's not that faith in the risen Christ makes the law meaningless or useless. It's just that those who put on Christ, so to speak, are stepping into maturity. The law was a stepping stone to this point, but now the fence is down, so to



speak, because God's children have grown and now know how to live beyond the disciplinarian. Torah is no longer an outer boundary, it now dwells within. As the prophet Jeremiah promised for God, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).



Back to fathers. A *pedagogue* in Paul's day was not the father in the family. Even so, there are some similarities between a *pedagogue* and a father. We who are dads are disciplinarians. There's no escaping that fact. Children need boundaries; even teenagers do, no matter how loud they squawk. Eventually parents and children can become friends, but in the growing years the role of parent must be clear. Like a

fence protects children, so fathers are there in tough and tender ways to insure their safety. At times we are teachers and guides hoping that today's lessons become internalized. At other times we oversee from a distance. We have an important role as guardians. Our children are in our custody for their welfare, not our own.

Being a father is the most important job I have had or will ever have. It is a great calling from God. I can still remember the birth of my firstborn, as well as the next three. It is an



awesome joy, not only to be a part of their beginning, but also to witness the steps they take along the way of their growth. I now understand a bit better my own father who embarrassed me as a teenager in his struggling attempts to express how proud he was at times, and how deep was his love. I'm there in relation to my own

children now grown.

A few months before moving to long Green Valley, twenty six years ago, I wrote a song that still speaks some of what I want to say. It was a bridge between children, describing my second-born



and his older sister, but anticipating another sibling. My question is no longer “is there enough love to share with yet another child?” I know the answer. My questions have changed toward the other side of the equation, “is there enough love to let go?” Let me share this song again with you.

Love to Share

©1990, Pete Haynes

http://rockhay.org/worship/music/Love_to_share.htm

1. How much love is there to share? One more comes for whom we care.
Is love like a piece of pie, cut it small to satisfy?
Never fear, never fret, loaves and fishes don't forget.
God provides baskets deep, so much love in them to keep.
Every time you add one more, there is more in store.

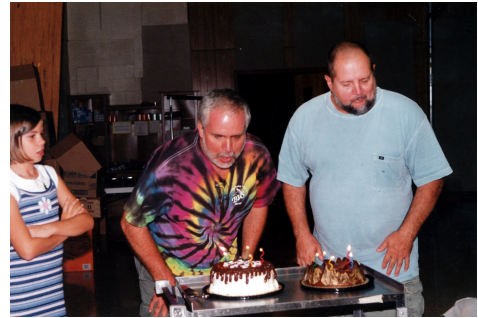
refrain: God gives us so much more than we ever had before!
When we open up our heart, so much love God does impart!

2. Little fingers, little toes, all God's joy here overflows.
Smiles that last the whole day through; messy faces, you know who!
Growing child, Momma's boy, grabbing for his sister's toy.
Busy one, Daddy's son, going strong till day is done.
How much love is there to share? More than we're aware! refrain
3. One more child for us to love, precious gift from God above.
Adding more than taking 'way, fully living each new day.
How could we ever doubt, loaves and fishes don't run out.
In this gift multiplies all the love our God provides.
How much love is there to share? Much more than we dare! refrain
4. As this boy becomes a man, seeks to be whate'er he can,
Grant us, Lord, the grace to know Love's sweet wisdom as we go.
Being strong, being weak, tough and tender as we speak.
May our love never cease, even as we must release.
How much love is there to share? All that's found in prayer!Refrain



I spoke earlier about the apostle Paul's use of the word *pedagogue* as a metaphor for the law. Strangely enough, it also fits fatherhood. When it comes right down to it, us fathers are servants of our heavenly Father. When it comes to our children, we are not the master. God is. Our role, whether it be as a disciplinarian, a teacher, a guide, a guardian, an

overseer, or a custodian, is a temporary job. Mind you, it's a loong temp job. However, the day comes when a shift happens. We don't cease being fathers, but the job description changes. Hopefully, being a friend and mentor can be more of the total picture, as we gradually release the reigns. All along the way to that point, however, we "*escort (our) children and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure they really get to the place they set out for.*"



When it comes right down to it, we are not ultimately divided into parents and children. Just like (as the apostle Paul put it) "*there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,*" we fathers and mothers and children are "*one in Christ Jesus.*" We are a church of the *Brethren*. May it be your desire, you who are fathers - as well as

everyone else here this morning - to keep growing into the likeness of Christ, thirsting for a deeper relationship with the One who loves us best. Indeed, God gives us so much more than we ever had before! When we open up our heart, so much love God **does** impart! Amen?