

Chapter 2 - Truth that Transforms

Outward Form vs. Inward Reality

Seeing truth as a spirit to be walked in not only changes us individually, but also changes our whole understanding of what the Church is. When truth is seen as no more than a sum of truths to profess, the Church is seen as just a sum of individuals who all profess the same truths. That is why we consider the Church to be in the truth solely on the basis of the correctness or orthodoxy of its doctrinal statement. However, if truth is more than words and doctrines, then the Church, as much as its individual members, needs to *walk* in the truth in order to *be* in the truth.

The spiritual condition of the Church is not going to exceed the spiritual condition of its members. How can our relationships be any more real than we ourselves are? Christians are intended by God to be the most real people on earth. The Church ought, therefore, to be a haven and refuge from the hypocrisy and self-deceit of the world, the place to which truth-starved men and women can flee. What makes it such a haven is not any amount of words, but only people walking in truth, moment by moment, together.

The world is full of people with keen discernment, scrutinizing the Church. Our profession of truth has drawn all the more attention to ourselves. People in the world have learned to recognize pretense. They are well-schooled in the art of bluffing. They know all about convenience, expediency, insincerity, and manipulation. They can sense superficial relationships. If they find in the Church nothing essentially different from what is found outside of it, if they see no real difference in the way money and power are handled, then no amount of words, no matter how true they may be in themselves, is ever going to impress them.

A congregation, like an individual, can have an appearance of truth. It can stand upon the most orthodox and fundamental doctrines. It may have signs of blessing and prosperity in large numbers and abundant finances. It may even exhibit manifestations of spiritual gifts. But does it express truth in its innermost being? Or is it inwardly riddled with pretense and evasion, with shallow

relationships, feigned love and unspoken animosities that subvert and contradict its words and make them, in effect, lies? God desires truth in the inward part. We need to begin to reckon truth as He does, which means according to our true spiritual condition and not our seeming, outward condition. It is the genuineness of our patience and forbearance and our commitment to speak and hear the truth in love that will reveal what we really are as the Church—not the volume and frequency of our "amens," "praise Gods," and "hallelujahs."

Love and Truth

The objection may be raised that too much is being made of truth when love is what is most crucial to us, both as individuals and as the Church. After all, didn't Jesus say, **"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35 NAS)**. Love is crucial, and sadly lacking, but the reason it is lacking has largely to do with how we conceive of love in relationship to truth.

The world is desperate for love and obsessed with seeking it. There is an incessant flood of talk about love in music, in literature, on television and radio talk shows, yet has the world ever been more vulgar, more violent, more sick and obscene than in our day? We are always in pursuit of love, but never able to find it. What men call love breaks down under pressure, degenerating into lifeless duty, or lust, or sentimentality. Real love has proven impossible for the world to achieve, and the reason why is not hard to discover. Jesus said,

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, Whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him. (Jn 14:16-17 NAS).

The world, by definition, cannot receive the Spirit of Truth. This is the very Spirit by which the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. It is the very nature of the world to seek love apart from and at the cost of truth. It fervently seeks after love but cannot and will not receive truth; therefore, it finds neither truth nor love.

The world forfeits love when it turns away from truth. What then happens within the Church? Are we any more likely to find genuine love than those outside of the Church when we seek it apart from the Spirit of Truth?

John's second epistle begins,

The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (II Jn 1-3 NAS).

