

TRUTH

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O LORD, are not Your eyes on the truth? (Jer. 5:3).

If there is one problem which is affecting both the church and the world, it is the collapse of any interest in truth; not just the truth of God's Word, but truth of any kind. Steered by role models in politics, pop music, the media, TV, movies and novels, society has felt more and more free to lie. Some lies have become standing jokes because they are repeated so often: "*the cheque is in the post*," "*tell her I'm not here*," "*I was out having a drink with my mates*." Truly we can say with Jeremiah that, "*This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth*" (Jer. 7:28). Or with Hosea, *For the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy Or knowledge of God in the land"* (Hos. 4:1).

The great sadness is that as the world has entered the church more and more, the church has not only been a place where lies abound, but a place which is little concerned about the truth. This is a very serious, indeed, terminal matter, for God promises to judge and condemn those who suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18). In the past, godly leaders catechised their flock from the earliest age; some catechisms being specifically written for children (such as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*). This was not indoctrinisation but rather the providing of a sure foundation for the Christian life. As catechising went out of fashion, many church members became increasingly ignorant of truth. Modern believers of many years standing frequently know less than infants raised in godly homes centuries ago. Neither do people read history as they used to. Learning from the fight against errors of the past gave a good grounding and preparation for avoiding modern versions of those ideas.

When a church abandons truth, it commits slow suicide. It will die, at least in terms of spiritual authority, if not subsequently in geographical terms. Truth is vital to Christianity. Why is this?

Truth is a constant focus of God's attention

God is said to abound in truth (Ex. 34:6). He is full of truth since it is part of the nature of His being; hence, He is God of truth (Deut. 32 :4; Ps. 31:5; Is. 65:16). When God teaches His people He is said to be leading them in His truth (Ps. 25:5). God's plan of salvation was the application both of mercy and truth (Ps. 57:3; 61:7). God's compassion and patience results from truth mingled with mercy (Ps. 86:1). When God speaks it is as the Spirit of truth (I John 4:6). The Holy Spirit is repeatedly called "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:7, 15:26, 16:13). All God's work is based on truth. He can't act at all without being true (Ps. 33:4). God can't do anything contrary to truth because He is truth.

Jesus is the truth

Jesus is the personification of truth (John 14:6), and all truth finds its basis in Him. Just as genuine righteousness comes from Him, so truth emanates from Him. When He came as a man, He came with a message of truth (John 18:37) proclaiming God's Word, the Word of truth (John 17:17). His salvation was a sanctification worked by truth (John 17:17, 19). If we ignore truth we turn our back on Christ since the truth is in Jesus (Eph. 4:21).

The Christian must walk in truth

Worship is at the heart of a relationship with God and genuine spiritual worship must be performed in truth (John 4:24). Godly men are men of truth (Ex. 18:21) and must speak truth (Eph. 4:25). Thus true believers are stated to be those who are "of the truth" (John 18:37). The fruit of the Spirit is manifested in truth (Eph. 5:9) and it is truth which is the first item of spiritual armour to be put on (Eph. 6:14). We cannot bear spiritual fruit or defend ourselves from spiritual attack without basing our lives on the truth. Truth forms the basis of our Christian walk; if

we are not centred on truth, we cannot be practising Christians (I Kin. 2:4; Ps. 86:11; III John 1:3-4). Talk is empty if not acted upon in truth and even good deeds are worthless if not performed in truth (I John 3:18).

The church is built on truth

The church was brought forth by the truth of God to be a testimony and a glory to His character (James 1:18). The church is said to be the pillar and ground of truth (I Tim. 3:15). Truth in society should rest in the foundation of truth in the church. Like salt in the earth, the church is meant to permeate society with truth. It sets an example, it preaches the Gospel, it manifests Christ's character. In doing so it influences the world around it. Church history shows that in times when the church has excelled in its testimony, society has also flourished for the better. In days when godliness and truth were ignored or ridiculed, society became degraded, debauched and declined. Our times are a clear example of this.

God's word is truth

The revelation to men of God's truth is found in the Bible which is the words of God breathed out into men's minds, who then wrote them down (II Tim. 3:16). The objective touchstone of truth for the church is the Bible. This cannot be overstated. If mere subjective impressions were the final word as to God's desires, every man would have a different standard and would defend his stance to the bitter end. Feelings are not enough; the heart can be deceived and thoughts can be captured. We need an objective, absolute measure of truth.

This is what the Bible is and why it is so important. Truth is vital to our lives and scripture explains to us what that truth is: in teaching, picture form, narrative history, figurative typology, symbols, sermons, poems, songs, parables, praises, prayers, commands, rebukes, encouragements, exhortations and blessings. These all combine to present a unified message of the mind and will of God. The various forms are used so that the receptive understanding of every individual is catered for. The person who finds didactic teaching hard to follow may more easily understand

the truth in a psalm. The person who cannot fathom typology - like the Tabernacle or the various sacrificial offerings - may well see the heart of God in an apostolic prayer or a parable of Jesus.

God wants us to walk in truth

God wants us to be followers of Christ. Since God abounds in truth and Christ is the truth then it follows that we should be full of truth as well. If we doubted this, then Psalm 51:6 makes no bones about it. We are not to simply walk in truth, but we must also be full of truth in our soul. We must inculcate truth in our thoughts and emotions. Our choices must be based on truth. This will mean taking every thought captive (II Cor. 10:5). If the inner man is set on truth, then it is relatively easy to walk in truth.

