

ABOUT this BOOK

Who knows the truth?
Who lives the truth?
What is truth?

These are simple questions for which few have the final answers. The person who claims to know the truth may be thought to be arrogant.

Knowing the facts is not necessarily knowing the truth.

Jesus claimed to know the truth, to tell the truth, and to be the truth.

In what sense was this the case?

How can the author of this book insist on the one hand that all human creatures know the truth, and on the other that they so suppress what they know that they do not know the truth?

How does one come to the truth, and then begin to live it?

Without doubt this is a dynamic book. It is more so because its arguments do not run along traditional lines. In one sense it is a simple book, not entering into clever debate. In another sense it is a book which is deeply disturbing.

To the seeker it will prove relevant for living today.

Jesus said that those who listened to him sincerely would come to know the truth, and the truth would set them free. He meant 'genuinely free, in every department of living.'

The author, Geoffrey Bingham, has always lived where the action is, as a free-lance journalist, a soldier, prisoner-of-war, farmer, minister, missionary, and Bible College principal. As a husband, father, grandfather, and contemporary citizen, he is always talking to human needs, seeking to share the truth for life in this world, and hope for the next.



NEW CREATION
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TRUTH the Golden Girdle.



Geoffrey C. Bingham.

'Truth is the golden girdle of the globe.' William Cowper,
'*Charity*'

'Righteousness [integrity] shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness
[truth] the girdle of his loins.'
Isaiah 11:5

'...and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a
long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast...'
Revelation 1:13

'Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth...'
Ephesians 6:14

Truth

The Golden Girdle

Geoffrey C. Bingham

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Foreword

Is it possible for a person to think that he or she is living in the truth only to discover that this is not so? Even worse, is it possible to be living a lie and never know this to be the case? Most of us have enough honesty to admit that we are often deluded, sometimes mistaken, but few of us would care to say, 'All my life I have lived in a lie.'

Recently a man visited our publishing house. 'Visited' is not quite the word. He almost burst in upon us. He was excited about one of our books which he had just read, and it had transformed his thinking, and, from what we could see, his life. He was amazed that the truth revealed in the book was so simple, and so obvious. His face shone with delight. Then he said, 'You know, I don't think too many people understand this truth.' We had the feeling he was out to see that more people did come to understand it.

To come to the truth—'The whole truth', as we say—is at once both frightening and exhilarating. It is frightening because we feel let down as with a sickening thud, and exhilarating because at last we feel ourselves liberated into a new world. Strangely enough, at the back of the non-truth which we lived, we always had a sense of truth. One existentialist philosopher said, 'This existence is absurd!' How did he know it was absurd? At the back of his mind he could sense something better, something which was not absurd. He must have had some standard of comparison to make such a remark.

The person Jesus, who claimed to have come into the world to bear witness to the truth, came from a long line of

prophets, indeed from a prophetic nation. These prophets uncompromisingly insisted that they knew the truth, that they had it directly from God. Jesus, we are told, 'was full of truth and grace'. On one occasion, he said, 'I am the truth,' and on another occasion, 'If you go on in my word . . . you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' These statements and promises at once confuse and intrigue us. Is the truth something man does not know? Is there in fact truth which is not truth? Can a person know the truth even though most of his (or her) life has been lived apart from it? What, anyway, is the truth?

It is some of the answers to these questions that I set about giving in this book.

I cannot remember a time in my life when I was not fascinated by the truth. A study I did some years ago on heresies and cults has shown me that the people to be feared are who claim that they know the truth and that others, for the most part, do not. Such people are elitist, generally sectarian in spirit and condemnatory in nature. This, to me, is a proof that they do not really know the truth. Truth is not a set of ideas, and not even good orthodox theology—useful as that may be. Truth is something which is lived out. It is life truly lived. One thing that it certainly is not is simply a set of facts or even a system of thinking. Whilst we may speak roughly of 'scientific truth', 'poetic truth', and 'historic truth', none of these categories is really *the* truth.

The truth must be God, who He is and what He does in our past, present and future. If this is so, then it is doubtful that man can discover the truth unaided. If we accept two statements of the apostle Paul then we are confronted by man's terrible dilemma: on the one hand, he does not know truth because somewhere in his history he rejected it; on the other, deep down, he does have a sense of the very truth against which he is so desperately fighting. Every time he is confronted by the truth—either outwardly or inwardly—he

compulsively 'holds down the truth', ie. he suppresses it. His dilemma is that he will never be his true self as a human being until he sees, accepts and lives by the truth. Because he wants to live his own life, make his own rules, and keep what he calls his autonomy, he cannot afford—so he thinks—to surrender to the truth. He does not see it as the way of remarkable freedom.

To write a book about the truth is simply sticking one's head in the lion's jaws. It is—in a humorous sense—digging one's own grave! Who would pick up a book in order to be shown that he—the reader—was actually living his whole life in a lie? Would not an author of such a book appear to be incredibly smug in thinking that *he* knew the truth, thus inferring that others did not? Would he not sound patronising, whether he intended to be or not? Well, certainly he would. If, however, the intending reader could detect the genuine note of humility, could hear a confession of the writer that, having had the truth revealed to him, his initial sense of rude shock had passed into rich and exciting freedom, then the reader might become intrigued and read on. He would soon discover whether the author was an arrogant sectarian or a simple man, humbly sharing the good things he had discovered.

I certainly trust that this is how the book will come through to its reader. In it there is no invitation to join a group, to become a member of an elitist band, to enter into some esoteric pilgrimage or to discover exotic forms of truth—so called. At most, it is an invitation to consider how a person may know the truth and live life in genuine freedom, given, of course, that such freedom will always be contested, and will not be merely an escape into an Arcady of the mind, an ivory tower of unreality.

*Geoffrey Bingham,
Coromandel East, 1983*

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Truth the Golden Girdle

There, in the beginning, was the truth,
 The Truth Himself, eternal, immutable
 But speaking the creative word, calling out
 The things unseen to seenness.
 The things unknown to knownness.
 This was the word bringing
 The fruits of Truth as the word,
 This the irresistible reality
 Of universal and eternal creation.

There, in time, was the Truth,
 The truth causing the sons of God to shout
 And joy to take the primal morning,
 The new flush and ripple of creation
 Spreading its way through time
 Until the 'all things' emerge
 And the whole is one
 In the dispensation and structure
 Of the creative Truth—love,
 Making the whole an indissoluble unity,
 The eternal fellowship.

There in the path of time; the movement
 Of covenant-chesed, is love's emanation,
 Love's promise covering man's primal choice—

The evil volition of man and snake—
 And rending wide the new revelation
 Of interminable grace, the glory
 Of the golden-girdled truth. Truth
 As a gleaming girdle, encircling the earth
 Outside of which is nothing,
 Inside of which is the life of truth.

Had truth not come in warmth of flesh,
 Had eyes not gleamed and glowed with life—
 That which we know by hands and arms—
 Then Truth had not been seen or known;
 Man made the lethal change from life to death,
 From truth to lie, entrusting the lie
 With clever means, new rationale, sly motion
 Towards the eternal Truth as though
 This were the lie and He the Lying One.
 Cone far from truth man cannot know
 The truth of Truth, can only feel
 The lethal drive anew in him
 With every movement of the lie
 That hates veracity.

He was the true and faithful one
 Who lived the life of truth, who spoke
 The words which came from heaven. He alone
 Could tell the truth that he had heard.
 Strange words they were which broke the air
 Which beat upon the ears of men. Strange notes
 That made a music rare, nostalgic forms of thought
 That wakened memories of another age
 When man had truly lived. New pain was born
 To wake the heart to richer thought
 That man had dared to dream—love's dream
 Become reality.

Truth's home is in a timbered cross,
 The cross that flowered its brightest blooms
 All red as blood and black as death
 And white as life. Truth's fruit that forms
 Has come from death—the grain in ground,
 The tears so moist, the pleading pain—
 And come from life, the surging tomb
 Where truth breaks out afresh,
 Streaming its living torrents to
 The sons of eternal day. This flow of life
 Is flow of truth: is flow of love.

Truth in the primal time, truth now,
 And truth at the endless end.
 The dark lie Seeking to encircle truth, asserts itself
 In forms of dreary faultlessness,
 Deceit and draining lusts; wearies itself
 And man. The truth reversed brings pain,
 Pursuit of anodynes to ease
 The conceived restlessness,
 The gestated pointlessness, the endeavour
 To find truth's rest through lies.

Truth is the stream of hist'ry
 Emerging from the womb of time
 Conceived in prior eternity
 Reaching its zenith in that prior cross
 Now evident in time. Love's blood
 That gouts itself on Calvary's stones
 Is truth of truth, God's heart of heart,
 The living knowledge that our God is love,
 Is Father to our children's hearts,
 And mothers all our needs.

Truth's army found its genesis
 In timbered cross, triumphant cry,
 And empty tomb. Truth poured itself
 In Spirit's power, anointing light,
 In Gospel's form—the word of truth—
 And lighted men to share the light,
 Despoil the dark, destroy the lie,
 And bring truth's life to hearts.
 Truth vivifies itself in truth,
 But lie brings death to death
 Extending death perpetually
 For lie's demise, and lie's defeat.

Truth lives to reign. Its reign in us
 Is reign by us, through Christ the truth,
 Creation's bonds are slipped from it
 And truth moves out in waves of light
 To capture all, transforming it
 To truth's true form, the stable life
 Of God's unchanging faithfulness
 Finding its warm and living forms
 In humans glorified: the new kings
 Working their holy priesthood out
 In aeons of serving, love's epochs
 That witness to eternal truth,
 And give the truth to love.

1

What is Truth?

‘What is truth?’ That was a question the Roman governor of Palestine asked the man Jesus of Nazareth. Probably this question had a touch of sarcasm to it. A man hardened by political life and intrigue has generally lost his ideals, and is a bit sceptical about truth. Most of us can remember the warm ideals of truth that we had when young, and the dreams we dreamed about making the world a better place. Many of us have become somewhat like Pilate as the years have passed. The days of anger at injustice, the protests, sit-downs and similar efforts to make sure the human race would live according to truth have passed for the most part. Like Pilate we wonder whether the truth isn’t something of a luxury, or, at best, one option among many.

Jesus’ answer to Pilate’s question is quite intriguing. He said, ‘ . . . for this cause came I into the world—*that I might bear witness to the truth*’ (John 18:37). He meant, ‘My coming has confronted the world with the nature of truth, ie. the truth of truth.’ *How* this was so we will examine later.

WE ALL KNOW THE TRUTH

No matter where we travel, no matter what race or creed we may meet, men and women believe they know the truth. Some of them may think of it in terms of their culture or

religion, but universally human beings believe they can pick out the true from the false, that they can discern what is good and what is evil. And in one sense they can. Some see truth as the basic reality of things. Others have few absolutes and see right and wrong in relative terms. When it comes to the point of decision, most people would say that they know what is right and what is wrong.

NOBODY KNOWS THE TRUTH

If we take the early Christian writer, Paul of Tarsus, at face value, then we will have to say that no one knows the truth. He says that universally man—in his past—'exchanged the truth of God for a lie' (Romans 1:25). Paul says, in effect, that man refused the truth and accepted its opposite—the lie—as the genuine truth. As a result of this, man has 'held the truth in unrighteousness' (Romans 1:18). Later we will see what Paul means by this, but for the present we understand that Paul sees man as suppressing the truth, doing acts of seeming good or seeming evil. Man does not really live in the truth.

GOD IS THE TRUTH

Most of us have a simple idea of what truth is: we say it is the facts as they come to us and we understand them. In a way this is the case. We come to our conclusions about things by examining what we call the facts. Yet they are not the truth. They may be details which we can call 'true' or 'authentic', but they are not the truth.

Man can speak of 'scientific truth', meaning 'the truth of things as science comes to see and know them'. Science is supposed to be the knowledge of things as they are. It develops a phenomenology of things, and even arrives at an application of the principles or 'laws' which it observes.

This is called 'scientific truth'. Even if we allow that, roughly speaking, this is the case, we are not one whit closer to truth'

If such things do not bring us to the truth, we may well ask where and how it may be found. To that question there is a simple answer'

God is the truth, ie. who He is, what He has done, is doing and will do. Whilst millions of facts may relate to the truth, they themselves are not the truth.

HOW GOD IS THE TRUTH

You will notice that I have made a statement without proof. I say God is the truth. By this I do not mean that creeds concerning God are the truth, or that ideas formulated about God are the truth. They might constitute theology but they are not the truth.

To understand how God is the truth, we can begin with our own human understanding of the term. Generally speaking, we relate it to honesty, reliability, trustworthiness, lack of deceit, lack of falsity, and lack of inconsistency. Some people think of truth as abstract reasoning, the endeavour to arrive at a rationale of all things. In this sense, philosophy is that research which endeavours to give a reason for things-as-they-are, and if successful would call the result 'the truth'.

We also have a fairly good idea of truth when we speak of 'the truth of fatherhood', 'the truth of motherhood', 'the truth of humanity', 'the truth of nature', and so on. The truth of fatherhood is a pattern or principle of fathering which makes up a certain category. In a sense we are right in speaking of 'the truth of fatherhood'. We can—roughly speaking—assess whether a person is living as a good father or a bad father. Somewhere within us is a *sense of truth*.

If we go to the Bible, we find the words 'truth', 'true',

and ‘truly’ used as though readers would easily understand them. They occur frequently in the seventeenth century English version of the Bible, known as the ‘Authorised Version’ and the ‘King James Version’. In twentieth century translations—especially in the Old Testament—we often find these words replaced by others such as ‘faithfulness, steadiness, stability, soundness, constancy, loyalty and justice’. This helps us to understand the Bible’s idea of truth. The adjectives likewise are ‘faithful’, ‘steady’, ‘stable’, and so on, whilst the verbs are ‘to be true’, ‘to confirm’, ‘to stand firm’, ‘to be trustworthy’, and others containing similar ideas. Thus in the King James Version, Psalm 31:5 says, ‘God of truth’, whilst the RSV has ‘faithful God’.

THE TRUTH IS ACTIONAL

Generally we think of truth in terms of ideas, principles and concepts. In fact, though, it is a person who is true or not true; so truth, rather than a set of beliefs, is *o state of being*. Further, ‘being’ is never divorced from ‘doing’, and truth is *something we do*. We do everything either truthfully or untruthfully. We discover the truthfulness of a person by what he does or does not do. We also discover someone’s falsity by the same means.

The Scriptures portray God as always actional. He is doing things such as creating, sustaining (His creation), working for it, redeeming it, sanctifying it (keeping it pure and making sure its action is truthful), and, finally, glorifying it, that is eternalising it. That is the way the Scriptures speak of God as the truth.

They also insist that God *speaks* the truth. When God speaks, then, the words and ideas which He speaks are not only true (reliable, trustworthy, etc.), but they *affect* what He says. For example, when He says, ‘Let there be light!’

then there is light. Thus we are forced to conclude that God is always true and His actions constitute the truth.

HOW CAN WE KNOW THE TRUTH?

If Paul is right in saying that we exchanged the truth of God for a lie, then we do not know the truth because we do not want to know it. However, he also says ‘we hold [down] the truth in (ie. by) acts of unrighteousness. Since this is deliberate it must also mean that in some way we do know the truth, even though we deny it. When we swear to tell ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’ we know what we are called to do. However, there are so many elements in us which are adverse to the truth that it is extremely doubtful whether any human being has ever succeeded in actually telling it that way. We know but we do not know the truth. We tell, but we do not tell the truth. Yet every human being would insist strongly that he or she surely knows the truth. This is our dilemma, the dilemma that our book endeavours to state and to solve.

2

The Truth of Creation

Proceeding on biblical lines we see that God created. Some passages tell us that all creation issued from God's word of command:

'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth' (Psalm 33:6, 9).

'Let them praise the name of the Lord! For he commanded and they were created. And he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed' (Psalm 148:5-6).

'By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear' (Hebrews 11:3).

At a later time Jesus commented of God's word, 'Thy word is truth.' Since everything came into being as a result of that creative utterance, and since the word was truth, nothing could have been created that was not true. Nothing false, deceitful or untrustworthy came into being through God's creational act.

This is strongly debated by many people. When they see elements such as evil, certain forms of suffering, deformed creatures, wars, genocides and rapes, they are certain that this creation is not trustworthy. That is, it is not true, and the God who created it is not the truth.

Against this, God said of His full creation, 'It is very

good.' He meant that it was functional, and had nothing evil or untrue within it. Paul said 'Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected'; 'To the pure all things are pure'; 'I am. . . persuaded that nothing is unclean in itself' (I Timothy 4:4, Titus 1:15, Romans 14:14).

THE TRUTH OF MAN

Without thinking too generally or abstractly, we must recognise that man was created in God's image. God is always in action: so then man likewise is always in action. Everything that God is, man is like that, although he has absolutely no deity. In practice this means that because God is the truth, man is essentially truthful. So then all his actions are sincere, reliable, and of the nature of goodness, righteousness, holiness and love.

In fact, this is not how we see man today, nor has he been like this for a long time! Doing all sorts of 'good' he is nevertheless capable of great evil. This seems to deny that God made the world and its creatures as being reliable, true and faithful.

THE UNTRUTH OF MAN

Paul once said, 'Let God be true, but every man a liar!' The psalmist said, 'I said in my haste, All men are liars' (Romans 3:4, Psalm 116:11). If man was created as true, then how has he come to be unreliable? The answer is given, he (man) 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie' (Romans 1:25).

When we examine man's beginnings in creation we see that God was satisfied with him (Genesis 3:31). When tempted, man heard the serpent say, 'God knows that in the day you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then your eyes shall be opened and you will know what is good

and what is evil.’ God’s word—ie. the word of truth—was questioned by the serpent. Man listened and also questioned. He decided that either God’s word was not the truth, in which case he did not have to obey it, or that it was the truth and that he was not going to obey it anyway. There can be no other explanation.

Romans 1:18-32 speaks of man rejecting the truth of God, replacing it with the lie, and, at least for himself, and for his own purposes, treating the lie as if it were the truth.

Now if what is said there is true—that man ‘exchanged the truth of God for a lie’—then man has always been living a lie. This statement is absolute; either it is true, or it is not. Man either lives in the truth or he does not. There is no such thing as living partly in the truth and partly in the lie. In practice we may think this is possible, but we would be wrong. Most human beings would admit to sometimes being true and sometimes false, and claim that, generally speaking, they live in the truth. However, the truth and the lie do not co-exist in reality.

When we talk about the *untruth of man* we mean that man as we now see him is not truly man. We sometimes speak of man as dehumanised or brutalised, and that means we assume there is a norm for man, when he is not dehumanised. In fact man’s rebellion against God really unmanned him, ie. dehumanised him in the true sense of that term. He became less than man, and not truly man. Nevertheless, though not wholly man while he lives in the lie, he is still *essentially* man. What we mean by this kind of statement will be clarified as we proceed with our subject.

MAN LIVING THE TRUTH OF MAN

When we examine man at the time of creation we see him being himself because and as he related to God. He was given a commission to ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill up

the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over it.’ Man then was a vocational creature. The creating of woman from the man brought plural relationship, which in its turn brought unitary relationship. Man related to God and his fellow creature, and to the creation of which he was part. Humanity was a man-woman thing. Also, man lived in a joyful environment. All the trees were ‘good for food, and pleasant to the eyes’. Man was without fear, guilt, or purposelessness. Many of the things which affect modern man were absent. In this sense ‘innocence was bliss’.

For man, the truth was living in relationship with God, one’s fellow creatures, and the beautiful and functional creation, whilst at the same time having a purposeful goal and vocation. The point of all this is that *man, living in the truth, was free!* We can call this creational, vocational living, ie. the truth of manhood and life.

THE REJECTION OF THE TRUTH

When man listened to the serpent’s voice (word), then he accepted that word as the truth, and refused God’s voice as the truth. The temptation did not seem to be an evil one: ‘You shall be as God [or, “gods”], knowing good and evil.’ Up to this point, man had depended upon God to know the good (truth) and evil (untruth). Now, from innocence man passed to guilt, from obedience to disobedience; he began to make his own choices as to what was good and what was evil.

Nowhere in the world do we meet persons who do not believe that they can distinguish between good and evil. It is universal that man thinks he knows what is true and what is untrue. Mostly, in making the distinction, his thought is, ‘This would be good for me!’ or, ‘This would be bad for me!’ Such thinking can never provide a proper basis for him to avoid being deceived. He does not understand what is the

actual truth, unless he knows God, and lives in the truth of God.

LIVING IN THE LIE

Rarely would you find a human being who would say that he lived in the lie, ie. that he lived in other than the truth. There are reasons for this. Man has worked out his ideas of God (theology: every man is a theologian of sorts), the universe (cosmology: all people have some world-view), and man (anthropology: man believes he knows what man is). He has worked out these ideas as he wishes them to be. This constitutes his many re-rationalisations of God, the world, and humanity. He is reluctant to surrender such ideas.

