

Walking in Truth

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"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. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" 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 1:14-17)

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:12-15).

"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 1-4).

As the apostle John neared the end of his journey here on earth, he makes this statement: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Why did he single out "walking in truth" as a supreme goal? Would we make the same statement? Do we know what it is to walk in truth?

There are some that would make this statement: "Let's just lay aside the things that divide us and concentrate on loving Jesus. After all, that is the most important thing, so let's not concentrate on the minor things."

On the surface, this may sound good, but I would like to ask us to consider it again carefully before God. Can we love Jesus without walking in truth? Is any area of truth unimportant? What is truth? Can we know truth with assurance? I believe these, along with many other related questions, are very important to answer properly if we want to know the full purpose of God and experience the riches of His grace in all things. Let us come before God with hearts that are hungry to see more clearly and walk in truth as God reveals it to our hearts. May the prayer of our hearts be to be included with those who have fully obeyed God and who walk in truth to the glory of God.

The Importance of All Truth

Is any truth unimportant? Some may think so. We could easily come up with a list of controversial issues or questions which have divided believers through the centuries. We know that God is against division, so our first thought may be to eliminate the issues. Do they really matter? We may think, "If our hearts are right toward God and toward others, let's not bring up subjects that could hurt the relationship. Let's just love Jesus and one another." On first thought, that may sound like good guidance. But is it really?

Consider the question from a different angle. Would a perfect God give us any truth that is unimportant? Or would God ever omit or overlook anything that is important? I think we could agree

that the answer to both questions is no. God is perfect, and perfect in all of His ways. Only sin and men who have been affected by sin can hinder His perfect way.

In this discussion of truth, I am not referring to natural "truths" such as the laws of nature or facts about the world, its people, or its history. I am referring only to spiritual truth: the principles and laws of God that apply to various relationships and the expression of His purpose and plan. (This definition will be expanded later.) Spiritual truth cannot be comprehended by the natural mind or reasoning. We are dealing with spiritual matters, for *"God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:24). Paul brings this out clearly when writing to the Corinthian church: *"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:14).

I believe we are prone to bypass this truth too easily, but this is often where the problem lies. It is a mixing of the natural and spiritual that creates confusion. But when we allow our minds to be washed and transformed by the Spirit, we are able to see things clearly and "think in God." Then the gray areas clear up and truth becomes clear to us. However, this is not a simple matter, for we must allow God to touch the deepest recess of our hearts, and lay everything down at the feet of Jesus. If we find a matter to be unclear and begin to think that perhaps it's not important anyway, my strong encouragement is to put the matter before Jesus and ask Him to apply His eye salve so we can see clearly. He will not fail us.

This natural illustration came to me recently. Suppose I am building a house. I am building the foundation and am very concerned that it be correct in every way. During that process, someone could come by and offer to sell me a doorknob for the front door. I am not thinking about my front door at that time—I am focused on the foundation. If pressed, I might say, "Look, I don't care about doorknobs right now. The foundation is what is most important, so I am not interested." At that time, that is correct. While building the foundation, I don't have time to think about anything else.

But suppose my house is now finished, and I continue to say, "I am not interested in doorknobs," so I don't install one on the front door. What will happen? (A brother once replied, "You will have an open door policy!") The house may be beautiful, and have a secure foundation, but because I did not install a doorknob, the front door will not stay shut. Every kind of insect and animal will be free to go in and out. The birds can make nests in the house and the rats have a free home. You would think I am very foolish "because I do not care about doorknobs."

This may be a rather silly example, but I think it illustrates what I am trying to communicate. At a certain point in the building of God, it may be proper to concentrate on foundational truth and ignore areas that seem to be less important. We cannot think about everything all at once. But at some point in the building of the house, every truth becomes important. The neglect of any truth will weaken the testimony that God wants. It may seem small, but given time, it will damage or even destroy the building if not corrected. No truth can be neglected without loss. If we want to see the fullness of God revealed through His body, we dare not neglect anything. The Holy Spirit will be faithful to reveal the time and place that each truth needs to be dealt with. Remember, it is God who is building both now and for eternity, and He knows what He is doing.

What Is Truth?

