



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

July 2018

POINTING FINGERS AT OTHERS

See if any of this sounds familiar: the prime minister or president blames the legislature and the legislature blames the top ruling figure in the country. The national government blames the state/provincial governments and the state/provincial governments blame the national government. The coach blames the players and the players blame the coach. The teacher blames the parents and the parents blame the teacher. The husband blames the wife and the wife blames the husband. The overseers blame the congregation and the congregation blames the overseers.

When we say “pointing fingers,” we refer to placing the blame for something on someone else. If a blatant mistake occurs, some activity does not go well, or if something is left undone that should have been done, people often begin pointing fingers.

Finger-pointing is not something that is limited to one gender, one culture, one financial class of people, or those from one level of educational training. It is something that folks from all walks of life do, and it knows no geographic boundaries.

Finger-pointing has been around since the population of the earth was only two people! After Eve and Adam violated God’s instructions by eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they began making excuses. And in this case, their excuses involved pointing fingers at someone else, as if blaming someone else for their misdeed somehow would erase the reality of their own sinful conduct.

After the transgressions took place in the Garden of Eden, God asked Adam, “*Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?*” (Genesis 3:11). What was Adam’s response? “*The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate*” (3:12). Adam admitted that he ate the fruit, but, at least in part, he was pointing a finger at someone else. He pointed a finger at Eve, saying *she* gave him the fruit. And, his words also had “the ring” of blaming God . . . for giving him the women . . . who gave him the fruit.

Well, what about Eve? She, too, did some finger-pointing. When Jehovah asked her, “What is this you have done” (3:13), she admitted that she had, in fact, eaten the fruit, but her complete statement was, “*The*

serpent deceived me, and I ate” (3:13). Instead of taking full responsibility for her failure, she pointed a finger at the serpent.

In the next book of the Bible, we again read of a person who sinned against God, but rather than “man up” and show remorse for his evil-doing, he tried to place the blame on someone else. We are talking about Aaron, the first high priest of Israel and older brother of Moses. What sin did Aaron commit? He led the Israelites in building and worshipping a golden calf. Moses’ question to his elder brother was, “*What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?*” (Exodus 32:21). Aaron’s wimpy, finger-pointing answer was, “*You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, ‘Make us gods that shall go before us . . . And I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out*” (Exodus 32:22-24). At whom did Aaron point a finger? At “the people.” Aaron gave a cowardly, non-sensical, blame-others response. God’s people deserve better leadership than that!

In contrast to the finger-pointers in the world, when King David messed up by committing adultery and other evil deeds, rather than blame someone else, he “told it like it was.” With no stipulations or attempt to minimize his guilt, David declared, “*I have sinned against the LORD*” (2 Samuel 12:13). His sin was ugly, but his spirit of repentance and taking responsibility for his grievous error was beautiful.

The Bible says, “*So then each of us shall give account of himself to God*” (Romans 14:12). It also is written that the God of judgment “*will render to each one according to his deeds*” (Romans 2:6). When we stand before the judgment seat of the risen Son of God, pointing a finger at others will not remove the guilt of any transgressions that we have committed.

If a sin was committed, but we had no involvement in it, we are not responsible for it. On the other hand, if we broke God’s law or failed in some manner when others were counting on us, let us be mature enough to admit our fault, take responsibility for our action, and strive to do better in the future.

-- Roger D. Campbell

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT ABIGAIL?

Does the Bible character Abigail sound familiar to you? She is mentioned for the first time in the Bible in the book of First Samuel. One of the things about Abigail's life which many Bible students recall is that she had "a loser" for a husband, an Israelite by the name of Nabal. Following his death, "*Abigail the Carmelitess*" married David and later gave birth to David's second son, Daniel (1 Chronicles 3:1).

But what about Abigail's character traits? We learn a number of things about her from the divine record found in 1 Samuel 25. Let us take a look at some different aspects of her mentality, speech, and conduct which we see in this passage.

Abigail was *humble*, as she showed when she encountered David for the first time. What did she do in that instance? "*Now when Abigail saw David, she dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground*" (1 Samuel 25:23). Is humility a lost trait in our time? The following two truths are relevant in every period of history: "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*" (1 Peter 5:5).

Abigail was *honest* in her evaluation of her husband when she saw that he treated David rudely. She referred to him as "*this scoundrel Nabal*," saying, "*For as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him! . . .*" (1 Samuel 25:25). Nabal conducted himself foolishly, and Abigail refused to support such behavior.

She was *generous*, as she brought a considerable amount of provisions to feed David and those men who accompanied him (1 Samuel 25:18,27). Would it not be wonderful if all of God's people graciously shared their substance without expecting any type of payback? Having a spirit of hospitality is a quality that should characterize each Christian (Romans 12:13).

Abigail also was *God-revering*, using her tongue to speak with respect and honor about Jehovah (1 Samuel 25:28-31). Would it not be wonderful if all modern-day females and males alike would do the same?! So many people of our day flippantly and disrespectfully refer to the Creator. Among God's children, this should never happen. Instead, we ought to speak and "*serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*" (Hebrews 12:28).

