

## TRUTH

(Lesson prepared for Fairview Memorial's winter Bible study by J. A. Reynolds for February 16, 2016)

**"What is truth?"** Long ago a Roman governor asked that as a final question of Jesus of Nazareth, before he turned politician and ordered the death of that innocent man. Pilate might have truly wondered what a real answer to that question might be, but it appears that, like so many people today, he was not expecting to learn anything. *"Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and said unto them, I find in him no fault."* (John 18:37-38) Pilate endeavored strenuously to persuade the Jews that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death or any criminal act according to Roman law, but in the end amidst much fear or whom Jesus might really be did the politically expedient thing of submitting to the popular demand. **How many people today commonly forsake the truth in order to choose the easier path?**

The source Pilate was facing was in fact the very embodiment of eternal truth, the most important and lasting of all truths. When his own closest disciples, all His hand-picked members of His first church and already ordained apostles, had asked him to show them the "way" to the place where He said He was going, He answered, **"I am the way, the truth, and the light."** (John 14:6) Not only does knowing Him personally and intimately as a penitent, believing, and forgiven sinner whose spirit has been born from above of His Holy Spirit guarantee such a true disciple a future place with Him in God's heaven, but that Divinely revealed knowledge and the benefits which are included with it gives him **open access to get direct answers from the only source who knows the truth of all things, past, present and future.** Not that all of us who are thus "regenerated" use this gift as perfectly as we could or ought to, but that **we are offered that access if we approach it in God's way according to God's will!**

Providentially, Pilate was provided with enough evidence that Jesus was both innocent and also a **very extraordinary person** that his failure either to perceive or to submit himself to the **truth** before him left him wavering, doubtful, unbelieving, and lost, like so many people today.

**The truth of all things is available** for those who prize it above themselves and all else they might have or gain without it. The truth is at times unpleasant, and this unpleasantness is humiliating to human pride, but that is a foolish reason to turn away from it. Turning away from truth, and in so doing effectively denying it, is always destructive to self and to others. The magnitude of that destructiveness depends upon the relative importance of that particular truth according to the judgment of God. But **always, there is a price to pay in exchange for ignoring, neglecting, or denying whatever is true.**

**What is truth?** Few people seem to know, especially in this late age and in this now decadent society. I fear that **the ability or our citizens to perceive truth, and so to distinguish it from falsehood**, is also rapidly declining. **This is ominous for the future of our children and grandchildren.**

What is truth? (1) Few people seem to know! (2) More and more people seem to think no one knows. (3) A few people think they know, but are far from it, but yet are so bold and self-confident in their thoughts that many people trust and follow them to their own misfortune.

**The truth is:** (1) what really happened, (2) what is really happening, or (3) what is really going to happen. It includes the facts regarding the past, present, and future.

*"Truth" in New Testament Greek* = ἀληθεια ← **What is true of any matter under consideration:** from Thayer's Lexicon

**Only God knows the truth of the future, except for those to whom He has truly revealed it!** Many people are obsessed with guessing and predicting the future. Not even the devils know the future, but they try incessantly to make people think that they do. Demonically influenced people are often tempted to devise great theories about the future which they fail to perceive has been designed by devils to fool their fellow men.

God's people have great need to remain a visionary people, because *"where there is no vision, the people perish."* (Proverbs 29:18) This means direct revelation from God, though it is only occasional and comes to certain people when God chooses, **warning them of improper course of actions regarding self or others. They first need to be certain of the warning, and then they need to be bold and unwavering. Living close to God on a daily basis improves the likelihood that God will use you in that way.** I fear that too many of God's children are living such a guilty distance from God that (1) it is unlikely they will be the recipient of such warnings, or (2) will be bold enough with its dissemination when they are, or (3) will be convincing enough to their hearers when they speak of it.

People who are in love with this present world find adequate and safe knowledge of past truths too hard to achieve. Many truths have been written about past events, not only in the Bible, but also from many other sources of wisdom learned from experience, which frequently agrees with some Biblical truths. **I have found that many such precious gems are out there to be found if you search for the truth sincerely, prayerfully, and relentlessly. But, we should not expect this "treasure" to be easily found, or for the search to cost little.** The Devil and his demons have had 6000 years to find ways to cover it up, to distort it, and to devise counterfeits.