"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). As John wrote the gospel that bears his name, in describing Jesus he said, "...we beheld His glory...full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He said that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ, and Jesus Himself said that He was truth. Thus we have a beginning definition of truth. It is defined in the person of Christ. We may be quite familiar with Jesus' statement, but what does it mean to us? I believe God wants to give us an increased understanding in all things as we grow in God. If we are to walk in truth, we must know in some measure what this scripture means.

In the scripture from John 16 quoted above, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide us into all truth, and that He would take the things of Jesus and "declare them to us" (make them real to us). If the work of the Holy Spirit is to make the things of Jesus real to us and in us, and if Jesus Himself is the ultimate definition of truth, can we say that truth is everything that pertains to that work? In other words, truth always relates to the person of Christ and the expression of Christ through human vessels. When John saw Christ, he saw truth, or "the word made flesh." It was not an abstract idea that he saw, but the very character and nature of God revealed through a man.

Following this a little further, I believe we can say that truth is everything that brings us into and keeps us in a right relationship with God through Christ. Other things outside of this may be "true" but not the "truth" that we are concerned about. For example, the law of gravity may be "true" and part of God's creation, but it does not directly relate to our relationship with Christ. What God is concerned about is the expression of His life in and through those who were created in the image of God.

Continuing to expand this, we can say that truth encompasses these areas:

The eternal goal of God (that He may be all in all) The plan of God (how He has chosen to accomplish His goal in Christ) The character and nature of God (expressed through Christ and His body) The ways of God (or His wisdom revealed in the church)

All of these together constitute areas of truth that we are called to understand and walk in. In other words, our love for Jesus will result in our obedience to His commands pertaining to truth. *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). We cannot separate Jesus from these areas of truth. To love Jesus is to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us in all of these things. He is "the Spirit of truth" and God has chosen to give Him to indwell us and lead us into all truth. To allow Him to do so results in us being established on a solid foundation in God. To reject God's plan or any part of that plan is to reject God and create our own way. If we seek to find our own way, we will find ourselves outside of God and His grace, for grace and truth are realized in Christ.

The Eternal Goal of God

Sometimes we find it difficult to think about such things. They seem too lofty, too far removed from our everyday lives. We would rather think about more practical things to help us to deal with the everyday demands we face. God does care about the little things we face each day, and He has an answer for everything. But I also believe it is important to have a clear understanding (or revelation) of God's eternal goal. This will allow us to properly fit together things that happen to us. If our goal is unclear or too low, we risk the danger of misinterpreting the events of daily life and not profiting from them as God intends.

What is God's eternal goal? What is He after? Consider these scriptures: *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."* (John 17:20-23)

"For 'He has put all things under His feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:27-28).

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.' And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be Myson'" (Revelation 21:1-7).

These are some descriptions from scripture of the lofty purpose of God. Put very simply, Paul says it is "that God may be all in all." Is that a selfish goal? Not when we consider who God is. Everything that is good is in God, and He has made the way for us to be included in His love, His riches, and His presence for all eternity. Our finite minds cannot grasp that. We catch glimpses here and there, but the vastness of it is beyond us. One day those who are faithful in Christ in this life will experience this, and we will "know as we are known." Now we are called to walk by faith, but in that day we will see all things as they are. Now we see only the form or outline, but then we will see face to face and dwell with God for all eternity.

What does this goal mean to us now? What is God after? Is He not seeking a perfect relationship that cannot be broken no matter what comes against it? In the first temptation in the garden, Satan questioned the integrity of God and Eve fell as she listened to the lie of the deceiver: "Isn't God keeping something good from you?" *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* (Hebrews 11:6). What are we called to believe? To believe all that God says He is: good, faithful, loving, all-powerful, and perfect in all His ways. Satan would lead us to question that, and when we entertain even one little lie pertaining to the character of God, it affects our relationship with God and hinders us from experiencing the riches of His grace.

That God may be all *in* all! God in everything. God as our peace. God as our righteousness. God as our strength, our wisdom, our resource in everything. That is what God is after—that He may be everything to us and that we might look for nothing outside of Him. We can have a perfect relationship with a perfect God. With that relationship, He can take us into eternity and we may share in the riches of His

love. Is this our goal? Does our goal agree with God's? If it does, we will be able to see all other things more clearly as they relate to this goal.

