



Truth Matters

A Publication Discussing Matters Related To Truth Because Truth Matters

Scripture Reading
Week of
August 14th - 20th



Monday

- ❖ Job 7, 8
- ❖ Psalm 140
- ❖ 2 Corinthians 12

Tuesday

- ❖ Job 9, 10
- ❖ Psalm 141
- ❖ 2 Corinthians 13

Wednesday

- ❖ Job 11, 12
- ❖ Psalm 142
- ❖ Galatians 1

Thursday

- ❖ Job 13, 14
- ❖ Psalm 143
- ❖ Galatians 2

Friday

- ❖ Job 15, 16
- ❖ Psalm 144
- ❖ Galatians 3

Saturday

- ❖ Job 17, 18

Sunday

- ❖ Job 19, 20

Discerning Dogs and the Masters Who Train Them *Developing Christian Discernment*



Another day dawned for Fenced-in Fido. He was released to the back yard for the day as his master went off to work. Fido did his usual routine: he ran the borders of the fence barking and yipping at the wind. No one was watching, but just in case, he was establishing his territory.

Even to the casual observer, there is a well-worn track around the fence-line while the center of the yard is plush and green - territory seldom enjoyed by Fenced-in Fido. He is so preoccupied with this fence. He spends his days challenging, charging and chasing everything on the other side of the fence. He pauses ever so often to simply sit and whine as he watches other dogs at play in the park across the street. He so badly longs to be free of this fence so he can race across the street and be free in the park.

This article is a follow-up to one written last week addressing Fundamentalism and discernment. In that article I articulated my own opinion based upon my experiences within Fundamentalism that they suffer from the dearth of discernment. In fact, I charged the movement with not training their people to be discerning. I introduced you to two dogs in the last article: Fenced-in Fido and Well-Trained T-Bone. The point was simple. Fenced-in Fido is dependent upon a fence built by someone who has no relationship and no daily interaction with him while Well-Trained T-Bone has become accustomed to the voice of his master such that he can go into the park and walk along the street unfettered by a leash and free from any fence. T-Bone is, however, reined in by the voice of his master. T-Bone has learned his master's voice. He tunes out other calls, cries and invitations for his attention and he zones-in on his master's commands. It is one thing to simply build fences; it is quite another thing to train your dog to obey your commands.

Every person on the planet does everything they do because they want to. Nobody ever does anything they do not

want to do. Think about that statement because it will probably strike you as false. It is, however, absolutely true. In everything we do, we do that which will please us.

The reason this axiom seems to be counterintuitive is because it appears to minimize the conflict of choices. My son wants to go outside and play when I call him to take out the garbage. Have you ever been conflicted between two choices? Obviously, we all have. What is going on in such conflicts? Are we not simply weighing the options to discern which choice will please us the most? Ultimately, every decision and every choice is made upon the belief that it is the right decision at the time for bringing about our happiness - and lack thereof. Of course, certain choices are manifested later to have been unwise; but given the evidence you had at the time or given the fact that you ignored evidence at the time of decision, it was still made with the belief that it was right for your pleasure.

When we are conflicted between choices, we set out to discern which choice will bring about our happiness. The key word in that last sentence is the

... continued on page 2

Fence Building and Dog Training

The Residue of Fundamentalism's Dearth of Discernment

...continued from page 1

word discern. Discerning hearts and minds are what we are called to as Christians. *What is discernment? Where does it come from? And what does the process look like?* These are the questions I wish to address.

Well-Trained T-Bone has learned that the more dependent he is upon the voice of his master and the more closely he adheres to his commands, the more freedom he has to enjoy the park. Well-Trained T-Bone has a relationship with his master. Fenced-in Fido, on the other hand, has no need of a relationship with his master because he is secure behind his fence.

To the casual observer walking by the yard belonging to Fenced-in Fido he looks like any other dog: full of life, full of energy, bouncing and yipping at anything that passes. But to those who sit on the park bench across the street from his yard and carefully watch there is another side all together. Fenced-in Fido runs back-and-forth along his path barking and yipping. He stops frantically from time to time and paws at the dirt beneath the fence. Any human can clearly read his thoughts: "I gotta get outa here! I gotta get outa here!" repeated over and over as he pants and paws at the dirt. The dog is clearly restless and unsettled. You get tired just watching his frantic pace as he pauses only long enough to whine and whimper and yip at the other dogs.

I told you last time what happened the day that Fido finally squeezed under the fence: He got three paces into the street as he set out to race across to the park when he was smashed beneath the tires of a car. Oops! Fido had not been trained on how to handle cars. I also gave you an alternate ending in case that one was too abrupt. Imagine that Fido made it to the other side of the street. He finally felt the plush grass of the green park. There were countless dogs there with their masters and a few without masters. He approached the first dog he saw.

CLAMP! With one clamp of Roscoe the Rotweiler's jaws, Fido's neck was broken. Oops! Fido had not been trained on how to approach other dogs. Fido had spent 18 years preoccupied with the fence. In his mind, his only problem was the fence. But once free from the fence, he was awakened to a whole world of dangers.

You see, when all we do for our children, teens, and adults is establish mere rules and standards, we are simply building fences that require no relationship with a master. We communicate to them that as long as you stay within the boundaries you are safe. That may be true but it fails on three massive fronts:

- (1) It fails to address the reality that the fence may not and likely will not always be there!
- (2) It fails to address the heart issues in people who will beat-down the path because they just want to be "outa here!"
- (3) It fails to cultivate a relationship with the voice of their master.