"The truth needs to be told!" Those words came to me as consolation from one of the wisest elderly members it was ever my privilege to pastor. There was a clarification of church history which was much needed, a correction of claims in order to silence accusations of falsehood coming from the outside. A certain young member was resisting that correction to the point that I asked him what his problem was, to which he replied, "I just wish this did not have to be told at all!" After I explained that the church's truthfulness was being impeached, the correction was made without opposition. After dismissal, an elderly member told me, Brother Reynolds, "if it is the truth, it needs to be told."

**But is this always true, in every time and place?** The Christian family of Corrie Ten Boom in the Netherlands during Nazi occupation was hiding Jews from their would-be exterminators, endangering their own lives in the process. Corrie had no qualms about lying to the Nazi Jew hunters with a goal to preserve innocent lives, but she worried that her sister was so devoted to always telling the truth that she feared she might jeopardize their operation. Corrie always regarded that sister as more Christ-like than herself, but was that true? What do you think?

Baptist preacher Samuel Harriss was preaching in a forbidden Anglican dominated county of Virginia during the Baptist persecution of the late 1700's when he was arrested along with some others. To gain release he promised to leave the county without preaching again. However, soon after his release he was solicited by some local folks to preach again to their people. As he submitted, he began his sermon with a disclaimer, saying something like this, "I promised the devil that I would not preach again in this county, but 'the devil is a perfidious wretch and promises made to him are not to be kept.'" He then proceeded to preach the gospel.

**Timing and location** for speaking or writing the truth, along with other considerations, are important. Solomon wrote, *"To every thing there a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... a time to keep silence, and a time to speak ..."* (Ecclesiastes 3:1-7) Notice that in keeping with Solomon's wisdom he preceded the need to "speak" with a time to "keep silent." Solomon had much to say about foolish speaking and the virtue of wise silence!

*"Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince. (Proverbs 17:7)*

*"In the multitude of words there wanteth (lacks) not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. (Proverbs 10:19)*

*"For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words."*  
(Ecclesiastes 5:3)

*"A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover (expose) itself."*(Proverbs 18:2)

(No verse seems so appropriate to condemn the vanity and foolishness involved in the common misuse of modern "social media!")

In 2nd Corinthians 12:6 - discretion and wisdom caused Paul to defer declaring a fact (also a boast) for charitable reasons. )

Abraham Lincoln is often quoted as whimsically paraphrasing Solomon with something like this, "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak up and remove all doubt." TRUE!

James had a lot to say about the use of the tongue to utter words, both bad and good, writing in verse 1:26, *"If any man among you seem to be religious, and **bridleth not his tongue**, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain,"* and following that with a lengthy lesson on proper use of the tongue in verses 3:2-11: *"For in many things we offend all (we all offend). If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect (spiritually mature) man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth (wills). Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. **Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet and bitter?"***

Most of what James had to say about the utterances of the tongues of men is negative, but the whole lesson is one teaching the proper use of the tongue. From the strength of his negative warnings a person might be induced to think that total silence is always safe, but such is not the truth. A "bridle" is not designed to only halt the power of the horse, but more often to guide him in the desirable direction in which to apply his power for good purposes. The tongue and its words are to be vehicles of the gospel message, along with other constructive truth.

Silence is not always safe. Knowing the truth *"sets men free,"* Jesus declared. Tragedies result when those who know the truth always remain silent. Yet there is a time to speak, and a time to remain silent, as Solomon declared. It is not always an easy matter to discern the right time and place to do either. Without true wisdom, and more especially without immediate promptings from God's Holy Spirit, we cannot well succeed at either.

A great defender of liberty and noted British statesman of the late 1700's, Edmund Burke, wrote, *"All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."*(quoted from The Book of Man, by William Bennett, page 245.)

I have seen much evil result from people talking too much. One of my son's teachers told his class, *"95% of the people who are doing the talking just need to shut up."* How appropriate for this modern age! He also said, *"A few people make things happen, a lot of people watch things happen, but most people say, 'What happened?'"* TRUE! I appreciated those interjected bits of valuable wisdom.

