

So we all know those who claim to be Christians – followers of Jesus – but whose consistent life choices are in opposition to the truth given in the Word of God. Perhaps they are involved in some addictive behavior – gambling, drugs, alcohol, over spending, pornography, lying, stealing. Or perhaps they are living in sexual impurity – adultery, sexual activity outside of marriage, homosexuality. Or perhaps they are rejecting behaviors taught by God to be associated with followers of Christ – not involved in the Church, not reading the Bible, not praying, not forgiving, not showing love.

How are we to encounter such as these? Surely God wants us show love as we challenge such to godly behavior. But what should we say? What should we NOT say? Well, let's learn from our Master, Jesus, from an encounter He had with those who had “believed” Him and claimed to be the sons of God, walking in the truth, and yet were actively engaged in sin. So here is how this Jesus encounter begins:

John 8:31 *So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*

So we encounter someone who claims to be a Christian, yet is actively involved in sinful practice – whether sin of commission or sin of omission. I'm not talking about someone who has lied recently or only goes to church occasionally. These are issues that he/she must indeed address as a believer. But I'm talking about someone who has a consistent life style of disobeying God's Word to DO or NOT DO something, and are living in denial of their need to change.

#1 I am called to share TRUTH presented in LOVE

Ephesians 4:15 *But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up on all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.*

Truth shared without love comes across as a hammer of judgment. Love shared without truth comes across as weak, mild concern with no real encouragement to change. The challenge for us is to balance truth with love. And the emphasis in Ephesians 4:15 is to bring TRUTH to the conversation, presented in LOVE. TRUTH is to be the emphasis, LOVE is to be the presentation.

Again, this is how Jesus began his encounter with the false disciples of 8:31 and following – emphasizing the importance of TRUTH in Christian behavior.

John 8:31b-32 *If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*

Translation for our encounter might be: “As a Christian, your choices must reflect a devotion to what God says is right. And once you follow what God says in His Word is right, you will truly be set free by His truth.” And then you might follow up with asking, “Are you aware that God has something to say about your choice to (whatever the wrong choice is)?” “Will you follow God's truth revealed?”

Keep in mind that truth presented in love must not only use loving words, but must also demonstrate a loving attitude behind which is a sincere, loving motivation to restore and rehabilitate.

But keep truth and love in balance. Don't be so loving in your delivery as to be ineffective in your challenge, or so overpowering in your sharing of truth to shut the ears and harden the heart of your hearer.

#2 I am called to understand consistent sin as SLAVERY

Jesus goes on in His encounter to say:

John 8:34 *Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is he slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*

Those involved in a consistent sin pattern must be made aware that they are in essence a slave of that sin. They really don't have the power in and of themselves to break free, but need the power of Jesus. That's what it means *"if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."* Only when one waves the "white flag" of surrender and sincerely reaches out to the Almighty is there truly power to overcome the addiction that sin brings. This can be your loving message of truth and hope.

Now when Jesus uses this example of the slave and the son, with the son remaining forever - to what is He alluding? I believe it is that the true child of God will indeed listen to the Father, follow the teaching of His Word, and never be kicked out of God's house because he is truly a child of the Father. But a slave has no hold on the house or the relationship with the Father. His disobedience will not only get him kicked out of the house, but also show that he was never a legitimate son in the house to begin with. In other words, a true Christian ultimately listens to the Father and does it God's way, and a false Christian does not. "So which are you?" you might ask. Jesus also said it this way:

John 10:27 *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."*

That's why Jesus would say to these supposed disciples: *"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."* In other words, He is saying, "The fact that you are presently acting outside of God's Word calls serious question as to whether you are truly a follower of the Lord. Only if you respond to His voice and willingly return to Him will you show yourself to be His true disciple." Yes, these are convicting words, but they are TRUTH, hopefully shared in LOVE.

#3 I am called to teach that for the Christian, WALK must match TALK

John 8:37-39 . *I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father. They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus *said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham."*

Now Jesus is speaking to Jews here, who claim spirituality because of their allegiance to Abraham. In our encounters we will find people of all "stripes" who claim a spiritual connection to God because of any number of backgrounds, church affiliations, or deeds performed. To these we can say, "If you are truly a child of God, then your godly deeds and lifestyle must match your claim."

At this point you might get the response of "judge! or "hypocrite!" But there is no argument that Jesus makes it clear that His followers will listen to and follow His teachings. No, I'm not perfect. But when I realize I'm disobeying His Word I turn (repent) and follow Him afresh. Your response could be "Is this what you want to do – turn and follow Him?"

#4 I am called to know that the DEVIL is behind all spiritual rebellion

Here Jesus brings one more major "truth" into His encounter. He mentions their father as being other than God, the Heavenly Father. And in the following verses He gets more specific by referencing "the devil" as their father.

John 8:41a,42,44 *"You are doing the deeds of your father. If God were your Father, you would love Me ... You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar*

and the father of lies.

First, note that Jesus clearly believes in the devil as a real and active being. He is not some figment of imagination like the “boogie man” or the “dark side of the force.” He is real, he is the enemy of God and all that is good, and he is actively seeking to dissuade all from following God’s truth by his lies. All lies are rooted in him, for he is “the father of lies.” Not here, but in other Scripture, he is shown to be a created being who rebelled from God and now is the full time enemy of all goodness and truth.

That doesn’t mean we can blame all sin on the devil, for we have a sin nature that is fully capable of rebelling without any devil influence. But behind every lie and every rebellion from the truth is the devil, the father of lies. This is the message given by Jesus.

My suggestion is that our best effort in truthful and loving encounter would NOT be to say to our hearer that he/she is being led by Satan (though that might well be the case). But we can reference Jesus in mentioning that there is another voice (of the devil) that is influencing, for every time one acts contrary to God’s revealed truth he/she is playing into Satan’s hand.

Paul the apostle taught of that “other voice” speaking in our spiritual ear:

Galatians 5:7-8 *You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you.*

So another “tool” in our encounter “tool belt” would be to reference the influence of the devil in our poor life decisions and the importance of listening to the correct “voice.”

#5 A Christian will ultimately follow the GOD-MAN JESUS

John 8:45-47, 58 *But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God. . . Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM [God].*

Bottom line, Jesus was and is God in the flesh. He has remained God in the flesh even to this day in heaven, forever the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” (*John 1:29*) Either we follow Jesus as Lord and God, or we reject Jesus as Lord and God. If we follow Jesus then we will (1) believe Him as God, (2) know that He speaks only truth, (3) hear His voice of truth, (4) and obey that truth. If one claiming to be a follower of Jesus continues in sin, he thus proves himself not to be a follower of God (a Christian).

This is the level of teaching Jesus achieved in His encounter. If we can reach this level we will have followed the Master’s example in challenging one who claims to be a Christian but doesn’t show it.

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#3 I am called to teach that for the Christian, WALK must match TALK

#4 I am called to know that the DEVIL is behind all spiritual rebellion

#5 I am called to follow the GOD-MAN JESUS

If the Son makes you free, you are free indeed. So follow the Son and “be free indeed”!