The Plan of God

How has God chosen to accomplish His goal? *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him"* (Ephesians 1:7-10). That He might "gather together in one all things in Christ" is God's chosen plan. I believe that is a full statement of the mind of God, and I question that we will ever come to the end of exploring what it means. He has chosen to work all things in Christ. All truth relates to this in some way. When we find ourselves considering something that we believe is truth, but we cannot relate it to this plan of God, we need to lay it aside until we see how it does relate. If not, we will find ourselves chasing after something that has no merit and will hinder our progress in God.

The term "in Christ" cannot be overemphasized. Those exact words and similar phrases abound in scripture. Perhaps the primary meaning can be expanded by speaking of being "in union with Christ," or "Christ in us and us in Christ." *"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"* (Colossians 1:27-28). This supernatural union, the joining of the Holy Spirit with the spirit of man, is the way God has chosen for us to experience His life in human vessels. The reality of the union opens up all of the resources of God Himself to us, as we move in faith and draw upon His grace in the daily situations of life.

What did it take to bring about this union? It took the death of Christ at Calvary. Christ died so that the Holy Spirit could come and abide. *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you"* (John 16:7). Christ's departure could only be by way of the cross, for that was the will of God for Jesus. He humbled Himself, was obedient to the Father's will, and so secured the foundation for our salvation. God raised Him from the dead and seated Him on high, far above all things. In His triumphant position, He received the gift of the Promise from the Father and poured out the Holy Spirit so that we might share in His victory. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who brings us into union with God and makes all the work of Christ at Calvary real and effective in us. The truth we need is that which brings us into and keeps us in this union with God. It is there that we experience all that God is and God's perfect will is accomplished in us. As we live in the truth that is related to this union, we will find ourselves "perfect in Christ Jesus."

The cross is the focal point of God's working with mankind. Everything God did before the cross was preparation for that event and everything that follows after is based on what happened there. Calvary was where God, in Christ, dealt with that which separated man from God. We are those who live after Calvary, and God expects us to draw from the resources of His grace which are all in Christ Jesus. God's plan is perfect. Nothing we need is outside of Christ; thus, our focus is Christ and Christ alone. But to fully draw upon the resources, we need to know what Christ did and what God made available to us. The Holy Spirit will lead us into this truth. As the truth is proclaimed, understood, and received, it

will form the foundation upon which our faith rests.

Sometimes we have the idea that faith is just "believing everything will be okay," like a "leap in the dark." But faith has a focus. It is not faith in faith, but faith in Christ that brings reality. More than that, the declaration of the gospel is a declaration of what God has made available to us in Christ. Consider just a few of these things: acceptance, redemption, righteousness, sanctification, hope, peace, strength, healing, a new creation, and so on. These and much more are all "in Christ," and were provided at Calvary. We can expect the Spirit to begin to reveal these things to us. As He does, faith receives the truth and acts on it to make it ours.

For example, as sinners we found ourselves alienated from God. We hid our faces from Him. But as we turned to God and accepted His provision in Christ for the forgiveness of our sin, we found that the wall of separation was removed and we could lift our faces before Him with no condemnation. It was a joyous day. But as we continue, we may begin to reason and think that we are not worthy of such acceptance, and start looking at ourselves separate from Christ. The Holy Spirit will bring the truth before us: "We are accepted in the Beloved." At that point, we have a choice. Will we walk in this truth or not? Will we listen to God, or will we listen to our reasoning? If we do not walk in this truth, we will find ourselves condemned and living outside of the grace (resources) of God because we are questioning God. But if we walk in this truth in faith, and "take every thought captive to Christ," we will experience the grace of God and the provision of Christ at Calvary will be ours in experience.

We can take this same working into every area of truth. It is possible to live far below the place God has provided for us, and in so doing suffer the consequences of unbelief. Faith must walk in every area of truth. We must "put our feet" on every place God has given us. *"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses"* (Joshua 1:3). God had given Israel the land, but they had to go in and possess it. God has given us all things in Christ, but we must go in and possess everything by faith. It is all potentially ours, but until we actually make the choice to step out into truth in faith, it is not ours in experience.

