

## ***Truth Symposium Part 2:*** **PREPARING OURSELVES FOR TRUTH**

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: “If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake and continually follow me.” – ***Matthew 16:24***

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When we began this ministry, we worked extensively with various recovery missions in the City of Hope. We shared the plain and open teachings of Jesus with hundreds of men and women who were recovering from alcohol and drug dependence. We were overwhelmed with the response. These men and women came from all sorts of backgrounds, many were affiliated with street gangs and/or were guilty of serious criminal activity. Few, if any, came to the missions seeking God. Yet when they heard the pure unadulterated message of Jesus, they grabbed hold to it and have not let it go. Most were so moved that they were determined to be baptized into Christ by any means. Some of their experiences are relayed in the articles **The Powerful Message of Sonship** and **What Prevents Me?**

At the same time, we were sharing the plain and open teachings with people who professed to be religious. They, too, were deeply affected, but there was a difference. The men and women from the missions were more quickly moved to action. Without compulsion or recommendation, they eagerly picked up the mantle of discipleship and instinctively sought to share the Master’s teachings with their families and friends. Some denounced their gang affiliations and reached out to their fellow gang members, and even members of rivals gangs, to introduce them to the Christ. Some of these men cooperated with law enforcement to mediate gang truces in major U.S. cities. These extraordinary acts of faith were rather common among these men and women. We wondered why there was such a difference in their reaction. The above cited scripture gave us some indication.

Of course, we recalled that Jesus came primarily for those who are considered lowly ones by man’s standards:

“Jehovah’s spirit is upon me, because he anointed me to declare good news to the poor, he sent me forth to preach a release to the captives and a recovery of sight to the blind, to send the crushed ones away with a release, to preach Jehovah’s acceptable year.” – ***Luke 4:18-19***

“In reply Jesus said to them: “Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but those who are ailing do. I have come to call, not righteous persons, but sinners to repentance.” – ***Luke 5:31-32***

And we were reminded of an illustration given by Jesus where he said:

“Two men were debtors to a certain lender; the one was in debt for five hundred denarii, but the other for fifty. When they did not have anything with which to pay back, he freely forgave them both. Therefore, which of them will love him the more?” In answer Simon said: “I suppose it is the one to whom he freely forgave the more.” He said to him: “You judged correctly.” – *Luke 7:41-43*

Of course, these factors have a bearing on the situation. Perhaps these men and women viewed themselves as having greater sin and therefore they were more grateful. But there is another, more profound reason for the difference in response.

These men and women had reached a precipice moment. They realized that their way was not working and they wanted more out of life. Most were familiar with church doctrines, and had tried the 12-step program with limited success. But when they heard the plain and open teachings of Jesus, things changed. They realized the source of their distress was that they were spiritually hungry and they were open to being filled. (*Matthew 5:3, 6*)

They were especially impressed with the purity and simplicity of Jesus’ teachings. As Jesus said, ‘my yoke is kindly and my load is light.’ (*Matthew 11:28-30*) In response, they openly confessed their errors and earnestly sought to make amends. They exposed themselves thoroughly, nothing was hidden. There were no stumbling blocks that hindered them. All of their walls were down. It was like Jesus said:

“[T]he kingdom of the heavens is like a traveling merchant seeking fine pearls. Upon finding one pearl of high value, **away he went and promptly sold all the things he had and bought it.**” – *Matthew 13:45-46*

They had divested themselves of man’s will, and unreservedly invited Christ Jesus into their lives to reign supreme. They had mastered the mantra, “let go, let God.” They had disowned their fleshly selves. (*Matthew 26:34*) That was the difference!

