

The Caught Test!

PASSING LIFE'S TOUGHEST TESTS

Proverbs 5:21-23; John 8:3-7

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Four different times toddlers lurked in the halls where Diane and I lived. Each time we relearned some rules, especially **Toddler Property Laws**. Are you familiar with them?

If I like it, it's mine. If it's in my hand, it's mine. If I can take it from you, it's mine. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way. If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine. If it looks just like mine, it is mine.

I cannot remember the number of times I've been *caught* violating a Toddler Property Law, and had to pay by enduring a lip-curling, tear-spilling, body-shaking, ear-injuring, floor-hugging tantrum of indeterminable length. In life there are other ways we are *caught*.

In the gospel lesson a woman was *caught* in adultery. She may have cheated on her husband; she could have been single and entangled with a married man. Her reasons for adultery were irrelevant. The Seventh Commandment is unambiguous and unqualified. It says, "*Do not commit adultery.*" It does not say, "*Do not commit adultery unless... your unhappy or feel hopeless.*" The woman may have justified her actions, but Jesus did not excuse her.

Over the years I've heard many excuses: "*My marriage was over already, it was never meant to be. I'm more mature. How can the love we have be wrong?*" People generally see warnings against adultery as a good thing. They just want a personal exemption.

They don't understand how they are **caught**. The woman *caught* in adultery was *caught*,

exposed by others; and she also was *caught, ensnared* by deception. The Bible teaches:

The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.
(Proverbs 5:22, NIV)

Sin traps us. It offers some pleasure while it dulls our senses and corrupts our thinking. It holds us in a prison of deceptive thinking where we act defensively and destructively.

Third, she was caught in judgment. She faced estrangement from her peers and also from God. What could be worse?

A man had to drag his stubborn camel across a desert. Night fell while he still was in the middle of the desert. The man was so tired and hungry he could barely put up a tent for shelter. Finally, he lit a candle for light and shoved his hand into a bag of dates. He took the first date, held it up to the candle and saw that it was wormy. He tossed it. He took the second date, held it to the light, and it was wormy too. He did the same with the third and fourth, then he blew out the candle and ate the rest. I don't want to think about the consequences, and neither did he.

How many times have you and I blown out a candle, and ate the dates? We closed our eyes, and said words, watched movies, and did destructive deeds. Jesus put it this way:

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. (John 3:19-21, NIV)

Jesus said that we avoid the light because we really don't want to see the truth. Like the man in the desert, desire overcomes our judgment. Closing our eyes doesn't prevent harm. Nor does it absolve us of guilt or shame, or spare us such gnawing estrangement from people and God.

There is a prison called shame that bars us from the joy of God's love. People conceal an

affair or a crime; and then they live in silent shame. Maybe they've injured someone and won't forgive themselves. Perhaps, they've been shamed by someone they trusted. In our Bible reading, God sent Jesus to meet a woman exposed as an adulteress, in order to spring her from her prison of deceit, estrangement and shame. She walked away with a new life in the love of God.

When we face the truth and openly confess our deception and shame, we receive mercy and love in Christ that renews us. Then we carry Christ's mercy and love to others.

When we collect boxes for Operation Christmas Child, we are not only brightening a child's life for a morning. We are opening an ear and a heart to the love of Jesus who came to free all who are caught in the web of deception, shame and estrangement. We go to Jamaica next summer because in the hottest time of the year, Jamaicans need to know the love of Christ and freedom from sin, shame and estrangement. We serve our needy neighbors in Rochester through *In His Name*, because they need love that opens them to Christ who releases people from the grip of sin, separation, shame and poverty. As we receive from Jesus and as we give with Jesus, we become the badge of God's love and God's unfolding story of freedom and favor.

Are you a badge of God's love and his story of unfolding freedom? God is reaching out to you personally. Right now, accept his mercy that removes your judgment. Right now, receive his grace that adopts you as God's child. Cease the cover-up. Face your unbelief. Welcome now, your new life and identity. Let your whole life point to the love of Christ your Savior. Let your mouth speak gratitude. Let your heart hunger his light to walk in. Let your life be filled with joy. For you are meant to walk this earth in freedom and with God!