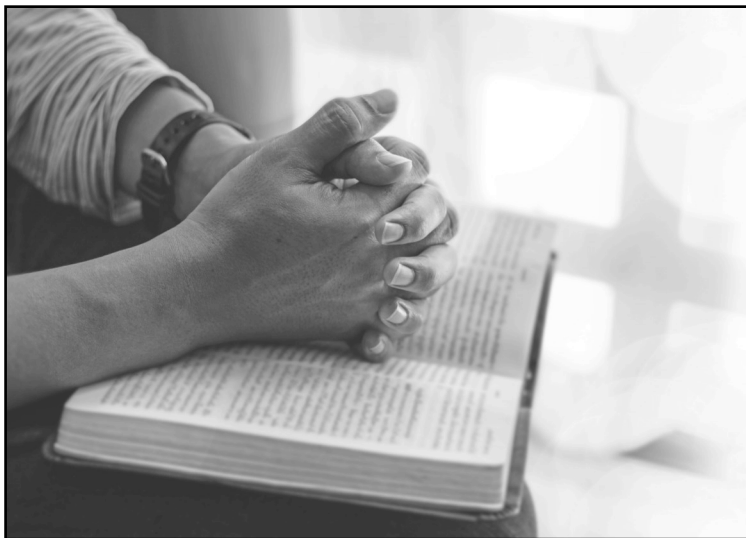


Bible Lessons



*Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite
my heart to fear thy name..*

—Psalm 86:11

Volume 55, No. 3
July • August • September
2023

Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

Volume 55

July • August • September

No. 3

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*Publishing the Bible truths in the interest of Jesus Christ and His Church.
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THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR THE 3rd QUARTER, 2023

Truth

How many digits of Pi have you memorized? Math lovers will quickly rattle off 3.14159, while many of us stop at 3.14. The current world record is 70,030 decimal places, which is quite impressive! Pi is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to the diameter of the same circle. No matter how many decimal places we take it, the expression of Pi will only become truer. Pi is used countless times everyday world wide with complete success. Pi works, because it represents an element of truth that cannot be altered by humanity.

The ratio of Pi has been used for about 4000 years, starting first with the Babylonians. They estimated its value at 3.125. That is close, and not too bad for folks that did not have the means of measuring as accurately as we do now. The Egyptians, roughly two thousand years later, came up with 3.1605. If these two civilizations could have combined and averaged their estimations, they would have had 3.14275, which is pretty near to being accurate. Many years later, the Greeks and the Chinese got much closer to the real value of Pi by using the approximations of $3 \frac{1}{7}$, $3 \frac{10}{71}$, and $\frac{355}{113}$. William Jones, of Britain, started using the well-known symbol of Pi in 1706. (*Condensed from "Live Science" writers Brandon Specktor and Adam Mann.*)

Enough with math, though. What does the value of Pi have to do with truth? Perhaps we can turn the question around and ask, "Is there anything about the value of Pi that can be proven to be untrue?" Because the principle of Pi is based on truth, we can use it in a feeble effort to explain truth itself. Truth is something we can count on to work every time. It is ultimately dependable, just as Pi is.

God *IS* truth to the fullest degree, and what He says is automatically truth. Unfortunately, many folks believe otherwise and suffer the consequences. If, however, we are interested in truth and desire to benefit from the knowledge thereof, we can have truth. Praise God, He will make sure of it!

For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations. (Psalms 100:5)

—Bro. Clifford Cole

JULY 2, 2023

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Psalm 119:142 Thy righteousness *is* an everlasting righteousness, and thy law *is* the truth.

John 1:14 And the Word was made 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 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

John 15:26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

John 18:37 Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

MEMORY VERSE: Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. —John 18:38

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Pilate asked a very important question, “What is truth?” If he had searched further, he would have discovered truth is God’s law, God’s Word made flesh by the birth of Jesus, and God’s Holy Spirit.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 1:17 **“Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”**: The law, given by Moses, could not give grace, but Jesus, through the plan of salvation, introduced unbounded grace for every situation in life. Jesus brought full light and truth to a sin-darkened world. The world suffered in darkness before Jesus came, but we can enjoy full light and truth today! Praise God!

John 15:26 **“The Comforter ... the Spirit of truth”**: God’s Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the Father, testifies of Jesus and the

wonderful plan of salvation. The Holy Spirit, when invited into our lives, reveals truth to our spirit and is a witness of truth.

John 17:17 **“Thy word is truth”**: The word of God is truth and will always agree with God’s Holy Spirit.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Pilate’s rhetorical question, “What is truth?” is a question for the ages. Cain and Abel probably discussed truth, to some degree, when they talked in the field. Cain’s version of truth did not line up with God’s truth, unfortunately. Unwilling to change his view, he grew angry enough to kill his own brother.

The whole world, except for Noah and his immediate family, chose to believe a truth they thought was self-evident; they contended that since it had never rained before, it certainly would not rain now! How wrong their “truth” proved to be.

Jesus came to “bear witness unto the truth.” Jesus manifested a truth that had been there all along, but the world, in its sin-blinded state, simply could not see it. The Law, brought by Moses, was the tool God chose to make mankind aware of right and wrong, but it did nothing for the heart. Jesus came to bring truth *into* the heart, not just knowledge to the mind.

DISCUSSION:

1. What sources of “truth” do people use today when they turn away from God?
2. If God’s law is the truth, how important is it that we have a good understanding of it?
3. When God’s law crosses our self-interest, how do we deal with the temptation to rationalize and “adjust” God’s law to suit our own thinking?
4. What happens if we accept most of God’s truth but attempt to alter a small part of it?
5. When we accept truth, to the best of our understanding, how can this lead to further revelations of truth?
6. If truth is not fully accepted, how can this hinder further revelations of truth?
7. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. What was the

- wisdom in God choosing to reveal grace and truth by Jesus?
8. Compare the effectiveness of the law given by Moses and that of grace and truth brought by Jesus Christ.
 9. What blessings do we enjoy through God's Holy Spirit?
 10. Why is the Holy Spirit also referred to as the Comforter and the Spirit of truth?
 11. We are sanctified through God's truth and through His word, according to John 17:17. How important is it that we are in agreement with all the truth revealed to us for us to be eligible to be sanctified with the Holy Spirit?
 12. Jesus came into the world to "bear witness unto the truth." Describe what Jesus' ministry would have been like if He had come up with his "own" truth?
 13. If Jesus was careful to not come up with His own truth, how careful must we be to not succumb to the temptation to come up with our own version of truth?
 14. Jesus said in John 18:37b, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." What does it mean to be "of the truth" so that we can hear the voice of Jesus? Can anyone hear Jesus' voice if they are not of the truth?
 15. Why did Pilate ask, "What is truth?" How interested was he in truth? How important is it for you and me to ask, with all our heart, "What is truth?"

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Philosophers and religious people have debated truth for centuries. Moral and spiritual questions have so many human answers, with almost none of the opinions agreeing completely. Isn't this why we have countless religions, as well as different branches of most of these religions? It's not surprising that so many people get completely disillusioned with "religion" when they see the mess humanity has made of it.

Many people believe life came about through evolution, while others acknowledge God created it all in six days. Many state there is no life after death, but some understand we will live throughout eternity—either in heaven or in hell. The refusal to acknowledge that they will answer to a just God when they die seems to be at the bottom of the belief in evolution. On the other hand, there seems to

be universal acceptance of the standards in measuring time, distance, weight, etc. Furthermore, most people agree completely on the formula for acceleration, the principle of gravity and other laws of science.

It seems mankind can live in harmony believing truths that do not affect matters of the soul. There is nothing spiritual in agreeing on how to measure temperature or time. When it comes to the question of where we will spend eternity—or if there is an eternity at all—humans have a vast array of opinions. The many flavors and shades of right and wrong also stem from the absence of the fear of God. If there is no belief in God, there is no real basis for any belief. There is no anchor.

What can we conclude, then, about the portion of society that firmly believes in God, heaven, and hell, yet cannot agree on certain elements of truth in the doctrine of God? Is there wiggle room, as many claim, for one to believe one thing, someone else another thing, and yet another to believe something else? What if the laws of science and mathematics were handled in the same manner? It simply would not work to have more than one answer for math equations, would it?

Is there such a thing as absolute truth? If there is absolute truth, who gets to decide what it is? Can I hope to be okay in the end if I decide my brand of truth is right, simply because it is what I believe? All of these questions are settled firmly and irrevocably with those who recognize God's entire word as the final authority on truth. There is no room for self, pride, rebellion, hate, or unforgiveness in God's truth. The truth in God's word will stand any test and will still be true throughout eternity. Everything else will be burned up in the end, along with the devil and his imps.

“Dear Heavenly Father, please help me to reject anything that promotes self or makes allowances for pride, rebellion, or unforgiveness. Help me to ever seek after that which leads me to higher ground and promotes your love and mercy. Please help me to live up to the light you have shone on my path, so I may yet enjoy more light when you see fit to reveal it. Help me to not reject that which I know to be true, so that I will not be hindered from further truth. Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

I have found that many, if not most people, prefer that their inconveniences and problems disappear rather than discovering the complete truth. To illustrate this, I have to tell a work-related story.

Many times down through the years, I have been handed a repair order that said that the vehicle “just quit while driving down the road.” In one instance, a father and mother had purchased a new car for their son upon graduation. The car came in three times with the transmission failed—about every 20 thousand miles, with the explanation above. The first time, factory warranty paid. The second time, extended warranty paid. The third time, there was no warranty. The last time, it had broken an axle shaft as well. There was no factory warranty or extended warranty policy to cover the repair.

I remember the customer coming to my work area asking, “Dan, why does this transmission keep failing?” I responded, “Do you really want to know the truth?” He assured me that he did. So, I asked him how the big black marks were made on the road that he saw occasionally. He looked at me and asked, “Do you really think that's what my son is doing?” My response was, “You wanted the truth, didn't you?” He left, assuring me that he would “have a talk.” I repaired the transmission at the customer's expense that time. I don't know what was included in the “talk,” but, I know that the customer drove that car for close to 100,000 miles after that, and when they traded it in, the transmission was still working like it should.

The whole truth and nothing but the truth is usually never as comfortable as just some of the truth. “...and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

—Bro. Dan Adams

JULY 9, 2023

ALL THE PATHS OF THE LORD ARE MERCY AND TRUTH

Psalm 25:10 All the paths of the LORD *are* mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Psalm 33:4 For the word of the LORD *is* right; and all his works *are*

done in truth.

Psalm 85:10 Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed *each other*.

Proverbs 3:3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:

James 5:19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

MEMORY VERSE: All the paths of the LORD *are* mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. —Psalm 25:10

CENTRAL THOUGHT: All of the paths, or ways, of the LORD are consistent in mercy and truth, especially for those who keep covenant with God and His word. God is the author of mercy and truth. As our creator, God made us in His own image and deals with us in the same tender love He had when He fashioned mankind in the beginning. We can trust Him to lead us in the very best possible way.

