

Chapter 7 - Truth: A Guileless Spirit

Paul: An Israelite Indeed

Paul was a Nathaniel, an Israelite indeed—and manifestly so, because he was free of guile when it counted.

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (I Cor 2:1-5 NAS).

No one could doubt that Paul was eloquent. He could speak wisdom, but not the wisdom of this age. His words were spiritual, reserved and fitted for spiritual thoughts. When he was eloquent, his eloquence was transparent; it was completely at the service of truth. It called no attention to itself. The apostle was utterly careless of his reputation. He knew the fine points of Greek oratory; he knew all the ways to win a crowd's admiration with a series of well-turned phrases; he knew the utility of eloquence, good appearance, and adorning his speech with contrived cadences and gestures. However, he was determined not to do so. Paul knew what every lover of truth knows: in order to speak truth, you must demonstrate truth, and in order to demonstrate truth, you must be as humble and transparent as the Spirit of Truth Himself.

Speaking Truth in the Power of the Spirit

Every word Paul spoke was shaped and determined from within by the truth that he was not speaking by his own calculation. Once the nature of truth is recognized, the form and manner of speaking, as much as the content, cease to be at the discretion of the speaker. Paul was determined to know and to communicate nothing but Christ and Him crucified. He was determined not to communicate Paul, not to be concerned for his own glory or reputation. Thus, his

very manner of speaking of Christ was itself a crucifixion for Paul. It was a demonstration of a death to all self-serving, all regard for one's own reputation, all desire for effect. This is true not just for Paul. Whenever we speak, we face the same choice that confronted Paul, either to enhance and protect ourselves as speakers or to trust truth to manifest itself. Too often, is not what we do in the name of better communication really done to safeguard against our appearing foolish? We fear embarrassment more than we love truth. Paul spoke not in word only, but in the demonstration and power of the Spirit. Unless we determine to set aside our modern equivalent of Greek oratory and rhetorical flourishes, we will be left with words only, devoid of all demonstration and power.

It is difficult to imagine how foolish Paul appeared in Corinth. The Greeks he spoke to were among the most verbally sophisticated people in the world. They epitomized worldly wisdom. Paul's foolishness in Corinth can only be compared to that of the One who went before him in Israel. When Jesus appeared to Israel, He was like a root out of parched ground. He had no stately form or majesty to appeal to men's eyes. There was nothing in His appearance to attract men to Himself (Is 53:2-3). Everything that worldly wisdom would dictate to make Jesus more acceptable and appealing, every form of fleshly adornment, was absent. He was the unadorned truth and nothing but the truth. Therefore, He was despised and forsaken, not at all esteemed, but thought a fool and a madman. Men turned their faces from Him. He suffered rejection and ridicule precisely because He was heavenly, unleavened bread. Paul was treated the same way as his Lord, for he was an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile.

Confidence in Truth vs. Human Ability

Everything that would make Paul strong, impressive, and secure as a speaker was set aside. He came with fear, weakness, and trembling into the midst of a world filled with its own impressive wisdom. Paul was supremely confident in the power of truth, enough so that he could rely upon it without seeking to assist it by some means of his own. Paul was so set upon God's glory that he was willing to face ridicule and rejection, rather than detract from the demonstration of the power of truth. His weakness and trembling are the inevitable condition of every minister standing before a congregation, of every evangelist, of every Christian walking out a day of his life in the midst of the world—every one, that is, who shares Paul's love of truth and his jealousy over God's glory. Paul

endured what he did so that our faith might be in God, so that we might be moved and persuaded by the truth and not by some skillful marketing technique born of the pride and insecurity of the speaker, who could not and would not love and trust the truth.

The issue that Paul faced in speaking in Corinth is exactly the same issue we face every morning before the mirror: Am I free from all guile? Then why do I style myself the way that I do? Paul spoke only those words that were transparent and that let the light of truth pass through from within, without reflecting any light back upon himself. Paul spoke the truth, and only the truth, at all times. What do the clothes, the jewelry, the hairstyles, and the perfumes that I wear speak? Do they magnify God or myself?

Peter addressed women specifically, but his words apply to the Church as the bride of Christ:

Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of fine clothes, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. (I Pe 3:3-4 RSV).

Likewise Paul wrote,

I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness. (I Tim 2:9-10 NAS).

