

January “Man to Man”

Calling Bad... “Bad”

By Bubba Ingram

In the late 70's, one of the local malls had just opened its doors and was the “place to be” throughout each weekend. The mall drew the gamut of personalities and ages. They came to enjoy burning a few calories while walking, sought clothes and gifts, and watched movies on the new screens. Always among them there were teenage boys wearing a unique blend of metal and leather roaming the concourses of the suburban haven. They were usually just as harmless and unobtrusive as any other visitor to the mall. This time was a little different. I was less than 10 years old at the time. I remember riding down the escalator beside my dad with my mom a couple of steps in front of us on the way down. The mall was very crowded that night and we had been separated while trying to queue onto the escalator. As we approached the ground floor, we were surprised to see two of the aforementioned boys pushing their way up the down escalator in our direction! I remembered them pushing my dad out of the way to get by us. My mom remembers an elderly lady being pushed also. Regardless, Mom had made it to the bottom by this time and was watching this unfold. As surprised as I was to see boys that were rebellious enough to go up the down escalator, I would never have guessed what would happen next. Above the low roar of the crowded mall, my mom began to yell. “Hey! Hey tough guys! If you're so tough, why don't you come back down and push me! Come on!” Well, they had reached the top by the time she ended and had stopped awkwardly with their

back to the direction of the shouting. It was like they were momentarily stunned. Finally, they couldn't help their curiosity and turned their heads to see who their mortal foe was. They were not relieved upon seeing the look on mom's face! They turned dejectedly and faded into the night. I doubt they ever thought of doing that again.

In last month's article, I elaborated on what I believe is the special measure of empathy and serving with which God has blessed Moms. This story from my childhood may appear at first to be in stark contrast with the message delivered last month. Quite the contrary, I assure you that it is the proof of the message I shared! You may have any or all of a host of emotions about this story. Maybe you're cheering like it's the lost sequel to "Rocky." Maybe you're aghast at any loud exchange. Maybe you're just thinking it's another reason to avoid the mall over the next month. Whatever your initial reaction, I encourage you to hear the Bible lesson to all men that is behind the story. **Loving people means calling bad, "bad."** Being politically correct has hushed the mouths of believers all over the world because we don't want to be seen as "insensitive" or "judgmental" or "closed-minded."

I'll admit my reaction that night was one of confusion. I wondered if any of my school friends were in the crowd watching. I wanted to go hide (and did for a while in a record store). Later in life, like so many of the lessons I learned from mom and dad, the meaning for me has grown to be a focal point in my life presently. Have you ever *loved* (and I don't mean pizza, golf or a movie!)? Has anyone lived in your heart to the point that you would not be complete without them? I'm sure most people could name more than one

individual taking that spot in their life. Whether it is a spouse, a parent, a child, a friend, a coach or a teacher, how would you react if they were threatened in your presence? You may be feeling in your stomach a little of what Mom felt that night - just from the thought. But, if we stop there, we're cheating ourselves and our loved ones. Surely everybody would take up for the ones they love. Wouldn't they (Matthew 5:46)?

I know now that Mom was actually "loving her enemies" as in Matthew 5:44. Her actions were certainly motivated first by the protection mechanism in parents, especially Moms. Similarly, I'm sure she was moved to protect the older lady that she remembered being in the mix. But how did this affect the boys? There really was no threat to the older lady or us by the time she started shouting. I believe the lasting impact on their lives was that somebody stood up to them and actually called bad... "bad." She made it stand out to the on-looking crowd. It lost the luster of being rebellious and brave and cool. Interestingly enough, I believe Mom would be one of the first ones to "squish" (her word) on their cheeks and tell them they are loved (leather, chains, piercing, tattoos and all!). At the time, the most loving thing anyone could have done for those boys was to point out the ridiculously wrong way they were acting. I think it had an impact on their lives.

One day, our Saviour entered Jerusalem one last time to complete the job He was sent here to accomplish (Matthew 21:12-16). Upon making it to the temple, no doubt the place on earth that reminded Him of home and His Father more than any other, He found some men making dishonest gain inside. He had been in the process of receiving the well wishes and accolades of His supporters on the way into the city. He knew that His time in

Jerusalem would be crucial to making preparation for His final act of love on our behalf. He needed to get the apostles ready for His departure. He would surely also be spending some time with His Heavenly Father in prayer.

But something troubled Him enough to warrant His undivided attention be given to some correction before the plan of salvation would take Him to Golgotha for us. He saw a repeat of the behavior He had chastised so sternly as recorded in John 2. What did He see? He saw some men taking advantage of people coming to sacrifice. He saw them doing that in the temple; the temple Solomon began to build as a house for the Lord in I Kings 6. Numerous times in the book of Proverbs the Lord speaks of dishonest measures as an abomination. **Christ saw the law being broken in an egregious manner. His heart was convicted to do something. Did He write them a letter? Did He discreetly ask one of the men to step to a quiet place to talk about their actions? No! And why? Because it wouldn't have served as a lesson to those observing had He spoken privately to the men.** The sin was public. It needed to be dealt with in a public way. The men were also likely to have been so calloused that they would have met a quiet inquiry with laughing disdain. The type of open disrespect for God's law needed to have the tables turned on it... and they were!

Did people fear Jesus as a hatemonger or a man with violent tendencies after this? They did not. The next verse in Matthew 21 tells us that the blind and the lame came to him in the temple to be healed. The people knew justice had been served. They knew Christ's heart. They knew He was compassionate and that He loved people. Only the scribes and

Pharisees continued their persecution, even intensified it, because Christ's name was being praised all the more.

Do we smile at the suggestive jokes at the office? Do we ignore filthy language used in our presence? Do we let peer pressure steal our children from our very homes for fear of rocking the boat? Do we wonder why America is drifting away from God? This country needs some tables to be turned! America needs some strong action taken within families. One day soon everyone will be reminded why taking the stand was important (Luke 12: 8,9).

Thanks Mom for calling bad, "bad."