

Is God Black and White?

I Samuel 16:1-13

Sermon

Hobart, April 14th, 2013

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I. OLD TESTAMENT READING:

I Samuel 16:1-13

¹ Now the LORD said to Samuel, “You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel, so fill your flask with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be my king.”

² But Samuel asked, “How can I do that? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.”

“Take a heifer with you,” the LORD replied, “and say that you have come to make a sacrifice to the LORD. ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you which of his sons to anoint for me.”

⁴ So Samuel did as the LORD instructed. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town came trembling to meet him. “What’s wrong?” they asked. “Do you come in peace?”

⁵ “Yes,” Samuel replied. “I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” Then Samuel performed the purification rite for Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice, too.

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, “Surely this is the LORD’s anointed!”

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

⁸ Then Jesse told his son Abinadab to step forward and walk in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “This is not the one the LORD has chosen.” ⁹ Next Jesse summoned Shimea, but Samuel said, “Neither is this the one the LORD has chosen.” ¹⁰ In the same way all seven of Jesse’s sons were presented to Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.”

¹¹ Then Samuel asked, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse replied. “But he’s out in the fields watching the sheep and goats.”

“Send for him at once,” Samuel said. “We will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”

¹² So Jesse sent for him. He was dark and handsome, with beautiful eyes. And the LORD said, “This is the one; anoint him.”

¹³ So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.¹

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Sa 16:1-13). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

II. NEW TESTAMENT READING

I Corinthians 13:4-13

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

⁸ Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! ⁹ Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! ¹⁰ But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. ¹² Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity.*

All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

¹³ Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.²

* Greek *see face to face*.

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INTRODUCTION:

III. MODERN ERA

A. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME HUGE SHIFTS IN THINKING IN WESTERN SOCIETY OVER THE LAST FEW CENTURIES

1. For many centuries scholars, theologians, and people in general were what could simplistically be described as black and white thinkers.
2. Today we could say that things are seen more as shades of grey
 - a) There is the common saying, “there are no absolutes”

B. WHEN I WAS IN MY TEENS

1. The big question topic was “is God is dead?”
2. And that and many other questions led me to read the church’s literature

C. I THINK WE ALL WERE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

1. Most of us were brought up in an era when most peoples were bold and clear in their views
 - a) Society had just emerged from two world wars
 - b) And things were simpler and starker
2. Life was conducted along much bolder and rigid lines
 - a) There was much less room for doubt or debate about moral issues
 - b) People in authority, parents, teachers, bosses, politicians, theologians—were more authoritarian and dogmatic in their views and leadership
 - c) The opinions of others were rarely considered. There was little room for discussion or input, at home, at work or at church.

3. The views of church and society were in much closer agreement, including on social issues that today have brought about a great deal of debate and disagreement

D. BUT IN THE 60'S AND 70'S, WHEN MOST OF US CAME INTO THE CHURCH

1. Society was going through a huge upheaval
 - a) Everything that religion and society taught dogmatically was being questioned, and in many cases rejected
2. So most of us were looking for some certainty
 - a) For some clear, black and white answers to the moral and behavioral issues, and particularly questions about God and Christian life and practice
3. Herbert Armstrong was called a “voice crying in the wilderness”
 - a) The church claimed he was the end time Elijah, come to set things back on track, particularly religiously
4. We were given black and white answers to just about every topic imaginable—from prehistory to the end of time--from belt widths and hair lengths to what sort of sugar to put in your tea.
 - a) And most of us came to find a great deal of comfort and certainty from it in the midst of a world that was becoming more and more uncertain

S.P.S:

E. OVER TWO SUNDAYS WE ARE GOING TO WORK THROUGH THIS QUESTION

1. Is God black and white in his actions and judgments?
2. Does he demand that we think and act in black and white ways?

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3. Do the Scriptures give us unequivocal, dogmatic, true in all circumstances answers and instructions, telling us what to do in our lives

F. TODAY

1. We are going to take a quick overview of human and religious thought over the years
2. Then we are going to begin to look at 3 pairs of stories from Scripture
3. Next time we plan to discuss what conclusions we can draw from these stories
 - a) And how we can best answer our questions about black and white thinking

G. PRAYER

BODY:

A. HISTORY OF THOUGHT

1. Down through the millennia, mankind has discussed and debated about life, truth and morality
 - a) About how we can know what is true, and right from wrong, how we should live and behave
2. For most of that time society has been led in these issues by religious leaders
 - a) It has only been in the last century that religion has been usurped by agnostic and atheistic thinking
3. For thousands of years societies believed that the god or gods rewarded and punished people based on their behaviour
 - a) If the people pleased the god they would be blessed with good weather, crops and many healthy children
 - b) And if they displeased the gods they would be cursed and punished

4. This is called sympathetic magic

a) And it lies behind the thinking of many religious people's conscious or subconscious thinking even today