The LORD knows it is best for us to regard mercy and truth the same way He does as we interact with one another in life's difficulties. The best way to deal with one another is to keep mercy coupled with truth and not to ever use one without the other.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 25:10 "**Paths of the LORD**": signified by the tracks or ruts made by the wheels of wagons passing repeatedly over the same ground. Mercy and truth are constantly given to mankind by God in the same way every day, causing deep indentions in the sands of time. (*Condensed from Adam Clarke*)

Psalm 85:10 "**Mercy and truth are met together**": Only God can perfectly blend mercy and truth in such a way as to bring about the best result. Mercy extended without truth would be unjust. Truth meted out without mercy would bring about death.

James 5:19 "**One convert him**": to turn someone from their path of error and re-establish them in truth. This cannot be done with

force but by the prayerful and gentle persuasion of a good example.

James 5:20 **“Shall hide a multitude of sins”**: When someone is converted from the error of his way, the blessing is incalculable! Since one sin begets another and spreads like cancer in the life of sinners and in those under their influence, a great multitude of evil is halted upon the conversion of one soul. Also, and no less important, the sins already committed are covered by the blood of Jesus, to be remembered no more by God.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The LORD, in His infinite wisdom, decreed from the beginning of time that mercy and truth be bound together. Many examples of this are seen throughout the scriptures: God decided He must destroy the earth because of the perversion of mankind, but He saved a remnant through Noah and his family. Lot turned his tent toward Sodom, but angels led him and his family by the hand out of the city before God destroyed the place with fire and brimstone. The children of Israel sinned repeatedly through their murmurings and rebellions, but the LORD sent prophets to lead them back. In the fullness of time, Jesus came to redeem mankind back to God. All would have been lost if Jesus had not come to be our sacrifice for sin. There is a phrase of song that says, “Justice called, but mercy answered.”

DISCUSSION:

1. What would it be like if all the paths of the LORD were mercy and truth except for one?
2. What if the one exception to God’s mercy and truth involved *my* soul?
3. How fair and kind is God in His dealings with mankind?
4. Psalm 25:10 ties the LORD’s mercy and truth with those who keep His covenant and His testimonies. Knowing this, what does it mean to keep His covenant and His testimonies?
5. Psalm 33:4 states the word of the LORD is right and all his works are done in truth. How is this true?
6. How can mercy and truth simultaneously coexist in difficult circumstances?

7. Describe what happens when mercy is extended without truth.
8. What is it like when truth is meted out without mercy?
9. Why did God, in His infinite wisdom, put some responsibility on you and me to have a part in the conversion of sinners (James 5:19-20)?
10. What is our part in the conversion of sinners?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There is a saying, "I may not always remember what you said, but I will always remember how you made me feel." How true this statement is! Our attitude toward one another and the way we handle one another will always leave an impression, whether it be good or bad. The LORD designed life in such a way that our fair and just dealings with each other, in the difficulties of life, can only be accomplished through mercy and truth.

When a civil or criminal case is brought to court, the attorneys for both sides question the jury pool along several different lines, with the goal of setting an impartial jury. After each question in the vetting process, the attorney will poll the jury pool to see who might potentially have a problem with partiality. For example, if someone had suffered major injury in a car accident, it might be difficult for that person to feel impartial in a court case dealing with a car accident. The jury pool is also asked in several different ways if they would be able to hear testimony and evidence from both sides of the case before forming an opinion. It is not uncommon for it to take several hours, or perhaps all day, for both teams of attorneys to agree on twelve jurors and two alternates. Their goal is to seat a jury that will render a judgment based on mercy and truth without prejudice or partiality toward either party.

If the evidence in a civil court case proves the defendant is guilty, it is then up to the jury to determine the damages awarded the plaintiff. Ideally, the amount of money awarded should be enough to discourage anyone else from committing the same offense, yet still be within the bounds of reason and justice. In a criminal case, the length of the prison sentence should match the severity of the crime. It is not fair to the victim if there is not suitable punishment. On the other hand, justice is not served if the criminal is punished more than what is proper. It can sometimes be difficult to determine guilt or

innocence based on evidence alone. It can also be challenging to determine a proper sentence when the defendant is proven guilty, but exercising mercy and truth together is a good start.

Jesus, in Matthew 18, told the story of the servant who was forgiven a debt too large to repay. This same servant went out and grabbed his fellow servant, who owed him a small amount of money, and caused him to be put in debtor's prison when he could not immediately pay the debt. When the master was told of the injustice committed by the servant he had just forgiven, his wrath was greatly kindled. In the court of heaven, I was proven guilty and condemned to eternal death. Jesus offered to bear my punishment so that I might have eternal life. If I, in turn, refuse to forgive someone when I feel wronged, am I any better than the servant who refused to forgive his fellow servant? This principle casts a solemn light on mercy and truth.

"Dear Lord, I recognize your infinite wisdom in establishing mercy and truth as the cornerstone of your dealings with mankind. If I had received the full measure of what I deserved, I would have been consumed instantly. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for forgiving my sins and saving me from eternal punishment! May I also remember that you cannot forgive someone who has not forgiven their fellowman. Help me to have an honest and open heart to your dealings. Help me to freely forgive, even as you have forgiven me. May I avail myself of your love and grace to live in mercy and truth! Amen."

REFLECTIONS

On May 6, 2023, the world witnessed something that hadn't happened in nearly seventy years; the coronation of a new head of state in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As a student of world history, I took note that, even in our modern times, much of the world followed the proceedings with interest. The Commonwealth of Nations, consisting of dozens of nations that are home to nearly a quarter of the world's population and recognize the British Crown as head of state, looked on as their monarch took the Coronation Oath, declaring, "I will" when asked if he would to his "...power cause law and justice, in mercy, to be executed in all [his]

judgments?"

Mankind has long valued mercy interspersed with truth. Abraham, when pleading with God to spare Sodom before the city was destroyed, argued in Genesis 18:25b, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" God had every right to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, a fact which Abraham recognized but, he still pled for God to mix His justice with mercy. God, obviously aware of His friend's intent, didn't save the city but did extend mercy to Lot and his family.

Man expects God to be merciful, but God requires it of us as well. Micah 6:8 states, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" God is able to balance both, and He expects the same of His people.

—Bro. Fari Matthews

JULY 16, 2023

HIS TRUTH ENDURETH TO ALL GENERATIONS

1 Timothy 2:4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

2 Corinthians 13:8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

MEMORY VERSE: For the LORD *is* good; his mercy *is* everlasting; and his truth *endureth* to all generations. —Psalm 100:5

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God's will and desire is that all men be saved. Wrapped up in His plan is that all men come to the knowledge of the truth – not just any truth, but *the* truth. Since God is our creator, He has the privilege of defining truth. We can fight against truth but will never prevail. History has so many examples of those who fought against God's will and against truth—they always lost.

WORD DEFINITIONS

1 Timothy 2:4a **“Who will have all men to be saved“**: In this context, will means “to choose, prefer, wish, desire, intend.

1 Timothy 2:4b **“To come unto the knowledge of the truth“**: the truth which God has revealed; the “truth as it is in Jesus.”

2 Corinthians 13:8 **“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.”**: “None can really injure the truth or stop its victorious progress.” (F.B. Meyer)

2 Thessalonians 2:13b **“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation“**: Paul assured the church in Thessalonica that God had good plans for them from the beginning of time, if they would but receive it. (Condensed from Matthew Henry)

2 Thessalonians 2:13c **“Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth“**: Although God desires that everyone be saved, it is only those who apply themselves through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth who will reap the full benefit of God’s desires. Sanctification and the belief in all of God’s truth will not be neglected in a prospering soul. (Condensed from Matthew Henry)

Psalms 100:5b **“His truth endureth to all generations“**: His firmness, moral fidelity, faithfulness, and stability is evermore.

LESSON BACKGROUND

God had a plan already in place when He placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When they fell into sin, the Lord did not wring His hands and wonder what could be done to salvage the situation. He revealed a little of His wonderful plan when He told the serpent in Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” The plan to redeem mankind to Himself centered around Jesus coming to earth as a baby, living here among us, teaching us the truth of God’s plan, dying for our sins, conquering death through His resurrection, and sending His Holy Spirit.

DISCUSSION:

1. Knowing that it is God’s will, or deepest desire, that everyone be saved, how should we feel about those we may be tempted to

- overlook as being worthy of salvation?
2. What potential does God see in every soul?
 3. Not only is it God's desire that everyone be saved, He also wants everyone to come to the knowledge of the truth. How many versions of "truth" do you think God is pleased with?
 4. How can we help others to come to "the knowledge of the truth?"
 5. What impact can truth have on a lost and hurting soul?
 6. How can it be that "we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth," if we are free to exercise our own will and possibly "kick against the pricks" in our stubbornness?
 7. Why did God choose, or desire, from the very beginning that everyone be saved?
 8. How does God manifest His desire that everyone be saved?
 9. How is God's mercy everlasting?
 10. How does God's truth endure to all generations?
 11. What would happen if God's truth stopped exercising its authority on earth?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Benedict Arnold is a well-known traitor during the fight for independence in the Revolutionary War. Feeling unappreciated when passed up for a promotion, Arnold resigned his commission in July of 1777. General Washington, however, refused his resignation and ordered him to report to General Gates. Unfortunately, Gates and Arnold did not get along well at all, arguing often.

Not long after joining General Gates' troops, Arnold was relieved of his command by Gates for insubordination during the first of two battles, the Battle of Saratoga. Sidelined by Gates during the second battle of Saratoga, Arnold joined in anyway, defying Gates' order to stay clear of the battle. He led a charge on horseback that helped ensure ultimate victory for the Americans. Arnold's leg was severely wounded during this attack.

Historians believe the Battle of Saratoga was a crucial step toward American independence from England. After the Americans won the battles of Saratoga, the French formally recognized America as an independent nation and sent financial aid. Winning Saratoga also

helped ensure that New York did not remain under British control, which would have been crucial for the British side in the war effort.

Although Benedict Arnold later tried to sell his country for profit, his role toward American independence is still important. There is a memorial of a boot at the site of the Battle of Saratoga signifying Arnold's contribution. There is no name on the boot, but it is an effort to recognize what happened at a critical time in history. (*History.com 1/14/20*)

"For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2Corinthians 13:8). God saw fit, in His great wisdom, that America become a free nation. Benedict Arnold ultimately turned traitor to his country, but God still used him to help bring about American independence.

King Cyrus, the king of Persia, gave financial support to the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. This event was prophesied almost two hundred years earlier in Isaiah 44:28, "That saith of Cyrus, *He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*" Here again, a man that might not normally be considered an agent of God's will, was used to fulfill God's plan and purpose.

As free moral agents, we can choose to rebel against God, as the Pharaoh of Egypt did, but the Lord's ultimate purpose will be fulfilled in the earth, despite what mankind tries to do otherwise. When God saw fit to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt, He used Pharaoh's own stubbornness to bring about the near destruction of Egypt. It is the Lord's will that everyone be saved, but He does not force anyone to serve Him. When it comes to God's overall plan, however, we are but dust in the whirlwind. His truth and goodness will prevail.

"Dear Lord, thank you for your great mercy toward your creation. Thank you that you have the power to ensure your overall will for mankind prevails. Thank you that your truth endures to all generations, including ours today! Help me to cooperate with your plans and benefit thereby, rather than be found "kicking against the pricks" and suffering for it. May your will be done in my life, and may your truth be glorified. Amen."

REFLECTIONS

“All generations”—quite a thought. ELS song number 334 lets us know, “When the earth shall cease to be, and the heavens pass away, the unchanging Word of God we’ll see just as it is today.” Verse three says, “Hath a mortal yet been found who hath trusted Him in vain? Search the whole broad space of earth around and search it once again.”