If man only held false theories, it might not be all that bad; but these very ideas determine the kind of existence he lives. Never far below the surface, they determine how he views God, the world, and other people. They result in actions. When man looks at his actions he thinks—for the most part—that they are reasonable.

3

Aids to Deceit

The trouble with a book like this is that it may be too confronting. If it is true that we are living in the lie, and seeking all the time to rationalise it to ourselves, then we will not want to read something which will put us on the spot. What I am about to say certainly puts us all on the spot!

THE ANCIENT LIAR

Jesus said of Satan, ‘...he has nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.’ The first lie that we hear from him is in Genesis 3 where he insinuated that what God had said was not true.* Such a lie had much appeal; it seemed (and still seems) to be ‘good’ to man who seeks to achieve his own self-rule, and to know good and evil without God.

Jesus, in speaking of Satan, was unmasking him. He was saying that his hearers could not hear his (Jesus’) word because they were listening to the word of their (false) father, Satan. Satan had deceived man at the beginning. Now he was keeping them imprisoned in the lie. Paul, too,

* Note that John the Seer identifies Satan with ‘that old serpent’, ie. the serpent in Eden which tempted man at the beginning

had much to say about the prince of liars: ‘. . .the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. . .’ (11 Corinthians 4:4). He added, ‘. . .Satan disguises himself as an angel of light’ (11 Corinthians 11:14). John, in his book of the Revelation, points time and again to Satan as ‘the devil who goes out to deceive the world’; ‘the deceiver of the whole world’, and so on. Satan, as originally created, was not a liar, but in rejecting the truth of God he confined himself to the lie. This also became the case with man, as we have already seen.

THE DECEIVERS

Human beings know how deceitful are human beings. Years ago, the McCarthy trials in the USA were held to determine who were communists or fellow-travellers with communists, and who were not. A man later wrote his Ph.D thesis on the trials.* Having examined them thoroughly, he came to the conclusion that no one in the world can really tell the truth. He concluded that every human being has a bias of some kind, including judges, defendants, witnesses and any others concerned.

Paul speaks of men as ‘deceivers and deceived’ (II Timothy 3: 13). He also talks of ‘. . . the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles’ (Ephesians 4:14). Man, then, is a deceiver. Hence Paul’s ‘Let God be true but every man a liar!’ In fact human life is geared to the idea that men will deceive habitually, if not, indeed, all the time. If these statements seem too strong, consider the extent to which our human institutions are designed to protect us against one another’s deceit.

* I am unable to document this matter.

But deceit is not limited to the action of one human being to another. It operates within us all. Paul speaks about ‘the deceitful lusts of the flesh’. That needs little commentary. We easily deceive ourselves by our own lusts. John names these lusts as ‘the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life’. The idea of sin being deceitful is also present in Scripture. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews speaks of ‘the deceit of sin’. He says it is subtle and dangerous (Hebrews 3:13-14). Paul says that sin is clever and deceitful enough to use the moral law of God to trick us into sinful acts (Romans 7:11).

As if all this were not enough, the Bible speaks of (supernatural) demonic powers which deceive humanity. They speak contrary to the truth, forbidding marriage and certain foods. The things which man has been given by God for enjoyment, become sources of unhealthy prohibitions and foolish asceticism (I Timothy 4:1-5, cf. Colossians 2:20-22). Paul links demons with idols (I Corinthians 10:19-21), but idols are of themselves delusive. They promise much but give nothing. Idols have no real (ontological) existence. They are conceived in the minds of deceived human beings. Being created by man, they promise him all that goes with love, worship, and adoration, but turn out to be empty. Of them Isaiah says, ‘He [the idolater] feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” ‘ (Isaiah 44:20).

THE LIFE OF DECEIT

We have already seen that it is rare to find a human being who thinks he lives in the lie, or is being self-deceived. He has worked hard, for the most part, in achieving a reasoned approach to life. He has reasoned out who God is (or isn’t), what the world about him is, and who and what he is as a human being. He may—from time to time—revise these

views, but the factor which gives him some comfort is that he believes that he himself can discern good from evil. In this way he assures himself that he knows the truth, ie. what is true or false.

It has been said that 'A weed is a plant out of place'. What if most of our deeds and acts are out of place? What if all of them are just that? Good though they be, they are not really good because we ourselves have determined their action.

Jeremiah said something profound: 'The way of a man is not in himself. It is not in a man to direct his own footsteps'. This powerful statement means that man cannot be truly man within, by, or from himself. He is, by creation, a dependent creature, needing God. He unmans himself when he departs from God. Apart from God he cannot really perceive how things are. Of course, he thinks that he can; but of himself, he simply cannot know the truth, cannot distinguish good from evil.

If we look at the remarkable passage of Romans 1:20-32 we see what man becomes when he separates himself from God. His sexuality goes awry, his relationships become shattered. He rejects authority, and he does 'his own thing'. He then becomes a disoriented, malfunctioning, disjointed, ego-centred creature. We could say also that as the electric plug requires the power-socket in order to be truly a plug, so man requires God as Father in order to be a son, God as Creator to be a creature, and God as King to be a subject. In all these relationships man is truly man, and so he is able to live in the truth. Without them he is lost, having slipped his moorings. He is, as we have said, unmanned, and so he lives in the lie.

RATIONALISING THE LIE

It will be strange if, by this time, some readers are not

angry. They will feel my observations to be harsh. Not so: they are biblical statements which are intended to bring human beings to recognise their parlous plight. It is natural enough for us, as fallen human persons, to rationalise the lie. There is no human being who is without guile. This is a realistic and not a cynical statement. Whenever anyone would suggest we have been wrong in an action, a thought, or a judgement, we are ready—pronto!—with a rationalisation. We are always reluctant to confess to being wrong. It is impossible for us to admit that we are living in the lie. Self-justification is an inbuilt part of us.

This goes too, for what we call 'the truth'. Jesus—shockingly enough—had to point out to certain of the Jewish leaders that they were of their father the devil! On another occasion he called these trained theologians 'blind leaders of the blind'! He said that a person with a true conscience will know what is light and what is darkness. He said that some of his listeners were filled with darkness, but actually thought that darkness to be light! This is how deep the deception can go.

Nor is this self-deception limited to religious areas of life. It is in every area. It is possible to deceive oneself into thinking that a useless life is useful, a pointless life has point and purpose, that mediocrity is brilliance, and so on. In every area of life we can be deceived and can deceive ourselves.

The only way in which we can see the extent of deception is to have the truth set before us. This truth would have to be *lived* by a person or persons, not merely presented in abstract reasoning' Then it would have to be seen. No human device or power can guarantee that a deceived person will see the truth, even if it is living personally before him. Jesus said, ' . . . now you seek to kill me, a *man who has told you the truth* which I heard from God . . . Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word' (John 8:40, 43).

One of our ways of countering the thought that we do not know the truth is to immerse ourselves in facts, or what we call *the* facts. Facts, as we have said, are not the truth. They are simply facts. They do, however, help the illusion that we know the truth. We tend to say, 'The more facts, the more truth we know', and thus fix ourselves more firmly in our delusion.

4

However Will We Know the Truth? 1

GOD THE UNCEASING COMMUNICATOR

If the truth is really God as He is, and what He has done, is doing and will do, then all creation is embraced in that truth. We can speak generally of 'the truth of God', 'the truth of creation' and 'the truth of man'. More particularly, we know, roughly speaking, that there is a 'truth of being a man', a 'truth of being a father', 'being a mother', 'being a child', and so on. All these elements must become obscured if man rejects God as truth.

And that is exactly what has happened. Satan, in Genesis 3: 1-6, claimed that God knew that, once they ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, they would be as God Himself, able to distinguish good and evil. The insinuation that God had a self-preserving motive, in keeping this knowledge from man, was a clever one. It put God in a wrong light, and the serpent in the role of a liberator.

The lie has been accepted. Consequently, the truth, in all its aspects and details, has been obscured; the closest we can get to it is to think in terms of what is best for everyone.

The marvel is that when man rejected the truth, and chose the lie, God did not cut Himself off from him, and leave him to perish in the lie. We say 'perish in the lie' for the lie

is, by nature of the case, lethal. Left wholly to himself with all restraints taken from him, man would be in a position far more perilous than what he knows at present. God does not wholly abandon man to the lie. He does not let him live at ease in it. No, God has gone on communicating. There is never a moment of man's history when He is not communicating. This is not to say, of course, that men listen to Him. It is to say, however, that God persists in His work of sending out the message of the truth.

GOD'S MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION

The various media of communication are set out below. In brief, they are all of the word of God. We say that 'a man is as good as his word', and this is so. A man may speak hypocritically, but if we are on the alert, we will perceive his deceit. He will still be, then, 'as *good* as his word', although in this case it may be more appropriate to say *only* as good as his word, or as bad as his word.

In a cartoon or comic strip we see a balloon issuing from a person's mouth. This is the word he utters. We cannot cut off the balloon and separate it from the speaker. A person is to be identified with the word he/she has spoken. So with God. He is as good as His word. In fact He is one with His word. He is identifiable with His word. He *is* His word. The media as we set them out are all involved in this word of God, that is in His person which is the truth.

THE MEDIUM OF CREATION

We saw that God spoke and creation came into being. 'By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God' (Hebrews 11:3). Note that only faith understands this. Sight does not see it. In addition, Paul tells us that the visible things of creation communicate the invisible things of

God. What He spoke into being goes on speaking of Him. For example, when a father or a mother loves the child, we see the truth of love, however imperfectly it may be shown. When we see the principle of family in operation, we are led to true Fatherhood, ie. the truth of fatherhood. And so on.

The writer of Psalm 19 tells us in the first few verses that 'the heavens declare the glory of God, and the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork'. He then goes on to say that each day passes on this message to the next, and night hands on to the coming night the very same message.

If men would observe what they call 'Nature', they would see, in fact, the nature of God. They would hear His voice. In the main, however, they are determined not to see it that way. To live in the lie is to refuse the truth, no matter what way it comes.

Yet men may wish to escape the lie. A young man once came to me having been on drugs, having lived in illicit sexual practice, and having searched esoteric religions and the occult. He said, 'One day I was looking at a television show. In it there was a beautiful young woman, singing and playing her guitar. Suddenly I saw how beautiful she was, how rich was her song, and how gifted her playing. At that point my mind was blown. I said, "How great and wonderful must He be who made this beautiful creature." For days I wandered about, flabbergasted. God had spoken to me.'

In fact he had heard one of God's countless utterances. He had seen one window out of billions, but it had been enough for him to glimpse the truth. That incident had drawn him to God, and to all the truth. I understand that today he is pastor of a church.

THE ANGELIC MEDIUM

This medium could occupy a lot of our attention if we cared to allow it. The Scriptures have numerous accounts of

angels coming to man and giving persons messages from God. If we put these messages together we see two things: first, they relate especially to their recipients, and the times in which they lived; second, certain elements of the truth of God can be adduced from them. Such communication is fresh, for example the announcement to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist: 'I am Gabriel who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news (Luke 1:19). The communication is direct from God.

The book of the Revelation speaks of many communications through angels, most of which God issues for the age in which we live, ie. 'the last days'.

Linked with angels are what are called 'theophanies', meaning 'manifestations of God', generally in the form of angels or unusual men. For example, three men appear to Abraham in Genesis chapter 18. God appears in the form of 'the angel of the Lord' in the burning bush, to be seen by Moses (Exodus 3:1ff.). Ezekiel sees a significant vision of glory (Ezekiel ch. 1), and Isaiah sees the Lord in His holiness (Isaiah ch. 6, cf. John 12:40-41). This has led many to think that the Son of God (later known as Jesus Christ) was the 'angel of the Lord'. Whatever the case may be, God has used His own angel to bring messages to mankind.

THE WORD OF LAW

Law is written into creation. This seems to be the thrust of passages such as Matthew 19:1-9 ('... from the beginning it was not so', cf. Genesis 2:24-25) and Exodus 20:8-11 (regarding the Sabbath). Law is common to all the human race, even though laws may differ in variant cultures. Paul links law and conscience, saying the law is written on the hearts of the Gentiles, ie. the non-Jewish peoples.

If man rejects the truth, then he also rejects the law in its

creational purity. Even so it is a constant factor of communication. Man has to fight its insistent dynamism. That is why we find fallen man occupied with law. It is true that he may be either a legalist or that he fights the truth of law; either way, he is obsessed with the law-principle. At the same time, he refuses to hear God speaking through it.

This is especially so of the law as Israel was given it in the covenant made through Moses. A sympathetic and sincere student of this law would certainly hear God speaking through it. Psalms 1, 19, and 119 are rich with revelational statements concerning the truth of God for man.

THE ACTS OF GOD

We have said that a man is as good as his word, but the word without action is no true word. God not only utters the word of law: He acts consistently with His word. For example, we have the prophecy of The Bruiser of the Seed of the Serpent in Genesis 3:15: 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head. . .'. In history Christ becomes that Bruiser as also he is bruised (Isaiah 53:5). Most powerfully we see the acts of God in His deliverance of Israel from Egypt. In the wilderness, His acts continue. In Canaan, God acts according to the teaching of Deuteronomy. When Israel obeys God He blesses them. When they disobey He punishes the nation, even to sending them into exile.

God's acts can be said to be of two kinds, (a) His providential care, daily, of all His creation, and (b) His redeeming care and action for fallen humanity. These acts and their meaning are made known through the prophetic and inscripturated word.

5

However Will We Know the Truth?- 2**The Medium of Prophecy**

Hebrews 1:1 says, 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers, by the prophets'. The prophet is the voice of God. This is seen by reading Exodus 7:1-2. It is nothing short of amazing that a man should utter the words of God. When he does, they come in a most confronting manner. He is not speaking his own ideas; he is telling the words of God. A powerful passage on this matter is Jeremiah 23:23-32. It is worth quoting in full because it reveals the dynamic of prophecy.

'Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!" How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets,

says the Lord' who steal my words from one another. Behold' I am against the prophets' says the Lord, who use their tongues and say, "Says the Lord." Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the Lord'.

We see that the utterance of the truth by God through His prophets is so dynamic that in order to work on the same principle—though with untruth—men utter false prophecy. It is an unconscious testimony to the essential power of prophecy.

The subject of prophecy is of vast dimensions, and we cannot here deal with it at any length. Today great numbers of people are impressed—albeit superstitiously—by prophetic mediums of the occult. Man seeks to hear a communication which derives from the supernatural even though it comes through a human voice.

It is significant that man has always destroyed the true prophets. Jesus said with some irony, 'It is not possible that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem'. He meant that where truth is supposed to be found it is most rejected when it comes through prophetically.

The Inscriptured Word

By this, we mean the uttered word and actions of God which have been written down. Paul's classic statement is, 'All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work' (II Timothy 3:16-17). When we think about it, we only know of the media mentioned above from what Scripture tells us about them. It is the Bible which tells us that God speaks through creation, angels, theophanies, the law, conscience, God's acts and the prophetic utterances.

Only through it do we know that God utters and fulfils His own promises.

For the man searching for the truth, the Scriptures are a rich goldmine. There is nothing which he needs to know of the truth that is not contained within them. In fact he must be wary of seeking the truth elsewhere. Only the word which is given by God—and is now inscripturated—can be his guide to the truth.

Other Media of Truth

There may be many more subsidiary media of truth. For example, if all creation mediates the truth, then man is constantly confronted by every element of man and nature, albeit man is fallen. Man who has come to the truth will be a powerful agent of the word of God. John the Baptist was, in Jesus' words, 'a prophet, *yes, and more than a prophet!*' That is, he had a richer communication even than a prophet.

In later chapters we will discuss the truth as it has come through the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He was the prophet *par excellence*, even more dynamic than John the Baptist. He too, was much more than a prophet. He witnessed to the truth (John 18:37), but first John the Baptist, and then the Father, witnessed to him as being authentic (John 1:6-7, 5:33-37). The Father had already taught the truth of Christ being the truth (John 6:44-46). The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, was to be the basic medium of the truth, following Christ's ascension to the Father (John 15:26, 16:7-15).

In this connection, John (the apostle) makes the point that 'There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood' (I John 5:8). He means the Spirit of truth, the water, ie. Christ's baptism by which he became Messiah, and the blood shed on the Cross by which he became Redeemer of fallen mankind. These, rightly understood, are the media of the word, ie. the truth of God.

Finally, the medium by which God speaks His truth in the world is His people, ie. the church. Anyone looking at it would not be inclined to think so, yet Christ said, 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses. . .to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8). He meant that men and women who were anointed with and by the Spirit of truth would go on communicating the truth, even in spite of their many weaknesses and human foibles. Somehow the truth would come through them to the world. This last medium of communication—the church—is also a large subject, and we shall leave it now and deal with it in more detail later. Then we will see that the gifts of apostles, evangelists, prophets, pastors and teachers are dynamic ministries within the church, and given by Christ for the communication of the truth.

A SIMPLE CONCLUSION ON THE MEDIA OF GOD

We can see that Paul's statement, '...he did not leave himself without witness...' must be true. By the various media we have examined, God has always been communicating. Man must have to battle hard to evade the truth. Every day and in many ways it confronts him. The marvel is that he does not hear it. We do not simply say, 'He cannot hear the truth,' but we say, 'He cannot hear the truth only because he will not.'

It is the grace of God that He does not abandon us to the lie. Where He seems to abandon us (Romans 1:24, 26, 28), it is only to let us so stew in our own juice, that we will be driven to desperation and finally to His loving and redeeming arms.

Meanwhile, let us see that man's failure to know the truth is not because God does not continually reveal it, but because man continually opposes it.

6

Man- the Suppressor of the Truth

MAN CHOSE THE LIE

Let us look at the following verses (Romans 1:18-25):

‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature’ namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.’

This passage reveals the rebellion of man against God. Some scholars equate it with Genesis chapter three, especially the first seven verses. Others see it as the Gentile rejection of God. Paul sees it as including both Jews and Gentiles. Possibly the best way to see it is that what happened at the beginning of man’s history—the fall—has set

our attitude towards God, namely that of rejection of truth and an opting for the lie. Whilst it is the history collectively of the human race, it is also the experience of each human person.

For better understanding of this matter Romans 3:10-18 should be read in conjunction with Romans 1:18-32,

‘ . . . as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands, no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong;
no one does good, not even one.”

“Their throat is an open grave,
they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

“Their feet are swift to shed blood,
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they do not know.”

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.” ‘

Man, then, has chosen the lie and rejected the truth. In this sense he does not truly live but is actively existing in the lie.

MAN LIVES IN THE LIE

Romans 1:18 is a most significant verse: ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth’. According to this statement of Paul, men suppress the truth by acts of wickedness. To discover the full import of what Paul is saying, we need to understand that truth, although it is something which we know, is much more than that. *Truth is something we do*. Jesus spoke of people who *did* the truth. ‘ . . . he who *does* what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds are wrought in God’. Jesus also said, in the same context, ‘ . . . everyone

who *does* evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed' (John 3:21, 20). Again, John in his first letter says, 'If we say we have fellowship with him and we walk in darkness, we lie, and *do* not the truth' (1:6).

If then the truth is something we *do*, *so* also is evil, ie. we do evil. In order to suppress the truth, we act, we live the lie. We suppress the truth by acts of untruth, ie. unrighteousness. To suppress purity, we commit an act of impurity. To suppress love, we do an act of hatred. And so on. Fallen man with his bias for the lie is forced continually to do acts which suppress the truth. Paul uses the verb *aleethuo* (Greek) in Ephesians 4:15, where it is translated 'speaking the truth in love'. In fact it could be translated 'truthing it in love'. That is we either 'truth it' or we 'lie it', ie. live the lie.

LIVING IN THE LIE

We have described this state of man earlier in our study. Romans 1:18 says that the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who are suppressing the truth in (acts of) unrighteousness. How then is God's wrath revealed?

The answer is given in verses 24, 26 and 28. God gives man up to his evil, to his wrong living, to his suppression of the truth. Man receives in himself the due penalty *of* his error (verse 27). That is, the dynamic affects and effects, of sins committed, compound within the person living the lie. Dreadful and horrific things happen within his personality. His guilt is a powerful factor leading him on to further sin and so further guilt. He is now on the mill-race of evil. Although we do not say God's wrath is sin, we can say that sin is God's wrath in that all its constituent elements of evil, pain, shame, guilt, heaviness, fear, defilement and the like come as judgement within the conscience of man. He brings

upon himself the most terrible suffering. He is no longer a human being in the true sense of the term. The image of God is working in reverse, so to speak. The original freedom which man knew when he was in fellowship with God is reversed. To live the lie is to live in bondage. That bondage is in some sense the very wrath of God.

REFUSING A LOVE OF THE TRUTH

We must not think that God has pleasure in the suffering and destruction of human beings. 'Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?' (Ezekiel 18:23). What we have in Romans 1:18-32 is Paul's argument *preliminary* to the revelation of grace. When we see the deserved wrath of God upon man, then we can see the grace which saves him from that wrath, and the love which liberates him from his suffering. It is that grace and love which Paul is most concerned to show.

