

Truth

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28th February 2010

John 14¹⁵⁻¹⁷, John 16¹²⁻¹⁵/ Psalm 15/ Eph 1¹¹⁻¹⁴

We've been talking over the last few weeks about being a 'spiritual people.' We are called to become a spiritual people and to be made into a spiritual house in 1 Peter.

⁴Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2)

So what does this mean? We've said two is means at least two things. Firstly it means **coming to Jesus**. Bringing ourselves deliberately into His presence by whatever means we can find to be influenced by Him in all our thinking and our doing and our feeling. Bringing all that we are to Him day by day - this is our first and primary step in living as a spiritual people. As we come to Jesus we find our lives becoming open to His Spirit and as this happens we become spiritually alive.

Secondly we said last week that Christian spirituality involves the creation of whole and healthy relationships. A spiritual person puts personal resource into growing their relationship with God. They forgive and seek forgiveness; they commit to better relationships especially with the central people of their lives, wives, husbands and children and they commit also to the development of relationships with those who are needy and alone. Relationships are the stuff of our spirituality as Christians. If these are out of kilter we will find our spirituality leaks.

A third major feature of Christian spirituality is truth. Christian spirituality leads us to the Truth about God and about us. It leads us to know the Truth but also to live the Truth – to live in truthful ways. It is no coincidence that God's Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth and in John 14 Jesus says these words...

¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (John 14)

Throughout the NT we find the Spirit linked to Truth. The Spirit is God's Truth and He brings God's Truth. So to have anything at all to do with the Spirit is to enter into the realm of Truth and we begin to deal with the Truth by first dealing with the falsehood that marks our existence.

And it does. We are people not of the Truth but of a lie. Sin began with a lie that the snake told Eve – ‘You shall not die’ - and from that point on has been characterised by deception and lying.

So, we are, as sinners, a people of the lie. This sounds a terrible thing to say and many of you may object to such a damning assessment but the more we come to understand ourselves and the more honest we are about our interaction with others the more obvious this seems to be.

One way we can tell that this is the case is that throughout the Bible God’s call for His people is to become a people of the truth. And this begins with truth in our innermost being, truth in our hearts...

¹*O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?*

²*Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth **from their heart**; (Psalm 15)*

⁶*Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom **in the inmost place**. (Psalm 51)*

And is to be reflected in what we say and what we do...

¹¹*Teach me your way, O LORD, **that I may walk in your truth**; give me an undivided heart to revere your name. (Psalm 86)*

¹⁸*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all **who call on him in truth**. (Psalm 145)*

And the great judgement of Israel concerns her attitude to the truth...

¹Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look around and take note!

Search its squares and see if you can find one person who acts justly **and seeks truth**— so that I may pardon Jerusalem. (Jer 5)

What is God after? One person, just one person, who will act justly and **seek the truth**.

Every deception begins with self deception and our capacity for self deception is almost legendary. Listen to this... Seatbelts can be a hassle. Some people just don't want to be bothered even when the law requires them to buckle up. According to the Associated Press, a New Zealander named Ivan Segedin took it to an extreme. The police ticketed him 32 times over five years for failing to use his seat belt. Even though this was costing him big money, Segedin refused to buckle up. Finally, instead of obeying the law he decided on a new tactic. He made a fake seat belt that would hang over his shoulder and make it appear that he was wearing a seat belt when he was not. His trick worked for a while. Then, he had a head-on collision. He was thrown forward onto the steering wheel and killed. Discussing the accident, the coroner described the fake seat belt: "Though his car was fitted with seat belts, an extra belt with a long strap had been knotted above the seat belt on the driver's side, providing a belt to simply sit over the driver's shoulder."

What can we do about this? How can we become a people of the truth and put away both deception and self deception? The key lies with the Spirit of God. What we discover in the NT is

that God's Spirit is the Spirit of Truth and that becoming a truth-filled people will involve receiving that Spirit.

The NT describes a twofold process in this regard. What this appears to be, however, is two ends of the same movement. It's as if we are being taught to drive a manual car and the instructor is trying to tell us how to get the car moving forward. Having put it in gear we are then told to slowly let the clutch out whilst pressing lightly on the accelerator. The trick is to operate both in a manner which will allow the car to move forward smoothly. In the case of Truth the process of becoming a Truth filled person involves in the first place believing God's Word. By doing so we open our hearts and lives to God's Spirit.

¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; (Eph 1)

The Word of God prepares our hearts and minds to receive the Spirit. Indeed, it might be said that God's Spirit enters with that Word. But there is now a second movement and one which is of the utmost importance for the knowledge of God's Word isn't all there is to knowing God. As Paul says in 1st Corinthians,

But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. ²Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. (1 Cor 8)

One of perhaps the most common mistakes in regard to the nature of Christian faith is that it begins and ends with knowledge. When we rely only on knowledge, however, no matter how key that knowledge may be, we forget that faith is also a relationship of love. God comes to us first and foremost **in love!** Being right isn't the same as being righteous. Being correct isn't the same as being obedient. Being careful isn't the same as being wise. As Neil Armstrong once said at a USC graduation...

"I hope you become comfortable with the use of logic without being deceived into concluding that logic will inevitably lead you to the correct conclusion."

The second movement in becoming a people of the Truth is to receive not just the Truth but to receive the Spirit of Truth – the One who will lead us into all Truth. The NT is convinced that we must all be 'filled with the Spirit.' You see receiving the Truth isn't just about accepting a certain logic. Even evil has a logic of its own which is tremendously compelling at times. Think of how you have felt when someone has done something really nasty to you. Think of how much that person has deserved to feel the pain you feel and to experience the loss you have felt. Think how good it would be to take revenge and to make that person pay for what they have done. At the time, at least, it all seems so right. But the Bible is clear that vengeance is not ours and that revenge does not equal justice. Sometimes we have to use all our self control to resist the logic of evil. I learned much about Truth from my parents and though they were, at times, terrible teachers and even hypocrites I have come to realise that despite that I learned so much real Truth from them. What is more, I discovered, despite my best efforts, that hypocrisy runs in the family! There is something terribly personal about the truth, something that surpasses logic,

something that rises above words. We need a personal hand on us to become a people of the Truth and this is what Jesus promised us when He said...

¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (John 14)

So becoming spiritual requires that we soak ourselves in God's Word – that we somehow get it inside of us and that our mental pathways become familiar with it. But to do that we also need to do business directly with God's Spirit. Jesus has given us this Spirit and Paul calls us to be filled and go on being filled with this Spirit.

This is not only how we come to know God's Truth. It is also how we can leave behind the lies that plague our life. We need to become people of the Truth in order to leave behind lies. I wonder what lies you've lived with. 'I'm ugly and no one could love me?' 'I'm dumb and no one would want to employ me?' 'I'm weak and I'll never achieve anything?' 'I'm cursed and I'll never get anything right?' 'I'm slow and I'll always get beaten.' What are the lies that slow you down?

God wants to deal with those lies but He needs us to draw near to Him so that we might receive His Spirit and begin to know His Truth.

On February 10, 1996, a 38-year-old security guard at a Pennsylvania middle school convinced then 14-year-old Tanya Kach to leave her father and live with him. For the next ten years, the security guard kept Tanya in the home he shared with his elderly parents. Throughout the years after Tanya's disappearance, her father desperately tried to find her. He posted her picture several thousand times on flyers and milk cartons. To keep her from running away, Tanya's captor convinced her that no one cared that she was gone—that her parents weren't even looking for her. He told her: **"You're stupid. You're immature. Nobody cares about you but me."**

Eventually, the security guard became so confident in her loyalty to him that he allowed her to leave the house for short periods of time while he was at work. Through these daily excursions, Tanya became friends with Joseph Sparico, the owner of a local Deli Mart. In March of 2006, Tanya finally confessed her true identity to Sparico, who shared the information with his son—a retired police officer. Before long, Tanya was rescued and reunited with her father. Commenting on the girl's situation, Sparico said, "She wanted to be wanted, that's all." Tanya's father, Jerry, was overjoyed to see her. "It was exactly 10 years, one month, and 11 days," he said, "and there wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think of her. I just say thank you, there is a God, and he brought my little girl back home." Tanya, too, was delighted to learn that her father had never given up looking for her. "He's crying; I'm crying. All he kept saying was, 'I got my baby,'" she said, describing their reunion. "I'm touching blood, and I get to say, 'I love you, Dad.'"

God is looking for us. He loves us and wants us to experience that love. Let's not let lies keep us apart.