What is truth? John 17:17 tells us, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” All things are judged to be true or false according to the Word of God.

What is truth? John 15:6 tells us, “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

What is truth? That which is without error. Christ is without error.

Romans 2:14-15 states, “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.”

God has a way of revealing truth to all generations. How sad it is when we allow the culture of our day to veer us away from the truth. Abraham, no doubt swayed by the culture, said, “She is my sister.” How sad it is when the righteous are rebuked by the unrighteous. Brother Lot offered his two daughters to the men at Sodom and Gomorrah. How do we walk today with the things that affect our culture such as abortion and same-sex marriage? Will we be found calmly resting on the Word of God which endures to all generations, or will we be swayed by the beliefs of our culture today? The truth is the truth.

—Bro. E.E. Gracey

JULY 23, 2023

TRUTH IN THE INWARD PARTS

Psalm 15:1 A Psalm of David. LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

2 He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

Proverbs 12:17 He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.

Zechariah 8:16 These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates:

Ephesians 4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

MEMORY VERSE: Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

—Psalm 51:6

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The psalmist David asked an important question, perhaps the most important question anyone can ask themselves: Who will go to heaven? The answer is simple—he that walks uprightly, works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart. The Lord will forgive an honest heart that pleads for his forgiveness, but a dishonest heart is incapable of seeing their need of a Savior.

It is also prerequisite that we speak the truth in our hearts before we can deal honestly with one another and have successful and meaningful relationships. Dishonesty in any form, starting in our hearts, will destroy the work of truth in our lives. Honesty promotes truth in our life and among all whom our lives touch.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 15:1a **“Abide”**: sojourn or live temporarily as a guest. We are but strangers and pilgrims on our journey to eternity.

Psalm 15:1a **“Tabernacle”**: the tent that Israel carried from place to place. (*Albert Barnes*)

Psalm 15:1b **“Dwell”**: to stay permanently; to remain (*Strong’s*) We are pilgrims here on earth but will live eternally in Heaven.

Psalm 15:1b **“Thy holy hill”**: Zion, the place God chose to have the temple built. (*Albert Barnes*) It signifies our permanent home in heaven.

Psalm 15:2a **“Walketh uprightly”**: to behave with integrity and sincerity.

Psalm 15:2b **“Worketh righteousness”**: practice right living.

Psalm 15:2c **“Speaketh the truth in his heart”**: to think, answer, pronounce, or teach that which is stable and faithful to himself.

LESSON BACKGROUND

David’s predecessor, King Saul, had serious issues with speaking the truth in his heart. He struggled greatly with pride, jealousy, and murderous intentions through much of his forty-year reign. David felt the brunt of King Saul’s jealousy and hatred from the time he started leading men to battle, on behalf of Saul, to the time of Saul’s death. These long, hard years were perhaps the greatest schoolmaster David could have had, teaching him what NOT to do when he finally came to the throne.

Saul’s lack of complete honesty led him down a long and torturous path to utter destruction. It started out small at first, perhaps just a little entertainment of pride in his heart. He was tall, and good looking. The people looked up to him, giving him every opportunity to take a little glory to himself. After all, wasn’t he the king – the Lord’s anointed?

David observed what pride and dishonesty could lead to and recognized that only complete truth in the heart could lead to a good outcome. Anything less than absolute honesty in the inward most parts of himself would not work!

DISCUSSION:

1. What effect does dishonesty have on the way truth is regarded in the heart and mind of a person?
2. How much dishonesty within the innermost being does it take for someone to start straying from complete truth?
3. In what way does a lack of complete truth and honesty start manifesting itself outwardly, where other people start recognizing it?
4. What does it mean to speak truth to ourselves?
5. Proverbs 12:17 ties speaking the truth to exhibiting righteousness. Why are the two linked together?

6. Zechariah 8:16 and Ephesians 4:25 both deal with how we are to treat our neighbor, or those we interact with in life. How necessary is it to first have complete inward honesty and truth before we can treat our neighbor with honesty and truth?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Abraham Lincoln, as a young man, once walked six miles to return three cents he overcharged a customer. There are many stories like this one. He became known as “Honest Abe” because of his complete fairness and integrity when dealing with others. Lincoln had a famous quote, “I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to what light I have” (Benjamin Spall). Various writings and quotes attributed to Lincoln bear out the fact that his honesty was a course he resolutely chose in life, rather than singular acts of doing the right thing all strung together. He concluded, at an early age, that being honest and truthful with everyone in every situation was the best way to live. He did not lead a double life, one in which he was dishonest with himself in private moments but honest with everyone else publicly. He was simply honest all the time – first with himself, and then others. Historians agree that even his rivals in court cases, and later in politics, all attested to his absolute honesty and integrity.

How did Abraham Lincoln become so honest with himself and others? His life was filled with hardship and pain from an early age. His mother died when he was nine years old. He worked hard as a boy and throughout his growing up years. Education was sparse, at best. Most of his learning came from books he borrowed and read when he had opportunity. In his early adult life, he failed at several business ventures but never failed to repay people when he owed them money. He struggled in politics, failing to gain any real traction until he was ultimately elected president. Certainly, the many difficulties did not dissuade him from truth in the inward parts. Rather, it hardened his resolve to do the right thing anyway, even if it hurt.

One of Lincoln’s best friends, Leonard Swett, said it best, “He believed in the great laws of truth, the right discharge of duty, his accountability to God, the ultimate triumph of the right, and the overthrow of the wrong.” Lincoln had to believe in truth itself.

Everything else followed naturally in its course. If he had not believed in truth, he would not have been able to live in truth.

There are a few times in Abraham Lincoln's life where it seems he was less than totally honest. One incident involved a court case in which he was asked by both sides to represent them. He chose the client that could pay him more. This does not ring true to total fairness. There is, however, the example of Abraham in the Bible, that reminds us humans can fail. Abraham and Sarah were faced with the possibility of his life being in danger because of her striking beauty. Abraham told half-truths on two different occasions, saying, "She is my sister." He admitted to his failure both times, and God helped him to get past those failings. Simply said, we do not have any human as a perfect example of complete truth and honesty. We must look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith to get it right.

"Dear Lord, thank you for truth. Help me to believe in truth enough that I want it more than any shortcut around it! When I am tempted to consider anything less than full truth in my inward parts, help me to recognize the deception and cling to you and the right! Amen."

REFLECTIONS

Have you noticed that we all want others to deal with us in truth or honesty and integrity? Have you noticed the reaction of people when they find that someone has acted outside of those parameters?

David felt the responsibility and the necessity to have an inward truth. It was a very painful lesson to learn. To possess truth in our heart, feelings, and intellect is a most serious endeavor. Without it, life becomes a profession of falsehoods. King Saul failed in having truth in the inward parts and therefore, suffered great failure in his life.

The world still utilizes principles of honesty and truth. World economies, businesses, and relationships are based on truth, trust, integrity, faith, and confidence. Many fail to hold or live to a standard of truth within, yet they expect you to do so.

People often watch what you do and how you conduct life, whether young or old. I'm reminded of being asked a question by a former school classmate who would occasionally attend a service

during our revival meetings. Before I could answer in any way, he pointed at me and said, “I know you can’t lie!” Many in this world have some understanding of what inward truth looks like. We must truly possess it within. Anything less falls short of what God desires in our lives, and it falls short of what we should expect to live.

Without inward truth, we’ll resort to deception. In order to deceive others, we have to deceive ourselves, first.

—Bro. Paul Phillips

JULY 30, 2023

CALL UPON HIM IN TRUTH

Psalm 25:5 Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou *art* the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.

Mark 10:17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God.

19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

John 3:21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

John 4:24 God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.

MEMORY VERSE: The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. —Psalm 145:18

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Truth is important when we are sincere in getting to our destination or in finishing an important task. If we do not know the whole truth about a matter, we are subject to error and disappointment. We have the privilege of coming to the Lord for truth anytime we need direction in life. Our motive must be sincere or we will go away sorrowful, just as the man did in the reading above. He came running to Jesus, full of eager expectation. He probably had certain things in mind and felt that he had already “checked all the boxes.” Jesus saw his heart and found something that needed adjustment. When the reality of the situation hit home, it was too much and “he went away grieved: for he had great possessions.”

When we desire more understanding, as we will from time to time, it is wise to ask the Lord to help us to first have a willing mind and heart to accept what He shows us. Truth digs deep, and it can hurt. If we stay with God, though, He will bring us through to a better place!

WORD DEFINITIONS

Mark 10:17 **“There came one running”**: He was deeply convinced of the importance of his business, and seriously determined to seek so as to find. (*Adam Clarke*)

Mark 10:17b **“Kneeled to him”**: He caught him by the knees, thus evidencing his humility, and addressing himself only to mercy. (*Adam Clarke*)

Mark 10:17c **“Good Master”**: He came in the spirit of a disciple, or scholar, desiring to be taught a matter of the utmost importance to him. (*Adam Clarke*)

Mark 10:17d **“What shall I do”**: He came in the spirit of obedience; he had worked hard to no purpose, and he is still willing to work, provided he can have a prospect of succeeding.

Mark 10:17e **“That I may inherit eternal life?”**: His question was the most interesting and important that any soul can ask of God—How shall I be saved? (*Adam Clarke*)

Mark 10:21a **“Then Jesus beholding him loved him”**: Jesus saw something in the young man that compelled him to tell him the truth. Jesus wished for the young man to leave that which was hindering him, and to take up the cross, and follow him. Only a few people received the special invitation to follow him as a disciple. This young man was one of them.

Mark 10:22b **“And went away grieved”**: The young man’s sorrow was two-fold – He could not bear to part with his riches, which now gave him absolutely no pleasure; and he had the realization that he was trading his riches for his soul!

LESSON BACKGROUND

The prayer David prayed in Psalms 25:5 was for the Lord to lead him in truth. David knew that it was the Lord that had helped him kill the lion and the bear. This gave him the confidence that he could face Goliath, with God’s help, and be victorious.

Truth kept David at other times as well. When given the opportunity to slay King Saul, David always refused, knowing that Saul was the Lord’s anointed, and he must not interfere with how the Lord was handling the situation.

When David finally despaired and decided he must flee to the king of Gath for refuge, he got on the wrong side of truth. “And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: *there is* nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand” (1 Samuel 27:1). David looked at the physical evidence and concluded there was no hope, except he flee to the enemy king. He lost sight of the real truth, that God was his shield, regardless of what the situation looked or felt like. He learned the hard way that despair does not equal truth.

The young man that ran to Jesus, eager to learn more perfectly the way of salvation, also learned a hard lesson: Our human zeal can get in the way of truth just as much as our despair. Our own thinking will not lead us to truth.

