

Misfortune Cookies #1
It's Only Wrong if You Get Caught
Ephesians 4:14
11/6/16

- This coming Tuesday, we should all be going to the polls to vote. I hope we have been praying about this and asking God for direction. But, let's not just ask God for direction for how to vote, but let's continue to ask God to give wisdom to whoever wins the vote. We need to constantly be in prayer for our nation and those who believe they are leading our nation. May they know that it is only through God that they can lead this land and may they be humble enough to know that God is really in control.
 - o Unfortunately, what we too often see is that absolute power corrupts absolutely. What we have too often seen is that leaders lack integrity and they think they can do whatever benefits them, even if it is morally and ethically wrong, as long as they don't get caught.
 - o Several years ago a high-profile candidate for President of the US seemed like the poster child for the All-American Christian family. I won't mention his name. If you are a history / political buff, you can probably figure it out.
 - o He had spoken out against President Clinton's infidelities. His wife was going through cancer treatments at the time and he was the ever-present help and support.
 - o Then during the campaign word comes out that he has had an affair with a member of his campaign staff and she is now pregnant. He vehemently denies it. Sometime later, he admits to the affair, but denies the child is his. A year later, he tearfully admits the child is his and asks for forgiveness.

- The question is why? Why is it that we see this kind of story so often in our world? Why is the first reaction, *"I did not do it. I am not guilty. I am not wrong."*
 - o Then the indisputable evidence comes up, they're caught and they comes the, *"I was so wrong and I'm so sorry."*
 - o Why? Because our world is infected with the idea that "It's only wrong if you get caught." That is our sermon title today.

- Over the next few weeks until we begin the Advent season, we are going to be in a sermon series called "Misfortune Cookies." How many of you like Chinese food? We have some really good Chinese restaurants here in our little town.
 - o I've never been to a Chinese restaurant where they don't give you a fortune cookie at the end of the meal. You know what they are, right? These hard little things made out of I don't even know, but in the middle is a piece of paper.

- We look forward to seeing what the piece of paper says to us. Let's see what this one says...
 - But, we look forward to what it says as if it might somehow personally apply to us or our current situation.
 - But, deep down, we know it doesn't. These are written by someone, somewhere and sometimes they don't even make any sense. Yet, for some reason, we are looking for some personal validation or "fortune" for life.
- Unfortunately, many, many people live life with this fortune cookie approach to life. They are looking for some wisdom, some advice, some fortune to follow that will give them meaning, purpose or success in some way.
- There are even people who will play the "lucky numbers" that are listed on the little piece of paper in their fortune cookie because somehow, the universe made it so that those numbers weren't just randomly printed for some hard little cookie, they were printed just for them to win the big one!
 - Yet, what most often happens when having this fortune cookie approach to life is that we end of following wisdom or advice or some fortune or some numbers that do absolutely nothing for us and in the end only lead to our own hurt or cause us to hurt someone else or further the seeming meaninglessness of life.
- That's why this sermon series is entitled "Misfortune Cookies." Because too many people are looking for some easy wisdom of the world rather than looking for real wisdom and real truth. And, what they think is right for their life actually ends up not being a fortune at all, but a misfortune.
- The wisdom of the world, while it seems right and easy and it tickles our ears with what we want to hear, it is not wisdom. It is misfortune. The wisdom of the world has led countless people to disease, misery and death.
 - Oh, those things might not happen at first. That's the trick of the enemy. At first worldly wisdom seems so right and it seems to work. But slowly and surely, it leads to destruction. It always does. Always.
- And, worldly wisdom is so fickle. It changes from year to year, from generation to generation.
- I was in Panera Bread Thursday morning to work on my sermon. I love working on sermons there. There are people around which tends to motivate me as an extroverted personality, but the people don't interact with me which allows me to get work done.
 - If you remember on Thursday, it was a nice day – it got up to 70 or something that day. So, I and another young lady were waiting near the counter for our order to come up. This young lad was probably a college aged student. She was wearing a fleece jacket on the top half of her and on the bottom half, it looked like she had forgotten to put on anything because

her shorts were so short that she might as well have gone out with just her underwear on.

