

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

When trying to teach a child good manners, when they demand something, a parent will often prompt,....

“What do you say?”

>Please< is the expected response.

It is proper to teach good manners to children, this is especially true when it reflects honesty and sincerity.

Yet, are we being charlatans? Are we pretenders? No matter one's age, in our society, we value good manners and crafted words because we know, as James pointed out in chapter 3, the tongue can truly be destructive.

In our pursuit of appearing to have good manners, are we squelching honesty, and thus encouraging deception? Are we hypocrites? Do we cover up our true thoughts just so we can look good on the surface?

Cultivated etiquette, decorum or manners are desired and necessary in a civilized society. Good behaviour makes life more gentle and pleasant, especially for parents.

However, sometimes,... and maybe too often, honesty and integrity is lost in the fluff of polite and costumed words.

James warns us about those who abuse words, and he is convinced that the message will, eventually reveal the content of the bearer.

.....History does tend to reveal lies that are covered up.

?Are we honest? Do our words match our truth.... our actions?

Do our words match our being, thoughts and spirit??????

Remember the children's show “The Friendly Giant”?

I have fond memories of watching that show when I was young.

Ben Homme [Haw' mee] was the actor for the show, which lasted 26 years and over 3,000 programs. His was the longest running children's television show in Canada.

It was a unique show, based upon a simple format: a minimum of personalities (only Jerome the Giraffe and Rusty the Rooster); a stubborn belief in the power of imagination,.... **and** a fierce respect for children.

Underlying it all was a powerful message, which was: **everyone is welcome; all are valued and respected.**

What is less well-known is that Bob Homme lived what he portrayed on his show.

He rejected repeated offers to make more money and worldwide syndication contracts from sponsors that insisted that the roster of characters be expanded in order to allow marketing of “Friendly Giant play figures” and other money-making possibilities for the show.

Homme wanted to inspire and entertain children, not exploit them!

He lived his life in harmony with the values presented on his show. He was honest in word and action.

Sadly, I believe, we expect less these days. Perhaps, we have been exploited so many times we are now numb! ????

It seems we expect people to deceive us.....???

In the Mark passage, Jesus **does not** settle for the polite, “fluff” answer. He pushes his question until they truly understand its probe to the heart.

In everyday civility, we will greet someone and ask, “How are you doing?” And, we settle for the vapid–dull and vague response, “Fine,” rarely seeking a deeper, more straightforward reply.

Jesus asks, in general, what everybody thinks of him.

The disciples render a polite answer, no doubt concealing the negative comments that they’ve heard.

Jesus pushes his question for specifics, and asks Peter.

Peter presents a wonderfully safe and respectful response, “You are the Messiah.”

In Old Testament thinking, a Messiah could be a priest, prophet or king; the label designated an “anointed” one who would be a deliverer.

The New Testament view was a little more narrow than that. It was believed that the Messiah was a great deliverer, with political overtones, who was sent from God.

Jesus doesn’t settle for the vague answer. He clarifies his role: what his life and ministry means in the way of consequences and demands.

Then, Peter reveals his honest thoughts and hopes about who Jesus was, and is rebuked by Jesus.

In verse 34, Jesus presents his question in a compound form which includes what it means to follow him.

Before I continue,I want to point out one important benefit of open honesty, which is it allows and invites correction and clarity.

An honest statement invites an honest response... which can prompt an opportunity to learn and grow.

Can we handle that?

Can we survive without it?

To follow Jesus, one must have a realistic perception of who Jesus is and what it means to follow. Jesus knows this, and that is why he presents the compound question about “denying self and taking up one’s cross.”

There are many concepts / perceptions of Jesus.

This line of thinking is called Christology. And, how we perceive Jesus Christ greatly affects our theology and how we live.

There are some that say that Jesus and the Gospel message are mostly for those who believe,..... that the “Kingdom” only affects believers.

Those with this perception, accept the teachings and virtues of Christ’s message for themselves,yet releases nonbelievers and the secular domain to another set of principles. The adherents of this interpretation would

declare **two kingdoms** – a double standard: God’s and the secular world. In the Two Kingdom view, there are two domains—the Christian’s spiritual realm... and the rest of the heathen world. Thus, believer can live by two sets of rules. With two Kingdoms, a Christian can be for peace and kill in the name of peace.

It is simpler to live in two kingdoms / domains, yet it prompts many problems.

Listen to some differing views:

Some ask, “Why didn’t the German church in the 1930's speak out against the policies of Nazi government?”

Some say, we don’t want to hear about national concerns in church.

