

Is Emerson's Philosophy "Trust Yourself" Valid?

Posted by Dr. Gary H. Cote on June 9, 2005

Relying on the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Bedford Journal published the editorial "Trust Yourself," writing, "Emerson had it right." The Journal quotes Emerson's thought, "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men." The article promotes "self-reliance," and trusting in "that internal voice that tugs, sometimes to be ignored, sometimes to be acted upon," writing, "Trust it." The article ends with, "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself."

Attempting to encourage young people to move forward with confidence, the Bedford Journal promoted a misguided worldview that is built on foolishness and supports deception. To believe that the subjective world of your own mind and heart, with its wide range of imaginations, conflicting patterns of thought, and constant feelings of inadequacies and insecurities, can become your truth, provide peace, and secure your future, is ludicrous.

Emerson did not have it right; he had it all wrong! The Journal's position is faulty, fragmented and will leave a person in a state of futility. The very statement the Journal uses proves itself to be something you cannot trust. The Journal stresses reliance on the internal voice of conviction or conscience that must be and can be trusted, yet in the same sentence, the Journal distinguishes that the prompting must be sometimes accepted and at other times ignored. Therefore, the internal voice is not always right nor is it always wrong. Either way, one is still taking the chance that the choice works out. This is weak trust that simply cannot be trusted.

People every day and everywhere are making decisions hoping the outcome proves to be favorable. Pros and cons are weighed, people pray for guidance, rely on luck or fate, sometimes spiritualists are consulted, and sometimes they are purely impulsive merely hoping all will be well. Often times, the attitude of "we'll see" dominates. In each case, there will be a certain level of anxiety exhibited, thereby proving the presence of mistrust, i.e., doubt. If it works out right, we say the decision was right. However, if we are determining its rightness by its outcome then it is still faulty. We would not be relying on the internal voice, but merely making a decision with the hope that it works out as we desired, and determining its rightness after the fact. This would be pragmatism at work—determining rightness by outcome.

To hold onto your truth, i.e., subjective truth, as the truth for you and is the truth for others and in others, is once again pure foolishness. No society can operate this way. Our own government system would have to eliminate the judicial and legislative branches of government if we truly held on to this philosophy. The executive branch could stay because that executive person who rules would be everyone's truth. Foolishness! This is the thinking of aristocrats who care little for the opinion of those under their rule. The opinion of the ruler becomes the law of all those under their rulership; all others abide within the parameters. The United States founders

established the checks and balance system of power and authority for the very reason that people cannot be trusted—various motives and opinions are at work and rarely in unity. The thought that only you can bring peace to yourself is equally foolish, futile and faulty. People are saturated with problems and troubles with little peace, internally or externally. America enjoys the greatest measure of peace today and the news will make it clear that it is not that peaceful. Anxiety and depression are on the rise, more so as we slip away from the truthfulness of Christ. If we seek the peace in us, it will be the result of ignorance or indifference at work—chalking it up to “what will be, will be” or “who cares?” This is not peace; this would be the temporal euphoric feeling of escape which never leads to peace. The history of humanity provides enough evidence that peace and truth are not found within the self-life. Though Emerson’s words and the Journal’s editorial may make one “feel good” and maybe “feel encouraged” it will never and does not ever provide the peace and security and hope that is true. Many problems and troubles exist in families and businesses and in countries because the people trusted in their “feeling” or their “sense” of right and wrong, sometimes based on traditions or principles that worked in time pass, but usually dominated by the self-life determining what seems best for them at the time, which is usually at the expense of what is best for others.

Scripture and history clearly presents that truth, peace, and security are found in God Almighty alone. He alone can be trusted and He alone declared and demonstrated His faithfulness to His word. What He says will be, is! God revealed and encourages all to trust in Him; He alone knows the end from the beginning and controls all. We are encouraged to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your path (Proverbs 3:5-6).” Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you (John 14:27).”

When Christ rules the heart rather than self; when the mind of Christ governs the soul, rather than the mind of the natural man, then peace, security, joy, uprightness, and peace become real. Emerson missed this, but he gained an equally foolish following that still praise the empty words of man astray from truth. May the truth of Christ keep us from error and may His peace uphold us till the hope of His coming dawns!

May the Lord grant all wisdom and grace to receive this message and live out its purpose!