

The Truth: God's Reality

An Examination of the Necessity of God in all Matters of Life

Pastor Timothy Hoelscher

In John 18:37-38, Jesus told Pilate, "I testify to the truth. Everyone who is from the Truth hears my voice." Pilate responded, "What is truth?" Pilate's response is common among mankind. Paul wrote of women¹ who are always learning but never able come to a full knowledge of truth (2 Timothy 3:7). In both cases the failure stems from the rejection of God's authority and work. Believers and unbelievers alike have this problem with different consequences. These individuals suffer the consequences of rejecting the Truth regarding God. Acknowledging the Truth regarding God has benefits for both types of individuals.

The Truth is a specific truth regarding God. At the heart of the Truth is the fact that God alone is God. An aspect of the Truth is that God alone is capable of accomplishing most significant, righteous activities. Therefore, an aspect of the Truth addresses the unbeliever, confronting him with the reality of God and what God alone can do to save him. Another aspect of the Truth addresses the believer, directing him to live as though he can do nothing righteous apart from God. This realization should drive the believer to depend upon God exactly as God has revealed in His Word. Furthermore, the Truth will reveal how the believer can experience freedom from his sin nature. This is a refinement in what Scripture means by the Truth.²

In this paper, I intend to examine the specific teaching termed, the Truth. To accomplish this, I will consider the definition of truth. I will consider this definition as it applies to God's, as a divine attribute and attempt a definition or definitions which explain its various uses. I then will consider passages in which God develops the meaning and nuances of the Truth. I will not look at every occurrence of the word truth or the expression the Truth, but focus on those which illustrate the nature of this doctrine. It is hoped that this study will help us clarify our understanding of the Truth, and by that clarity affect the way we relate to God in our lives.

Truth defined

Our English word "truth" translates the Greek *alētheia*.³ This is truth as an idea and derives from the adjective "true" which translates *alēthēs*. This adjective is comprised of an "(alpha privative and *lēthō*... literally, *not hidden, unconcealed*)." ⁴ The verbs *lēthō* and the form *lanthanō* involve the actions of concealing or allowing something to escape or miss one's attention. Therefore, our noun *alētheia* originally having the idea of that which is not hidden, at the time of the New Testament indicated "1. *that which has not only the name and semblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name...* 2. *equivalent to alēthēs, true, veracious, sincere,*"⁵ Related to the verb *lanthanō* truth means that one does not allow reality to escape his attention. Some while seeing a reality choose to let that reality escape their attention, as Peter wrote, "And saying, 'Where is the promise of His presence, for from the when the Father's slept, all things continue

¹ Feminine participles *μανθανοντα* and *δυναμενα*.

² I wrote a paper on the Truth, [The Truth: A Doctrinal Word-study](#) in the mid-90's. I did not date the paper. The present paper is not a revision, but return to the subject matter to tease out some refinements in definition.

³ This is the feminine noun *αληθεια*.

⁴ J.H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Formatted and hypertexted by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 1.6.

⁵ *ibid*.

in this way from a beginning of creation. For this escapes their attention, their wanting it so, that heavens were from of old and earth from water and through water is stands together by God's word" (2 Peter 3:4-5). These do not operate by truth because they do not wish to see reality. Truth is reality and reality properly recognized, properly appraised.

That which is described as true is genuine as opposed to false or fake, it indicates that which is accurate rather than misleading. Therefore, Paul had sworn off the shameful hidden things, and did not operate by means craftiness or anything misleading in the manner he handled the Word from God, but by plain visibleness from the truth (2 Corinthians 4:2). The word "craftiness" indicates the use of any means necessary to reach one's goal, and "deceit" is that which uses bait to mislead.⁶ Truth does not bait others nor does it use any means at its disposal to accomplish its purpose. We could say that when Paul presented the good news, what people saw or heard was what they would receive; he was genuine.

Truth as an expression of certainty can be seen in phrases such as *ep alētheias*.⁷ Translated literally "upon truth" this prepositional phrase, occurring seven times, acts as an adverb, "truly." Men who approached Jesus claimed, "the way of the God you teach **truly**" (Mark 12:14). Though attempting to catch Jesus in a chargeable offense, they credited Him with teaching accurately, though they probably didn't think this themselves. Coming to Cornelius' house and household, Peter stated, "**Truly**, I understand that God is not one of partiality" (Acts 10:34). In these instance the speakers acknowledge the accuracy or truth of another's words.

Truth as accurate and not deceptive

As Paul contrasted the unbeliever's way of life to how believers ought to live, he said concerning the unbeliever's lifestyle, "but you have not learned the Christ in this way" (Ephesians 4:20). Christ had given gifts, some of which involved teaching (Ephesians 4:8, 11). The Ephesians had heard Christ and were taught by Him through the teaching of those gifted to teach." What they learned about the Christ was accurate, for truth is in Jesus (Ephesians 4:21). Jesus, speaking through these men, spoke accurately. Jesus always speaks truth. He never spoke with hidden, underlying motives intended to mislead anyone.

When the believer takes the armor of God to defend against Satan's attack, he first puts on "the girdle of truth" (Ephesians 6:14). Because Satan acts to deceive, no one can hope to fend off Satan's attack unless he/she first responds to Satan's deception. Therefore, the believer first takes a proper or accurate view of his circumstances and choices. This is the belt of truth.

Truth as genuine

People can learn what an activity is supposed to look like and then mimic that activity. They go through the motions but the actions are not genuine. So Jesus told the Samaritan woman that God desires those who worship Him to do so in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). Truth indicates that it is genuine. Making right claims regarding God may or may not by genuine worship. If a believer does so in appreciation for God's character or to encourage others to appreciate that character, it may be genuine worship. If a believer makes such claims to impress other believers or himself with his knowledge, it isn't. A believer can learn what love looks like and mimic the activity, hence the action is not genuine love. So John charges believers to love by means of work and truth (1 John 3:18). Colossians 1:6 does not speak of the

⁶ The first word is *panourgia* πανουργια and is always negative. The second *doloō* δολοω. This latter word once meant to bait into a trap. *Doloō* seems to also involve the mixing of some truth with error, where truth is the bait.

⁷ επ αληθειας

initial salvation of the Colossians, but of that time in their Christian experience when they came to really know the grace of God in truth, or the grace of God in reality as opposed to a twisted inaccurate portrayal of God's grace.

Truth as an Attribute of God

God is truth. God defines truth, truth does not define God as though truth were an external standard imposed upon God's nature. He is a God of truth, so that those who are His servants find Him faithful to His promises (Isaiah 65:16; cf. Psalm 31:5). He is the true God in contrast to false gods and idols (Jeremiah 10:10-12; 1 Thessalonians 1:9). H.L. Schafer defined this attribute of God, "Truth is that divine attribute of God by virtue of which each Person of the Godhead fully answers to His estimate of what He is. He sees Himself and others as they really are."⁸ Charles Ryrie writes, "To say that God is true is to say, in the most comprehensive sense, that He is consistent with Himself, that he is all that He should be, that He has revealed Himself as He really is and that He and His revelation are completely reliable."⁹ On the absolute eternal level, God being truth means that nothing about His own character and being ever escapes His attention, therefore, God is absolutely what He knows Himself to be. God's attribute of truth is distinct from but related to omniscience. With omniscience God knows all things. By truth God knows accurately and operates appropriately. As a result, everything God says is true and He is faithful to everything He promised; He cannot lie (2 Samuel 7:28; Revelation 19:9; Hebrews 6:18). God deceives no one including Himself. He is genuine about all things towards all including Himself. God is truth.

God's Truth Contrasted to Satan's Lie

God's truth, His genuineness and accurate appraisal of Himself and all things contrasts strikingly to Satan. Jesus said to the Jews, "You are from *your* father the devil and the cravings of your father you desire to do. That one was a man-slayer from a beginning and he was not standing in the Truth, because truth is not in him. Whenever he speaks the lie, he speaks from his own things, because he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). Ezekiel 28:17 states the he (the devil) was lifted up because of his beauty and he corrupted his wisdom by reason of his splendor. Though he was the seal or pinnacle of perfection within God's creation, he thought he was even more than he was. He estimated himself higher than he was. Isaiah writes of his self-estimation, "I will ascend the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will cause myself to be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13b-14). To Adam and Eve he said, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Always the liar, Satan does not see God properly, does not see himself properly, and does not see any other part of creation properly. His estimation is distorted by his own aims. While he is a wily and immensely intelligent adversary, his failure to see reality (truth) will lead to nothing good.

The Truth: The definite article

The Greek word *alētheia* occurs over one hundred times in the New Testament, and over half of these occurrences are articular- *hē alētheia*¹⁰ "the truth." The Greek uses the definite article to

⁸ H.L. Schafer, *Maturing in Christ*, (Xulon Press, 2010) p. 16.

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986) p. 44.

