



Virtue

On February 26, I was privileged to listen to Bishop NT Wright from the Anglican Church in England. He is one of the most respected theologians and denominational leaders in the Christian Church today. He spent the evening discussing Virtue, and as we begin the season of Lent, this is a good time to re-consider what this means.

Virtue is not just goodness. Virtue is doing the right thing 1000 times quietly, and then finally doing the right thing on the 1001th time, when it really matters. Virtue is what happens when wise choices become second nature. We start off doing them with great difficulty, until finally they become a habit. As Aristotle said, Virtue is made up of courage, temperance (restraint), prudence (cool judgment), and justice (concern for others). The culture we live in today does not value virtue. Rather we value effortless spontaneity on our part, then expecting God to intervene and rescue us. Instead of this, the Bible speaks more about God's Holy Spirit developing in us a strong moral character.

Some people live by rules. When all we have are rules, we don't have to think, and the rules don't cover all of our circumstances. Other people live by their emotions. Their motto is: I feel, therefore I am. Virtue sets us on a course towards maturity, which takes us beyond both rules and feelings.

Not only does virtue shape our individual lives, but virtue shapes the community of the church for mission. The Bible speaks of the mission-shaped church. As Christ sends us into the world to join God in His mission, we want to reflect the nature and character of God, which is what virtue is all about. It flows from the renewing of our minds. A genuine Christian character (virtue) can be very attractive.

We become like what we worship. Thus, what we worship is very important. We are called to worship the one true God. This means that liturgy is important. But, it also means that we must guard against idolatry. Some of the church's worship wars are about idolatry. We have made our particular style of worship into an idol. We have made it more important than God. We have made it more important than the mission of the church. The liturgy is important in that it leads us into a deeper experience with Christ, but it cannot become our idol.

In developing our virtue, we don't need a bunch of new regulations. We need a change of character. We need a new heart. We learn from Jesus how to be a Jesus person. We sit at the feet of the Teacher to become teachers ourselves. We may not be able to break bread and worship together with all the Christians around the world because of our theological differences, but we can all read the Bible together. So, let's do that. Let's

read the Bible with Christians of all stripes, because we can even learn from other brothers and sisters, even ones with whom we disagree.

Lighting a match may be striking and exciting, but it doesn't last. So, use your match to light a candle, and it will burn for a much longer time than the match. Virtue is not popular. Virtue does not come naturally from our human spirit, and it is not developed easily. But, once doing the right thing becomes second nature, then we are becoming more like Christ. As we move through this season of Lent, let's explore the virtues Christ wants to develop in us.



Respond to: ClarkCowden@PresbyterySD.org