But there is, sadly enough, a state of mind which arrogantly refuses the truth. Jesus said clearly that knowing the truth would set us free. It does not uselessly bind human beings. Rather it is the means and functional way of freedom. Still, some refuse it.

In II Thessalonians 2:9-12 Paul states,

'The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders' and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness'.

This is a rather terrifying passage. Notice, however, that the ones spoken of are those *who refused to love the truth*. They are those who love the lie. It cannot be said that they

do not know the truth, at least in one sense, for otherwise they could not suppress it. They do know it and so they can suppress it. Intention of will must be seen here or we will think that God drew them to believe what is false—so to speak—against their own wills.

In 11 Timothy 3:1-9 Paul speaks of the last days when times of stress will come. Men will actually love the lie, the false way of life. They will also wrongly influence others, especially those 'who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at *a knowledge of the truth.*' Paul says 'these men also *oppose the truth*, men of corrupt mind and *counterfeit faith.*' Here there is a conscious resistance of the truth. In chapter 4:1-4 he adds to these thoughts of the last days by speaking of those who 'will *turn away from listening to the truth*, and wander into myths.' In I Timothy 6:5 Paul also speaks of those who are 'depraved in mind and bereft of the truth'.

CONCLUSION TO MAN LIVING THE LIE

Satan has his own media for communication, and has manufactured a counter-truth. Believing that lie, man uses it to replace the truth, and lives by it. Thus he can easily rationalise the untruth of his living, convinced that he is, in fact, living in the truth. But he is deluded.

We have seen that Satan has as his aim the deceiving of the whole world. Man, on his side, has much invested in deceiving himself. In fact, rebellious man is doing much more than simply evading the truth; he is seeking to destroy it! He devotes himself to suppressing it.

The ways of suppressing it are not always harsh and radical. Often they are subtle and cunning. There is intellectual deception, philosophical deception and religious deception. Every day the intelligence headquarters of evil beat out their message of untruth through human and supernatural

media. There is an unceasing battle for the minds of mankind.

In all of this, man deceives himself that he is on the right trail. He cannot be told that he is wrong. No wonder Isaiah cried, 'Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!' (Isaiah S:20-21).

7

Man and the Battle for Good and Evil

MAN A CREATURE OF JUSTICE

Man is wholly preoccupied with the matters of good and evil. This can be seen in many ways. For example, study films, plays, novels, stories, operas and the like. It will be seen that most prominent in them is the battle between good and evil. On most occasions, the good wins. That seems to be the contract between reader-listener and the author. Goodies and baddies, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians have their stories cast in this mould.

What is curious about the matter is that the viewer generally sees himself as on the side of the angels. He wants the good to win. Why is this? Because man lives in the delusion that he is good and does good.

However, Paul says, 'There is no one that does good, not even one.' Is this true? The answer is, 'Yes. Man does relative good, but not actual good.' This answer will be opposed by most people.

Another curious point is the intense and irresistible thrust for justice. This of course is the drive behind 'cops and robbers'. Most writers know—whether consciously or unconsciously—that they must introduce a blatant injustice early on in their scripts. Then the suggestion must be that retribution

will come, and justice be effected. This is what keeps people watching a film or play or reading a novel, even to the bitter end. That is all we want to see—justice done!

It is an interesting fact that enormous injustices can be justified on the grounds of getting true justice! There has to be honour amongst thieves, or look out! Mob justice is in order where an injustice has been done!

WHY IS MAN IN THE BATTLE OF GOOD AND EVIL?

The answer to this question is very simple: man believes he is a good creature, doing good. He recognises—for the most part—that he is not perfect, but considers that his life is nevertheless oriented to the good. When asked about the truth of God, his reply is generally that such matters are OK for those who are on a religious line, but, as for him, he doesn't aspire to that kind of pious living. He is just ruggedly for good and against evil. He thinks this is the pattern of true truth. In fact he feels cosy in this kind of goodness.

The truth is that his attitude stems from the fall of man. The temptation—as we have seen—was to know good and evil, *of himself*. He wished to monitor the actions of good and evil from himself. He genuinely believed he knew what was good and what was evil. We have said before, that what it generally amounts to, is that he defines 'good' as what he believes, 'evil' as what appears to be adverse to him.

In this, strangely enough, man has some support from the Bible. The Hebrew word for *good* is *tob*. This means 'that which is pleasant, appropriate, functional, pleasurable, right'. *Ra*, the Hebrew word for *evil*, would then mean 'that which is not pleasant, functional, etc.' *Tob* really amounts to 'full of pleasure', whilst *ra* amounts to 'full of pain'. God has planned good for man, and not evil. Man knows instinctively that what he is about should yield pleasure and well-being, as, of course, it really should. If man were free in the

truth (in God) then this is how it would all be. Yet only those who love God come to know this, for as Paul puts it, 'In all things God is working for *good* for those who love Him.'

Man understands, then, that to be man is to live in the good and not the evil. It is just that he will not let God tell him which is which. He wishes to make his own decisions on that score, and so he does!

THE DELUSION OF THE RIGHTEOUS MEN

Robin Hood and Ned Kelly were right. They opposed the evil rich, and helped the righteous poor. The rich are always evil, and the poor always good. So goes the myth. 'All men are equal, but some are more equal than others', is a modern saying. Beliefs like this lead to such conclusions as the opinion that it is right, at any cost, to bring down governments, especially if they are unjust, or promote inequality. It is right to raise the poor. Anything is pardoned if it aids the oppressed.

In this sort of argument there is an element of truth, but even so it is not *the* truth. There is an enormous amount of 'do-goodism' in the world. Car stickers advise us as to what *is good* and *right* to do. We must save the whales, the dolphins and the land-mark! We must not use uranium but we must use solar energy. We must preserve the forests and the bull-ants. We must have regard for the animal kingdom, and for the disadvantaged of the human race.

Who could argue against such admonitions? Of course we ought to work for peace, for equal opportunity for human beings, for preservation of the creational *status quo*, and a million other such things. At the same time, we should do these things without strong criticism of those who don't, and without pharisaical pride because we do. Christ's teaching was that it is best to live in the truth

unconsciously*, not letting one hand know what the other is doing. We will, of course, be conscious that we are *not* doing good if our sense of truth is alive and we are tempted to depart from it.

The only point we are making in the discussion above is that other human beings are always deciding for us what is good and what is evil. Rarely are do-gooders challenged as to their reasons and motives for doing such so-called good. No one enquires whether much of their action is a guilt-compensation operation. The person who fights for anti-pollution measures may even be a cigarette smoker! One who espouses health-food may be a drinker of alcohol or a smoker of marijuana! This doesn't matter for he is seeking to do good. Now we are not decrying this doing of good—even if it is only relative. We are simply saying, 'Let us be humble about the good we think we are doing.'

We do not want to call a moratorium on doing good, but just on the human pride and pharisaism which often goes with it. By all means let us do good unto all men, but let us have the humility to know whether we are doing it out of pride or even guilt, and so not truly out of love.

To conclude our study on self-righteous man, we quote Jesus. 'He told this parable to those who *trusted in themselves that they were righteous*' (Luke 18:9ff.). That is the delusion of the self-righteous man, for no one in himself is righteous. The story Jesus told was that of the Pharisee who congratulated himself on his innate goodness, and chatted the matter over amiably with God, telling Him what a good fellow he—the Pharisee—was. He thanked God he was not like the tax-gatherer who was beating his breast for

* An example of living unconsciously in the truth is seen in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). Here the disciples (the sheep) are represented as being unconscious of the good they have done. At the same time, we cannot deny that we often do good, i.e. consciously, cf. Romans 12:21, James 4:17, Galatians 6:10.

his own sinfulness. A Sunday School teacher was telling the story and concluded, 'Well, children, let us thank God we are not like the Pharisee'! We nod and yet think, 'Let us thank God we are not like the Sunday School teacher'!

The delusion that we are basically good and understand what is good and what is evil seems cemented in our thinking. How dangerous this is can be seen by the damage done down through the centuries by self-appointed messiahs, would-be founders of utopias, and fanatical do-gooders. Nothing will convince man that his ideas of good and evil are not in accordance with the truth.

8

The Coming of the Truth

MAN IN NEED OF THE TRUTH

If what we have said about man is true—that he has exchanged the truth of God for a lie—then he is in great need of the truth. If he is deluded in thinking that he knows what is good and evil (ie. the truth and the lie) then it is imperative that he come to the truth, especially by the unmasking of the lie. Only when he knows the truth will he be free, ie. free from what is false, freed into what is true, and free in the living of the truth.

We saw that God has always employed His media to communicate Himself as the truth to the human race. Stubbornly, man has either ignored these media and their message, or has deliberately tried to destroy the media, and if not the media, then the message. That is not to say that many of the human race have not heard the truth and acceded to it. Many have heard, and many have obeyed it, and come to the freedom a human being ought to know.

God has moved in history to bring the truth to man in a manner which is powerful, and by a mode which is undeniable. This has happened in the sending by God of His Son, in the coming of Jesus Christ to be man.

THE WORD WAS ALWAYS THE TRUTH

There was no man Jesus before the incarnation at

Bethlehem, but there was always the Word, otherwise called ‘the Son’ (Hebrews 1 :2-3, John 1: 1-3). This is the Word by which all things were made (John 1:1-3), the word uttered as a command, the word of God by which creation came into being (Hebrews 11:3). This word (or Word), John tells us, was God, face-to-face with God. The word expressed God, but God was not the word, although He was one with the word. It (he) was the word which tells us concerning God. John says, ‘ In him was life, and his life was the light of men ’ .

What does it mean: ‘In him was life, and his life was the light of men.’? It must mean that, because he was the truth, his life lighted (and lights) men in the way they should be and live. This is why Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world. He that follows me...shall have the light of life’ (John 8:12). Without this life and paradigm we will not know how to be and live, especially where there is darkness. We are told that ‘the light [of his life] shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.’ This must mean that truth is stronger than untruth, and so vanquishes it.

Where, then, was that life (light) until the babe Jesus was born? The answer is, ‘This life always was. It was always the word, upholding all things by its own power’ (Hebrews I :2-3, Colossians 1: 16). We have intimations that in the Old Testament times this word was always active. Even so it never explicitly appeared in person except it be that the ‘angel of the Lord’ was himself this very Word.*

What really matters is that the Word, as the truth, now came visibly into the midst of human affairs.

* Passages such as I Corinthians 10: 1-5, John 8:58, and 12:41 (‘ . . . he saw his [Christ’s glory and spoke of him’) indicate the action of the Son in pre-N.T. times. As the Word he was always upholding creation (Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3).

THE WORD BECAME FLESH, LIVING WITH US

The *notion* of the Word becoming flesh is difficult to comprehend. The *action* was simple. A baby was born. It grew, and became a man. The man was certified by John the Baptist as the one who had power and authority (a) to bring in the Kingdom of God, (b) to bring universal forgiveness of sins to mankind, and (c) to pour out the Holy Spirit universally (ie. to baptise in—or with—the Holy Spirit). These were stunning claims. No human being had ever had such roles accredited to him. Either they existed only in a secluded religious sphere—a world of abstract spirituality—or they were real. He claimed them not only to be real, but for the world, indeed for all history. The Kingdom of God was a sovereign and eternal reality. The forgiveness of sins, not arbitrarily gratuitous, but on the basis of true righteousness, was indispensable to man, whilst the anointing of the Holy Spirit was necessary for receiving the truth and communicating it to others of the human race.

What we mean is that Jesus, being truly man, could communicate the truth in a man’s way, to other human beings. Whilst, undoubtedly, his deity was there with his humanity, it never crossed the boundaries of the divine to bolster the human, nor did the human invade the domain of deity. Being truly man he was more man than man had been since the time of his fall. By this we do not mean he was super-man but truly man as against the degraded state of fallen man.

THE WORD OF TRUTH: THE WITNESS

We saw briefly that Jesus had been witnessed to by John the Baptist. John 1:6-8 says, ‘There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.’

In John 5:33-34 Jesus spoke of John's testimony to him: 'You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony which I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved.'

The words 'testimony' and 'witness' are basically the same. To bear witness is to testify. To bear witness is to tell the truth. In human affairs human beings tell the truth as best they are able. As we observed before, no human being can tell 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth', although he may believe that this is what he is doing. He tells what he has seen. In sport even linesmen disagree among themselves, let alone those who are on opposing teams. It is difficult for us as human beings to be detached and impartial.

Even so Jesus was witnessed to by John whom the people had accepted as the prophet of God, a prophet who had come after hundreds of years of no prophecy. Yet Jesus had a greater testimony or witness than that of John. It was that of the Father. In John 6:44-46 Jesus made it clear that God (the Father) had already taught via the prophets about His Son. Those whose hearts were open would recognise him when he came. At his baptism the Father said, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' He repeated this at the transfiguration of Christ: 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased: listen to him' (Matthew 3:17, 17:S). Jesus said, 'The testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father sent me. And the Father who sent me *has himself* borne witness to me' (John 5 :36-37).

He then explained why they (his audience) did not hear him (Jesus) and his words. 'His [God's] voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you *do not believe him*

whom he has sent' . Later he repeated these thoughts, for the Pharisees had accused him of bearing witness to himself. He answered, 'Even if I bear witness to myself, my testimony is true; for I know whence I have come and whither I am going, but you do not know whence I have come or whither I am going. . . In your law it is written that the testimony of two men is true; I bear witness to myself and the Father who sent me bears witness to me' (John 8:14-18).

The point is that in any court of law a man may witness to himself, otherwise he would not be called as a defendant. It is the duty of the judge and/or jury to discern whether the person's witness is authentic. The Father had borne witness to the Son. This witness ought to have been accepted but it was not. This is underlined in Jesus' statement, 'No man knows the Son save the Father, and no man knows the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son is pleased to reveal him' (Matthew 11:27). Jesus' point was that not all would (could) receive the truth, even though it came from God.

Jesus also declared that the Scriptures bore witness to him (John 5:39-47). He went even further and maintained that his words were the truth no less than the given Scriptures. In saying, 'If you do not believe his [Moses'] words, how will you believe my words', he was ranking his words with those which they ought to have held in highest esteem. One amazing claim was, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.' Perhaps most powerful of all was his assertion, 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.' Nothing could be more dynamic than that! Peter agreed. He said, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life' (Mark 13:31, John 5:47, 6:63, 68).

THE ONLY TRUE WITNESS

John said, 'The word became flesh and dwelt among us,

and we beheld his glory as of the only Son of the *Father, full of grace and truth.*’ He added, ‘The law came by Moses, but *grace and truth* by Jesus Christ.’ He was not saying that the Old Testament was not the truth, or even that grace was not found in the Mosaic covenant, but he was saying, ‘Grace and truth have become incarnate in the Son.’

We have to say it: man had not seen personalised truth before Christ came. How could this be? The answer is, ‘Never man was like this man in life, in action and in accomplishment. He was the truth walking, talking, doing, acting, dying, rising and ascending.’ No man had ever been the true paradigm of truth.

Putting it another way, we say, ‘No man had ever seen God. He showed God. He was the true witness.’ That is why he said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen’. He had to add, ‘but you do not receive our testimony’ (John 3:11). Later he said of himself, ‘He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony’. He then added a powerful conclusion: ‘He who receives his [Jesus]’ testimony sets his seal to this, that *God is true*’ (John 3:32-33).

In John 8:40 Jesus cried, ‘. . .you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God’. This is an amazing statement; it should make immense impact upon the whole human race. At last we have a man who knows and tells the truth ! He explained why they could not hear the truth. ‘Why do you not understand what I say? It is *because you cannot bear to hear my word.*’ It may have been understandable that the Gentiles would not hear this man, but that his fellow-Jews—the true people of God—did not hear was unbelievable (John 8:43, cf. 1:11). It meant they were in double deceit. The Gentiles were the Non-God people. The Jews claimed to know Him. Yet they could not hear the words of His Son because they could not bear the truth.

This was the double deceit.

In talking to Pilate, Jesus said, ‘. . . for this cause came I into the world *that I might bear witness to the truth*’. That tells us all! Jesus came to give to men the truth they had rejected when they had rebelled against God. They had walked in darkness. His life was to be light for them, but they had no love for the truth. Here, now, was Jesus living the truth—doing it—and telling them what it was. He was the true witness.

NO OTHER WITNESS

No other man could claim to be the true witness to God. Not then, nor ever. Those who accept the truth from his lips can witness to the witness to the truth! Theirs is not a direct witness, except to Christ. That is why he is called ‘the faithful witness’, and ‘the faithful and true witness’, and ‘Faithful and True’ (Revelation 1:5, 3:14, 19:11). This means the truth has come to the human arena. Men can no longer say they have no place to go where they can find the truth. The truth has become flesh. He is the one who can rightly claim, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’.

9

How He is the Truth**THE TRUTH IS THE TRUTH**

Jesus said to the Father, ‘Thy word is truth’ (John 17:17). He meant no less than ‘You are the truth, therefore when you speak what you say is the truth.’ It is right to say then that the Father ‘spoke’ or ‘uttered’ the Son. That is, the Son, when he came, spoke the words of the Father (John 7: 16-18, 8:26-28, 47, 12:47-49, 14: 10). He was the infallible witness to the truth, ie. to God the Father.

How was he the true witness? Did he merely parrot the words God had given him? Was he like a modern tape-recorder, like a tape which was first recorded and then switched on to PLAY? Not at all. He was one with the Father (John 10:30), but relationally this way. He did nothing of his own accord, but only what he was shown by the Father did he then show to the world (John 5: 19-20). How he lived, what he said, and what he did was all the dynamic reflection, and indeed the action of the Father Himself.

This would mean that nothing Jesus did was false. Nothing was irrelevant. Nothing was outside the will of the Father. Everything was the substance, essence and manifestation of the truth. He could be this only because he was truly aligned with the Father. (‘I and the Father are one.’) He was the first man of whom this could be said. The wills of Father and Son were synchronised.

This being so, to what did he witness?

He said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of *what we know*, and bear witness to *what we have seen*’. *He* [the Son] bears witness to what *he has seen and heard*. He added, ‘He who receives his [the Son’s] testimony sets his seal to this, that *God is true*’. How can this be? ‘For he whom God has sent *utters the words of God*, for it is not by measure that he [the Father] gives the Spirit’. The Son can witness because, as man, he is filled with the Spirit of truth. That is why Jesus could claim, ‘. . . for this cause came I into the world that I might *bear witness to the truth*’ (John 3:11, 32-34, 18:37).

FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH

Being one with the Father he was one with Him in the truth. His glory was ‘of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.’ For a world which has lived mainly in the lie, the coming into the world of the Son was a unique happening, strongly confronting, wholly threatening to the way of the lie. How then was this, and what modes did the revelation of truth take? The answer is, ‘Jesus lived the truth by which man can measure whether or not he is of the truth. He is the paradigm of true man, by which man can measure whether or not he is a true man.’ A true man is one who is full of grace and truth. This is the true image of God in the practice of life.

None of this is mere abstract and theological thinking. It is not merely a matter of reasoning. We only have to look at the life (and death) of Christ to see the truth in action. As we observed, *the truth is something you do*. You ‘truth’ it, *doing* the truth all the time. This is what it means to be a true man.

THE WITNESS TO GOD

Jesus could say, ‘He who has seen me has seen the

Father.’ He added, ‘I *say* nothing from myself [ie. on my own authority: I am not detached from the Father]; the Father who dwells in me, *he does the works*’ (John 14:10). This means that if we went through the Gospels and everywhere it is written, ‘Jesus said’, ‘Jesus cried’, ‘Jesus commanded’, we were to cross out ‘*Jesus*’ and write ‘the Father said’, ‘the Father cried’, ‘the Father commanded’, then that would be the true picture. In practice this would give us a very different view of the Father, for to many He is distant, remote, even severe and authoritarian. To such people, it is Jesus who is the warm, the intimate, the loving one. For some he is even seen as pacifying the stern Father. These are wrong views, of course, but only an acceptance of Jesus as the true witness to the Father will alter our misconceptions.

Jesus is really saying, ‘everything stems from the Father, ie. the sending, the incarnation, the baptism as Messiah, the ministry, yes, even the death of the Cross and the Resurrection.’ This, of course, was true, and Paul summed it up when he said, ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses against them’. When we see this, we marvel at the love of the Father, and His intimacy with us, in and through His Son. This is the truth of God.

To what special things did Jesus witness? Whilst we can say he witnessed to all aspects of God, we can focus on a number of things which it is vital for us to know:

He witnessed to the truth that God is Father.

He witnessed to the true principle of Fatherhood, ie. ‘The Father loves the Son and shows him all things’. ‘If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, shall not your heavenly Father give good things [or, the Holy Spirit] to them that ask him?’ (John 5:20, Luke 11:13).

He witnessed to the truth that the Father is love. ‘God so loved that he gave. . . .’; ‘That they might know, Father, that you have loved them *even as you have loved me*’.

