

Doing what is right, even when it's tough

1 John 1:5-2:2

Everton Hills

July 20, 2014

Kids Talk

“Who would like this **\$20 bill?**” Then crumple it up, step on it, roll it around and then hold it up again and ask, “Who still wants this \$20 bill?”

Why do you want it? It's no longer crisp and nice. It's now a bit **dull and bent.**

You want it because it is still worth \$20.

The value remains the same no matter what the item looks like on the outside – no matter how scarred, bruised or beaten, the value is still the same.

There is a word for that, it is called integrity.

Integrity means that there is consistency between my words and my actions.

For example, saying I will help with the dishes, and then doing them is an example of integrity. But saying I will help with the dishes and then running off and doing something else... what happens then? Mum and dads get frustrated... and there is tension in the house.

Or saying I will tidy my room and then doing that, is an example of integrity. But if I say it and then ignore, the same thing happens doesn't it?

When people don't have integrity, it creates problems. But the thing is, when we acknowledge what we have done wrong, when are honest about messing up, God gives us a new sense of freedom.

That's what I am going to talk some more about shortly...

But before I do that, I want to teach you a new song...

Message

Integrity. It involves **consistency between words and actions.** It involves having an alignment between the things that you hold dear in your heart, and how you act or behave. When we follow through with that alignment, when those things that we hold dear in our heart are consistent with how we live, we show integrity.

But what happens when we don't? What happens when the alignment doesn't quite match up? What happens when there is a disconnect between our words and actions? Some people might call it hypocrisy... but really it is a loss of integrity.

For example, if I bit into this apple, and it tasted like a banana, I would stop eating it wouldn't I. I would think that there was something wrong with it. It would be logical to desist, because if an apple ever tasted like a banana, well it just wouldn't be right!

Or, if I want to lose weight, exercise and get fitter, but continue to comfort eat, and lounge around on the couch? What's going to happen? Nothing! I will continue to be the slob that I am, if not become more of a slob!

Or, if I say that I want to spend more time with my family, that I want to connect more closely to my kids, but I continue to work ridiculous hours and when I am with my family I play on my device, what's going to happen? We will continue to drift apart!

Someone has said that **if you are digging a hole in the wrong spot, it doesn't matter how big you dig the hole, it will still be in the wrong spot.** If we say things, it doesn't matter how much we say them, if we don't act on them, nothing will change.

And that is equally true in the context of living life in community in the church. If I say that I want to live and share God's transforming love and peace, but don't take the time, and the opportunity to express that transforming love and peace with the people around me, what's going to happen? Nothing. To quote the words of the apostle Paul, ***if I don't love others, I am only a noisy gong or clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1, NLT).***

There is a word for that image of a noisy gong, or a clanging cymbal. The word is dissonance.

Dissonance is that discomfort that we feel when we hear a musical discord, or when we feel that discomfort within ourselves when we do or say something that isn't quite right. And what is fascinating, is that instead of acknowledging the dissonance, the discomfort, the disconnect, instead of acknowledging our lack of integrity and doing something about it (because we generally don't like to live with contradiction – with discord) we put our spin on what has happened. We make excuses. We blame someone else.

I kept eating because I am stressed at work.

I didn't spend time with my family because work has been just too tiring – and besides, they were busy doing their own thing.

I didn't share God's transforming love with that person I sat next to this morning because I don't think that they would have appreciated it! Or, because I wanted to catch up with my friends.

Initially, our conscience might cause us to wince a little at what we have said or done, but the more we talk to ourselves, and to others, the more we soften our conscience and that little voice in our head starts to say that it is all OK. At first, there might have appeared to be a contradiction, but with a few tweaks to the storyline, a few reinterpretations of the truth, we show that we were right all along. And then, our loss of integrity is complete.

In 1 John 1, the apostle provides theological language to help explain what is going on...

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. 1 John 1:8, NLT

What John is doing is giving us language to help us understand the internal conflict that occurs when on the one hand we say we want to love everyone, or love others, or live in fellowship or community with each other, but then go about doing our own thing.

The apostle Paul was equally scathing of the Christians in Corinth.

...it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together.... For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this! (1 Corinthians 11:18, 20-22, NLT)

Paul doesn't mix words does he?

And maybe you can think of situations in your own life where there have been those moments of discord, dissonance or disconnection. Maybe you can think of times when you have promised one thing and done another. When you have desired to express God's transforming love and peace, but something else has gotten in the way; selfishness, pride, past hurts, fear of being vulnerable, whatever...

Listen carefully, then, to how John talks about how to deal with the discord of loss of integrity...

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. 1 John 1:8-9, NLT

John says that the first step to moving beyond our lack of integrity is to acknowledge it and name it!

I wonder sometimes, if one of the reasons why we sometimes hesitate to name it, to name our lack of integrity, to acknowledge our sin, is that we are afraid to **fail**. We are afraid to be found out that we are not the people we say we are. But I wonder if sometimes, if we looked at failure as a **First Attempt In Learning**... it would enable us to be more honest with ourselves and with others.

Because what John is saying is that when we own it, we begin the process of being released from its power. **Repentance is the first step towards freedom.**

And that is why the gospel is so transformational. That's why the message that God loved us so much, that even while we were sinners Christ died for us, is so important, because it tells us that despite everything, if the Creator of the world deems us important enough to die for us, we can have confidence to confess our sins, be true to ourselves, and then live the freedom that forgiveness brings.

In essence, God's grace allows us to face our failures, to name them, to accept them, and to move on from them, towards a life of integrity! After all, it is only as the discords are turned into melodies that our lives can truly sing... and Jesus is the means through which that happens.

And that is what we are going to do now. We are going to have a time of confession. A time of honesty. And if God stirs something in you during this time, what are you going to do about it? Let dissonance remain a discord, or let him turn it into a melody?

We pray...

God who is truth,

We seek to come before you honestly

And lay our hearts open before you.

We invite your penetrating gaze; your Spirit's deep work

To search; challenge; convict and correct.

We have been careless with words, expense claims and actions.

We have been quick to judge others by standards that we do not uphold ourselves.

We too are at fault.

We have gone out of our way to look better, sound more important, more pure – and we have made truth elastic.

Forgive us.

As we sit in silence, reveal to us your truth for our life.

In Jesus name we pray.

SILENCE

God of all truth,

We thank you that you welcome all into your holy light-filled presence,
when we come in humility, honesty and trust.

Thank you that your forgiveness is available to all who lie, distort and twist,
as we come to you in faith and repentance,

And to all who judge, assume the worst or simply distrust,
help us to know that your love and forgiveness is enough.

By the power of your Spirit, restore in us a clean heart,
And build within us both trust and honesty once again.

Amen.