5. The relationship between God and the individual is seen in simple terms;

a) If I do right I am good, and accepted

(1) **If I do wrong, I am bad, and rejected, condemned, punished**

b) A simple Tit-for-tat contractual relationship

c) And this is also how human relationships tend to be conducted

(1) **You do good to me, I will do good to you**

(2) **But if you hurt or take from me in anyway, I will do the same back to you**

B. THIS IS VERY MECHANICAL, SIMPLE AND PLAIN THINKING

1. And it tends to be accompanied by a matching simple, black and white approach to right and wrong

2. Too often that boils down to; what I want from you, and what I want for myself is good and right

a) Anything that displeases me or takes away from me is wrong

3. We see stark examples of this in despotic tyrants and dictators like the Pharaohs of Egypt, Genghis Khan, Herod, Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, and current North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

a) And too often we see it in families, churches and the workplace

C. EDWARD DE BONO

1. Is well known for his books on thinking outside the box, what he calls lateral thinking

2. He wrote a book called, "I Am Right, You Are Wrong" on the differences between what he terms rock logic and water logic.

3. Or as we are discussing, black and white thinking and shades of grey, or as I'd prefer to call it, multi-dimensional high definition full colour thinking

D. DEBONO POINTS OUT A NUMBER OF THINGS THAT ARE WRONG WITH OUR TRADITIONAL AND DEEPLY EMBEDDED BLACK AND WHITE THINKING

1. He makes the point that instead of mechanical, clinical mathematical and scientific reasoning we need wisdom.

2. He writes;

We need to shift from cleverness to wisdom. ...There are some dangers that arise directly from the nature of our traditional thinking culture. There are others arising from the complacency and arrogance with which we hold to be adequate a thinking culture that is clearly inadequate.

The direct dangers include crude perceptions, polarizations, misleading effects of language, unnecessary confrontations, righteousness and aggressive beliefs. Many of these things are directly responsible for much of the human misery that man has inflicted on man.

...Perhaps the greatest dangers are those of arrogance, complacency and the ability to defend that arrogance and complacency. ...Every belief system sets up a framework of perception within which it cannot be attacked. The arrogance of logic means that if we have a logically impeccable argument then we must be right – “I am right—you are wrong.”

Yet the value of any conclusion depends on both the validity of the logic and also the validity of the starting perceptions and values. A fault computer will produce rubbish. A computer working flawlessly will also produce rubbish if the input is rubbish.³

3. This is one of the major points of the Scriptures

- a) As humans we go by what we want, and our simplistic surface logic
- b) Judging and making decisions by looking on the outward appearance of things and people and circumstances
- c) Rather than doing as God does and instructs, looking at the heart

³ Edward de Bono, *I Am Right You Are Wrong*, 1990, Penguin, p.27

I Samuel 16:7b

⁷ bThe LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

4. When we deal with another human being, we need to look deeper than at the surface
 - a) More than at just the actions or words
5. But at their motivation;
 - a) why they may have said or done what they did
6. At their needs and circumstances;
 - a) What is happening in their lives, what is going on inside their hearts and minds
 - b) What are they really trying to say or do
 - c) And why
7. Although in many ways we are all the same, we are also different
 - a) There are always many things affecting and influencing what we say and do and think and feel
 - b) Life isn't two dimensional
 - c) Relationships and even single interactions have deep and complex back stories or contexts.
8. Isaac Newton, the highly influential scientist's discoveries in the 1600 and 1700's were the underpinning of modern mechanical thought and logic
 - a) Wikipedia gives a quick summation of Newton's life and work

Sir Isaac Newton (25 December 1642 – 20 March 1727) was an English [physicist](#) and [mathematician](#) who is widely regarded as one of the most influential scientists of all time and as a key figure in the [scientific revolution](#). His book ("Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy"), first published in 1687, laid the foundations for most of [classical mechanics](#).

Newton's *Principia* formulated the [laws of motion](#) and [universal gravitation](#) that dominated scientists' view of the physical universe for the next three centuries.⁴

9. But over time, as scientists dug deeper, they found that such mechanical two dimensional “laws” didn’t function in other dimensions

a) Einstein and recent science has found there is a lot more to the way the world works than what Newton and earlier scientist purported.

E. DEBONO USES EUCLIDS LAWS OF GEOMETRY AS AN EXAMPLE

1. They were accepted as absolute black and white always true facts. But as deBono points out;

It was only very much later that the axioms on which Euclid built his geometry were show to be rather particular and to apply only to plane surfaces.⁵

We rely so much on the excellence of argument for attack and defence that we fail to see that something may be ‘right’ but in adequate in a larger framework.⁶

2. Modern science has found that many of the basic rules we have accepted as absolute and black and white about geometry, time and space, the laws of motion and gravity don’t hold true in all circumstances

3. Einstein’s theory of relativity showed them to be flawed.

a) Not always false, but also not always true.

4. Things are more complex, more fluid and less black and white and concrete than we had dogmatically believed

F. DEBONO

1. Goes on to talk about how our society makes decisions about “right and wrong” and what is best in too limited and narrow a way.

