

## “Family Conversations”

I have a question for you this morning: “Is Christ at the center of your family conversations?” I’m not asking if he is the topic of your conversations or if he is even mentioned but rather is who he is, what he stands for, and what he means to your life as a redeemed child of God- do any of these come into play when you are talking with members of your family? This may seem like a strange question to ask so let me clarify it. What I am not suggesting is that every single conversation we have with family members take into account our faith in the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return of Jesus Christ- I mean talking about where to go out to dinner does not have to be a comprehensive theological conversation- but what I am suggesting is that we all take a few minutes this morning and perhaps a few more minutes in the coming weeks to contemplate, analyze, and really think about how our conversations sound, the attitudes we project when we are talking, as well as the things we are actually talking about as families in the context of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. Today as we wrap up our sermon series asking the question, is Christ at the center of our families, our final topic is conversations.

Now if you ask me, I think this topic takes a lot of introspection and maybe even some internal wrestling with who we are as Christians. We are, after all, forgiven sinners- heirs to the grace of God through our faith in Christ. That is our Christian identity and thank God for it but how much of that identity actually shows up in our family conversations? Sadly, so much of the time for you and for me, it doesn’t.

I was visiting someone the other day in their home and while we talked, the kids were in the room watching TV. A commercial comes on and the person I'm talking with deliberately proceeds to tell me and the kids what a *fat slob*, idiotic sounding man in the commercial is and how someone like him should not be on TV. It sounded so mean..so out of place- especially in front of the children and especially in this Christian home.

It’s no wonder so many people outside the faith view Christians as hypocritical. This kind of talk and many more examples like it doesn't help our cause. We put each other down; we gossip about other people; we complain about the smallest things. You know what I’m talking about because we all do it.

I often wonder if an outsider to the faith had the chance to hear some of the things we talk about or some of the ways we talk to each other, what would they think? Chances

are they would question what any of this Jesus stuff has anything to do with our lives because based on our conversations, it sure sounds like it doesn't!

Trust me, people searching for significance in life; people searching for escape from the overbearing guilt of their sins- people searching for true peace only found in Christ will not be drawn into His Church if they equate Christianity with what they hear in our negative, defeated, mean-spirited, and often times hopeless conversations.

A recent article in the *Atlantic* supports this point. A young atheist who abandoned the Christian faith offers this reason for his disbelief: "Christianity is something that if you really believed it, it would change your life and you would want to change the lives of others. I haven't seen too much of that."<sup>1</sup> There is a grain of truth in what this person said, I think, especially in light of our family conversations. Shouldn't the fact that Christ has changed our lives by bringing us back into a saving relationship with God our Father be reflected not only in how we talk to each other but what we talk about within our families? I think we all know the answer to that question. In fact we have a powerful reminder of the answer to that question in our OT reading from Deuteronomy.

Hear these words again: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." **Love for God is the greatest commandment!** Jesus himself states this to the Pharisees in Matthew Chapter 22: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind," he says.

According to God, truly loving him not only involves talking of him in our homes but also keeping him at the center of every place and activity- he being the constant subject of our thoughts and conversation. These aren't just some words we are to put to memory but words we are to put into action, commanded by God. But judging by many of our family conversations, we have failed to keep God's "greatest commandment" to love him with all our heart and soul, haven't we?

So what do we do? Stop trying and chalk it up as something we can never achieve and go on living as though this commandment is irrelevant?

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Alex Taunton, "Listening to Young Atheists: Lessons for a Stronger Christianity," *The Atlantic*, June 6, 2013.

Martin Luther had an answer. He once said of loving God with all your heart and soul, "you may say: Oh, it is utterly impossible for a person to keep this commandment. Yes, it is impossible for a person to keep or perform it. You cannot do it; **God must do it in you, for him it is possible.**"<sup>2</sup> God says to love him with all our hearts, which includes sounding and acting like that love matters in our family conversations. And the only way we are able to do it is because of what God does **in** us. The faith we have in Christ is created and sustained by God in us. It's his work, not ours, and when we get to the point of truly submitting to this truth that God is the primary actor in our lives and we are to follow his lead and live through the love he has for us in Jesus, that's when things start to change. That's when our family conversations become centered on him.

And that's where God wants us to be because when we are there, we are loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, soul, and might! And when we reflect that love as the saved and redeemed people we are in our family conversations, we are doing what he desires.

If your family conversations follow a pattern of being self centered, rude, materialistic, condescending, uncaring, disrespectful, focused on everything but Christ- make a change. Prayerfully, with all the faith you can muster-commit yourselves to make a change. Even if your family situation is far from ideal- a divorce, an estrangement from parents, siblings, or even your own kids, don't go on acting like this Jesus stuff doesn't matter. It always matters, regardless of the family circumstance any of us find ourselves in. Commit yourselves to speaking more kindly, speaking more patiently, speaking more confidently in the very Christian faith you confess. And if you are not having any conversation at all with a family member, give it another shot. Take the high road and reach out. None of this is going to be easy nor is any of this a "quick fix." But put some effort towards this thing- I know I will be- because it's what the Lord wants from us.

And it's not just the way we talk to each other that we should be aware of but what we are talking about. In our families, are we actually talking about life in the context of our faith or are we talking about life in the context of pop- culture? Is Christ invited into our conversations about how we are spending our time or our money? Are we talking about what TV shows or websites are appropriate or not for our families and why? This is a lot to think about isn't it?

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<sup>2</sup> AE 51:104

And while we're at it, there's one more family conversation we can't ignore, and that is the conversation of prayer. Whatever your family looks like- whether it's large, small, or in-between- make those conversations with God a priority. He is always available- he keeps no office hours- and wants to hear from us. Talk to him about your fears; your hurts; your joys. And talk to him as a family. Just sit down and simply pray. A great place to do that is the dinner table. Praise him for the wonderful gift of life he gives to us all in Jesus Christ; thank him for his many blessings; and ask him for guidance and protection.

All of this is a bold move I know and but being a disciple of Christ requires bold moves. But we can do this! Are you with me? Let's allow our love of The Lord to be heard and expressed in our conversations and may all our families continue and remain Christ centered. **Amen.**