Counselor’s Corner

Rebellion

“Wet Paint: Do Not Touch”
By Dr. Glenn R. McElhinney

Do Not Touch

Truth be told every man, woman, and child is rebellious at heart. Did you ever have to train or encourage your two-year old child or grandchild to do something wrong? That bundle of joy that comes home for the hospital is no doubt the cutest sinner you have ever seen. The only thing that happens over time is that your child, teenager, college student, or adult child is more intentional and thoughtful in their rebellion. Do not forget that you were once that cute bundle of joy!

Rebellion is defined as opposition to or defiance of authority, accepted moral codes, or social conventions. Rebellion is defined as disobedient, unruly, insubordinate, defiant and disloyal.

Wet Paint

When did this problem begin? It started with our original parents, Adam and Eve. The book of Genesis gives the account in chapter two when God said, “…you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil…” In order to eat from the tree, one would first have to touch the fruit and then take it. It is interesting that God told Adam and Eve to not eat the fruit and they responded like we respond to the sign that says, “Wet Paint, Do Not Touch”, they ate the fruit.

Just like Adam and Eve who looked at the fruit they were not to eat, we look at a newly painted object. We don’t have any idea many times Adam and Eve might have passed by the forbidden tree. They walked in the Garden with God every evening. He told them not to eat from it so undoubtedly their moment of temptation wasn’t their first glimpse of the tree and its fruit.

How many times do you pass the “wet paint, do not touch” signs of life? Maybe its daily, weekly or monthly. Just like Adam and Eve, it’s likely not your first time! The commands, “Do Not Eat” and “Do Not Touch”, reveal our hearts. In the moment Adam and Eve heard God’s voice and the moment we see the sign it is an opportunity to either obey or rebel.

Adam and Eve ate what they were not supposed to eat. We touch it just to see if it is really wet. Maybe you have not touched to see if the paint is wet but you have “touched” other things where you have been told by others not to, including God. You have violated rules that others or God has laid down. It is part of your sin nature to express that “see for myself” attitude.

A Painful Lesson

We lived in Florida for a number of years and would come North to see the grandparents. On one of these summer trips grandma was making waffles out on the back porch. Our son was a toddler who knew and understood the rules of hot and it is hot so do not touch.

Yep, you guessed it. Our son came to the door with big crocodile tears running down his face holding up his hand. Sure enough the griddle was hot. We had warned him but he proved it. We picked him up and got ice and soon all was better. At that moment, he was looking for two
things. One, some relief for his hand and two, a loving hug that said he was loved and mommy and daddy would make everything ok. He received his two requests but that did not eliminate the consequence of not listening. We did not need to give him the usual reminder, “What did mommy and daddy tell you about the hot griddle?” The consequence of a burn on his hand was enough. At that moment, he needed comfort not a lecture.

The rule “do not touch things that are hot” was not because we were controlling parents. It was because we knew the pain and potential harm that would come. How did we know this? Because when we were kids we had our own “do not touch” moments. The rule for our son was the same as for us when we were kids; parents desire to protect their children.

“Do not touch” is a command. There is a reason for the command. To violate this command and touch is ultimately an act of rebellion. The word rebellion or rebellious occurs nearly 100 times in the Bible. There are several passages that speak of a rebellious heart or a rebellious people when referring to the Israelites.

It is the same with God our heavenly father. His rules are meant to protect us. God is all knowing so He knows what the consequences of “do not touch” will be. He does not want us to experience the accompanying pain. His heart breaks, as does a parent’s, when He sees His children in pain. Violating the “do not touch” is simply rebellion. It may be a curious rebellion to see if the paint is wet or the pan is hot. It may be an outright act of defiance, “I will not listen and I will do what I want.”

Source of Rebellion

In Deuteronomy, Moses and all of Israel are once again in God’s presence. He is renewing His covenant with them. In that context, Deuteronomy 29:19 states, “Those who hear the warnings of this curse should not congratulate themselves, thinking, ‘I am safe, even though I am following the desires of my own stubborn heart.’ This would lead to utter ruin!” This is the height of self-deception. It is also a statement of acknowledging that this person is intentionally pursuing their own agenda. It is a statement of absolute rebellion, “I will go my own way.”

My experience with college students and adults is that even though they have contacted me for counseling there are those who, despite the counseling process, still desire to continue to follow their own stubborn heart. This is the same stubborn heart that had gotten them into trouble initially. Rebellion is an intentional commitment to get what one wants despite the negative consequences. There is no concern or thought for the consequences of their pursuit including what relationships are hurt and destroyed, financial loss, loss of job and career, and church discipline. Rebellion is designed to obtain what you have not been able to get or what others have not been able or willing to give you. You pursue your rebellion because you believe that you are entitled to what you are pursuing.

