

Chapter 1 - Walking in the Truth

Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (III Jn: 2-4 NAS).

No Greater Joy

Of all the things that could possibly describe our relationship to truth, why did John choose walking? And what is it about walking in truth that causes John his greatest joy? There are grander expressions that could have been used, suggestive of something more lofty and spiritual. Walking is an activity so commonplace, so ordinary that we give it little, if any, thought. It is as unconscious as breathing—and that is just what makes it so important, so revealing. Walking is precisely the right word because it suggests nothing lofty or exalted. It brings truth down into the everyday, into every aspect of a person's life, which is where it belongs.

Walking is part of almost everything we do, whether we are walking to the refrigerator, or to the pulpit. There is hardly a word more inclusive, or, therefore, more appropriate to describe the conduct of our lives than "walking." It is no wonder, then, that John chose it to describe our relationship to truth; and it is no wonder that John, and we can safely add God Himself, rejoices to see His children walking in truth. **"I have no greater joy."** Does it not follow, then, that His grief is to hear of His children, so knowledgeable in "truths," walking in pretense, deceit and lies?

Walking in truth is not something that just happens. Though it expresses itself so naturally and thoughtlessly, it is not attained without thought or by accident. Walking in truth happens just like walking itself, one step at a time. Choice by choice, moment by moment, one's abiding in truth or untruth is being determined. To affect a pose or not, to self-interestedly calculate the effect of a word or gesture or not, to say the "appropriate" but insincere thing or not, such choices present themselves over and over in the course of a day, and their cumulative effect is to render one habitually true or untrue. It would be a grave mistake to think that quoting scriptures

correctly or subscribing to the right doctrines wholly constitutes walking in truth. A man may be saying all the right words, yet be contradicting his words by the insincere manner in which he says them. You hear him, and while your intellect is saying "true," your spirit is saying "false." It is possible to know the truth yet not walk in it, and the truth is really in us, and we in it, only to the degree that we actually walk in it.

Express Truth in All Things

The Amplified Bible renders a statement of Paul's from Ephesians like this: **"Let our lives lovingly express truth in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly" (Eph 4:15 Amplified).** Few statements capture the meaning of walking in truth so well. "All things" is all-inclusive. It is not possible to confine truth to our speaking and still fulfill what Paul is saying here. Our tendency is not to see our lives as a seamless whole, but rather as a patchwork of discreet fragments. We tend to compartmentalize everything. We live as if our health, both mental and physical, our faith, our doctrines, our relationships, all existed in distinct spheres, each with its own rules and regulations, quite isolated from and unrelated to each other. Thus, we dangerously misconceive our own nature as fragmentary and suffer because we do. It is no surprise, then, that we misconstrue the nature of truth itself and imagine it to pertain only to our doctrines and our thinking. It hardly occurs to us that truth is meant to pervade and express itself through every aspect of our lives, in all things, nor does it occur that each of our lives is a single whole through which truth should be expressed. The fact is, that it is truth, the Spirit of Truth, which unites and holds us together. By confining truth to a small verbal, doctrinal part of our lives, we condemn ourselves to being fragmented and full of internal opposition and contradictions, which is to say, we condemn ourselves to being untrue.

Walking is an activity, not of just feet, but of the whole body. If the whole body does not walk, then no part of it will either. **"Express truth in all things."** If we are not expressing it in all things, then are we really expressing it at all? We may be able to make true statements, but such verbal formulations are merely an effect of truth. They do not of themselves constitute its substance, its demonstration. Truth, because it is foremost a quality of life, a living spirit, requires a life through which to express itself. Truth must be lived, or it will cease to be truth. That is why it is our walking in truth, and nothing short of that, that causes John, as well as God Himself,

to rejoice. **"I have no greater joy than to hear of my children walking in truth."**

A house divided against itself cannot stand, and a man divided within himself cannot stand either. Jesus came upon a man sitting beside the pool at Siloam, who had been crippled for 38 years, and asked him if he wanted to be made whole. What would our response be if He suddenly asked us the same question?

There are many of us who have been crippled for as long or longer, sitting in our "correct" understanding, but unable to walk in truth. In order to be able to walk in the Spirit of Truth, one must be made whole. Do we want to be made whole? When God comes and asks that question, He is asking about something far more than our health or our bank account; He is asking about our whole life. Do we want truth to drop like a plumb line into every area of our lives, revealing as well as righting every inconsistency? Do we want every false and deceptive thing removed so that we might speak truly, deal truly, and live truly? We all want to walk, but do we want to walk in the way and in the life? Jesus said, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me." (Jn 14:6 NAS)**. To be made whole, to be able to walk in this way, we need to cry out, not, "God, give me more truth," but, "God, make me true! Teach my heart to fear your name!"

A man walking in truth is not hard to recognize. He is consistently whole in marriage, ministry, work and worship. His wardrobe, medicine cabinet, and face do not contradict one another. That very wholeness and reality is truth itself, making itself known through someone's life—and it shows. Whenever the inner and outer lives have been brought into unity, it always shows. This is truth. This is salvation: a life set free from the burden and strain of trying to keep a disconnected life together, of being a different person at work, at church, at home, and alone. But do we want this much truth? Do we want this much salvation? Do we want this much of God? To say, "I love truth," yet to want to be less than wholly true is itself a contradiction, just as it is a contradiction to say, "I love God," and yet not love Him with one's whole heart and mind and strength. Our love for God is really no greater than our love for truth. We have no more of one than of the other. Truth, like God, will not force itself upon us. It will penetrate only so far as we let it, and we will let it live in us only as much as we desire it, and desire to walk in it.