¹⁰ η αληθεια - nominative singular, της αλαθειας - Genitive, Ablative singular, τη αληθεια - Locative, Instrumental and Dative singular, την αλαθειαν - the Accusative singular

indicate specificity.¹¹ The article may indicate specifically a truth previously mentioned by the writer. It may indicate specifically one inferred in a context. It may indicate specifically one as opposed the general idea of a thing. The New Testament word “truth” occurs over fifty times with the definite article, and each occurrence must be evaluated in its context to determine if it refers to this doctrine.

Not every occurrence of *hē alētheia* refers to the Truth as this specific doctrine (i.e. the topic of this paper). In Romans 2:20, Paul addresses the unbelieving religious legalist. This individual has convinced himself that he is a leader for the blind and that he can train others in the Law (Mosaic). This one has the form of the experiential knowledge and the truth which is in the Law. While this could be a reference to the Truth,¹² it seems rather that Paul meant the specific truth in the Law as opposed to truth in general. In presenting God’s Word, Paul did not resort to craftiness or guile. Craftiness involved resorting to any means of deception so one could accomplish his end. Guile is deceit that baits so as to reach one’s desired goal. Paul did neither but operated by the plain visibleness of the truth (2 Corinthians 4:2). Paul never wished to tweak or adjust doctrine so as to bait individuals into adhering to his teaching or becoming dedicated to Paul and his ministry. In John 16:7 Jesus told the eleven disciples that He had spoken the truth to them. Everything Jesus said and taught was true. In this instance, “truth” has the article because Jesus was not referring to all He had said or taught but specifically to how beneficial it would be for Him to leave and send to them the Holy Spirit. Each of these occurrences have the definite article but specify a particular truth in each context.

The Truth Introduced

John begins His gospel by establishing the deity of the Word, the second Person of the Godhead. John purposed to record the glory he witnessed during Jesus’ earthly life, the glory of the Word become flesh, the special/unique One full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Through the remainder of the book, John expects his readers to recognize God’s grace and truth in Jesus’ activities. So John explains the significance of this grace and truth, “the Law **was given** through Moses, the grace and the ‘Truth’ **came to be** through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Of the Law, John wrote, “it was given” using the verb *didōmi* [δίδωμι], while of the grace and the truth, John used the verb *ginomai* [γίνομαι] meaning “to come into existence.”¹³ Note that Moses did not originate the Law, but was the channel¹⁴ through which God gave the Law to Israel.

¹¹ Greek has no indefinite article. The absence of the article is not equivalent to an indefinite article. It emphasizes quality. John 1:1 illustrates the use of both the presence and absence of the article. “Word” is always definite, emphasizing “the Word” distinct from anything or one to which the word “word” might be applied. However, the first occurrence of “God” is definite and the latter is indefinite. The definite article in the first occurrence emphasizes the specificity, God the Father not anything or one which might be called god. In the last instance “God” is indefinite, emphasizing the quality or nature of being God in contrast to a specific person identified as God. Dana and Mantey note, “The use of the articular and anarthrous constructions of θεος is highly instructive. A study of the uses of the term as given in Moulton and Geden’s *Concordance* convinces one that without the article θεος signifies divine essence, while with the article divine personality is chiefly in view.” H.E. Dana, and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1955) p. 140.

¹² If it is specific, and I doubt that it is, it would be the Truth of what only God could do, contrasted to Israel’s failure under the law, Israel’s presumption that he could do, “All that the Lord’s says.”

¹³ William Mounce, *Concise Greek-English Dictionary to the New Testament*, edited by William D. Mounce with Rick D. Bennett, Jr. Copyright © 2011 <http://www.tekna.com/greek-dictionary>, Accordance edition hypertexted and formatted by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 3.2. See also Abbott-Smith, op cit, p. 92.

¹⁴ δια - dia

However, Jesus Christ was the channel through which the grace and the Truth originated. The grace and the Truth originated with God the Father. This can be seen Ephesians 3:2 where our rule of life comes from “the God” [του Θεου], the article emphasizing a specific person, in this case the Father. The grace and the truth manifested something about God’s glory, God’s reputation, and this was manifested by God the Son, God in flesh.

John emphasized specific grace and specific truth, “the grace and the truth.” John does not state that grace and truth as qualities came into existence through Jesus Christ. Grace and truth existed before the Word became flesh. John is concerned with the grace as a way of life, specifically this dispensation or house-rule for the Church, the body of Christ. Likewise, the Truth also characterizes the way of life for New Testament believers. This specific aspect of truth was not an Old Testament reality but part of the attitude necessary for New Testament believers to live in keeping with God’s revelation of this grace way of life.

The Grace Began in Acts Two

The grace as a way of life did not begin during Christ’s earthly ministry. The dispensation of grace did not begin until the foundation of the Church was laid and the Spirit began to place believers into the body of Christ. This began on the day of Pentecost in Acts two. At the same time the Spirit began placed believers into Christ, He also began to regenerate them. Both of these works were new, and both are foundational to life by grace. Therefore, the grace as a way of life began after the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

John states that the grace came into being through Jesus Christ, but He did not state that it came into being as a way of life during Jesus’ earthly ministry. The gospel of John records many works of Jesus which exemplify this way of life by grace. Consider the lame man at the pool in John five. Jesus’ words in John 5:14, “Sin no more, that nothing worse happens to you” seem to imply that the man was lame due to his own personal sin. Jesus offered Himself as the bread of life to a crowd concerned only with filling their bellies with real bread in John six. Jesus refused to condemn the woman taken in adultery, but also charged her to go and sin no more in John eight. Each of these constitute just a sample of God’s grace exhibited through Jesus Christ. John told us in his introduction that they saw Him full of grace and truth. We should expect to see examples of both, and John does not have to remind us each time, “that was grace” or “that was truth.”

In the same way that this grace was exhibited by Jesus Christ but did not begin as a way of life until after His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, so also the Truth was exhibited, but did not begin as part of our way of life until this present dispensation and age had begun, in fact we could say they began at the same time.

The Truth is largely a New Testament teaching. The Old Testament presents God as Truth and being true (Isaiah 65:16). Truth like grace has always been around, but this aspect of the Truth is newly revealed. Paul and Jesus referred the Truth back to prior events, but the doctrine was not articulated prior to the time of Christ and not given explanation until Paul.

The Truth contrasted to the Lie

The Lie is the opposite of the Truth and helps define the Truth by contrast. Not every reference to the Truth is about New Testament believers. Romans one relates **the Truth** to unbelievers of the past. Paul states that a quality or sample of God’s wrath (anger) is revealed

upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who are suppressing¹⁵ **the truth** by means of unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). Both the verb “revealed” and the participle “suppressing” are in the present tense. Though Paul will look at the past to explain this problem, it is on going. People today suppress the Truth by means of unrighteousness. In the following verses, Paul develops the kind of unrighteousness used to suppress the Truth, by referring to man’s response in history. At a time in the past, though evidence of God was all around them, mankind did not give or treat God in keeping with His reputation (i.e. “glory”) and they were not thankful (Romans 1:21). Instead, they became empty in their reasonings, while they considered themselves to be wise, they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God by means of that of corruptible created things (vv. 22-23). Like Satan, they replaced God with the creature. This was their unrighteousness, by means of which they suppressed the Truth about God; they replaced Him. If one can treat creation as god, one does not have to face (at least in his mind) the reality of the one true God. Paul added that they **exchanged the Truth regarding the God by means of the lie** and worshipped and did priestly service to the creature instead of¹⁶ the Creator (v. 25). Recall that Satan is the father of the Lie. He is the one who originated the idea that he could be like God and that he could go and do what God alone does. Romans 1:25 demonstrates that the devil has convinced mankind of this same lie.

If the Lie asserts that the creature can be the Creator, can do what only the Creator can, deserves the worship due to God, and therefore does not need the Creator, then the Truth is the opposite. The Truth confronts us with God’s absolute uniqueness, for no other is truly God. The Truth confronts us with God’s absolute accuracy in all He says verbally or by action. The Truth confronts us with God’s worthiness of our worship. The Truth also confronts us with our limitations. In part, the Truth maintains the distinction between Creator and creature.

During the first part of the future day of the Lord, some of unsaved humanity will worship a man identified as the man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11). Those who are easily deceived did not receive previously a love of **the Truth** that they should be saved (v. 10). Prior to the day of the Lord, these people were presented with the truth of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done to provide for their salvation. They rejected what was said about Him and rejected His death for their sins so they could be forgiven and righteous with God. Any time an individual rejects the gospel, the creature is telling the Creator something like, “I don’t need you to do this for me. I can do it myself” or “I reject that I need anything.” That response might take a variety of forms including some religious acknowledgement of God and Christ, or it may involve an overt rejection of God’s existence. Whatever expression it takes, they did not believe **the Truth**, they did not submit to the reality of who God alone is and what God alone can do. So, God will send an error which will work within them so they believe the Lie in the form of this future man. They will accept this man of lawlessness as god (v. 4). Again, the Truth versus the Lie involves the matter that God alone is God, versus the notion that the creature can replace God and do what only God can do.