This is what it means to "walk in truth." As we walk in truth, that truth will become part of us. It will be made flesh in us as it was in Christ. As we continue this process, we will be transformed into His image and become an expression of God's character and nature here in this sin-sick world. This is our calling in this world: to give expression to the life of God.

The Word Made Flesh

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

"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"

(John 1:14). "The Word became flesh." What does that mean to us? When John looked upon Jesus, he saw the Word of God embodied in human flesh. Christ was God revealed in the flesh. It was not just the words that He spoke (although certainly it included those) but the nature and character of God perfectly proclaimed in the life He lived. Every action and every word was a manifestation of God Himself. Jesus was "the Word of God." When men saw Jesus, they saw God.

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power"

(Colossians 2:9-10).

What God did in Christ Jesus, He has also purposed to do in us. The word of God must also be made flesh in us so that we become a living declaration of who God is. This happens as we walk in truth. Obedience establishes the character and nature of God in these human vessels. We are not called just to speak the word of God, but to declare the word of God in our lives as Jesus did. Our lives and actions open the door for others to hear the words we speak. We are called to be witnesses unto God by our whole manner of life.

One of the primary differences between what God did in Christ and what He is doing through us is that today we *together* are the body of Christ. *"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually"* (1 Corinthians 12:27). When He walked the dusty roads of Israel 2000 years ago in a physical body, He declared the nature of God in every deed, in an individual body. But when He ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, He continued that declaration in a different body. This body is made up of you and me, as we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and walk in obedience to Christ our head. Individually we are members of that body, and together we make up the whole body. Christ is the head of His body, and as each member "holds fast to the Head" in faith and submission to His authority, God will declare who He is for all to see.

This collective expression of God in the church is the way God has chosen to establish and express truth in this hour. *"...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"* (1 Timothy 3:15). To be a part of what God is doing, I must be alive to God by the Spirit and under the authority of Christ. This gives me the ability to function as a member of His body. As I walk in truth as an individual member, I will be prepared to walk in truth with other members. As we allow God to build us together, and as we move together, we form an expression of the body of Christ in our locality. As we walk in truth together, that truth will be established and declared for all to see. In the words of Jesus, we will be "the light of the world, a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden."

Although there are a great many things about this body or "house of God" that we do not have space here to speak about, the important thing to see in relation to our discussion is that truth will be seen in this body. It is not just individual members scattered around the world who are walking in truth, but a collective gathering under the authority of Christ that is walking in truth. When this is taking place, those who are looking on will see an expression of Christ who is truth. There will be no "disconnect." In other words, we will be able to say with Paul, "Look at our example and follow Christ." God will use the expression of truth not only in our own lives but also in the lives of others.

The Ways of God

The ways of God may seem too vast to talk about, but when I refer to the ways of God, I mean His order, or the ways the Holy Spirit moves in the church to reveal Christ and establish truth. Yes, they are vast, but not too big to talk about. Just as God established an order and His ways in the Old Covenant, He also has an order and ways in the New Covenant. In some ways they are similar because He is the same God, and in some ways they are different because we have a greater resource than the Old Testament saints had. They looked forward to the coming Messiah, and much of their order was prophetic of what Jesus would be like and what He would do when He came. However, we look back to Calvary, where Jesus secured our salvation, defeated the enemy of our souls, and made provision for us to enter unhindered into full fellowship with God. These ways of God are part of the truth that we need to come to Jesus and experience the grace God has provided for us in Him.

Here is what Paul said when he was laboring to bring the Galatians back to a right foundation: *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love"* (Galatians 5:6). Notice these words: "in Christ Jesus" and "faith working through love." These are statements of the ways of God. God has chosen to work everything by bringing us into a love relationship with Christ by faith. It is there that we will know the grace of God that triumphs over all obstacles. It is easy to pass by that statement and say "I know," without giving our full attention to it. We would rather hear something more concrete, more specific, and in some ways "more natural," even though we may not use those words.

We have already considered the term "in Christ," but how do we come to this place of union? God portrays this relationship as similar to a bride who is giving herself to a husband. *"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 11:2). What must the bride do? She must forsake all others and give herself unreservedly to the one who is to be her husband. It is the same with Christ. He is looking for us to forsake all others and give ourselves unreservedly to Him. This can only be done by faith. Christ is the "way" of God and faith brings us into this union where we experience the grace (provision or ability) that is ours in Christ. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9). Again, these may seem to be elementary things that we all know, but my observation is that while we may know the words, we often do not know the truth of the words in our experience. It is often a theory rather than a reality. God wants us to walk in this truth so that we can know Him in reality.

