

TRUTH

“. . . Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

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EXPRESSING LOVE IN WORDS VERSUS EXPRESSING LOVE IN ACTION

Some people express their love in words. Others may be reluctant to say, “I/we love you,” but instead try to show their love by their actions. Which would you personally prefer? Would you rather a person express love for you in words, or by their conduct?

Is it possible for a person to say, “I love you” but not really mean it? Yes. Is it possible for a person to tell someone, “I love you,” but the way he treats that person makes it obvious that he does not genuinely love them? Yes, that is possible.

In Proverbs 23:7, we read, “*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. ‘Eat and drink!’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you.*” Conclusion: Words do not always match the real sentiments that a person has in his mind. When it comes to serving the Lord, Jesus said some people draw near to Him with their mouth and honor Him with their lips, but their heart is far from Him (Matthew 15:8). If we sing, “My Jesus, I love Thee,” that affirmation *may* or *may not* be true. When it comes to our communication with other humans and our relationship with God, *saying* we love them and *really* loving them are not always the same.

Some of us were raised in a family or culture in which parents never verbalized their love for their children, and vice versa. In other families and cultures, kids and their parents freely and frequently express their love for each other in words.

Is it acceptable in God’s sight for His people to express their love for others? There were times when the Christ verbally expressed His love for people. For instance, He told His apostles, “*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*” (John 15:12). Though some of the saints in Corinth did not return Paul’s love, he told them, “. . . *I love you*” (2 Corinthians 12:15). In his writings, the apostle John more than once told those to whom he was writing letters that he loved them (2 John 1 and 3 John 1). Thus, no one should conclude that when a Christian tells another person that he loves them, such is immature, un-Christ-like, or a sign of weakness.

From a biblical viewpoint, there is more to true love than just talking about it. God the Father has a great love for mankind. He tells us that. But, He also *shows* it. He sent His only begotten Son to be our

Savior (1 John 4:9,10). And what about the Son? “*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us*” (1 John 3:16). Jesus talked about love, but He went beyond words and expressed His love in action.

The apostle Paul did the same thing. In his epistles, he verbalized his love for the churches in Corinth, Philippi, and Thessalonica. More than talk about his love, though, he showed it by his attitude and action. For the souls of brethren in those areas, Paul was ready to “*spend and be spent*” (2 Corinthians 12:15). He exhorted, comforted, and charged each one of them (1 Thessalonians 2:11), and he prayed for them without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 1:2,3).

How are you and I doing in the matter of love? Do we love God? We *sing* about our love for Him. We *talk* to others about loving Him. In our prayers, we *tell* Him that we love Him. The Bible teaches that those who love Him keep His commands . . . That is love in action (1 John 5:3). And, yes, the proper action/obedience must come from the heart in order for it to please the Lord (Romans 6:17).

What about our love for our spouse and other family members? One who mentally or physically abuses a spouse lacks proper agape love. Such a one might send daily texts, write sweet notes/cards, or say “I love you” orally multiple times per day, but, until the behavior *displays* a loving spirit, the words are empty. Indeed, there is a difference in expressing love in words and showing love by our actions.

What about our love for our neighbors and friends? We are to love them as we love ourselves, and Jesus wants us to treat them (and all others) just like we would want them to treat us (Luke 6:31), showing them love, goodness, and mercy by our action (Luke 6:32-36). If those friends and neighbors are lost outside of Jesus, His love compels us to try to reach them with the gospel (Romans 1:14-16).

As we deal with other members of the church, what does God expect? “*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*” (1 John 3:18). Again, our action must support our claim to practice brotherly love. Words are powerful, but the old adage is true: “Actions speak louder than words.”

-- Roger D. Campbell

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING ZEDEKIAH

Zedekiah was the last king of the nation of Judah, as well as the last earthly king in David's lineage. Though Zedekiah was a son of King Josiah, there were three kings between them. Thus, the order of the final five kings of Judah was as follows: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah.

