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**October 5, 2008**

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## **Perception and Reality**

### **Mark 10: 17-22**

While on sabbatical, I didn't simply learn lessons about new styles of worship and interesting truths from books. I also decided to take some golf lessons from a wonderful teacher named Luke Smith, a young British golf professional of whom I think a great deal.

I said, "Master Luke, I want you to teach me how to hit my driver from right to left."

He laughed and asked, "How long did you say your sabbatical was?"

You see, a golf ball is not designed to be hit straight.

Some people "fade it," which means they move the ball from left to right,

while some players "draw it," which means they move the ball from right to left.

I am one of those people who can almost always make a golf ball go left to right,

but I am generally incapable of making a ball go right to left with most of my clubs, especially my driver, and I wanted to learn how.

So my teacher gave me a few pointers, and I hit a few balls for him.

However, even with his coaching, none of them went right to left.

My teacher said, "Dr. Kremer, you've got to close your club face early in your swing."

I said, defensively, "But I am."

He answered, "Dr. Kremer, you think you are closing your club head quickly. That's your perception.

But the flight of your ball tells you otherwise. Your perception is not reality.

You think you are doing one thing, but trust me, you really are doing something else."

It was my time to laugh. "Master Luke," I said, "that observation has a far wider application."

I have thought about my golf teacher's insight a great deal over the past few months, and, oddly enough,

I find it offers great insight in understanding this marvelous passage where Jesus

has a conversation with the young man generally known as the rich young ruler.

He comes to Jesus to ask a profound and important question: "What do I have to do to have eternal life?" Jesus

says, "You know how God has instructed us. You know the commandments."

Then Jesus quotes from mostly the so-called "second tablet" of the Ten Commandments:

"Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet."

The young man quickly and earnestly answers,

"I've kept all of these commandments since my youth."

The text then includes this marvelous phrase: "And Jesus looking upon him, loved him . . ."

Jesus loved this young man.

Jesus sensed that this young man was a sweet kid, a genuinely good guy,

intensely and completely sincere, a believer who had truly been trying to live righteously.

This young man truly believes that he is indeed keeping the Commandments.

And though it doesn't seem like it, Jesus is trying to coach and guide him rightly.

Certainly, the young man had *tried* to keep the commandments.

But Jesus perceives his weak point: "I only need you to do one thing more: Go, sell all that you have, give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

The Scripture then offers this sad and devastating denouement:

"At that his countenance fell, and he went away in sorrow, because he was very rich."

After spending the last several months contemplating the Ten Commandments with me, do you recognize what is going on here?

This young man truly believed he had kept all Ten Commandments.

That is his perception. He felt that he has kept them all since his youth.

But Jesus looks at the swing of his life and realizes that his approach to faith is profoundly flawed.

*Jesus knew that while this young man thought he had kept all the commandments, he had in fact failed to keep the very first one:*

*“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”*

Jesus perceived that in truth this young man’s god was really his wealth.

His deity was really his portfolio. His power and prestige were really what he worshipped.

His perception was that he had kept the commandments,

but in an act of spiritual genius, Jesus saw the disparity between this man’s perception and his reality.

With one extraordinary command Jesus helped this man see with devastating clarity

that God is not his God. His possessions are his god.

If he would have eternal life, he must displace his man-made deity from the center of his worship and allow the true God to reign over and order his life.

Perception and reality: the disparity between the two is a lesson that speaks to every life.

We think we have this spiritual life thing all figured out.

We think that the way we are living is fine.

We are pretty sure that we are always doing the loving thing.

We think we are always being gracious. We think we are always being faithful.

We look at the Ten Commandments and think “Yeah, I’m keeping those.”

As best anybody can tell, maybe we are.

We think we are being open. We think we are being teachable to the Spirit.

But that’s only our perception.

When our Lord looks at us, he sees the disparity between our perception and reality.

When our Lord watches us take a swing at life, he looks at us with love and says,

‘I know that you perceive that you are doing okay. But your perception is not reality.

In truth, your spiritual life has not progressed.

Your relationship with the divine has remained static for a long time.

Your spiritual commitment has not advanced.

Your capacity for deepening relationships with others has not fully developed.

Your spiritual understanding has not matured.

You think of yourselves as spiritually healthy. That’s your perception. But reality is something else.”

The basic spiritual fact of life is that our Lord cannot teach us unless we allow ourselves to be taught.

Our Lord cannot instruct us until we admit to our God that there is truly a disparity between what we think we are spiritually and how we really live and relate to the divine and others.

Yet the wonderful truth about our Lord’s table is that He invites us to come to it warts and all, weaknesses and all, infirmities and all, immaturities and all. He says to us, “Come, let us eat together.”

So we gather around this table, where we can be honest with ourselves and with Christ and confess,

‘You know, Lord, I might need some lessons in how to be loving, lessons in how to be gracious, lessons in how to be understanding, lessons in how to be tolerant, lessons in how to be forbearing and forgiving. I need some lessons in truly how to advance in spiritual maturity.’

When we open our being to God’s guidance,

we can truly allow ourselves to be fed through communion with the divine.

In such moments of candid acknowledgement of our weakness our Lord says to us,

“I can teach you. I can guide you in the ways love and faith. Come, let us eat together.”

In a spirit of humility and openness, let us approach this table.

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer  
Communion Homily, October 5, 2008  
The twelfth and last of the Series