DISCUSSION:

1. Psalm 25:5b states, “On thee do I wait all the day.” What significance is there in waiting all the day, rather than most of it, for truth to be manifested?
2. When the young man ran to Jesus wanting to know what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, what could have been some of the “truths” he had in mind that he felt he was clear on?
3. What might some of the things be he thought Jesus would tell him to “do” to gain eternal life?
4. What truth did Jesus understand this young man needed to deal with?
5. Why didn’t Jesus tell Zacchaeus to sell everything when he was dealing with him?
6. How do we call upon God in truth?
7. What happens if we call upon God, but not in truth?
8. If we are sincere, how does further truth affect us?
9. Why did Jesus say we must worship God in spirit and in truth?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43). This dying man recognized who Jesus really was and what was about to be accomplished that day on Mount Calvary. His companion, suffering on the other cross, had railed on Jesus, saying, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us” (Luke 23:39). How did one man not see the truth of who Jesus was, while the other understood so completely? The man, who joined Jesus that day in paradise, understood who Jesus was seemingly more than Jesus’ own disciples! How was that possible?

The Bible does not elaborate on how one man on a cross could fully accept truth of Jesus’ mission, while so many others rejected it. We only know that this man accepted truth for what it was. In contrast, the man that railed on Jesus hoped that Jesus would save himself and them, failing to recognize we do not get to define what truth is nor can we bend it to suit our ideals or needs. We either

accept truth or reject it. There is no middle ground or “degrees of truth.” Simply put, either Jesus was the Christ, as He claimed to be, or He was not.

Jesus’ disciples believed early on that He was the Christ, but they did not believe the whole truth—that Jesus came as the sacrifice for sin, condemned to die on a Roman cross. They looked forward to a tangible, earthly kingdom and had more than one discussion on who would be “the greatest” in that kingdom. They had their sights set far too low, which hindered them from seeing the full truth of the Kingdom of Heaven. The man that met Jesus in paradise had a complete grasp of what Jesus’ kingdom was – spiritual and not earthly.

Thankfully, others came to the full realization of truth that happy Easter morning! Mary, on a mission to attend Jesus’ body, recognized her risen Savior when He said, “Mary.” Peter and John’s understanding opened soon thereafter also, with many more believing in the coming days. Thomas, ever the pragmatic disciple, had to have more proof; but, he too, soon accepted the truth with all his heart.

“Heavenly Father, help me, in Jesus’ name, to accept your truth with all my heart! Help me to remember that I must not attempt to define truth intellectually, according to human wisdom. May I simply believe your Word and live accordingly – not trying to mold it to my unique situation. Thank you for the privilege of calling upon your name in truth. Thank you for the power and deliverance in truth! Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

As children of God we must call upon the Lord. However, it’s important that our motives are pure as we do so. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). In order to fully access the blessings of God, we must go through Jesus and do things His way. As we inquire of the Lord, sometimes we have an idea of the way we’d like a situation to work out, or we have in our mind how we’ve seen how similar situations work out for others before.

There’s nothing wrong with remembering past answers from God. However, we must be careful so that as we approach Him, we

are truly willing for Him to work our request out His way, which may be completely different than anything we've ever seen or heard of before. This attitude is a vital part of calling upon Him in truth.

Another aspect of calling upon God in truth requires us to walk in the light He has already shown us. We cannot expect Him to reveal more of Himself, His Word, His miracles, and His truth, if we are not walking in obedience. We must first do what has already been shown to us before we can receive additional blessings and more revelation.

May the Lord truly help each of us to examine ourselves to ensure we are submitting our plans and desires to Him and calling upon Him in truth.

–Sis. Serena Johnson

AUGUST 6, 2023

THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

Psalm 86:11 Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.

John 8:3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

5 Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

6 This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not*.

7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

9 And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

MEMORY VERSE: Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

—John 8:31-32

CENTRAL THOUGHT: When we walk in God’s truth, we are free from the traps and snares that would otherwise hinder our progress toward heaven. We are also spared from the grief that would otherwise attend our missteps. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

The story of the woman taken in adultery is a wonderful example of how truth makes us free. She was bound by the chains of sin and then condemned by the law to be stoned for her sins. Her accusers offered her no hope at all, but Jesus set her free completely with the words, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”

It is sad to realize that her accusers, faced with their own sins, chose to walk away, rather than obtain the same freedom the woman received that day. By not accepting the truth, they remained captive to their pride and sin.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 8:4b “**Taken in adultery, in the very act**“: seized while being unfaithful to her husband. (*Strong’s*)

John 8:6b “**With *his* finger wrote on the ground**“: There is no mention of Jesus ever writing anything else, and It is not recorded what Jesus wrote this time. Whatever he wrote was not intended to be read by anyone but those present. It is better that some things not be kept forever. (*Condensed from Adam Clarke*)

John 8:11b “**Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more**“: Jesus knew that her accusers could not justly condemn her, being guilty themselves, nor could they free her from her sin. Seeing her

repentant heart, Jesus released her from her sin, but warned her to sin no more.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Adam Clarke writes that adultery was exceedingly common in New Testament times—so common that they had ceased to put the law in force against it. The Law allowed for a woman accused of adultery to either declare her innocence or admit her guilt. If she pled innocent, she could agree to drink the waters of jealousy before the people. If innocent, the water would not harm her. She was free to go back home with her husband, who would also regard her as innocent. If guilty, the water would make her fatally ill. Since many men in Jesus' time were guilty of being unfaithful, most hesitated to accuse their wives of unfaithfulness to the point they would drink the waters of jealousy, believing that the water would have no impact, since they themselves were also guilty. (See Numbers 5:11-31)

The woman caught in adultery, in the very act, was most likely not brought to Jesus for judgment by her husband but by a group of men who cared only about entrapping Jesus. If Jesus also condemned the woman to death, as they felt she should be, they could accuse Jesus of being inconsistent, since He had previously eaten with publicans and sinners. If He released her, they planned to accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses, which gave provision for her punishment.

DISCUSSION:

1. David prayed the LORD to teach him His way so he could walk in His truth. What are we free from when we walk in truth?
2. What freedom may the woman in adultery have thought she was enjoying before she was caught?
3. Before she was caught, what fears might she have had that chipped away at her "freedom?"
4. How free and innocent were the men that brought the woman to Jesus, since they all slipped away, one by one?
5. Why didn't the realization of truth about their own sins give freedom to the woman's accusers?
6. How did the truth give freedom and forgiveness to the accused woman?

7. Why did the men go away in their broken state and the woman departed free from her guilt?
8. Our memory verses stress the importance of continuing in God's word. What are the results of doing so?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Some of the greatest paradoxes involve sin and freedom:

Secret sins do not give the freedom and happiness they promise. (Proverbs 28:13)

Those who demand the freedom to pursue their own passions will soon be enslaved by those passions. (Galatians. 6:7-8)

Cain felt "restricted and judged" when unwilling to offer sacrifices pleasing to God. He killed his brother to be free from condemnation but later said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." (Genesis 4:13-14)

Lot chose the well-watered valley that led to Sodom. He lost about everything in the end. Abraham took the land that was left but ended up with all the land in the end.

Choosing our own path is not real freedom, but enslavement. Our flesh will never be satisfied if we make it our master.

Frank Sinatra made the song, "My Way" famous. It chronicles how he lived life "his way" without regret. In reality, Mr. Sinatra was a lonely and sad man. His friends included big names in the music and entertainment industry, but he was married four times. His musical career made him famous, but his lifestyle left him with broken health. His last words were spoken to his fourth wife, "I'm losing." What a contrast these words are to the lyrics in his hit song, "My Way."

"Dear Lord, please help me remember the great lesson in life that my way is not the way of truth, freedom, happiness or eternal life.' Help me honor you by walking in your path, the path of truth. Amen."

REFLECTIONS

A great many literary classics have dealt with the oppressive burden of guilt and the desire of human beings to be freed from that burden: Shakespeare's Macbeth, Edgar Allan Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart, and numerous others. Crime and Punishment, one such classic

by the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, deals with the same theme. The book's main character is a young, impoverished former law student who devises a plan to rob and murder an old lady with means and, in following through on his evil thoughts, ends up killing her sister, too. Although he narrowly escapes discovery of his hideous crimes, he is racked with guilt and mental anguish and eventually discovers that only a full confession will set him free. Is not this desire to be free of guilt and sin the impetus for so many turning to Jesus Christ? Thank God for His deliverance! I am reminded of the lyrics to the song "I'm Free Again" by Vep B. Ellis:

Satan led my soul astray (Satan led my soul astray I drifted),
From the straight and narrow way (that leads to happiness and life
eternal);
But to Jesus I did pray, (to the Lord I humbly prayed),
He heard my prayer, rescued me that very day, (that very day).

Praise God I'm free, (free from every chain of sin),
I've been set free by the grace of God;
I'm free, (with a settled peace within,)
No more the paths of sin I trod;
I'm free, (Heaven's gates I'll enter in),
The blood has cleansed every sinful stain;
I'm free, (Praise the living God,)
I'm free again. (I'm free again.)

—Bro. Fari Matthews

AUGUST 13, 2023

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

MEMORY VERSE: Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. —John 14:6

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The conversation with Jesus and Nicodemus is one of the best-known passages in the Bible. In response to Nicodemus' effort to compliment Jesus on the miracles He had performed, Jesus turned the conversation to a truth Nicodemus could not grasp: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Jesus explained to Nicodemus that the way to Heaven cannot be understood in human terms.

The plan of salvation involved Jesus coming as a baby, being tempted in every way possible, dying on a Roman cross for our sins, then rising from the grave on the third day. The human way of saving ourselves centers around defending self at any cost. God's plan and mankind's plan for salvation are opposites and cannot be reconciled. Either man's plan is followed or God's plan is followed.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 3:18 "**Condemned** ": to be tried, judged, then sentenced with punishment.

John 3:19 "**Light**": to shine or make manifest; to compare.

John 3:19 "**Darkness**": shadiness, obscurity.

LESSON BACKGROUND

When the devil tempted Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit, he promised her something he could not give her—wisdom rivaling God’s wisdom. He also assured her that taking her own way was the real path to happiness and that she would not die, as God had warned would happen if they ate of the tree. The opposite, of course was true. Eve, her husband, their children, and all mankind afterwards were destined to live degenerate lives full of heartache, then doomed to eternal torment at the end of life – *unless* they accepted God’s plan for redemption. The *only* way to eternal life was to follow God’s plan.

Nicodemus, along with the rest of the Jewish leaders, thought they were on the path to eternal life. This thinking had been passed down to them for generations. Jesus referred to their way as “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). Having their own way, however, had only been their constant downfall.

DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the love God had for fallen man so that He was willing to give His only Son as a sacrifice for their sins.
2. Why is it necessary to believe in the sacrifice Jesus made for us if we want to have eternal life?
3. What would the plan of salvation have looked like if Jesus had come to condemn the world?
4. How and why do people try to convince themselves they can choose their own path and not be condemned?
5. Why would anyone prefer the darkness of their own thoughts and actions rather than the light of God’s love and forgiveness?
6. In John 14:6, Jesus declares, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” What other paths do people claim will lead to happiness and eternal life?
7. What wisdom is there in the truth that there is only one way to forgiveness and Heaven, as opposed to the countless paths pursued by those who do not know, or accept truth?

8. Why do some people believe in multiple ways to Heaven rather than the “one way, one truth” that Jesus taught?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The story of Jonah is a vivid example of “my path” versus “God’s path.” The LORD commanded Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh that destruction was coming in forty days. This assignment was so disagreeable to Jonah that he went another direction, booking passage on a ship headed to Tarshish. From Jonah’s hometown, Nineveh was over 500 miles to the east. Tarshish was over 2500 miles west. Isn’t it amazing how far we can get from where God wants us to be when we choose to go our own way?