I have also seen much evil from people talking too little. The common saying, "if you cannot say anything good about someone, don't say anything," is not always wise. It may be good advice to live by most of the time, but there are occasional exceptions of great consequence. When people prove themselves to be dangerously subversive, it is not good to say nothing about it to others. I have seen great harm come to some people and to whole churches from such silence regardless of how well-intentioned it may have been. Paul was not hesitant to warn young pastor Timothy about *"Alexander the Coppersmith,"* or to recount the bad behavior and example of

"*Hymanaeus and Philetus*." (1st Timothy 1:20, 2nd Timothy 4:14-15, & 2nd Timothy 2:17-18) Paul had learned of their treachery and blasphemy by hard experience and his motive was to help Timothy and others to avoid the same kind of treatment. He was issuing a timely warning to a beloved brother rather than gossiping. John was not shy with a truthful report regarding the bad character of "*Diotrephes*" when he wrote to young "*Gaius*." (3rd John 1:9-10) These reports are included in God's inspired word as good examples regarding proper handling of unpleasant truths. However, much wise caution is in order before such warnings. Not only must they be **certainly** known to be true reports, but they must be timely and prudent, not overstated. Confine your report to **known actions** as much as possible **rather than speculation regarding motive**. People can do wickedly at one time and circumstance, and then change for the better. The best people are also hesitant to easily believe an "evil (meaning adverse) report" against others. **Paul's and John's cautions were directed to people who were able to handle the report, and perhaps disseminate it to others only as needed, for the good of the churches and God's cause. Much care is needed to discern who such others are, and the right time and place to speak even to them**, rather than spreading talk indiscriminately where it may be lightly dismissed as only another bit of gossip or received with hostility as malicious. Paul and Barnabas were careful when first taking their good report of revival among Gentile nations to the attention of the Jerusalem church to first confide it "*privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means, I should run, or had run, in vain.*" (Galatians 2:2) The brothers first approached were "*James, Cephas (Peter), and John,*" (Galatians 2:9) who afterward supported Paul's and Barnabas' Gentile ministry before the whole Jerusalem church as detailed in Acts 15:6-29. **Thus great future success came from their prudent handling of the truth.**

Notice that James wrote that **the truly religious man "bridles" his tongue. A bridle is designed not merely to halt the power of a horse, but to guide it aright.** The tongue is a powerful force for good or for evil, for truth or for falsehood, treachery, and subversion. **All words and visible gestures have this capability, whether spoken, written, or portrayed on stage or for electronic media.**

When Alexis de Tocqueville observed and analyzed our American culture in the 1830's, at the pinnacle of American spirituality during the ebb tides of the second "Great Awakening" revival, he identified the "**innumerable journals**" he saw everywhere as a **primary educator of the already incomparably literate citizens of the United States**. Americans had not invented **journalism**, but they were already at that early date making the best use of it, despite its natural liabilities for misuse. Some of us can still remember when each city and town generally had at least two competing newspapers and sometimes more. Citizens in most localities could compare reports of current events from various points of view after which many wise readers could draw a composite and reasonably accurate conclusion of what was really the true report. **Truth** was greatly helped by the fact that the pervasive "religiousness" which Tocqueville also witnessed, greatly admired, and boldly discussed in his books on Democracy in America. "**Scruples**" (careful attention to what is **right and proper**) of the Americans, of both writers and readers, tended to prevent most citizens from writing words which might mislead or maliciously harm fellow citizens. This was not always so, by the very partisan nature of the power of the pen. Word twisting, sophistry, and demagoguery were ancient arts long before the early American experience, but **widespread Biblical Christian values greatly mitigated the common use of falsehood by these means, compared to the present.**

Almost all of these safeguards are a distant memory at present even to us who can remember the last vestiges of real honest reporting. Almost all of the present channels of information are largely controlled by a few powerful sources far removed from local communities receiving their communications, and are plugged with people whose goals are not truth in reporting but rather promotion of some special interest agenda which they intend to impose upon this whole nation and society. **The truth is still out there somewhere, even in abundance, and more accessible than ever, but it will not be so easily found as it was** when many reporters and their editors were sticklers for true reporting. A diligent painstaking search is usually required to find all of the facts of a matter. **Learning the truth of current events will require more will, effort, and Providential guidance than it did in yesteryear.**

Modern journalism, along with book writers and film makers, unfortunately including many **revisionist historians**, are today regularly **obscuring the truth rather than exposing it**. Rather than remaining a primary educator of American citizens they have more often become a primary confuser of the public understanding. **It is harder to find the truth of anything, past or present, amidst all of this false or tainted information. With a**



misconception of what has happened, it becomes harder for citizens to prepare for the future also. More time and effort must be invested, and the direction of God Providentially and Spiritually is needed more than ever.