Upon Josiah's death, his son Jehoahaz succeeded him (2 Kings 23:30). Unlike his very faithful father, Jehoahaz was a wicked man, reigning only three months before the Egyptian ruler Pharaoh-Necho removed him from power, put Jehoahaz's brother Eliakim on the throne, and changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:31-34). Like his brother, Jehoiakim was a wicked man (2 Kings 23:36-37). Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, made his first incursion into Judah during Jehoiakim's reign, carrying Jehoiakim, some items from the temple of God, and some of the royal lineage to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:5-7; Daniel 1:1-4). Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin succeeded him (2 Kings 24:6; he is also called Jeconiah or Coniah – 1 Chronicles 3:16-17; Jeremiah 22:24). Jehoiachin reigned only three months before Nebuchadnezzar came again against Jerusalem, taking Jehoiachin, more treasures from the temple of God, and more prisoners back to Babylon (2 Kings 24:8-16). Nebuchadnezzar then made Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah, king and changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17). (Note that, at this point in Judah's history, both Jehoiachin and Zedekiah were more like viceroys of Babylon than kings.)

This brings us to the reign of Zedekiah. From 2 Kings 24:18-20, we learn the following of Zedekiah: (1) this final king of Judah reigned 11 years; (2) he was an evil man, the fourth in a line of stubborn kings refusing to heed God's word and turn to God for help and forgiveness; and (3) his evil tenure brought about the ultimate and utter end of Judah as a kingdom and ended Israel's earthly monarchy. From 2 Kings 25:1-7, these facts may be added: (1) after a siege of approximately 18 months, the Babylonian army entered Jerusalem; (2) Zedekiah fled but was caught by the Babylonians and brought to Nebuchadnezzar for judgment; (3) after Zedekiah's sons were slain before him, his eyes were put out; (4) the temple of God, the king's house, and other houses were burned; and (5) the walls of Jerusalem were torn down.

What are some lessons we can learn from the disastrous, rebellious, godless life of King Zedekiah?

➤ **God knows all.** God knew what would happen to Judah, and He knew every detail of the lives of Zedekiah and the people (Jeremiah 16:17). It is still true today: God knows and sees all (Hebrews 4:13).

➤ **Leaders have tremendous responsibility.** Zedekiah and the spiritual leaders of Judah—as well as various others before them—utterly failed their nation (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Today, all leaders still have great responsibility (Proverbs 14:34), but none more so than spiritual leaders (Hebrews 13:17; James 3:1).

➤ **In times of distress, look to God for help.** God warned Zedekiah that Egypt could not help him (Jeremiah 37:7). Earlier, Jeremiah had prophesied that the people would remain in the land if they submitted to Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon (Jeremiah 27:1-15). Stubbornly, Zedekiah did not listen, and it cost both him and the nation. When facing difficult times today, let us remember, “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*” (Psalms 46:1).

➤ **The importance of honoring one's word.** Ezekiel 17:11-21 details how Zedekiah reneged on his oath to submit to the king of Babylon, seeking help from Egypt. God said of Zedekiah, “*Since he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and in fact gave his hand and still did all these things, he shall not escape*” (Ezekiel 17:18). God has always expected people to be truthful; He hates lying (see Proverbs 6:16-19). Today, Christians are called to imitate Jesus and His utter lack of any kind of deceit (1 Peter 2:21-22).

➤ **God debases the proud and exalts the humble.** The Bible records how Zedekiah “*did evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD*” (2 Chronicles 36:12). How different things could have been for Zedekiah (and Judah) if he had only humbled himself before God and His prophet! The inspired proverb rings true: “*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*” (Proverbs 16:18). God still expects and calls upon all to be humble (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:5,6).

➤ **The law of sowing and reaping.** Paul writes, “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Galatians 6:7). It is a law of nature, but it is also a spiritual law: one reaps what he has sown. Zedekiah sowed rebellion and reaped ruin. This principle is no less true today (Galatians 6:8).

➤ **Sin is disastrous and far-reaching in effect.** Zedekiah's sins did not affect his life alone; they led to the downfall and ruin of an entire nation! Sin has a leavening effect that extends far beyond just one individual (1 Corinthians 5:6; 15:33).

