The Need to be Right

My old Bible, now lost to the ravages of storage in some damp box, or eaten by a now righteous mouse, or lost in our few but tumultuous moves, used to have a list of righteous sayings on one of the blank pages. I wish I could remember them all, but I’ll try to remember some:

You do not have to agree with me, you have the right to be wrong.

Can I help it if I’m right?

Yes, I trust your motives. Implicitly. You're just wrong.

I don’t get paid to be nice. I get paid to be right.

Life forces us into one major choice, to be right or happy. Not both.

I do love it when I am right, which is fortunate, since I so often am.

Most people will do the right thing after they've tried everything else.

But being confident you are right is not the same as being right.

But if you were right, I'd agree with you.

I love sarcasm, in which stating the obvious by emphasizing the absurd leaves the opponent at least amazed or sometimes confused. It is the soul of wit and the exposure of human frailty. Of course we are not always right, yet we live in a world in which being right is the goal and the prize of personal verification. To be wrong is to be dehumanized, so we fight to be right, even when there is logical and empirical data to the contrary.

Why is it that being right is so important to us? Why do we hang our personal value on the single thread of being right?

In politics it is of course essential that our position be affirmed and that our candidate wins. Right now we can see the results of this contrast between right/wrong in our streets. ‘Of course they are wrong’ we affirm, they lost the election. That of course verifies that the majority are always right, which also, of course, we know is not the case. The majority can be wrong and often is.

But to admit to being wrong is such a terrible thing for us. It is not just the loss of an argument but the loss of self. Our identity is wrapped up in our belief system and the substantiating of that support system is life’s goal.

But the concept or righteousness (rightness, if you will) is an elusive and fleeting thing. We think of being in right standing as the accumulation of good works and the absence of evil deeds and/or the mental capacity to rightly understand reality. It is the means of self-assurance and of self-worth. To be bad or to be wrong is the degeneration and degradation of self.

Then why do bad people do bad things? Well, some believe themselves to be worthless and bad so they do not try to achieve the status of rightness. This is the state of pathological deviance, in which one gives up on ever being good and revels in bringing the pain of it to others.

But for most of us we are bent on the path of self-verification and the need to be right in behavior and belief.

It is not just politics that reveals this need to be right, it is also the foundation of religions. The competitive nature of religious belief leaves us with thousands of belief systems and sub-systems. It is probably impossible to count the sects in Christianity because they grow and split faster than we can count. Each identifies itself in contrast to the others by having better doctrine, better understanding and better forms and rituals.

So, am I saying that truth is relative? Not at all. Are all systems of thought wrong or is there one that is absolutely right, leaving the rest to be wrong? No, this is not the point. Truth is not relative, but we are. We are partial, incomplete, and imperfect. Yet, after laying a foundation of uncertainty of our need to be right, I affirm that there is an absolute and perfect truth and reality. It is not me. It is in Him, the creator of all thing. The problem is in the contrasts we bring by our diverse uniqueness.

I married a lovely lady who is my polar opposite. I fight myself to keep from crushing her by my rightness. That is, I believe doors were made to be closed, including cabinet doors, drawers etc. Linda believes they are on hinges to be opened and left that way. I think lids belong on the top of the containers they came off of. Guess what… She does not. I tell myself many times every day, “Leave her alone. She is not wrong and you are not right. It does not matter.”

So if God is right, what does He require of us? Does He care about political issues, doctrinal differences or human behavior? Does He not expect us to live righteously and to know the truth? Well, my flippant cynical answer would be, No, He does not. It doesn’t matter. But that is too simplistic and confusing. So, then what is the point?

The point is this: God does not ask us to be right but to be real. If He demanded righteousness from us than He would not have sent Jesus to be a sacrifice for us. No need to waste a perfectly good sacrifice! The essence of our relationship with God is not self-worth or self-righteousness or self-rightness. It is GRACE!

*Romans 4 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.*

*5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, 6 just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 7 “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; 8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”*

*Romans 5:17 For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*

*Ephesians 2:7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Self-verification by any means is useless and worthless. The measurement of God toward man is not in us or of us. It is in Him and of Him. It is by His grace. The path to grace is not by self-effort or human correctness but by coming to the end of ourselves and standing naked before God without anything to offer. It is in being real. From that point grace imparts, creates, enlightens and grows. It does not require effort simply acceptance.

Grace makes human contrasts unnecessary and answers to our need for value and worth. I am of value because He has valued me – grace plus nothing. In Him!

Righteousness does not come from the outside in but from the inside out. Truth does not come from the outside in but from the inside out, for truth is not what I believe but in whom I believe – He is truth.

Yes, I do have definite political opinions. I would like to think that they are grounded in the observations of rational and logical thought. But they are opinions, none-the-less. They presume to understand how the world works and how social structures are best constructed. But they are not there to be used as a weapon to injure those who disagree. They are structures of my mind that I hope would help and benefit the world.

Yes, I have a doctrinal construct in my Christian beliefs and I hope that they best approximate how creation works and how God relates to me and to all of humanity. May they never be used to bring injury and pain but liberation and peace.

There is an answer to doctrinal controversy. There is an answer to human prejudice. There is an answer to world peace. There is an answer to all things. It is not found in our contrasts, but in Him, by whom the whole universe has its beginnings, its life and its end.

In Him!

Pastor Dave