Since the Truth is about God, Who He alone is and what He alone can do, to disobey the Truth is a refusal to acknowledge that fact either by word and/or conduct. In Romans 2, Paul established the lostness of all men. Having outlined man’s response to God in the past, he demonstrates that man continues down this path. God “will repay each one according to his

¹⁵ The verb is *κατεχω* [*katechō*], listed by G. Abbott-Smith under definition 2, “to hold back, detain, restrain.” op cit., p. 241. This is the emphasis in Paul’s usage in Romans 1:18.

¹⁶ *Para* [παρά] can be “along side” and “beyond, against, contrary to” ibid, p. 337.

works” (Romans 2:6). Paul then gives two scenarios.¹⁷ First, in verse seven we have those who measured by patience consisting of a good work are seeking glory, honor and incorruption. They are **not** seeking these for themselves, but for God. Paul used the terms glory and incorruptible in chapter one to describe man’s failure regarding God: they didn’t give Him glory, they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for that of corruptible creatures. Though honor is not used in chapter one, their actions demonstrate that they did not value God as God. So in Romans 2:8 those who receive wrath and anger have operated from selfish ambition¹⁸ and have disobeyed the Truth and obeyed the unrighteousness. Paul first cites selfish ambition as part of their problem, and we might define it, “Everything is about me.” In some ways that’s a synopsis of the Lie applied personally. Self ambition is the opposite of the Truth because it fails to recognize that it is or should be about God, not about me, not about what I want, not about what I can do, but about what God can do. Second, they disobey the Truth. “Obey” indicates that something is required of one who hears or learns of the Truth: acknowledgement in attitude and/or action of who God is and what He alone can do. Disobedience would then be the refusal to acknowledge God’s uniqueness both in identity and ability. They disobey the Truth by obeying the unrighteousness. “Obeying” is an instrumental participle in the middle voice. Instrumental means that obeying the unrighteousness is the how or the means by which they disobeyed the Truth. The unrighteousness refers to the unrighteousness described in Romans one, an extensive list of which Paul gives in 1:29-32. The middle voice emphasizes personal interest, benefit and/or involvement in the action. These people obey the unrighteousness because they have an interest in it; they see it as benefiting them in some manner. They consider themselves better off being the masters of their fate than learning to rely upon the all-powerful God. In this context, Paul is proving why men are lost, and therefore, no one seeks those things which promote the uniqueness of God, but rather pursue those things which they errantly think are beneficial to them. They like the Lie better than the Truth.

This passage helps refine our understanding of the Truth by contrast. The Truth does not involve our selfish ambition. It is not all about what we can get out of it. The Truth also will seek for God what is alone God’s (Romans 2:7). Because the Truth recognizes who God is, it will seek God’s glory not our own. It will seek God’s honor, not our own. It will seek to maintain God’s incorruptible nature, rather than trying to make or imagine God like us. All these are done within the context of patience characterized by a good work.¹⁹ Note, in this text, “good work” is singular, though in nearly every other occurrence it involves plural good works.²⁰ However, in Philippians 1:6, Paul refers to a good work begun in the believers by God, a work He is confident that God will carry through to completion, not a work he expects the

¹⁷ Many Bible students have stumbled over this passage and thereby have confused the gospel and God’s means of salvation. W.E. Vine lists five points which avoid this problem, and they are based on the context of the passage and the testimony of God’s Word regarding salvation. His first point will suffice, “Now (1) the subject of the whole passage is not the means of obtaining eternal life, but the righteous judgment of God against man’s sin, and in this respect what is mentioned in verses 8 and 9, as to the punishment of those who do not obey the truth, is perfectly consistent with the teaching of the rest of Scripture on the subject.” *The Collected Works of W.E. Vine, Vol. I*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996) p. 338.

¹⁸ *eritheia* εριθεια

¹⁹ I take the Genitive *εργου αγαθου* as a Genitive of description describing the patience. The NASB and NIV translates this “doing good”, the AV and ESV “well-doing”, the NET “good works” all of which miss the point.

²⁰ Though not always in the plural, even when in the singular the expression is preceded by the adjective “every” [πας] thus considering more than one good work.

Philippians to finish. In Romans 2:7, the patience is the believer's and it is characterized by a good work, God's good work. Not only is the Truth contrasted to that which seeks things for or pertaining to one's self, but it is characterized by patience which reflects God's good work in the believer.

For the unsaved, the gospel of salvation is the Truth (Ephesians 1:13). The Ephesians had heard the word (message) consisting of the Truth, and having believed they were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise. To reiterate, the Truth confronts the unsaved with the reality of his or her sin, the reality of God's judgment, and the reality of what Jesus Christ has done to secure both our forgiveness and our righteousness. In Colossians 1:5, Paul also refers to the word of the Truth, the gospel. While the Ephesians passages clearly refers to initial salvation (hearing → believing → being sealed),²¹ Colossians 1:5 appears to involve a present tense aspect to this message involving a hope laid up for the believer. That hope does not appear to be the hope of being forgiven and declared righteous, but the hope of exercising faith and love among the saints (Colossians 1:4). This may demonstrate that the Truth first confronts the unbeliever with his need and God's work, and then upon believing, the believer's need and God's work. It does not involve all the same details but the general message is the same.

The Truth and the New Testament Believer: Freedom from the Sin Nature

While the Truth has an application to the unsaved, most references regarding the Truth are for the sake of the believer's life. Jesus revealed that the Truth brings freedom. He was speaking to a group of Jews in their temple (John 8:2).²² He told them that they needed to believe that He is God, "Believe that I AM" (John 8:24). Some of this group believed in Him (v. 30). Jesus encouraged these new believers to continue being at ease²³ in or comfortable with His words. Many Bible interpreters believe that those answering Jesus are the same ones who believed in Him in verse 30. These interpreters then describe this smaller group as exercising spurious or shallow faith. One writer states, "The validity of the belief referred to here seems questionable."²⁴ However, the importance which John places on believing would suggest that John does not use this term lightly. It is preferable that the negative questioning came from the unbelievers in the crowd. So F.F. Bruce adds, "The Polemical tone of the exchange which now follows between Jesus and his hearers makes it difficult to think of those hearers as confined to the Jews who had newly believed in him."²⁵ It is believers to whom Jesus spoke the charge to continue at ease and the promise of knowing the Truth.

Jesus promised these believers that they would come to know the Truth and it would free them (vv. 31-32). Most commentators understand the Truth to be Christ's teachings,²⁶ gospel embodied in Christ,²⁷ the Lord Jesus Christ himself.²⁸ Refreshingly, C.E. Stuart catches Christ's intent, "Now this, which is Christian teaching, is set forth at length in Rom. vi., vii. The law

²¹ The Spirit seals believers into Christ at the moment of initial salvation, not at a later time.

²² I accept these first verses as part of the original text though they are omitted from the earliest manuscripts.

²³ *menō* [μενω]

²⁴ Merrill Tenney, *John in The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) p. 84, and so the majority of commentators.

²⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) p. 197.

²⁶ J. Carl Laney, *John*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) p. 163.

²⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) p. 348.

²⁸ A.C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of John* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1965) p. 162.

could never promise that freedom for the Jews. Grace alone can for those, who, believing on the Lord Jesus, own Him as their life, and learn practically the blessed result of being in Him who has died, reckoning themselves dead indeed unto sin. Over such sin shall not have dominion; for they are not under law, but under grace (Rom. vi. 14)."²⁹ This is part of the Truth and it is tied to Christ Jesus Himself being the Truth, but it needs further articulation.

Not the believers, to whom Jesus has just spoken, but the unbelievers responded to Jesus, "We are Abraham's descendants and at no time have we ever been enslaved to anyone. How do you say, 'you will become free ones?'" (John 8:33). The verb "enslaved" is a Pluperfect form, indicating, "That state of being continued up to some point in the past and then presumably ceased."³⁰ So an expanded translation which reflects this would be, "At no time in our past have we ever been enslaved so as to have remained slaves and obviously we are not slaves now." This may not be the Lie but it is a lie. Israel had been enslaved on numerous occasions. In the first covenant with Abraham, God foretold the enslavement³¹ of Abraham's descendants (Genesis 15:13). When God brought them out of Egypt, it was "from the house of slavery" (Exodus 13:3, 14; 20:2). Israel had been slaves to the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:9). God viewed Israel's exile as slavery (Isaiah 14:1-3; Jeremiah 30:8; Ezekiel 34:27)). Even when Judah returned to the land from exile in Babylon and Persia, because they remained under the control of the Persians, they viewed this as slavery (Nehemiah 9:36). This last instance continued under the Greeks and then the Romans who controlled their land at very time Jesus spoke to this crowd. Either these Jews did not know their own history, were in denial, or reacted negatively to Jesus' promise. By denying they needed any freedom, they held to the Lie.