When all we do is build fences without cultivating a relationship with the master, we instill a minimalist mindset in believers - a mindset that asks, "What is wrong with this?" - a mindset that constantly lives life on the edge seeking to get as close as it can to the boundary because the other side looks more appealing. We must show them that the un-trod grass in the middle of their yard is just as plush, soft and green as the grass on the other side of the fence in the park. They must first have a relationship with a master and not a fence! There are all kinds of implications here for Christian parenting that I hope you can see. Children need boundaries but not at the expense of a relationship to a master. More than a fence they need Christ.

How can we train ourselves, our children

and our teens to be discerning? How can we train them on how to approach other dogs and cars? How can we truly guarantee their security and safety?

What is Discernment?

The English word *discern* is used in the New Testament to translate a family of words that have to do with testing and approving. Discernment is really "the process of examination" of a situation, activity, person or message that seeks to determine whether or not is to be approved. I stated last time that all Fundamentalists ask the question: "Is it approved?" But the problem is in who sets the standard. As a pastor, I only set the standards for what will happen in the corporate gathering of the church. Beyond that, I have no authority over a person. I am not their master. This has massive implications in what we say we believe regarding the priesthood of believers. Each person answers to God for him or herself. No one answers to me unless they are in the context under my charge.

As Well-Trained T-Bone walks down the sidewalk unfettered by a leash he has been trained to continually take glances backward toward his master. He knows that if he gets outside the accepted circle of safety he will be called back. He now finds security in not leaving that circle. Those frequent glances back or approval glances. All is well!

Similarly, when T-Bone comes to a curb or intersection, he has been trained to sit and look at his master until he is given the command to go. He does not look left and right and decide for himself when it is safe to enter the street. He simply sits and watches his master until the approval is given.

So for the believer, the approval factor comes from one place and only one place - our master, the Lord Jesus. It does not and CANNOT come from mere men without

Fence Building and Dog Training

The Residue of Fundamentalism's Dearth of Discernment

....continued from page 2

wreaking havoc on the priesthood of believers. So Paul issues this command in 1 Thessalonians 5:21: "Test everything and hold to what is good." If you or I are ever asked as to why we participate in certain activities, it is an unacceptable answer to respond with: "I don't know; I never thought about it." We are commanded to test everything we do so to discern whether or not it an approvable action (cf. Rom 14:5, 22).

Where does Discernment come from?

The apostle Paul gives us further teaching on discernment when he instructs us in Ephesians 5:10 to "try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." You see, a believer is subservient to a new master. We have been given a new heart that is capable of loving both Christ and his commands. We are God-lovers. The litmus test for whether or not any action, person or message is to be approved by us is in how it pleases the Lord and enhances our love for him. Like Well-Trained T-Bone our glances are aimed back at Christ. Is he pleased by this action? Is this activity helping or hindering my relationship with him? This is the opposite of simple fence-building. Instead of fostering a minimalist mindset, we want to instill a maximum mindset: How will this activity result in me being more in love with Christ? How will this bring him more glory? Is he pleased by this? So discernment flows from a heart in love with its master, a heart that wants to be pleasing to its Lord.

What does the process look like?

To be sure, Well-Trained T-Bone did not come out of nowhere. He did not come to his master already trained. So too, you did not come to Christ already trained, already sanctified; and neither did your children or teens. We must undergo an arduous and tedious training process. It is a process. But nonetheless it has a starting point.

I took my dog to obedience classes. The trainer said right up front, "This is not a

class for training your dog; this is a class for training you." She was right. I needed to be trained on how to train my dog. It helped! Her next words were, "Your dog needs to know who is in charge." So true! So do you and I when it comes to life. Christ is clearly our master. But watch this. Next, the dog trainer said, "Your dog needs to know exactly what is being commanded of him. Make your commands short and consistent: T-Bone, Sit! T-Bone, Come! T-Bone, Stay!, etc." So my dog needs to know who is in charge and what exactly is being commanded of him. That's easy!

Paul says the exact same thing when it comes to developing a discerning mind and heart. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, *that by testing you may discern* what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2, *emphasis mine*). You and I need to know what the will of God is for our life. That is, we need to know what God has clearly revealed to us in Scripture - his expectations. This is none other than the clear commands of Scripture. When Christ issues a command, it is good, acceptable and perfect! We need to find it approving! We know this is what Paul means because of a parallel in Philipians 1.

"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with all knowledge and discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Philip. 1:10).

Do you approve what is excellent? Do you find the clear commands of Christ to be approving to you? Have you ever been conflicted between two choices? I want to watch this TV program when Christ commands to flee immorality? Which choice will make you happiest? That's the one you will choose. Will you believe your flesh and choose to pursue your happiness

through the immoral show? Or will you look to you master like a well-trained dog and seek his approval? Will this be pleasing to the Lord? Will this enhance my relationship with him? Will this develop more of a love for Christ in me?

I could easily and simply build a fence and say, "No television. Don't even own one!" It may protect you from immorality on TV but it requires no relationship with a master. At some point the loyalty of our hearts will be tested to see if we will test all things and hold to that which is approving to the Lord!

Oh that we would cultivate a community of discerning hearts and minds, for it is the only way to be a community of God-lovers.

Corporate Arsenal Passages

God is Faithful to All His Promises

Promise 21: Promises to do you good

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 32:40

I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