- You know, I have dreams where I'm in public without pants or just in my underwear and in these dreams, I'm trying desperately to cover myself. These are nightmares to me. Anyone else have those dreams? If you look deep in my psyche, maybe there is a fear of exposure or something, I don't know. But, here is this young woman who just walking around like that as if it's nothing! My nightmare is her fashion choice!
- Her order came up first, she got it and left. Then, my order came up. Now, I know the older woman working. I go to Panera at least once, often twice a week. So, we were chatting and she said, "Weren't those the shortest shorts you ever saw?" I said, "I don't even know what to say." She stated, "I don't get it. We're living in a different world."
- Exactly! We are living in a different world from when she and I grew up compared to now. The wisdom of the world changes and people are tossed about going from one wisdom to another, one extreme to another. And, it all leads to overexposure and to misfortune!
 - Paul addresses this in Ephesians chapter 4. First, he admonishes people to be equipped in the things of God to do his work and build up the church. This equipping, then, ensures that they are maturing.
 - Let's read **Ephesians 4:13 – 14**.
 - I like the wording of the New Century Version of verse 14. It says, *"Then we will no longer be babies. We will not be tossed about like a ship that the waves carry one way and then another. We will not be influenced by every new teaching we hear from people who are trying to fool us. They make plans and try any kind of trick to fool people into following the wrong path."*
- We live in the world Paul is describing. People are tossed about back and forth by just about anything, anything that is trending. But, who's behind the trends? Most often, people who are wanting to trick and influence in order to do what – make money!
 - Emerging generations simply don't know what to believe, so they believe anything and everything. People are following the trends rather than following the truth!
 - That young woman was just following the fashion trends of the time. Go into any store before summer and you will see that the main option for shorts are booty shorts. She's just following what the fashion market is dictating for her.
 - The problem with that is it isn't right! I don't care what the fashion market says, showing that much is not right. It certainly isn't biblical!
- And, there is the problem – there is a lack of foundational beliefs. As a culture, we lack solid foundational beliefs.

- Dr. Glen Schultz wrote, “At the foundation of a person’s life, we find his beliefs. These beliefs shape his values, and his values drive his actions.”
 - Let’s take a look at a visual here. What we see people doing is just a reflection of their beliefs. Without foundational beliefs, our actions and our values flip flop with any new teaching that seems to be right at the time.
 - Isn’t that what we are seeing today?
- This flip flopping, though, isn’t tolerance or new thinking. It is confusing and harmful. We need consistent truth. We were made to need consistent truth. We yearn for consistent truth. So, when we don’t have that and we don’t find it in the belief system of the world, it brings confusion and disorder to life.
- You can see this among young people today. Studies show that young people who lack a consistent biblical belief system are:
 - 225% more likely to be angry in life
 - 216% more likely to be resentful
 - 210% more likely to lack purpose in life
 - 200% more likely to be disappointed in life
 - 36% more likely to lie to a friend
 - 48% more likely to cheat
 - 200% more likely to steal
 - 200% more likely to physically hurt someone
 - 300% more likely to use illegal drugs
 - 600% more likely to attempt suicide
 - When you factor in that fact that only 12 - 15% on average of young people today actually follow a biblical foundation because they claim themselves as followers of Jesus Christ, we see that WE LACK FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS!
- Instead, people are believing the misfortunes of the world such as “It’s only wrong if you get caught.” They are being led into distortions of bits of truth. One of the biggest distortions is distorted beliefs about God.
- We’ve reached a time when the prevailing view about God is extremely warped, but extremely popular. It’s the idea that we get to define who God is for us.
 - Several years back, Newsweek did a story entitled “What Teens Believe” Their answers were as individual as the kids themselves.
 - One thought God was like his grandfather: “He’s there, but I never see him.” Another took a harder view, describing “an evil being who wants to punish me all the time.” Other opinions followed.
 - Finally, the last teen weighted in: “I think you’re all right, because that’s what you really believe.” In other words, God is whatever works for you. On this, all of the youth agreed.

- The problem with this is and the consistent truth is that you don't get to define God! No one gets to define who God is to them! God is the only one who gets to define Himself.
 - You see, the emerging generations are extremely spiritual. They believe in God unashamedly. But a majority of them believe that Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jews...all pray to the same God.
 - And that those prayers and "gods" all lead you to the same place.
 - It's like the pyramid we saw earlier, there is a lack of a solid foundation of belief, so it is producing poor values and even poorer actions. It's producing people who believe that as long as you believe in something, you are fine.

