

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUTH

In the lesson this morning I want to talk to you about truth.

- a. Even within our brotherhood, I believe there is a growing lack of appreciation for truth and a growing tolerance for error.
 - ▶ I'm concerned about that, so I want to remind you of what the Bible has to say about truth.
 - ▶ I want to call your attention to some of the characteristics of truth.

But before we talk about the characteristics of truth, I want to impress this thought upon your mind: nothing is more important than truth.

Nothing is more important than truth, because . . .

- a. You are going to be judged by the truth.
 - ▶ Psa 96:13 ~~ “For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His **truth.**”
 - ▶ Rom 2:2 ~~ “But we know that the judgment of God is according to **truth** against those who practice such things.”
 - ▶ Rom 2:8 ~~ “. . . but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the **truth**, but obey unrighteousness ~~ indignation and wrath . . .”
- b. If you are saved, you are saved by the truth.
 - ▶ Prov 16:6 ~~ “In mercy and **truth** atonement is provided for iniquity.”
 - ▶ 2 Th 2:13 ~~ “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the **truth** . . .”
 - ▶ Jn 8:32 ~~ “And you shall know the **truth**, and the **truth** shall make you free (from the bondage of sin, bw)”
 - ▶ 2 Th 2:10 ~~ “. . . and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the **truth**, that they might be saved.”
- c. If you are sanctified, you are sanctified by the truth.
 - ▶ Jn 17:17, 19 ~~ “Sanctify them by Your **truth**. Your word is **truth**. . . 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the **truth.**”
 - ▶ 1 Pet 1:22 ~~ “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the **truth**”
- d. If your worship is acceptable to God, it's because you worship Him in truth.
 - ▶ Jn 4:23 ~~ “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and **truth**; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and **truth.**”
- e. If you reject the truth, you will be condemned.
 - ▶ 2Th 2:12 ~~ “. . . that they all may be condemned who did not believe the **truth** but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

With all this in view, the apostle John, in his 3rd epistle, said: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in **truth**” (3Jn 4)

So we would do well to heed the admonition of the wise scribe of the book of Proverbs: “Buy the **truth**, and do not sell it . . .” (Prov 23:23)

Now, if I have succeeded in getting you to think about how important truth is, I want to talk to you about some of the characteristics of truth.

SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUTH

1. TRUTH IS ALWAYS NARROW.

Every kind of truth is narrow.

Mathematical truth is narrow.

- a. Two plus two equals four ~~ no more, and no less.
- b. Anyone who says two plus two equals something else is wrong.
- c. Every other answer given as an answer to that mathematical problem is a wrong answer . . . and there are many wrong answers . . . but there is only one right answer.

Scientific truth is narrow.

- a. Under ordinary conditions at sea level, water freezes at exactly 32 degrees Fahrenheit . . . just that . . . no more, and no less.
- b. There are thousands of temperatures at which water does not freeze.

Historical truth is narrow.

- a. A given event took place in one particular way.
 - ▶ There are thousands of ways in which it did not take place . . . and only one way in which it did take place.
- b. For example: Abraham Lincoln was shot in the head by John Wilkes Booth while attending a play at Ford’s Theater in Washington, D.C.
 - ▶ It was John Wilkes Booth ~~ not John Dillinger, or Charles Manson, or Richard Speck.
 - ▶ It was Ford’s Theater in Washington D.C. ~~ not Carnegie Hall in New York City,
 - ▶ Lincoln was shot ~~ not bludgeoned, or stabbed, or strangled, or poisoned.
 - ▶ Lincoln was shot in the head ~~ not the foot, or the heart, or the back.

Geographical truth is narrow.

- a. Chattanooga is in Tennessee not Alabama, or Florida, or Michigan.
- b. Atlanta is south of Chattanooga . . . not north, or east, or west.

It really is true: every kind of truth is narrow ~~ and that includes spiritual truth.

- a. In **2Pet 2**, Peter speaks of the way of salvation as “**the way of truth**”

(v2) and “the right way” (v15).

- ▶ And Jesus says the way of salvation is a difficult way that we must enter through a narrow gate.
 - Matt 7:13-14 ~~ “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”
- b. And Paul shows us that spiritual truth is very narrow.
 - ▶ Eph 4:4-6 ~~ “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

But while it is true that every kind of truth is narrow, it does not follow that anything that is narrow is truth.

