



But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. -

Matthew 15:9

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He Chews on His Toenails

[The Father Revealed in the Son] At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. – Matthew 11:25

And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. – Matthew 18:3

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." – Matthew 19:14

"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." – Mark 9:37

God is love. It's what he is, it's what he does. Period. And since he is Love, then he loves us all unconditionally. He doesn't like our bad behavior, but he loves us.

Consider the growing child. The younger they are the more confused their ideas can be. When I was small there was a television show that had a short segment at the end where the host interviewed young children. The host was Art Linkletter and the segment was called "Kids Say the Darndest Things."

A while back I watched some old episodes of those interviews with children and found them to be quite amusing. Those kids did in fact say the darndest things.

To the children, their actions may very well make sense and what adults perceive to be bad behavior may not have been intended as bad. The child may have had good motives. You've got to marvel at the thought of all the antics that children pull. Put yourself in God's place for a moment. He has been watching the children ever since they were created. He knows the motives of their hearts and he's got to have had a lot of laughs and joyful moments while watching the little ones. He's also shed tons of tears because of the bad behavior committed by and on the little ones.

Tonight I am reminiscing. This morning Elkanah sat down on my side of the bed then proceeded to clip his toenails. I thought that he would leave them on the carpet so I asked him to put the clippings into the trash so my bare feet wouldn't find them and get holes poked in them. He stopped what he was doing, retrieved the nails he had already clipped then finished his pedicure.

No. My topic is not aimed at Elkanah. If he has ever chewed his toenails I'm not aware of it. His actions this morning and my request reminded me of an incident when I was a young child. I promise you that I had the best intentions when I did this, and my uncle Doyle was a champion in how he handled the situation.

I'll guess that I was 5 or 6 years old at the time. One day my aunt was visiting with my mom and I overheard part of their conversation. My mom told my aunt that Doyle chewed his toenails. In retrospect I realize that there had to be more to the comment than that. Maybe she was saying that when he was little he chewed his toenails. Or perhaps she was making a joke about him for some reason. I don't have a clue what the conversation was about. I only know that I heard the comment that Doyle chews his toenails and that was all I needed to know.

You know where this is going don't you?

I loved my Uncle Doyle. And now I knew what I could do for him that would make him happy. I waited patiently, watching for the day when my toenails would be long enough that I could cut them. Eventually they made it but I still waited a bit longer.

The day came that my mom said we were going to go to visit Uncle Doyle and his family and I needed to get ready. Without a word to my mom I quickly clipped my toenails and held on to them, eager with anticipation. I couldn't wait to see the look on my uncle's face when I presented him with my toenails.

When we got to their house, I waited for my mom and dad to go inside then I went into the garage where my uncle was working on something.

Me: Hi! I brought you something. (I was so excited.)

Him: What have you got?

Me: My toenails. (I held out my hand.)

Him: (He didn't flinch but held out his hand like this was a normal thing.) What are they for?

Me: I thought you might like to chew on them.

Him: That sounds good. But I'm not in the mood for toenails right now. I'll put them in my pocket and save them for later. (Into his shirt pocket they went.)

I felt a bit disappointed that he didn't pop one into his mouth immediately, but I was happy because he accepted them and promised to use them later. He didn't scold me or tell me I was a fruitcake. He treated me with dignity. I never forgot that.

Notice the text above, Matthew 18:3. Unless we change and become like little children we cannot enter into God's kingdom. I realize that Jesus was saying that he wants us to trust him and his Father. So let me make a quick comparison in how my uncle treated me. I acted very childish but my motive was pure. I wanted to please my uncle. He treated me with dignity and I never forgot his kindness to me that day. He had my trust.

My uncle is gone now but not forgotten. I hope to see him again when Jesus comes to restore all things.

How do you treat children? Do you stop to think about what they're doing and realize that they are learning, or do you automatically scold, humiliate and punish? If you find yourself to be fitting in the latter description, then stop and think about the toenails before you start to scream at your kids. If you want them to love you, treat them with dignity. It's what God wants for his children, both the young and the aged.

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