

YOUR ATTITUDE MATTERS

The word “attitude” has a complex meaning. It represents one’s position or feelings on things or people. The complexity is indicated by the number of synonyms that can be used to describe it: opinion, thought, approach, point of view, belief, outlook, frame of mind, belief. Attitudes are formed in our minds by the interaction of past and present experiences, ideas and emotions.

Our attitudes represent our outlook on life. This has a strong influence on our behaviour - good or bad. Stated differently, our behaviour is based on our psychological attitudes towards life, events and people. One’s attitude determines how one thinks, feels, and behaves in a given situation. Our attitudes towards people, places, things, or situations are formed by the choices that we, as well as others, have made in life.

There is fundamentally ONE choice we all make – am I the centre of all my decisions, or not. If I am at the centre, it will automatically influence what I want to achieve in all my actions – namely to do what is to my advantage. This we identify as self-centredness or selfishness, and is characterised by “taking”. This is the default modus operandi of humankind. If we do not make a determined effort NOT to function this way, we naturally revert to it. It is the attitude that is promoted by the Devil – because that is how he operates.

When we are not the permanent focus of our thinking and planning, we may be said to function in an altruistic mode. “Altruism” is defined as the disinterested selfless concern for the welfare of others, characterised by “giving”. It involves making deliberate decisions on how we can benefit others. This is God’s modus operandi, so well described in John 3:16-17:

For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour.

Through our attitudes we reveal our ideas, values, impressions of people and belief systems. With our behaviour, resulting from our attitudes, we express our feelings through actions – verbally or physically, often shown in our facial expressions and body language. People do not generally talk about their attitudes. One’s attitude is clear to others through the words that are used, the tone, as well as facial expressions and body language.

Attitudes can be classified as positive or negative. Positive attitudes are those that strive to bring about beneficial circumstances, whereas negative attitudes are usually destructive. Here is a list of a few common positive and negative attitudes:

Positive	Negative
Attitudes of righteous indignation and anger	Attitudes based on bias , preconceived ideas and opinions.
Attitudes of forgiveness – to make up for misdeeds against someone else, either by one self or by others	Attitudes of judgment towards poor people or rich people; uneducated people; pretty people or ugly people.

Attitude of trust	Attitude of suspicion
Optimism	Pessimism
Contentment	Greed
Compassion	Self-centredness (hard-heartedness)

It is difficult to trace the origin of our attitudes, but people's experiences play a large part. Psychologists may be able to give us an insight as to the origin of some of our attitudes, especially those that are self-destructive, but an unfailing source of comfort and relief is the Book. God, the author of the Book, who created us, knows every detail and past experience in our lives, and He is able to reverse some of the damaging effects that have generated negative attitudes in us. Jesus and the apostles had great insight into the powerful impact of our attitudes and in their writings (in the Bible) they addressed people's attitudes sternly, but with great humility. Let us have a look at some of the above-mentioned attitudes, seeking guidance in the Book – our Bible.

God is concerned about your Attitude

God has used people who are committed to Him to teach us about positive and negative attitudes. The apostle John has this to say (1 John 4:7-8)

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever does not love, does not know God, for God is love.

The love that John speaks about is sacrificial love – a mental decision to do what pleases God. That love even needs to extend to our enemies, as Jesus teaches in the sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:43-45):

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your friends, hate your enemies'. But now I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the sons of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil."

As His children ("sons of the Father") our Father wants us to act like Him, and do good, even to our enemies. That is a HUGE assignment!

Attitudes of Righteous Indignation and Anger

From the time of man's creation, anger is a natural reaction when being hurt, injured or treated unjustly, even justly. We may get angry when treated justly, when are shamed by our own attitudes and deeds as they are exposed and addressed.

For example: Cain's attitude and deeds were not pleasing to God (because he seemed to make sacrifices out of a sense of duty, not spontaneous devotion) and He would not receive Cain's offering from him. Cain felt that an injustice was done to him and became very angry; even his body language showed it. Then, our Lord spoke to Him (Gen 4:5-7):

"Cain became furious, and he scowled in anger. Then the Lord said to Cain: Why are you angry? Why that scowl on your face? If you had done the right thing, you would be smiling; but because you have done evil, sin is crouching at your door. It wants to rule you, but you must overcome it."

A father's eldest son was angry because he felt that it was unfair that his younger brother who had deserted the family and the farm was honoured with a feast when he returned. In contrast the eldest son had stayed with the family and worked hard to keep the farm going. He refused to attend the feast prepared by his father for his brother. Even when his father pleaded with him, his heart was hardened towards his brother (Luke 15:28-32):

"The eldest son was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. But he answered his father: Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him! 'My son,' the father answered, 'you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, and now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.'"

