

Finding Your Way

Understanding Your World:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

July 4, 2004

When the Declaration of Independence was penned and signed on July 4th, 1776, no signer knew the outcome. For most who signed the document, a path of suffering and sacrifice unfolded. Some lost property, some lost family and so many lost their health. Many lost their lives. What is more, the rightness or wrongness of their actions had little relationship to the immediate consequences for them. That is real life.

In the ideal life you would get blessed right away if you did right, but in real life you may suffer irreversible loss (at least in this life) if you do what is right. Do you remember the experience of Moses? The Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. God called Moses to lead them out and directed him to confront Pharaoh. The Israelites trusted God and embraced Moses as leader. Do you know what happened? After Moses confrontation, Pharaoh ordered the Israelite slaves to make the same quota of bricks they had before, but now also to gather the materials for the bricks. They couldn't do it. Israelite leaders were beaten, Pharaoh put the blame on Moses, and, the Israelite slaves cursed Moses. Nothing worked out.

Did you know that some time after David was anointed king and 600 men joined to fight with him, they each lost their families? David did too. They later regained them, but before that they nearly stoned David. Now what was to be their compass? What would tell them they are doing what is best? Immediate consequences were not that helpful.

In finding our way as individuals and as a community, we need some sort of compass, don't we? We need to know what life is all about, and what direction we must take, or we will find ourselves lost and wandering. We need to know both what direction and have confirmation that we are headed in the correct direction. Is there some accurate, reliable standard for navigating life? Is there some way to know that our decisions advance us to the goal?

I'm holding a magnetic compass. Did you know that this is only crudely reliable? It actually doesn't point to the North Pole? It points to places in Canada about a thousand miles from the North Pole because the earth's northern magnetic field shifts as the earth changes its tilt with the seasons. In addition, the steel hulls of ships and steel buildings can interfere with its readings. Sailors once used sextants to navigate. They could pinpoint with that instrument where they were and where they wanted to go by measuring the sun, moon or stars in relationship to the horizon. They needed one more thing, an accurate watch. If they were off even 5 seconds, they would wrongly locate themselves by more than a mile.

Now if navigating across the stable and predictable surface of the earth is that complex when the weather is clear, how much more difficult is it to find your way in the changing currents of relationships and society?

King David knew that we all need help. We all need divine guidance. Among his prayer songs, he wrote:

Teach me your ways, O LORD, that I may live according to your truth! (Psalms 86:11, NLT)

David knew that we need more than our own reason. We need more than what human beings can discern. The wisest of the wise can not give us the counsel we need. Since God in his infinite greatness made this wonderful world, with all its creatures and with spiritual hosts in the heavens, we need God to show us his ways so that we do not live in ignorance or deception.

Solomon understood this. He wrote:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths. Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the LORD and turn your back on evil. Then you will gain renewed health and vitality. (Proverbs 3:5-8, NLT)

Solomon is the one human figure most known for his wisdom, and here is his counsel: (1) trust in the Lord with **all** your heart [that means put your whole life in the hands of Yahweh, the God who revealed himself with Abraham and Moses], (2) don't depend on your own thinking [you don't know enough], (3) seek to know God's will in every task [submit everything for his direction and approval], (4) don't be enthralled with your own ideas [check them out with God], (5) fear Yahweh, Jehovah [it's his world and you are accountable to him] and (6) turn away from evil [specifically, the evil of ignoring or disobeying God's commands]. Solomon expects us to cultivate a relationship with the covenant God who has spoken in history to instruct his people. Knowing and implementing his will for your life is your call.

Jesus affirmed that very thing. In a debate with Jewish leaders, he said:

Your problem is that you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God. (Matthew 22:29, NLT)

He told them that their judgment was faulty because of two things: ignorance of Scriptures and underestimating the power of God. He showed those leaders that even God's choice of words to Moses, "I am" versus "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," was significant (Matthew 22:29, Mark 12:24).

How familiar are you with the Bible? Are you consulting the very words that God has provided you for direction and to which you will be held accountable. Jesus said something very interesting about the Bible. When he was about to be stoned for a claim he made, he pointed to the claim's consistency with Psalm 82. Then he told his accusers, "***Scriptures can't be broken***"

(John 10:35, NIV). In other words, its binding on our lives cannot be loosened. God has spoken to our world; and as citizens of this world, we are judged according to our response to his word.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his young apprentice Timothy about fulfilling his purpose, he wrote:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV)

Paul wrote that God breathed every sentence of the Hebrew Scriptures: “All Scripture is inspired by God.” The New Testament carries the authority of Christ, and all Scripture, not some, are written down as a gift from God for four purposes.

First, they are given to teach us. The Bible is given to teach us about God, ourselves, our world and our purpose. God does not want ignorant children.

Second, the Scriptures were written to rebuke us. None of us like to know or admit that we are wrong. However, unless we discover that we are wrong and how we are wrong, we never change. The Bible points out our errors. Are you discovering from the Bible your errors? Ignorance of Scripture leaves us in error.

Third, the Scriptures were written to correct us. Although we need to repent, God really isn't interested in our groveling. Our Father wants to direct your and my steps to restoration as his children. God really wants you to fulfill your purpose and realize your potential while you live on this earth. He caused the Scriptures to be written so that you and I would be so directed.

Fourth, God wants to train us in righteousness. Training is the process of adopting habits that result in fulfilling certain goals. Right living is the goal, and the Bible is given for your training so that you will live righteously.

Do you really believe in the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ? How then do you regard his word? Is his word actually changing and reforming your life?