Though His audience thought Jesus referred to social or political freedom, Jesus meant spiritual freedom (John 8:32). He clarified that "everyone doing **the sin** is a slave of **the sin**" (v. 34). Occurring 173 times in the New Testament, the sin is the lawlessness (1 John 3:3-4). Sin is the arrogant refusal to acknowledge God's right to place any limits or any boundaries upon an individual. Sin is the act which rises from one's arrogant attitude toward God, "You're not the boss of me." The word "sin" with the article occurs seventy-seven times and of these, forty-one are in the singular.³² Examining these occurrences in the singular demonstrates not a reference to a single act of sin, but to a sin nature.³³ Paul treats it almost like an entity (it is not) which "took opportunity through the commandment", "worked death," "indwelt" Paul, and "reigned" (Romans 7:8, 13, 17, 20; 5:21; 6:12). We use the added term "nature" to clarify that "the sin" is not a separate being, but part of our nature. This sin nature dwells in our flesh as it is the twisted, perverted cravings of our nature (Romans 7:17-18). For example, God created Adam and gave him real desires: sex, God, food. When Adam chose to be his own god, instead of depending upon the only true God, he bent those desires. So within the works of the flesh are perversions of the God-given desire for sex. We find idolatry and superstition which displaced the God-given desire for God. Drunkenness twists the God-given desire to eat and drink. Each of the works of the flesh could be traced back to a proper desire created in Adam. Adam was responsible for the entrance of the sin nature into the world, "by one man **the sin**

²⁹ Clarence Esme Stuart, *Tracings from the Gospel of John*, (London: E. Marlborough & Co, nd) p. 196.

³⁰ James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979) p. 98.

³¹ The NASB's "They will be enslaved" is the Qal perfect form of עָבַד "to serve as a slave," therefore, "they will serve them as slaves." The rendering of the AV and ESV better represents the Hebrew text.

³² 10x in the Nominative, 15X in the Genitive/Ablative, 7x Locative, Instrumental, Dative, 9x in the Accusative.

³³ Exceptions: Acts 7:60; John 1:29 (this could refer to either one); 9:41 (previous reference); James 1:15 (p.r.).

nature entered the world and **the death** (spiritual) by it” (Romans 5:12). Even unsaved people become frustrated with slavery to the sin nature, as Paul refers to “the sufferings pertaining to the sins” (Romans 7:5). The tense of the participle “doing” in John 8:34 is present emphasizing continued activity, at that moment, a way of life. People who operate in their sin nature are slaves of the sin nature and are not at ease in the house (John 8:34-35). Therefore, for believers alone, Jesus promised freedom from this sin *nature*.

In the context of John eight, Jesus did not explain the full means of that freedom, but He would affect it in some way (John 8:36). His promise of freedom refers to both the freedom at times within the Christian life and the full-freedom believers will experience in the future. Jesus did not promise a freedom as presented by Pentecostal/Holiness teachers, who promise a second blessing consisting of eradication of the sin nature. Such an eradication would deny other Scriptures written by John (he recorded these words of Jesus). John wrote that we can neither deny that we have sin nor can we claim that we have not sinned³⁴ (1 John 1:8, 10). Both are lies and both are the opposite of the Truth.

To His believing disciples (the eleven), Jesus revealed Himself to be the Truth (John 14:6). In John 8, Jesus had promised that if those who believed in Him continued at ease in His words, they would know the Truth. These eleven had done so. So Jesus begins to explain the Truth to them; I AM the Way, **the Truth**, and the Life. Though His disciples do not appear at that moment to have understood what He meant, this statement clarifies that the Truth is not some teaching which is separate from Jesus Christ Himself. Rather He Himself is the Truth, that Truth which would free them.

Freedom from the sin nature rests upon Christ’s death for our sins, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven and His present seated position at the Father’s right hand. In this, He is the Truth as in John 14:6. God chose Paul to be the one through whom He would explain the details of the Truth. Paul wrote Romans to stabilize believers (Romans 1:11; 16:25). The believer’s ongoing problem with his or her sin nature often becomes an obstacle to stability. For this reason, Paul pointed out God’s means of freedom as well as God’s response to the sin nature. He explains that when the sin nature increases, the grace really increases (Romans 5:20). Some might think that being comfortable in the sin nature is good because it would seem to imply that we will get more grace (Romans 6:1). However, Paul points to God’s work to demonstrate the illogicalness of this response. We were baptized or put into Christ’s death and His resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). Sadly, many Christians understand baptism in this passage to mean water baptism. This would make baptism our work, because we are the one’s who submit to it. However, Paul meant Spirit baptism, or the work of the Spirit Who placed believers into Christ even into Christ’s death and burial. This baptism is solely God’s work, not ours and not experiential. Being in Christ’s death and resurrection, we shared in Christ’s death to the sin nature (v. 10). Christ had no sin nature, but for the last three hours upon the cross, the Father imputed our sins and our sinful natures to Him (cf 2 Corinthians 5:21). The Father logically counts us to have shared in Christ’s death to the sin nature. So Romans 6:11, Paul encouraged believers to logically count themselves to be dead ones to the sin nature but living ones to God **in Christ Jesus**. This is God’s means of freedom from the sin nature. He provides the freedom. We cannot free ourselves. God alone makes this freedom possible.

However, many Christians do no avail themselves of God’s provision for experiencing this freedom from the sin nature. Many Christians turn to a set of rules, a law system of some sort to provide freedom or to render one’s self acceptable to God. So, in Romans seven Paul

³⁴ This is a perfect tense, “I don’t sin with the result that I do not...”

rehearses his own experience of failure following salvation.³⁵ Paul wished to do a good thing, His sin nature countered with a desire, he did what the sin nature wanted. Paul recognized this as a law or principle that whenever he desired to do good, evil was present with him (Romans 7:21). He concluded this experience with the summary, “I am a miserable man. Who will rescue me out of the body characterized by this death” (Romans 7:24). Paul’s first two points relate to this kind of experience: I’m not condemned in Christ, the Spirit frees me from the principle of sin (Romans 8:1-2). The Spirit frees us from this cycle of the sin nature. The Spirit leads the believer to his position in Christ as one dead to the sin nature but living to God (Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18). The one who follows the Spirit’s lead is walking by the Spirit (Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:17). By walking according to the Spirit, by following the Spirit’s lead to his position in Christ, the believer is putting to death the practices of the body by means of the Spirit (Romans 8:13). This simple explanation reveals the details of the Truth which is based upon Christ’s work. Christ spoke of what the Truth would accomplish, but Paul revealed the specific bases of the Truth. We can follow the Spirit’s lead to our position in Christ, but we do not affect our own freedom: the Spirit does.

The Spirit of the Truth

In the Upper Room, Jesus referred to the Spirit three times as the Spirit of the Truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The genitive “of the Truth” characterizes the Spirit by His relationship to the Truth. 14:16-17 are one sentence, in which Jesus identified the Spirit of the Truth as the Helper (ESV, NASB, NKJV, John 14:16). The AV and ASV translates the noun *Paraklētōs* “Comforter”, the NET and NIV “advocate.” The noun occurs four times of the Spirit in John and one time of Jesus Christ in 1 John 2:1. The use in 1 John has a distinct meaning from that in John.³⁶ “Helper” is appropriate in John, however we should not think of it as one aiding us or assisting in something which is a little too difficult for us. Rather, the Spirit Helps by doing what we could not otherwise do at all. In John 14:26 He teaches and reminds the disciples of what Jesus said. In John 15:26 He witnesses concerning Christ. In John 16:7ff, He convinces the world of their need to believe in Jesus Christ. The Spirit is the Helper.

In John 14:16-17, the Spirit of the Truth helps as Christ previously helped, except that in this case He indwells: shall be in you. His indwelling presence makes possible for believers what would otherwise be impossible. This promise seems tied to the statement in verse fifteen regarding loving Christ and keeping His commands. Christ’s command was to love in the manner which He loved the disciples (John 13:34). Christ’s kind of love³⁷ would be impossible, but the Spirit produces fruit within believers, the first part of which is love (Galatians 5:22). Next, Jesus promised that the Spirit of the Truth, the Helper would testify (witness) about Him (Jesus Christ) (John 15:26). In the next verse He told the disciples that they also would be

³⁵ Many Christian teachers treat Romans seven as the experience of the unsaved. Because most Christians teach that the Law is not in effect for initial salvation but remains in effect for daily living, they cannot understand this chapter as a failure in Christian experience. It doesn’t fit their theology. Romans seven involves event when Paul was living without law and the sin nature lived again (Romans 7:9). The sin nature did not merely come to life, but lived again-*αναζωω* [*anazaō*].

³⁶ John uses *Paraklētōs* in 1 John 2:1 with its legal sense of one called to Help as a character witness. He is Jesus Christ the Righteous, He is our righteousness even when we sin.