Jesus, who came to save the lost, spoke out against those who displayed a judgmental attitude towards who are despised in society because they considered themselves righteous in their own eyes (Mark 2:16-17):

Some teachers of the Law, who were Pharisees, saw that Jesus was eating with these outcasts and tax collectors, so they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such people?" Jesus heard them and answered, "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. I have not come to call respectable people, but outcasts."

Jesus became indignant and angry many times. Especially because of hardness of heart and narrow interpretation of God's commandments displayed by the priests and leaders in the Temple towards the sick and crippled waiting for healing (Mark 3:1-5).

Then Jesus went back to the synagogue, where there was a man with a paralysed hand. Some people were there who wanted to accuse Jesus of doing wrong; so they watched him closely to see whether he would heal the man on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man, "Come up here to the front".

Then he asked the people, "What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help or to harm? To save a man's life or to destroy it?" But they did not say a thing.

Jesus was angry as he looked around at them, but at the same time he felt sorry for them, because they were so stubborn and wrong. Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and it became well again.

When Jesus showed the people how bad their 'shepherds' (religious leaders) truly were, ruling over the people by their man-made laws, it angered them. Their self-righteous attitude went as far as them plotting to kill Him (Mark 3:6).

So the Pharisees left the synagogue and met at once with some members of Herod's party, and they made plans to kill Jesus.

If people could do that to the Son of God, why are we surprised that they would do that to us as well?

Jesus' anger and actions were an expression of His righteous indignation, free from any thought for His own safety and need for the admiration of people, being concerned only with the glory of our Heavenly Father. For us, for whom it is extremely difficult to be totally selfless

in our righteousness it will be wise not to become angry easily. The Book exhorts us to rather leave anger and revenge to God (Psalm 94:1):

Lord, you are a God who punishes; reveal your anger!

Yet, we cannot help, but to get angered sometimes and that is not necessarily a bad thing. It is important to consider how we express our anger. Furthermore, we need to be careful that we are blameless ourselves. We know, of course, that we are not (Ephesians 4:25-32):

No more lying, then! Everyone must tell the truth to his fellow-believer, because we are all members together in the body of Christ. If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin, and do not stay angry all day. Don't give the Devil a chance. The man who used to rob must stop robbing and start working, in order to earn an honest living for himself and to be able to help the poor. Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you. And do not make God's Holy Spirit sad; for the Spirit is God's mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the day will come when God will set you free. Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ.

Greed versus Contentment

Both greed and contentment are attitudes. We all know the devastating effects of greed – taking advantage of people, oppression, swindling, bribery, even human trafficking. The origin of greed may be the experience of severe deprivation. It may be that at the bottom of greed is the fear that one may experience this again. Jesus wanted people not to be driven by this fear when he said in Matthew 6:25-27:

"This is why I tell you not to be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive, or about clothes for your body. After all, isn't life worth more than food? And isn't the body worth more than clothes? Look at the birds: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your father in heaven takes care of them! Aren't you worth much more than birds? Can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it?"

The antidote for allowing ourselves to be driven by fear (which generates greed) is to trust in God who promised in Philippians 4:19:

And with all his abundant wealth through Christ Jesus, my God will supply all your needs.

The apostle Paul reminds us that it requires mental determination, and a strong belief in God to ensure we do not fall into the trap of letting greed rule our lives (1 Timothy 6:6-10):

Well, religion does make a person very rich, if he is satisfied with what he has. What did we bring into the world? Nothing! What can we take out of the world? Nothing! So then, if we have food and clothes, that should be enough for us. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and are caught in the trap of many foolish and harmful desires, which pull them down to ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a source of all kinds of evil. Some have been so eager to have it that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows.

Attitudes of Bias or Prejudice

The attitude of bias can be because of our many preconceived ideas and opinions. For example, that all people of a certain race, gender or religious orientation are either our friends or enemies.

Bias based on cultures, traditions, rules and regulations could make us proud by feeling superior; believing that we are special and set apart with special rights; being the chosen ones due to our bloodlines, origin, standing or image.

In the Jewish religion from very early times the first-born animals and people were considered to have to be dedicated to God, as a reminder of the miraculous deliverance from the Egyptians, when every first-born in Egypt died because Pharaoh had refused to let the Israelites go (Exodus 13:1)

The Lord said to Moses, "Dedicate all the first-born males to me, for every first-born male Israelite and every first-born male animal belongs to me."

The sons could however be redeemed (Exodus 13: 15) with a sacrifice or money paid to the priests. The eldest son was to be considered the heir of a double portion of his father's wealth and he would become the patriarch of the family. Every family member would be ruled by him. This heir would often also be considered to be an elder of a clan or tribe and everyone in the village, town, city or country would be his servants.

