

Learning From Jesus Week 13

Kingdom Honesty: How Living in the Kingdom is the Cure for Lying

Key Verse:

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." John 14:6 (NLT)

Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.
John 17:17 (NLT)

"What is truth?" Pilate asked. John 18:38 (NLT)

Key Term: Truth

"a thought or statement is true if what it is about is as that thought or statement represents it. About spirit and spirituality, **we have knowledge**. We are not guessing in the dark. We are competing against another system that claims to have knowledge in itself. These ideas are important, as are all ideas. When we stand up to preach and teach for Jesus, we are presenting knowledge, truth, about reality. The arena in which we compete is fundamentally opposed to this knowledge: it is pluralistic." (DW Private Notes)

Reflections on Truth

Dallas Willard opens *"Renovation of the Heart"*... with a tragic story. An Air Force Fighter pilot was practicing high speed low altitude maneuvers, and turned the controls to make a sharp climb – and flew right into the ground. The pilot had been flying upside down and at the time of the climbing maneuver, didn't even know it...

A lot of us are like that. We move at high speed and have lost any framework to help us tell up from down, right from wrong. Crashes are inevitable.

That is the heritage of the worldview known as "Post Modernism", a movement that believes all truth is ultimately relative and subjective. Post-moderns believe that all truths have equal claim and all cultures have equal value. There are no

universal standards of justice, only interest groups competing for power. So your truth is every bit as important as mine.

The Bible has a very different perspective on truth, that truth is rooted in God, and in the way he has created us and the world around us. That truth is clear and absolute and unchanging. The Bible says this is so because God is true:

God is not a man, that he should lie...

Num 23:19

This issue about truth is important in life, because when your convictions are out of sync with the way the world really is, the way God really is, and out of sync with his purposes for your life, you can fly your plane right into the ground. That is true of the history of the nations. It is true of family life. That is true of individual lives like ours. That is why the Bible warns against lies all the time. Lives built on lies crash.

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.

Eph 4:17 (NIV)

When Paul compares the Jewish and Gentile worlds, one of the outstanding differences is the place of truth in those two cultures. What made the Jews different from all the other nations of the world was they had the scriptures. They had the words of God and the truth of God and the promises of God. And Paul knew this made a critical difference in life. Lives and cultures without truth take a tragic path. In three short verses he tracks the downward spiral of life without truth. Let's look at it.

- Closed Minds and *Hardened* Hearts
...because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. Eph 4:18 (NLT)

The word for hardened means their hearts became like marble, like rock. And Paul says they did this intentionally, implying they did so because they didn't want to live their lives for God. They wanted to live for themselves. So They hardened their lives against God.

- Darkness and *Ignorance* Take Over
you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking... darkened in their understanding... the ignorance that is in them... Eph 4:17-18 (NIV)
- Separated from the *Life* of God
They are... separated from the life of God Eph 4:18 (NIV)

That becomes the tragic impact of the postmodern worldview. No grace. No rebirth. No forgiveness. No fellowship. No guidance. No promises. No Holy Spirit. No hope. Just life without God. It is a frightening phrase.

- Letting Go and Let Go

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.
Eph 4:19 (NIV)

No boundaries, no barriers, no restraint. Addiction. Anything goes. Nothing satisfies. When you let go like this, God eventually lets you go. And then you are gone. Heading straight into the ground at high speed, and you didn't even know you were flying upside down.

In his book, Willard tells the story of Robert Coles, prof at Harvard University, who some time ago published a piece on the connection of intellect to character. In this article, he tells the story of a female student who took his classes on ethical development - who came from a mid-western working class community and was earning her way through college – cleaning rooms among other things. The male students whose rooms she cleaned were rude and often crude to her, partly because of her lower economic background, partly because she was cleaning their rooms, and partly – just because.

One of them propositioned her frequently as she went about her work. What confused and infuriated her was she was in a class on ethics with this same student, who was the best student in the class at arguably the most prestigious university in the world.

The girl left Harvard because of all this, and professor Coles did an exit interview with her, and heard her whole story. She said to him, *"I've been taking all these phil courses... but how do you teach people to be good, and what's the point of knowing good if you don't try to become a good person?"* The professor seemed heartbroken at her questions. But never spoke to the student who propositioned her, and never changed the way he taught his class. There were no questions on his tests on these matters.

Because the class had no framework for ethical values. Its discussions were built on the shared postmodern assumptions of the modern universities. There is no absolute truth. No right, no wrong. No God who creates and redeems and guides. Just you and me set adrift in this cosmic vat, our lives nothing more than random occurrences in a meaningless world, and somehow we have to make our own way. And life is all about us. So I can do whatever I want.

And you can be the smartest student in the most prestigious university in the world... and be just like that.

It is the power of truth to break this cycle.

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,

Eph 4:20-21 (NASB)

Paul reminds us that we have gone to a different college, a different school, no matter what our university. BTW, this is the best university in the world, because in this school we have learned truth. With three short phrases he sums up the curriculum and the faculty and the spirit of this university.

