

Chapter 6 - Absolute Truth and the Spirit of a Lie

Coming to a Full Stop

Everyone who has driven a car has had the experience of approaching an intersection, slowing down, glancing both ways, and then choosing either to stop or to slowly slide through. The sign *says* "full stop," but...that is only a guide, a warning; it does not really *mean* "full stop." After all, stopping is so inconvenient, so time-consuming and wasteful of gas and brake linings. It requires going against the momentum of a vehicle already in motion, of a set of well-practiced attitudes and choices in favor of self-assurance, ease and convenience. Therefore, we do not stop. We make truth relative to our own judgment, our own needs, and our own subjectivity. "It says...but it doesn't really mean." Then we wonder why the Spirit seems to be absent from our lives. We are all guilty of this, or offenses like it. We are all, to some degree, in one place or another, not coming to a full stop.

As long as it is convenient and serves our interests, truth, like a stop sign, is obeyed. When there is traffic in the intersection, or we cannot see far enough to proceed safely, we are willing to come to a full stop. But what happens when there seems to be nothing to gain, no apparent benefit from stopping and some obvious benefits to be obtained from coasting through? What happens when we, like Eve in the garden, examine the forbidden fruit before us more closely and determine that it is good for food, beautiful to the eye, and able to make one wise? "God *said* do not eat...but what He really *means* is...It *says* "full stop," but what it really *means* is..." We would never simply disregard a sign. We slow down to provide enough of an appearance of obedience to satisfy ourselves and others, but it is just an appearance. The issue has already been decided. Once truth is made relative to our ends, however base or noble, it has ceased to be an end in itself. Truth that is relative to our ends is our servant. Only truth that is loved and obeyed for its own sake, apart from its apparent utility, is our Lord. Relativism is at the very heart of worldly wisdom. The world celebrates tolerance as a cardinal virtue and is prepared to tolerate everything—except absolute values and absolute truth. To the wisdom and enlightenment of the world, nothing is more offensive than what it calls "dogmatism." However,

beneath the world's professed concern for the complexity of circumstances, there lies a rejection of *any* and *all* absolutes. In its zeal against "dogmatism," the world exalts toleration above righteousness, and degrades truth thereby.

Pragmatism vs. Obedience

Relativism has its typical catchphrases: "That may be true for you, but not for me." "It all depends on how you look at it." "Nothing is black and white." Thus adultery, like beauty, is reduced to a function of the eyes of the beholder, and sodomy is reduced to an "alternative lifestyle." All values and judgments dissolve into a pervasive gray haze. That grayness is fatal to truth. It is the result of practicing relativism and mixing right and wrong, white and black, light and dark; but God is light and there is no darkness in Him. Light is truth, and grayness is as much of a deception and a lie as is darkness—if not more. God's first words spoken over a chaotic creation were, "Let there be light," and He separated light from darkness (Gen 1:3-4). That act of separation has never been annulled. Light and darkness cannot mix; neither can truth and falsehood. "Full stop" goes on meaning "full stop," even when it is inconvenient. The world's wisdom is always trying to undo God's eternal, absolute distinctions, always trying to blur the boundary between truth and lies, always seeking to create a gray haze in which to redefine and justify what we desire to be and to do. Relativism is appealing because, unlike truth, it is so convenient!

God's Plumb Line of Truth is Absolute

God has dropped a plumb line down from heaven: absolute truth, absolute righteousness, and absolute love. That plumb line is Jesus Himself. In Him all things hold together. Outside of Him all things fall apart; all things tumble back towards a formless void. The universe does not "approximately" hold together because God is not an approximate God. Jesus is not approximately the truth, the way, and the life. That is why the Redeemer is not very popular. He is absolutely holy and true and terribly inconvenient. When He says "Stop," He does not mean "Slow down and slide through." He comes full of grace...and truth (Jn 1:17). The spirit of this age is wholly antithetical to such a Christ and such a truth. It prefers its truth

without teeth, harmless and docile, to be used when convenient and then put quietly back in its place. It prefers the grayness.

One, therefore, expects to find grayness in the world. It was conceived by a lie in the beginning. The serpent said to Eve, "You surely shall not die" (Gen 3:4). This evil age was birthed by the principle that the end justifies the means. It lives by that principle as its primary creed. The relief of loneliness justifies adultery; the relief of stress and inconvenience justifies abortion; the perfecting of the race justifies genocide. The world is simply fulfilling its spiritual nature when it denies absolute truth. Grayness is its preferred atmosphere, its necessary condition for survival. The Church, however, was begotten by the word of truth. It is the one place on earth where grayness should never be found. God is light and we are children of light. The righteous are characterized by their love for the light (Jn 3:19-21). The light banishes all the varying shades of gray; it makes things manifest. The righteous should have no need to dwell in shadows. They should have no personal ends, no desires that require shadows for their fulfillment and justification. The pallor, the dullness, and the grayness, which are the outward signs of living in a shadow world of partial light, should never be seen among God's people—not in our marriages, not in our worship, and not in our faces—for we are children of light.