The Father’s love is shown in forgiveness, ie. total forgiveness as a grace gift, a gift that is unconditional, but a gift which required the death and resurrection of the Son before it could rightly be given. The *receiving* of this gift is the point where the revelation of the Son becomes reality to and in a human being.

If a human being could receive this witness of the Son, then he would see how deceptive, how tawdry, and how empty is the living of the lie. To receive the witness is to know that God is Father, that He is love, that He is the true God, and (as Jesus said) to know the Father is to live in eternal life (John 17:3).

JESUS IS ALSO THE WITNESS TO TRUE MANHOOD

We will leave this principle for later development, for it is extremely important and of immense practical value for us. Here we can say simply that fallen man is not true man. He has unmanned or de-manned himself in and by his rebellion. Whilst, roughly speaking, he is still man, he is really a caricature of what it is to be man.

Our problem is that we take our fallen humanity to be the norm for manhood, when it is far below that norm. Jesus’ manhood is the true norm. His is not a super-humanity. It is simply humanity.

This is not to say that everything that Jesus did is to be mimicked by us. He had a vocation and calling as Messiah which was unique to him. We do not then have to be ‘parallel’ messiahs. However, in character, and in our relationships with God, our fellow man, and the creation, we should be as he was. As he manifested the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22-23), such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, then so should we.

In saying this we are not talking about perfection. To be a

man is not to fulfil certain legal requirements. We must recognise that it is the habitual thrust of a person which matters, not success in the meticulous observance of a set code. Man, in recovering from his fallenness and from living the lie, will need a transforming power to restore him to his true humanity. Also he will find the forces of darkness to be pitted heavily against him.

All this being true, the new man has Christ as the paradigm of true humanity. Christ has powerfully witnessed to what it is to be a man.

10

What, Then, was the Witness?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WITNESS

Any reader who has persisted to this point and has followed my way of reasoning—may he be blessed!—will have noted that I make no effort whatever to prove what I say, other than to quote the Scriptures. We all know the technique of conceiving what we think is a magnificent idea, and then seeking to substantiate it from the text of the Bible. This approach is, of course, inadmissible. On the other hand, I believe that once we have discovered the key to the theme *witness* in the Scriptures, then we are well on the way to discovering the truth of God. Perhaps—as seems to be the case in the early church—we first have to be brought livingly to the truth, after which we see the importance of witness.

In this chapter I want us to look at the witness of Jesus to the truth, ie, his witness to the Father in all His being, and following that, to see the emphasis given to witness in the Old and New Testaments.* What I would like us to see is the simplicity of the life of Christ as he lived the truth. If

* In this area of research I have been greatly helped by the Monograph of Allison A. Trites (Society for New Testament Studies), published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977.

anywhere he failed to witness truly then we cannot say, 'He was full of grace and truth'. If, at any time, he fell short, then all his claims to be a witness must fall to the ground, and we would still be unable to know the truth. We could not claim to have the 'word of truth', for everything depends upon the veracity of Jesus in word and life. Jesus was and is either a total witness or no true witness at all.

HOW JESUS WITNESSED

Paul exhorted the Philippian church in these words, 'Have this mind *among you* which *is yours* in Christ Jesus'. What then was *the mind*, and *how* was it theirs? The answer is shown in the mind or attitude of Jesus, '...who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross'. Paul has a parallel thought in II Corinthians 8:9, where he says, 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for[our] sake he became poor, that [we who were poor] by his poverty...might become rich'.

This *mind* of Christ is the *mind* of God. Paul had asked the Philippians to 'count others better than themselves', and '... do not merely look out for your own interests but also for the interests of others'. In Romans 15:1-3 he had said, 'Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please himself; as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me" '. In all of this Paul was saying that Christ witnessed to the mind of God. Unbelievably he was claiming that *God*

counted us better than Himself!*

Did he really mean this? The answer is, 'Yes! As we should put others before ourselves, so God put us before Himself.' This is the way of love. If God had put Himself first the Father would never have sent the Son, nor would the Son have come.

Yet, Christ not only witnessed to the mind of God, but also to what is truly the mind of true man, man made in the image of God. Just as God's true love is seen in the Son giving his life for man, so man's true love is seen in laying down his life for his fellow man.† Christ then witnessed by his incarnation, life, death and resurrection to the truth of God. At the same time he witnessed to the truth of man.

PRACTICAL MODES OF WITNESS: SUBMISSION

Remembering that to witness is to tell out the truth as it is, we can examine the modes of Jesus' life and discover the truth as it is in God, and as it ought to be in man. Everything then, that he was and did, is part of that witness. This would include the submission to being conceived by the Spirit in the womb of a woman—being made in the likeness of sinful flesh.‡ It would include being born under the law, an act demanding submission to that law, even to the Jewish law. Included would be submission to his parents, and to the authorities of the land. In all such things we find no

* For the whole principle of servanthood, both divine and human, see my book *the Sons of God are the Servants of All* (Adelaide: NCPI 1982). To account others as better than ourselves does not refer to the quality or attainments of others so much as 'in honour preferring one another' (Romans 12:10 AV). In this sense Christ (and so the Father) preferred us in honour, ie. gave us the place of primacy in love through the incarnation and atonement. Of course the Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit) is before man in quality of essential being;

† Cf. Romans 15:1-3, 8-9, John 15:13,1 John 3:16-18.

‡ Galatians 4:4 5, Romans 8:3, Hebrews 2:11-14

rebellion, no haughty claim that he is excepted from such things because of his divine origin.

At his baptism we see his identification with sinful man in asking for the baptism which was for sinners, even though he was 'without sin'. We see the submission of humility which draws out the cry of the Father, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased'. This submission is seen again in the temptation, where Jesus will obey only the will of God. He is subject only to the truth, the word of God His answer to Satan is, 'It is written'. Satan seeks then, by the quoting of the word of God, to seduce him by the truth from the truth. In Satan's mouth *the quoted word is not the true word* of God (Matthew 4:1-11).

His submission is not simply a witness to obedience— though it is indeed that—but witness to true sonship, or (we might say) the active principle of true sonship. In all that the incarnate Son is doing, he is showing the mind of the Father, ie. the truth of the Father, that is to say the truth itself, or rather, the Truth Himself.

PRACTICAL MODES OF WITNESS: THE MINISTRY OF COMPASSION AND LOVE

Jesus' announcement of his ministry in Luke 4:17-18 (quoting Isaiah 61:1f.) was a proclamation of compassion. Peter later summed up the ministry as he was preaching his initial message to the Gentiles: 'Jesus of Nazareth [whom God anointed] with the Holy Spirit and power, [who] went about doing [all manner of] good and healing all those who were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him' (Acts 10:38). In Matthew 9:36 it is recorded, 'When he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd'.

An examination of Jesus' ministry would reveal the variety within that compassion. He heals in domestic situations,

raises children and restores them to parents. He has a heart for the unclean, the lepers, the moral outcasts, the demonically possessed, the heavily guilty. He washes the feet of the disciples in their most frightening hour, giving them supportive love and comfort. His ultimate revelation of love is his cross and resurrection. In restoring people to their true humanity*, and in all these acts of love, he displays the truth of the loving and compassionate Father. At the same time, he unmasks hypocrisy, time-serving, and various other modes of living the lie. At one time he can call Herod 'that old fox', and at another he can angrily overthrow the tables of illicit commerce in the temple. As well as a ministry of compassion, it was a ministry of judgement.

He disclaims taking the initiative in any of these things. He says, 'Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but *the Father who dwells in me does his works*' (John 14:10). All the Son's actions then are true ones, and the very witness of the truth.

PRACTICAL MODES OF WITNESS: THE UTTERANCE OF THE DYNAMIC WORD

Jesus could claim, 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life' (John 6:63). In such passages as Isaiah 55:9-11 and Jeremiah 23:23-32, the word of God is shown as dynamic and of itself effective; so too are the words of the Son; they are the truth of God (John 8:40). As we have seen, the Son insists that he utters no word on his own authority. They do not originate with him. He is the voluntary vehicle of them, and as such is the very truth of

* The word 'salvation' relates to healing and wholeness. Man is not only healed from disaster, tragedy and the consequences of his sins, but is restored to the wholeness of his manhood and true being.

the Father (John 14: 10). Of course he is more than a vehicle; he is the word incarnate, the word *in actu*.

We see the power of the word in his utterances, When he says such things as, 'I will; be thou clean', or, 'Stretch forth thy hand', and the man is healed; or 'Neither do I condemn you: go and sin no more', then in each case his word is effective. In John 3:31-35 Jesus sums up the fact and power of his words:

'He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth belongs to the earth, and of the earth he speaks; he who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony; he who receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit; the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand'.

No less on the Cross was his word dynamic, when he prayed for the forgiveness needed by those who were persecuting him, and when he assured the penitent thief of entrance into the eternal Kingdom, In the hour of the last supper, he had said to his disciples, 'You are clean through the word that I have spoken to you,' and to the Father, 'Thy word is truth: sanctify them through the truth'. In all this then, Jesus was the Father's witness to the truth, for the truth itself was powerful in effecting what it said.

PRACTICAL MODES OF WITNESS: THE SAVING EVENTS

The events prior to the Cross and Resurrection are not merely 'preliminaries'. They are an integral and important part of the truth. But it is the climactic happenings of Cross and Resurrection which constitute the very heart of the truth of God, the truth of His Fatherhood, the truth of the very Godhead, the truth of the nature of God: in short, the Truth!

We conclude, then, that the incarnation, life, words and acts of Jesus are the Father's communication to mankind of the truth, which they had once exchanged for the lie (Romans 1:25). That lie, which masquerades as the truth, can be unmasked by nothing but the revelation of the truth itself.

It is no wonder that humanity which wishes to continue living in the lie is angry when confronted with the truth in the person of Jesus. His confrontation is an intelligible one when we speak of it in ordinary human terms. He spelled out the truth, not in theological or abstract statements, but in his simple but profound manner of living, and dying, and rising. It was said that he was full of truth, that he told the truth which he had heard from God, that he was the truth of the Father, and that he witnessed to the truth (John 1:14, 8:40, 14:6, 18:37). No man before had done that, and neither has any since. He is unique as the revelation of the truth.

The mystery is that man, who badly needs the truth, should pass him by. That in itself is a witness to the power of the lie, and so to the stubborn wills of human beings. In the ultimate, nevertheless, this truth will unmask the lie forever, and cast it helpless and lifeless to the dust of death.

11

The Continuing Witness**THE WITNESS THAT ALWAYS WAS**

In Acts 14:16-17 Paul writes, ‘In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness’. The apostle is really saying that the seasons and the crops reveal the nature of God in His providence. We have seen that God has brought revelations of His truth to mankind through various media, and still uses such media. The deposit of the prophet, ie. their inscripturated word, is still a dynamic witness.

Within those prophecies we find God setting forth His case of truth and demanding answers. On some occasions these utterances take the nature of the language of the law court. God takes up an accusation made against Himself, and challenges the accusers to prove their case. They are, of course, unable to do so. He then goes on to put them into the defendant’s box, rather than the plaintiff’s, so that now they are under accusation.* The valuable point made is this, that whilst God never sets out to justify Himself, He leaves no grounds for the accusations of men. He proves them

* For a full treatment Of this, see A. A. Trites, *op.cit.* pp ~47.

baseless by revealing the truth to them. He pursues their lie, nailing it down, and by so doing, unmasks false accusation.

It seems strange that God should take the trouble to reveal the truth. We conclude that He has two purposes behind such actions; one is to reveal the truth to those who have been deceived so that they might come to know the truth, and the other is to leave no grounds for excuses for those who deliberately follow the lie. In his ultimate judgements, God will be just, and those who have pursued the lie will not only be unmasked, but will have to *be responsible* for espousing the lie and rejecting the truth.

**THE JUSTICE THAT SEEMS NOT TO BE:
TRUTH UNREQUITED BY GOD**

In the New Testament we have two significant passages (amongst others) which speak about God’s injustice being carried out on time. These passages are Luke 18:1-8 and Revelation 6:9-11. Man always has problems with God’s timing. Man is keen to ‘get justice’ as quickly as possible. God seems slow to effect it. In this regard, God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit Palestine, but not for some hundreds of years because ‘the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet fulfilled [ie. completed, ripened]’. In other words God would not judge the Amorites until they were ripe for judgement. At that time the Israelites would come into Canaan and be God’s instrument of judgement through punishment.

In Ecclesiastes 8:11 it is written, ‘Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil’. Man, when not judged immediately, will think God does not care about his evil. This thought is again given to us in Psalm 10:13: ‘Why does the wicked renounce God, and say in his heart, “Thou wilt not call to account”?’ The point made in Luke 18 and Revelation 6

is that God judges on time; never before, never after. The principle is, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' and 'Will not God vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you he will vindicate them speedily'.

Man's idea of 'soon' and God's idea of 'soon' are different. It seems to man that if God were what He claims to be, then He would act quickly. If He says He judges and then does not judge—quickly—then He is *not* the God of truth. The answer to that statement is that God never leaves Himself without a witness. Likewise He judges *on time*. He is true to His word, notwithstanding the accusations of the contrary witnesses. Always, God has witnessed to the truth of His righteousness. The book of the Revelation is primarily concerned with showing the righteousness of God. As well, it exposes the evil of man and fallen supernatural powers, and their action in history, and outlines God's (vindicating) judgements, both within the processes of history and at its final climax.

Israel was told many times that God had appointed it as a witness, and that it should continue to witness (eg. Isaiah 43:10, 12, 44:8). Israel witnessed to the nature of God. This was in conformity with Exodus 19:5-6 ('a kingdom of priests and a holy nation') and Leviticus 11:44 ('be ye holy for I am holy'). The witness Israel was also the servant of God. Yet that servant was at once Israel, and Messiah. Messiah himself was the Suffering Servant but was so related to the holy remnant of Israel that he was one with them. He, by his suffering, was the true witness to and of God. This is especially shown in Isaiah 53, where he took on him the sins of the people, bearing their griefs and carrying their sorrows, so that they were healed and God's love was accordingly manifested. In other Isaianic prophecies the servant was also the victorious leader and king. 'I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for

the peoples' (Isaiah 55:4). Suffering and victory, which h fact go together, are both a witness to the nature of God.

Christ fulfilled that task of witnessing, but his witness was not over with the Cross and Resurrection. In one sense his great universal work of witness began with the completion of these two events which constitute the basis of the Atonement.

We need to know in what sense this was the case' for we must not lose sight of the fact that by his incarnation, life, death and resurrection, he showed the Father, and showed the truth of His love. Also, as we have seen, he showed what we might call 'the truth of man'. So in that sense his witness was completed for God's love was definitively shown. However, God's work had begun even before creation—in planning man's glorification (Ephesians 1:11-14 + Isaiah 43: 6-7, I Corinthians 2:6-10, Romans 8:28-30). In that sense, history is always the witness of God in His intention for man and creation, for He had planned to redeem mankind from its bondage to sin and evil and to form His elect people. The witness to this was to proceed from that point in time which we call Pentecost. It finds its climax at the point we call 'the Parousia of Christ'. Until that time, the witness continues.

In Acts 1:1-8 we see Christ preparing his disciples for the work which was to be theirs. He spoke of the Kingdom of God, and of their related part in it. He said, 'You will receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and you *will be witnesses to* me in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth'.

This was not the first mention of their being witnesses. In Luke 24:44-49 Jesus had told his disciples that the Scriptures prophesied his death and resurrection, and also predicted that 'repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his [Jesus'] name among all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem'. This accords with the world-wide witness principle of Acts 1:8. It further accords with it

because in Luke 24:48 Jesus added, ‘You are witnesses of these things’. The sum of both passages is that they were to be witnesses of his life, and particularly of his death and resurrection because they had seen them. Finally he added, ‘Don’t leave Jerusalem until you be empowered by the promise of my Father [ie. the Holy Spirit]’ Both passages emphasise then that witness will be through the power of the Spirit.

Further confirmation that it was this which made disciples into witnesses is in the significant passages of John 15:18-27. Its substance is as follows: ‘Don’t be amazed if the world hates you. If it hated me it will hate you also. I have come with the truth, confronting them with it, and they hate me. They wholly refuse to understand me, but the Holy Spirit will come after my going and as the *Spirit of truth* he will witness to me, ie. he will bring the truth of me to men. You, my disciples, also will witness’. Doubtless he meant they would witness through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.

CHRIST’S WITNESS CONTINUES THROUGH THE CHURCH

We must be clear that the acts of Christ continue. His ascension does not mean they ceased and that the Holy Spirit and the church took over in his absence. He had said, ‘. . .you make disciples of all nations, and look! I am with you right up to the consummation of the age’. He meant, ‘In all that you do I will be present. As I did that which was the work of the Father, so you will do my work. I will be with you so that these works can happen and the witness thus continue’. A study of John 14:10-14 and Matthew 5:16 will show that, as the Son witnesses to the Father, so Christ’s people will witness to the Son, and thus to the Father. Behind all the actions of the Son and the church is

the Father who is working. We conclude that Christ works from Pentecost to the Parousia (the day or time of his appearing), and *everything that he does is witness to the Father, ie. witness to the truth*. Now, however, he has called his people to share with him in this witness. Those who do so are said to ‘hold the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’. Christ thus continues his witness through his people, especially as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

It is this witness about which we shall speak in the next chapter but one, but first we will examine the work and ministry of the Spirit of truth, the one who is himself the witness to, and of, the truth.

12

The Spirit of Truth**THE SPIRIT OF LIFE, CREATION AND REDEMPTION**

Just as the Son must know the Father in order to witness to Him, so the Spirit must know both the Father and the Son. Being the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of the Son, and the Spirit of Christ, he is able to do this. We should not think of God apart from His Spirit. Paul says, 'No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God' (I Corinthians 2:11). He says, 'The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God', and in the same breath indicates that the Spirit reveals those depths to us.

The Holy Spirit is seen at creation (Genesis 1: 1-3, Psalm 104:30), and is present when the word is spoken. He relates to the Son, the Word of God, by whom all things were made. Being the Spirit of creation, he is also the Spirit of life (Romans 8:2, II Corinthians 3:8, cf. Job 33:4, Ezekiel 37:1-14). He then can witness to the truth of God as Father, and to Christ as Son of the Father (Matthew 10:20, John 16: 12-15, Romans 8:9- 11, Galatians 4:4-6). He is the Spirit of providence, as Psalm 104:29-30 shows. So then all through history we see the work of the Spirit as he is agent in creation, in providence, in the patriarchs, in Israel, and in the prophets. He is not merely conversant with the truth; he is the agent of the truth (I Peter 1:10-12, II Peter 1:20-21). In fact, John even speaks of him as the truth: 'The Spirit is

the witness. . .the Spirit is the truth' (I John 5:7).

THE SPIRIT AND THE WITNESS OF CHRIST

The disciples were told (a) they were to be witnesses to Christ, and (b) they could only be such witnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit. This was because the Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Apart from the Spirit they could neither know nor tell the truth. The Spirit for his part was a better witness than any man because he had been involved and active in every event of Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. Luke, chapters one and two, show the Holy Spirit as he was connected with the events prior to and at Jesus' birth. John's father, Zechariah, was filled with the Spirit and prophesied. Elizabeth, John's mother, was filled with the Spirit when she met Mary. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. By the Holy Spirit Mary conceived her child virginally. Through the same Spirit both Simeon and Anna testified to Jesus' unique call and being.

Jesus was undoubtedly also filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb, but he was specifically anointed with the Spirit for his Messianic ministry. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested out before he launched into that ministry. After his testing he returned, victorious over Satan, and full of the Spirit. He explained the anointing he had as being that which sealed his Messiahhood (Luke 4:18, cf. Isaiah 61:1f., and Acts 10:38). All his ministry was accomplished in and by the power of the Spirit. As he said (Matthew 12:28), 'If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you.'

His great acts of the Cross and Resurrection were effected by the aid and power of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 9:14, Romans 1:4-5, 8:9-11), as indeed was his Ascension (Romans 1:4). These facts tell us, then, that the Spirit was

intimately one with the Son in all that he did. This is why he is called, ‘the Spirit of Christ’, ‘the Spirit of the Son’, ‘the Spirit of Jesus’, ‘the Spirit of the Lord’. In fact, as Paul says, ‘No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit’ (I Corinthians 12:3).

In John 15:18-26 we saw the impossibility of Jesus’ enemies ever changing in their hatred and misunderstanding of Christ. There was no way in which they would come to understand and acknowledge him. Because he, as a man, confronted them with the truth, they hated him and sought to kill him. Having exchanged the truth for the lie, man does not wish to come to the truth. We have seen that the odds against man seeing and accepting the truth, humanly speaking, are insurmountable. Certainly no man of himself can bring the truth to another human being. The Spirit, however, was to witness to the truth of Jesus. This of course he would do through men. In doing so, he would bring conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement to mankind. Mankind is notoriously set against such conviction, but so powerful is the truth, and so powerful the Spirit of truth, that he is irresistible. By this, we do not mean that man is overcome by some strange power, ie. in spite of himself. No, we mean that the Spirit brings conviction of the truth whether man likes it or not. Once confronted in this way man cannot deny the reality of the truth, but he can—if he so wishes—deny its demands. This means that having been given the truth and having rejected it, he is brought under judgement. The man who, having been convicted of truth, accedes to it, will find life and thus come to live in the truth. For him, the impossible has been achieved; by the action of the Spirit of truth, his mind has been changed.