The riches of God's grace and presence are known together with other believers. This is another one of the "ways" of God. Paul prayed for the Ephesians, *"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* (Ephesians 3:17-19) It is essential to God's way that we would know Him together with others. In this day and age it's easy to think that if we have our Bible, we have the Holy Spirit, and easy access to a host of books and the Internet, these are enough. But none of these things substitute for personal relationships with brothers and sisters in our locality. That is where we experience the love of God together. That is where the love of God is revealed to others through the body of Christ, and that is where we find fulfillment in God and where God is pleased to dwell.

What are the ways of God in this body? They are vast, and we must explore them and walk in them if we want to be part of what God is doing today. We cannot just read about them in the Bible. That is a good beginning, but now we must walk in them as the Holy Spirit reveals the ways of God to us. There is an order in the body: how we gather together, how we relate to others, how we partake of the grace God has given others, and so on. As we submit to the order of God and his ways in the church, we will grow in grace and the knowledge of God. As we walk in truth, it will become part of us. We will not just quote a Bible verse; we will be able to put the same truth into our own words and relate it to our experience. It will not contradict the Bible or the truth that God has revealed to others; instead, it will amplify that truth and others will benefit from the truth that has been made flesh in us. The ways of God truly work together so that we may experience the Way of God, which is Christ Himself.

We cannot explore all of that truth in a small booklet (or in a large book, or in a number of books). We can only explore truth as we walk in truth together with others. Consider how the early church began. *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers"* (Acts 2:42). The apostles were teaching truth, then brothers and sisters were fellowshiping in that truth. They came together to remember the Lord "in spirit and truth" and they were on their knees praying in truth as the Holy Spirit enabled them. Is there any end to this? Not this side of glory! This is the reality of the Holy Spirit (who is God) leading us into all truth.

Led by the Spirit in Truth

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:13).

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

How does the Holy Spirit lead us? Have we carefully considered that before God? I believe most of us truly want to be led by the Spirit, but we are often confused about how this is done. The statement of Jesus quoted above is critical. He said that the Holy Spirit would guide us into all truth. That is where the Spirit begins. He reveals truth (embodied in Jesus) to us. So the more we see of Jesus, the more we see of truth. As this revelation grows, we see light to walk in, and we then choose to walk in what God has revealed to us.

What do we sometimes do instead of this? We may be facing a decision and not sure which way to go. Instead of taking hold of the truth God has revealed to us and letting it direct us, we often look for feelings or signs. Sometimes we also talk to other people to get "their view" of things to consider. As we digest all of this, we generally come up with a decision and say that "the Lord is leading me" a certain way. Somehow we "feel" this is what we should do, so we say that the Spirit is leading us. If our leading is questioned by a brother or sister, we can easily become defensive. "The Lord is leading me this way, so why are you questioning me?" Once we make up our mind on a course of action, it seems we are quite capable of finding enough evidence to support that decision and say that it is God. This is dangerous. We are complicated beings, and it is very easy to interpret feelings or desires coupled with the reasoning of our minds as "the leading of the Spirit."

What protection do we have from being misled? *"If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority"* (John 7:17). Here is the foundation. If we are not committed to do the will of God from the heart, we will not be able to discern truth or the leading of the Spirit. Someone has put it this way: "If you truly want to know God's will in order to do God's will, He will make it clear. But if you only want to know God's will to decide whether or not you are going to do it, you will never know it."

The Spirit always leads us in the purpose, plan, and order of God. He never violates those. God is a God of order, and He is building for eternity. He is not haphazard, going one way one time and another way another time. James describes that kind of action as "being tossed by the waves." Paul describes it by "being led by every wind of doctrine." The Spirit leads in a solid way, moving with purpose toward a goal. If we are truly being led by the Spirit, the characteristic of our life (the fruit of being led by the Spirit) will be just that—moving with purpose toward God's eternal goal in Christ Jesus.