What do you say?

Some say we should incorporate current events in worship.

Some say we should not because we want to come to church to escape and ignore the ugliness of the world.

What do you say?

Some say we should just do our part and not worry about politics.

Some say doing justice includes community and world involvement, and politics can’t be separated from the Gospel Message.

What do you say?

Some say morality is a government concern.

Some say we are part of the government and the problem and the solution.

What do you say?

Another understanding of Jesus and the Gospel focusses on Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins. This limited view of salvation asserts we must ‘believe in this atoning sacrifice’ called “Accepting Jesus” to be saved. The great revivals were based on this Christology.

This perception produces an “US” and “THEM” mentality-- the “saved” and the “lost.”

And please note: All perceptions include some truth. Yet, the danger with this one is that it can mutate into moral arrogance where the “saved”, in their narrow understanding, are more holy, justified and righteous than the rest.

The Crusades, persecutions and other abuses were based on this view.

Mennonites were persecuted by the Lutherans because Anabaptists were not really saved,... so they claimed.

Some contrasts:

Some say we should go after and kill the bad guys.

Some say we all do eviland we are all made in the image of God.

What do you say?

Some say it is our moral imperative to use violence to end what is evil. Some say violence, for any reason, is evil.

What do you say?

Some say severe punishment is a necessary deterrent. Criminals must suffer.

Some say we dare not play judge; we should be gracious and no one is beyond hope.

What do you say?

Another opinion of Jesus is that he was a prophet or a wise teacher or even a gifted, spiritually wise servant for God,.... but **not divine**.

Agnostics would likely feel comfortable with this view, as would those who align with other types of religions.

Therefore:

Some say that we must fight for social change, that it is up to us to save the world.

Some say self discipline and social reform isn't enough.

What do you say?

Some say that we all have potential to be as Christ.

Some say only those who believe in Christ have hope.

What do you say?

Another view of Christ is as the Logos, the all knowing and very divine presence on earth. This perception overlooks the flaws of human weakness that Jesus may have had.

This type of Christ radiates from John's Gospel.

The mighty, all powerful Jesus presents "awe", yet that Christ also creates frustration..... because That Jesus is too divine a model and it forces us to become an existentialist failure.

We can't follow a Christ who is perfect? We really can't.

Yet....

Some say we must pretend to be as Christ, that a righteous image is critical. Therefore, we must at least smile and pretend we are happy.

Some say that it is okay to honestly reveal our weaknesses.

What do you say?

Some say Christ is too perfect to emulate, therefore we want our pastor to be our model, to be as perfection.

Some say, if we cannot be as Christ, then we should NOT project Christ on the pastor.

Others say, "I know the pastor; he is very human." ☺

What do you say?

Another interpretation includes elements of the others.

It asserts that Jesus lived, taught and demonstrated how we are to be; that he was fully human (in every way), and was fully divine.

This view combines the image of Jesus as the gracious face **and** outreaching hand of God. This Christ truly knows what it means to be human.....and so can realistically challenge believers to follow him – to be as Jesus in the world. This Jesus calls us to be followers of God's way / followers of Christ.

*Some say this perception is too complicated, too full of inconsistencies, not practical, and **too demanding**.

Some say we must strive to embrace Christ in body, mind and spirit, regardless of the risks and set backs.

What do you say?

Some say Jesus lived and proclaimed peace.

Some say we can do redemptive violence because we are called to be the agents of justice.

What do you say?

Some say since Jesus did Not address the current hot button issues like abortion or homosexuality, we must turn back to Old Testament legalism for direction?

Some say Jesus' example of empathy, compassion, grace and loving acceptance are clear enough for all situations.

What do you say?

Some say what about terrorists and other threats to our sovereignty? We Must spent money for a strong military to defend our interests?

Some say what about those who are killed by American and Canadian troops?

Some say millions die from hunger each year, we need to spend our money helping the poor.

What do you say?

Some say Christians should just be nice, keep people happy and not make waves.

Some say following Christ means standing up against destructive industries and marching to keep our planet safe for generations to come.

What do you?

When confronted by Christ, WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Who do you say Jesus is? What do you say to God?

*What do you say when you hear, You must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus?

*What do you say to Jesus' challenge of "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for Christ's sake and the sake of the Gospel will save it?"

What do you say?

WHAT DO WE SAY?

More importantly,

What do our lives say?

Do our actions match our words?

Are WE following in the steps of Jesus?

What do WE say.....and Do?

DO our Words match our lives?

Are we Honest – in truth..... or a lie?

What do you say?