As recently as my early years, there were prominent dedicated journalists devoted to the truth. When Walter Cronkite said at the end of all his daily reports, "and that is the way it is..." this date, he sincerely meant it to be so! Most of his competing news anchors were close to the same mind. Cronkite's biography does not paint him as a saint. His character was flawed according to strict Christian values, but that does not change the fact that he was a stickler for accuracy in reporting each day's events. That reporting honesty was once the boast of most American journalism, and the American public learned to trust it too much over the years. Any time too much trust is invested in any human agency, be it journalism, academia, governments, or any other, the Devil and his evil forces have a great incentive to infiltrate and subvert it in order to produce evil influence rather than good influence upon the people.

Our early American forefathers regarded all these named - journalism, academia, and governments - essentially as necessary evils. They were never to be trusted too much, yet all had a necessary function in an orderly and productive society. God's immediate input, along with the accrued wisdom of the ages, would always be necessary to safely judge them all.

George Reynolds, my paternal grandfather, born in 1873, had a saying, "Paper is gentle! You can write anything on it." Most Americans prior to the twentieth century maintained a similar skepticism.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1807: "the man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them, inasmuch as he who knows nothing is nearer to the truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors." (From A Basic History of The United States, Volume 2, page 150, by Clarence B. Carson, Ph.D in History from Vanderbilt University - taken from The Political Writings of Thomas Jefferson, edited by Edward Dumbauld, page 95)

Ed Stone, a personal acquaintance, born in 1903, once insisted of a newspaper report, "There has to be some truth in it, or they wouldn't let them print it!" I asked him "who are 'they'?"

Would you believe old Solomon's wise words of truth in the Book of Ecclesiastes, or David's, which were written after his bad behavior concerning Bathsheba and Uriah? Is not the truth still the truth regardless of its source and channel?

Whose ultimate responsibility is it for you to know the truth?

### HOW TO PROPERLY HANDLE THE TRUTH

First, apply it to ourselves for proper self-examination and humility. Conform to it as much as possible with God's earnestly solicited help. Recognize that the truth is better than any man, or any church for that matter. Realize that it requires the help of God to apply it properly.

Learn to recognize truth from whatever source or channel it may come. Failure to do this limits our knowledge and understanding, as well as our weaponry against falsehood. Paul did not hesitate to use truths uttered or written by heathen sources when preaching to heathen audiences, by correctly applying it to his gospel message. Examples: Quoting the Cretian poet to Titus regarding the characteristically flawed character of his own people; and ingeniously employing the Athenian idol's inscription to introduce them to the God they confessed they did not know. Quoting Hebrew Scriptures to the Athenians would likely have meant nothing to any of them. His bold declaration of his experimental knowledge of the Most High God, whom they had publicly confessed was "unknown" to them, won the hearing of a few.

God forbid that any of us should use our recognition of **the fact that the truth is better than any or all of us** as an excuse for making a poor effort to conform ourselves to it, but, the **recognition that the truth is the truth regardless of its source or channel is a wise one which often has a useful benefit.**

We should **be careful about quoting such an untrustworthy source of channel lest we give the hearer a false impression that we are endorsing the person or agency rather than a certain true statement,** because the next advice coming from this same source of channel might be totally false.

We must recognize that most people of this world may allow any of our perceived misbehavior to negate all the good advice we might offer, even to their own detriment. That is the way of the unregenerate inhabitants of this world, and too often also of carnal, Spiritually immature, children of God. **The devils help with this confusion by making certain that skeptics perceive every fault in the speaker** so as to negate whatever truth he is capable of conveying. For the glory of God and the benefit of mankind, we must not allow this to happen.

Nothing convinces the unbeliever as well as a powerful anointing of the Holy Spirit upon the speaker, but **it is truth which even He is witnessing,** as a second witness to the hearer. **We must never be content without such anointings upon our ministry.** We need them **frequently,** if we are to have much success. Sheer eloquence, though it be ever so loaded with excellent truths well spoken, is never sufficient for the glorious gospel committed to our trust as true churches. **Our ultimate purpose is that the truth of all things be believed, and understood, for the proper honoring of God, and the good of mankind.**