Zedekiah's life may be summarized in one word: “disastrous.” These things are recorded “*for our learning*” (Romans 15:4). Are we listening?

-- Chad Dollahite

Jesus — the High Priest of Christians

One of the points of emphasis in the book of Hebrews is the fact that Jesus is our high priest. While the Old Testament foretold that the Messiah would be a priest (Zechariah 6:13), only in the book of Hebrews is Jesus called our *high* priest.

Unlike the high priests of God who served under the old covenant, Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi, nor was he a descendant of Aaron. There is a new priesthood under the new covenant, and the Christ stands as our first, last, and only high priest.

What do we learn from the book of Hebrews about our Lord's high priestly status?

- Jesus is a merciful and faithful high priest (2:17).
- Jesus is the high priest of our confession (3:1).
- The Christ is a great high priest (4:14).
- Our high priest has passed through the heavens and is seated at the right hand of the Father (4:14; 8:1).
- As our high priest, Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses. He was tempted in all points as we are, yet He is without sin (4:15). No high priest under the old law was sinless!

• Our Lord did not glorify Himself to become high priest, but was chosen by God (5:5).

• Jesus is not a priest through "*the Levitical priesthood*" (7:11), but is called a high priest "*according to the order of Melchizedek*" (5:10).

• Our high priest is "*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens*" (7:26).

• In contrast to the old covenant priests who offered *animal* sacrifices on a *daily* basis, the Christ offered *Himself* one time, and that one time was sufficient to provide cleansing from sins for all (7:27; 10:11-14).

• The Bible says the Christ came as high priest "*of the good things to come*" (9:11). The law of Moses was "*a shadow of the good things to come*" (10:1), "*the good things to come*" being the spiritual blessings which we now enjoy in Jesus under the new covenant.

• Jesus serves as high priest "*over the house of God*" (10:21), which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15).

• Under the old covenant, some of Israel's high priests were committed to God's plan, cared about their brethren, and were faithful in carrying out their duties. Other high priests failed to serve with honor. What about our high priest? He is perfect in every way, and even now makes intercession for those who come to God through Him (7:25).

Our high priest offers salvation to those who obey Him (5:9). How thankful we ought to be for His salvation and the blessing of being priests under Him.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Lessons from 1 John 5:14-19

This passage is revealing and uplifting!

5:14,15 – Here is a picture of Christians petitioning the Father, making requests of Him. John says God hears and God grants our petitions. That is conditional. On what? We must ask "*according to His will.*" Compare 3:22, where it is written, "*And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*" Knowing that we are walking according to God's truth and ask in harmony with His will, we have confidence as we approach Him (5:14).

5:16 – A brother sins. A second saint sees that the first one has sinned. If the sin committed is "*a sin which does not lead to death,*" the observing brother asks of God and He grants life to the sinning one. Other Bible verses show that a disciple is forgiven when he repents of and confesses sin (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). If the first brother's sin is one that does not lead to death, another brother is *not* to pray for the sinning brother's forgiveness (5:16). Why not? It is implied that the sinning brother has not forsaken his sin. No repentance, no forgiveness. No repentance, no asking for God to forgive the impenitent person. A sin unto death is one which a Christian does not forsake.

5:17 – "*All unrighteousness is sin.*" Any thought, speech, or action that violates God's standard of righteousness is counted as unrighteousness/sin. Folks sometimes categorize sins as "small/mild" and "big/significant." God says *all* unrighteousness is sin.

5:18 – As we earlier studied in 1 John 3:9, one who has been born of God does not sin. That is, he does not become a perpetual slave of sin. A key aspect is this truth: this saint of God "*keeps himself*" (5:18). He practices self-control as he allows God's seed/word to abide in him and direct his actions.

