

# RELATIONAL REFLECTION ON “THE PARADOX OF CHANGE AND RELEVANCE”

-- PART 1 --

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(Editor’s note: this is the first of a 2-part series)

“Jesus *looked at* him and said, **You are** Simon son of John. **You will be** called Cephas.” (which, when translated, is Peter). (John 1:42)

“All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently that too God **will make** clear to you. Only let us live up to what **we have already** attained.” (Philippians 3:15-16)

“...the paradox surrounding change and relevance. On the one hand, no one and nothing stays the same unless they are willing to change. On the other hand, no one and nothing becomes truly timely unless they are in touch with the eternal.”  
(Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, Baker Book House, 1993, p.89)

When Jesus *looked at* Simon the Greek phrase used “*looked at*” (penetrating gaze) is the same one used by Luke when Peter denied Jesus three times. “The Lord turned and *looked straight at Peter*. (Luke 22:61). Our **first relational reflection** is as follows: that we need to understand both Jesus and his statement to Simon “**You are** Simon. **You will be** called Peter in **Trinitarian terms**.”

If we are to come to grips with the paradox of change and relevance, we too need to be in touch with the Eternal Son of God. The significance of this in a rapidly changing world where there is not only competition from a plurality of religious views, but also a plethora of spiritualities within the Christian worldviews. Therefore, a greater measure of spiritual discernment is required if we are to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Thus with an external challenge of alternative religious worldviews and internal threat of multifaceted Christian spiritualities it seems as Dr. Carl F.H. Henry aptly puts it

“if in an earlier generation people were said to be so heavenly minded that they were of no earthly use, in our day the very opposite is more apt to be the case; they are so earthbound, it is said, that they are now alien to the spiritual world.”  
(*Alive to God – studies in Spirituality presented to James Houston* IVP, 1992, p.8)

Dr. Henry is not suggesting that there is an absence of spiritualities, but the present climate of spiritualities is so human-centered that it lacks reverence and a distinct transcendence. This leads us to our **second relational reflection** that is closely tied in with Jesus' view of man. We are not to soft pedal Jesus' humanness nor are we to undermine his divinity. He is the God-man. A failure on either or both these truths could lead to a Unitarianist doctrine at best or loss of Christ's uniqueness at worst.

Our **third relational reflection is as follows:** If we are to live with the tough tensions of the paradox of change and relevance then our view of truth needs to be re-evaluated and measured against the full stature of Christ who is the way, the truth (Alethia) and the life. To assert that all truth is God's truth requires great caution and discerning thinking.

No truth, however clearly stated, is the whole truth. No single principle, however well applied, is the all-sufficient answer. All our truths, principles, and emphases need balancing. Only so will the church demonstrate the fullness of the truth that sets us free.  
(Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, Baker Book House. p.86).

In our experience on the mission field, Western colleagues generally do not like ambivalence and discrepancies. Westerners like a clear black-&-white approach. The opposite of truth is a lie. On the other hand our Asian counterparts are accustomed to living with ambivalence and so called "gray-areas." Truth therefore is viewed differently. It is as if the corollary to truth being a lie is actually the failure to take truth to the next level of truth. For example Jesus' statement to Simon is "**You are** Simon" – one level of truth. Jesus' next statement "**You will be** called Peter" – taken to the next level of truth. In other words the same truth through Asian eyes is seen cyclically rather than linearly. (e.g. already... but not yet; "You are... You will be"). Our final relational reflection is as follows: The significance of this is the implication for our **understanding of sin – substantively or relationally or both.**

In the life of Peter it is clear that he wrestled with this issue of sin as he viewed it time and again through the grid of his own cultural relevance. It was only at the climax of Pentecost (Acts 10) that he came to a fuller understanding through the vision to go to Cornelius home that what he considered unclean was clean in God's sight. Peter had to take one truth to the level of total truth, rather than abort the truth at the level of culturally relevant application. Sometimes we can preach Christ and lose the kingdom!!!- an oxymoron.