

Foreword - The Spirit of Truth

"the house of God, which is the church of the living God, *the pillar and the ground of the truth.*" (I Tim 3:15).

I suspect that in your experience, as in mine, the references to this foundational description of the Church have been rare. The omission may be significant, for the unhappy truth is, that of all the institutions of the earth, the Church is the most stilted and inauthentic, the most predictable and contrived.

How is it that a phenomenon whose origin is heavenly and was purchased at such cost should become, by our generation, so melancholy a culture? Is it not that we have failed to jealously prize and safeguard truth itself, instead of exercising the daily, moment-by-moment diligence that truth by its very nature requires? Have we not recognized that the issue of truth is so much more than mere outward compliance to form, that only the intensity of a lover of truth would suffice?

Appropriately enough, the essay that you are about to read had its origin at a church where I was brought one Sunday morning, free from any commitment of my own, to enjoy the luxury of hearing another preacher. I went tripping as a doe, full of delight and anticipation, buoyed by the lavish praise for the minister as a preacher of the Word, by the brother who escorted me.

I was seated in the balcony of the crowded church, attentive and waiting, but not a little disturbed by the contrasting groups around me. On the one hand, the assembly included clusters of giddy teenagers round about. On the other hand, I was struck by the air of religious stiffness and joylessness in the adults. I endeavored to throttle my jaundiced subjectivity, not wanting in any way to allow it to impinge upon the preached word now beginning to come forth. As the message unfolded, I could readily understand the enthusiasm for the preacher that my companion held. The words were clear, pointed, and correct. What, then, was this strange uneasiness rising in my soul that intensified with every word, till finally my innards were knotted in an inexplicable anguish?

At last I realized my dilemma: my mind was approving the outward biblical and doctrinal correctness of the word preached, but my soul was recoiling at the spirit of the speaking that contradicted its every syllable! We were with the one enjoined to radical commitment and sacrifice, while the other was saying, "No need to panic; this need not be taken seriously—remember, this is only a sermon. I'll provide a biblical message weekly, and you provide for my personal security and well being. I won't push you, and you won't push me, and we'll get along famously."

In that moment, the realization was birthed in me (should I have not long before seen it?): *the truth is the whole truth and nothing but the truth, or it is not the truth*. The spirit of the one speaking—the constitution and grit of the person—must be in complete agreement with the words of the one speaking, or it is a lie. The devastating words of the widow of Zarephath to the prophet Elijah pierce me still:

"Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." (I Ki 17:24 KJV).

So commenced the reflections, given as a series of messages, which you are about to read. My colleague in this endeavor is Paul Volk, like myself, a believer whom you would likely have little occasion to know. Our souls have become intertwined in the years together in community here in northern Minnesota, where we have wrestled through the issues of the faith. We are Jews of an intellectual and academic bent, seeking to disengage the faith from its cultural and traditional trappings, so as to behold it and proclaim it in all purity. There are few men who better know my heart, and who are able to interpret and express it with an uncommon incisiveness and clarity. As his wife Adrienne has often expressed, "You can't tell where the one ends and the other begins."

Well, I *can* tell, for I am often left admiring, if not envying, the turn of a thought that Paul brings that converts an insight into an aphorism, so pithy and penetrating that the entire book is thereby justified. I am left with the strange feeling in reading this manuscript of something that is mine, yet not mine—intimately familiar, yet new. It is the synthesis of two minds and hearts and spirits that makes it qualitatively other and infinitely better; it is even a foretaste, if you will, of the glories of true corporateness that await the flowing together of the Body of Christ in this last hour. You be the judge. As I have frequently said, theology is too precious and expansive for the labors of one, but it needs a plurality of effort and insight to bring forth its beveled brilliance. May this book be an intimation of that, however modest.

Finally, may our effort kindle anew the love of truth that, in this dark and turbulent age of deception, alone saves one from perishing. The cynical spirit of Pontius Pilate that implies that truth cannot be known, or the spirit in our relativistic age that says truth does not even exist, increasingly pervades. It is a fashionable posture and presumption, which is itself a lie, that will contend against the truth even unto death. The love for the truth, which is its only antidote, will be costly in this hour. May the Lord, who Himself is Truth, breathe on these pages to inspire the courage to desire and seek the truth, to witness and obey it, to suffer for it as inevitably one must, so that, in the end, there might be a Church in this devious world that is the ground and pillar of Truth. May we be kept from that longing for the manifestations of the power of God that is unaware, as Jesse Penn-Lewis reminds us, that the Spirit of God, before He can be known or experienced as either power or love, is first and primarily, the Spirit of Truth.

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