But what about the inner witness? We may have heard testimonies of those who had a "witness" that the Spirit was leading them to do something and was correct. It may have been a small thing, or it may have been dramatic. We may have had our own experience like this. I agree that this is a provision of God. He has promised to write His word "on our hearts and minds." But for this to be a valid experience in God on a continual basis, I believe there are some areas of truth that form a foundation and keep us from being misled.

The first one we have already mentioned—we must be committed to do the will of God, or, to put it in other words, "to live His life." That means that we have dealt with God and allowed God to deal with us. I must know that "I have been crucified with Christ." That is not a small thing. When we encounter Jesus Christ, in the cross we find that God has pronounced judgment on everything we are according to the flesh. Paul says that "we died, and our life is hidden with Christ in God." The reality and grace of God are experienced as we believe God in this matter, but without that foundation, we will find ourselves struggling in our own ability even if we *want* to do the will of God (similar to Paul's testimony in Romans 7).

Along with this, we need to know that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. This should come at the very beginning of our relationship with God, and is the "normal" Christian life—this is how we live His life. When we submit to Jesus as Lord, He gives the Holy Spirit to enable us to make Him our Lord in experience. Our place is to receive Him and yield to Him, giving Him the place to express God's life through these vessels of clay. A yielded heart, filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit, is essential to being led by the Holy Spirit on a consistent basis.

Another area I believe is critical is that we have allowed the Holy Spirit to discipline our thoughts, emotions, and desires so that we have a quiet heart. If this has not taken place, there may be so many "voices" that we cannot discern the voice of God. This takes time, but God is able, and knows how and where to begin. I am not speaking about a single dramatic event, but a continual leading, being able to discern the "still small voice" of God. "My sheep hear my voice" is the statement of Jesus. It may not be obvious in the beginning, but we must learn the voice of God through exercise and obedience.

Finally, there are the gifts of the Spirit. These touch many areas. There may be a choice before us and the choice does not seem obvious to us. We need wisdom. God has made provision. This is where our brothers and sisters often come in. Are we submitted to one another, open to the grace coming to us

through others? A word of counsel coming from a spiritual brother or sister or a word of wisdom coming through another member can be of great help. If our hearts are right before God, we will be able to recognize God coming to us in this manner. Others may be more detached, able to see the situation more objectively than we can. This is part of God's provision and God expects us to avail ourselves of it.

What is the place of the scriptures? Some may believe that the scriptures are really all we need, so we just need to study the scriptures to understand spiritual principles, then apply those principles to the decisions that come before us. However, take note of what the scriptures themselves say they are given for: *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Note that nothing is said in this scripture about leading. Why? Because the Holy Spirit (the person of God) has been given to lead us.

What are the scriptures? They are the written record of what God spoke in the past to others. Men recognized the words of God and preserved them for us. They form the basis of our teaching and are essential for the functions quoted above. But we need the Holy Spirit to interpret them and know how to apply them in our situations. Apart from a relationship with God and the leading of the Holy Spirit, it is easy to "twist" them to mean what we want them to mean. *"And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures"* (2 Peter 3:15-16).

The scriptures are not God. God gave them for our instruction, but we must have a true relationship with God to be able to handle the scriptures properly. One of their essential uses is to judge or correct what we say God is leading us to do today. God will not contradict Himself. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We may find ourselves in circumstances different from those of men in the scriptures, but truth is timeless. If we try to depend on the scriptures in a wrong way, we may find ourselves in the judge's seat, reasoning with our natural minds about the things of God. Instead of this, God wants us to take the lowly place and depend on Him to reveal the things of God to us. God is still speaking by the Spirit. *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12). This is not a reference to the Bible, but to the personal communication of God to our inner man by the Spirit.

If we are truly being led by the Spirit, I believe there will be agreement in the things we have mentioned. The Spirit will lead us in truth (as defined in the person of Jesus). There will be agreement in the scriptures (as interpreted by the Spirit). We will have a clear conscience before God (peace) as we come before Him, and we will have a good witness from other spiritual brothers and sisters. Other things may be helpful, such as circumstances falling into place, but unless we have a good foundation in basic areas, we may not know if the circumstances are an open door to walk through or a hindrance to be overcome. Not every open door is of God. Some are tests to see if we will walk in truth. Only God can show us the difference.