Peter and Paul were no more advocating shabbiness and rags in these passages than Paul was advocating bad grammar and poor logic to the Corinthians. The issue is one of motives and of faith. Do I hesitate before the mirror, or before the pulpit, lest I detract from the glory of the Spirit of Truth?

The End Dictates the Means

Am I content to let what I am show through? Am I so devoted to truth, so intent on expressing truth in all things that I will not allow my manner of speech, or the clothes I wear, or the way I present myself to create an impression, an image that is not true? The temptation to alter my image, to add a bit of illusion to the truth, is very powerful. The temptation to justify my self-enhancement as a way of better and more impressively serving God is equally great,

but a lie can never serve the God of truth. Every false image is a lie. Everything done from a motive of vanity, pride, and insecurity is a lie. Am I trusting God to live and do and be through me, or am I continually fabricating some kind of image, physical or spiritual, some character that is external only and offering that to God to use and do with and speak through? The end never justifies the means; the end dictates the means. If the end is the revelation of a God who is the truth, then the means must be truth in every aspect of my life.

You Can Tell a Book by its Cover

The world is so acclimated to false appearances that it holds as an uncontested principle of wisdom that you can't tell a book by its cover. However, you could tell Nathaniel by his cover; and you could see the Father in His Son. When the Spirit of Truth is fully present, reigning within, He will express Himself outwardly through everything, from the words of a sermon to the hairstyle of the preacher. The fact is, you can always tell a book by its cover. Nothing about a life is merely superficial. Everything, from the surface down, expresses what is the deepest within. If what is deepest is vanity or fear for one's reputation, then that will be what shows itself outwardly. Try as we may to keep our secret heart hidden, it remains true that everything hidden will be revealed.

My teaching is not my own," Jesus said. "It comes from Him who sent me...He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. (Jn 7:16,18 NIV).

I can speak true words, but if I make them my own, that is, if I employ them for a self-serving end, then I am not a man of truth. Jesus allowed for only one motive to the man who speaks on his own: to gain honor for himself. Whether from vanity or insecurity, to seek one's own honor is to cease to be true. Then what about my praying, my manner of dress, or my facial expressions? Is my objective to gain recognition, power, or honor for myself? Is there yet something that lingers in my soul that makes me relish and delight in my ability to impress, to manipulate, to control others, with my body, my makeup, my words—my prayers? If we love truth, then these are the type of questions we will be asking ourselves. It simply is not enough to have Jesus say of me, "He spoke no false words." His pleasure and approval are conveyed only when He can say of

someone, "He is a man of truth, and there is nothing false about him."

The Subtleties of Deceit

There is an unspoken covenant between the deceiver and the deceived that allows the pretense to go on. There is no preacher who allows himself to become a performer without a congregation willing to become an audience. There is a self-serving end for both. The flatterer and the flattered, the seducer and the seduced, have both ceased to love truth for the same self-gratifying reasons.

Our spirits should wince every time an assembly of God's people are referred to as an "audience". In truth, that is precisely all too often what it is: an audience, enjoying—as well as prompting—the performance of the man on the stage. He who preaches plays his part well and receives his reward from those who came to see and hear him. He knows how to stir the emotions. His voice rises and falls evocatively as he prays; his bearing and manner fulfill our image of what we expect and desire a preacher to be. The words are correct, even stirring, but the spirit of the speaker is saying, "It's all right; I don't really expect you to be changed by this. I'm just doing my part in an unspoken agreement, and you are doing yours, but we know that it is really all just a show."

We have become the willing accomplices in each other's lies. No one is willing to call the other's bluff for fear of having his own bluff called. Truth has become just as relative and captive to our own needs and wants as it is for unbelievers. And as long as truth is suppressed in us, we will be kept from being Nathaniels to a world beguiled and bewitched by the subtleties of deceit.

We have been accomplices in each other's illusions. We need, and are called to be, accomplices in each other's sanctification. We need one another desperately. There is no one without a blind spot. We are all apt to be hypocrites. If we cannot and will not confront one another in love, then we will go on being the prisoners of our own illusions. We are afraid to hurt and to offend, so we remain silent and call our silence love. What we desperately need, and what true love instills, is a greater sense of horror at the sight of lies eating away the souls of those around us. Love constrains us to speak, not to remain silent; for if zeal for God's house and the purity of His word does not consume us, then the spirit of the lie will.