Four times in three verses the apostle of love, whose head rested upon Jesus' breast at their last meal together, mentions truth. Love and truth are so entwined, so permeated with each other that they are inseparable for John, and that is because they are inseparable for God. Therefore, they ought to be so for us. **"Whom I love in truth,"** John says. Is there any other way to love? If there were, we would have found it by now because we have tried so hard and for so long to discover it. Truth is threatening to us. We live in fear of truth, so we tend to structure our marriages and relationships and churches to insulate and protect us from it. Church, family and fellowship have evolved into elaborate systems for avoiding conflict and exposure and for skirting issues. The very architecture of most churches and our whole way of conducting services are perfectly suited to keeping any real involvement in the daily reality of each other's lives to an absolute minimum. Then, in our varying degrees of insulation, effectively cut off from any intimate contact with God or men, we cry out in desperation for love. What we get is false comfort, superficial healing, and some flimsy rationalizations and excuses. We give each other bear-hugs and say "God bless you" to one another, calling that love, and then go on pretending that all is well when all is not well. The gnawing hunger in our hearts persists. We begin by insulating ourselves from truth in order to protect ourselves; we end by insulating ourselves from love. Shielding ourselves from truth does not protect love; it suffocates it. The only thing preserved by being sheltered from truth is a lie.

Is there any significance in the fact that John, the disciple who spoke so much about truth, was also the one who rested his head on the bosom of the Lord? He even referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Is there some connection? Did this affection shared between John and Jesus have anything to do with John's love of truth? John's head could finally come to rest upon Jesus' breast, the questionings could finally cease, and the fear and loneliness could dissolve. The bond of love was sealed and sure because there was nothing between them, no protective insulation, nothing pretended, nothing concealed. They were together in truth, and thus united in love. If we are casual with, or indifferent towards

truth, if we still feign and pretend, then upon whose breast is our head going to lie?

We desperately need to put our heads to rest upon the bosom of the Lord, both individually and collectively. What prevents us? The answer does not lie so much in our theology as in our inability (or is it unwillingness?) to walk in truth. Perhaps we have been driven away by too much painful exposure to a cold, compassionless light masquerading as truth. We need to be reminded again that mercy and truth are met together (Ps 85:10); that the Spirit of Truth is the Comforter; that the sun of Righteousness always rises with healing in its wings (Mal 4:2). Truth, after all, is not the flat, dead glare of a police searchlight. It is not cold and lifeless; it is a spirit and a supreme mercy to all who welcome it and love it.

Purified Souls

The most overlooked and neglected remedy for lovelessness is a large dose of truthfulness. However, simply accumulating more truths will not produce more love. Truths are of no value unless they penetrate the heart and make us more true. Love can only exist in an atmosphere of truth. In any other atmosphere, regardless of what words are spoken, love must of necessity be feigned and false. It is a delusion and a lie to believe that we can love or be loved truly, while not living truly. Peter implied as much when he wrote, **"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."** (I Pe 1:22 KJV). Unfeigned love requires first a purified soul. That includes, but is far more than, informed intellect. Only by obeying the truth by the Spirit, and not just the intellect, can we be purged of every false and deceptive thing, until what flows out from us is unfeigned love for one another. Until truth has gone this deep, it is vain to expect or require fervent love.

By this all men will know that we are Jesus' disciples, by the love we have for one another (Jn 13:34). Men will know because they will recognize a wholly different kind of love from what they have seen and known elsewhere, a love that is grounded in and issues from utter truth and reality. What we need to do is to frankly ask ourselves to what extent our love is in truth and to what degree it is no more than a correct doctrine or an outward sentiment. It is relatively easy for a white Christian to profess love for his black brother, until that brother moves in next-door or starts coming to church. It is relatively

easy to pour out love and concern for Jews, until we encounter a Jew in real flesh, who draws all of our latent hatred and envy to the surface. We profess our love for each other and sing choruses about it in church, but the world outside is waiting to see what happens to our love when the trials and pressures of life put it to the test.

God is determined to bring us to love in truth or not at all. Either we are going to be a demonstration to the world of what real love is, or the world will not see real love. Feigned love is not going to suffice; only truth in the innermost being can result in unfeigned, fervent love of the brethren. So we are back to the issue of truth. Far from being an enemy or obstacle to love, truth proves to be the indispensable precondition for love. Real love does not evaporate in the light of truth. Real love *is* the light of truth. The only love that God's truth will dissipate is the love that is not God's. His fire will consume what is temporary and false, but it will purify and preserve what is lasting and true.