³⁷ Christ altered the emphasis of *agapé* though it had no special meaning prior to this time. Jesus changed the word meaning by referring it to the kind of love He exercised toward the disciples. *Agapé* was a distinct term but did not have that great of a distinction from other terms until this time. Unbelieving Greek-speakers did not change the way they used this word, because the command was only for believers.

witnesses because they had been with Him from a beginning. They could testify to what they had seen. We cannot do this, because we did not see those acts of God the Son in flesh. This where the Spirit's work enters in. Through believers, the Spirit is able to give witness to who Jesus Christ is. John later wrote in 1 John 5:6 that the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the Truth. He gives witness to the reality of Jesus being both spiritually alive (water: tied to the Spirit in the gospel of John 3:3, 6; 4:13-15; 7:37-39; 19:28) and physically alive (blood: not at present, but the antichrist denied that He has come in flesh). We speak that truth, but the Spirit is the one who witnesses to that reality. Finally, Jesus applied this description to the Spirit in John 16:13-14. He would lead the disciples into all the Truth and in so doing, He would glorify the Son. Jesus could not explain to His disciples all that was about to happen. Remember the Truth provides freedom as the Spirit leads us to our shared position in Christ: His death, burial, resurrection and seated position, a reality the disciples could not handle at the time. The Spirit does not lead believers to Himself, but to Christ. He glorifies Christ by pointing to Him as the Truth and the location of our freedom.

The Truth of the Gospel

While spending time with believers in the church at Antioch, and reporting on God's work in southern Galatia, some Jews arrived teaching the brothers that circumcision was necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1). By "saved" these individuals meant present tense salvation, growth, Christian living. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to settle the matter, where believing Pharisees repeated the requirement (Acts 15:5). The fact that Luke identifies these Pharisees as having believed³⁸ demonstrates that they understood the requirement for initial salvation but thought that present tense salvation involved obedience to the Mosaic Law. This continues in many Christian circles. Sinclair Ferguson summarizes the Reformed view of sanctification (Christian living), "For this reason sanctification in the New Testament involved conformity to the moral law, for Christ 'condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit' (Rom 8:3-4)." He further writes, "consequently, the law of God remains the standard of holiness for the New Testament believer."³⁹ The issue of Acts 15 is perennial, should Christians live by law?

Paul referred to this event in Galatians two.⁴⁰ The gospel he explained to them was not the good news proclaimed to the unsaved but to the saved. The problem in Galatians is that it is not immediately obvious that Paul meant a different gospel, though the remainder of the letter demonstrates that his concern is about Christian living, not about how the unsaved come to be saved. So when Paul presented this gospel to the "somebodies" in the Jerusalem church, false brothers also snuck in to spy out "our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 2:4). This gospel was about liberty, as demonstrated above, liberty from the sin nature. Paul did not submit to these individuals for even an hour, so that "the Truth consisting of the gospel would truly continue" before the Galatian believers (Galatians 2:5). If these new Christians were put under the Law, they like Paul would find themselves in the unending cycle of failure he rehearsed in Romans seven. Paul did not wish this for them, and therefore he stood his ground on the Truth, the good news of liberty. This demonstrates that the Truth must also involve freedom from the Mosaic Law.

³⁸ The participle "believe" is a perfect active emphasizing believing in the past with the continue result.

³⁹ In *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsityPress, 1988) p. 68.

⁴⁰ Paul went up to Jerusalem 14 years after his previous visit, which was three years after his initial salvation, which may have been three years after the Church began, c. AD 30. This makes the Galatians 2 event about AD 50.

After this matter was settled in Jerusalem, Paul returned to the church in Antioch, followed closely by Peter (Galatians 2:11). Apparently Peter wanted to hear more about this liberty, this message of God's grace for Christian living, and so he came to hear more of what Paul could teach on this subject. It took. Peter appreciated it and was even eating with Gentile believers, until some law-keeping Jewish believers arrived, and then Peter separated from the Gentiles (Galatians 2:12). His actions caused other believing Jews to follow suit. Paul described their actions as, "not walking upright facing the Truth consisting of the gospel" (Galatians 2:14). By "upright" Paul meant that they were crooked or bent over. Before the whole group, Paul spoke to Peter because this matter had just been settled in Jerusalem, and now it was starting again. Paul's justification by faith statements in Galatians 2:16-17 refer to Christian righteousness. Even after salvation, a believer is incapable of righteous activity apart from God (cf Philippians 3:9). Paul's answer is "I through law, died to law, that I might live to God. I am jointly-crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:19-20). Just as the believer has been freed from the sin nature by God imputing him or her to have died with Christ, so also the believer is freed from law by joint-crucifixion with Christ. To act as one under law, as Peter did, was to deny this freedom. Just as Paul would not yield that freedom to the false brothers in Jerusalem, he would not yield that freedom to his brother Peter in Antioch. The Truth involves freedom from the sin nature and freedom from law.

Just as both Jesus and Paul indicate the Truth involves liberty from the sin nature, they also relate the Spirit to the Truth. So in Galatians three, Paul asks the question, "I wish only to learn this from you, did you receive the Spirit from law works, from a hearing consisting of faith? Are you so mindless, having begun by *the* Spirit, are you now being matured by flesh?" (Galatians 3:2-3). This question further demonstrates that Paul's concern is for Christian living and liberty. These questions involve the ministry of the Spirit which involves freedom, versus the efforts of the flesh which resorts to law. This gospel of the Truth is about freedom based upon the work of Christ, freed from the sin nature and the Law, thus making all believers equal in Christ and worked out by the ministry of the Spirit.

Doing the Truth

To experience freedom from one's sin nature is not an end in itself, but a step to a further work of God. "The one who is doing the Truth comes to the light, that his works might be plainly visible that they have been worked by God" (John 3:21).⁴¹ John introduced "light" in 1:4 explaining that light is God's life seen by men. It is seen because they observe what it does, its activity. Jesus exhibited this life in human terms for the first time in human history (cf John 5:26). He was not sent to judge the world, however His distinctive life made Him an object of hate. Men did not love to come to Him because He was light come into the world, and men loved the darkness because of their evil works (John 3:19). Their works were deficient of what should be exhibited and in that they spread.⁴² Further their works are worthless, "they practice worthless things" (3:20).⁴³ Our English Bibles translate this second word "evil" making no distinction between the adjectives in 3:19 and 20. The adjective acting as a noun in verse 20 is anarthrous indicating that whatever those evil works of verse 19 are, they all are worthless. These types of individuals hate the light because they do not want their works to be proved to be what they are. In keeping with the Lie, they want to think their works are good enough. In

⁴¹ It is hard to know where Jesus' words end and John's commentary begins in John 3. However, it is all God's Word and matters only as to what Nicodemus was told at that time.

⁴² πονηρος *ponāros* a malignant evil, evil in that it is not as it should be, it lacks in appropriate character.

⁴³ φαυλος *phaulos* is a "easy, slight, ordinary, mean, worthless, of no account." Thayer, op cit.

contrast, those who are doing the Truth recognize that the only works which are good enough, the only activities with any worth are those accomplished by God, so they come to the light so that God gets the credit. God accomplishing His works in believers is also part of the Truth.

John addressed the matter of the Truth in 1 John to counter the false claims of the antichrists (unbelievers) and those believers negatively influenced by the antichrists. John wrote about eternal life, God's life shared by the persons of the Godhead and potentially shared by believers (1 John 1:1-3). John wanted his readers to fellowship by using the same life-eternal life. Fellowship involves active participation, not mere possession. All believers have eternal life (1 John 5:11-12), but only when believers use eternal life do they have fellowship. If a believer operates in the sphere of the sin nature, that individual is not using eternal life. He is receiving the wages which the sin nature pays-death (Romans 6:23). He needs to follow the Spirit's lead to his position in Christ so that he can use God's grace gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23).⁴⁴ When Christ used eternal life, that life was light (John 1:4). Likewise, when a believer uses eternal life, that too is light, as God is light (1 John 1:5). If a believer claims to be having fellowship with God but walks in darkness, he lies and is not practicing the Truth (1 John 1:6). If darkness is God's life lived out, made visible; darkness is either the absence of God's life or God's life unseen. If a believer is not doing the Truth, he is operating in his sin nature, and God's life is not being seen through him, but his own sinful nature. However, a believer can walk in light; God's life can be visible in his activities (1 John 1:7). When he does so, he enjoys fellowship with other believers who are doing the same. This is only possible for the believer who does the Truth.

If one is not experiencing freedom from his or her sin nature, then this one's works will lack character and be worthless, because such works will be the product of their own fallen nature as opposed to being worked by God. We developed this in more detail in our examination of the Truth in Galatians. Know that we can engage in work and in ministry and it can be worthless. As a result, we can carry away from the judgment seat of Christ nothing because our work has been worthless (2 Corinthians 5:10). The word "bad" [AV, NASB, NIV, NKJV] or "evil" [ESV] is *phaulos*, the same word used in John 3:20 and more clearly rendered "worthless." Contrasted to good works, one doing worthless works has nothing to show for his efforts.⁴⁵

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul warned that our works might be burned up and we walk away with no reward for our works. In the context of 1 Corinthians 3, the works are "ministry" but done in allegiance to individuals: Paul, Apollos, Peter, Christ (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4). Such works of ministry might done in dependence upon the World's wisdom: philosophy, scholarship, debate (1 Corinthians 1:20-21). They might be ministry works done from zeal (competitiveness) and strife (argumentativeness) and perhaps even divisions⁴⁶ (schisms within) coming from our flesh (1 Corinthians 3:3). Such works end in a loss of reward not reward (1 Corinthians 3:15). If a believer's "ministry" is to be worthy of praise, the believer must be experiencing freedom from the sin nature and relying upon God so that his or her works are worked by God.