The woman Abigail was *perceptive*, understanding that it was God's will for David to reign over Israel. She knew that God had spoken something concerning David's future on the throne, telling David, ". . . *when the LORD . . . has appointed you ruler over Israel*" (1 Samuel 25:30).

For me personally, the one aspect of Abigail's character which stands out more than anything else is this: this wise woman *had the heart of a servant*. In ancient times, in most cases who was it that had the responsibility of washing the feet of guests and dignitaries? It was the lowest of the servants, right?

Listen to what the Bible tells us about what Abigail did and said when she came before David: "*Then she arose, bowed her face to the earth, and said, 'Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord'*" (1 Samuel 25:41). Abigail basically said, "I will wash the feet of the foot-washers. Count me as the lowest servant." In an age when people have "gone nuts," so to speak, spreading selfies (a photo one takes of him/herself) and self-exalting statements on social media or in any forum where they can get some "Likes" to stroke their egos, it seems to me that we could use a whole lot more hearts like Abigail's — the heart of a humble servant. Jesus, the Master, came to serve others (Mark 10:45), and He plainly proclaimed, "*If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all*" (Mark 9:35).

What we read in the Bible about Abigail reminds us that one does not have to be well-known in order to make an impression on and influence others. Though she would not be categorized as a "major" character in Bible history, and although she lived about three thousand years ago, she continues to send a message to you and me by her attitude, words, and behavior, much like Abel by his faith speaks to us (Hebrews 11:4).

Abigail was not a perfect person. She did, however, manifest some admirable qualities: she was humble, honest, generous, God-revering, perceptive, and possessed a servant's heart. In every generation, people of both genders, young ones and older ones, too, can learn from her. The Old Testament was recorded and preserved for our learning (Romans 15:4). We are blessed to have its record about Abigail. Let us be thankful for it.

-- Roger D. Campbell

LORD, HELP ME TO HAVE A SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

It is scriptural to remind faithful saints of God about their obligations before Him. It also is biblical to encourage those same faithful people to grow in their service to the Lord. It is proper, too, to inform slackers that they need to make improvements. When it comes to our own personal spiritual development, the Bible makes it plain that (1) it is *possible* for us to grow in that fashion and (2) the Lord *expects* us to do just that.

A personal question: How are you doing when it comes to sacrificing? Do you make sacrifices? To sacrifice means to give up something (or live without something) which we value for the sake of something else which we deem to be more important. In general, why do people give up things which they enjoy or from which they get satisfaction? For some, their sacrifices are made for health reasons. For others, it may be for financial reasons, to improve their relationship with another person, to obtain a particular job, or to stay out of prison. Or, on the spiritual side, it may be that a person makes sacrifices to please God.

One who carefully considers the Bible's message learns that sacrificing is part of serving the Lord. It is God's will for each Christian to present his body as a living sacrifice to Him (Romans 12:1). The Master calls on all who follow Him to deny themselves and take up their cross each day (Luke 9:23). He even said that those who do not forsake everything cannot be His disciple (Luke 14:33). So, sacrifice is not optional, but "comes with the territory" of following Jesus.

Who are some Bible characters who made sacrifices in order to serve the God of heaven? Abraham left his homeland (Genesis 12) and was willing to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22). When a man offered to give David the animals and wood needed for a burnt sacrifice, the king's response was, "*No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing*" (2 Samuel 24:24).

Four fishermen "forsook all" in order to become fishers of men (Luke 5:11; Mark 1:17-20). A poor widow cast all of her money into the treasury (Mark 12:41-44). Early disciples willingly sold material possessions and gave the money to the apostles for the work of the church (Acts 4:34-37). Faithful first-century saints "*risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 15:26). The churches of Macedonia gave liberally, despite facing "*a great trial of affliction*" and living in "*deep poverty*" (2 Corinthians 8:1,2). We are fascinated to read about a brother by the name of Epaphroditus, about whom it is written that "*for the work of Christ he came close to*

death" (Philippians 2:30). The sacrificial spirit shown by the early saints stands as a great example for us.

The spirit of sacrifice continues in the lives of many modern-day Christians. We know of cases where people became Christians and were forsaken by their family as a result. Still, they remained faithful to the Lord. We have seen members of the church do without material items in order to give sacrificially to help others or support a church project. We know men who have given up high-paying jobs in order to become gospel preachers. Other disciples have forsaken activities from which they received great enjoyment, in some cases doing so because those activities were sinful, and in other instances letting go of them because they feared those activities were a hindrance to their influence on others.

It may be that a big portion of what we call "sacrifice" in our lives does not really constitute much of a sacrifice at all. In the big picture of things, how great of a sacrifice is it to give up soft drinks, coffee, or tea? How much of a sacrifice is it to give up eating pizza or reducing the number of meals we eat out in a restaurant? What about giving up satellite/cable TV or air conditioning? Some of us old-timers can recall the earlier days of our lives when drinking soft drinks was a rarity, if we ate pizza at all our moms made it, there was no satellite TV available, and we survived without air conditioning in our homes. When I read my Bible and see the sacrifices that our brothers and sisters made in the first century, I see a vast difference in what they gave up compared to giving up what we sometimes label as "creature comforts." You may or may not be aware of it, and you may have no desire to hear it, but today in a number of areas in the world, we have faithful brothers and sisters who have minimal material stuff, yet they have a heart devoted to the Christ and a sacrificial spirit. The key thought is not to count material objects and earthly activities, but to have a heart that is willing to sacrifice.