- a. You would be just as narrow if you affirmed that two plus two equals five and nothing else, as to affirm that two plus two equals four and nothing else.
 - ▶ But you would be very wrong.

2. TRUTH IS ALWAYS CONSISTENT.

One truth never contradicts another truth.

Historical truth is always consistent.

- a. One historical truth never truly contradicts another historical truth.
- b. Example: Abraham Lincoln died from his gun-shot wound on April 15, 1865.
 - ▶ If a newspaper reporter reported that Lincoln addressed a meeting of the Daughters of the American Revolution on April 16, 1865 that would contradict the report that he died on April 15 ~~ both reports could not possibly be true.

Scientific truth is always consistent.

- a. One scientific truth never contradicts another scientific truth.
- b. Example: Our science books for many years have taught that matter can neither be created nor destroyed. I believe they still teach that.
 - ▶ The statement by Fred Hoyle, the British astronomer, that matter is continuously being created out of nothing in the empty spaces of the universe contradicts our science books ~~ and both cannot possibly be true.

It is also true that spiritual truth is always consistent ~~ one truth never contradicts another truth.

- a. 1Cor 14:33 ~~ “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”
- b. Application #1: The doctrine of justification by faith only cannot be true because it contradicts plain Bible teaching (Jas 2:24).
- c. Application #2: The doctrine that Jesus emptied Himself of deity

when He came into the world cannot be true because it contradicts plain Bible teaching in **Matt 1:23; Jn 20:28**.

- d. Application #3: The doctrine that the gospel is only the teaching of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ cannot be true because it contradicts plain Bible teaching in **Matt 4:23/Matt 16:21; 1Tim 1:8-11; 2Th 1:8; Col 1:5**.

3. TRUTH IS NOT DETERMINED BY WHO BELIEVES IT.

The Greek astronomer, Ptolemy, said the sun and all the heavenly bodies revolve around the earth.

- a. He was a brilliant man, and highly respected but what he believed and taught about that was not true.
- b. The Catholic Church took the same position and forced Galileo to publicly agree with it ~~ but that still didn't make it true.

Spiritual truth is not determined by who believes it either.

- a. The religious leaders among the Jews rejected the teaching of Jesus, but His teaching was still the truth.
 - ▶ **Jn 7:45 ~~ "Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, 'Why have you not brought Him?' 46 The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this Man!' 47 Then the Pharisees answered them, 'Are you also deceived? 48 Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? 49 But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."**
- b. The worldly-wise, the influential, and the high-born rejected the gospel, but it was still the truth.
 - ▶ **1 Cor 1:26 ~~ "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."**
- c. The rulers among the people rejected the teaching of Christ, but it was still the truth.
 - ▶ **1 Cor 2:7-8 ~~ "But we speak the wisdom of God . . . 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."**
- d. Application: The fact that Homer Hailey teaches it (or Mike Willis, or Ron Halbrook, or Ed Harrell, or Sewell Hall) doesn't make it true.
 - ▶ So you cannot defend your position by saying, "Well that's what Bro. So-and-So teaches."
 - It's not what Bro. So-and-So says that counts ~~ it's what the Scriptures say that counts.
 - You've got to study the Scriptures for yourself.

4. TRUTH IS NOT DETERMINED BY HOW MANY BELIEVE IT.

What Ptolemy taught about all the heavenly bodies revolving around the earth pre-vailed for nearly 1,500 years.

- a. Everybody believed it ~~ but that didn't make it true.

When Christopher Columbus set sail to find a new trade route to India, most people believed he would sail off the edge of the earth.

- a. Most of the people of his day believed the earth was flat ~~ but that didn't make it so.

Spiritual truth is not determined by how many people believe it either.

- a. In Noah's day only eight people in the whole world believed the truth, but it was still the truth.
 - ▶ 2Pet 2:5 ~~ “. . . And (God) did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly . . .”
- b. In Jeremiah's day there was almost no one in the nation of Judah who believed the truth of God's law or Jeremiah's message, but it was still the truth.
 - ▶ Jer 5:1 ~~ “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her.”
 - ▶ Jer 7:28 ~~ “So you shall say to them, ‘This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.’”
- c. Application #1: When the use of instrumental music and church support of the missionary society caused division in our brotherhood, the majority of the churches (about 2/3) accepted instrumental music and the missionary society ~~ but that didn't make those things right.
- d. Application #2: When church-sponsored recreation, sponsoring church arrangements, and church support of human institutions caused division in our brotherhood, the majority of the churches accepted those things ~~ but that didn't make those things right.
- e. Application #3: I'm not a prophet or the son of a prophet, but I predict that most of the churches of Christ will ultimately accept false teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage ~~ but that won't make it right.