Grace and Truth

When John summarized the glory that he saw in Christ, he used the words "grace and truth: *"...we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). Not only did he see truth in Christ; he also saw grace. What is grace? What is the connection between grace and truth? I believe our comprehension of this is lacking at times. Let us ask God to lift that vision, that we may know the fullness of His grace in all things.

What do we understand when we hear the word "grace"? A common understanding of grace is "unmerited favor" or simply mercy. Thus, when we hear the term "grace," our minds often just interpret the word as "God being good to us in a way that we don't understand or deserve" and leave it there. While I agree that mercy and unmerited favor are included, I believe "grace" goes much further. Consider the following scriptures:

"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age..." (Titus 2:11-12)

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

In these three scriptures, do you think that "God's unmerited favor" is all that is meant? I do not think so. Grace is imparted by words, grace teaches, and grace gives ability to labor in the lives of others. A statement we find in many places in scripture is that "grace is in Jesus our Lord." *"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 2:1). If we then go back to what is meant by "in Christ," we can say that grace is experienced as we abide in Christ (or, in a proper relationship with Him). Here are some definitions offered by men, that expand the meaning of grace:

God's real ability coming to empower us
God's riches at Christ's expense (these first two are acrostics for GRACE)
The practice of love
The gift of God's presence expressed

Perhaps God can give you a better definition than any of these, but one thing we can say for sure: grace is "in Christ" and can be seen when it is present. It is effective in each member to change us into the image of Christ and express the character and nature of God through us. Thus we can see it is closely connected with truth. They are both experienced "in Christ." Grace is experienced as we walk in truth, in faith before God. It is this real expression of *God in us* that saves us out of our sin and brings us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Too often, the gospel that is preached is just a theoretical gospel with no power. That is not the gospel of Christ. Paul says that the gospel of Christ has power—power to save us from our sin, power to walk above sin, power to do the will of God, and power to declare who God is in truth. That takes ability from God; thus, an essential element of grace is ability that is not from us but from God. What allows us to experience this ability? We must walk in truth. When we walk in truth, our hearts will be established in the grace of God. *"Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have*

been occupied with them" (Hebrews 13:9).

Remember that Jesus said He is the truth. To live and walk in Jesus, we must walk in truth. But grace is "in Christ Jesus," so as we walk in truth, we will experience this grace (ability) that is ours in Him. The converse is also true. If we do not walk in truth (Jesus), we will not experience the grace that is in Him. This leaves us trying to live by our own ability (our own knowledge, strength, and resources). I am afraid this is where many find themselves. They do not know the power of the gospel, but instead of coming back to God and beginning to walk in truth, they redefine grace at a lower level (unmerited favor that accepts us no matter what), then just try to go on and do the best they can.

Acceptance before God is as we abide in Christ. Mercy is in Christ. Grace is in Christ. Wisdom is in Christ. Strength is in Christ. God has given Him to be all things to us. Remember the goal of God: "That God may be all in all." This does not begin at the grave, but now. Now is when God wants us to know the fullness of His grace that He has provided for us in Christ Jesus. *"And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace"* (John 1:16). God wants us to draw upon the grace that is in Christ Jesus, that we may live in His grace and walk as He walked, to declare in a many-membered body who God is. This cannot be done in our own ability, but only in His grace. He has made provision for this at Calvary. To avail of that provision and experience the riches of His grace, we must walk in truth and love underneath the authority of Christ.

Truth and Love

"...But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16). God is love. Jesus said that He was the truth. Therefore both truth and love are embodied in the person of God. They always go together and cannot be separated. Someone has said it this way: "Truth must always be spoken in love. If not, it is no longer truth. And love must always speak the truth. If not, it is no longer love."

I believe it is very important to see the connection of truth and love. Sometimes a person may begin to see a new truth. It is exciting, and in his zeal, he is eager to share it with others. It is very easy to do this without love. In so doing, he can nullify the value of the truth and do more damage than good. What he is seeing may be correct, and his motive pure, but it must be combined with love to be of value to God and others.