This experience taught us the value of disowning ones self. We believe if the average man or woman took him or herself to task, emptied themselves of all their hidden sins, secret grudges and preconceived or poorly conceived ideas about life and God and truth, and sought to make amends for their wrongs against others, there would be nothing to prevent such persons from living in truth, out loud and unashamedly. Really, the failure to be honest with ourselves makes our worship worthless:

“If we make the statement: “We are having a sharing with him,” and yet we go on walking in the darkness, **we are lying and are not practicing the truth.** However, if we are walking in the light

as he himself is in the light, we do have a sharing with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we make the statement: “We have no sin,” **we are misleading ourselves and the truth is not in us.** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous so as to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we make the statement: “We have not sinned,” **we are making him a liar, and his word is not in us.”** – *1 John 1:6-10*

But a true self assessment requires courage. Man has a tendency to cover over his own errors and pretend like they do not exist. This is hypocrisy. Jesus has no tolerance for hypocrisy:

**“Stop judging that you may not be judged;** for with what judgment you are judging, you will be judged; and with the measure that you are measuring out, they will measure out to you. Why then, do you look at the straw in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the rafter in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Allow me to extract the straw from your eye’; when, look! a rafter is in your own eye? **Hypocrite!** First extract the rafter from your own eye, and then you will see clearly how to extract the straw from your brother’s eye.” – *Matthew 7:1-5*

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** because you resemble whitewashed graves, **which outwardly indeed appear beautiful but inside are full of dead men’s bones and of every sort of uncleanness.** In that way you also, outwardly indeed, appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” – *Matthew 23:27-28*

Besides, Jesus already knows those things we are trying to hide:

“For **the word of God** is alive and exerts power and is sharper than any two-edged sword and pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and [their] marrow, and [is] able to discern thoughts and intentions of [the] heart. And there is not a creation that is not manifest to **his sight, but all things are naked and openly exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have an accounting.**” – *Hebrews 4:12-13*

We personally know the value of disowning self. When we began this journey many years ago, we decided to reset or reboot our spiritual lives. In addition to being honest with ourselves about ourselves, we decided to divest ourselves of everything we had ever been taught about God, the Bible, Jesus Christ and the truth.

We let go of every cherished belief with the intent to rebuild our spiritual lives on the only thing we absolutely knew to be true – that there is a God who is the creator of everything. We decided that we would only accept ideas and concepts consistent with that one truth and then build our faith on those things.

This was a very scary proposition. We knew that once we divested ourselves of all teachings, we would have no teachers. We could not run to the security of the approval of others. We would be on our own, yet we had faith that the Father would take us in. The interesting thing about faith is that in the beginning it is difficult. But as one exercises more and more faith, the Father responds with His assurances. And eventually, the Father’s protection and guidance become so real that it hardly seems fair to call it faith anymore. (Ponder that thought.)

This is how our faith progressed: We had faith that God is the creator of all things. The natural outgrowth of that idea is that every man is our brother. Now we had two things we absolutely knew to be true – God is our Father and every man is our brother. From there, we went to what we were familiar with, the Bible. And we decided to read it anew with our fresh perspective. We were thrilled when we realized that Jesus taught the very same two truths as the basis of his ministry:

“But you, do not you be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, whereas **all you are brothers**. Moreover, do not call anyone your father on earth, for **one is your Father, the heavenly One.**” – *Matthew 23:8-9*

And these two truths formed the foundation of his only commandments:

“[O]ne of them, versed in the Law, asked, testing him: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ He said to him: ‘**You must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind.**’ This is the greatest and first commandment. The second, like it, is this, ‘**You must love your neighbor as yourself.**’ On these two commandments the whole Law hangs, and the Prophets.” – *Matthew 22:35-40*

A spiritual reset is alluded to by the apostle Paul when he wrote:

“Do not be lying to one another. **Strip off the old personality with its practices**, and clothe yourselves with the new [personality], which **through accurate knowledge** is being made new according to the image of the One who created it.” – *Colossians 3:9-10*

**“[Y]ou should put away the old personality** which conforms to your former course of conduct and which is being corrupted according to his deceptive desires; but that you should be made new **in the force actuating your mind**, and should put on the new personality which was created according to God’s will in true righteousness and loyalty.” – *Ephesians 4:22-24*

