



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

“THEY SAID I WAS SPECIAL!!!”

David Anguish

A little boy who attended our Vacation Bible School discovered something which startled him. He was a visitor, feeling alone in a crowd of excited and noisy children, most of whom know each other and what's expected in a Bible school assembly. A little girl — we're talking pre-schoolers here — sat with him, welcomed him, and treated him like a friend. His teachers made sure he didn't get lost in the crowd as they taught the story of Jesus and what it means to be a real success.

And he went home and excitedly reported, “Mom! They said I was special!!!”

A pre-schooler doesn't begin to understand concepts like sin and salvation. To him, baptism's just someone getting dunked in a smaller pool than they have at the park. The theology of atonement, be it the satisfaction theory or Christ victorious, is lost on him. Whether he's justified or sanctified is less important to him than whether he can manipulate his blocks, make the right noise for his trucks, or find something useful for his imaginary friend to do.

But he knows love when he sees it. He knows when someone treats him well — or badly. He can see whether this person cares about him, or whether that person sees him only as a nuisance or a “bad” child.

There are a lot of people like that pre-schooler in our world. To be sure, the trucks they play with are bigger than his, and the blocks they build are taller and intended to somehow provide a more lasting memory. And the places their imaginations take them involve real people, but, as often as not, the expectations prove just as hard to grasp as that pre-schooler's imaginary friend is to hug.

But they know love when they see it. They know when someone treats them well — or badly. They can tell whether this person — or group — cares about them, or whether they are just nuisances who have ruined their lives with bad behavior and thus deserve whatever they get.

The distinguishing mark of the church which Jesus said would first stand out for people was the love we have for one another (John 13:34-35). He also told us to love our enemies and to pray for those who seek our harm (Matthew 5:44). And he said that what

will matter most on that final Day is how we treat those so many deem unworthy (Matthew 25:31-46).

We'll never love like that until we have absorbed the truth which that pre-schooler discovered. *We are* special. And so is the troubled teen, the roaring drunk, the unwed mother who had the abortion, the workaholic executive whose abandonment of family comes in the form of neglect, the belligerent boss, the slothful co-worker who somehow slides by and shifts the blame, the lesbian, the dogmatist, the philandering politician. And so on.

We — and they — are special because we are not like anything else in this world. We — and they — are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). We — and they — are therefore intelligent, emotional, relational, and spiritual beings. We can communicate with a precision seen nowhere else in creation. And we can forgive and start over when that precious communication breaks down.

Yes, we are hampered by sin (Hebrews 12:1-2). And if we fully grasp the implications of God's image, we have no love for it, only the desire that it be overcome. So, we must not excuse ourselves, or others, for falling short of God's glory. But neither must we batter ourselves or others by rehashing the obvious. When tough love is needed, we must strive to apply it so that the love is at least as evident as the toughness, if not more so.

Special people deserve no less. And God said we are special!

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