GOD’S WITNESSES AND THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

We can see now why Jesus told his disciples to wait until

the Spirit came upon them (in power) before they set out to proclaim the Gospel. It would be utterly impossible for them to bring the Gospel of truth through as truth apart from the Spirit of truth, Man’s strong prejudices and his counter-truth mind-set would reject and ridicule the truth. *The Spirit alone would be able to confront man.* Being, also, the Spirit of love, he would convey love to the sinner, not only as a concept, but bring it as an experience, and also as a revelation (Romans 5:5). This he would do by showing Jesus, who in turn witnesses to the Father. As we have seen, the Spirit is the Spirit both of the Father and the Son. The book of the Acts, and passages in the New Testament epistles, tell us that the Spirit was most effective in aiding the disciples to proclaim the word of God. In regard to the powerful and effective preaching of the redeeming word by the Spirit, we ought to read the Acts, and then such references as I Corinthians 2:1-S, I Thessalonians 1:5, I Peter 1:12 and Hebrews 2:4. These declare the dynamic of true witness.

THE DISCIPLES AND TRUTH

One of Jesus’ promises was that when the Spirit came he would lead them into ‘all the truth’. This in fact happened at Pentecost. Prior to that day they did not really have a body of truth.* Following the outpouring of the Spirit, and on that very day we are told that the 3,000 converts with the small body of Christians, ‘continued in the apostles’ doctrine’. Prior to this there was no such doctrine but at Pentecost all that Christ had told them was remembered and the significance of him and his acts suddenly became

* Of course they had truth as they understood the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures and tradition. However it is clear from the Gospels—especially the teaching of Jesus—that they did not really understand the truth as a living entity.

crystallised. The Spirit had given them a rich revelation. He had brought the truth. The lie was abandoned by many. The liberating truth came through to all who believed.

We have been saying that the truth is something you do, something you live. This, too, was what happened with the coming of the Spirit. The new people of God began to live the truth, ie. to truly love one another. This is seen by the daily distribution of goods that met the true wants of the needy. As a community they cared for the orphans, widows, the hungry and the poor. They supplied their material needs from their shared resources. They also helped to fulfil the emotional needs of the Spirit-led community. It was only in the life they led—life in the truth—that they could then proclaim the truth with power. How powerful that word was, we can see from the events described in the Acts, as men and women came into the gifts of repentance, faith, forgiveness, new life, sonship and love. The Spirit was able to bring these gifts together, which explains the radical and beautiful changes which took place in human lives. Men and women were living the truth.

THE SPIRIT AND THE WITNESS OF LOVE

People are apt to think that the power of the Spirit is mysterious, in fact almost occultic. Not so: the Spirit, in revealing the love of God in the Atonement, thus brought love to the hearts of believers. The principle of love in the New Testament is, 'We love because he first loved us'. We not only love Him who loved us, but we love all mankind. Our love for others flows from God's love to us. Yet only the Spirit can bring the revelation of that love. As we saw he brings it to man as the word of the Gospel, and having distributed the gifts of salvation such as repentance, faith and forgiveness, he thus inspires us to love others. 'The love of God has been flooded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit

who has been given to us'.

All these statements and observations are factual, but they will lack the rich warmth and wonder of personal experience unless we cease being observers and become participants ourselves. For those who participated in the truth as communicated by the Spirit, there was no lack of life in the truth, But for many of us today these events seem to be merely a reiteration of historical facts, laid out for us to follow in the narrations of the book of Acts. Only when the Spirit comes to us personally does all this become alive. We are then participating in the truth, ie. in the very nature of the living God whose words are Spirit and life. There was nothing merely factual about that great tide of love which swept through that early community, and when it comes upon us today it is not simply a dry, bare fact. It is vibrant reality. It is the full-blooded truth. That it has not come for some of us is no proof that the truth is not as powerful now as then. It is simply that we are absent from the truth, the love of God.

THE EQUIPMENT OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE TRUTH-WITNESS

We might spend much time here speaking in detail of the way in which the Spirit works in the new love-community, the people of power, the apostolic household, but there is no need for that. It is enough to see that when the truth comes, it brings its own gifts and weapons, We say 'gifts' because the gifts which the Spirit distributes are really the gifts of Christ who 'led captivity captive and gave gifts to men' (Ephesians 4:8). These gifts are not given willy-nilly but are distributed sovereignly by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:4ff., Hebrews 2:4). Gifts are used in love (I Corinthians 13: 1-3) to meet the needs of human beings, especially where they aid the proclamation of the Gospel and the building up

of the people of God,

Gifts, however, are not all. Because the Gospel is 'the word of truth' (Ephesians 1 :13) it is bitterly opposed by 'the word of the lie', and the Christian community is strongly persecuted. Its message is savagely contested. For this reason the new community needs weapons with which to fight, and these are described as 'spiritual', ie. they are weapons given by the Spirit (II Corinthians 10:4). They cannot be weapons of anger so as to meet anger with anger. The word of God is called 'the sword of the Spirit'. These weapons (cf. Ephesians 6:10-18) are 'mighty to the pulling down of many strongholds', ie. to the destroying of bastions of evil. They are not merely defensive. We will have occasion to look at these weapons later, but now we are ready to see what is meant by 'witnesses to the truth', and 'holding the word of God and the testimony of Jesus'. Only men and women who have been radically transformed by a revelation of the truth can go out to proclaim that truth, and be powerful enough to break through the lie of evil.

13

Holding God's Word and Jesus' Testimony

YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES

In earlier chapters we saw how man had exchanged the truth of God for a lie. In spite of centuries of God's communication through His various media, mankind in general had opposed that truth and sought to suppress it. Whilst it is true that from the beginning there had also been men of faith, ie. those who believed the truth and lived in it, yet for the most part men refused to see it. They raised up their 'counter-truth' or 'alternate-truth', believing the so-called good that they did was essential good. It was not.

The Son was sent, and bore witness to the truth. He was therefore rightly called, 'Faithful and True', and 'the faithful and true witness'. His going, and the coming of the Spirit, were intended to raise up a great army of true and faithful witnesses. This, in fact, is what has happened. Since Pentecost, each generation of mankind has seen such witnesses. They hold to the word of God as being the word of truth, and they live as faithful witnesses. This we cannot understand until we realise what the Spirit has done to make them such.

THE ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT

John the apostle in his first letter says, ' . . . you have been

anointed by the Holy One, and you all know'. It can also be translated 'and you know all things'. He adds, '...the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him' (I John 2:20, 27). John is saying that the anointing of (or by) the Spirit has brought the whole of truth; as Jesus promised, 'He will lead you into all the truth'.

This anointing did not simply bring truth as a body of doctrine, for the very truth itself purified and regenerated its recipients. In I Corinthians 6:11 Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit working to wash, sanctify, and justify sinners. In Titus 3:5-7 he repeats the thought in strong language, speaking about 'the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit'. This constitutes a dynamic and radical change within the sinner. Elsewhere it is called 'new birth by the Spirit' (John 3:3f.). It is the same as James' statement, 'Of his own will he brought us forth by *the word of truth* that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures'. Although the Spirit is not specifically mentioned here, the word comes to man only through the Spirit. Paul says, ' . . . our gospel came to you, not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction'. Hence Peter speaks of us having 'been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God' (I Peter 1:23). Paul says, 'In him you . . . who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit' (Ephesians 1:13). This is the same as 'coming to know the truth' (II Timothy 2:25).

All of these statements point to what we saw happen at Pentecost, namely a dynamic and vital work of the Spirit in man, effecting a radical change. It is the work not only of bringing the truth to man but man to the truth, to the point

that he comes into it, and receives the actual forgiveness of sin. He undergoes a radical change of mind, and so becomes a creature of faith, receiving the life of Christ into himself so that he is now not merely looking at the truth but has the truth within himself.

All of this amounts to 'the anointing which you have received'. John tells us of '...the truth which abides in us, and will be with us forever' (II John 2). This is an amazing fact.

THE SPIRIT AND WITNESS

We have seen that true witnessing is bound up with the presence of the Spirit of truth. John says, '*The Spirit is the witness because the Spirit is the truth*' (I John 5:7). This is a powerful, positive statement. In this context he speaks about three witnesses, namely 'the Spirit, the water and the blood', and says that these three agree. He means that the Spirit, Christ's Messianic baptism, and the death of the Cross are all one in the truth. They are the truth, for through them Jesus witnessed to the truth of God.

These elements have become part of the warp and woof of the witnesses of Jesus. Grippled by the truth that has transformed us and become dynamic within us, we thus become witnesses of Christ.

WHAT IS MEANT BY 'MY WITNESSES'?

There was only one way Jesus could witness to the Father. It was to *have the truth of the Father within him*. This meant he was one with the Father, and that the Father carried out His truth through His Son. Likewise, to be Christ's witnesses, we must have within us the truth of Christ himself, ie. his own life. It must further mean that Christ lives out his witness to the Father through his people. It is by and

through them that all his actions during this age of the last days are worked out in history and in the world. Wherever Christ is, there are his witnesses. Wherever are his witnesses, there is Christ! If we see this as mere doctrine, in pious, devotional language, it will seem lofty but impractical and unreal' But it is not. It is the reality, the very business of history, and for the most part it constitutes a demanding battle in a world where the lie seems to prevail.

'THE WORD OF GOD AND THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS'

Statements concerning those 'who hold the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' are met a number of times in the book of the Revelation. In 19:10 the angel who has been showing John some of the ultimate events, says, 'I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus'. John then adds, 'For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'.

We have a problem in understanding this statement, 'The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy'*. The idea of 'the testimony of Jesus' has been that believers are called upon to witness to Christ. This is of course true, but often that witness is seen as a work which the believer effects on his own, out of his own resources, so to speak. However in Revelation 19:10 the testimony of Jesus is the testimony which Jesus bore to the Father and so to the truth. This is the spirit of prophecy. He who holds this testimony within himself will therefore prophesy. If we can understand prophecy to be the uttered word of God, and if we can understand it therefore as the telling of the truth, and if,

further, we can understand that it is the truth which Jesus lived and proclaimed, then we can see that prophetic utterance is the testimony of Jesus. Only by having and holding that truth can one bear witness to Christ, ie. to his bearing witness to the truth. We must keep in mind also that Jesus' ascension witness did not finish at the ascension but is still continuing. Then we will see how dynamic and current is that witness as it is being worked out in and through those who hold it.

We will see shortly that the apostolic community was prophetic, and its witness was to share with the world the witness of Jesus. Only in this way could man be liberated from the lie, or alternatively, be confirmed in, locked into it, by his deliberate refusal of the truth.

* Because the matter is so important I have added an appendix, 'The Testimony of Jesus' which has been abstracted from my booklet *Is Prophecy for Today?* (NCPI, Adelaide, April 1982, pp 22-24.).

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The Powerful Prophetic Community

COMING TO REALITY

I recognise that in writing the details concerning Christ, the Spirit, truth, love and the early Christian community, that I may have obscured the personal reality of the things which I have described. Perhaps it has become difficult for you to see the wood for the trees. I mean that the communication of truth does not always come best through such descriptions as I am giving. The best way to understand is to be in the heart of the matter yourself. That is something I cannot do for you. It is a matter of your own will and involvement. What I say can only act as a directory to the elements I am describing. As a writer of fiction I have discovered what Jesus found when he told his stories; people find the essence of the matter when they work it out in the action of life.

For this reason we will go directly to the apostolic community and see just how they witnessed. The method is very clear; they received the word of God with simplicity and were transformed into a forgiven, loving, and caring community. They lived truth in honesty of life, in genuine morality and in never ceasing to proclaim what they knew—the truth of God’s love in Jesus Christ His Son. This love was for the redemption of the world and the making of the elect people of the Father-Creator.

Keeping all this in mind, let us consider the prophetic thrust of that community. To do so, we will need to have some understanding of the nature of prophecy itself.

A look at Exodus 7:1-2 tells us that *the prophet is the mouthpiece of God, who utters His own word through the prophet’s lips*. In this sense *prophecy is the direct utterance of God*.

It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on the impact of prophecy as man is confronted by the truth which God speaks. For man living in the lie, that confrontation is nothing short of frightening. No wonder the prophets were—for the most part—persecuted and murdered. Sadly enough, we mostly use the term ‘prophecy’ today to mean only interpretation of biblical prophecy, the unfolding of prediction, the cracking of the (supposed) ‘prophetic code’. Because much of this is done in weird ways, and because we think of prophecy primarily in terms of prediction, we—for the most part—evade it. It is not of course that prediction is not a part of true prophecy. It is, but prediction is always with a view to exhortation.

Whether we had prophetic cranks with us or not, we would still rationalise prophecy, confining it to the past or projecting it wholly into the future, seeking to confine it to the canonical prophets. By this we mean that we are not a prophetic people and that we allow prophecy to have very little to do with the actions of our lives now. Such are our clever ways of letting ourselves off the prophetic hook.

At Pentecost the Spirit came upon the small community of believers as Jesus had foretold would happen. They then began to tell ‘the wonderful works of God’. Peter described what had happened in the terms of Joel 2:28-32. For his account, we need to read the whole of Acts 2. Here we will look particularly at verses 16 to 18:

‘...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be, God declares’ that I will pour out my Spirit upon all

flesh' and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days will pour out my spirit; and they shall prophesy . . .”

Clearly, when the Spirit comes, the community will prophesy—that is, both men and women. If we link Revelation 19:1-15 with Acts 1:8 we have the whole picture, namely that to hold the testimony of Jesus is to bear his witness to the world. That is to say that true prophecy is to proclaim the Gospel, the word of truth. In other words it is to witness. Of course this will not be a formal proclamation. It will not be merely theological, or coldly credal; it could not be, because the bearer himself has the witness of the truth within him. It has affected him. Its effects are that he is now a person living in the very truth which he proclaims.

This then is true prophecy. This is witness. This is having and holding the testimony (ie. witness) of Jesus. Thus the prophetic community has the witness of Jesus and so witnesses to Jesus—the very one who witnesses to the truth, to the Father, to His love. This is what we mean by the term ‘coming to reality’. Every person must come to this truth for himself. To have *a theology of the truth without having the truth itself is sadly and dangerously enough a possibility.*

THE WITNESSING COMMUNITY

The word ‘witness’ (Greek *martur* = English *martyr*) is a significant one in the book of the Acts. Although it is used only eleven times, it emphasises the indispensability of witness each time. The verb ‘to bear witness’ or ‘to testify’ (Greek: *martureo*) is used nine times in relation to proclaiming the Gospel. If we equate witnessing with prophetic proclamation, then we must see the early community as prophetic. As we have suggested above, it was prophetic not only in utterance but in its manner of life. It lived the truth

which it proclaimed. It was itself the fruit and outcome of the prophetic word.

If we trace the nouns and verbs linked with witnessing we see that the apostles used the direct approach. They confronted their Jewish brethren with the truth, and it was the truth uncluttered by theological niceties, apologetic persuasiveness, or eloquent rhetoric. If we can believe Paul, the use of such things actually obscured the truth (I Corinthians 1:17, 2:1, 4, II Corinthians 2:1-4). The apostolic witnesses certainly faced the temptation of being afraid of their persecutors, but they did not accede to it. The occasion in Acts 4 where they were threatened by the Sanhedrin caused all the church to pray that these apostles might be bold to continue proclaiming the word.

The effects of their prayer were electric. Everyone—apostles and all the church—were freshly filled with the Spirit, ‘and they spoke the word of God with boldness’ and ‘with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection’. This of course makes sense. Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth—ie. the Spirit of witness—then his endowment freshened them in the truth, so that they could ‘have and hold the testimony of Jesus’, ie. witness powerfully to him. It is interesting and significant that not only was the proclamation clear, but ‘the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common’ (verse 32). We see then, that in the community, *living the truth and proclaiming the truth are inseparable.* It is when we try to effect one without the other that the prophetic witness deteriorates.

ATTACKS UPON THE TRUTH

It is scarcely likely that the ‘father of lies’, ie. the Devil, should leave this proclamation and demonstration of truth

to proceed unhindered. The lie must, compulsively, attack the truth. This is the theme of the book of the Revelation' It is also the principle that is seen in the book of the Acts, and which is spoken about in the New Testament epistles. As we have pointed out above, the Holy Spirit not only distributed gifts for the strengthening of the church within itself and the proclamation to the world outside, but also gave the community weapons by which it might fight the powers of darkness and overcome them, thus diminishing their areas of dominance in the universe.

One of the first attacks which was made by evil is seen in the rejection of the Gospel by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish parliament. At first sight this merely seems to be a misunderstanding of the nature of the Gospel. However, time and again in John's Gospel, Jesus said that the people of God ought to have understood him, his message and his Father, but they did not. In fact he was crucified because he claimed to be the Son of God, ie. the Son of the Father (Matthew 26:63-65). They never actually sought to discover whether he was or not; they bluntly judged him for the claim, saying he was a blasphemer. Jesus had previously told the leading Jewish theologians that they were 'blind leaders of the blind'. They walked in the darkness which they claimed was light. Later we will see the heinous nature of truth that is not truth, although it has seemingly *the form* of truth.

The second direct attack was the event in which Ananias and Sapphira were involved. The truth of love had been displayed by many in the sharing of their goods with others. These two—husband and wife—had laid claim to the same truth when in fact they were not following the truth of love. They wished for praise from their fellow-believers, but they were deceitful. Had they kept something for themselves and said so, their gift would have been taken as love. However it was an attack by Satan in seeking to discredit and destroy

the truth of love in which the believers lived. Peter asked Ananias, 'Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?' Lying to the Spirit of truth was their evil.

Other attacks came, thick and fast. One that kept cropping up for some time was the argument by some Christians of Jewish background that the Gentiles should conform to the law of circumcision and observe certain of the Jewish ceremonies. The truth of love and grace overcame these attacks.

A simple attack was the dissension that arose between the Hebrew widows and those Jewish widows who had come from other lands. The latter claimed that the Palestinian widows were receiving preferential treatment. This attack was defeated by setting up men who were full of faith and the Spirit, and who distributed the needed food and goods with impartiality. Again, it was the truth of love that overcame the ways in which evil powers sought to discredit this dynamic witness to the truth.

We need not describe all these events, but each had to be met and defeated. As the community had begun its life in love, so it had to walk in love. It continually needed the guidance and oversight of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and love. The letters which the apostles wrote to the churches convince us of this. They were letters which sought to habituate their readers in the truth, as also to unmask the lie of evil wherever it appeared.

No more clearly is the deterioration of the church from the truth shown than in chapters two and three of the book of the Revelation. Here both Christ and the Spirit speak to the seven churches, which probably means they speak to the complete church throughout the church age. Only two of the churches have no rebuke. The others are in states which can only be spoken of as 'living the lie'. Not all members in any of the churches are in this state, but some in most of the

churches are in need of rebuke. So, to this degree, the attacks upon truth have seemingly succeeded. Through Christ and his Spirit, the churches thus described are being alerted afresh to truth. They have to learn anew what it is to live in the truth.

This leads us to the situation of the church today, and to our own personal ways of life as members of the people of God.

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Living the Truth Today 1

THE TRUTH IS PERSONAL

To some degree we have made a survey of the truth. Let us look back over some of the main points. We have seen God creating through the word of truth, and how that word is in fact the Word himself, later known as ‘the Son’ and as ‘Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah’. We have seen that all creation is upheld by this word of truth. The same truth has been communicated by many media throughout man’s history. Whilst men of faith have responded, others have not. The Word himself became flesh, became human, dwelt amongst us and showed the truth, the truth of the Father and His love. He gave the lie to those who had maligned God. He lived the truth.

His death was part of the truth, revealing who and what God is, namely love. His resurrection was part of the truth —God defeating death for our sakes and for the sake of His own holiness. Part of the truth is that He defeats the lie, the evil of Satan and his hosts. This defeat of evil is part of the truth of God—who He is, what He has done, is doing, and will do.

This bringing of the truth was the responsibility of Christ, but it is not his work to make it real to each person. The Holy Spirit, being the Spirit of truth and relating to Christ in the truth he lived and proclaimed, was, and is, the one to

quicken truth to man by convicting him, and giving to him the gifts of repentance and faith so that, as a result, he may receive the further gifts of cleansing, forgiveness, eternal life, love, sonship, and the Holy Spirit. The truth, rightly known and accepted, makes man free. This freedom is firstly from the penalty of sin, secondly from its pollution, and thirdly from its power. Full freedom is then experienced in the life of obedience.