Jonah had reasons for avoiding Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. The Assyrians were a brutal people, intent on ruling the entire known world. “They don’t deserve to be warned,” Jonah reasoned. Could it be that Jonah suspected that the Assyrians might turn from their wicked ways if they were warned? When Jonah finally went to Nineveh and preached, all of Nineveh fasted and repented. Jonah’s complaint to the LORD was, “For I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil”(Jonah 4:2b).

God’s way was so well explained by Jonah: gracious, merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness, and repenting of evil. Man’s way is demonstrated by pride, selfishness, grudges, envy, hatred, strife, murder, deceit, lusts, and every other hurtful attitude.

Mankind can reason that it is not good to forsake God’s plan, but that it sometimes needs to be modified slightly to make it more palatable or “up to date.” The rebellion is not so obvious in these cases, but is it still rebellion? Years ago, I worked at an explosives plant. My boss was the head engineer in charge of the facility. One of my tasks was to maintain the large library of books containing the numerous directives from the head office in the U.K. My boss gave me explicit instructions on the method he wanted me to use in maintaining the library. For some reason, I came up with a slightly different way that would make it easier and more efficient. I did not intend to be insubordinate, but I still had my idea on how best to carry out the work. When my boss found out I was not doing my job exactly as he specified, he corrected me—not once, not twice, but

three times. I say this in shame and remember his words to this day: “Cliff, this is the third time I’ve called you on this.” It finally dawned on me that I had been doing it my way and not his way. I sincerely apologized and did it his way from then on. He was kind enough to give me grace, and we had a fantastic working relationship moving forward.

I had been performing all the rest of my job exactly the way it needed to be done. It was only in this “one small area” that I differed with my boss. I could have insisted that maintaining the library was unimportant enough that “it did not matter how it was done—just so long as it was done.” I worked at an explosives plant, however, and it *did* matter how things were done. Many lives were at stake, and my disobedience to explicit instructions could have put lives at risk. Regarding truth, it *does* matter how we think about it. Our souls are at stake, as well as the souls of others that are affected by our decisions.

“Heavenly Father, help me to regard truth as you regard it – not through my human understanding and preconceived ideas, but with the acknowledgment that you view things from an eternal perspective. I may think that I have a better plan in some situations, but help me to submit to your infinite wisdom, and follow what is written in your word and by what you reveal to me through your Holy Spirit. Help me to remember that your Holy Spirit and your Word will always agree. When my own thinking conflicts with your Word and Spirit, help me to remember that your way always leads to life.”

REFLECTIONS

The scriptures let us know that God created the heavens and the earth. The memory verse in today’s lesson reminds us of what Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father (God), but by me.” We are conditioned by our environment—by the world we live in. We have so many options and numerous ways of doing something to achieve the same thing or reach a desired goal. One example is multiple directions that can be given to get from point A to point B. Getting directions from your cell phone’s mapping app may divert you from the most direct route to a roundabout way to avoid traffic or road construction. A spiritual parallel could be trials and tests. There is a human tendency to apply

natural-world thinking to the spiritual world. This does not nor will it ever work. The word of God is plain and clear. There is only one creator—God. If we want to make it to HIS heaven, the ONLY way to get there is to go HIS way. None of us have the authority to create our own heaven or make our own way to get to His. Be careful of the “seem right” way. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). The path has been given to us; our job is to follow it. There is but one true way.

—Bro. Tavis Browne

AUGUST 20, 2023

BUY THE TRUTH, AND SELL IT NOT

Proverbs 23:23 Buy the truth, and sell *it* not; *also* wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.

1 Corinthians 13:4 Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Ephesians 6:14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

1 John 2:21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

MEMORY VERSE: Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. —Titus 1:14

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Truth is a valuable commodity, with no substitute. Without it we have no true wisdom, knowledge, or understanding. This principle applies to all disciplines of math, science, history, philosophy, and the arts. We cannot imagine a world where 2+2 does not always equal 4, or where the laws of physics are not steadfast. History, sad to say, is unalterable, but it can be taught in dishonesty, thus twisting the truth and altering human beliefs and reactions negatively. Philosophy, the study of knowledge, reality, and

existence, is presumed to be based on truth. What happens when philosophers base their trains of thought on anything less than truth? Musicians would not be able to play or sing in harmony and on time if the laws of music relied on the whims of each musician. Artists would get confused if the blending of certain colors did not produce the same results every time.

Truth is inseparable with true Christianity. Of what benefit is a Christ-like life that does not have love and kindness? How effective would Christianity be that was full of envy, pride, unseemly behavior, selfishness, evil thinking, and that rejoiced in evil? When faced with temptations and trials, it is necessary for a Christian to “stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth....” We conclude, therefore, that truth is indispensable to the Christian.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Proverbs 23:23 “**Truth**”: stability, certainty, trustworthy, faithful, right, sure.

Titus 1:14a “**Jewish fables**”: “Idle fancies; things of no moment; doctrines and opinions unauthenticated; silly legends, of which no people ever possessed a greater stock than the Jews. Their Talmud abounds with them; and the English reader may find them in abundance in Stehlin’s Jewish Traditions” (*Adam Clarke*).

Titus 1:14b “**Commandments of men**”: The injunctions of the scribes and Pharisees, which they *added* to the law of God.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The author of Proverbs 23:23, “Buy the truth, and sell it not” did exactly that; he sold the truth and lost so much in the bargain. Solomon later regretted his error, but the damage was done. He wrote “all is vanity” in several different passages of scriptures. He also “loved many strange women” who “turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God... and Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD” (I Kings 11:1-8).

Did selling the truth harm Solomon, his family, Israel, and the generations following? First, Solomon risked his own soul. He may have found forgiveness before he died, but it is not recorded as fact in the scriptures. His son, Rehoboam, soon lost most of the kingdom

of Israel when ten tribes revolted. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah later went into captivity. It is hard to quantify the pain and loss resulting from one man selling the truth.

DISCUSSION:

1. “Buying the truth” implies an exchange of something in order to obtain truth. What must be given up in exchange for truth?
2. How would a person get wisdom and understanding without truth?
3. What would be the result if a person learned something of value, but learned it incorrectly, or without truth?
4. How dangerous can it be to learn something incorrectly?
5. How important is spiritually sound, or true, doctrine?
6. Why are iniquity and truth contrasted with each other?
7. How necessary is truth to be able to stand spiritually?
8. I John 2:21b states, “No lie is of the truth.” What does this really mean?
9. How does giving heed to “Jewish fables” and “commandments of men” turn people from the truth?
10. How can we recognize a spiritual fable or a commandment of men? How do we recognize truth?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Air Canada Flight 143 was just past halfway on their flight from Montreal to Edmonton when fuel pressure warning alarms began to go off. It was July 23, 1983. The new Boeing 767 had only 150 hours of total flight time. The cockpit had the latest flight displays and instruments, but what good were they in a situation like this? The flight computer showed that they should have more than enough fuel for the duration of the flight. The fuel gauges, unfortunately, were both inoperable at the time. The pilots had to rely on how many pounds of fuel were taken on board, and the rate of fuel burn, to verify they had enough fuel.

A few minutes after the first alarm went off, the left engine quit. The pilots were already in contact with the flight controllers and now declared an emergency. The pilots at first headed towards Winnipeg, but finally decided on Gimli, an old abandoned military base. They

were unaware, however, that the old air base had been converted into a strip for drag racing. Several families were camped out at the drag strip, having just finished the drag races for the day.

When the pilots realized they would reach Gimli, they were very relieved. Their joy was short lived, however, when it became clear that they were too high to land safely. The captain resorted to a method of cross-controlling, called a side slip, to lower the plane faster than normal without increasing air speed. After slipping most of the remaining glide to the runway, the captain straightened the aircraft out and landed safely on the runway. Thankfully, the main gears had responded to the emergency landing gear deployment and had come all the way down into a locked position, but the nose gear did not deploy all the way. After touchdown, the jetliner skidded down the runway with its nose throwing sparks and smoke. Two boys, riding their bicycles at that end of the runway, raced back to the crowd in a futile effort to warn every one of the approaching plane. If it had not been for a metal guardrail erected in the middle of the drag strip, the plane might have gone down the runway much further than it did. When the front part of the fuselage started grinding against the guardrail, it slowed the aircraft down to a halt. There were a few minor injuries during the evacuation, but, miraculously, everyone was able to get safely off the plane.

Why did the 767-airliner run out of fuel halfway through the planned trip? Everyone involved with the fueling believed they were putting enough fuel on board, but the recent change from Imperial to Metric, coupled with the fact they had to manually measure the fuel being put on with “dip sticks” inserted into the tanks, caused enough confusion to cause the error. The readings on the dip sticks were paired with the pounds factor instead of the kilogram factor. One kilogram equals 2.2 pounds, so the jetliner took off with almost half the amount of fuel necessary. Unfortunately, the crew putting fuel on board made the initial conversion mistake, and the pilots then double-checked the numbers using the same method. Their multiplication was correct, but the formula was wrong.

In matters of the soul, it is imperative that we “get it right.” There is no room for false doctrine, no allowance for anything but the truth. We do not want to find out, like the pilots on Air Canada Flight 143, that we ran out of fuel at 41,000 feet, spiritually speaking. God was merciful to Flight 143, and He will show mercy to every honest

soul that is seeking him. It is dangerous, however, to gamble with truth and error. We are much better off when we desire and seek for full truth!

“Dear Lord, thank you for your mercy when I fall short of truth. Help me, though, to seek truth with all my heart. Too much is at stake for me to assume that I understand what the truth is simply because I have an opinion about it. I do not want to run out of fuel at an inopportune time. Help me to ‘buy the truth and sell it not!’ Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

“Buy the truth, and sell it not...” Truth is absolute. It is essential to our spiritual success. Why? Because truth is our foundation, like light on the path of life. It will direct us in the right way. Without it we would have no absolutes. We would fall into darkness, confusion, and uncertain paths. What is truth? “...Thy word is truth.” God’s word is truth, and it is solid. We can stand on it and be assured of being successful in our journey to heaven!

“Buy the truth...” Invest in it! It is like gold or other precious metals; but it has eternal value. It will not fade away. It cannot be destroyed. We need to do all we can to attain it. And when we get the truth, we must hold fast to it because it is our lifeline. Truth will stand forever, and it will cause us to stand. We must not let it go. We must not “sell” it.

Many people have sold the truth for the pleasures of this life. They do not realize the value of truth. Some have “...changed the truth of God into a lie...” What a dangerous state to be in! Without the truth, we open ourselves up to deception. It is sad to see people who once had the truth, invested in it, then turn from it to engage in worldly pleasures, who sold it to “enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” These dear ones are not realizing that time is swiftly fading away! May we be stirred to “SELL IT NOT!”

“Buy the truth, and sell it not.” It is essential to our spiritual success.

—Sis. Doris Clay

AUGUST 27, 2023

WHO DID HINDER YOU THAT YE SHOULD NOT OBEY THE TRUTH?

Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

Hebrews 10:26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

2 Timothy 2:18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

2 Timothy 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

MEMORY VERSE: Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? —Galatians 5:7

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Apostle Paul had a great burden for those who allowed themselves to be hindered—cheated—from obeying the truth of the gospel. Having once been on the other side of truth, as an intense persecutor of the way of truth, he understood what being in error could do to a person.