The Godhead's sacrifices on our behalf ought to move us! God gave His only begotten Son for you and me (John 3:16). The Christ gave up His rich estate in heaven to become poor. Why? So we might be rich through His poverty (2 Corinthians 8:9).

When Peter reminded Jesus that he and the other apostles had left all to follow Him, He told them that there will be rewards for those who make sacrifices for Him. Some will come in this life. The greatest reward will be eternal life in the age to come (Mark 10:30). Lord, help us not to whine about what we lack. Rather, lead us to have a spirit of sacrifice for You.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Matthew 7:13,14 – Two Paths Which Lead to Two Eternal Destinies

As part of His amazing “Sermon on the Mount,” the Master declared, “*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*” (Matthew 7:13,14). In these verses, we read about two gates, two ways, two groups of people, and two eternal destinations/destinies.

If you and I are familiar with those words of Jesus, that is *great*. If we accept the truthfulness of them, that is *better*. If we are applying their teaching in our own lives and declaring them (along with the principles and specific Bible teaching which are connected with them) to others, that is *even better*. After all, at the end of the day, of what benefit is it to me personally if I acknowledge the truth but fail to use it properly in my own life?

Jesus’ message about paths, gates, and destinies involves a choice, and that choice is ours to make. What does our Lord want each one of us to do? His message is clear, but does our desire match His? He implores mankind to enter “*by the narrow gate*” (Matthew 7:13). If He calls on us to take that action, then it is possible to do it, correct? We are reminded that Jesus also said we must “*Strive to enter through the narrow gate . . .*” (Luke 13:24). To “strive” means to put forth great effort, even when difficulties are faced.

Let us **compare the two ways**. One way is *broad*. It is, as we say, the path of least resistance. It is the way of doing your own thing, going along with the crowd, or focusing on the here-and-now aspects of life. The broad way leads to a wide gate. There is a better choice, though, and that is taking the *difficult* path which leads to a narrow gate. One who decides to travel this path will not find it easy to stay committed to it. It is one thing to *begin* going down this path, but it is an entirely different matter to *stick with it* until the end of life. One who travels the difficult path will face resistance along the way. Come what may, he is required by the Lord to sacrifice himself, forsake all for Jesus’ sake (Luke 14:33), and keep his focus on the spiritual and eternal. Such a life is not for little children!

Let us **compare the two eternal destinies**. According to the Christ, one path leads to destruction. That would be what He later called “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46). It will be eternal destruction from God (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The other way/path sounds much better! It leads to life, which

the Bible calls “eternal life” (Matthew 25:46). And the only way to have such wonderful, never-ending life is through Jesus. In God’s arrangement, there is no third alternative: there are *eternal life* and *eternal destruction*, period.

Let us **compare how many people are taking the two paths** which Jesus mentioned. The Master said that “many” are traveling the path to destruction (Matthew 7:13). Such a declaration is heart-wrenching for those who genuinely love the souls of men. The reality of many humans living out of harmony with the Creator’s will does not shock us, though, as we reflect on the widespread, yes, universal rebellion against God in the days of Noah, when only eight people were spared destruction (Genesis 6:5; 1 Peter 3:20).

What about the number of people who are taking the path that leads to life eternal? The Christ said, “. . . *there are few who find it*” (Matthew 7:14). In these matters, did Jesus speak accurately? Of course, He did! Never did He or the Holy Spirit-guided biblical writers tell us exactly how many folks will be lost or what percentage of people will be saved eternally. The contrast, however, grabs our attention: *many* to destruction and *few* to life.

The only thing that can keep us out of heaven is sin . . . *our own* personal sin. Why will so many be lost when they leave this world? There are multiple correct answers to that question, but from the context of what we have been examining in Matthew 7:13,14, here are four matters to consider:

- (1) Some live for self and think of self above others rather than apply “the Golden Rule” (7:12).
- (2) False prophets lead people astray and devour them (7:15).
- (3) Some are involved in religious activities, but do not submit to the Father’s will (7:21-23).
- (4) Some make the unwise choice to disregard what Jesus says and build their life on sand (7:24-27).

Friend, the choice is ours. Will we make the wise decision to submit to the will of the Lord so we can live with Him eternally? Let each one of us make this resolution in our heart: “Regardless of what any other human might do or say, I want to live for the Lord and follow the path that leads to heaven.”

-- Roger D. Campbell

[Unless stated otherwise, all quotes in all articles of TRUTH come from the New King James Version; ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.]

TRUTH is published monthly by the Green’s Lake Road church of Christ in order to help educate, edify, encourage, and equip the saints of God