

Truth and Love

By David Sheats

Published by NTChurchSource.com

"I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another" (2 John 4,5). "That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Eph. 4:14,15). "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23,24). "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart" (1 Peter 1:22). "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).

These and many other scriptures speak of truth and love and their close relationship. Often we separate them, and we do so to our own destruction. Both are in Christ, and we cannot have one without the other. Someone has summed this up in these words: "Love that does not speak the truth is not love, and truth that is not spoken in love is not truth." Paul says that the only way we are going to grow up in Christ is by speaking the truth in love to one another. We all want to grow up, and to be rooted and grounded in truth and love so that we will not be swayed by everything that surrounds us. It is truth that will set us free into the liberty of the sons of God so that we can do His will and please Him in all things, and it is love that must be the underlying motivation for all things. Our purpose here is to consider these areas again, praying that the Holy Spirit will quicken them to our hearts and shed light on our pathway that we may walk in truth and glorify the Lord.

Truth Is In Christ

When we think of truth we often think of "truths," separate from the person of Christ. Someone may say to us, "It doesn't matter what we believe, we just need to love the Lord and each other." This is said in all sincerity, thinking that love should cause us to lay aside doctrines and areas of disagreement, and focus our attention on Jesus. But if pressed on this point, most would agree that we must agree on certain fundamental issues such as the deity of Christ or the fact that salvation is by grace and not of works. On what basis do we identify one truth as necessary and another truth as unnecessary? And how can we separate any area of truth from Jesus Christ when He said that He Himself *is* truth?

I believe that if we will be honest with the scriptures and with the anointing in our hearts, we will come to the conclusion that no area of truth can be ignored without loss. The natural mind tries to find a place to justify our condition before God, even if we are not able to walk together in truth with our brothers and sisters. But in doing so, we are essentially saying that where we are is where we want to stay. We give no place for God to lift us up, and give us the same mind and judgment in all things. (1 Cor. 1:10) Can God speak the same thing to every member? Can He make us one as He is one? If we are all holding fast to the Head (Christ), will we not all hear the same thing? How could it be otherwise? Can we let truth judge us, instead of judging the truth ourselves?

Jesus said that He *is* the truth. This one statement should answer every question. Truth must relate to Jesus, and if it does not, it is not truth and should be discarded. God has chosen to sum up all things in Christ. When considering an area of truth, the first thing that we should consider is how it relates to Christ. If it does not seem to, then we need to be silent until we see how it does relate, or that it should be rejected altogether. All truth brings us either to the place of life in Christ, or to a fuller expression of that life. Anything else that we may call truth is only ideas of men that may seem good, but have no value to God. God is interested in only one thing: an expression of His Son in us. If we have accepted our calling in Christ Jesus, then we will reject every expression of self, and focus our entire attention on our calling, which is to live His life. (Gal. 2:20)

Although in theory we may accept this view of truth, the difficulty many times is that we do not see how a truth being held before us relates to Jesus and our relationship with Him. In general, the problem is our lack of seeing who Jesus Christ is. When Jesus asked Peter who He was, Peter said, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matt. 16:16). Have we taken careful note of what Jesus said in reply? *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"* (vs. 17,18). Jesus did not say that He would build His church on Peter, but on the revelation of who Christ is. We are totally dependent on God for that revelation, and apart from this beginning, we have no hope of relating truth properly to Jesus Christ. A faulty revelation of who Jesus is will lead us into error in other truths. Every individual truth must be measured against the revelation of who Jesus is. He is the standard.

This is not a place of maturity but a place of beginning. Our revelation of Jesus must grow and expand, but if we are hungry to know God in truth, He will give us a beginning revelation that is true and will set our course properly. Have we let the Holy Spirit reveal to us who Jesus is? Our part is to humble ourselves before God and ask Jesus for the eye salve. He feeds the hungry, and rewards those who ask, seek and knock, knowing that apart from Jesus they can do nothing. Have we done our part? God is faithful to fulfill His word.

Truth Versus Truths

We have the clear statement of Jesus, "I am the truth." How then can we know truth if we are not knowing Jesus? The answer, of course, is that we cannot. Only as we abide in Jesus can we abide in truth. As we abide in Him, truth will abide in us, and everything will be held in proper relationship. On the other hand, if we do not abide in truth, we will not abide in Jesus. The two cannot be separated. Only as we abide in truth can we expect to know the grace of God in our lives, and bring glory to God in all things. Consider carefully these words from John: *"The elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father in truth and love"* (2 John 1-3).