There seems to be three different categories of concern: Some people are bewitched or tricked into not obeying the truth. Others willingly fall away from truth after once having knowledge of truth. The last group is comprised of people that simply have not accepted truth, fighting against the dealings of the Holy Spirit and opposing themselves.

It is especially sad to think of those who once knew the truth and prospered spiritually to lose out because they did not remain faithful! Solomon, Judas, and Demas are among the unfortunate who somehow allowed themselves to be hindered. How beautiful the end of their race could have been!

WORD DEFINITIONS

Galatians 3:1 “**Foolish**”: sensual, unwise.

Galatians 3:1 “**Bewitched**”: to fascinate by false representations.

Hebrews 10:26 “**Willfully**”: voluntarily.

2 Timothy 2:18 “**Erred**”: missed the mark; deviate from truth; swerve.

2 Timothy 2:25 “**Oppose themselves**”: to set oneself opposite.

Galatians 5:7 “**Hinder**”: to beat back, or hinder.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Galatia, as well as to his own people, the Hebrews, with similar concerns. There were those who once knew the truth and who ran the Christian race well. Somewhere along the way, however, they allowed themselves to fall short of obeying the truth.

Paul wrote, in II Timothy 2:14-18, that Timothy, his personal representative to several churches and later pastor in Ephesus, should remind his congregation that it was detrimental to strive over unprofitable words and opinions, “for they would increase unto more ungodliness.” The doctrine that claimed the resurrection had already passed was especially dangerous, as it greatly weakened the cause of Christ and completely overthrew the faith of some.

DISCUSSION:

1. Part of the definition of unwise is “sensual.” How are magicians able to make something appear as true when it is not?
2. What effect does belief in a lie have on truth?
3. How can a person believe a lie about something and believe the truth about it at the same time?
4. What must happen for someone to believe a lie that once knew the truth?
5. Why does Paul say that there is “no more sacrifice for sins” for those who sin willfully after they have received the knowledge of the truth?
6. What must happen for someone to regain their spiritual vision of

- truth, if they should reject truth and believe a lie?
7. Why does Paul caution that meekness should be used when instructing those that oppose themselves, peradventure they would repent and acknowledge the truth?
 8. Why did Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, suppose that someone had bewitched and hindered some of the believers?
 9. Why is it so important that we not allow ourselves to be hindered in the Christian race?
 10. What can we do to help avoid being hindered in our race to heaven?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

“I see you read my instructions carefully,” the judge said to the jurors, as he gathered and stacked the papers before him. He then smiled and thanked us for serving as jurors in the case. After the judge made his remark about our carefulness in reaching a decision, I thought to myself, “He knew all along what the verdict should be!” Indeed, the judge did know! He was very familiar with the laws of the state and knew how they should be applied in this case.

When we went into the jury room for deliberations, the judge sent us a set of instructions written specifically for the case to which we had listened. The defendant was facing three different counts, each of which carried a potential monetary judgment that would be awarded the plaintiff, should we find the defendant guilty on that count.

Looking back over the course of the trial, I went back and forth in my mind wondering, “Is he guilty or is he innocent?” We were told by both sets of attorneys and by the judge to not make up our minds until all the evidence had been presented. Even then, we were told to hold our judgment until we read the judge’s instructions, which spelled out plainly how we should determine guilt or innocence. Once we read the judge’s instructions and discussed the different points of evidence presented in court, we unanimously declared the defendant innocent on all three counts. It was straightforward once we understood and applied the judge’s instructions.

In another court case several years ago, I began to think, “It’s all smoke and mirrors!” after hearing several hours of evidence. The

attorneys did their best to influence our thinking. After all, they are paid to persuade the jury. Is this right? Shouldn't they just present their case, fact by fact, without trying to sway emotions with their eloquent and often boisterous presentations?

There are many ways in which must "weigh the evidence" in our daily lives. The media bombards us on every hand, sometimes trying to influence the way we think about the news they present. *"Media influence is the actual force exerted by a media message, resulting in either a change or reinforcement in audience or individual beliefs (Wikipedia)."* Another quote from a journalism student interview reveals that journalists do sometimes report as advocates for a cause rather than with strict objectivity. *"I think it's a natural thing for somebody to be reporting on an issue for a long time to have a stance on that issue. They are obviously well versed in [the] issue, so I think it's a little unreasonable to assume that that person won't have some sort of stance"* (Frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2017.00094/full).

Advertisers unapologetically strive to influence our thinking. Since it is not an ethical issue in many cases, there is not much push-back in the way advertisers go about their jobs. After all, they just want us to buy their products. Thankfully, there are guidelines in place for products that are hazardous to our health, but, unfortunately, these efforts do little to dissuade the general public. Warnings on cigarette advertisements do not discourage people from smoking that really want to smoke, even if they are warned that they could get cancer from tobacco smoke.

"Satan is the best salesman ever! He can sell the vast majority of earth's population the most body, mind and soul-destroying products, services and ideas imaginable and even has the barbaric nerve to charge an excessive price for most of them!!" (Quoted by permission from Bro. Gary Eck.) When it comes to our soul, we cannot afford to be persuaded in the wrong way. Just as attorneys strive to influence the jury, as journalists sometimes slant a story to favor their viewpoint, and as advertisers strive to pitch their product as the best, so the devil presents his wares with great cunning. He is intent on tricking every soul possible to come over to his way of thinking, even if it takes a lifetime! What a sad thing for a soul that had been faithful to the Lord for many years to lose out in the end—just because they finally gave in to the devil's trickery!

“Heavenly Father, I recognize that I am human. As such, I am subject to the bombardments of the enemy of my soul. He is out to get me, even if it takes years. I ask that you reveal to me what your Holy Word says about the things the devil tries to entice me with; thoughts that are not right, entertainments that distract me from my eternal purpose, activities that hinder my spiritual progress, or the lack of taking time to feed my soul. Help me to not allow the devil to trick me or hinder me in any way! Thank you for your desire to help me to be an overcomer. I gratefully accept your grace and power to preserve my soul until the judgment day. Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

Simon “bewitched” the people of Samaria, giving out that he was some “great one.” The people gave heed to him saying, “This man is the great power of God.” They were taken advantage of because they were ignorant of satan’s devices and did not know God’s voice.

The only safe antidote against satan’s trickery is to “hear” the Lord’s voice and follow it! If we follow the Lord closely, then among all the voices that call will be that recognizable voice behind us that says, “This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21). “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

In unbelief satan led Eve astray. She knew God’s voice, but there was an element of “desire” for what God had forbidden and an “ignorance” of what she was really getting into. I saw an intelligent young man many years ago as he smirked and said, “I think I can handle sin.” He wasn’t prepared for the many years of sorrow, alcoholism, drugs and pain to his own family that sin brought to him! The element of desire for the forbidden and ignorance of the cost of sin blinded him!

Let us not be deceived by the many voices that call, whether they be false religion, the cares and pleasures of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, or any other temptation. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (II Peter 1:10).

—Bro. Phillip Gellenbeck

SEPTEMBER 3, 2023

THEY RECEIVED NOT THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH

2 Thessalonians 2:1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him,

2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

MEMORY VERSE: They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. —2 Thessalonians 2:10b

CENTRAL THOUGHT : A falling away before the end of time is prophesied, in that the “man of sin, the son of perdition” will be revealed. It will be “with all deceivableness of unrighteousness” because they received not the love of the truth.

WORD DEFINITIONS

2 Thessalonians 2:2b “**The day of Christ is at hand**”: a metaphor for the end of time, and a possible reference to the coming destruction of Jerusalem. The city was destroyed, as we know, and the end of time will come on its appointed day. (*Adam Clarke and Matthew Henry*)

2 Thessalonians 2:3b “**A falling away**”: an apostasy. A corruption of doctrines that renders the system of Christianity inefficient to salvation.

2 Thessalonians 2:7a “**The mystery of iniquity**”: The doctrines that first started working among the early morning church that started the great apostasy. These doctrines worked under cover for some time but are revealed for what they were in our day and time. (*Condensed from Adam Clarke*)

2 Thessalonians 2:10a “**Deceivableness of unrighteousness**”: With every art that cunning can invent and unrighteousness suggest, in order to delude and deceive. (*Adam Clarke*)

2 Thessalonians 2:10b “**Received not the love of the truth**”: They heard the truth, understood it, but chose to not love it. They, instead, chose to believe a lie. (*Matthew Henry*)

2 Thessalonians 2:11a “**Strong delusion**”: efficient and effectual error; strong deceit.

2 Thessalonians 2:12b “**But had pleasure in unrighteousness**”: Chose to take pleasure in the things of this world rather than to believe in the truth.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The early morning church started out with thousands getting saved. Persecution caused the gospel to be spread over the whole known world. Soon, apostasy showed its ugly head among the believers. The prophecy began to be fulfilled that some “received not the love of the truth.” The result is the face of modern Christianity

today—an assortment of multiple beliefs and contradictions, which is often the cause for cynicism among unbelievers and will be a cause for many missing heaven because they believe a lie. There are scarcely any words more somber than those recorded in 2 Thessalonians 2.

DISCUSSION:

1. Independent of what a group of people may do at any given time, how does personal apostasy, or a falling away, take place in an individual?
2. Verse 10 refers to “deceivableness of unrighteousness.” What are the steps taken in unrighteousness that lead to being deceived?
3. What can cause a person to not love truth when they hear it?
4. Why does not receiving a love for the truth cause a void of that truth where it is no longer understood?
5. Why does a lie take the place of truth when the truth is not accepted?
6. When someone rejects truth and then believes the lie that takes its place, what does that person now regard as truth?
7. How does the principle of lies taking the place of truth explain the shape the world is in today?
8. Verse 11 speaks of a “strong delusion.” How strong is this delusion? Why is it so strong?
9. Verse 12 states that those who chose to not believe the truth will be damned. Why can’t there be an exception to this?
10. Considering the consequences of not receiving a love for the truth, how important is our love for the truth?
11. What can you and I do to receive a love for the truth?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

“The *illusory truth effect*, also known as the illusion of truth, describes how, when we hear the same false information repeated again and again, we often come to believe it is true. Troublingly, this even happens when people should know better—that is, when people initially know that the misinformation is false. (thedecisionlab.com/biases/illusory-truth-effect)”

“Although the truth effect has been demonstrated scientifically only in recent years, it is a phenomenon with which people have been familiar for millennia. One study notes that the Roman statesman Cato closed each of his speeches with a call to destroy Carthage (*“Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam”*), knowing that the repetition would breed agreement. Napoleon reportedly said that “there is only one figure in rhetoric of serious importance, namely, repetition,” whereby a repeated affirmation fixes itself in the mind “in such a way that it is accepted in the end as a demonstrated truth.” Many well-known leaders have taken advantage of the truth effect Advertising that repeats unfounded claims about a product may boost sales because some viewers may come to think that they heard the claims from an objective source. The truth effect is also used in news media and is a staple of political propaganda” ([wikipedia.org/wiki/Illusory_truth_effect](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illusory_truth_effect)).

The two excerpts above are the tip of the iceberg on the history, and the study of *the illusory truth effect*. Much more information is available, but space does not permit it here.

