



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society February 2021

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Why Don't They Listen to ME?!

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

You've likely had this situation: you're in a conversation with somebody, and despite the fact that you've outlined your position with great logic and clarity on a particular topic, when the conversation ends, they still continue on with their original, stupid beliefs. Clearly they're wrong! How come they can't see the truth?! Then you look out at the world, and you observe that things seem to be getting crazy, and only progressing towards more craziness, and think that if only the world saw things as you do, then everything would be fine.

But, if you're like me, nobody has called and asked you to be the monarch or benevolent dictator that is going to save us all. I mean, I'm still waiting for that call, but it hasn't happened yet. In the meantime there's increasing pressure to pick sides and compromise is getting harder to find. Why is this? Why is it that despite our best and well intentioned arguments that things don't change?

I was fortunate to find the answer to this quite by accident while in theological school. It wasn't that I had picked this up in a class, but rather when researching for my dissertation I stumbled across this teaching that really transformed how I understood other people. The gist of it is that we are not moved by thoughts, ideas or teachings when they run counter to the loves in our life.

I had been, mistakenly, assuming that people were actually interested in knowing the truth above all else. I don't mean "truth" in some sort of abstract theological way, but in a down to earth practical way. The reality of my mistaken thinking was right in front of me, had I only pondered it a bit more. Here's an example: we want to know the truth as to which car is better before we buy a new one. Right? Well, not necessarily. If you're a "Ford Man," then it didn't matter just how fabulous the new Holden (RIP) or Toyota was, you had your set of reasons as to why the Ford was better, and you were going to buy that new Ford. I thought this was just some isolated automotive silliness. But it wasn't. It was a symptom of the truth that I had uncovered in the Writings.

Basing our thoughts on the things we love would be nothing short of wonderful if not for the fact that we have generations of hereditary evils that have corrupted our will, not to mention things that have happened to us in this life that can scar us and change our loves, and therefore our thoughts. We have this strong tendency to be consumed by thinking about selfish desires, controlling others, materialism, or even just being right. This creates a problem for our spiritual growth. If we are unwilling to raise our thinking beyond this world, and have no desire to think spiritually, our thoughts become even further limited. This results in a diminished ability to judge whether or not something is good, bad, or apply spiritual principles to our lives (AC 5089). It is basically like putting blinders on ourselves that prevent us from seeing the spiritual.

The Scribes and Pharisees of the New Testament are great examples of this phenomenon. Jesus consistently pointed out how they failed to see the greater spiritual truths of the

Jewish tradition. In the story where Jesus and His disciples ate from the fields on the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-11), the Pharisees were quick to point out how this “work” broke one of the commandments. On another Sabbath Jesus healed a man whose right hand was shrivelled. In both instances the Pharisees were upset because the love they wanted to defend, is one where they had status and power in the nation. They did not want to give up that status and power to Jesus, so they put blinders on themselves and refused to think spiritually about the law. As a result all they saw was the exacting letter of the law.

Jesus did try to convince them that their ways were erroneous. He tried to change their way of thinking when He asked, “which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?” (Luke 6:9). But the thinking of the Pharisees does not change. Jesus heals the man and they were “furious” and began to discuss what they could do to Jesus (Luke 6:11). Their thinking did not change because their affection or love did not change. They still kept the same love for power and status.

We are no different. We can see how we react to having our thoughts challenged by argument or experience. How many parents have given their teenage child solid, logical reasons as to why he or she should do something different than what they have planned? How effective have those talks been? Like the Pharisees, the child may have been furious, or maybe quietly rebellious, but either way the result was not what the parent was hoping for. During the conversation the parents may temporarily get the teen to acknowledge the validity of their argument, but if the experience does not break our affection upon which the original thoughts are based, any new thoughts or beliefs will only last a short time. Everything will fall back to our original affection, and the thoughts will flow from it (AC 2694.3). That is the challenge of anybody trying to change the thinking of another: nobody is actually able to change the underlying love and affection of another person.

These days there’s no end to the range of topics that are polarizing, and from what I observe no end to the back and forth arguments that seem to fail to come to a peaceful resolution. Then we wonder why? Well, it’s really because people are feeling that a love is being attacked. That’s really where the problem is. We think we can present a set of facts that are irrefutable and that everybody else will simply follow our logic. Well, have you ever tried presenting the logic of the New Church to somebody? How many people said, “That’s right! Sign me up!” It’s the same thing with any other topic that a person has some investment in. They won’t change if their current thoughts are based off of a love.

Once you realize that, then you’re confronted with the reality that changing a love is hard. Really hard. You can barely change what you love with the Lord’s help, let alone can you change what somebody else loves. So for me, and my sanity, what I remind myself is that most of the things that people argue about these days really are not matters of salvation. Whether or not somebody believes that the US election was stolen or not really isn’t spiritually important. It won’t affect a person’s place in heaven if they think that COVID is a deadly disease or a bad case of the flu. So I encourage you to guard your sanity, and debate some of these things a little less. If you do choose to engage in a debate, just know that you’re facing an impossible battle if they feel you are attacking something they love.