Much of the time, when we think of truth we are thinking of a specific truth or doctrine. Sometimes we are speaking of a true fact. Truth has its expression in truths, but truths do not bring us into truth. Truths can be mere facts, but facts can be void of a relationship. Truth is always in a relationship with Jesus, and in that relationship, He will order all truth, or truths, in proper perspective. An example in the life of Jesus that is well known to us is His encounter with the woman caught in adultery. The religious leaders on that occasion were moving on true facts and their own reasoning about those facts. In so doing, they did not judge rightly or glorify God in the matter. Jesus reordered the whole occasion and in so doing, brought truth to affect the lives of all who were present. He offered a place for

response to God that would bring eternal fruit. As we discuss truth, we would do well to consider whether we are doing the same.

The point is that our pursuit of truth must focus on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Doctrine or truths that do not spring out of this pursuit will most likely be off track and lead us or others astray. Truths or true facts that are held separate from Jesus and only feed the mind will deaden us, because they do not lead into a relationship with Jesus who *is* truth. Truth which is ignored leads to a broken relationship with God, since all truth relates to the person of Jesus. Thus to ignore truth is to ignore life, and it will end in death. We cannot have Jesus without truth or truth without Jesus.

Walking In Truth

John said that he was rejoicing to find some children walking in truth. Is walking in truth separate from walking in Jesus? Some may think so, but John does not separate these. *"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 9). To walk in truth is to walk in Jesus, and to avoid truth is to avoid Jesus. When we avoid any area of truth, we lower God's standard, and diminish the character of God. God does not accept our standards, and does not lower His standard so that we can be accepted or "feel good" where we are. He has given Jesus Christ to dwell in us by the Holy Spirit, and in doing so, He raises us up to His standard. If we want to dwell with God, then we must walk in who He is, not in who we are.

What does it mean to walk in truth? If Jesus is truth (which He is), and if Jesus is in us by the Holy Spirit (if He is not, we are not His), then He will write His word on our hearts and on our minds. This is the promise of the New Covenant. When His word comes to us in a living relationship, our place is to respond to that word and work it out in our lives. It is God at work within us, both to will and to do His good pleasure. But our place is to work out that salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. 3:12) If the Lord brings an area of truth before us which we will not walk in, or if we explain it away somehow, then we have rejected Jesus. He does not bring truth before us that is unnecessary or irrelevant. He always comes to us at the right time and with the grace to obey. We can never blame Jesus. He is perfect in all His ways.

The truth that Jesus brings may seem beyond us, but it is never beyond Jesus in us. He does not consider what we can do separate from Him, but what His grace can do in us. Our place is to believe Him when He speaks, and then to act in faith, leaving the results in His hands. When we reason according to our understanding, we cease to walk in truth■in Jesus■and our love relationship with Him is greatly affected.

Truth In Love

"Therefore be followers of God, as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:1,2). Not only are we called to walk in truth, we are also called to walk in love. Are these in contradiction to one another, or are they in unison? Christ is truth while at the same time being the full expression of God's love, so if we abide in Christ, then we will also walk in truth and love in perfect harmony. Someone has said that the gospel must be proclaimed, but it first must be adorned. Truth is the same. It must be adorned with love in an earthly vessel. There is a heavenly fragrance coming forth from a person in union with Christ that is very attractive to a lover of truth. It is an aroma of life unto life. (2 Cor. 2:14-16) It is more than just believing the right thing. It only comes from knowing the right One.

Consider what John says about Christ: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* *"And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"* (John 1:14,16,17). Is it only in Christ that the Word became flesh, or is that the calling of every disciple of Christ? *"It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher"* (Matt. 10:25). We are bone of his bone, flesh of His flesh. *"As He is, so are we in this world."* The same word that dwelt in Christ must also dwell in us, until we become an expression of that word. We are in reality the Body of Christ here upon this earth. And in this high calling, we are called to express the same life that He did. The aroma that proceeds from our life will open the way for truth to a hungry soul seeking the way.

How can truth always be held in love? There is only one way, and that is to know the love of God filling our whole inner being or heart. How can this be done other than in a personal, intimate, ongoing relationship with Jesus by the Spirit? God is love, and the only way we can have that same love in our hearts is to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. We have all heard these words many times, but we dare not pass over them lightly. Knowing what we should do and doing it are two entirely different things. How then can we know this reality? Listen to John again: *"This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it"* (2 John 6). Listen also to Jesus: *"If you keep My commandments you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"* (John 15:10). To say that we are abiding in God's love without having that love expressed in keeping His word is a contradiction. The ultimate expression of love is obedience. If we obey the Lord, we will abide in His love. If we do not, we will not abide in His love, and the expression of our life will not be an expression of truth.

When we think of obeying His "commandments," what do we mean? Some think of the "Ten Commandments," while others think of a list of basic and important doctrines. But in a living relationship with God, are the commandments a fixed set of laws or truths? That may have been true in the Old Covenant, but now we have entered into a "new and living way." The commandments now are the expressions of His will written on our hearts and minds by the Spirit. They are "in life," and they are coming to us continually. The evidence that we have submitted our lives to God and that we are abiding in His love is that we are obeying those commandments. In this way, God is leading us according to who He is, and not according to our understanding or limited judgment. Since God sees all things, He is able to lead us in truth in all matters whether we understand or not.

