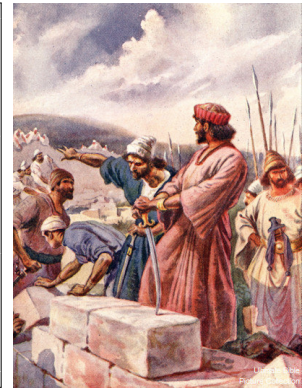


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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What Is Truth?

Jesus appeared before Pilate. Pilate asked Him several questions related to the charges leveled against Him by the Jews. Pilate asked Jesus, for the second time, whether He was a king. Jesus answered, *“You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into this world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”* Pilate then responded, *“What is truth?”* (Jn. 18:37-38).

We cannot know exactly what Pilate meant with his response. He may have spoken in the sense that truth cannot be ascertained. He may have accepted the philosophical notion of truth being fluid, depending on circumstances. He may have been plain sarcastic. One thing for sure - - he certainly did not *care* for the truth. He ultimately gave in to the demands of the Jews. Truth was of no concern to him at all.

The question, “What is truth?” has caused many to ponder in search of an answer. If we were to give a simple Bible answer it would be this: Jesus. He is the truth (Jn. 14:6). He is the *“only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”* (Jn. 1:14). What truth there is in the New Testament has Jesus at its base. *“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (Jn. 1:17). It is the truth that will set one free from the bondage of sin (Jn. 8:32). Furthermore, it is the truth that will purify the heart (1 Peter 1:22). We ought to love the truth (2 Thess. 2:10). For all it can do it is therefore a precious commodity. Centuries before Jesus we find these wise words, *“Buy the truth and sell it not”* (Prov. 23:23).

Nothing is more valuable than the truth in God’s word. It will endure

while all other material things pass away (Matt. 24:35). It is incorruptible when all else is corruptible. Jesus said it this way, *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it”* (Matt. 13:44-46). May I suggest to you that what had been found in both parables was the truth of God’s word? The characters in each parable recognized the value of what they had found. Price was no object when what was before them was priceless.

There is no substitute for truth. The only replacement for truth is error. Do not be deceived, nothing is “just as good as the truth.” Yet, in spiritual matters there are those who do not want the pure, unadulterated truth of God. Far too many are willing to accept the replacement. It is a shame that they are often even eager to receive error. They may claim to be “friends of the truth” as they clamor for error. Their actions show that they do not love the truth, an action that greatly displeases God and will incur His wrath (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Those who are willing and eager to embrace error will denounce the truth and they will lead others astray while doing so. *“And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed”* (2 Peter 2:2).

Truth will be disparaged as being “too restrictive.” It will be “in the way of liberty.” *“While they promise liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption”* (2 Peter 2:19). We will be assured that truth has become “too narrow”; it ought to become broader. This is an old argument and it is a false one. It has

been false for almost two thousand years. The broad way does not lead to liberty, it is the way to destruction (Matt. 7:13). It is the narrow way that leads to life (Matt. 7:14).

Think about it for a moment. Truth is always narrow. Even in other venues which are non-spiritual, truth is narrow.

Mathematical truth is narrow. Two and two have always made four - - no more, no less. There is only one possible answer. That is narrow. Any other number out of the other thousands of available numbers is wrong. Error is indeed broad.

Scientific truth is narrow. Under ordinary conditions at sea level, water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. It has been that way since the beginning. A broad-minded person may insist that water, in such circumstances, will freeze at 35 degrees. It won’t and ten thousand others agreeing with him will not change scientific truth. Truth is narrow, error is not.

Geographical truth is narrow. I may stand in Martha’s rock garden and face the picture window of the house in which we live. When I do so I am facing north. East will be to my right, west to my left, and south will be behind me. Nothing can change the truth of this. It will be the same should another person stand in the same position. Geographical truth is narrow and error is broad.

Can we not recognize how truth is narrow in these other venues? I think we do, but we often do not want a narrow truth when it comes to spiritual matters.