Many are not aware of, or simply ignore the fact that God, the King of kings, whose Kingdom is heaven and earth, made a covenant with people of all nations on earth: those who confess that Jesus Christ is His first-born Son, and heir, have become His disciples and servants. It is a given that many people from all races and nationalities are now also recognising Jesus as their King, Ruler, High Priest and Saviour, which is a mystery of God revealed to us by Paul, who stated (Eph 3:6-7):

The secret is that by means of the gospel the gentiles have a part with the Jews in God's blessings; they are members of the same body and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus. I was made a servant of the gospel by God's special gift, which he gave me through the working of his power.

To us, Jesus our King and Ruler is also the Lord of a blessing and a curse when He will judge us.

There is an attitude that is very damaging and self-destructive one - having a low self-esteem. With such a negative attitude, combined with anger, bitterness and self-pity some people could develop a variety of mental disorders and harm themselves, even others. We believe that with the help of the Holy Spirit, even the most destructive attitude can be redeemed, and turned into an attitude that produces good.

Attitudes Based on Feelings and Emotions

Our emotions often reflect our pain and joy, bitterness, hate and love. Our pain robs us of our joy in life, causing us to hate, envy and commit many deeds that are damaging to ourselves and displeasing to God.

We can love just as deeply as we are able to hate.

When we love we harm no one and have only their wellbeing in mind. We serve with pleasure; we go the extra mile; we forgive easier and improve our ways when our friends and partners indicated that we were doing things that are displeasing and hurtful to them.

When we hate the things someone has done to us, we often deal with it by hating them in return. This is an instinctive reaction to pain. We refuse to forgive and forget; we feel we can never trust that person ever again. We might say many things to or about that person that we will regret later. This attitude will become like an iron ball chained to one's legs. They will never be able to hop skip and jump again. In many ways their lives will have come to a halt while they stagnate in a pool of bitterness and resentment.

Hate is a strong emotion, but no man is entitled to shed the blood of another since God himself is the Lord of that life that dwells in the blood of man. When punishment is dealt out, God always limits that punishment to the one who has done the deed. No one is held responsible for the sinful deeds of their parents and others, unless they also commit those sinful deeds. This is borne out by the following text (Ezekiel 18:20):

It is the one who sins who will die. A son is not to suffer because of his father's sins, nor a father because of the sins of his son. A good man will be rewarded for doing good, and an evil man will suffer for the evil he does.

Often children are scarred by terrible deeds done by their parents. It needs the redeeming work of the Holy Spirit to release them from the guilt of his father's actions.

Actions that we have done, and that plague our consciences can be dealt with by sincere confession coupled with the determination to cease from this behaviour (Ezekiel 18:21-22):

If an evil man stops sinning and keeps my laws, if he does what is right and good, he will not die; he will certainly live. All his sins will be forgiven, and he will live, because he did what is right.

But the danger to disregard God's law and live recklessly is also highlighted (Ezekiel 18:24):

But if a righteous man stops doing good and starts doing all the evil, disgusting things that evil men do, will he go on living? No! None of the good he did will be remembered. He will die because of his unfaithfulness and his sins.

Even if men are not punished here on earth for their transgressions, it will be unwise for them to believe that they won't ever be punished.

Attitudes of Judgment

Attitudes by which many tend to judge poor people or rich people; uneducated people; pretty people or ugly people are ego based. Our egos are a true reflection of our own self-image – of how important and superior we think we are, or how unimportant and little value we feel we are.

What makes us judge others? As we perceive the differences between various ideals, and our own opinions, It is important to be aware of these: (1 Pet 4:17):

The time has come for judgment to begin, and God's own people are the first to be judged. If it starts with us, how will it end with those who do not believe the Good News from God?

Having strong opinions might cause strife and discontent, as it is within groups of people, households, nations and the various Church denominations. Paul highlights this sentiment this in 1 Corinthians 1:11-13:

For some people from Chloe's family have told me quite plainly, my brothers, that there are quarrels among you. Let me put it this way: each one of you says something different. One says, "I follow Paul"; another "I follow Apollos"; another "I follow Peter"; and another "I follow Christ". Christ has been divided into groups! Was it Paul who died on the cross for you? Were you baptised as Paul's disciples?

Paul shows a mature way to express his own preference on the subject of marriage. He explained why he chose to remain single himself (1 Cor 7:32-35):

I would like you to be free from worry. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's work, because he is trying to please the Lord. But a married man concerns himself with worldly matters, because he wants to please his wife; and so he is pulled in two directions. An unmarried woman or a virgin concerns herself with the Lord's work, because she wants to be dedicated both in body and spirit; but a married woman concerns herself with worldly matters, because she wants to please her husband.