If we desire to be full of the fruit of the Spirit, we will centre upon truth in our behaviour since truth undergirds all the other fruit. *“Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord”* (Eph. 5:8-10). In order to do this, we must know the truth. This means devoting ourselves to understanding God’s Word. Our fellowship with others should be rich in truth and we should not be afraid of giving or taking correction, for only by being corrected can we all learn and grow in knowledge. *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another”* (Col. 3:16).

Do we want to be loved by God? Of course we do. How can we ensure this? We honour God by doing what he says. The obedient child is loved by the father, the wayward child is a cause of grief and pain to a father (just as Israel was to God). If we focus on loving Christ, we will obey God’s Word and be full of truth. The father promises to love such people: *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him”* (John 14:23). The apostles felt exactly the same because they were of the same mind as God. *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth”* (III John 1:4). They wrote the Word under God’s inspiration so that we could walk in truth and bring joy to God.

If we want to mature as Christians then it is vital that we grow in truth and develop in our understanding of the Bible. The Word of truth is vital for growth. Are we weak in faith? The Word brings faith (Rom. 10:17). Do we need assurance? The word brings assurance (I John 2:5). Maturity is learning to discern good from evil (Heb. 5:12-14). Just as a child needs to learn about the dangers of life in order to develop, so must the believer distinguish between good and evil. A child does not understand that an electric socket is dangerous or that bleach cannot be drunk. It learns what will harm him by listening to his parents and by painful experience proving that they were right. Running too fast will result in falling over, for instance. Likewise the church must grow and mature or it will suffer evil. It does this by understanding the Word and thus becoming more discerning.

The local church should corporately walk in truth

Truth is the foundation of church life: *“I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”* (I Tim. 3:15). No one is excluded. Leaders must speak in truth (II Cor. 12:6), teach in truth (I Tim. 2:7) and are approved by truth not power (II Cor. 4:2). Members must worship in truth (John 4:24), serve God in truth (Josh. 24:14), walk before God in truth (I Kin. 2:4), rejoice in truth, not experiences (I Cor. 13:6), speak to one another in truth (Eph. 4:25), meditate on truth (Phil. 4:8) and love the truth (II Thess. 2:10).

Clearly everything must be based on truth. Even church growth is seen as the progression of truth. Church expansion is the Word growing (Acts 6:7; 19:20; 12:24; the Word here is the Gospel, “the word of truth;” Col. 1:5; John 15:3).

Some reasons why understanding the word of truth is vital

We will look at just one chapter (Psalm) of the Bible to see what the benefits of comprehending God’s Word are. We need to grasp the Word in order:

- To worship uprightly (Ps. 119:7, 54, 62)
- To avoid sin (Ps. 119:11)
- To gain counsel (Ps. 119:24)
- To be able to meditate (Ps. 119:27, 148)
- To gain strength (Ps. 119:28)
- For a faithful way (Ps. 119:30)
- For liberty (Ps. 119:44-45)
- To answer criticism (Ps. 119:42)
- For comfort (Ps. 119:52, 76, 92)
- For blessing (Ps. 119:1,2)
- To learn through affliction (Ps. 119:67, 71, 75)
- To be given life (Ps. 119:92-93)
- For wisdom (Ps. 119:98-100)
- For understanding (Ps. 119:104, 130)
- For peace (Ps. 119:165)

Conclusion: Why we should want to walk in the truth

Apart from the divine commands and wanting to be like our God, we ought to live in truth even if for purely self-centred reasons. Firstly, it frees us from our bondages: “*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32). Any ministry which is not based on Biblical truth, no matter how “powerful,” will only bring harm and bondage. The promises of loud, famous ministries which are based on supposed acts of power and demonstrations of physical phenomena, rather than Scripture, are false and will lead to spiritual impairment not healing. Even their own case histories show this. Several of these ministries are on video proclaiming someone to be healed who later died of the “healed” disease. This has been common throughout Pentecostal history, though it is rarely talked about. If you want to be free of bondage, Jesus’ words remain the only answer - you must continue in His Word and the truth will make you free.

What about spiritual warfare? Don’t we need street marches, spiritual mapping, demonic confrontations and so on? In short, no; none of these are part of the normal directions for the believer; but what is part of our

standing battle orders is to be girded with truth before anything else. Truth is the foremost, vital aspect of real spiritual warfare: “*Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth*” (Eph. 6:14). Truth is the first item mentioned; the belt holds all the rest together. Without truth you are naked to the enemy in your most sensitive area. Furthermore, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is the last item to be taken up in the battle preparations (Eph. 6:17). So the first item is truth and the last item of armour is the Word of truth. According to Paul, truth is the most vital component of spiritual warfare. John agrees, overcoming the evil one is dependent upon truth: “*I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one*” (I John 2:14). So, if we want to be strong and able to deal with the enemy, we must focus on the Word of truth.

If we are struggling to understand a text or a doctrine, we should fellowship with others to resolve the problem. This obviously means seeking out mature brothers for advice, but it also means reading good books, which is only fellowshipping the ideas of good men who are not present. The fashion of some to disparage commentaries and systematic theologies is tantamount to ignoring fellowshipping with the advice of eminent, godly teachers.

Why is truth so fundamental to Christian living? It is because God’s Word is truth and Christ is God’s Word (Rev. 19:13). Christ is thus the truth itself; truth comes from Him (John 14:6). Focusing upon Biblical truth is focusing upon one aspect of Christ. As we meditate upon the glory of Christ we will see many virtues: His love, His mercy, His beauty, His righteousness, His patience with us. But above all, His truth is the one thing that is most needful in our daily walk and growth. We cannot ignore this important matter, except at our peril.

This article was authored by Mr. Paul Faby, founder and chief writer for “Understanding Ministries.” It has been abridged from a longer original of the same title with the permission of the author.