Israel was told there was one God and no other. *“You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not*

bow down to them nor serve them” (Ex. 20:3-5). Some found this to be too narrow and called for another god. Behold, they made a golden calf and proclaimed, “*This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt*” (Ex. 32:4). What a sorry outcome for a people who knew better. Unfortunately, they wanted a different truth from the one revealed and demonstrated by the mighty hand of God. On down through history it has happened again and again. The truth is always there, but the replacement of error has far too often been preferred. It has happened when men left the truth of the simple arrangement of the church for the error of denominationalism. It has happened when men practiced sprinkling with water and called it baptism. It has happened when men decided they like playing instruments of music as much, if not more, than singing. Over and over has truth been cast aside so error may prevail.

There are those, however, who will not accept error in place of truth. These are ones who will accept only the genuine article. They can identify the truth and they are willing to buy it and sell it not.

John wrote a letter to a disciple named Gaius. In that letter he mentioned some true disciples who were earnestly devoted to the truth. “*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*” (3 Jn. 2-4). I notice that twice in these verses John mentions walking in the truth. When he did this he was describing a manner of life engaged by Gaius and others in Gaius’ company. Here were some who had found the truth and were tenaciously clinging to it. The truth had become the pattern by which their lives were now ordered. The truth was not an after thought to them, it was now their first thought.

I like to think of the ones John wrote about in light of what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:15 (ASV). “*Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth.*” I like the idea of “*walking in the*

truth” and coupling that with “*handling aright the word of truth.*” The truth cannot be handled improperly for that would harm the handler and all whom he would engage.

“*Handling aright*” comes from a Greek word (orthotomeo) that is only found here in the New Testament. Thayer says it means: 1) to cut straight, to cut straight ways, i. e., to proceed by straight paths, hold a straight course, equiv. to do right. 2) dropping the idea of cutting, to make straight and smooth;...i. e. to teach the truth directly and correctly.” This means to keep things proper and right. There is first developed a familiarity with the truth. A disciple becomes proficient as the truth becomes part of his nature. He is then able to discern **how** to use the truth. Let me hasten to add that it is just as important to know **what** the truth is as **how** to use it. There is, in the truth, **both** milk and meat (Heb. 5:12-14). It is important to see that those who need milk or meat receive **what they need**. I have read where we are to be “*ready in season or out of season*” in order to “*convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching*” (2 Tim. 4:2). It is important to know when to do what. The skilled workman will know these things and then competently handle the truth accurately in order that all will profit accordingly. In doing so he “*will save both yourself and those who hear you*” (1 Tim. 4:16).

Let me point out another thing about “*walking in the truth.*” John wasn’t writing about those who would obey the gospel and then seldom, if ever, be seen again. Gaius and those unnamed others were continuing in the truth if they were walking in the truth. Paul wrote to the Colossians about their continuing in the truth, “*since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth*” (Col 1:4-6). To continue in the truth is to “bring forth fruit” and to be known for it. It is also to “*continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (Acts 2:42)

and be known for it. Walking (or continuing) in the truth is a continual process. It is a daily walk or continuation. Truth is always with us, not just for one hour out of the week!

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Give Me The Truth

If you are my friend, if you are concerned about my soul, GIVE ME THE TRUTH. Do not flatter me. Do not praise my virtues while remaining silent about my vices. Do not fear that the truth will offend me. Do not treasure our friendship, our friendly relations, about my salvation. Do not think that by ignoring my sins, you can help me. Do not think that by being blind to my sins, you prove yourself charitable. However I may react to it, whatever may be my attitude toward you after you have done it. GIVE ME THE TRUTH!!

For the truth, and only the truth, can make me free from the shackles of sin, strengthen me in the pathway of righteousness and lead me to the joys of heaven. If I am wavering, if I am weak, if I am lukewarm, if I become indifferent, if I am neglectful; if I have been overtaken in a trespass; if I have been drawn into the pleasures of this world; if I have left my first love; if I have been led astray by error; or if I have done none of these but simply need to grow in knowledge and to be edified, GIVE ME THE TRUTH.

Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). The truth of God’s Word is the only true source of freedom. But, having a copy of God’s Word on the mantle is not enough. Did you notice that Jesus said, “Ye shall KNOW the truth”? Thus, it is mandatory that we allow that truth to permeate our hearts and guide us in the paths of righteousness. We must come to know the truth by a study of and a surrender to the teachings of God’s Eternal Word.

Jack Thompson, preacher for the White Park church of Christ.

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