⁴⁴ This verse is not about how an unsaved individual gets eternal life, but how a believer uses eternal life, he must operate/rest/abide in his position in Christ.

⁴⁵ κομιζω *komidzō* to carry away securely, "to carry off safe" Abbott-Smith, op cit. p. 253.

⁴⁶ Some texts omit διχοστασία *dichostasia* but is supported by P⁴⁶ א* D F G 33 M .

Your Word is truth

Jesus asked⁴⁷ the Father to set apart those who believe in Him (John 17:17). His request was not only for the eleven but for us also, for those who believe through the word of the eleven disciples (John 17:20). Jesus spoke these words in the context of believers living in this world (John 17:15). He didn't ask for the disciples to be taken from the world but to be kept secure from the evil one. He asked the Father, "Set them apart by the Truth. The Word, Yours, is truth." Contrary to popular interpretation, "The Word" is not a reference to Scripture, or to some saying/s but to Jesus Christ Himself. He is the Word (cf John 1:1, 14).⁴⁸ Therefore, He sets Himself apart on behalf of His disciples (John 17:19). After His death and resurrection, He ascended into heaven and took His seat at the Father's righthand and in this way He set Himself apart from this world. He constitutes the believer's position (in Christ), so that in Him believers are those who have been set apart and remain set apart, a state emphasized by the perfect tense participle "may be sanctified" (NASB, John 17:19b). Theologians have applied the term "sanctification" to the Christian life, to growth or to experiencing freedom from one's sin nature, though sanctification is equally part of the believer's past or initial salvation (1 Corinthians 6:11). However, Jesus appears to be concerned with His disciples' standing. So, in this present dispensation, every believer is already set apart, already sanctified or holy because he or she is in Christ who has set Himself apart. This set apart position is the basis of the believer experiencing practical sanctification with regard to his sinful nature, though that is not the point in this text.

The New Man Created in the Truth

The Truth relates to the believer's position in the new man (Ephesians 4:24). The new man is not the new me or new you, but the new us.⁴⁹ The new man is the Christ, the new creation which Christ created in Himself (Ephesians 2:15). It is Christ the head in connection with His body (cf. Ephesians 1:22b-23a). That new man was created in righteousness. It is righteous, for God imputes His righteousness to all who make up the Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). The new man was created in "holiness." This is not the normal word for holy⁵⁰ but one describing a character which fits God's character and so honors God.⁵¹ "Of the Truth" modifies both righteousness and holiness. The new man was created by a Divine standard or according to God.⁵² God is the measure of its creation. The idea of creating points us back to God's creation of Adam in God's image⁵³ and according to God's likeness. In this context, the new man bears what Adam lost. For this reason, the righteousness and holiness have a direct relation to the

⁴⁷ The verb "sanctify" is an Aorist Imperative.

⁴⁸ I am unable to find a commentator who agrees with my interpretation, all I consulted take "the Word" to refer to Scripture. In the context of John, Christ as "the Word" makes more sense and is supported by verse 19.

⁴⁹ Harold Hoehner argues that it is both individual and corporate. *Ephesians an Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) p.

⁵⁰ ἅγιος *hagios*

⁵¹ ὁσιος *hosios* "has the idea of a disposition of piety towards the gods or parents." Harold Hoehner, op cit. p. 612. Dale Spurbeck defined it, "a holiness that fulfills God's demands upon man." *RIGHTEOUSNESS*. (2010) A paper presented at the Theological Forum on Contemporary Issues, Cherry Grove, OR. p. 41.

⁵² κατὰ θεόν *kata theon*

⁵³ Genesis 1:26 has "in our image" בצלמנו *betzalemnū* from צלם *tzelem*, where the prefixed preposition *b* is "in." "According to our likeness" is כדמותנו *cidmūthēnū* from דמות *demūth*, where the prefixed preposition *c* is "according to" or "like."

reality of God. Neither are independent of God but wholly rest upon God's character. God is anarthrous as it includes the work of more than one person of the Godhead. The Son is the one creating in Himself, perhaps similar to that exercised in Genesis one and the creation of physical things, in which He spoke the creation into existence. The Spirit then places believers into Christ in keeping with the Son's words. The Father is the one Who counts believers to be in Christ. In this context, the Truth also stands in contrast to lewd conduct, uncleanness and greediness to which the unbelieving have given themselves (Ephesians 4:20). Paul charged the Ephesian believers to put off the old man (who we all were prior to salvation, our standing in Adam, subject to the sin nature) (Ephesians 4:22). He charged them to put on the new man, our corporate oneness in Christ and with Christ. The new man does not exist apart from God's work. The new man bears the righteousness and holiness of the true God, the image of God.

The Truth affects the believer's conduct by allowing her or him to function free of the sin nature's domination. One who is experiencing such freedom is not superstitious about how certain foods might interfere with his or her relationship with God, and therefore nothing is off limits for religious reasons (1 Timothy 4:3).⁵⁴ The believer can purify his soul by obeying the Truth (1 Peter 1:22). The flesh attacks the soul, the interpretive center of emotions tied to one's senses (1 Peter 2:11). Therefore, while experiencing freedom from the flesh's dominion, the soul not being pulled in inappropriate directions is able to join in a genuine brotherly love (fondness), a fondness which is not hypocritical. God alone makes this possible.

Godliness and the Truth

The Church is a pillar and support of the Truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus in hopes of returning himself. He wrote 1 Timothy to encourage Timothy regarding certain aspects of the work in Ephesus. Paul was concerned that Timothy know how to conduct himself in God's house which is *the* living God's assembly/Church. The daily routine conduct of believers as part of God's assembly is crucial in upholding the Truth. The words "pillar" and "support" describe architectural supports the first within or under an upper structure and the second a support on the outside which kept a wall from tipping and falling outward. This seems an odd way to describe the Church related to the Truth, as the Truth tells us that only God can do these things. Yet the Church is the entity entrusted with communicating this.

With only a simple "and" [*kai*], Paul moves from his statement regarding the Church's responsibility to one regarding godliness in verse 16, "agreedly, great is the mystery about godliness." The Greeks used the word godliness of activity which honors a god. For New Testament believers, honoring God involves the exercise of eternal life and the new nature in a proper manner. Paul told Titus that godliness is based upon a hope coming from eternal life (Titus 1:1b-2a). Godliness is impossible apart from God's work. It is impossible without the possession of eternal life. It is impossible apart from the ongoing work of the Spirit. Godliness requires the believer to recognize the Truth, only God can do this. The Church is the pillar and support of the Truth by upholding the necessity of God, the impossibility of honoring God apart from God's faithful, ongoing work in the life of the believer.

Matters of Resistance to or Denials of the Truth by Believers

Teaching Law for Christian living Is Inconsistent with the Truth

Just a few years after the Galatian churches began, other teachers came telling the believers that they needed to be circumcised. They did this to make a good appearance in flesh to be

⁵⁴ Abstinence for health or out of love for other believers may have bearing on this matter.

able to boast in what they compelled another to do (Galatians 6:12.). Yet even these people did not keep (guard) law (Galatians 6:13). So back in Galatians five, Paul asks, “You were running well. Who hindered you, that you do not obey the Truth” (5:7). To turn the law, or part of the law-circumcision-is to not obey the Truth. Law is not done in dependence upon God. Whatever one might say good about that Law, Paul found it to be a ministry of death (2 Corinthians 3:7ff). God gave Israel the Law in Exodus 19 because they presumed they could do anything God asked of them, and this after many failures on their part (Exodus 19:8). God gave Israel the Law to demonstrate what they could not do. It is a sad commentary on the Church that nearly twenty centuries after the Law was set aside, that Christians still presume to keep the law. God, the one calling believers, does not persuade believers to turn to the Law. He persuades believers to turn to what He alone can do. So, in Galatians 5:9 Paul tells them that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. That little leaven is circumcision, the whole leavened lump is living by law because, when a man is circumcised he is obligated to do the whole law, not just one or select parts (Galatians 5:3). The Truth stands in contrast, because Christ has freed us to be free (Galatians 5:1). To teach Christians to live by law is to teach them to disobey the Truth.