5:19 – "*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*" Here are two concepts that we have seen throughout this epistle. First, we can "*know*" something. Among other things, we know that we know God (2:3), we know that we are in Him (2:5), we know the truth (2:21), we know that we have passed from death to life (3:14), we know that we have eternal life (5:13), and we know that He hears us as we ask (5:15). Second, the term "*of God*" is repeated. In John's language, those who are "*of God*" confess Jesus (4:2), practice righteousness, and love their brethren (3:10).

Though the world is under Satan's sway (5:19), by faith (5:4) we overcome him through our mighty God (4:4) and His word (2:14). God's army is victorious!

-- Roger D. Campbell

THE CHALLENGE TO STAND UP FOR WHAT IS RIGHT WITHOUT BEING OBNOXIOUS OR HATEFUL

The psalmist David declared, “*The Lord is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works*” (Psalm 145:17). Moses also stated, “. . . *His work is perfect . . . Righteous and upright is He*” (Deuteronomy 32:4). God, in His very nature, is right. And He is crystal clear in His word that His people are to stand for what is right.

In the Old Testament, Noah was preaching what was right among people who were ungodly (2 Peter 2:5). Daniel had a moment in his life where he decided not to defile himself with earthly pleasures, but to follow the instructions the Israelites had from God, which were right (Daniel 1:8). And not long after that moment, Daniel’s friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, recognized when they should serve the righteous God of heaven and not the idols of this world (Daniel 3:18).

In the New Testament, Peter and other apostles with him, encountered the option to follow God or men, and they stood firm in their willingness to stand for God, Who is always right (Acts 5:29). The apostle Paul stood for what is right on many occasions in his life, and he encouraged Christians to do the same. He spent eleven verses using the illustration of a soldier’s armor to help Christians understand how important it is to be prepared to stand against the devil, and in that connection, to stand for what is right (Ephesians 6:10-20). Standing for what is right is a fundamental action that followers of God should be taking.

God is also crystal clear in His word that there are attitudes that Christians are to avoid. “*And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all . . .*” (2 Timothy 2:24). “*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice*” (Ephesians 4:31). “*For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another*” (Titus 3:3). Christians should have the right actions *and* the right attitudes behind those actions.

As humans, we often feel good about ourselves when we are correct or right about something. Sometimes that thing is as trivial as a contest or a game. Other times it might be an argument with a family member. Even other times it might be about a spiritual matter. When we feel that good emotion, the feeling in and of itself is not wrong. Paul mentioned several times that he was proud (2 Corinthians 5:12; 7:4), and he did not mean that he is arrogant, obnoxious or hateful. When the Bible speaks about not being proud, it is referring to the attitude we can

have when we think we have it figured out and we do not need God. Or, for our discussion in this article, when we take something that is good (standing for what is right), but allow it to cause an issue because our attitude is misplaced (obnoxious or hateful).

How can Christians maintain this proper balance between standing for what is right and keeping the proper mindset? One key attitude that followers of Christ should wear is compassion. Jesus modeled this attitude throughout His ministry. Mark records that, “*Jesus . . . saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a Shepherd*” (Mark 6:34). This can be easy when we encounter someone who is ignorant of what is right. We may feel compassion because they have never heard the truth and once they hear it, they are willing to listen and change. On the other hand, some people know they are standing for what is wrong and they simply do not care. In this situation, it is much harder for us to maintain the proper attitude. Striving to have the compassion of Christ can help us.

Another important reminder is to realize that we have been told it will be this way (we will face opposition). Jesus plainly stated, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:10). And Peter reminded Christians, “*But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed*” (1 Peter 3:14). We know that we will have to stand for what is right and that many people will revile us for that. So, we must do our best to maintain the proper attitude when we stand for the truth.

The apostle Paul gave us the best example of this challenge when we said, “*but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ*” (Ephesians 4:15). Paul is telling Christians then, and us today, that it is possible to speak the truth and to speak it with the proper attitude. Love is the proper mindset. A love both for the truth and for the person who needs to hear the truth.

The truth is, this will always be a challenge for Christians. As human beings with human emotions, we sometimes fall short of the standard God has set for us. Maintaining a proper attitude will be a challenge, but not impossible.

-- Joel Danley

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