Unexpected Change

This intentional rebellion reflects the plan that a person has. The problem is that others get in the way. What does this look like? On several occasions, I have had a spouse contact me because they desire to know how to have relationship with a spouse who is difficult to live with. Their expressed desire was that they wanted to be obedient to God while hoping their wayward spouse
would seek help and change. The unexpected surprise comes when the wayward spouse does in fact respond to the work of the Spirit in their life. This surfaces the real agenda. The offended spouse reveals that they did not expect their spouse to change nor did they really want them to. Why? Because they had already devised a plan to leave the relationship. They were just going through the “spiritual exercises” that made them look spiritual. Now the repentant spouse is blocking their agenda to leave.

The leaving spouse is now placed in the position to either repent of their wrong motive and seek reconciliation, or proceed with their plan to leave. To proceed with their plan is an act of rebellion. It violates God’s principle of reconciliation. The leaving spouse is not getting what they want with their initial plan but they proceed anyway. They are blinded by their desire and believe they will be safe even though they persist in going their own way.

My experience in these situations is that the person who blindly proceeds is surprised through the whole process of leaving their spouse. They still expect the plan that they had imagined in their mind to continue without a hitch. They have imagined everyone to cooperate with their plan. It does not occur to them that others will not simply go along with their plan. **Rebellion completely blinds a person to reality. They become increasingly angry as their plan continues to unravel.**

**Pride**

Pride is involved in the thought process when one is committed to a false agenda. Pride is a false belief that in what one thinks is true. It is a reflection of what Paul says in Rom. 1:25 that people not only have the ability to exchange the truth of God for a lie but actually do it. To exchange the truth for a lie is an intentional act accompanied by a deep commitment to the process. Implicit in this commitment is that fact that a person does, in fact, know the truth. It is not a situation of ignorance but purposeful intent to believe what one knows not to be true.

**Self-deception**

Jeremiah 17:9 state, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"2 Self-deception is a condition of the heart. A person deceives themselves with the notion that the lie that they now believe will produce their desired goal. To do this requires that they deny what they know to be true and then blame others for their “dreams” not coming true. This often spirals into long lists of what others have done to “make me this way” or have not done for them. This then justifies the acting out on the deceptive thinking and behaviors. Nothing good results from pursuing falsehood disguised as truth.

The person who is deceived is not open to any type of confrontation. Their minds are made up and no amount of logic will persuade them from their agenda. Biblical wisdom will not penetrate the deceived heart; the person has shifted from logic and biblical wisdom to self-sufficiency. They rely on their thoughts. They become gods unto themselves. They have ignored the one true living God because He has not cooperated with their agenda. He has not given them what they have persuaded themselves they believe they need and must have.

**Consequences of Rebellion**
The result of this scenario, and ones like this, where people persist in going the wrong way while deceiving themselves, always end up in disaster. My experience with these people is that the warning of the last part of Deut.29:19, leads them to utter ruin.

A person cannot intentionally disobey God and expect a good, biblical result. There are some God-orchestrated consequences to sin. Jonah is a good example. God dramatically intervened and Jonah got thrown overboard and was swallowed by a great fish. There are also just the natural consequences of sin. Sexual sin for example may lead to a pregnancy or an STD.

There is a natural consequence to the scenario that we have been referencing in this article which is breaking the covenant of marriage that God ordained and established. God ordained that man and woman are to become one flesh, literally glued together. You cannot break that and expect lives not to be fractured. The natural consequence of pulling something apart that has been permanently glued results in something jagged with lots of splinters. Applied to a marital situation the result is chaos in the lives of everyone associated with the situation. There is a major fracture in the relationship and lots of other splintered relationships. Everyone is now left to their own devices to figure out how to relate.

**Isolation**

The ripple effect of the fracture that has been described is like the aftershocks of an earthquake. One of many aftershocks of rebellion is isolation. The rebellious person is often surprised that those affected by their decision do not support them or seem to sympathize with them. Once again, things are not going as “I had planned.” Their response is now to isolate themselves from all who do not agree or who challenge their rebellious direction. They isolate themselves for the purpose of finding acceptance in their rebellion. They will seek out others who will give a sympathetic ear and affirm them in their direction. It is “easy” for these new people to be sympathetic and affirming because they have nothing to lose and are not impacted by the decision.

To seek out would be supporters is just another evidence of their commitment to their rebellious ways. It has amazed me over the years to observe how far some people will go to stick with their agenda of going the wrong way and still distorting the reality of their decisions.

**Conclusion**

There is ultimately no way to change a person’s mind who is committed to deceiving themselves into knowing that they are going the wrong way and expecting a good result. You can continue to share the truth of God’s Word with them as long as they are willing to give you a forum to speak. The other thing you can do is pray. These options are humanly very unsatisfying because it seems like we should be able to do more. The truth is we cannot. Heart change is the issue and we have not been given the challenge or ability to change people’s heart. That is the job of the Holy Spirit. We need to be content with accepting our limits and trust the Holy Spirit to work as he sees fit.

**ENDNOTES**