

**(For Monday, August 14, 2017) Are you the genuine article?**

*“Then Absalom commanded his servants, ‘Mark when Ammon’s heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, “Strike Ammon,” then kill him. Do not fear; have I not commanded you? Be courageous and be valiant.”’ (2Sam.13:28, ESV)*

Absalom’s encouragement to his servants to be “courageous and valiant” is chillingly ironic, since these appalling instructions to commit murder represent neither courage nor valor. The human is an integral being. We begin to separate our moral, emotional, spiritual, and physical components at our great peril. The old saying to “Do as I say and not as I do” is a recipe for disaster. Only a man or woman who lives a virtuous life can expect their instructions to be honored by virtuous people. Try as he might, an immoral man can never hope to inspire honor and courage, even if he should utter the most informed and insightful guidance. Jesus was right; a diseased tree simply cannot bear good fruit. (See Mt.7:16)

What about you? Do your words carry the weight of your actions?

**(For Tuesday, August 15 , 2017) Have you put things in their proper place?**

*“All worshipers are put to shame who make their boast in worthless idols.” (Ps.97:7a, ESV)*

The wisdom found in Psalms is absolutely timeless. While the pen of David may well have been speaking about pagan worship fetishes of wood and stone when he wrote about “idols” a thousand years before the coming of Christ, yet God’s word comes down to us in our own day with a new layer of meaning. Our present-day world is full of potential idols. Anything that diverts the focus of our lives away from living in the center of God’s will really does become an idol. And such idols can ruin our peace, destroy the harmony of our family-life, damage our livelihood, and finally diminish the abundance in our walk with The Lord. Yes, those who create idols with their lives are truly destined to be put to shame.

Are there some changes you need to make in your own life in order to steer clear of creating idols?

**(For Wednesday, August 16, 2017) How inclusive is your faith?**

*“The next day Paul took the men and purified himself with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the dates when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.” (Acts21:30, NIV)*

These actions by Paul to respect the Nazerite vows (See Num.6:1-21) seem to contradict his position that as Christians we are free from the oppressive constraints in the Law of Moses. But what Paul is actually doing here is to show respect for the traditions of others, in order that the ultimate freedom of the Gospel might prevail. The salvation of Jesus Christ can only flourish in a society of freedom, where each person is given the right (and the responsibility) of free will. And such a fertile ground for God’s truth can only be cultivated when we preserve and defend the rights of everyone to make their own decisions about life, even if those decisions are not in agreement with our own. Paul’s most ardently felt conviction may well have been that the exercise of our freedom should never become a stumbling block for those who are seeking Christ (See 1Cor.8:9). In the end, one of the primary characteristics of the Gospel is its radical inclusiveness.

What about you? How inclusive is the practice of your faith, so that in being all things to all people, you too might win some for The Lord? (See 1Cor.9:22)

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**(For Thursday, August 17, 2017) Do you fully understand the difference between folly and grace?**

*“And they [James and John] said to him [Jesus], ‘We are able [to drink the same cup as you].’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the Baptism with which I am Baptized, you will be Baptized.’” (Mk.10:39-40a, ESV)*

James and John in their ignorance of Jesus’ full mission, see him as purely a political Messiah, who has come to free Jerusalem and Israel from foreign occupation. They think it will be necessary to fight along-side him, so they rashly commit to accepting this yoke. They have no idea that what they are agreeing to will involve a life-time of humble sacrifice, pain, humiliation, and – at the very least in the case of James – a horrific death. Doubtless, later in their lives they would remember this moment and their brash promise with a profound sense of reverent significance. We all make rash decisions and commit acts of prideful brashness. And God, who is sovereign, permits these moments of impetuosity in our lives. What separates the wise person from the fool is the ability to look back on our brashness and recognize how such moments changed our world.

Can you look back on the instances of your impetuous past and recognize both human folly and divine grace?

**(For Friday, August 18, 2017) How much mercy do you practice?**

*“And many rebuked him [blind Bartimaeus] telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more ‘Son of David have mercy on me!’” [Mk.10:48, ESV]*

There are times in the lives of every Christian when he/she is called upon to separate himself/herself from the crowd; to follow the beat of a different drummer, so to speak. But, since we are supposed to “if possible, live at peace with all people,” (Rom.12:18) the challenge is knowing when to keep silent and when to speak. Yet, there are some very clear guidelines about when it is proper to speak out against the consensus of the group, and Bartimaeus knew he was in the right to do so. Because there is simply no good reason NOT to plead for the mercy of God in ANY situation. No, it’s not always a popular nor an easy thing. But wouldn’t the world be a far better place if we could all simply demand greater mercy in our lives, work, and nation?

What about you? Are you a practitioner of boundless mercy?

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