

## **Michael VandenEnden**

*The Matrix* is one of my favorite movies. When I first watched it in the theater I had no idea what to expect, I had not seen any previews--I had no idea what "the Matrix" was. When the lights dimmed and the projector began to flicker images on the screen, I was blown away with uncanny special effects, rich metaphor, and lightening fast Kung Fu fighting.

In the film, Keannu Reeve's character, Neo, is confronted with a worldview crisis. His search to know what "the Matrix" is leads him to be involved with a group of anarchists who claim that reality is not all what it is cracked up to be. The leader of the group, Morpheus, explains that "the Matrix" is "the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth." What truth? The human race is in bondage, born into slavery--they just do not know it, but they can feel it. At the end of their discussion, Morpheus gives Neo the option to either take the blue pill and comfortably remain in the world of lies and slavery, or to take the red pill and discover the truth about reality. Neo takes the red, of course. What kind of Hollywood script would allow Neo to do anything else?

**"He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son"**

In Colossians, Paul contrasts the "dominion of darkness" with the "kingdom of the light." Although the two may physically occupy the same time and place, they could not be any more different from each other. The dominion of darkness is the world as most people know it: alienation from God, alienation from each other, and the religious rules and regulations employed to cover up these facts. This is a world tossed around at the whim of varied authorities, all grappling with each other for power and control. Any attempt to resist these authorities is turned around and used in their favor. This is a world of futility, without hope.

The kingdom of light is a new world, superimposed on the dominion of darkness in such a way that the darkness knows its reign has ended--the contrast between the two is striking. The kingdom of light is a world of redemption and forgiveness; relationship is restored with God and between each other, and there is no more passing blame. This world has only one final authority, Christ, who gained it when he relinquished all power and control. As such, those living under his reign, in the kingdom of the Son, are free from all previous power and control, their only authority is Christ. This is a world of opportunity, with much hope.

Life in the world of the dominion of darkness is defined by what you cannot do--there are too many authorities struggling for power for a mere mortal to have any freedom. Decisions and creativity are stifled by the myriad of manufactured rules, all designed by the powers to maintain control and subdue humanity under fear and illusion. New life in Christ, in the kingdom of the Son, is defined by endless freedom--the written code and regulations that the powers used to subdue us has been nailed to the cross. For those in the new kingdom, the spontaneity and creativity that humans find so natural is no longer bound and defined by external forces--at long last their life can be an expression of who they truly are.

**"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

When Neo takes the red pill, the world as he knows it melts before his eyes and he wakes up as an adult floating in a bathtub of amniotic fluid, hooked up to all sorts of wires and connections. He took the red pill because he simply wanted to know the truth. Morpheus had explained that knowledge of the truth could not be conveyed by words, only experienced. This

experience shows Neo that his whole life has been spent in a prison apart from reality. The world as he experienced it was not the real world. In the real world Neo had never moved, breathed air, or used his real eyes or ears. Although while in the Matrix he thought he was simply living the human experience, Neo discovers that his entire life (in every aspect) had been in the service of domineering non-human authorities.

When Neo is free of these authorities, then the movie gets really exciting. Although Neo is free from the Matrix, there is overlap between Neo's old world of illusion and the new world of reality. Neo reenters the Matrix, but not in the confinement of the amniotic bathtub--he is patched in via a remote renegade signal. Neo is in the Matrix, but he is not of the Matrix. Although Neo is now free from the powers that dominate the Matrix, Morpheus has to show Neo what that means. The rules that govern the limits of speed and gravity are shown to be a sham, and Neo must learn how to act free of those rules, but it is not easy. As the movie progresses, Neo slowly begins to live out the truth he has come to experience, rejecting and opposing the false authority of the Matrix. In the climax of the film, Neo resists the powers of the Matrix in a way that no other person had, showing that even the Matrix's rules of death do not apply to him.

Now that Neo has experienced the truth and lived it out in all its full reality, his mission becomes to defy the powers and show people another way. In the closing scene, Neo declares his intentions to the ruling authorities of the Matrix, "I'm going to show these people what you don't want them to see. I'm going to show them a world without you...a world without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries. A world...where anything is possible."

We live under a new reality, a truth that is far more exciting than the red pill that Morpheus offered Neo. Through his death on the cross, Christ offers forgiveness from the sin and blame-passing of the old world and invites us into the reality of the kingdom of the Son. We are invited to join in Christ's death and to leave the dominion of darkness with all its rules and controls, with its borders and boundaries and be resurrected into the new kingdom of light. Once we are reborn into this new kingdom, into the *real* world, we begin to learn what it means to really move, to breathe real air, and to use our real eyes and ears. The old world that had blinded us to the truth is defeated, and we are given the freedom to be who we were created to be.

**"If you have died with Christ to the powers of this world, why do you still submit to its rules?"**

Why do we find it so hard to speak the truth to each other when the truth has been so liberating in our lives? In the old kingdom of darkness, honesty was subject to the whims of multiple powers. Our natural inclination toward honesty was suppressed and only permitted so long as it served the interests of our projected image or personae, public opinion, and of our pocketbooks. Our genuine ability to be truthful was controlled with rules of fear and intimidation. Under these rules, we had to tell lies even though we knew it ran contrast to our true nature. Well there is a new sheriff in town, and he has said 'to hell with your rules.'

Just as we have been liberated by the truth of Christ and freed from the authority of the dominion of darkness, we can be living out our freedom and in turn be speaking truthfully. We can show these people a world without fear, without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries. By being honest in the toughest of situations, where the powers' threat of reprisal is at its greatest, we can demonstrate our freedom from those powers by boldly speaking the truth.