The Spirit of Truth Allows No Compromise

Paul was unafraid to appear weak and foolish to the Corinthians. He was equally unafraid to appear bold and to risk offending men, even to risk offending the apostle Peter at Antioch. To the Galatians he wrote of the time in Jerusalem when false brothers pressed him on the issue of circumcision. **"We did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you." (Gal 2:5 NAS).** He would not yield even for a moment, because to do so would allow leaven to enter into the lump. It would have been convenient to let Peter's subsequent hypocrisy in Antioch pass. Why risk offending a pillar of the Church, especially when you are not one of the original twelve yourself? Why risk appearing as an upstart? Why risk being rebuffed by Peter in the presence of those whom you have won to Christ? No one wants to be labeled as fanatical, legalistic, or unloving. However, because Paul was himself a man of the truth, he knew by the Spirit of Truth in him when an issue allowed for no compromise. He knew the difference between discretion and cowardice, between self-righteousness and a zeal for the integrity of God's truth. He knew when love compelled him to confront the hypocrisy of a brother.

Gentleness and Boldness: One Source

Paul was a latecomer to the gospel, he had been a persecutor of the Church, and in Antioch he found himself face-to-face with Peter, who was one of the three that had been closest to Jesus. The same Paul who stood before the Corinthians in fear and great trembling now stood before Peter and opposed him to his face (Gal 2:11-14). What moved Paul to appear weak and foolish at one time was precisely the same thing that moved him to be bold and confront Peter at another. His weakness and his boldness, his gentleness and his firmness, had one source, one purpose animating them: a passionate devotion to the purity and truth of the gospel.

Paul had observed Peter willingly eating together with Gentile believers, until a band of Jewish believers, who still kept the old ordinance against eating with Gentiles, arrived. At that point, Peter's behavior changed.

For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to

withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. (Gal 2:12 NAS).

Peter's change was not born out of deference or love, but out of his fear of men. Paul watched while someone as broken and gifted as Peter succumbed to fear of disapproval and rejection, descending into hypocrisy. Every lie has at its root some self-serving purpose. Abraham told Sarah to lie and say that she was his sister, "that it may be well with me" (Gen 12:13). There is no freedom from the temptation and the power of lies so long as there is a "me" seeking to be pampered and protected.

Only a Crucified Life ...

If even Peter was not immune to such temptation, then we would be very foolish to imagine that we are. If Peter needed a Paul to confront him, then we would be very foolish to think that we can keep ourselves true alone. But who will confront me in my hypocrisy if he is ensnared in hypocrisy himself? Had Paul been ruled by fear of men, had he still been addicted to and dependent upon men's approval and praise, he could never have confronted Peter. The fear of man, the fear of rejection, the fear of ridicule, has a way of turning the strongest knees to jelly. Only a man like Paul, whose only boast was in the cross of Christ, who was a dead man brought back to life in Christ, could rise above fear and speak to Peter in truth and love. Only a crucified life, and not merely the doctrine of the cross, will set us free from fear of men and enable us to confront, when necessary, the Peters of our own generation.

And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward [lit. walking straightly] about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas *in the presence of them all*.

(Gal 2:13-14 NAS) [brackets and emphasis added]

A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Peter's hypocrisy was contagious. It quickly spread, probably without a word having to be spoken. Action really does speak louder than words. The price of tolerating a lie does not remain constant; it increases and continues to increase until it is paid in full. Present pain avoided becomes a greater pain later. Truth is not convenient, and as long as we prefer and choose comfort and convenience, we will not walk in the truth. The spirit of the lie will provide convenience and self-gratification

and self-justification for everyone who seeks them. It will seek to convince us that it is not necessary to suffer in any way, that pain can and should be avoided. That which is true and unfeigned is always costly. It requires putting away that which is false. The way of truth is always the way of the cross. It is a death to confront a brother in love and a death to allow one's self to be confronted.