⁴ Wikipedia; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton

⁵ de Bono, p. 28

⁶ de Bono, p.28

- a) Our decision making tends to not include all the important factors
- 2. He urges that in government decisions and economics we need “a ‘care loop’ which intertwines with the ‘productive’ loop.”
 - a) We need to include an ‘ecological tariff’ when working out costings of projects.
 - b) In other words we need to base decisions not just on one set of priorities and calculations, which is almost always financial but to include other “values” in the decision making such as human and environmental costs and impacts

G. SO WE COME BACK TO THE POINT IN I SAMUEL 16

- 1. What were the circumstances behind this statement in I Samuel 16:7, about not judging by outward appearance.
 - a) Not just jumping to a conclusion about what is right and wrong based on what we see at the most obvious level

I Samuel 16:1- Samuel Anoints David as King

16 Now the LORD said to Samuel, “You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel, so fill your flask with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be my king.”

² But Samuel asked, “How can I do that? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.”

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IV. JESUS’ JUDGMENT

A. JESUS IS THE ONE WHO SHOWS US HOW TO MAKE DECISIONS AND WISE JUDGMENTS ABOUT WHAT IS MOST APPROPRIATE

Isaiah 11:1-5

¹ Out of the stump of David’s family^{*} will grow a shoot—
yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.

² And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

^{*} Hebrew *Shammah*, a variant spelling of Shimea; compare 1 Chr 2:13; 20:7.

^{*} Hebrew *the stump of the line of Jesse*. Jesse was King David’s father.

1. Jesus trusted in his Father, and the Holy Spirit to help him see the big picture.
2. The Spirit counsels us and gives us wisdom
 - a) Wisdom is not the mechanical, surface logic, and simplistic, moralistic, legalistic, narrow and rigid approach to what is right or wrong
3. The Spirit's wisdom seeks what is best and most loving and beneficial for those involved in any given circumstance

³ He will delight in obeying the LORD.

He will not judge by appearance

nor make a decision based on hearsay.

4. Jesus delighted in obeying the Father
 - a) In following his way of sacrificial love, mercy and true justice and care for the needy and hurt
5. He looked below the surface, beyond outward appearance
 - a) It is interesting on the talent show, "The Voice" that the judges have to choose participants "blind", without being able to see them, so that they concentrate on their voice, not their outward appearance.

⁴ He will give justice to the poor

and make fair decisions for the exploited.

6. The Spirit led Jesus to make decisions and to live his life with the needs of the poor and the exploited as top priorities

The earth will shake at the force of his word,
and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked.

⁵ He will wear righteousness like a belt

and truth like an undergarment.

B. THE IMPACT OF THE SPIRIT'S LEADING OUR HEARTS AND MINDS AND ACTIONS IS POWERFUL

1. Jesus had a massive impact on the people and the world around him
 - a) And through that same Spirit he seeks to continue that impact
2. In the end his way, truth and life will change the world, and bring an end to evil and injustice, and bring about the reign of truth and righteousness
3. Because he habitually, and by nature lives this way of life and decision making.

C. GOD'S WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TRUTH IS BASED ON LOVE

1. Love perseveres, and patiently seeks the truth, the best for each person and circumstance
 - a) And refuses to be rude, shallow, selfish or presumptuous
2. As Paul writes in I Corinthians 13:4-13

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

D. THIS IS NOT A PICTURE OF A SIMPLISTIC, BLACK AND WHITE, RULE BASED LIFE

1. It is appropriate, wise, appropriate responsiveness to the true realities and complexities of human life and relationships and circumstances.

⁸ Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages* and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever!

* Or *in tongues*.

2. These are surface matters that become too large in our consciousness and concerns, and distract and detract from what is really important and truly good and right in God's sight.

a) Only his way of love has true and lasting value

⁹ Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! ¹⁰ But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless.

3. Life is not as straight forward and black and white as we might like to presume

a) We see only part of the big and complex picture about what is important in life, and what God is doing

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.

4. Paul said the same thing to the Galatians about maturing and moving beyond the simplistic and mechanical religious definitions of right and wrong

a) We are called to grow and develop the wisdom and maturity of Christ

¹² Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity.* All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

¹³ Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

* Greek *see face to face*.

CONCLUSION:

I. SO IS GOD BLACK AND WHITE

A. CAN HIS WAYS, HIS MIND, HIS WILL, HIS RIGHTEOUS LIFE OF LOVE BE SUMMED UP IN SIMPLISTIC BLACK AND WHITE STATEMENTS AND LAWS?

1. Can we comprehend him easily?
2. Paul is saying it will take the resurrection for us to be fully mature, to see more fully and accurately the true realities of God and life

B. BUT EVEN TODAY WE ARE TO GROW IN THAT VISION

1. As we focus on at Pentecost, we are given God's Spirit to lead us to grow in the maturity and wisdom of Jesus Christ
 - a) To see and understand God and the realities and truth of the world we live in and the situations we face, more and more through Jesus' eyes
2. This is an ongoing process
 - a) It is based on our living our lives, with the Holy Spirit living alongside us, showing us more and more of the truth and realities of each aspect of life, each situation

C. PRAYER