The devil has been using the **illusory truth effect** for over six thousand years, to great effect, unfortunately. Since the devil “is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44c), we cannot expect him to do otherwise. He uses multiple mediums to transmit his propaganda – far too many to list. The devil is the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2b). What means of transmitting information has the devil not taken advantage of?

One source I read regarding the illusory truth effect suggested that not partaking as much in the deluge of information helped in not being overwhelmed with it, thus reducing its effect. The most effective method of pushing out falsehood is to *fill our minds and souls with truth*. The laws of physics state that “two objects cannot occupy the same place at the same time.” If we fill our thoughts with good things, and meditate on the Word of God, there will not be as much room for the harmful wares the devil tries to sell us.

“Dear Lord, thank you for your truth. Thank you that you never deal in deception and that you cannot tell a lie. Thank you for your desire that we dwell in truth, even as you do. Help me to receive a love of the truth, even if I am tempted with what feels like a more attractive way. Help me to not heed the ‘siren call’ of the world. Amen”

REFLECTIONS

Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me.” God’s word warns many times not to be deceived. Being deceived is to believe a lie. Deception can come through others or it can come through us deceiving ourselves. In order for us to keep from being deceived, we must have a sincere desire for truth or a love of truth. Psalms 139:23-24 says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” This expresses a heart seeking truth. Not just truth that goes along with what I already believe or want, but truth that could reveal a wicked way within—a truth that could go against my will and desire.

To love the truth, we have to love God’s way. What makes us vulnerable to deception is an overwhelming desire to have our own way. There was a time in my life when I was sincerely tired of my own way. My way had created disaster in my life, and I wanted to be free. Freedom came with truth; the truth about what was wrong with my thinking. The truth about corrupt desires. The truth that love is better than hate, forgiveness rather than bitterness, purity rather than filthiness—the list could go on. I learned to love the truth and sincerely desired truth in my inward parts. I’ve learned to appreciate the fact that God’s way is truly best. The truth has set me free.

There is still a temptation to want my own way or to want God to agree with my choices, but I die daily to my will because of my love for God and the truth that sets me free. I choose every day to serve the Lord and to follow the truth in my life. May the Lord help us to resist deception through the love of the truth.

—Bro. Marvin Moles

SEPTEMBER 10, 2023

EVER LEARNING AND NEVER ABLE TO COME TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH

John 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

2 Timothy 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

8 Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.

1 John 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

MEMORY VERSE: For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing. —Acts 17:21

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, was highly educated in the Law given through Moses. He had also been trained in all the Jewish customs. His great learning, however, did not touch the need of his soul. He came to Jesus for answers but ended up with more questions. Thankfully, tradition claims that Nicodemus later became a believer, despite his handicap of a Jewish education.

Paul warned Timothy about learning, or head knowledge, that hinders truth. This type of learning promotes all the wrong things, primarily because it originates in fleshly appetites.

The Athenians met Paul on Mars Hill for the sole purpose of tickling their ears with “some new doctrine.” Paul shared with them the gospel message. Most scoffed at the truth, but a few believed and were saved.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 3:1 “**A ruler of the Jews**”: a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court.

John 3:3 “**Born again**”: born from above, or of heavenly birth.

John 3:10 “**Master of Israel**”: a teacher of the law of Moses.

2 Timothy 3:1 “**Last days**”: before the end of time. During the days of the Messiah, extending to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. It can also mean a future time period that comes to an end.

2 Timothy 3:1 “**Perilous times**”: reduction of strength, difficult, dangerous, furious, fierce.

2 Timothy 3:7 “**Ever learning**”: Continually learning from false teachers, which can never teach them the truth. (*Adam Clarke*)

2 Timothy 3:8 **“Reprobate”**: of no judgment; castaway; undiscerning or untried; unapproved, rejected, worthless.

Acts 17:21 **“Spent their time in nothing else”**: The Athenians spent much time in speculation, critiquing the various new forms of philosophy. (*Condensed from Albert Barnes*)

Acts 17:21 **“Either to tell, or to hear some new thing”**: The Greek meaning is “something newer”; the latest news, or the latest subject of inquiry or speculation. The ancient writers tell of the Athenians intemperate desire of the novelty of new news or speculations.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jewish education had up to three levels. The first level, *Bet Sefer*, or “House of the Book,” was for the youngest children, ages five through ten. They memorized the first five books of the Old Testament. Most of the children, having finished their formal education by the age of ten then went on to learn the family trade. If a child showed potential, they attended the second level of learning called the *Bet Talmud*, or “House of Learning.” The children at this level, ages ten through fourteen, were taught the rest of the Old Testament through the book of Malachi. Finally, if showing a real aptitude for scriptures, the young person would enter the *Bet Hadrash*, or “House of Study.” This third level of study was conducted by a rabbi in hopes of training up future rabbis. The rabbi would say, “Follow me” to the student, in invitation to be his student. (condensed from livingtruth.ca).

The people of Athens enjoyed learning but scorned reading as a method of study. They preferred to “swap stories,” finding it much easier, as well as very entertaining. The Athenians indulged continually in the latest gossip or “new thing” to be heard. This type of learning did not elevate the mind or challenge the soul—it served only to please the flesh. When Paul met with them on Mars Hill, he presented to them the gospel, neither appetizing to the flesh nor soothing to the ear.

In Paul’s counsel to Timothy, he warned that mankind would degenerate to a very low moral and spiritual level. The description he gave is one of complete degradation. At the end of the list is the surprising conclusion, “...ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:8).

DISCUSSION:

1. There is a saying, “The best way to learn something is to teach it.” How did this work out for Nicodemus, being a religious ruler and teacher?
2. How did Nicodemus’ status as a teacher affect his ability to see real spiritual truth?
3. Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again. What do you think Nicodemus was expecting to hear?
4. How does “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” tie in with perilous times?
5. Paul wrote of people resisting the truth. What takes place when truth is resisted?
6. By rejecting truth a person is in danger of becoming reprobate. Why?
7. I John 2:4 states truth is not in a person who does not keep God’s commandments. How does this lack of truth affect a person’s everyday life?
8. The Athenians “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.” What did this profit them in the end?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Education is a wonderful thing, opening the door to an endless array of opportunities. It is a good thing to continue learning throughout life—whether it is keeping up-to-date with your field of work, learning a new skill or trade, or taking up a new hobby. No matter how much a person knows already, there is always more—another level to attain.

Can education and learning be detrimental? In some cases, yes. If a skill is learned incorrectly, the effectiveness of that skill is limited. Sometimes, great harm or injury can occur if the task is not performed in the right manner, and the skill must be “unlearned” back to the point where the principals diverged from truth. The skill must then be relearned correctly.

There is only one truly correct way to position your fingers on a keyboard. It is called the “home position.” Most modern keyboards have a raised bar, or dot, on the two keys that your left and right

pointing finger rest on. If I accidentally place my hands one key off to the right, I end up typing gibberish, like this: “Vsm upi trsf yjod?” Properly translated, the previous sentence is, “Can you read this?”

If we set out to do something in the wrong manner, it can end up looking like the sentence above. A correct foundation must be laid for any task we undertake, much like having our hands in the “home position” on a keyboard. It doesn’t matter how much we learn or how long we learn it; if we start out wrong, our potential for success will be greatly diminished.

Spiritually speaking, learning with a foundation built on the truth of God’s Word is paramount to success. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3:11). The principles God wants in our spiritual foundation include repentance unto salvation, presenting ourselves for sanctification, forgiving those who trespass against us, and living a sin-free life. There are many other important doctrines in the list as well.

There are many religions, but only one true plan of salvation. Every religion teaches their unique belief system, but when that belief is not based on absolute truth, everything touching that belief is out of step with truth. History teaches us what happens when man learns of ways that do not line up with God’s word – it does not end well.

“Heavenly Father, thank you for the truth in your Word! Help me to learn of you with complete honesty and humility. In your mercy, keep me from error that I not learn of you amiss. Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

Many people today are focused on learning, on higher education, on gaining additional certifications in a particular field of study so that they can show themselves to be approved to take on certain tasks or about certain jobs or promotions.

As I’ve worked with people in the computer and technology fields, I’ve run across those who were truly knowledgeable and could apply their knowledge to solve very difficult problems. I’ve also worked with those who only studied to pass the test and did not truly have the depth of understanding to apply the theories and ideas. In real world applications of knowledge, the latter were useless and of no value.

In our spiritual lives, if we do not truly focus on foundational teachings and gain a true understanding of what the Lord is desiring of us, we will find ourselves “unemployable” and cast out, desperately seeking to gain access to heaven. Psalms 84:10 states, “...I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God.” A doorkeeper in the house of the Lord would only need to know who to let in and who to keep out. How important and vital that humble role is—to help honest souls gain entrance and to prevent those who would only enter to destroy.

May we not get caught up into being a “certified” Christian or trying to attain some sort of stature within a group based on our extensive knowledge of the scriptures. Let us study to show ourselves approved for the calling the Lord has given us, no matter how humble.

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”
(2 Timothy 2:15).

—Bro. Eric Doolittle

SEPTEMBER 17, 2023

WHO HOLD THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 23:1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.

5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour

widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

24 *Ye* blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26 *Thou* blind Pharisee, cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

James 3:14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

MEMORY VERSE: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. —Romans 1:18

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Some of the harshest words in the Bible are Jesus' rebuke of the hypocritical Pharisees. Not only were they missing the mark themselves, through their stubborn refusal of truth, but they were also hindering others who otherwise would accept truth. Jesus pointed out that their outward pretense was only a thin covering for an evil heart.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 23:2 "**Scribe**": writer or secretary. The scribes were employed in copying the Old Testament word for word. Tradition holds that if a scribe made an error on a parchment he was working

on, he discarded it and started over. Scribes also taught from the scripture.

Matthew 23:2 “**Pharisee**”: a separatist; exclusively religious; one of three great sects among the Jews. The other two were Sadducees and Essenes. Smaller sects included the Herodians, the Galileans, and the Therapeutae. (*Albert Barnes*)

Matthew 23:2 “**Sit in Moses' seat**”: It was the custom of the religious teachers to sit while they taught the people. Moses taught the people the precepts and commandments God gave. The Pharisees also taught out of the law of God but tainted it with their own thinking and dishonored it with their practices. Matthew Henry notes, “Many a good place is filled with bad men; it is no new thing for the vilest men to be exalted even to Moses's seat (Psalm 12:8); and, when it is so, the men are not so much honoured by the seat as the seat is dishonoured by the men.”

Matthew 23:5 “**Make broad their phylacteries**”: The phylactery was a pouch that contained small slips of parchment with portions of the Old Testament. The pouch was tied to the forehead of the person who wished to wear the scriptures as a charm. (*Albert Barnes*) A “broad phylactery” would be an especially large pouch, possibly intended to make the wearer look good in other people’s eyes.