- This misfortune then leads to distorted beliefs about Truth.
 - 70% of today's young people believe there is no absolute moral truth. 81% believe that "all truth is relative to the individual and his/her circumstances." It's the same core belief as with God – anything goes, any belief is as valid as another, any action is ok, any value is ok.
 - But, ya'll, this is SCARY! This means, there is NO authority in my life. I am my own God. I decide what's right and wrong based on my circumstances and how I feel inside.
 - Now, maybe you think you are good enough to have that kind of power over you. But, I know the wretch that I was. I know the kind of evil I could be capable of. I know without Jesus, there is much in me that is not good. I don't trust myself with that kind of power over me. I simply cannot count on myself for being the source of truth.
 - Can you honestly count of yourself to have that kind of power or to be the source of truth? Oh, it would be nice to think that we can because then we can do anything we want. But, deep down, you know.
 - Just like children need and deep down want parents who care enough to set boundaries. We are the same. We need it. 'Cause we ain't good enough without it

- *Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life."*
 - Oh, what peace it gives me to know that God loved me enough to send His only Son to earth to show me how to live this life. He didn't just drop me off some place to find it out for myself.
 - There wasn't some weird explosion that "banged" me into existence until I finally crawled out of some swamp in a rain forest and became a person.
 - NO – God made me in His image, sent His Son to love and die for me to show me the way!!! HE IS THE TRUTH! Whatever he says is true. His Word is truth.
 - And, his truth is absolute. It was true then, it is true now and it will be true forever and ever. So then, the idea that it's only wrong if you get caught is a lie because no, it's not wrong only if you get caught, it's wrong because there is absolute truth that says it's wrong!

- And, the fact is, I need this kind of truth. You need this kind of truth. The world needs this kind of consistent, firm, strong, absolute truth.
- Without absolute truth, we come up with distorted beliefs about Reality.
 - In the 1960's when Hugh Hefner, the Playboy mogul, said, *"If it feels good, do it,"* most of Americans rejected that belief.
 - Fifty years later the majority now subscribe to that mantra. 72% of young people today say "you can tell if something is morally/ethically right for you by whether or not it works in your life."
 - If it works...If cheating on a test works...it's ethically right. If stealing some clothes works...it's ethically right. If lying to your boss works...it's ethically right.
 - This distorted reality starts small, but where does this lead us? If committing adultery makes you feel good ...If killing your neighbor to hide an indiscretion works... If having babies but not taking care of them gets you off the hook...
- When we lack foundational beliefs, we have a distorted view of GOD, TRUTH, & REALITY. *Psalm 36:9 says, God is "the fountain of life, the light by which we see."*
 - So what is the missing FOUNDATION in our world? God's Word – His truth! We don't know God Word. Even in the church, we don't know God's Word!
- Yet, for some reason, people want to contest the Bible as truth. So, let's take a few moments answering the question how can I trust the Bible?
 - We're going to see what the Bible says about itself and what history / science / anthropology says about the Bible as well.
 - This is going to be an overview, not a comprehensive study. There are lots of resources that I can give you that will provide a more comprehensive study.
- But, let's start with what the Bible says about itself. The Bible is God-Breathed, God inspired.
 - 2 Timothy 3:16 in the NIV says *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training."* The NLT version of 2 Timothy 3:16 says, *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right."*
- Other books were not breathed by God. How did God breathe it, how did he inspire it? Well, Peter, one of the ones who God breathed on and inspired to write His Word, breaks down the process more directly for us:
 - He says in 2 Peter 1:20-21 *"Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human*

initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.”

- God breathed the Bible into existence, using human-beings as they were directed by the Holy Spirit. He inspired them to write what he was telling them to write. What God wanted said, was said. They were directed by the Holy Spirit of God.

- Because God breathed it, the Bible is trustworthy and it has been proven trustworthy.
 - The Bible is a compilation of 66 different books. Those books were written by 40 different writers who lived in 3 continents who spoke 3 different languages over a period of 1500 years. Yet, all the books over that vast amount of time by different authors all confirm itself.
 - Darrel Bock says, “We know a lot about the Bible and how it was produced. In fact, we know far more about it than any other ancient book.”
 - Yet, I’ve heard the argument that it was church politics that determined what was in the Bible, not God. Really? Let’s take a look at the Canon of Scripture. What is the Canon of Scripture, it refers to what religious books that were written were included in the Bible.

- When church leaders went about compiling the books to make the Old and New Testament of the Bible, there were other books that could have been included. However, they used a particular measuring rod, which is what “canon” actually means – it is rule, a measuring rod to determine something’s validity.
 - One of the measuring rods they used was if the book was already authoritative and was being used as valid through time by its agreement and by its use among the apostles and early church.
 - New Testament expert Bruce Metzger points out: “...The canon of Scripture was not the result of a series of contests involving church politics...these documents didn’t derive their authority from being selected; each one was authoritative before anyone gathered them together”

- So, the early church did not authorize the canon of Scripture, they recognized its authority through unity of the Spirit. They recognized that God was already using those books because they were his Word.
 - The books of the Bible had to measure up to several tests. That’s why there are some that were not included and so you might hear of other books in the Catholic Bible, for instance, or in the Orthodox Bible.
 - But, the 66 in the Bible we use have all stood the test of time, of authority and of unity as inspired by the Holy Spirit and as God’s Word to his people.