Phillip Island Camp Update

As of this moment, we have 35 people signed up for camp, which is a long way from meeting our original minimum numbers of 55. As promised, I've been in touch with the folks at Phillip Island regarding what options exist for us for camp. At this point they are saying that they are willing to be flexible with us regarding the booking deadline, but have been less enthusiastic about reducing the minimum numbers. I've told them where we're at numbers wise, and I'm just awaiting a response from them as to whether or not they are willing to accept us with only 35. There are some people I've talked to or emailed with that have expressed some interest in camp if things break the right way, so we could potentially see 40, and maybe even 45 if everything goes right.

Before long I'll be emailing to those who have signed up and see what their thoughts are. If anybody has any great ideas, I'd love to hear them.

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Quarterly Working Bee

With the start of a new year and a new school term inevitably comes..... our quarterly working bee! We'll hold that after our service on Sunday Feb 7th; lend a hand around the church gardens and claim your share of pizza for lunch! Bring tools & gloves if you've got 'em; we'll have a few to spare as well. Thanks in advance for your help in keeping our gardens beautiful! Many hands make light work.

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Virtual Women's Weekend March 12-14

We're doing it again! Back by popular demand, we'll be having another - virtual - women's weekend next month, March 12th-14th; depending on COVID distancing restrictions at the time, ladies are encouraged to get together with others in their area, as well. There will be a mix of spiritual discussion, crafty instruction and good old-fashioned chatting.

For more information or to join the fray, please contact **Jenn Beiswenger** (jenn@beiswenger.net).

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Outreach via Tennis

After our first church service of 2021 I was talking with one of our newer attendees, **Willie Hong**. He had enjoyed the service, and was interested in trying to help us get some more new people to attend. Willie is a professional tennis coach, and his idea was to combine some tennis coaching with a worship service.

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Basically he wanted to entice people to show up with the offer of free coaching, but put the worship service part way through the morning so as to prevent people from skipping it by either showing up for the tennis after the service, or leaving after the coaching was done. To further entice folks to stick around we offered a sausage sizzle as well.

Overall I think the event went really well. We had to manage the number of people on the court due to COVID stuff, but we had about 15 people show up that had never attended one of our church services before. Some people were Willie's clients, some were neighbours, and others were people who had previously used our court. They showed up, and stayed for the whole event, and best of all was that there was some real interest in the spiritual side of things. Time will tell if those seeds will bear forth any fruit, but I'm really grateful for Willie's offer and for the flexibility of our church community to pull it off in just one week.

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What Do Ancient Sumerian Dog Statues and a Japanese Hamburger Have in Common

Last year I ran a series of classes on seeing the Ancient Church in modern religion, and one of the things that we came across were these little clay statues of dogs. They were actually buried under the doorways of many buildings, running the whole spectrum from an individual home to a palace. This pack was found beneath a palace doorway at Nineveh. Each is named after a quality required in guard dogs:

- Loud is his bark! (black dog).
- Bitter of his foe! (blue dog).
- Don't think, bite! (white dog).
- Catcher of the enemy! (red dog).
- Expeller of evil! (white dog with red spots).



In other cultures too we saw a similar, magical, use of idols to ward off evil spirits. I think people today don't really think in terms of using things to ward off evil, but apparently 2020 has been so hard on some that people are willing to revisit this ancient practice.

You see, in a video on the Burger King (aka Hungry Jack's) Japan YouTube page, the company announced the arrival of the new Spicy Yakuyoke Whopper containing spicy garlic flakes and a special spicy sauce. But what caught my attention is that Burger King Japan hints that this special burger may "get rid of evil." Now there's a unique selling point for you!

How does the burger remove evil? At first I assumed that had something to do with the use of garlic, but while that may be part of the reasoning, it seems to go a bit further than that. In Burger King's commercial, a group of employees are shown bringing the burgers to a temple in Chofu City, Tokyo, where they appear to be blessed. The caption also explains that it will be difficult for Japanese citizens to carry out their traditional end-of-year events — like attending similar blessing services at temples — due to the "difficult" nature of the year 2020. It is custom in Japan to visit a temple or shrine around the new year and pick up a yakuyoke amulet to ward off evil.

At first I found this idea of a burger to ward off evil rather amusing, but I guess when you get right down to it, we actually do the same thing at every meal when we bless our food in the Lord's name. While I usually think of a blessing before a meal as more of a way of saying "thanks" to the Lord, the reality is that a "blessing" by its nature is to remove evil from something. Maybe we're not doing it explicitly to ward off evil spirits, but that really is part of offering a blessing. So who knows, perhaps in a few thousand years some archaeologist will uncover the advertising for this burger and say, "Well, this looks like a tastier way of getting rid of evil than the Sumerians had."

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Birthdays

January: Margaret Heldon (9th), Kerry Lockhart (24th), Kaye Macfarlane (30th)

February: John Hicks (9th) and Mike Lockhart (11th)

PS. Please note the **Spiritual Growth Program** “Living Courageously” which begins on **February 7th**. For more details please revisit the News Notes from January and the February calendar sheet.

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