Silver-Plated Christians

Years ago, when silver dollars were really made of silver, there was a simple way to determine if they were genuine or not. All you had to do was throw them down and listen to the sound they made when they hit the ground. If a coin was an imitation, if it was merely silver-plated, though it might have given every appearance of being genuine, it made a dull thud when it hit the ground. By contrast the real silver dollar rang true because it was silver, not just on the outside, but all the way through. The imitation may have had real silver on the surface, but it was still worthless. It had to be of the same substance at its core as on its surface, or it was not a silver dollar at all.

Sadly, there are many "silver-plated Christians" in the Church today. There is a layer of real truth on the surface of our lives. We sound very scriptural. However, our actual condition, the true state of our inner man, is revealed, not by how biblically correct we are, but by the sound we make when we hit the ground. What happens when we are thrown down, that is, when we are thrust into an unexpected situation, adversity, or temptation? How do we respond when there is no time to compose a religious phrase or face? Does our life ring true at home, or at work, or when we are alone and no one sees or hears? What are our inward thoughts when we are free to think what we will? Are we silver through and through or only on the surface? In the Psalms, David expressed his own realization about truth as God reckons it. **"You desire truth in the innermost parts" (Ps 51:6)**, David said to God. He understood at that moment what John expressed long after: God's greatest joy is reserved for his children who walk in the truth.

David's Deception

David wrote the fifty-first psalm as a result of a profound and painful revelation of his own innermost parts. The story is a familiar one. David had arranged to have Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed in battle rather than to have his adultery brought to the light. After a considerable time, Nathan the prophet went to David to confront him. He did so indirectly by first telling him a story. He related how a wealthy man, needing a lamb to slaughter to feed a guest, takes the one precious lamb of a poor neighbor. David's sense of justice was aroused, and in anger he pronounced stern judgment against the rich man. **"As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because**

he did this thing and because he had no pity." (II Sam 12:5-6 RSV). It was at this point, and not a moment before, that Nathan turned to David and said, **"Thou art the man!" (II Sam 12:7).**

A considerable time elapsed between David's sin and the day Nathan confronted him. Why didn't God send Nathan to David immediately? Why did He allow David to go on in his sin? The answer lies in David's own heart and in what he needed to see in himself. He presumably continued in the day-to-day activity as Israel's king, not to mention in his daily relationship with Bathsheba. How was that possible for him?

David had been terribly unjust, yet his sin did not prevent him from discerning and responding with great indignation towards the injustice of the rich man in Nathan's story. David was a man passionately committed to justice, while at the same time he himself was being unjust. The fact is, we are often as quick and fervent in discerning error in others as David was in his anger towards the man in Nathan's story. We can be fervent "men of truth" outwardly, while inwardly living a lie about ourselves and not know it. When Nathan said, "Thou art the man," David saw the breach between the inner and outer man revealed. He saw an unjust heart in the midst of a burning zeal for justice. That is what made his repentance so profound and complete.

Truth in the Innermost Being

We should be praying for God to send a few more Nathans, and not just to our neighbor whose hypocrisy we see so clearly. God desires truth in the innermost being and wisdom in the hidden parts. If it is not there, we are false, despite all of our outward professions. Truth is spirit; it has to do primarily with our spirit, our heart, and our innermost being. To walk in truth is to walk in and by the Spirit of Truth. Walking in the Spirit will mean speaking and thinking truly, never in opposition to our heart, but rather as expression and manifestation of our heart. That is what it means to walk in truth.

Does Christ live in us? We say that He does, and we tell others so, but others are unmoved and unimpressed. We can tell ourselves that this is a positional and judicial fact only and not an experiential one, but that explanation hardly satisfies us, let alone the skeptical non-Christians all around us. Jesus did not say, "I am positionally the truth," nor did He say, "The truth has set you positionally free." We know that this is not the gospel. We know instinctively that truth

by its very nature is more powerful than that. Lies don't make us positionally slaves: they make us experientially slaves, because they have the power of a spirit working within them. Truth must be at least as powerful as lies. Then why does it seem so weak and feeble?

Words, Power, and Full Conviction

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians,

Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. (I Th 1:5 NAS).

The apostle's words came in power because day by day his life was a demonstration of truth among those to whom he spoke. He *was* true, and so the true words he spoke had power and full conviction. To walk in God is to walk in truth, and others will experience Him in us only to the degree that we are actually walking in Him.

There is a story about what once happened when Charles Finney toured a textile mill in New York State. As he walked through the mill, he approached a woman operating a loom. As he came toward her, she stopped her work. As he came closer, she began to tremble. As he came still closer, she erupted in tears and finally fell to her knees and cried out to God for mercy; and Finney had not yet spoken a word. How often have we had just the opposite experience: hearing someone speak a multitude of words and not being moved at all? What accounts for the difference between a man who says nothing, yet brings a woman under conviction, and one who says much, yet leaves us unaffected? The answer lies, largely in part, if not entirely, in the fact that the truth is in us, and we in it, only to the degree that we actually walk in it.