A mistake many of us make is that we tend to judge other people using as reference our own skills, knowledge or understanding which we have attained in any form of art, science and business—often not giving God any credit for it. Scripture advises us to view others the way God sees them. (Acts 17:31-32):

For he has fixed a day in which he will judge the whole world with justice by means of a man he has chosen. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising that man from death!

When they heard Paul speak about a raising from death, some of them made fun of him, but others said, "We want to hear you speak about this again."

God's followers will judge others in the hereafter, but let us not judge prematurely, thinking too highly of ourselves (1 Corinthians 4:5):

So you shall not pass judgement on anyone before the right time comes. Final judgement must wait until the Lord comes; he will bring to light the dark secrets and expose the hidden purposes of people's minds. And then everyone will receive from God the praise he deserves.

Attitudes of Bias, based on Preconceived Ideas and Notions

We are often, consciously or unconsciously, biased towards people of other cultures and nationalities. We may judge people according to their traditions. Another form of bias is being opinionated and judgmental about other people's dress codes, the movies they watch, the books they read and what they eat and drink – judging habits and behaviour different from one's own.

This was a mistake even Apostle Peter made and our Lord spoke to him about it, showing him that it was an incorrect attitude. What happened made Peter reflect, and he started to see things God's way. He obeyed God and did then what he was commanded to do, namely to go and preach to Cornelius' household. After Jesus had spoken to him in a symbolical vision he understood that, like God, we need to accept people from all cultural backgrounds (Acts 10:34-36):

Peter began to speak: "I now realise that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what race he belongs to. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.

Despite the fact that Jesus was put to death because of a false bias against Jesus' goals and lifestyle by the rulers (motivated by envy) this was part of God's plan of saving humankind. His followers made the deliberate decision to proclaim God's message, contrary to the wishes of their rulers who had not changed their attitude towards Jesus (Acts 4:27-31):

For indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together in this city with the gentiles and the people of Israel against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you made Messiah. They gathered to do everything that you by your power and will had already decided would happen. And now, Lord, take notice of the threats they have made, and allow us, your servants, to speak your message with all boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal, and grant that wonders and miracles may be performed through the name of your holy Servant Jesus.

When they finished praying, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim God's message with boldness.

As in the case of the disciples, God sometimes wants us to ignore the threats of people in powerful positions and obey Him, rather than their instructions, especially when their demands are motivated by unjustifiable bias.

Attitudes of Atonement

This attitude, driven by the desire to make up for perceived misdeeds against someone else can lead, as we have seen in South Africa (acts of retribution by black people against whites), to an attitude of hate and resentment. Another example is the harm done by Hitler's persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany. This desire can lead to having an attitude for righteous revenge and the persecution of the so called previous offenders or their descendants.

In this case, no individual is judged. An entire race, nation, people of a certain culture and/or tradition are judged and condemned, been perceived as an enemy of the state.

Jesus addressed these attitudes and the hurt that they caused others effectively. To bring about our salvation, He did not mince His words, yet He was gentle in His manner. Jesus' attitude was always positive and never negative or neutral, nor biased towards anyone – poor, rich, educated and uneducated, clean or dirty, man or woman.

When Jewish people committed deeds that were considered a sin against God, they made atonement for, not only their individual misdeeds, but also for the misdeeds of others by offering sacrifices in the Temple. Now that the Temple is no longer there, we know that in accordance to God's Word we need to make atonement through prayer, asking God's forgiveness and forgiving others for their wrongdoings against us. We must also seek the forgiveness from others for our personal wrongdoings against them.

The only way to receive people's forgiveness is to ask them to forgive us. This is the only way to receive God's forgiveness – to first ask His forgiveness and to become reconciled with Him, and then offering our lives to God, by obeying Jesus and living a pure life – striving not to sin against God ever again.

It will help us to forgive, since we need to remember that none of us is perfect and blameless. Nevertheless, we are loved by God (Romans 5:6-9):

For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time that God chose. It is a difficult thing for someone to die for a righteous person. It may even be that someone

might dare to die for a good person. But God has shown us how much he loves us—it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us! By his sacrificial death we are now put right with God; how much more, then, will we be saved by him from God's anger!

It must be emphasised though that atonement does not mean the appeasement of God's wrath, but it had been divinely decided that the broken communion through sin between man and God must be restored.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you sometimes find it difficult not to judge certain people because you condemn their actions?
2. Do you struggle to forgive others for what they have done to you?