

Introduction - The Spirit of Truth

"What is Truth?" Pontius Pilate never asked a more important question. And, though the man of whom he asked it did not utter a single word in reply, no man ever received a more complete and articulate answer. Why was Jesus silent? And, when asked that same question by men today, why are we so compelled to speak? One would think we had at our disposal far more truths and right doctrines than Jesus had. We could have given Pilate a very impressive statement—all quite scriptural and correct. Why didn't Jesus do the same? At other times and in other encounters He was strikingly articulate. He could reason and contend with the best religious minds in Israel.

Yet before Pilate, Jesus, the master of encounter, the supreme scriptural debater, stood mute. His silence was not born of a lack of truths. He possessed truths in abundance. He was silent not because He lacked truths but because He was full of truth, because He was truth - and in that moment to utter a single truth would have been to obscure the living truth that He was. If Pilate could not see truth before him, in a light and clarity heightened by the silence in which it stood, then nothing he might have heard could have saved him. And that causes us to wonder if perhaps the reason we so often cannot abide in silence is that we fear that it would only make more apparent the absence rather than the presence of truth in ourselves.

Jesus may not have spoken to Pilate, but He did speak to us. He even answered for us the question that Pilate asked, but His answer was as perplexing and as contrary to our expectations as was His silence to Pilate. "I am the Truth...", He said, implying that *truth is more than a sum of right answers. It is not something to have at all but something, first and above all else, to be.* Truth is a spirit, a life; and this spirit, this life is the way, the only way to the Father. **"I am...the truth, and...no one comes to the Father but by me."** (John. 14:6 RSV)

Suddenly it dawns upon us that it is not by *having* truths but by *becoming* true that we are saved. God's desire is not merely to inform us but to transfigure us, not to fill us with truths but to make

us true. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of adoption which sheds God's love abroad in our hearts, is the Spirit of Truth.

Jesus leaves us on new, unfamiliar ground. We know what it means for a statement or a doctrine to be true, but what does it mean when a man declares, "I am the truth"? We know what it means to have truth but stagger at the idea of being true. We are far more at home with the religion that is occupied with having and doing. We know how to go about acquiring more and more truths. But the religion of God is animated foremost by a desire to be, not merely to do or acquire. *We seek to possess truth; God seeks to make us true. The difference is vast and the kinds of men produced by each pursuit are vastly different and will have a different effect.*

To believe that having is being, that becoming true is simply a function of acquiring a sufficient amount of truth, is a deception. What such deception produces, if allowed to go unbroken, is the tragic and ironic spectacle of men impeccable (so they think) in their doctrines, yet living lives that are essentially performance and imitation, which is to say, false. If a widow could say to Elijah, **"the Word of the Lord in your mouth is truth," (I Kings 17:24 NAS)**, then it must follow that the Word of God in someone else's mouth can be false. The mouth, the voice, is not separate from the word that comes out from it. Voice and word are an unbroken continuum. Jesus speaks God's word because He is God's word. He speaks truth because He is true. Truths are important but they are as dead, and as deadly, as the law written on stone, without the Spirit of Truth in us to animate them. If the Law alone, however correctly quoted and followed, could not make us righteous, how could truths alone, however orthodoxy professed, ever make us true? As Christ is the goal and fulfillment of God's law, so is He the goal and fulfillment of God's truths. The same God who could make a Pharisee like Paul into a living epistle of His grace by the Spirit of grace can also make His Church a living demonstration of truth by the Spirit of Truth.

This little book is intended to be something different from an exposition of biblical truths. Hopefully it will prove to be more than just another book *about* truth. It had its origin in a series of messages spoken over several days to a gathering of believers, messages that were meant to reveal and hopefully even demonstrate the very Spirit of Truth, who is the essence of all truths. It is often difficult enough to capture in writing truths once spoken. It is even more difficult to convey the spirit in which they were spoken. This book is meant to be true, in word and in spirit. It is intended to restore the unity between the word and the life of truth without which

truth is cold and dead. If it only informs its readers it will have failed. If God can use it to some degree to transform them it will have succeeded.

However, a final word of caution may be necessary. The pages that follow consistently proclaim truth as a spirit, which is to say, something more than words. *Truth is indeed more than what we say; it ought to be what we are. But while truth is more than words, it is not less than words.* We live in an age that increasingly despises and denigrates prepositional truth. Even within the Church it is becoming a source of embarrassment to contend for the doctrines of the faith, as if all contending was of necessity contentious, and who wants to be labeled divisive in our increasingly ecumenical age? Some seem to think that by putting the word "mere" before "doctrine" that the subject has been sufficiently dealt with. But there are no "mere" doctrines. The truths of the faith are and will continue to be worth living and dying for.

It would be a mistake to take the emphasis of this book about truth as a spirit as if it were in opposition to truth as word. *The Spirit of Truth needs to be proclaimed not because the word of truth is unimportant but precisely because it is so very important.* Truths woodenly proclaimed without a life that is true are a disservice to truth. But likewise the elevation of being "authentic" or "real" or "true" in a way that diminishes the place and value of the truths once given to the Church does an equal disservice to truth. This book is a cry for the whole truth. It would be tragic and a real irony if the Spirit of Truth ever became yet one further and final banner behind which a partial and therefore false version of truth was championed.

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