Let's follow the verbs in these verses... Paul says,

- You *Learned* Christ He is the core curriculum. His eternal pre-existence, his miraculous entry into this world, his life, his deeds, his words, his wisdom, his death, his resurrection, his promises, his power, his present rule, his promised return, his indwelling presence, his kingdom – all leading to his surpassing call upon your life. Because we learned Christ, we live for Christ!
- You *Heard* Christ It is he whose voice is heard when you study the bible and listen to your pastors and teachers as they teach the bible.
- You Were *Taught in* Christ What does that mean? It means that his school is not a modern university where there are no values except the supremacy of the self. Rather his school is a place where trust and surrender and obedience and dependence the life of faith and partnership with him are all part of the curriculum. It's not about you. It's all about him. Then Paul sums it all up with this wonderful phrase
- *Truth* is in Jesus!

If you want to find out the truth about life and your life and God and this world, come to Jesus. Listen to Jesus, trust Jesus, follow Jesus. What difference will that make? In his school, you will learn that... new life brings new thinking and new living

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self... to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Eph 4:21-24 (NIV)

This is another way of saying that His truth has a purpose. It is meant to bring you to life in Jesus, keep you in that life, build you up in that life. It teaches you to fly right side up. You will learn up from down, right from wrong. Jesus will change how you think – you begin to think like he thinks. This is a teacher who

will change your mind and change your heart, and then you find you can actually change your behavior, taking off old habits and clothes and putting on new ones. You become different, from the inside out, and you change – you just know you can let those old habits drop away, like leaves falling from a tree in the fall.

Where can you find one of these classrooms?

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. Eph 4:25 (NIV)

Reflection Question: Summarize the key ideas in the Reflection in your own words.

Bible Study: Truth, Honesty, and Consent

1. Look up the following verses, and summarize them in the spaces below.

Reference: Exodus 20.16

Reference: Prov 6.16-19

Reference: John 5.24; 6.63b; 14.6; 17.17; 18.38

3. Dallas says (DC 174-175) “people swear oaths to impress others... it is a method for getting their way... a device of manipulation, designed to override the judgment and will of the ones they are focusing upon, to push them aside rather than respecting them... it is an inherently wrong approach to human beings... Kingdom rightness respects the soul need of human beings to make their judgments and decisions solely from what they have concluded is best...” Do you agree?

4. Dallas says (Renovation Curriculum p.29) “Now the will is especially important because that is what we contribute to the world. William James, the great psychologist, talked about the consents and non-consents, and what we have to give to the world is our consents and our non-consents. That’s our unique contribution. No one else can do that but us. And that’s why we want our will to be respected. To use Kant’s wonderful phrase, we should never [view] another person as a means only, but only as an end. “End” means we respect their will, [their] uniqueness. They cannot be replaced. That’s why we say a human being has a dignity but not a price. There is nothing you can replace the human being with, and at the center of the human is the will—also called the heart or spirit...”

“It’s spirit because it has that aspect of God of self-determination. My consents and non-consents make up my contribution to reality. That’s why God wants to know what is in our heart. And he has left us able to hide our hearts from other human beings, but not from God. But he looks on the heart. Remember, Jesus said God is looking for people who will worship him in spirit and in truth, because when you get down to that level, that’s really you.”

Do these sentences help you understand why manipulation (swearing oaths, etc) is “an inherently wrong approach to human beings...”?

Spiritual Tool for the Week

The following exercise is to be done this week. Record your experiences in the spaces below.

Spiritual Tool: Silence

Silence has two forms; it is two disciplines under one title.

- 1) **Quietness.** To be in quiet, to eliminate sound. Experience perfect silence or only 'natural' noise – wind in the trees, water running, heart beating, breathing. Sound penetrates to us more than any other sensation. The vibration enters right into our body. Natural sounds don't seem to affect us in this same way.
- 2) **To refrain from speaking.** Study Proverbs on talking and not talking... It allows you to stop managing the world and especially your appearance in the world. You stop trying to impress people. You let things stand without setting them right. Sometimes in solitude, people will talk to themselves about others, criticizing. James 3.1-12 *We all make many mistakes, but those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way.* Jas 3:2 (NLT)

'Silence completes solitude' H Nouwen. It is not 'nothing'. It is substantive. It is 'like the wind of eternity blowing in your face.' DW

Silence and waiting go together. Isa 40.31; Psa 25.3,5,21; 37.7,34; 62.5; 69.3

Silence breaks the need to say, 'I've got to say something' to establish ourselves, to manage the situation. Silence allows us to let God change our hearts and then we speak more appropriately. "Swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" – they are connected. Silence will help us gain congruence between who we are and what we say.

A related discipline is that of 'not having the last word.' Instead say, 'Well I think that is worth thinking about.' This gives us the ability to direct our language when needed, 'seasoned with salt'.

"Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them". Eph 4:29 (NLT)

The tongue of the righteous is a tree of life. Proverbs.

"The more I practice this discipline of silence, the more I appreciate the strength of it... The less I become skeptical and judgmental, the more I appreciate others and accept them created in the image of God, the more I serve them, the more I celebrate my life... I will accept and enjoy what God is giving me. I think I am beginning to enjoy God." (Spirit of the Disciplines, p.165)

Silence is a way of taking our dominion out of where it does not belong. And allowing the souls of others to come out, in grace.

The disciplines are Kingdom disciplines partly because they put us in a place of risk. Where God is needed. You can't defend yourself in silence. You can't manage the world in solitude. But God can.

Reflections on your experience

Readings for March 18th

Read Celebration of Discipline, Ch. 7; SG pp. 74-87