The freedom in truth, as we have seen, is strongly contested by evil which wishes to keep man in thrall within the lie. However, the truth is not a body of ideas he must hold, a creed he must chant, or a theology he must espouse—whatever the value of these things may be—but truth is personal in that it is in the person of Jesus we know it. It is personal in that we become persons of the truth. Thus we live the truth. Our aim now is to see how this can be, is so, and how it works out in practice.

THE PERSONAL LIVING OF TRUTH

For our own benefit, let us trace what happens to us when we come to the word of truth and hear it. Firstly, we become aware that the Gospel is the truth and our whole system of formerly evolved ideas is the lie. This is devastating. Our God-view, world-view and man-view is now seen as cockeyed. This is shocking, and had the new truth not come with its power and joy, then the loss of the old would be traumatic. As it is, we experience degrees of release from time to time, along with new and surprising understandings.

What has happened is that we have ‘been brought forth by the word of truth’. Just as in the original creation this happened—all things being brought forth by the word of truth—so in our new creation. This dynamic and radical happening Peter described as being ‘born anew to a living hope’, and ‘born anew, not of perishable but of imperish-

able seed, through the living and abiding word of God’. James had said, ‘Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creation’. Jesus had shown too the dynamic nature of the word of truth. ‘The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life’ (I Peter 1:3, 23, James 1:18, John 6:63).

We cannot then doubt our new beings in the truth. We have seen that the life-changing elements of forgiveness, cleansing, justification and sonship have wholly liberated us from the lie and made us to live as new persons, in *the truth*. This will not be fully real to us unless we comprehend that the truth is the Person of the Father and the Person of the Son, living in us. They do this, by the means of the third Person, the Holy Spirit. Christ lived the truth as man, and yet never without his Father and the Spirit. The truth he lived is clear for us to see and to follow. By the relationship which we have with Father, Son and Spirit, we too can now live the truth, and do the truth.

THE ANOINTING WHICH AIDS US

We need to look again at this anointing as we find it in I John 2:20 and 27. We saw that the anointing led the apostolic community into ‘all the truth’. It revealed all of the Father and the Son, thus all of the truth (John 16:12-15). No less has the Holy Spirit led us into all the truth, for the truth is something which we know relationally, experientially, and in our minds. We know the truth so that when error comes, or attempts to deceive are made, we know the difference between the truth and the lie. When we see our fellow creatures living the truth or living the lie we can recognise both. This is not to say that for various reasons we may not refuse to use or exercise the anointing. In order that we keep fresh in the truth, we must go on being filled with the Spirit and walking in the Spirit. If not, we

may quench the Spirit, ie. ignore the anointing and so suppress it, even if by neglect. Then we will not know the truth as we ought to, because we have chosen to avoid its confrontation and demands.

LIVING PERSONALLY IN THE TRUTH

We come now to the crux of our theme—personally living in the truth, or living the truth. There are a number of things we have to understand in order to do this: let us consider them.

Jesus is the paradigm (pattern and example) for living the truth. He is this for two reasons. Firstly, he revealed the truth of the Father and His love, ie. he revealed the truth which is God. Thus he himself was ‘the true and faithful witness’, the witness to the Father. Secondly, he revealed what it is to be truly man, as against the lie man had manufactured for himself.

When we ask *how* we can live the truth, the answer is in three elements, namely imitation, habitation and abiding.

To *imitate* Christ is to follow him, that is to do what he did (Ephesians 5:1, I Corinthians 11:lf., I Peter 2:21-25). We need to remember that Jesus was Messiah, and that that was his particular vocation; it is not ours, and we must make a marginal allowance for that.* We do not have to be messiahs, although in Christ our vocation is messianic. When it comes to relating to God the Father, relating to the world about us and relating to one another, then Jesus is the true paradigm. He was prophet, priest and king, and we also belong to the prophetic community (the community that wit-

nesses to the truth). Again, as he is the great high priest, so too we belong to the priestly community. We are a ‘. . . royal priesthood, a holy nation . . . that we may declare the wonderful deeds of him...’ (I Peter 2:9); we are ‘a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. . .’ (I Peter 2:5). We are a royal people for ‘we reign in life by one Christ Jesus’ (Romans 5:17). The community then is a royal as also a prophetic and priestly community.

Christ is also the servant *par excellence* so that we too must be servants, having this mind which was in Christ. We imitate him. As dear children of God, we imitate this beloved Child of God. If we were not, by grace, brought to these categories of the prophetic, priestly, royal and filial being, then our imitation would simply be bare mimicking. It would have no substance. We imitate our Father and Elder Brother because we are members of the family of God. Imitation is the way we learn. Habitation is the way we move towards maturation.

Habitation is a most dynamic truth. ‘Christ in me’ or ‘Christ in us’, is the New Testament way of speaking. Galatians 2:20 is the *locus classicus* of this state of the Christian: ‘I live yet not I but Christ lives in me’. Paul has other statements such as, ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’; ‘you are filled full in him’; ‘For me to live is Christ’; and ‘Do you not realise that Christ is in you. . .?’ (Colossians 1:27, 2:9, Philippians 1:21, 11 Corinthians 13.5).

The simple fact is that he who is the witness to the truth by living and fulfilling the truth is present within us. This is no mere concept: it is powerful reality. Without Christ within us, imitation would appear to be man’s effort, and as we have said, an empty mimicking of the truth. Christ in us assists us in imitating him *as* the truth. Thus we live in joy and this kind of joy carries its own motivation and impetus. The whole of Christ’s life can be lived out in us as we are one with him. Just as he was one with the Father, so we can

* We mean that we are not called to Christ’s particular vocation; therefore we do not imitate him in all things, ie. in the acts he did and the suffering he bore in relation to the Cross and grave. At the same time we are called to share in his vocation and each of us does so according to the gifts given us.

be one with him. This is the thrust of his teaching in John 14:10-14. There Jesus tells his disciples that they can do greater works than he has done if they are dependent upon him. He will pray to the Father, and then do the works, which in fact he will do within them, and so through them. By these means they will do the works, ie. with him.

This indwelling life of Christ has so many facets that we can never exhaust them, either in description or use. They cover the kind of life that was his, and the kind of life which is ours. This promise of habitation is not confined to the Son but includes the Father also, and then the Spirit (John 14:15-23). In one sense this is necessary for living the truth and witnessing to it. The Son had to have the Father dwelling in him, and needed the presence and guidance of the Spirit also.

Abiding is our dwelling in Christ. Our indwelling adds nothing to Christ. We do not aid him. We are not essential for his carrying out the task, although he does share it with us. No, we must live in him and draw on his resources. The classical passage on this teaching is John 15: 1-14. Except we abide in him we can do nothing, and our living will be fruitless. If we abide in him we will bring forth much fruit, that is we will glorify the Father by witnessing to Him as the truth.

Just as Paul emphasises Christ being in us, he even more emphasises us being in Christ. The Ephesian letter is filled with the little word 'in'. He shows that God planned our glorification, our sonship and our salvation, and all of this 'in Christ'. He shows us that we were crucified with Christ and we were raised again in him. He says we are now seated with him in the heavenly places (places of authority). We thus come to fullness in him.

Habitation and abiding are really two sides of the same coin. In John 17 Jesus speaks of himself being in the Father and the Father being in him. He really speaks of the one-

ness they have in relationship—'I and the Father are one'. When believers have this relationship with God and their fellow believers, then love has reached its true goal and witness—'. . .that the world may know that thou hast sent me.'

This is the true living of the truth.

16

Living the Truth Today 2**THE REVELATION OF HOW TO LIVE**

The letters of the New Testament are written by men who knew the practical difficulties their converts faced. If they had been Jews then they were always in danger of reverting to legalism on the one hand, or going on to antinomianism on the other. Legalism was giving the law precedence over grace, or making grace to some degree dependent upon law.

For example, some thought circumcision was binding on all who called on the name of the Lord. They tended to think that the old laws, given especially to Israel, now obtained for all Christians. On the other hand, there were those who, freed from the restraints of Jewish law, wanted to 'live it up'. Their freedom from law was heady and they easily became antinomians, ie. those opposed to law as a principle, and virtually lawless. In fact Paul never spoke of believers as being free from moral law, but from its penalty in Christ. Battles on these grounds were fought many times with Jewish converts. Then there were many Gentiles who had formerly been living lives of immorality. Paul said that their moral sensitivity had become calloused. The change for them was immense, and they needed help. The expectancy of the new life was to be a high moral one, not as a standard or goal to be reached, but as a life to be lived because of the new drive of love, and by means of the power of Christ and

the Spirit. We could say, 'Love is the spur, and the Spirit the power.'

Both Jew and Gentile needed to know *how* to live and *what* to do. Christ for them was the teaching paradigm. They could refer to him, to discover what he would do in the circumstances. Early Christians were interested to know what his ideas were in regard to things like marriage and divorce, relationships within the new community, between Christian and the State; and so on.

One of the paradigmatic passages is Ephesians 4:17-32. This section of Paul's letter sets out the contrasts between the old and new ways of life and we will later consider them. Our mind is drawn to the passage previous to this, where in verse 15 Paul says, ' . . . speaking the truth in love . . . ' This can be translated as 'practising the truth in love', 'living by the truth, and love', 'maintaining the truth in love', 'cherishing the truth in love', and 'doing the truth in love'.* In fact it can be best translated, 'truthing it in love', the verb really meaning 'to truth it'. This is important. Later (verse 2S) Paul talks about speaking the truth to one's neighbour, as against, of course, speaking lies. To 'truth it' is the whole of life: so then one lives truly, one witnesses truly, one shows the truth of God and man. When we have seen this principle we can see that one either lives in the truth and so 'truths' it, or one lives in the lie and so 'lies' it.

In I John 3:16-18 we again see the principle of 'truthing it'. Christ laid down his life for the brethren; so ought we to lay down ours. If we see a brother in need and do not help him, then we are not loving, *that is, we are not truthing it*. He then adds, 'By this shall we know that *we are of the truth*, and reassure our hearts before him'. If we do not love, then we do not 'truth it'.

* These are some meanings by modern translators and commentators.

In II John 1-3 the writer has the statements, ‘...her children whom I love in *the truth*’; ‘Grace, mercy and peace will be with us...in truth and in love’. In verses 4-6 he speaks of those who follow the truth as they have been commanded, that is they love one another, and it is love to follow His commandments, ie. *to follow love*. In the third letter he speaks much about following the truth. He says he *loves* certain people in *the truth*. In this context of love, he says (verses 3 and 4): ‘For I greatly rejoiced when some of the brethren arrived and testified to the truth of your life, as indeed you do follow the truth. No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth.’

We see then that the truth and love are inseparably joined. In fact the truth is love. There is no doubt that the truth of God is love. That God is Himself love is stated in I John 4:8 and 16. That God is the truth is what we have seen, and in John’s first letter the statement which goes with ‘God is love’ is ‘God is light’. We are not simply playing with words when we say that light in the Scriptures always stands for the truth.

Now if we see that the truth of God is love, then it makes much sense. Man generally does not see God as love. He has a million arguments to counter the claim that He is love. He accuses God of undue severity, of harshness, of being judgemental, of denying joy to the race, and of allowing—if not indeed creating—deformed children, wars, diseases, needless suffering and the like. He also condemns God for not handling human nature so that there would be no rapes, murders, genocides and the like. To say that God is love is an affront to the angry and self-righteous spirit of man.

I myself as a counsellor of numberless people have noticed that Christians are so often angry people. They take two instances to show the basis for that anger, as though somehow God has failed. One is Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane when the Father would not (they argue) take away

the cup of death; the other is when Christ cried out, ‘My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?’ We need not here argue the case for God, but these two events (rightly understood), far from depicting God as lacking in love, show Him even more deeply as love.

What we need to see is the inseparable nature, indeed the oneness, of truth and love, for this unity has deep implications for the human race.

THE TRUTH OF LOVE

Love is as vast a subject as truth. When man exchanged the truth of God for a lie, he also exchanged love for hate. This may not always seem to be the case, but the love of which we speak has a number of tests.

The first is the ‘death-test’. True love lays down its life for others; if it does not then it is not true love. Laying down one’s life is not simply a matter of dying or being killed. It is laying it down in every situation where love brings life to others. We can lay it down in the bus queue, in not taking advantage of another, and so on.

This brings us to the second test which is the ‘considering others better than one’s self’. Again this is not a matter of saying the other person is superior, but rather putting the other person first. It is taking up the other’s interests rather than one’s own.

The third test is the serving of others. One sees one’s self as servant to all men. The two former tests are really cast in the same mould as this.

The fourth test likewise resembles the former three, namely, ‘Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things, and never fails when needed.’ We need not explore the depths of this powerful statement.

Put together, the four tests make it obvious that the love of which we speak is not what we call ‘human love’, ie. the

love that fallen humans show to other humans. Such love as the latter is not truthful love; it is the love that guilty humans seek to express because somehow, somewhere, deep down, they know that truth is love.

NOT TRUTHING IT IS WHOLLY WRONG

The New Testament knows no expression of life which is neither love nor hate. We either love in the true sense or we hate. It is stated bluntly, 'He who does not love abides in death'. This is contrast to, 'We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren' (I John 3:14). To hate is to be a murderer.

Paul says, 'If any man love not the Lord let him be accursed' (I Corinthians 16:22). These are strong words, yet the truth is love, and not to love God with one's whole being calls for judgement. Man was created in love, for love, and to love, and so not to love God is not only ingratitude, but it is suppressing the truth. Likewise, not to love our fellow creatures is also reprehensible. To live in love is to live the truth. Truthing it in love is what human life is all about. In fact it is what creation is all about.

17

Modes of Living the Truth in Love

FROM THE LIE TO THE TRUTH

We have seen that because man lives in the lie, he needs a radical change from his old life to the new, and that when he arrives in the new, the old will still be all around him. Since this evil is personal, it will naturally seek to recapture him into the lie. This is why the new person needs constantly to be renewed in the truth. The method of this renewal we will see later. However, in the immediacy of the present, he needs clear guidelines. We need not, at this point, concern ourselves with the academic question of whether or not the new man has the power to follow and fulfil these guidelines. We simply need to see what they are.

OLD LAW FOR NEW LAW

We have seen the dangers on the one hand of legalism and on the other of antinomianism. What we need to understand is that the guidelines given in the New Testament are for those who see God through new eyes. They see Him as shedding His love on to men, and keeping them in His free grace. Their motive for obedience is the love He first reveals and then gives to them. They know they have a law, but it is the

law of love.

In the New Testament the law known by us as moral, and which is encompassed in the ten commandments, is called by Paul and James ‘the law of love’, ‘the law of Christ’, and ‘the liberating law’ (Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:13, James 1:22-25, 2:8-13). John simply says, ‘His commandments are not heavy for us’. He means they are the way of love.

Living the law of God is living the truth, and the guidelines given are very helpful.

THE NEW LAW WORKS OUT

In Ephesians 4:15-22, we previously mentioned, we have a good working out of the principle of living in the truth. In verses 15 and 16 Paul shows that when the body of Christ truths it in love then the church grows and matures. In verses 17 to 24 Paul has most interesting things to say. Here is the whole passage:

‘Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord’ that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them’ due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness. You did not so learn Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness’.

The substance of this section is that the Gentiles had been morally calloused. They had lost their sensitivity to God, to love, and to His law. They had so long lived in the lie that they saw it as immutable. It was their pattern of life. Paul points out that they have had a radical change. They have been taught *about* him (Jesus) and taught in him, ‘as the truth is in Jesus.’ This last statement is most important. He

means that *all the truth we need to know is in Jesus*: he is the truth and so he is the witness to the truth. We must see the truth in him and learn it from him. The way he did it is the way we should do it.

The practical working out of this is seen in verses 25 to 32:

‘Therefore’ putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths’ but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted’ forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.’

The passage reads clearly enough. What we did as we lived the lie was that we spoke falsehood, we were wrongly angry, we stole (there are many forms of this!), we spoke evil, we habitually had and expressed bitterness, wrath, clamour, slander and malice. Now we do the opposite. We can see then what is the truth. To be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving one another is to live in love. Notice a significant point in verse 28. The one who stole not only ceases from stealing, and works to support himself, but also works to *help others who are needy*. A new doctrine of work emerges here. We see *the truth of work*.

Life in the truth is probably intuitive because of the anointing. To have it spelled out—as it is in all the New Testament epistles—is very helpful, very practical.

THE PARADIGMS AND ARCHETYPES

We have just seen what it is to be a worker, serving others. The paradigm of the true servant is the Father. He

serves His creation unceasingly in creating, providing and redeeming. The Son also is the servant, and no less the Holy Spirit. Hence we learn the truth of serving. We see the practical acts of serving.

God is the true Father, He is not like a father or just one amongst many, He is *the* Father, Ephesians 3:14-15 makes Him the true source of Fatherhood as well as the true Fatherhood paradigm. He is the archetype from which we draw our pattern of fatherhood.

The Son is the true Son. His archetypal sonship is the pattern for our own. The true Father loves the Son and shows him all things. So it should be with our human fatherhood and sonship. The Son does nothing but what the Father shows him. How rare this is in human life. But for the Father and the Son we would never have known the truth of human fatherhood and sonship.

There is then the archetypal elder brother (Hebrews 2:11-18, Romans 8:29). There is the archetypal bridegroom (Ephesians 5:25-32, Revelation 21). There is also the paradigm of the true human bride (Revelation 21) and mother (Galatians 4:21-31). The family of God springs from Father, Son and Spirit and is found as a living thing in the New Testament, if not the Old Testament (Ephesians 2:18-22, I Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 3:1-6). The truth of the people of God so profoundly known in the Old Testament was innate in family—the household of God. ‘I will be their God and they shall be my people’.

THE PRACTICAL PARADIGM

We refer again to the constant need of renewal. Having been renewed by the Gospel through the Spirit (Titus 3:3-7), we need to have that renewal constantly working. We realise that every day there is an incessant bombardment from the headquarters of darkness as subtle evil powers beam out

their intelligence messages, seeking to reclaim us for the lie. We have the assurance that ‘we are being renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created us’ (Colossians 3:10). That is quite a statement, and indeed—on the surface—goes close to being mystical. In this same chapter, Paul has assured us that ‘our life is hid with Christ in God’, so he is really saying that we are one with the Truth. The renewing process is going on all the time. The more we are renewed in knowledge, the more we understand the truth. The more we understand it, the more we live it, and the more we live it, the more we understand it.

We have seen already that Christ and the Spirit had to rebuke the churches described in the book of the Revelation. Some of them had drifted far from the truth. The writer of Hebrews warns against the same drift (Hebrews 2:1-3, 3:13-14, 5:11—6:3). Paul in Galatians is hot-blooded in warning them against the shift which has almost taken place, a shift from the Gospel (Galatians 1:6, 4:1 f., 4:12-19, 5 :7). The letters of the New Testament generally warn against departures from the truth (Galatians 5:21, 6:7, I Corinthians 6:9-10, Ephesians 5:6). We see then that there is an unrelenting battle for the minds of Christian believers. Sometimes the mode employed by evil is seduction, and II Corinthians 11 is a chapter which spends time upon this method. At other times the means used is an appeal to the intellectual pride of human beings. The letter to the Colossians spends time on warnings against this form of confusion of the mind or seduction of the heart. The book of the Revelation tells us clearly that Satan—the Dragon, the Serpent—uses accusation and threats, hoping to drive believers into fear, and so away from the Gospel.

Paul’s remedy is shown in Romans 12:1-2, ‘I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this

world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.' He first exhorts his readers to surrender their bodies because their hearts have been gripped by the mercies and love of God. He then tells them to be transformed (*metamorphosis*), that is to be renewed from within. This will make them proof against *conformation* which is the way the world shapes the minds and actions of human beings. To be *transformed is* to worship in the true way, and such worship is linked with the yielding of the body. The rejection of the lie and the direct acceptance of the truth keeps the mind wholly renewed. Renewal is first a *crisis*, and this crisis leads to a *process*. When we link this pattern of renewal with the passage of Ephesians 4:17-24 and also Colossians 3:9-10, we see that this constant process of renewal is really the Spirit of truth keeping us in the knowledge and practice of the truth.

Never in this life are we wholly proof (ie. of ourselves) against the deceit of evil, against the seductive lie, or the threat of evil forces. To live in the truth is an unceasing battle. To know the truth is to have been liberated from the lie. Nevertheless, 'the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.' The New Testament has much to say about continuing vigilance.

18

The Cosmic Battle for the Truth 1

TWO GOALS FOR HISTORY

God has His goal for history. There are a number of strands or elements which constitute the full goal, and they are nominated in Scripture. We can trace them because we are told what it is that God planned before time. He planned that all things should be unified in Christ. This would be done by Christ filling all things, reconciling all things and harmonising all things. Also, God planned the redemption of man, to take the form of the elect people of God who would be holy and blameless before Him. Man would be glorified, having been resurrected from the dead, given eternal life and an eternal inheritance. He also planned the renewal of the heavens and the earth. All of these things would involve an ultimate judgement of creatures of evil. The completion of this goal would delineate the glory of God to His creation. God as the Father-King, His Son as the Lord of creation, and the Spirit as the Spirit of life would be shown in their fullness.