Our attitude must be: “let God be true but every man a liar” (Rom 3:4)

5. THERE IS NO SAFE SUBSTITUTE FOR TRUTH.

Truth can be replaced only with error.

- a. And the consequences of replacing truth with error can be tragic.
 - ▶ Rom 1:24-25 ~~ “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.”

6. TRUTH IS SOMETIMES OFFENSIVE.

Even truths of a secular nature are sometimes offensive.

- a. I'm sure there are a lot of historical truths that offend a lot of people.
 - ▶ Example: There are a lot of truths about the way the German people behaved during World War II that are offensive to a lot of Germans today.
 - They don't like to hear about it or be reminded of it.
 - Some of them want to deny some of those historical truths – they are very much offended by them.
- b. Scientific truths sometimes offend those who have espoused theories that are disproved or discredited by those truths.
- c. And it is certainly the case that spiritual truth has offended a lot of people.

But the truth is still the truth even when people are offended by it.

Matthew, in the 15th chapter of Matthew, tells about a time when the scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus because His disciples sometimes ate bread without first washing their hands (**Matt 15:1-2**).

- a. This violated “the tradition of the elders.”
 - ▶ Their tradition required Jews to wash their hands before eating, and they said it was a duty to wash after eating.
 - ▶ This was not encouraged as a matter of hygiene, but required as a matter of spiritual necessity ~~ for fear that their hands had brushed against a Gentile or something belonging to a Gentile and thereby caused them to be “unclean.”
 - ▶ And the more “pious” washed their hands between the courses of a meal.
- b. Jesus answered their criticism by His teaching in **v11**: “**Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.**”
- c. “**Then His disciples came and said to Him, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?’**” (**v12**).
- d. Now, when Jesus heard that the Pharisees were offended by His teaching did He apologize?
 - ▶ Absolutely not!
 - ▶ He said, in effect, “If the truth hurts, that’s just too bad.”
 - “**But He answered and said, ‘Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14 Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch’**” (**v13-14**).

Almost every gospel truth is offensive to someone.

- a. All we can rightly do is say “Amen” (“Let it be so”) to every truth.
- b. We must speak the truth in love (**Eph 4:15**).
 - ▶ And “speaking the truth in love” includes: reproof, rebuking, and exhorting (**2Tim 4:2**).
 - ▶ And if we do that, and someone is offended, that’s too bad.
 - ▶ We should not try to offend anyone, but if speaking the truth with sincerity and honest concern offends someone ~~ then so be it.

CONCLUSION

There is a true and a false in religion.

- a. There is a true God.
 - ▶ 1 Th 1:9 ~~ “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God . . .”
- b. There is the true grace of God.
 - ▶ 1 Pet 5:12 ~~ “By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.”
- c. There is a true light.
 - ▶ 1 Jn 2:8 ~~ “Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.”
- d. There is true bread.
 - ▶ Jn 6:32 ~~ “Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.”
- e. There is a true vine.
 - ▶ Jn 15:1 ~~ “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”
- f. There is a true tabernacle .
 - ▶ Heb 8:1-2 ~~ “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.”
- g. There are true worshippers.
 - ▶ Jn 4:23 ~~ “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”

When you stand before God in the day of judgment, you will be judged by the truth of God’s word.

- a. If you have not lived your life according to the truth of God’s word, you will find no comfort or consolation in having lived your life the way most people lived their lives.
 - ▶ You will find no comfort or consolation in having lived by the teaching and philosophy of the most respected religious teachers.

And whether you were right or wrong in matters of mathematics, or science, or history, or geography will be of no importance whatsoever, but your eternal destiny will be decided by what you knew of God’s truth and what you did about it.

- a. Only the truth can make you free from the bondage of sin (Jn 8:32).
 - ▶ There is not a passage anywhere in the Bible that says . . .
 - you can be saved by religious error
 - you can be sanctified by religious error
 - you can be spiritually benefitted by religious error

- you can purify your soul by obeying error
- ▶ False doctrine WILL NOT do for you what true doctrine will do for you.

So, let the prayer of the Psalmist be your own prayer: “Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle” (Psa 43:3)