



Truth

Ephesians 6:14 NIV

Stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...

How Should We Respond to These Strange Times?

Today I will talk about something that isn't given much thought in Christian circles. It is hard to imagine a topic that is more personal and critical than the one we are about to broach! The ramifications of what we shall discuss are crucial to how you live and the decisions you make. In fact, you probably are not even aware of just how impactful this part of your life is to you and your personality. There was a Far Side cartoon with one deer looking at another. In the background you could see a hunter with his gun trudging toward them. On the side of the first deer was a giant target in white and black. The second deer is peering over at it and murmurs, "That is one bummer of a birthmark!" Imagine having something just as life-changing connected to you, something that makes it tough to manage your behaviors and inner world because of how encompassing its effect upon you. The Bible tells us to, "**Stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...**" (Ephesians 6:14 NIV) Many though rather than truth buckled around them are bound up by lies. Let's look at what happens when that is the case.

An example from the Bible will help explain the issue. Absalom was the Brad Pitt of his era, two thousand years ago. Handsome and socially skilled, he was beloved and one of the most popular celebrities in Israel. His father was the king of Israel and he was third in line from the crown. One would think that Absalom would be happy with his lot, but such was not the case. The decisions he made as he reached toward middle age reflect a bitter and unsatisfied soul who lost his way in life. Remember that Absalom was not only the third son of his father, early he was one of six sons that his father had with six different wives. As his father's harem continued to expand, so did the number of kids he had to navigate around to gain his father's love. Even as handsome and popular as Absalom was, he had to miss not having a father's affection and attention.

Later a tragic event dramatically altered the course of Absalom's life. His sister was raped by his older half-brother. When Absalom's father David did nothing about the offence and his sister was left a devastated emotional wreck, Absalom stewed and plotted revenge. His deepening fury was two pronged. First and most obviously, he hated his brother for what he did to his sister. But, perhaps even more importantly, his disgust with his father for not punishing his older brother became a driving force behind his future actions. Few of us have faced such terrible emotional trauma but we all can relate to feeling unloved and violated. We all have seen injustice and been angry that nothing was done to correct it. Sometimes we slough it off and move on and other times we are captured by the power of its psychological violence.

When Absalom found his opportunity, he had his brother murdered and then left the country and went into exile. After three years, Absalom's father David sent messengers to him calling for his return. When he

resettled back in Jerusalem, it took time for David and Absalom to actually talk but it is clear that they remained estranged. There are perhaps reasons for David's reluctance to punish Amnon for his crime, but it is clear that Absalom continued to hate his father for doing nothing about the rape of his sister. Over the course of the next four years, Absalom implemented a strategy for wrenching control of Israel from his father. Eventually he gathered an army of 800,000 soldiers and then went to war with his dad. The battle was a disastrous defeat and Absalom was captured and killed to the great chagrin and sorrow of his father who still loved him profusely despite his son's rebellion.

There were three lies Absalom accepted that shaped his adult years. First, he thought life must always be fair. No harm should ever come to good people. Second, he decided that God was unable or unwilling to right wrongs and could not be trusted. Third, he believed that his father David did not love or care what happened to his sister. There are plenty of lies we accept, and the effect is sometimes troublesome for us and other times destructive. Relationships fall apart when lies are accepted. Anger and bitterness and depression are born out of lies. If we knew we were clinging to a lie, we would probably just laugh it off and move on but lies are powerful and sticky and bore in on us. One person believes he is a loser and can never succeed. Another person thinks she can never find happiness. Some consider themselves unlovely or worse, unlovable. Many believe that life is hopeless, unbearable. They fall into addiction to avoid facing themselves because they don't think they are good enough. So often a person quits just as success is right around the corner, a beautiful friendship is established, or a new adventure is started. All lies are from the devil and their purpose is to keep us from God and loving those about us. Lies are intended to isolate us and pull us apart.

Here is an example from the New Testament that sounds awfully familiar. Perhaps you've encountered this lie at home or at work, seen it at school or met it at a social gathering. The lie is subtle and difficult to recognize when it traps you, but it can have a profound effect on you. Martha threw a party for Jesus at her home and her sister came too. Because Martha was responsible for all the food and refreshments, she tore about trying to get everything ready. As the pace of preparations grew intense, Martha saw her sister sitting down relaxing next to Jesus and boiled inside. "How come she isn't helping me?", she screamed within herself. "Why is Mary so lazy all the time?", she murmured. "It's not fair that I have all this work to do and no one to help me," she fretted. When Martha went to Jesus with her complaint she was most likely unprepared for His response. **But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."** (Luke 10:40-42 NIV)

The lie fits differently on different people. For some it looks angry. Others grumpy. Many it just is lonely and isolated. The lie is carefully presented by Satan to you and made believable, almost attractive. You don't even realize you are wearing it because the lie is so comfortable. It comes in a variety of colors and sizes, but it always fits any situation. The lie goes like this. "It isn't about love." When others aren't helping and you are doing all the work, it isn't about love. When you are mad and holding a grudge, it isn't about love. When you have been hurt and want to end a friendship, it isn't about love. When you are depressed and feel alone and abandoned, it isn't about love. When you have too many bills and you think God has left you to fend for yourself, it isn't about love. When you have gotten irritated by someone's political stance and you want to push that person away, it isn't about love. When you are tired and you don't have time for your son or daughter, husband or wife, mother or father or grandparents, it isn't about love. Yet that is the lie. It is what Satan always tries to get you to accept. Jesus though said the truth is, it is always about love. Love is meant to be the driving force behind every action, behind every thought, behind every evaluation you make of another person.

When Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen what is better, it had nothing to do with chores or not chores, not even time with Jesus or not. Mary chose love. That was what was better. Mary loved Jesus, that was why she was there. If Martha was going to work on the dinner, it was love that was better. Cook because you love. Serve because you love. Prepare the best meal possible because you love. The other day I got angry because I was the only one cleaning the kitchen. I had accepted the lie that it was all about duty, and work and teamwork. It wasn't. It isn't. It is about love. I clean because I love each person in the house. I clean because I love Jesus more than life itself. The belt of truth is this central premise. Everything you do, think and feel is about love. Love God, love your neighbors, even love your enemies. It is so beautiful. Later, as recorded in the book of John, Martha put on another party for Jesus, this time after Christ raised Lazarus from the dead. Listen to the account. **Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.** (John 12:2-3 NIV) There is no hint of animosity in the air. Martha had the belt of truth buckled around her waist. No lie disturbed her joy. The party was about love. Love for Jesus. Love for every person in the room...Even Judas who sat there too and ate with all the others. When you decide that every action you take, every thought you have, every feeling that comes over you is about love, love for God and love for each person around you, including yourself, you will have found your way in this life. The true way! The belt of truth will be around your waist.