

Light Brings Salt

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Iron Range Bible Church

Dedicated to the Systematic Exposition of the Word of God



SIMPLE TRUTHS; PROFOUND IMPLICATIONS:

The following is an excerpt from a newsletter I get from a retired pastor with comments on the ongoing scene out there in the church as he sees it. He is very often very insightful on the issues of the day. At the top of the newsletter his heading is this:

THE WOODCHUCK'S DEN

The work of Dr. Charles "Chuck" Wood
Retired pastor and educator
Current husband, father, grandfather, great
grandfather,
Bible teacher, writer and contrarian.

The truly profound is often really quite simple. Whenever I think of that truth, I think of the preaching of Warren Wiersbe. I have often come away from hearing him with the impression that the message was so simple that it was hardly worth the time, only to find myself a week later still thinking through all the implications of what he had said. There are some simple truths in the Christian life that have profound implications, and the tragedy seems to be that these simple truths are seldom grasped by a significant portion of God's people. The following forms just a little sampling of the phenomenon.

No one can make me do anything I choose not to do. Simple? Yes, but the issue at the heart of martyrdom.

Everything I do or don't do is a matter of personal choice. That choice may be subconscious, the result of habit or even reflexive, but it is a choice none-the-less. Children have a tendency to defend themselves on the basis of, "he/she made me do it." It's a nice ploy, but it is uniformly untrue. Unfortunately, we carry that same defective thinking into adulthood to our own detriment.

I am responsible for my own choices and actions.

This statement arises out of the previous truth, but it goes down hard. The problem with it is that it establishes individual responsibility and strips one of all possible "blame-shifts" and excuses. Scripture is very clear that each of us will appear at the judgment seat of Christ to give account of his own performance, etc. It is also quite clear that none of us will answer for anyone else, nor will anyone else answer for us. We are responsible for the choices we make and the actions we take. If such is the case, then we also bear the full measure of responsibility for the consequences of those choices and actions. This is a tough truth in a victim-oriented world as it puts the blame squarely where it belongs - on each of us as an individual. It is also, however, a very liberating truth as it takes control of our lives away from others and places it in our own hands. For instance, I grew up in poverty caused by the "Great Depression" and in what was in some ways a rather dysfunctional family. It would have been easy to accept a "loser" role in life (victimized by the childhood poverty) and to replicate my own unhappy childhood family situation, saying that it's just the way I am because that is the way I was raised, and there is nothing I can do about it. I didn't chose to be born three years after the great stock market crash, and I didn't chose a father to whom I was almost completely unable to relate, but choices regarding my response and reaction to those outwardly-imposed circumstances were entirely mine. My responses have been far from a model of such, but I have chosen to rise above the poverty and to

structure a family far different from what was patterned to me as a child (my brother and late sister also made the same choices with essentially the same results). Without meaning to be arrogant or self-congratulatory, I grow tired of the whining excuse-makers and their endless wails of, "I can't help it...." I often want to say - and sometimes have said - "If you can't help it, exactly who can?" Tragically, so many of my own generation are living in self-imposed misery because of their unwillingness to take responsibility for the choices and responses that have led them to the situations in which they find themselves "trapped." If it is someone else's fault, then there is nothing I can do about it. If it is the result of my own choices, then I can change the choices and at least alter the outcomes (and this is true at any point in life - it is never "too late").

No matter what anyone else does, I am responsible to do right. I am responsible to treat others in a Biblical manner no matter how they may treat me (the Bible tells us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us; it does not say that we are to do unto others as they have done unto us). Fifty years of involvement in ministry have taught me that there is a "mean streak" in fundamentalism (likely related to the strong stress on separation, which is negative by nature). I have experienced my share of insults, false accusations, hypocrisy, "friendly fire," and the like. I have even endured deliberate "black-balling" that has somewhat limited the scope of my ministry. Because of my own carnality in the flesh, I have not always responded well to such treatment, but I have always known in my heart that I was responsible to do right no matter what anyone else did or said. There is so much clear Biblical teaching on this subject that it shouldn't be necessary to make specific citations, and Scripture also provides us special assistance with its frequent assurances that God will right the wrongs and settle the scores ("Vengeance is mine, I **will** repay, saith the Lord"). I have lived

long enough to know that "what goes around, comes around," as I have seen it happen numerous times. Natural impulse pushes us to respond in kind, but succumbing to such inner drives only increases the amount of evil in the world. It also violates the Word of God at a variety of points.

Right is its own reward. In fairy tales everyone "lived happily ever after." In real life it frequently doesn't work out that way. I have seen people do right and be rewarded with salary increases, bonuses, and heaps of praise. I have, however, seen others do equally as right and be rewarded with "a kick in the teeth," job termination, slander, and other forms of great loss. Over the last few years I have watched someone repeatedly face choices and chose to do what is almost beyond right rather than even skirt the edges of ethical conduct. As the situation has digressed, there has been no tangible "reward" (although God has done some obvious internal "reconstruction"), but the commitment to right has remained firmly in place. Reward will come, but it may not be in the areas in which the losses have been suffered. Regardless, the individual involved has the very satisfying reward of knowing beyond the shadow of a doubt that right has been done. For the child of God, that knowledge, in itself, ought to be sufficient reward to keep one going until the time when the eternal reward will exponentially overshadow any possible earthly reward. How we need to teach our children and young people this simple truth as its implications are profound. Right is often - even usually - rewarded in some tangible way. When it is not, however, the very fact that right has been done must be seen as itself the reward.

So much for this time. There are more, but these should provide an adequate "meal for your mental mill." Each of these maxims has sufficient Biblical support as to be the subject for a sermon (or series of sermons) or a lesson for a Sunday school class or small group Bible study. Simple truths with profound implications!