It is the meaning of being born again (*John 3:3-7*):

“Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through our baptism into his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, **we also should likewise walk in a newness of life**. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall certainly also be [united with him in the likeness] of his resurrection; because we know that **our old personality was impaled with [him], that our sinful body might be made inactive**, that we should no longer go on being slaves to sin.” – *Romans 6:3-6*

“For you have been given a new birth, not by corruptible, but by incorruptible [reproductive] seed, **through the word of [the] living and enduring God.**” – *1 Peter 1:23*

These ideas convinced us of the veracity of what Jesus said:

**“I am the way and the truth and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me.” – *John 14:6*

We were willing to disown ourselves, as Jesus said, ‘sell all things and purchase the pearl of very high value.’

What can give one the courage to undergo a reboot, or a rebirth, is a strong desire for truth, divine truth untainted by manmade interpretations and machinations, and an earnest desire to know God.

We believe that a reboot or a rebirth should begin by going to God in prayer, pouring out our hearts and asking for His guidance. As an example of such a prayer, we can look to the words of the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm. Here, the psalmist opens his heart completely to the Father and empties himself. It is not necessary that we mimick the words of the psalmist, but we might share his sentiments:

“Show me favor, O God, according to your loving-kindness. According to the abundance of your mercies wipe out my transgressions. Thoroughly wash me from my error, And cleanse me even from my sin. For my transgressions I myself know, And my sin is in front of me constantly.

“Against you, you alone, I have sinned, And what is bad in your eyes I have done, In order that you may prove to be righteous when you speak, That you may be in the clear when you judge. Look! With error I was brought forth with birth pains, And in sin my mother conceived me.

“Look! You have taken delight in truthfulness itself in the inward parts; And in the secret self may you cause me to know sheer wisdom. May you purify me from sin with hyssop, that I may be clean; May you wash me, that I may become whiter even than snow.

“May you cause me to hear exultation and rejoicing, That the bones that you have crushed may be joyful. Conceal your face from my sins, And wipe out even all my errors. Create in me even a pure heart, O God, And put within me a new spirit, a steadfast one. Do not throw me away from before your face; And your holy spirit O do not take away from me.

“Do restore to me the exultation of salvation by you, And may you support me even with a willing spirit. I will teach transgressors your ways, That sinners themselves may turn right back to you.

“Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God the God of my salvation, That my tongue may joyfully tell about your righteousness. O Jehovah, may you open these lips of mine, That my own mouth may tell forth your praise. For you do not take delight in sacrifice—otherwise I would give [it]; In whole burnt offering you do not find pleasure. The sacrifices to God are a broken spirit; A heart broken and crushed, O God, you will not despise.

– *Psalms 51:1-17* –

Heartfelt prayers such as this one will put us in the correct frame of mind. We will be open and exposed to the Father and to ourselves. And we will find comfort in our spiritual nakedness, knowing that we will soon be clothed and built up a new person – a spiritual person – one who can know truth:

“But a physical man does not receive the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot get to know [them], because they are examined spiritually. However, **the spiritual man examines indeed all things**, but he himself is not examined by any man. For “who has come to know the mind of Jehovah, that he may instruct him?” But we do have **the mind of Christ.**” – *1 Corinthians 2:14-16*

Many people around the world, from many different backgrounds, and under many different circumstances have been able to make miraculous changes in their lives by disowning self. From there, they can willingly picking up the torture stake of the Christ which means they were willing to undergo whatever it takes to follow Christ – ‘selling all things.’ And when we have stripped off the old personality with its practices and beliefs, we will be in a position to put on the truth, as Paul called it, putting on the ‘mind of Christ’ – the pearl of high value. Having been washed clean of the errors of men, we are ready for our new life, our new birth – being born again.

But how do we determine what is the mind of Christ? What is involved in putting it on? And when we put it on, what sort of persons will we be? These questions will be answered in the next article in our quest for truth and subsequent spiritual freedom, which we call “**Receiving Truth.**”

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