Paul wrote 1 Timothy to address (at least in part) those who did not want to pay attention to this present dispensation, but wished to be law teachers (1 Timothy 1:3-4, 7ff). Some of these individuals had shipwrecked their faith (1:19). By turning from God’s promise of freedom they were not directing faith at the right promise. They were to engage in communication with God while “lifting up holy hands” (2:1-2, 8). “Holy”⁵⁵ is again the word meaning fit for God’s demands upon you or in keeping with the divine order. It is contrasted to anger and disputing, both qualities which result from the flesh as people turn to law. Some would even forbid marriage and require abstinence from food as means of “exercising the body” (4:3, 8). By “exercise” Paul referred to spiritual disciplines practiced in an attempt to be “godly.” However abstinence from either of these does not promote godliness and those who know the Truth well understand this (4:3b). Those who know the Truth, know that self-denial or rituals (e.g. fasting) will not promote or improve one’s Christian life. Such emphasizes what the believer does, not the believer’s reliance upon God. It appears that at least one motive in this rigid lifestyle and law-keeping was the determination to be rich (6:9). These individuals taught differently, not paying attention to healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ or to Old Testament teaching which is consistent with godliness (6:3). Godliness is a New Testament mystery (3:16), therefore, any teaching of the Old Testament as a standard for godliness would be inaccurate. These teachers have corrupted their own mind⁵⁶ and turned themselves away from the Truth (6:5). They do not wish to know or live up to the Truth. Their intention seems expressed in the phrase, “supposing godliness to be a means of gain.” By misapplying law to themselves, they have concluded that if they rigidly observe the law, and put themselves under the rigors of self-denial, they can achieve gain. They miss the point that godliness with contentment is gain of itself (6:6). The Truth again is contrasted to law or any type of system by which one thinks he can earn any benefits earthly or heavenly.

Teaching Conditional Security Needs to be Countered by Presenting the Truth

In 2 Timothy, Paul instructed Timothy how to respond to those who teach some form of conditional security or future. Paul explained the dependable set of sayings in 2 Timothy 2:1-13. All four sayings are first class conditions, in which Paul assumes the condition to be

⁵⁵ Hosios see fn 51 under Ephesians 4:24.

⁵⁶ A perfect middle participle, they corrupted themselves with the result they remain corrupted.

true, so all believers have died⁵⁷ with Christ so we will live with Him, all respond in patience,⁵⁸ all will tell Him, No,⁵⁹ all will fail to be faithful,⁶⁰ but He remains faithful. so He will tell us, No, so we all will rule with Him. These four realities can really throw Christians. Christians are fine with the death and patience, but any lack of faithfulness or act of telling God, No, can cause Christians to have doubts. Many Bible teachers have capitalized upon this to motivate Christians to better conduct, though conduct without confidence in God's work will be deficient in proper motivation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:9-10, 12).

Some of these teachers take advantage of this situation and teach or suggest that believers who fail in these last two categories are not believers or have lost salvation. With these teachers, Paul warned Timothy not to battle over words, while reminding the believers of their security (2 Timothy 2:14). Timothy should keep at it so that he is an approved workman who cuts a straight path regarding the word of the Truth (2 Timothy 2:15). While popularly used as a verse regarding dispensations-“rightly dividing”-Paul's charge is about cutting a clear path so that believers can see the Truth despite the abundance of bad teaching. While others present contrary points of view, God's workman should be about the work God gave to him, and not drawn into verbal conflicts with those who do not agree.

Some who taught differently, went so far as to suggest that the resurrection had already happened (2 Timothy 2:18). Paul wrote, “the⁶¹ resurrection” referring to what Jesus called “a resurrection consisting of life” (John 5:29) and what John called the first resurrection (Revelation 20:5-8). They can only do this by making the first resurrection spiritual and the second literal. They would teach that all believers were raised spiritually when they believed, but they will be raised physically with all mankind in a general resurrection. Thomas Oden explains the two resurrections in Revelation 20:5-8, “Realized millennialists interpret this text differently, viewing the ‘first resurrection’ as repentance, faith, baptism, and spiritual regeneration, and the second as the general resurrection.”⁶² Donald Bloesch refers the first resurrection to the believer being immediately transferred into Christ's presence at death.⁶³ Yet, a general resurrection implies judgment contrary to Jesus' promise that believers will not come into judgment (John 5:24). Such teaching can overturn the faith of some believers. It overturns their faith by ruining a promise from our Lord and therefore, ruins an expectation or hope. I would contend that both of these men and many like them are teaching precisely about what Paul warned Timothy.⁶⁴ This teaching does not agree with the Truth, making the general resurrection and judgment an evaluation of whether an individual has the right to enter into life. Schreiner on Revelation 20:11-15 writes, “The judgment according to works should not be set in opposition to those whose names are inscribed in the book of life, for those whose names are in the book of life have practiced what is good and true.” He adds, “John

⁵⁷ Aorist active Indicative verb

⁵⁸ Present active Indicative verb

⁵⁹ Future middle Indicative verb, where “deny” is not the denial of His existence, but denial of a demand.

⁶⁰ Present active Indicative verb.

⁶¹ Some texts omit the definite article: \aleph F G 048. 33 but is supported by A C D ψ 1730, 1881 M.

⁶² Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2006) III:426.

⁶³ Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2006) p.186 of vol. 2.

⁶⁴ They would affirm a general bodily future resurrection, and claim that Paul meant individuals who denied a future resurrection. I think their commitment to a general resurrection blinds them to their common problem, to the fact that they are guilty of the very problem Paul addresses.

writes to exhort believers to persevere and obey in order to receive a final reward.” Then, “John emphasizes that only those who do God’s will and keep his commands will receive the final reward on the last day.”⁶⁵ Oden explains, “The pivotal issue is always, Did faith become active in love? Did faith express itself in deeds of mercy? Were the poor relieved, was charity shown toward all, were enemies forgiven? Faith is the engendering source and works the expression of the Christian life, assuming that your work is ‘produced by faith, your labor promoted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope’ (1 Thess. 1:3).”⁶⁶ Such teaching leaves believers uncertain about their future and can alter their motivation in service. Believers operating from uncertainty will try to do what only God can do, secure their own future.

Despite all this bad teaching, the foundation of God’s work stands firm with this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Timothy 2:19). Even if believers become confused by bad teaching and doubt their future, God knows they are His and their salvation remains secure. That’s the Truth. A conditional future or conditional security denies the Truth, it makes the completion of our salvation our work rather than God’s (no amount of attributing it to God while laying unnecessary requirements on believers changes that). In the face of this problem, it is necessary for teachers to cut a straight course. Believers need to be reminded that salvation is God’s work (I’ll address Philippians 2:13 later). God’s workman needs to cut this path straight and clear so believers know what God will absolutely do and how that differs from His requirements for the manner in which we live our Christian lives.

While some assert that our view of God’s eschatological plans (our future) beyond some general concepts is to pick at nits, John, Paul and Peter indicate that our understanding of the future impacts how we live now. John tells us that our hope of seeing Christ as He is and becoming like Him causes us to purify ourselves as He (Christ) is pure (1 John 3:2-3). Paul anticipated a crown of righteousness for loving His Lord’s appearing, implying that such an anticipation results in righteous conduct (2 Timothy 4:8). Peter encouraged us to focus our hope upon our Lord bringing grace to us when He is revealed (1 Peter 1:13). Peter also tells us that our knowing that this present creation will be destroyed should causes us to live in holy conduct and godliness (2 Peter 3:11). This brief sample of texts regarding our future demonstrates that God’s promises for our future affect the manner in which we live. Mess up those truths and you can overturn the faith of some Christians.

Impostors Who Oppose the Truth

In addition to believers who teach error, Timothy also had to contend with the presence of hard times in the form of bad conduct in the Church (2 Timothy 3:1-4). It is amazing that after the list of unrighteous attitudes and activities, Paul states, “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (v. 5). How can these people have a “form of godliness?” They have learned what godliness is supposed to look like and they copy some of that behavior.⁶⁷ Therefore, despite the list of characteristics, they conform to a set of God-honoring activities and in this way are not immediately recognized as being dangerous. Paul warns that some of these cause problems within families, and “captivate weak women”⁶⁸ (v. 6). These oppose the Truth in the

⁶⁵ Thomas Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) pp. 614-615.

⁶⁶ Oden, op cit. III:439.

⁶⁷ On *morphé* the translators of the NET Bible give, “*Outward appearance*. Paul’s contrast with power in 3:5b shows that he regards this “form” to be outward, one of *appearance* rather than reality.”