On the other hand, we may begin to see an area of truth and realize that this truth is costly. If seen and walked in, it may result in great cost to others. It would be easy to say nothing and keep it to ourselves. We can reason that others should just look to Jesus and deal with God themselves. "Why should I get in the way by bringing this truth to them? They may turn on me." If I truly love God and let His love flow through me, I must be willing to stand with Jesus in truth. He never held back because of persecution. Love caused him to declare the truth, no matter the cost. Souls are too important. Pleasing God is our focus. Eternal decisions are being made. If I do not declare the truth because of the cost, I am not allowing the love of God to have full expression through me.

As we have seen earlier, the church is called the "pillar and ground of the truth." We are called to "fill up the sufferings of Christ," and Jesus said that a servant is not greater than his master. If men persecuted Him, they will persecute us for standing in truth. It is to be expected. But as we stand in

truth, we must be sure that we let the Spirit of love fill our hearts and lives with the very love of God. Yes, we need to be known as those who have a love for the truth and stand in truth. But at the same time, we should be known as those who love and care for others. Those who are lovers of God will be attracted to walk with us, and those who do not love God will find every reason to distance themselves from us. This is our calling as the body of Christ here on this earth.

We can think of "speaking the truth in love" in two ways. First, there is the public declaration of truth. The gospel must be proclaimed. If we are living in the love of God, it will move us to declare the truth openly so that God may draw men to Himself. It will be done in compassion, grace, and wisdom, with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. God will take that word and drive it home in the hearts of men and women to "convict of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment."

Secondly, there is the private communication of truth to individuals. When we do this, we need to know that we are being led of the Spirit and have permission from God to speak to another. Have we prayed for that person? Have we let God search our own hearts to make sure we are moving in love? If it is a particularly touchy area, have we consulted with other spiritual brothers and sisters in a proper way to make sure we are seeing things correctly? Do we have the wisdom from God that is "first pure, then peaceable, and full of mercy"? Do we have the timing of God? Are we ourselves moving under the control of the Holy Spirit? If these things are not present, our "speaking the truth" may result in hurts and broken relationships that can take a long time to repair. To touch another person directly, we must have God's permission, and even then it must be done with great care and tenderness. Truth must be spoken in love to be truth.

Walking in All Truth

Brothers and sisters, we have hardly scratched the surface of our subject in this short article. Our purpose here is not to try to explore all truth. That will take a lifetime. Our goal here is simply to point out the way God has chosen for us to enter into the full experience of fellowship with Him and His grace. So often, we see that men are groping for answers. Where is God? Where are the miracles? Where is the power of God? They are all in Christ Jesus our Lord. So how do we enter into these things? There is only one answer. We must walk in all truth, and the Holy Spirit has been given to lead us in that walk.

What does that truth consist of? As I have said, we can hardly begin to consider that question here. We have mentioned just a few beginning areas, but that question must be answered in our relationship with God day by day. It must be answered as we allow God to build us together with others. It must be answered not just in words but in deeds as we obey God. As we walk in truth, we will find our lives rooted and grounded in God and in His love. But the focus of our encouragement here is that we must walk in *all* of the truth that God reveals to us. Too often, believers begin and then stop. We dare not do this. John rejoiced to hear that his children were walking in truth—now. The Holy Spirit is constantly leading us into *all* truth.

Why would we not continue? There are many reasons, but I think there is one that stands above all others. If we walk in truth, it will mean death to our natural life, then a full expression of the life of God in and through us. There is a price to pay, and that price is allowing God to put to death everything that is not of Himself. He does not force us, but if we are not willing to let God do this work in us, we will not continue in our walk with God in truth.

When we walk in truth, God deals with us in the cross of Christ so that the only expression coming through us is the life of God. God's purpose is that Christ would be all in all, and no flesh would glory in His presence. Walking in all truth brings that into reality. Sometimes that hurts and goes against what we want to do. God does not force our choice. He puts the way clearly before us and then bids us choose. He does not hide the cost. The way of the cross is costly. It cost God everything, and if we embrace His cross, it means death to our life and will. There is no other way. Life only comes out of death. Truth does set us free, but not in the way many commonly think. Truth sets us free from ourselves to do the will of God in all things, that He may be glorified.

So, beloved, let us not stop at any point, but rather let us continue in the grace of God. God has made full provision that we may know Him fully. May our testimony be the same as those John spoke about. May our greatest joy be to walk in truth. The end is full fellowship with God, both now and for eternity. Glory to His name!