- Then, some would like you to believe that the Bible is simply our religious book and it’s just like the Koran, Book of Mormon, or other religious texts. But, the Bible has

significant manuscript evidence. It has more manuscript evidence than any other ancient text.

- Homer's Iliad has only 643 copies, and that's the most for any ancient literature except the Bible. The Koran, the writings of Confucius, other religious books don't even have 643.
 - But, check this out - According to Josh McDowell, nearly 25,000 manuscripts of the New Testament are stored in libraries and universities around the world! This includes over 5,000 Greek copies, 10,000 Latin Vulgate copies, & 9,000 other versions of the NT dated as early as 7 years after the death of Christ! Of the 20,000 lines of text in your NT, there are only 40 lines of which there is some debate. And some of that debate is about authorship, not content.
 - Listen, GOD'S WORD IS AWESOME!!!! NOTHING IN THE WORLD COMPARES! THIS IS NOT UP FOR DEBATE some folks just don't want to hear it because they want to follow misfortune cookie wisdom.
- Let's move on to science. Archeology confirms the trustworthiness of the Bible.
- To date, over 25,000 Biblical sites have been excavated which support the Bible's claims.
 - Nelson Glueck, the renowned Jewish archaeologist has said, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference" (Quoted by Josh McDowell, "Evidence That Demands a Verdict").
 - Let me just note that Josh McDowell, Lee Strobel and others have set out to prove scientifically and in other ways that Christianity and the Bible are false. Through their research, they came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior because they found irrefutable evidence that He is the real deal, He is the I Am, He is!
 - Science can't refute him, it only confirms the truth of Scripture.
- Fulfillment of the prophecy found in the Bible also proves the Bible's validity. The prophecy of the Bible is when the God said what would happen years before it ever happened.
- We don't have time to go into all of the hundreds of prophecies that came true. Let me just show you 8 in the last 24 hours of Christ's life which can be substantiated by Scripture and history
 - Betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9; Matthew 26:49-50)
 - Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:15)
 - Forsaken by disciples (Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 26:56)
 - Silent before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 27:12)
 - Crucified with thieves (Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 27:38)
 - Lots cast for garments (Psalm 22:18; John 19:23-24)
 - Darkness over the land (Amos 8:9; Matthew 27:45)
 - Buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60)

- Finally, the Bible is durable and indestructible. It's been banned, burned, and blasted. But, you know what – it's still here!
 - The French author and atheist Voltaire, who lived in the 1700s, is reported to have held up a Bible in the air as he smugly declared, "In 100 years this book will be forgotten and eliminated." Shortly after his death, his own house became the headquarters for the Geneva Bible Society, which distributed. Tell me God doesn't have a sense of humor.
 - Now, who in here has ever heard of the French author Voltaire? But you better believe that even those who have never set foot in a church have heard the name of Jesus. Oh, they may use his name as a curse, but they still know the name behind all of Scripture!
 - Psalm 119:89: "Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens."
 - Isaiah 40:8: "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."
 - Matthew 24:35: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."
 - Years from now, after not a single copy of Da Vinci Code can be found, the Bible will still be circulated to every tribe & nation. The Constitution of the United States might change, but God's Word won't. God's Word has stood the test of time for thousands of years now and it will endure for all of eternity!

- John Wesley once said: "I want to know one thing; the way to heaven...God himself has condescended to teach the way...He has written it down in a book! Oh, give me that book! At any price give me that book of God! ... Let me be a man of one book.
 - This book (Bible) holds the keys to EVERYTHING you want out of life. Family, happiness, success, peace, joy, financial responsibility, health. It will give you the wisdom of life rather than the misfortune of the world.
 - It will move you beyond the foolish thinking of it's OK, as long as I don't get caught into the eternal fact that there is absolute truth and to violate that absolute truth results in death, meaning separation from the one true God who loves you and wants the best life for you.

- But, here's the thing - it can't do a thing for you out here (Hand). You must let it in here (Heart)!
 - D.L. Moody said, "The Scriptures are not given for our information but our transformation."
 - Is the truth in this book transforming you? Are you living in truth or are you living in the foolish wisdom of the world, just hoping that you don't get caught?