Against this goal, evil sets its own. It is to take pre-eminence in the creation, to set itself against the authority of God and effect a successful rebellion. The goal of evil is not positive; it sets out to negate the goal of God. It is impossible for evil to succeed by nature of the case, for that which

is created cannot be (or become) eternal, nor defeat God who is uncreated. Evil is itself steeped in self-deceit and battles on within the lie, with no possibility of success.

History, then, must be the battleground of good and evil. This seems to be universally recognised, but as we have seen time and again, there is basic confusion as to what is the good and what is the evil. Satan and his hosts may genuinely consider themselves to be hosts of light. Man believes for the most part that he is always battling evil, not realising that he is battling on a false front and so is confusing the issue. This too is part of the deceit of sin. The self-righteous man would indignantly deny that he is—by his self-righteousness—'holding down the truth in unrighteousness'. There is tragedy, then, in man believing he battles for good against evil when this is not the case. This tells us that the proclamation of the truth is of the highest priority and urgency.

THE DECEIT OF THE LUSTS

Paul speaks about 'the deceitful lusts of the flesh'. The apostle John nominates three lusts: 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life'. Some students of Scripture see these as the three temptations faced by the primal couple, since the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was 'good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise'. Some, too, see that Christ was faced with these three lusts in the temptation in the wilderness at the outset of his ministry. We are always being confronted by these temptations to lust, which come in so many variant forms. When we become captive to these lusts we are rendered useless for spiritual warfare.

THE BASIS OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

We do not have time and space here to set out the whole

strategy of good and evil. We know that angelic powers rebelled against God and so formed the army of evil and deceit. Man was trapped into this evil system and caught in its machinations against God and His ultimate goal. John says, 'The whole world lies in [the power of] the evil one'. Paul says that man is forced to follow 'the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works within the children of disobedience'. Christ told the Jews who opposed him that they were of their father the devil, and that they did their father's desires. Paul, in another place, shows the powers of darkness as intelligent—if not brilliant—organisers of battle against God and His people.

If we take up the subject in detail, we see that from the beginning, angelic powers,* which have been appointed to nations to aid and rule them, have—in the case of evil angels—turned their authority to destructive use. History is the battleground of cosmic powers, some of which are good and some of which are evil. Whilst the human race recognises that there is a power struggle of human communities — clans, tribes, nations and empires—yet it thinks that this struggle is its own, ie. that it is a purely human struggle and one unrelated to supernatural powers. This is the deceit under which man carries on his activities.

Were it not for the revelatory truth of the Scriptures, we would not know these facts. Some theologians claim that the supernatural system we have just outlined has no reality. They see it as arising from various imaginative sources, especially Babylonian and Persian myths and legends, and

* From such passages as Genesis 28:10-17, Deuteronomy 32:7-9, Daniel chs 10-11, John 1:51, Revelation 12:1-9, Colossians 1:16, 2:14-15, 20, Galatians 4:8-10, Ephesians 6:12, Romans 8:38-39, we can deduce a system of evil supernatural powers linked with man and the rise and fall of his nations. They are also linked with the rise and fall, personally, of human beings.

as having been absorbed by the Jews to form their rationalisation of good and evil, as also the basis of their eschatology. As such, of course, this bizarre system would have no historical reality. But Jesus himself spoke in the terms we have used above, and his followers used the same patterns of thought. Paul spoke of the work of Satan—'the god of this world'—as blinding the eyes of them who do not believe 'to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God' (II Corinthians 4:4). We may assume, even in the face of the theologians who do not hold this system of evil to be authentic, that there is an unremitting battle between personalised forces of good and evil.

THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION AND THE COSMIC BATTLE FOR THE TRUTH

The book of the Revelation is not a prophecy which stands on its own. In its 404 verses it has at least five hundred and eighteen references to the Old Testament. Only someone who is soaked in those early writings can fully appreciate the last book of the Bible. At first sight, much of what is written seems bizarre and even weird, but if we work through it patiently, referring back to other parts of Scripture, we come to a rich understanding of its theme. This theme is primarily the battle between God and Satan, good and evil, with that triumphant outcome which vindicates God and sets Him forth as the God of true justice.

After a powerful revelation of 'the true and faithful witness'—Jesus Christ—the book proceeds to speak to the seven churches which may well be understood as the seven-fold or complete church throughout all the church age. The untruth within these churches is exposed so that the church will stand only in the truth. Following this, the rest of the book (which is prophecy) is addressed to the whole church

in the whole age, and its prophecy has two basic strands. The first is the judgements which are under the control and operations of the Lamb who, having been crucified, is now shown as Lord over all creation. He alone can open the seals of the book of history, ie. history as God has ordained it. He releases the judgements in three series of seven. The first are linked with the initial six seals, the second commence with the opening of the seventh seal and are plagues upon the earth. Between the release of the seven bowls of wrath upon the earth is a dynamic intermission, in which the conflict between good and evil forces is outlined. This section is most important for us as it informs about the battle for the truth.

Commencing at chapter twelve we are shown a great red dragon taking with him a third of the angelic powers of heaven, and seeking to devour the child of the woman who is about to give birth. The woman clearly represents the matrix from which the Messiah comes. The child escapes destruction and the woman comes under the dragon's (Satan's) persecution. War takes place in heaven and the dragon and his angelic host are cast down from heaven. In his anger the dragon seeks to destroy the woman and her other offspring—the people of God. Chapter thirteen opens with the genesis of a beast (called 'the beast') who is later joined by a second beast who is also known as 'the false prophet'. The dragon and the beasts set up a system intended to conscript all humanity to their battle against God.

Following this intermission we then have the third of the seven-series, namely the seven bowls of wrath which are poured out upon the earth. When these actions conclude, John the Seer is shown the links between the dragon, the beast and Babylon who is depicted as a gaudy harlot. Babylon is that system which much of mankind espouses, and upon which it is dependent for the things which represent life, pleasure, possession and power. Unfortunately for

the section of mankind allied to the beasts, Babylon is suddenly destroyed. Its devotees cry,

‘Alas! alas! thou great city,
thou mighty city, Babylon!
In one hour has thy judgement come!’

Following the destruction of Babylon, there are two further episodes. In the first of these, Christ the conqueror rides forth on a white horse, leading the armies of heaven and destroying the leaders of humanity who are allied with the beasts. The first beast and the false prophet (the second beast) are captured and thrown into the lake of fire. The second episode concerns ‘that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan’. He is locked up in the bottomless pit for a millennium, which is a time of comparative peace. After that period Satan is loosed and sets about to gather those loyal to him—known as Gog and Magog*—so that they surround ‘the camp of the saints and the beloved city’, but they are rapidly destroyed by fire from heaven. Satan is then thrown into the lake of fire, the final judgement of all humanity takes place, and those who are not written in the book of life are thrown into the fiery lake. Evil is thus defeated.

THE MEANING OF THE PROPHECY

The general thrust of the prophecy is clear. God is constantly giving His judgements to the earth to fulfil His justice. Whilst such judgements ought to bring sinful mankind to repentance, those who are hardened in sin and deceit do not change. The church is in constant battle with

* Gog and Magog in the prophetic book of Ezekiel were a prince and his nation. By the time Revelation was written they had come to represent those nations opposed to God, working under Satan and his powers.

evil, but it is not left to its own devices. God is the initiator in the warfare. At the same time the people of God can and do conquer the evil about them. In 15:2 we read, ‘And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and *those who had conquered the beast and its image*. . . standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands’. These had battled successfully in the truth. In chapter six we are shown the martyrs who had died in this conflict for the truth.

The prophecy, then, is telling us that the battle of truth will be an unremitting one to the end and that the people of God cannot avoid conflict. Indeed they are significant and necessary participants in the struggle and its final outcome.

THE FINAL OUTCOME

The Revelation does go back in history from the point of time in which it was written, and also forward to the end of time, but it keeps us seeing that the battle is always on in the present. What is written in this prophecy comports with the whole of history as outlined in the Scriptures. Satan is there at the beginning, and man’s evil is always connected with his ‘working in the children of disobedience’. His attacks on Israel are rarely explicitly stated, but since he is linked with idolatry, it is easy to see how he sets about trying to destroy that nation. In the period of the Gospels, Palestine, though not outwardly idolatrous, is infested with demons. The early church is immediately attacked, eg. Satan fills the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-5). At the same time the Spirit-filled proclaimers exorcise demons, liberate the sick and diseased from illnesses which often have their root in evil, and emancipate large numbers of those who have been in Satanic bondage through their guilts. Having had this panoramic view of history and the battle of truth taking place within it, we can now look at the part the

church has to play in the conflict and the means by which it shares in the warfare.

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The Cosmic Battle for the Truth—2

In an autobiographical passage Paul speaks of the conflicts he has experienced because he proclaims the Gospel. He nominates some of the elements by which he fights the fight of faith: ‘. . . by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute’ (II Corinthians 6:6-8).

He speaks a few times concerning the weapons believers wield, and we will look at these, since they will be the same weapons we are required to use. In the passage just quoted he has spoken of things as diverse as ‘purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love and truthful speech’. All of these things have to do with the way of truth, and in a sense none of them is aggressive. Yet each one is dynamic in its effects. Likewise when in Ephesians 6:10-18 Paul speaks of warfare, the weapons he describes are truth, righteousness, the good news of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God. In another place (I Thessalonians 5:8) he speaks of ‘the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet the hope of salvation’. All of this he calls ‘the armour of light’ (Romans 13:12), and in fact

equates putting on this armour with putting on the Lord Jesus Christ . . . * Surely this is ‘the truth as in Jesus’, ie. the whole truth, for it is by the truth that we battle against the lie.

In yet another place he speaks of the spiritual battle: ‘For though we live in the world, we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but have divine power to destroy strongholds’ (II Corinthians 10:3-4). He is telling us two things: (a) that we are not merely in a holding situation, staving off stronger powers, but (b) we have weapons which are superior to those of the enemy and which will pull down the very strongholds erected and used by that enemy. Doubtless we need such weapons because ‘. . . we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ (Ephesians 6:12). That these powers are strong and their intentions vicious is shown when Paul tells us that they seek to separate us from the love of God. He concludes, however, that ‘. . . in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 8:37, 38).

THE METHODS OF THE BATTLE

Often, when we use military language concerning spiritual matters, we are in the danger of literalising weapons and

warfare. We have actual weapons but they are spiritual. We wage a warfare but it has nothing to do with harsh aggression. We have the polity of the Holy City but we use no human politics. No, our weapons are genuinely spiritual ones and at first sight seem weak and even pitiful considering the mighty battle in which we are involved. Who would nominate things like purity, forbearance, kindness and love as great and effective weapons? But we must see them as that, and be convinced of their power.

When it comes down to the reality of spiritual war, it can be made as simple as this; ‘He who lives in the truth and proclaims the truth will, without doubt, win the true warfare.’ No human heart and will can be finally and irreversibly won except by love. Love may seem to be a pitifully weak thing, but, to the contrary, it is the most powerful of all. It is love which bears, believes, hopes and endures all things and which never fails. Threats and domination may cow the human spirit but they will never win it. A person’s will may be seduced and kept in thrall by what fascinates it, but that will cannot be captured for ever by such things. In the ultimate—when the chips are down—there is no reality left but truth, and no way of truth but love.

So then, if we live in the truth and tell the truth, we cannot fail, not anyway in the ultimate. We will often lose skirmishes or minor conflicts, but never the final and decisive battle.

USING THE RESOURCES

We have already nominated the resources—simple things such as purity, truthful speech and love. Natural human courage has little to do with living the truth. John tells us the anointing (ie. of the truth through the Spirit) *abides in us*. That resource is never lost to us. In the same context he says, ‘. . . as his anointing teaches you about everything, and

* Cf. Galatians 3:27. In baptism one has already been clothed with Christ himself. The figure means that we are in union with Christ, ie. one with him.

is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, *abide in him*' (I John 2:27). He also speaks of, ' . . .the truth which *abides in us* and will be with us forever' (11 John 2).

In the truth lie all our resources, but we repeat the point that the truth is something we do: it is right action. We are encouraged to know that ' . . . greater is he that is *in you* than he that is in the world', and that 'we are more than conquerors through him that loved us' (I John 4:4, Romans 8:37), but all of this is worked out in our every day ('nitty-gritty') situations. If we live the truth, that will offend human beings. They will misread it, be threatened by it, feel they are accused by it, and in some cases call it deceit and set about persecuting us. Who wants to state the plain truth— even if one does it gently—when one knows it will bring hostile reaction, contempt or scorn? It is one thing to have a principle to live by, but it is another matter to put that principle into action.

What helps us to battle is to know that we are not loners in the fighting. First of all, God is 'a very present help in trouble'. One passage we need to read over and again in the battle is Isaiah 9. There God is the Intervener. He clothes Himself with His own armour and proceeds to fight for us. Yet when He calls us into the fray it is by His power that we wage the warfare. Again this is not merely a spiritual principle divorced from life's 'nitty-gritty'. It is at the point of conflict that we must rest in Him and trust Him. This is what James means when he says (quoting Proverbs 3:34), ' "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.' Likewise Peter, on the same principle, writes, 'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Be sober. Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm

in your faith. . . ' (James 4:6-7, I Peter 5:6-9).

If we consider this practically, it means something like this: 'If you have any area of sin, any element of untruth, any attitude not in line with the truth, then you will lose at that point of the battle.' I knew a man once who broke down under interrogation, not because he had done wrong where his inquisitors suspected he had, but where they had no idea that he had. His conscience was uneasy lest they find out, so he lost his basic integrity in the face of their questions. However, if we are humble, wholly under the hand of God, then our walk will be that of truth, and we will be impregnable. This is what John means by saying, 'Abide in him' .

We said, above, that we are not loners in the fight. Paul speaks of us fighting together:

'...let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that. . . I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with *one mind striving side by side* for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.' (Philippians 1:27-28).

The powers of darkness obviously must dread us if the Devil will flee at our stand of faith, and the opposing army experiences a sickening heart-felt dread when we are one together as we oppose them. No wonder John could write and say, 'I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one...because you are strong, and *the word of God abides in you*, and you have overcome the evil one' (I John 2:13-14).

CONCLUSION AS TO SPIRITUAL BATTLE

Many of us are filled with insecurity and even dread when we think of a spiritual battle. Yet we need not fear. An infantryman in the front line does not have to face the *whole*

line and destroy *all* the enemy. He simply has to act in his portion of that line, and under the directions of his N.C.O. or officer. He must leave the rest to those in command. Likewise us: we only have to live simply in the truth and forget the rest. Paul said that we are not ignorant of Satan's devices. Our 'anointing' monitors the lie of the opposition. We can fight the battle on our segment of the front.

Again, many interpreters of prophecy have gone beyond the bounds of true interpretation when they have mistaken the symbols of warfare for literal weapons and physical battle. Our weapons are *actual* but *spiritual*. It may well be that certain nations will gang up against the people of God in the end-happenings, but the real battle is not with physical weapons. Satan is shrewd enough to know that, and he dreads spiritual weapons such as the Sword of the Spirit, ie. the word of God, that which goes forth from the mouth of 'the True and Faithful Witness'. It is this weapon (alone) which shall smite the nations. Our battle is between the word of truth and the word of lie, the truth and the lie, God and Satan.

We should therefore rid our minds of images of a battle fought out on earthly soil around a literal camp of the saints and a physical city. The battle is more subtle than that! We must realise, simply, that nothing can defeat the truth. If we believe that truth, live in, and proclaim it, evil's strongholds will be torn down for, 'We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. . .' (II Corinthians 10:5).

That is why—as a result of the holy war—'every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father', and 'the kingdom of this world will have become the Kingdom of God and his Christ and he shall reign forever'.

Even so the simplicity of it all is quite amazing.

20

Living the Truth in the Church

THE CORPORATE PRACTICE OF THE TRUTH

We have seen in earlier chapters that when the Spirit of truth proclaimed the truth which we have set out in form, in Appendix One, that the word, as it was uttered, brought results. On the one hand, it polarised the opposition of those who refused to accept it as the truth, and on the other, it made its powerful impact on those who responded. Those who responded had faith, repented, and received the gifts of forgiveness, cleansing, justification, regeneration (new birth), sanctification and sonship. The radical effects of truth were to rehabilitate man to his true humanity, endow him with the Spirit and cause him to go on living in the truth.

Living in the truth was what Jeremiah called having the law put into one's inward parts and having it written in the heart. From this internalising of the truth, there issued obedience to God's laws. Likewise Ezekiel spoke of having a new heart of flesh in place of the heart of stone (hard heart), and of receiving the Spirit, by means of whom heartfelt obedience was now practised by the new man. Ideally then, the truth was lived out in its many facets daily, and by all members of the Body of Christ, since *all* were new creations.

In practice it did not wholly work out this way. Believers showed they could fail, make mistakes, continue certain

forms of sinning, and often be hazy about aspects of the truth. If this is the case then it is a serious matter. We need to account for those who were transformed by the truth, not now always living in that truth.

THE PERSONAL STRUGGLE FOR THE TRUTH

In our chapters on spiritual warfare we saw that the elect are hated by the powers of darkness. Hence the evil forces are always attacking them. The forms of attack such as subliminal propaganda, seduction and threatening have to be withstood. We need to walk in total humility and know how to have the mind constantly renewed from the source of truth. Any believer battling unaided is no match for Satan and his evil. An inability to use the spiritual weapons will expose the novice to evil's onslaughts. Against this is the supply of grace, of the Spirit, of love, and of Christ's Lordship. By means of these a novice can develop skill in living in the truth.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE TRUTH IN CHRIST'S BODY

The seven letters to the churches, written by Christ and outlined in the second and third chapters of the Revelation, are fair proof that the early church had many problems. Today, as then, the members of the body of Christ should be one, ie. unified. Any weak member weakens the corporate following of truth. To scan these letters is to see the kinds of problems which had arisen. They were lack of love, holding the teaching of Balaam (idolatry and immorality), the holding of certain heresies, false prophecy, occult practices, spiritual decline and loss of life, imperfect works, lukewarmness, affluence without spiritual dynamic, and spiritual blindness.

Because these letters constitute—overall—one letter to the

whole church throughout this church age, then we too are warned, by them, against departing or drifting from the truth. These selfsame problems are with us today, and many more also. Church history shows that such problems have, in fact, dogged the steps of the church down through two millenniums of time. In such cases the church stands in need of judgements and revival. Peter warns that judgement begins at the house of God, ie. within the elect people of God.

THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING US TODAY

The problems we have are legion. Critics of the church (and churches) lack no fuel for their fires of criticism. There is great value in the kind of criticism which is positive. And we must not be thin-skinned in the face of it. At the same time, much criticism is not positive, but negative and destructive. We can easily do without that! But even self-criticism is valuable if it is healthy, and not merely a form of self-flagellation .

What follows from this point is certainly criticism, but we trust not negative and not over-stated. Where we are overly sensitive, we may react very angrily to some of the things which will be said. We may even take them personally when there is no need to do so. We must grasp this one point, that if we do not face the weaknesses and failures of the church, and if we do not discover and expose all deviations from the truth, then we are not friends of the truth. Unfortunately for the kind of self-criticism we are here undertaking, there are some in the church who feel deep guilt about the matters mentioned and that very guilt often causes a violent reaction in those who read or hear the criticisms. To refrain from honest examination because of this would, however, be to betray the truth which has been revealed to us.

Notice Paul's statement: 'Examine yourselves to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do

you not realise that Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find that we have not failed’ (II Corinthians 13:5-6). He can also speak of some within the church who need rebuke and renewal. ‘For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things’ (Philippians 3:18-19). Paul had battled with the Judaisers, those Jewish legalists who departed from the heart of the truth—grace!

In the epistles of all the apostolic writers we have warnings against those who are dangerous to the faith, particularly because they claim that what they believe and what they do is of the truth. Today, we can expect to meet the same problems as the early church did. In addition, there are other elements which they did not face, and which have arisen because of the changing state of the world, with developments such as the emergence of new nations, cultural fluctuations, cross-cultural communications, changing views on the nature of the Scriptures, ethics, hermeneutics, the renewal of Eastern religions, current religious rivalries, and the diminishing of the barriers of time and distance because of universal electronic communications. Regardless of circumstances, wherever discernment is lacking, deceit can quickly find entrance into the church.

In the next chapter, we examine some of the factors which are relevant in this regard, and to which we need to address ourselves.

21

The Truth and the Church Today

THE USE OF THE BIBLE

Battles have been fought over the past 150 years on the reliability of the Scriptures. The critico-historical method of understanding what the Scripture was saying brought about a revolution in hermeneutics, i.e. principles of interpretation of the Bible. Since the days of Wellhausen, we have moved to the new hermeneutics, also known as existential principles of interpretation. The Reformed principle of exegesis was that the text of Scripture, when the Bible was taken as a God-given unity, explained its own self. The fundamentalist view is simply that every word in Scripture is inspired by God, is infallible and that all the Scriptures comport with the dogma or doctrines which fundamentalists hold. Whilst it is not our part here to examine and judge the validity of these approaches, the point we wish to make is that unless the Scriptures are seen as the revelatory truth given by God, then we have no criteria for truth. If what is called ‘truth’ in them is simply the evolutionary progress of the human mind, then we have no real objective truth. No matter how much ‘higher’ the ideas of scholars may seem to be above

the so-called primitive beginnings of religion, there is no guarantee that today's ideas may not, themselves, be quickly surmounted and outmoded.