⁶⁸ NASB

manner which magicians of Pharaoh's court resisted Moses.⁶⁹ Those magicians copied some of the miracles God performed through Moses, and so these individuals copy some of the acts of God's power accomplished through believers. They resist the Truth because they deny that God's power or God is necessary for "godliness" (vv. 5, 8). Paul encouraged Timothy with the inevitable failure of these individuals (v. 9). Trying to copy a type of behavior while not relying upon, in fact denying the very basis of that behavior eventually fails and others will see what they do for what it is. It is not surprising that unbelievers will deny the necessity of God, but sadly some believers succumb to the teaching of these unbelievers.⁷⁰

It is always a challenge to keep presenting the Word while believers turn away (2 Timothy 4:3). While dealing with those who resist the Truth, Timothy also would deal with people turn away from the Truth, preferring myths (v. 4). Myths contrast to the Truth. Myths often have some basis in a reality but have misapplied or twisted that reality into the story now told. In verse three myths are the opposite of healthy doctrine. Doctrine is *didaskalia* teaching which reveals truth from God that does not govern the New Testament believer's practice. In part it includes much of the Old Testament revelation. Paul described it in Titus 1:14 as "Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the Truth." Both Jews and men in general have reinterpreted the Old Testament to fit New Testament situations, because this is almost always what must be done with *didaskalia* to make it fit New Testament believers. Back in 2 Timothy 4:3 "healthy" indicates that one does not attempt to apply or make that teaching authoritative for New Testament believers (like not taking someone else's heart medicine). However, believers like that kind of teaching: I too can be a Daniel, etc, and so they heap up in piles⁷¹ teachers who tell them the myths they wish to hear. The misapplication of Old Testament truths to New Testament believers is to turn away from the Truth to myths.

Because the Truth rests upon God and His character, the Truth maintains some similarities between different dispensations. However, only in this present dispensation does it provide the means for experiencing freedom from one's sin nature. Therefore, Peter referred to it as "the present Truth" (2 Peter 1:12). Because God has given us all things for life and godliness, we believers can escape the corruption which exists in the world in the form of lusts (2 Peter 1:3-4). We should take the benefits and use each appropriately along with qualities God makes possible. When these are present in us and increasing, we are not idle, unfruitful and will not fall (vv. 9, 10). This was vital because in chapter two, Peter introduced the coming problem of unbelieving teachers who would present a perverted version of God's grace, telling believers that immoral behavior is okay (cf Jude 4). As crazy as this sounds to us, some believers did and do believe this message. When they put it into practice, the way of the Truth is blasphemed (2 Peter 2:2). To have known and proclaimed freedom by means of the Truth, only to become enslaved maligns the idea of the Truth. It might even suggest that God is not enough.

The preponderance of occurrences of "the Truth" occur in John's writings with 17 in John and 14 in 1, 2, and 3 John, compared to 26 occurrences in all Paul's letters. John introduces the

⁶⁹ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990 Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 1.7)

⁷⁰ The author has read some of the "spiritual formation" materials by writers such as Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* and Dallas Willard, *Spirits of the Disciplines*. Such men define salvation by actions, neither holding to eternal security, and positing the Christian life in a set of humanly developed disciplines: solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, sabbath secrecy, submission, Bible reading, worship, prayer, friendship of soul, confession, reflection, serving. They claim to encourage dependence upon God but apart from God's revelation.

⁷¹ The NASB's "accumulate" misses the impact of Paul's *episōreuō* **ἐπισωρεύω** to heap up as in a pile.

background and main points of the Truth in his gospel and addresses issues regarding the Truth in his letters. First, we'll consider claims in which individuals do not honestly appraise their situation. So briefly in 1 John, in 1:6-7 he compares fellowship to walking in the light. John defined light as a manifestation of God's life in activity (John 1:4). Therefore, to walk in light is to walk using God's life and in this way one has fellowship with God (cf. v. 3). This in turn would be the Truth, whereas making a claim to fellowship apart from using eternal life (walking in darkness) evidences that one is not doing the Truth, the same phrase used in John 3:21. Then in 1:8 to deny that one has sin evidences that the Truth is not in that individual. Since the Truth expresses God's provision for freedom from one's sin nature, to deny one has sin (acts or nature) demonstrates that one doesn't know the Truth; he claims he has no need of what God alone can do. Next in 2:4, claiming to know God but not guarding His commands (re: love), also demonstrates that the Truth is not in this one. How can you know God if you don't exercise His love as He alone makes possible?

Next John addresses the particular problem of antichrists, or unbelievers who deny both/or the deity and bodily resurrection of Jesus (2:22; 4:2-3). In 2:21 he assures his spiritually young readers⁷² that they know the Truth. They had to know Jesus is God and that He not only died but rose physically from the dead. They know that He did what God alone can do; that's initial salvation. They also know that every lie does not come from the Truth. Therefore, the lies of the antichrist have no root in the Truth. While the antichrists and their lies do not come from or arise from the Truth, believers come from God and from the Truth (3:9, 19). Genuine love versus that in words alone demonstrates⁷³ that we are from the Truth (3:18-19). This genuine love is only possible with God as the source. Those who know God hear us (1 John 4:6). John is concerned about the distinction between the Spirit from God who is characterized by the Truth versus those spirits from the world and are characterized by error. Believers can test the spirits by what they communicate: do they agree that Jesus Christ has come in flesh with the result that He remains in flesh⁷⁴ or do they deny this? The Spirit characterized by the Truth agrees with and upholds His physical resurrection. The believer not only died with Christ but is raised and alive to God in Him, and that relationship is crucial to freedom and the outworking of God's life (cf Romans 6:11, 23). The Spirit who is Truth witnesses to the reality of Jesus' deity and resurrection (1 John 5:5-6). Antichrists asserted that Christ came by water only, denying His physical nature. The Spirit testifies to both His spiritual and physical life. The Spirit also testifies through His working out eternal life as love in the believer. This causes the believer to be a victor with regard to the world. Only one in whom the Spirit works can experience this victory despite the antagonistic pressure of the world. John upholds the Truth contrary to these antichrists; Jesus is God and as Christ is risen, and God alone can do what the antichrist's claim they can do without God or for which they claim to have no need. 1 John serves as a good contrast between the two systems of the Lie and the Truth.

The matter of the Truth was of such importance to John that when brothers arrived and told him of evidence of the Truth in this church (3 John 3). Hearing that these believers were walking in the Truth caused John to claim, "I have no greater joy than this" (3 John 4). Coming

⁷² παιδία *paidia* a young learner, here of newer believers.

⁷³ In John's usage, the expression **ΕΝ ΤΟΥΤΩ** *en toutō* normally precedes the reason, here it follows.

⁷⁴ The verb **ερχομαι** *erchomai* in the perfect tense **εληλυθота** *elēluthota*. Donald W. Burdick clarifies, "Although the perfect tense does not guarantee permanence, as some have assumed here, it does indicate that, at the time of writing, Jesus was still incarnate. He still possessed the resurrection body with which He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11) and with which He will return." *The Letters of John the Apostle*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985) p. 296.

to recognize the necessity of God in all aspects of life and the living accordingly incited this great joy in John. It remains paramount for the believer.

Related Truths

For continued study regarding the Truth, apart from passages using the expression, I include the following suggested aspects of God's work and character. If God is necessary for all things including all aspects of the Christian life we should not be surprised that Scripture describes many necessary works of God. The believer experiences freedom from the sin nature by walking by the Spirit, not by sheer determination (Romans 8:4-5). God does not expect the believer to find his way to freedom, but to follow the Spirit's lead to his or her position in Christ (Romans 8:13). God does not expect believers to generate proper character, but the Spirit produces fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). God does not expect believers to function properly as members of the body of Christ by simple self-denial, but the Spirit fills the individuals with those qualities necessary to maintaining the oneness of the body (Ephesians 5:18). Though God has given the believer eternal life and charges him to "lay hold" of that life, it is only possible as he allows the Spirit to free him when he has followed the Spirit to relate to his life in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:23; Romans 8:2). Though God has given each believer a supernatural ability to serve others in the body of Christ (a spiritual gift), God the Father necessarily works within each believer when the gift is exercised and this in keeping with the Lord's direction for service within the body (1 Corinthians 12:6). Spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11) to serve within the body of Christ and cannot be replaced or duplicated by training or discipline. To serve by the Truth necessitates believers exercising those gifts.

As part of the Truth special note is to be given to the set of words indicating various aspects of "power." Though not tied directly to the words, the words support the concept of God's necessity in all aspects of human existence including the Christian life. *Dunamis* is God's power. He works that power in the believer (Ephesians 1:19). *Kratos* expresses the visible exercise of God's power as might; visible by the activity accomplished through the Spirit (Ephesians 3:16). *Energia* is God's in-working. While God accomplishes some things through intermediaries, *energia* indicates His personal direct work in a situation or individual (Philippians 2:13; Colossians 1:29; Galatians 3:5).

Summary

The Truth begins with God's character. God is truth, always living up to all He knows. The truth confronts man with the fact that only one true God exists and only that one true God is able to save man. For one who has believed this, the Truth confronts him with his continued inability, because only God can free him in his experience, and only God can work out His life and nature through the believer. The Truth involves various works of all three persons of the Trinity at the various points in this process. The believer supplies the decision to relying upon God precisely as God has revealed, for God even works in the believer to cause the desire and He will also do the work (Philippians 2:13). We are allowed to choose to participate in this process or try to do it without God which will end in failure. Few Christians would teach or claim that believers can accomplish God's revealed will apart from God.