Walking in Truth: The Choice of the Cross

We have worn crosses around our necks and attached them to the dashboards of our cars, but a dedication to truth will inevitably transform the cross from harmless decoration into a very real, daily experience. Purging the spirit of the lie is not painless. Every compromise, every exaggeration, and every lie is, in essence, an avoidance of humiliation and death. Like the serpent's first lie in the garden, every lie since is calculated to appeal to and exalt ambition, vanity, self-gratification, and pride; that is, everything that crucified the Lord, and everything He died to set us free from. The choice to walk in the truth is the choice to take up one's cross and follow Him daily. That is why truth is not very popular, why it is far easier to talk about it than to walk in it. Turning a pragmatic truce in a marriage into a real peace will require a measure of anguish and travail. This is why pragmatic truces tend to become as much the norm in Christian marriages as in worldly ones.

To slow down and barely slide through a stop sign is not ninety percent obedience; it is one hundred percent failure to stop. To exaggerate just a little, to perform and manipulate emotions from behind the pulpit just a little, to pretend and to posture just a little is to lie completely. We seem to have brought our experience of the classroom over into our relationship with God. We come to the Lord as students to their teacher at the start of the school year, asking, "What is the minimum I have to do to 'get by'?" What is the passing grade for this Christian life? Will sixty-five percent truth do? Truth is absolute, and something is either the whole truth, or it is not truth at all. Such absoluteness is very foreign to us. We have been so thoroughly schooled in the relativism of the world that it seems incredible that God's passing grade could actually be one hundred percent. Even the least bit of leaven still leavens the whole lump.

The choice between truth and a lie, between integrity and convenience, is put before us repeatedly, daily. It is as frequent and as significant as a stop sign. Until we resolve to come to a full stop, to become absolute about truth and integrity, instead of seeking the

minimum amount whereby we can 'get by,' our lives will remain devoid of real power, perhaps full of much sound and fury, but where it counts, signifying nothing. Ironically, by seeking the minimum of truth, we condemn ourselves to experiencing a minimal grace and forgiveness. God does not offer just enough grace to get by. His forgiveness when we fall short is as absolute as the goal He sets. He who aims for less than the whole truth will find himself experiencing less than the whole of forgiveness. Freedom from condemnation and despair comes from aiming higher, not lower.

"The kingdom of God consists of and is based on not talk but power—moral power and excellence of soul." (I Cor 4:20

Amplified). Moral power and excellence of soul are not attained by sliding through stop signs, regardless of how much we slow down. They are rather the fruit and the evidence of having come to a full stop. There is a task before us. There is a full stop that needs making in our work places and bedrooms, behind our pulpits and in our casual conversations, before our mirrors and in our prayers. God waits for His children to embrace and walk in truth— absolutely. His Spirit is poured out without measure upon those who are whole-hearted in their devotion to truth. We need to pray earnestly together for the grace to break the power of the spirit of the lie and to walk in truth before God and the world.

Lord, if ever we have asked that we be not hearers of the word only, but doers, we ask it now; even as we ask, we tremble, for we acknowledge that we do not have the courage for this. We are cowards, we are afraid of what men will say, we are afraid of what our husbands or our wives will say or do. We don't know how to relate to each other. We do not even know how to begin to speak the things that are true; we have been silent for too long. We have been satisfied too long with just "getting by." What You have called us to is a revolution, and we do not have any stomach for that, because we have to admit that we prefer convenience to truth. But, precious God, we love You, and we desire to see Your Kingdom established in the earth. How can we call You the King of kings and not yield to the Kingdom way? So, Lord, we just ask You for grace and mercy as we seek to walk in truth. We want You to rejoice. We want to see Your heart gladdened, and we are sick and tired of just merely mouthing "hallelujah" and "amens" and singing choruses. We want You really to have satisfaction and joy as you look upon Your children who walk in the truth. So, Lord, help us. Let it begin today. Show us in Your gentle way, by the Spirit, where we need to make corrections, where we have been slipping through the full stop signs and have not noticed. Show us that when You say "full stop," You mean full stop. When You say "love," You mean love; when You say

"truth," You mean truth...not "approximately" or "kind of" but actually, perfectly, totally. I ask Your blessing, Lord, on us, that to the degree that our hearts are determined to walk in this way, Your grace shall lead us where the tire meets the road. May we dare to live by faith, willing also to perish if You be not the God who brings life out of death. We would rather fail than "get by." May we enter a realm of Your grace that we have never before known and may the grayness be dispelled from our lives, from our marriages, and from our congregations, as an increasing measure of light and joy come with the coming of Your reality and truth. Thank You for being a God of urgent speaking, for being a God of truth. We love You and praise You for being such a One. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.