In the scripture quoted previously, Paul says that our responsibility as members of Christ is to speak the truth one to another in love. If we consider this command in light of our discussion, we can see this is a demanding place that can only be fulfilled in the grace of God. Love only considers God and His will. If we consider man, we will fail. If we only consider God, we will hold truth in a proper way that will minister grace to every man. If we consider man, we will be moved to act on a lower level, often taking a place of sympathy which will not help but only hinder what God wants to do in the life of another. God never sympathizes in this sense with our weakness or difficulties. He reveals Himself as our strength and lifts us up to a place of victory. God's love does not overlook weaknesses, but deals with the source of weakness to bring us to a place of strength. God's love does not hide anything, but brings everything to the light. He is light, and we are light in Him.

This union of truth and love is only possible in the life of God. It is not a special place for just a few, but the high calling of every child of God. Christ paid the way to make this possible, and we dare not neglect this great salvation through unbelief.

Fellowship

What we are considering has a direct bearing on our fellowship with God and fellowship with one another. *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:6,7). Fellowship is only possible as we walk in the light (truth). Any lesser definition is not fellowship. When we enter into fellowship with God, we are able to move together with God. He is able to reveal His mind to us, so that we can do His will in all things. John said that he was writing these things so that others may have fellowship with him and those who were with him. He also declared that their fellowship was with God. The message that he was declaring was the life of God, and he was confident that if others would partake of that same life in response to the truth, they would have fellowship with each other.

We need to let this truth wash our minds and break into our hearts. It is impossible for two men to have fellowship with God and not have fellowship with each other. We reason around this in a hundred different ways, but none of our reasoning stands before God. Jesus died that we might be one as He and the Father are one. We let our minds take us down "into the ditch" when we redefine oneness to suit our own situation. Brethren, we need to let truth judge us in this area. Fellowship is not some theoretical relationship that has no meaning. Fellowship is real, and it is only real when we are walking in truth. If we are walking in the light as He is in the light, we will have real fellowship that glorifies God. No matter how impossible that may seem to us, let us turn from our natural reasoning and accept God's judgment in the matter. He will show us the way, and lift us up to a place of true fellowship with God and one another.

I believe if we are honest with ourselves before God, we will come to the conclusion that the biggest hindrance to fellowship is self. We are our own greatest enemies. Self is expressed in a thousand different ways, but when it is traced to the core, it is all the same. We want to be somebody separate from God. Only the Spirit of God can detect this root in us, and if we ignore His prompting, our hearts become hard and we do not even recognize where we are. We want to be recognized, to do something for God, and to have our opinion considered. We want to be free to do what we want, when we want to, and in a manner that we judge correct. We call it freedom, but really it is bondage. We are in bondage to ourselves and our desires, and when we follow that desire it leads to sin and death. (James 1:14-16) Sin is not just getting drunk and falling into the gutter. Sin is moving separate from God, outside of a true relationship with Jesus. Self-expression is sin, and sin breaks fellowship.

This is why a proper working of the church seems so impossible. It can only be possible when the work that Jesus did on the cross takes expression in us, so that we can say with the Apostle Paul, *"I have been crucified with Christ"* (Gal. 2:20). Apart from this reality in every member, fellowship with God and with each other is an impossibility.

When we have dealt with God, and we have let God deal with us, the only thing we will want coming out of us is an expression of His life. This life will be expressed in doing His will and walking in truth. We may not see everything at this moment, but as lovers of truth, we *want* to see, and to see together with others. With hearts filled with God's love, we will be able to move together under the authority of Jesus Christ, honoring Him as Head. The testimony to the world will be, "Behold, how they love one another," with the result that Jesus is lifted up in and through us, drawing all men to Himself. This is what we all want, but do we realize that we can only go God's way? If His way seems too hard, it is because we are yet looking through natural eyes, reasoning with our own minds, and seeing ourselves separate from Jesus instead of in union with Him. Apart from Him, we can do nothing, but in Him, we

can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Is this a reality to us or merely theory? It must be a reality if we want to move on in God.

Brethren, my heart's challenge to each one of us is this: Are we lovers of truth? If we are not, we are open to deception. Have we let the person of Jesus be our definition of truth? If we have not, then we have accepted a lie. Are we holding truth in love? If we are not, then our truth is not truth. Are we walking in truth with each other? If not, then we do not have fellowship either with God or with each other. We are the only ones who can answer these questions, and we must answer to God, not to man. In His mercy, may the Lord Jesus apply the eye salve to our spiritual eyes so that we can answer these questions honestly. Let us be known as those who love the truth, walk in the truth, and speak the truth in love to each other. God will be glorified as we do, and the testimony of Jesus will be pure. Glory to His name!