Heavenly Truth vs. Worldly Wisdom

The sad truth, however, is that grayness is the mark of far too many Christian lives. The light of truths merely known and professed, but not walked in, is not sufficient to dispel the shadows cast from within by the relativism and pragmatism by which we are living. Our confessions of truth extend only to the boundaries of our own self-interest and convenience. When it comes to the practical issues of our lives and our ministries, we are as relativistic as the world. Our knowledge is heavenly, but our wisdom is the wisdom of the world. We know that the sign says "Stop," but we are all, in some way and in some place, finding a way to justify sliding through. Every time we do slide through, we pass out of the realm of the Spirit of Truth and enter into the domain and the dominion of the spirit of a lie.

If truth were convenient, then the whole world would be going after it; it is precisely the Spirit of Truth that the world cannot receive. The world does not want the Spirit of Truth because it is an embarrassment, an encumbrance, and a terrible inconvenience. The world has no room for truth; it is too full of its own spirit and wisdom.

How many businesses would suffer almost instant collapse and bankruptcy if they resolved to base all of their sales, their advertising and expense accounts on truth and nothing but the truth, in spirit as well as in word? According to the wisdom of the world, a man is a fool if he pays all of his taxes, or returns excess change at the checkout counter, or works a full shift for a full day's pay. That sort of truthfulness is more than foolish in the world—it is dangerous and subversive! It is a threat to the survival of a whole order, a challenge to the premises on which the whole system of the world is based. The world would shake and topple if all of the half-truths, exaggerations, and manipulations that prop it up were suddenly pulled out from under it.

What would happen if churches and Christian ministries resolved to base everything they did on truth alone? Would our mailboxes continue to be filled with some of the appeals that come to us? Would exclamation marks be as prolific? Would everything from "Help!" and "Urgent!" to "Dear Friends" be underlined with a felt-tipped pen? When calculation and manipulation begin to be employed, even in a good cause, the result is deceit. If you yield, even for a moment, to worldly wisdom, and set aside the high standard of conformity to the very Spirit and not just the letter of truth, then you will cross the line of demarcation between the Kingdom and the world. If you begin by exaggerating your need and justifying your exaggeration because it is, after all, for the sake of "the ministry," then you will end up justifying blatant lies and sins. If you begin by underlining "Urgent" for mere effect, then you will end up underlining "Dear Friends" as well. Once you allow yourself to justify sliding through the stop sign, it is just a matter of time until you disregard the sign altogether.

Truth: A Moment-by-Moment Vigilance

The whole earth is going to be shaken, and that includes the Church. Only that which is unshakable, grounded upon the Rock of Truth, will remain standing. Everything feigned and manipulative, everything corrupted by the self-justifying wisdom of the world, will come crumbling down. In the day of God's judgment, appealing to the end for which we sought will not justify our ungodly means. What is our end if we can even imagine that a corrupt means can be employed to reach it? Truly seeking to glorify and express the truth of God precludes employing manipulation and deceit. We may protest that our ultimate concern is God's glory and God's ministry, but the truth is, if we are employing the wisdom of the world and the

spirit of the lie, it is our *own* reputation and our *own* glory that is our end. Truth in the innermost place of our motives requires relentless, daily, moment-by-moment vigilance. Every seemingly small compromise serves to remove us that much further from the Spirit of Truth until the holy dove departs, and we go on, not even realizing that He has left.

The more urgent and the more spiritual the end seems, the more tempting it is to resort to the spirit of the lie to fulfill it. How do you express your need if you are a ministry and unable to house all who are laboring with you as a sub-zero Northern Minnesota winter approaches? How much innuendo, how much implicit suggestion, how many veiled appeals for funds are justified in a newsletter? Even legitimate need will not excuse a lie. If something cannot be spoken in the light, if it requires veiling, suggestion, some sort of shadowy covering, then it should not be spoken at all. There is an alternative to manipulation: trusting God. Speaking truth is evidence of trusting God; it is always an act of faith. The issue of truth is the issue of faith. If we cannot be moved to give, to repent, or to do anything by unadorned truth, then let us not be moved at all. Our love for truth is measured by how far towards perishing we are willing to go without seeking to save ourselves with a lie.

From Jesus' own mouth came a definition of a true Israelite, and by extension we can say, of a true Church. He saw Nathaniel coming towards Him, and He said, **"An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (Jn 1:47 NAS)**. That definition still stands. The Spirit of Christ in us still leaps in recognition when a Nathaniel comes into our presence. Nathaniel had not yet said a word. He had not uttered a single doctrinal truth or factually correct statement at the time that Jesus identified him. He was an Israelite indeed, a true Israelite, recognizable as such not by his words, but by his utter guilelessness. Nathaniel walked in truth, free from all pretense, all hidden meanings, all false appearances. He walked and lived in the light, and it showed.