Matthew 23:5 “**Enlarge the borders of their garments**”: The Israelites were commanded to have loose threads at the bottoms of their outer garments in order to distinguish them from other nations, and that they might remember to keep the commandments of God. The Pharisees made them broader than other people wore them, to show that they had special respect for the law. (*Albert Barnes*)

Matthew 23:13 “**Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men**”: They shut it up by teaching false doctrines regarding the Messiah; by binding the people to an observance of their traditions; by opposing Jesus and attempting to convince the people that He was an impostor, thus preventing many from becoming his followers. Many were ready to embrace him as the Messiah and were about to enter into the kingdom of heaven, but they prevented it. (*Albert Barnes*)

Matthew 23:15 “**Proselyte**”: a foreigner who converted to Judaism.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Pharisees, along with the Sadducees and the Essenes, originated about 150 years B.C. The Pharisees were the most numerous and the wealthiest among the Jews. Their name comes from the Hebrew word *pharash*, meaning to set apart, or to separate. In practice, they separated themselves from the rest of the Jews and professed to devote themselves to the strictest religious practices. Following are the main points of their doctrine: "The world is governed by fate, or a fixed decree from God; the souls of man are immortal, eternal happiness or misery beyond the grave; good and bad angels; God was under obligation to bestow special favor on the Jews; they were justified by their own conformity to the law." (Albert Barnes)

The Pharisees were proud, haughty, self-righteous, and held the common people in disrespect. They sought the offices of the state and affected great dignity. They were ostentatious in their religious worship, praying in the street corners, and seeking publicity. (*Condensed from Albert Barnes*)

DISCUSSION:

1. In general, how do people respond to those they perceive as hypocritical?
2. Why did Jesus call the Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites?
3. What harm did Jesus say the Scribes and Pharisees were doing to the people?
4. The Scribes and Pharisees did some things they thought were good; they fasted, prayed long prayers, paid their tithes, had nice clothes, wore phylacteries, and were very strict in cleanliness. Why did Jesus still regard them as hypocrites?
5. What are the weightier matters of the law that Jesus listed?
6. Why did the Scribes and Pharisees fail to follow that part of the law?
7. What did Jesus mean when he said, "these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone?"
8. Why did James write that envy and strife is lying against the truth?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There are many examples of people “doing the right thing for the wrong reason,” but the story of Absalom is in a class of its own.

Absalom was a good looking young man and he knew how to charm people. When his brother, Amnon, abused their sister, Tamar, Absalom had him killed. He waited two years for their father, King David, to do something about the matter, but finally took his own revenge. Forced to flee the country for a while, Absalom bid his time. After three years, he was allowed to come home but was informed he could not see his father’s face.

Another two years passed. Absalom grew impatient at not being able to see his father’s face. He caused Joab’s field to be burned to help spur Joab to petition the king for him. Joab pled Absalom’s case before David, and Absalom was allowed to see his face. After Absalom bowed down on his face to the ground, David kissed Absalom.

This seemed to be the end of a seven-year rift in the family—but it had only begun. “And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him” (2 Samuel 15:1). Absalom then started a practice of rising early and standing beside the way of the gate. When anyone came to the king with a problem, Absalom stopped him, asked where he was from, and inquired what his needs were. Absalom made it known that he wished he were made judge in the land, so that everyone could bring their problems to him, insinuating that his father, the king, could not do them justice. When anyone started to do obeisance to Absalom, he would stop the man and kiss him. “Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (2 Samuel 15:6).

After some time, when Absalom thought he had sufficiently “stolen the hearts” of most of the people, he asked permission of his father to visit Hebron, under the pretext of offering sacrifices there. Upon arrival, however, Absalom sent for Ahithophel, David’s counsellor, while he offered sacrifices. “The conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom” (2 Samuel 15:12). The rest of the story unfolded in a very painful manner—for all involved. Absalom lost his life, and David lost another son. Additionally, 20,000 men died in battle.

How did Absalom steal the hearts of the people? By doing “good” things to everyone he met at the king’s gate. Absalom practiced “good” behavior for wrong reasons. Jesus understood that the Scribes and Pharisees also did their “good” works with ulterior motives. Pride was at the bottom in both cases. It is possible to do good things for the wrong reason, and the results are usually very painful.

“Dear Lord, help me to never hold your truth in unrighteousness! Pride is at the bottom of every wrong motive, regardless of the outward appearance. May I ever hold your truth in the purity and humility it deserves! Amen.”

REFLECTIONS

The Pharisees did not blindly believe in following the letter of the law but taught that one should use judgment and reason to follow the spirit of the law. They also believed that God should be worshipped outside of the temple and the rites belonging to it. They believed that prayer and the study of the law were more important than the bloody sacrifices offered. These beliefs were integral to the development of the synagogues and the worship outside of the temple and outside of Jerusalem. All in all, these ideas were not in opposition to much of what Christ taught.

Christ told the woman at the well that there was a time coming when worship would not be done in Jerusalem nor in the mountain in which the Samaritans worshipped, “but the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). Even the old law made known that obedience was better than sacrifice: “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). We also have the instruction to follow the spirit of the law in 2 Corinthians 3:6: “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

In Matthew 23:3, Christ said the Pharisees taught good things but did not do them in an acceptable manner. According to Jewish teaching there are 613 commandments in the old law. It is my understanding that the Pharisees had added somewhere around 1500 “fence laws” to protect the Torah. As Jesus pointed out to them on multiple occasions, they held their traditions and laws to be more

important than the original commandments, at times making the original law of no effect. They were holding the truth in unrighteousness. We need to be careful that we do not adulterate the truth with unbelief.

—Bro. Eric Doolittle

SEPTEMBER 24, 2023

MY CHILDREN WALK IN TRUTH

John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare *it*: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Ephesians 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

1 John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

MEMORY VERSE: I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. —3 John 1:4

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jesus' highest hope and the subject of many of His prayers was that His disciples would walk in truth. He also prayed for us that we would behold His glory and walk in truth. He died that this might happen. What a price, but what a reward!

The Apostle Paul had the same desire for the people he labored among. His epistle to the Ephesians encouraged them to speak the truth in love. He wanted them to grow up into Christ in all things.

John counseled, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (John 3:18). John knew the benefits of walking in truth and was fully aware of what happened to those who did not. He remembered vividly the fate of Judas. How could he forget the sad end of Ananias and Sapphira? They had lied against the Holy Ghost and fell dead immediately.

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 1:4). Nothing pleases the Lord more than for us to walk in truth. Nothing pleases parents more than for their children, and grandchildren to walk in truth. A pastor's highest aim for the congregation in which he/she serves is that they walk in truth.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 17:17 "**Thy truth**": God's truth, not truth from any other source, for it misses the mark.

John 17:19 "**I sanctify myself**": Jesus consecrated Himself exclusively to the service of God.

Joh 17:20 "**But for them also**": All who believe in Jesus, through His word, are included in this prayer.

Joh 17:21 "**That they all may be one**": This prayer was answered on the day of Pentecost, while they "were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32). Jesus prayed that *all* who came after him would be of one accord.

LESSON BACKGROUND

God's plan from the beginning was that His creation might be one with Him. There was perfect unity in the Garden of Eden. Adam and

Eve were in harmony with one other and enjoyed visiting with God in the cool of the day. Their conscience was perfectly clean, and truth prevailed on every hand. The perfection found in the garden was interrupted by their failure to *continue* walking in truth. The devil tricked Eve into tasting the forbidden fruit saying, “Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4b). Adam ate the fruit with Eve and they were both driven from the garden.

Hope was not lost, though. God told of a time when the seed of the woman would bruise the head of satan. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy when He died on the cross and rose from the dead on the third day. The event of Pentecost completed the plan of unity. Mankind could now truly walk in truth and have power and unity with each other and with God. The whole world has witnessed how walking in truth, as God designed it, has the power to save and change broken lives.

DISCUSSION:

1. Why does God desire for us to walk in unity with each other and with Him?
2. Amos 3:3 says, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” How necessary is it for two parties to walk in truth to be in unity?
3. When people do not walk in truth, how much unity is there?
4. What other problems can arise when there is a failure to walk in truth?
5. Just as Moses was not jealous when the spirit of the Lord fell on seventy of the elders, so Jesus does not feel jealousy when we walk in fellowship with Him and His Father. Why is Jesus not jealous?
6. What happens when we speak the truth in love?
7. What does it mean to love in word and in tongue but not in deed and in truth?
8. Why did the Apostle John have “no greater joy” than to hear of his spiritual children walking in truth?
9. What is necessary for us to walk in truth?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

A beautiful illustration of walking in truth and being in complete unity is the performance of a large orchestra. Some orchestras have over a hundred musicians, with string, brass, wind, and percussion instruments of various types. Several of the instruments are loud, while some are softer; some play extremely low notes, while others play higher. Tones and sounds of the instruments vary widely; however, when all are played together the effect is stunning.

At the start of the performance, the conductor stands in front of the array of musicians. He (or she) instructs the principal oboe to play a continuous A (A 440) note. The oboe is the least adjustable of all the instruments, so all the other instruments, which are more adjustable in tuning, match its pitch, or frequency. When every instrument is in perfect tune, the conductor again stands, waiting for all eyes to turn to him. When he has everyone's attention, he steps up on the podium. On cue, all the musicians place their instruments in the "ready" position. When all instruments are ready, the conductor raises his baton. As the baton comes down for the first beat, every instrument that plays the first note starts in perfect unison.

The goal of everyone playing in the orchestra, from the conductor down to the musician who plays the fewest notes on a particular piece, is to play the composition perfectly; they are in complete harmony, both in intent and in practice; they are in tune and on beat. No instrument plays louder than it should and no one plays when they should be silent.

A conductor will hear every note of each instrument. He or she can tell if there is the slightest variation from what is written in the score. The conductor's score has every note of every musician. Having this information, the conductor will generally cue in different sections or soloists of the orchestra when it is their time to rejoin. The musicians' sheet music will have only the notes played specifically by them, along with any rests. A musician must keep time even while they remain silent, for their time will come soon enough when they play again—and it must be in perfect time and pitch. When played as it is written, a musical performance by a good orchestra is a very pleasant experience. It sounds true because it is played in truth—just as the composer intended. The psalmist David

also expressed something of great beauty: “Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalms 133:1). When brethren are in unity, they are doing exactly as God intended. His plans are fulfilled, and souls are blessed. The world, beholding the workings of the Holy Spirit in God’s people, witnesses real beauty, unmatched by anything this world has to offer. The best orchestra pales in comparison!

“Dear Jesus, Thank you for the unity we can have with you and with each other through the working of your Holy Spirit! Help me walk in truth, both with you and with my brother. May I be content when I must “mark time” and be silent. Help me to be faithful when it is time to “play my notes.” Help me be on the same tempo and tune as my brother and in perfect agreement with the score you have in front of you. Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

Truth is essential to our entering into this great salvation and to our being able to continue in it. We must walk in truth to stay on the path of holiness. God Almighty is a God of truth. The truth sets us free and will keep us free. But to walk in truth becomes a daily task. It is our life. We must cherish the truth and allow it to envelop us as we walk through life.

As children of God, we allow Him to cover us with truth. In doing this, it will influence how we think and act daily. First, we will be covered with the “word of truth,” which gives us directions for life. Then we allow this truth to be the motivating element our thinking and actions. We will speak the truth and behave in truth. We will be honest and up front in all our transactions. There won’t be any shady dealings. Jesus was an example for us, “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” He spoke and acted the truth.

Finally, at the end of our lives, God will recognize His truth in us. Nothing short of truth will be acceptable to Him. Many people will say partial truth with the intention to give a deceptive perspective of a situation. But as children of God we must, “Say what we mean and mean what we say.” So, our daily walk through this life must be guided by the truth of God.

—Sis. Doris Clay

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