

Being a Disciple at Work: Session 2

Habitus and decision-making

Habitus has the basic meaning of the more usual word 'habit'. But for us, habit is something which we do without thinking; it is almost beyond our control. **In classical ethical thought, however, a habit is a mind-set that has become second nature, but which has been induced by long training.** Of course there can be bad habits and good habits. A good habit is a virtue (courage, love, etc) which is so ingrained that it has got beyond deliberate ethical choice. We act well because that disposition is there, part of the soul. It is very like the way the military are so trained that they know automatically how to react under fire.

Habitus is that disposition of the mind and heart from which all Christian action flows. It is a way of being before God and with others such that the responses of Christian discipleship are made holistically and wisely. It engages the whole personality, holding together the reasons of both spiritual wisdom and intellectual commitment.

Ballard and Pritchard: *Practical Theology in Action*

There are two ways in which the human machine goes wrong. One is when human individuals drift apart from one another, or else collide and do one another damage. . . The other is when things go wrong inside the individual – when different parts of him or her (different faculties and desires and so on) either drift apart or interfere with one another.

You can get the idea plain if you think of us as a fleet of ships sailing in formation. The voyage will be a success only, in the first place, if the ships do not collide and get in one another's way; and, secondly, if each ship is seaworthy and has her engines in good order. As a matter of fact, you cannot have either of these things without the other. If the ships keep on having collisions they will not remain seaworthy very long. On the other hand, if their steering gears are out of order they will not be able to avoid having collisions.

...When a person says about something (s)he wants to do, "It can't be wrong because it doesn't do anyone else any harm," he is thinking . . . it does not matter what his ship is like inside provided that he does not run into the next ship. . . Almost all people at all times have agreed (in theory) that human beings ought to be honest and kind and helpful to one another. But . . . unless we go on to . . . the tidying up inside each human being – we are only deceiving ourselves.

What is the good of telling the ships how to steer so as to avoid collisions if, in fact, they are such crazy old tubs that they cannot be steered at all? What is the good of drawing up, on paper, rules for social behaviour, if we know that, in fact, our greed, cowardice, ill-temper, and self-conceit are going to prevent us from keeping them?

C.S.Lewis: *Mere Christianity*

Contrary to popular opinion, the Epistle of James is not a book about action. It is a book about the source of action, the heart of virtue . . .

James . . . understands that what is on the inside of a person will come out. If the central core of who we are is “earthly, unspiritual, devilish”, what flows out will be “disorder and wickedness of every kind”. Conversely, if the central core of who we are is “pure . . . peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy”, then what flows out will be “a harvest of righteousness [which] is sown in peace for those who make peace” (James 3:15-18).

This is why James gives so much attention to purifying the source out of which all action flows: does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh” (3:11-12).

Purity of heart is the fountainhead of all right action – this is the message of James.

Richard Foster: *Streams of Living Water*

What might the implications of these passages be for:

- **our spiritual lives?**
- **our attitudes to issues at work?**
- **our working relationships?**