

The Absolute Standard Of Truth

By Maurice Barnett

Jesus said He would send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into "all the truth," John 16:13. We find *the truth* in God's word, the Bible. John 17:17 says, "*Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth.*" Of course, there is "truth" regarding facts on many things in our *natural* world. But, the truth Jesus spoke of is in another area. God's truth reveals facts and instructions about our physical realm in the light of the spiritual. The facts found in the Bible are to be believed and the instruction in it must be followed. Truth teaches us rules we *must* live by; it is a matter of divine authority. The Bible contains an absolute standard of truth that is always right. *Absolute* refers to an ultimate standard, one that is perfect and complete.

God *could* have communicated with us in many ways. Some people believe in a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit that guides each one directly. They rely on some power apart from the written word for knowledge and motivation. This shows a lack of faith in the written word. Others look for signs, or a "chastening" of God, to nudge us in the right way. I have seen people in response to some accident or a strange happening, roll their eyes heavenward and say, "Someone is trying to tell me something." Yet, we are not guided, like Pavlov's dog, by a system of rewards and punishments, or by Astrology, neither weather nor rolling animal bones.

God revealed His truth to us in *human language*, God's mind speaking to our mind. In I Corinthians 2:6-13, Paul says we cannot know the mind of God by natural origins or resources; we cannot discover it on our own. He argues that none knows the mind of a man except the spirit of the man that is in him. No one can know what is on another man's mind unless he communicates it in some way, verbally, by "body language" or by some action. It's the same with God. No one knows the mind of God, except the spirit of God. God communicates His mind to us by the Holy Spirit through the inspired men of the first century: "*not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words.*"

God was very particular in wanting to express, by human language, what was on His mind. This revelation of the mind of God is designated *the truth*. This is what Jesus meant in John 16:13. The Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth. Everything God wants us to know and do is found there. We are obligated to have a *knowledge of the truth*, 2 Timothy 3:7; *believe the truth*, 2 Thessalonians 2:12; *love the truth*, 2 Thessalonians 2:10; *obey the truth*, Galatians 3:1, 5:7; and *handle it correctly*, 2 Timothy 2:15.

The truth is the same as *the gospel, the word*. Ephesians 1:13 says, "*in whom ye also, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.*" Colossians 1:5 calls it 'the word of the truth of the gospel.' Verse 6 adds, "*since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth,*" identifying the grace of God with it, as in Titus 2:11-12. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:13:

"And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God."

Looking at it from another viewpoint, "error" means to *wander from* the right path, to *stray*. To leave the truth is error. Jesus told the Sadducees that "*you do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God,*" Matthew 22:29. James 5:19-20 says:

"My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins."

All of God's revelation is wrapped up in the word "truth" in this passage. Look at the consequences of departure from truth; one becomes a sinner, bringing his soul in danger. Indeed, the truth is the basis of God's judgment upon us, Romans 2:2. *Adhering to truth* is the only way to please God. Titus 1:13-14 says:

"This testimony is true. For which cause reprove them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men who turn away from the truth."

They turned away from *the truth*, leaving *the faith* in doing so. The same fact is found in 2 Timothy 4:3-4. After Paul tells Timothy to preach the word with all longsuffering and doctrine, he says:

"For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables."

They left *sound doctrine* in turning away from the truth to embrace *fables*, meaning fiction, a falsification of facts. In 2 Timothy 2:16-18, after admonishing Timothy to "handle aright the word of truth," Paul says:

"But shun profane babblings: for they will proceed further in ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a gangrene, of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some."

This passage identifies the truth with the faith and contains instructions on the resurrection. The resurrection is not something we obey, for it is not a command, but rather what we hope for in the future. What the truth says about the resurrection we must believe; anything else is erring from the truth and departing from the faith. It *isn't* a matter of *doing* something unlawful, we *cannot believe just anything* we want to believe; we must believe the truth, God's mind revealed to us. In Galatians 2:3-5, Paul tells us how the truth relates to circumcision and keeping the law. In verse 14, it involves respect of persons, saying, "*But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. . .*" In 1 Timothy 4:1-6, the errors of an approaching religious apostasy concerning celibacy and food restrictions are identified as contrary to truth.

Notice the equivalent words to "the truth" that identify God's revelation: *the word of God*, 1 Thessalonians 2:13; *the word of truth*, Ephesians 1:13; *the word of the truth of the gospel*, Colossians 1:5; *the truth of the gospel*, Galatians 2:5, 14; *sound doctrine*, 2 Timothy 4:3-4; *the faith*, Titus 1:13-14, 1 Timothy 4:1-6.

The written word of God carries the same authority as what was spoken by the inspired men in the first century. In 1 Corinthians, Paul gives the importance of this revealed mind of God. In 4:6, he says:

"Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to my self and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn not to go beyond the things which are written. . ."

In 14:37, this is emphasized another way. The authority of the written word is clearly seen; *"If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord."* This is also seen in 2 Thessalonians 3:14:

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed."

Association is to be withdrawn from those who will not obey the written record of the New Testament. Look at Romans 16:17:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned. and turn away from them."

The doctrine he speaks of here, as we have seen, is another word for "the truth." It didn't matter whether the truth was oral or written, it had the same authority. 2 Peter 3:15-17 declares:

"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you- , as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness."

Everything Paul wrote, as well as "the other scriptures," required belief and obedience. Anything else was "error." Those described here are literally 'the ignorant who are unstedfast.' They twist the scriptures, but do so to their own destruction. Revelation 22:18-19 warns that dire consequences will come upon those who add to or take from the word of God. God also requires a breaking of our fellowship, and a ceasing of our association, with any who turn from this standard of truth. It is no wonder that 2 John 9-11 declares:

"Whosoever goes onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God - he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bring not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting - for he that gives him greeting partakes in his evil works."

Paul warned in Galatians 1:9 that *"if any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema."*

In addition to all this, we are assured that God's written revelation will furnish us with everything we need, in every necessary realm, 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

We have an absolute standard of truth, and it is written so that each of us may possess a copy of it to read and study. We must appeal to it in every disagreement, follow it as God declares we must, and defend its purity and authority against attacks from every quarter, both within and without.