The basic point is that our view of the Bible greatly determines what we are about in living, preaching and especially the proclamation of the Gospel. In this regard we have some of the following specific problems. On the one hand, fundamentalism can be sectarianism' It can be (so-called) belief divorced from action, and an obscurantist dogmatism that hides the true nature of the Gospel. For example, the church at Ephesus had—according to Christ's letter (Revelation 2:4)—pure doctrine, orthodox practice of life, but *no love!* By reason of the latter, Christ was about to abandon the church and would do so if it did not repent and come back to its first love. On the other hand, liberalism can be so humanistic in its gospel, that the Godward orientation of the Scriptures is lost. A man-centred gospel means death to the true Gospel. The acceptance and use of the Scriptures as the pure word of God and so the revelation of the truth is as much needed in this decade as at any time.

UNDERSTANDING THE INSCRIPTURATED TRUTH

There is a difference between holding the fundamentals of truth and being a fundamentalist. One would think both were the one, but in fact—as we have seen above—one can hold to beliefs which are not worked out in practice, indicating that one does not really hold these beliefs as living truth. They are form without substance, practice without power. However, our main arguments are not with a small group of fundamentalists, but with those who would claim they have 'the anointing' but yet do not preach the word of truth with power. Peter said, 'If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.' The word must have prophetic utterance. Instead, much of our preaching lacks immediacy

and power. What then are the causes for this state?

One of them is the bondage of (so-called) hermeneutics. Those who have been trained in seminaries are often afraid to make positive statements as to the meaning of Scripture. They have lost their nerve under the new priestcraft of a hermeneutics' bondage. They can only surmise that such and such a text may mean 'so-and-so'. There is danger in thus placing the Bible under our scrutiny instead of coming under the scrutiny of the truth of the Scriptures ourselves. It brings uncertainty as to the value of the word of God. 'Is it indeed the word of God!' is now the question asked. When the trumpet (the pulpit) gives an uncertain sound, how confident shall be the pew?

How *do* we see the text of Scripture, given in that it may have come to us via this and that event, or exigency of history? Do we rely on the text, and if so are we careless in our exegesis of it? Or are we over-meticulous and pettifogging in the hermeneutic to which we subject it?

The ultimate test is whether or not the inscripturated word is living truth to us.

THE PULPIT AND THE PEW

Whatever theological specialists may do in their seminaries in regard to the apparatus of criticism, textual investigation and hermeneutics, the man in the pulpit is facing the people of his generation in their needs, their problems, their spiritual hunger or their lack of interest. What word does he have for his generation? Which of the choices does he take and why does he take them? By choices we mean modes, motivations and methods of preaching.

A preacher may fence the pulpit by opting for an intellectual mode of convincing people as to the worth-whileness of the Gospel. He may retreat behind a doctrinaire view and practice of truth. He may be sedulously 'Reformed', dog-

matically fundamentalistic, insistently sectarian; or he may be liberal to the point of nonchalance, amusing to the point of flippancy, or an apologist who seeks to substantiate everything he says so that the Gospel may have credibility; or he may simply believe that the word is the truth, and that the Spirit honours sincerity and utterance by making it 'the oracle', so that even native deficiencies in intellectual prowess and cultured delivery may not greatly hinder its communication.

I realise it is unfair to create preachers of straw and then ravage them. Yet congregations have to listen year after year to spates of words from multitudes of pulpits, all of which seem to make little difference to the life of churches. Of course there are those spates of words which make a dynamic impact, but it is not to those we refer. Whilst the fault of the matter does not lie wholly in the pulpit, yet we must admit that much of it does.

The preacher's choices are important in determining whether the truth is brought to those who occupy the pews. If he denudes Scripture of its supernatural origins and elements, then he is attacking not only the truth of God but also the truth of true humanness. If he sees the Bible as only the word of man, then, for him, it is not the word of God. If, to the man in the pulpit, it is not the word of God, then where shall we hear the word of truth?

APOLOGETICS AND GIVING CREDENCE TO THE TRUTH

Paul made it plain that he was not ashamed of the Gospel for he knew it to be the power of God. This knowledge did not come only from his own conversion and the dynamic change in the lives of many who heard him preach it. He knew it to be the truth, the word of God. He had gotten to the core of the matter. He had discovered what it was essen-

tially. He knew that it was relevant to the human situation of sin, rebellion and required salvation. He knew the dilemma of man—that he was a sinner unable to effect his own salvation, and that God who is holy, righteous, true, good and loving will 'by no means acquit the guilty'. Paul knew in his own experience, and by the revelation of Christ within him, that this Gospel was the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures as they had been fulfilled in Christ's birth, incarnation, ministry, life, death, resurrection and ascension. He knew and expounded the theme 'according to the Scriptures'.

Paul also knew that nothing—repeat nothing—would change the heart of a human being but this Gospel proclaimed without qualification and modification. Look at some of his sayings.

When 'in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe' (I Corinthians 1:21). Paul knew no other way of men being saved. He had little time for apologetics as we call them today. To him any attempt to substantiate the word meant lack of confidence in it. Like Jesus his emphasis was, ' . . . we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen' (John 3:11). Peter's thrust and Paul's were the same: 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20). Hence Paul said he would not use 'eloquent wisdom lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power' (I Corinthians 1:17). As to modes of preaching he claimed, 'We have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways: we refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by *the open statement of the truth* we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.' He knew the Gospel to be 'a scandal to the Jew, and to the Greek, folly' (II Corinthians 4:2, I Corinthians 1:23).

This paradigm which Paul's life represents is a paradigm

and not a unique (unrepeatable) ministry. His apologia* had nothing to do with substantiating the Gospel by the use of proofs. He spoke from the belief that the Scriptures were authentic and that Christ fulfilled the prophetic expectation. Beyond that he had no apologetic. He knew that the proclaimer only had to show and not to contrive the Gospel's relevance. He saw no requirement to adapt it to man. He also knew that the Jew would not hear the Gospel of grace until the veil was taken away from his heart (II Corinthians 3:14-15), and that it was the Gospel alone—through the Spirit—which could effect this.

Today we have preachers who use their knowledge of psychology (or natural cunning!) to bend men's minds to religion and to persuade them to make 'a decision'. There are others who seem to have unconscious shame at the simplicity of the Gospel and so make intellectual passes from the pulpit. Others have theological (or untheological) carrots to hold out. The Gospel is the panacea for human ills and spills. It will make you happy. It will make you prosperous. God is good and His Kingdom idyllic. So the changes are rung in an appeal to the human elements within us, even fallen human elements, elements which some call 'psychological' as against 'spiritual'. By such methodologies, the clear truth of Scripture is modified and moderated. No longer does God have wrath, nor does He judge. He is greatly domesticated to be sure, and greatly emasculated for that matter. Such a gospel spawns its own spate of spiritual lemmings, rushing unknowingly to a fate that has called for no repentance, and no radical regeneration.

* Paul does have an apologia, a 'defence and confirmation of the Gospel' (Philippians 1:7, 16) but it does not consist of external 'proofs' which substantiate what he says. He uses the Hebrew scriptures as his basis for truth and the event/s of Christ as the working out of these. Truth to him is dynamic, but it has a structure and it is this structure that he knows so well.

Of course not all preaching is like this, but there is enough of it to demand our attention and to warn us not to go the same way, for that way is not the way of truth. It is more the way of accommodation, the way of human persuasion and the way—ultimately—of powerlessness and death.

THE VAGARIES OF THEOLOGY

First let us define theology. It is the study of God. It is man's conclusions about God from the facts which come before him, perhaps from Scripture, perhaps from the writings of others, and even the person's own assessment of God from what he observes and contemplates. We have varieties of theology, called by such names as biblical, dogmatic, patristic, reformed, liberal, catholic, fundamental, evangelical and historical. Rightly understood there is nothing wrong with theology; man has a right, and even a duty to study what he will. In one sense every human being is a theologian, even an atheist; so there is Christian theology, Islamic theology, Hindu theology, and so on.

What concerns us in our discussion of the truth is that theology is not itself the truth. Even if a theology were meticulously correct it would not, of itself, be the truth. Theology rightly used is a directory to the truth. In a street directory a street is shown by a black line on white paper. The line is not the street, but a symbol or indicator of that street. When in fact we arrive at the street we discover that it is a living situation. There is the thoroughfare, homes, perhaps shops, people living, walking, buying, selling, relating to one another. So it is with theology and truth; theology is the indicator and truth the reality. That is why we must not mistake theology for truth, or conceptual knowledge for that living relationship with God which is the heart of the truth.

We must proclaim truth by our lives as well as by our lips.

To do this we must live wholly in the truth. Theology may be our way of escaping the truth, in which case the fault does not lie in the theology but in us, ie. our wrong use of it. We may be brilliant at explaining, but yet be short on bringing direct confrontation with the truth. A simple example of this is the story of an old Presbyterian minister who, for years, had expounded the Scriptures faithfully according to his own standard. One day he saw Paul's statement, 'I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me.' He was at first stunned *by the truth* of this, and then filled with tears and joy. He jumped up on a table, dancing around and crying, 'Christ lives in me! Christ lives in me!'

If we are unwittingly using theology to escape the truth— both its practice and proclamation—then how will we know this? We will need to go back to the Scriptures, to God in prayer, asking for His enlightenment, and to the brethren with whom we can share the matter. We will also need to see why we are using theology in such ways. One reason could be that the truth-in-immediacy is too confronting. Another could be that we are seeking, while avoiding offence, to satisfy our consciences that we have delivered the truth. Theology, of itself, lacks the offence which is present in the truth; it also lacks the authority.

By these means we are saved from the anger that so often arises when the truth is proclaimed. We have said that truth-in-immediacy is powerfully confronting. Primarily it is we who are confronted; we must be confronted before we can confront anyone else.

Theology can also be a refuge from life. It can be a world into which we retreat, as can be the case with any vocation, research, hobby, sport or interest. It has often been said that the true theologian is a person who lives where others live and who shares the life of humanity. Issues which seem important to theologians take on different values when it comes to the place of everyday human living. The truth has

to do with the human race, where it is, what it is and what it does, and so cannot be contained within theological categories. All this is not, however, to denigrate theology. Theology is part of human living, rightly understood, and the pursuit of it can be a fine occupation. It is doubtful whether we can do without theology, but when it becomes a barrier to, or a diversion from, the truth, then it has been wrongly used. We cannot over-emphasise the fact that the truth is simple. To complicate it through theology is to lose its power, the action which is so vital and indispensable to true human living.

THEOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES

Theology alters with contemporary changes in thought and critical advances. This need not trouble us provided we keep in mind the temporary changes of garments. The truth within these garments does not change. The way we apprehend it does. Hermeneutics keep changing and because of this we must not allow them to bind us. Where we can see their usefulness and validity we ought to acknowledge and use them, but it is the truth we are trying to get at, as well as to communicate it to others. We should always express what we think in the thought form of the day, but we sometimes think that because the thought forms which were used in the past are now archaic that the truth, communicated through them, is also archaic. This, of course, is not so.

One of the tragedies of places of theological learning is the almost indecent haste of some to keep up with the vanguard, or even to be avant-garde. There is an amusing cartoon of one theologian introducing another theologian to a friend, and saying, 'This is Herr Doktor Herman Schmitt who influenced theology in Europe towards the end of January 1981'¹ We appreciate the keenness to be contemporary, but often educational principles take precedence

over the *substance* we seek to communicate, and theological fashions are revered rather than the truth they are intended to communicate.

So much for theology: we could spend much time on this important subject, but we must keep in mind all the time that the truth is simple and that theology which does not serve the truth is, in fact, of little use.

THE NATURE OF EVANGELISM

Evangelism has been described as ‘the overspill of a heart too full to contain it.’ What that heart contains is the truth. Sometimes this is called ‘the good news’ (*euangellion*), at other times ‘the proclamation’ (*kerugma*); but in fact the New Testament speaks much more about *witness* than it does about ‘telling the good news’. ‘The witness’ is of course good news. It is ‘the good news of the good news’. Certainly evangelism, as we know it today in a quasi-professional way, is not present in the New Testament’ It is easy for us to take pot shots at certain modern methods of evangelism, but then do nothing ourselves. What we ought to do for guidance, is to make our way back to (and then forward from) the way in which the Gospel was preached from the start.

The command of the angels to the apostles as they were released early one morning from prison was, ‘Go up into the courtyard of the temple and tell all the words of this life.’ Nothing could be more simple’ As witnesses they either knew ‘all this life’ or they did not. If the latter were true, then they were inadequate witnesses. We have already seen what it was to ‘hold the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’. It was to live and proclaim the truth.

Christ walking amongst the churches surely requires that we understand ‘all the words of this life’, including the significance of the Cross and Resurrection. It is obvious that men and women who are only evangelised along the lines of

psychological persuasion, emotional eloquence and promises merely of personal benefits from ‘a decision’ will themselves in turn use these modes and methods in their evangelism. We ought never to tell out what we do not really know. If we do know it, then, like the apostles, we will say, ‘We cannot but tell the things we have seen and heard.’ If we have not ‘seen and heard’ (by faith) then we have nothing to tell.

THE NATURE OF TEACHING

If we think about it, all the gift-ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher were linked with teaching. Each taught, though the mode differed from gift to gift, and even from person to person. The apostle spoke out the apostolic doctrine, and this was supported by the prophetic ministry which likewise had its own authority. The evangelist was a teacher: he proclaimed the evangel. And so on.

Today we are apt to think of teaching as the imparting of information. This may well be one aspect of it, but true teaching is dynamic. ‘Teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:20) means that teaching evokes our active response. The mere holding of teaching classes, and discussing elements of Scripture and doctrine may still leave us far from the truth. It is difficult to convince many that this is the case.

If we complained earlier about the unnecessary bondage of hermeneutics, then here we must complain about those who ignore hermeneutics altogether and go by Rafferty’s rules! It is necessary to have some understanding of true teaching, which comes out of ‘the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’, and which relates to the action of life. It is firstly kerugmatic, secondly saving (**soteric**), thirdly instructive (**didactic**), and fourthly prophetic (**hortatory**) and so

evocative of obedient responses. Then it is pastoral, the feeding of the whole person by the shepherd of the flock.

Christ amongst the churches insists upon true teaching. As his Father is Teacher, so is he, and so is the Holy Spirit.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH IN FELLOWSHIP

Although we idealise the early church, it was often fraught with problems and faced many divisive elements. Paul in his classic passage (Ephesians 4:1-6) on the functional unity *of* the church, speaks of ‘the unity of the Spirit’. He does not ask them to induce or form the unity of the Spirit but simply to *maintain* it. The unity of the church had its genesis in Pentecost. It is always prior to our membership of the church.

The fissiparous nature of the church today (that is, its tendency to split) must not be put down to its own ethos but to deficiencies in the preaching of the Gospel, and in particular to the heart of it—*the Atonement*. The Gospel of forgiveness has made its vertical and horizontal impact wherever the church truly is. The person who really understands the Cross, its cost to God, and its universal suffering in the face of God’s proper wrath upon sin, must truly know the nature of God’s love and so have love towards his fellow creatures: ‘We love because he first loved us’ (I John 4:19).

Some of the failures of the seven churches (in the Revelation) seem modest against some of the divisions we know today, not only between churches, but also within them individually. We readily split into new churches over matters of church government, ministry and sacraments. We grow angry and even develop intense hatred because of debates over baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the millennial question, the question of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, entire (or not entire!) sanctification, eternal punishment (or not), and many such elements.

On the one hand, we are calling the churches to revival when, on the other, we never step through the doorway of a neighbour’s church. Some of us have never ventured outside our own church. In the upper ecclesiastical eschelons, we are often ecumenical in pursuit. Yet locally, we hedge the communion table from other churches represented in our councils. How far—how very far—we are from the truth. Without a rich and vibrant unity, without dynamic love, without joyful fellowship our so-called ‘word of God and testimony of Jesus’ is a pallid thing.

THE NATURE AND PRACTICE OF THE SACRAMENTS

If we were to talk of the ‘truth of the sacraments’ then it would be to say that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the dominical ordinances, ie. those given by Christ. They are basically rooted in creational reality, ie. in the physical elements of water, bread and wine. They are constituted of manual acts—immersing, breaking bread, pouring wine, eating and drinking. They are close to us in their physical and actional nature. On the whole the churches live by the acts of the sacraments. Given that there is a great division between the Catholic and Protestant churches in interpretation and theology of these sacraments, most denominations hold firmly to sacramental practice. Yet, in the light of what we have already said about unity, they often are the sacraments which divide rather than those which unite. This division may relate not only to the style or practice of them, but also to the light-heartedness in practising them on the one hand, or excessive weight laid upon them on the other.

In principle we can argue that any view of these ordinances which takes away from the wholeness and dynamic of justification means we are wrongly understanding and wrongly using the sacraments. The division between the Roman Catholic and Protestant views of the Eucharist is

undeniable. Essentially these views rise from two different systems. Therefore justification is viewed differently, and in speaking of this we are not saying anything new about this debate on the truth. It is, however, when we come to the neglect of the place and significance of the sacraments that we need to examine whether we are in the truth' Paul insisted that, 'Christ did not send me to baptise but to preach the Gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power. ' By this he did not mean he was denigrating baptism, but that he was attacking a false view of it, namely that somehow baptism *per se* was a justifying factor, and people might claim, 'I am of Paul', 'Paul baptised me', 'I am identified with Paul; baptism has set me up'!

Again, in speaking of the practice of the Lord's Supper, Paul was at his sternest, warning against deficient understanding and wrong practice. Where the Lord's body is not discerned, some of the participants fall sick and some of them die. There is judgement in present action where the Lord's Supper is misused. It used to be standard practice in some churches to warn against this malpractice, but the blandness of today's churchly discipline and the ignorance concerning 'discerning the body of the Lord' is deplorable. Whilst it is true that the sacraments are not invalid where there is no deep theological understanding of them, it is not true that we do not need to know and live in their truth. At Corinth the church members were in danger of making baptism the seal of their party divisiveness, and in the Lord's Supper many ignored either the saving reality of Christ's death or the unifying dynamic of salvation—or both. Hence today we can contain immorality in the life of the church under the word 'grace'; we can accept divisions that are grievous and anti-sacramental under cover of 'peace at any price', and fail to see that baptism separates us from such basic worldliness, and the Lord's Supper from the evils of

disunity, immorality, and personal divisions. Since both sacraments spell out the dynamic of the Cross, Resurrection and the Parousia of Christ (both are eschatological), then we urgently require a revival in the truth of them.

THE NATURE OF SERVICE

The covenant people of Israel was a worshipping community which saw itself as serving God. Its sacrificial code recognised the grace of God in forgiveness, cleansing and healing, hence it was a code whose practice arose from and was motivated by grace. God's grace (*chesed*) demanded obedience from the heart and in fact enabled the practice of serving God. In being a priest-nation among all nations (Exodus 19:5-6) Israel served those nations, by virtue of being a witness. It witnessed to the truth of God. Its failure to do this at various periods of its history brought disaster upon it. Where there was responsibility to witness there was also the overburden of judgement for failure to do so.

In the New Testament, the new community arises from the suffering of the Suffering Servant. He came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. This 'mind of Christ', which Paul powerfully explicates in the first eleven verses of Philippians chapter two, is the mind which first shows that God serves mankind, and then exhorts men and women in Christ to serve one another. In fact the word *diakonia*—serving—is applied to all members. Everyone is a minister, ie. one who serves. The gifts and endowments are for the service of love. The church also renders universal service. This service is apostolic in that the Gospel must be taken to the world; it is creational in that the church must 'do good unto all men' in seeking to supply their needs which are material, emotional and spiritual. It is required to be affectional, in that all mankind, whether in the church or out of it, needs the brotherliness which is an

essential part of true creation and which flows afresh from the Fatherhood of the Creator-Redeemer.

The outgoing nature of service has been replaced in much of our church life by an expectancy of being served, but not of serving. The structures of clergy and laity—scarcely delineated in the apostolic church—have led us away from the truth that serving the creation is part of man's essential nature. Without this practice, he is less than himself. Only the love which responds to the atonement will clearly and definitively launch the true *diakonia*, and only continuing understanding by living in this grace will keep us from self-justifying service and maintain us in the service of love.

When we speak in these general terms we may yet miss the particular. The particular is specifically concerned with the drought of truth in our churches, the blandness of our doctrine, the arbitrary nature of service in practice. Affluence has made us into a Laodicean church—we are rich, but then we are naked and miserable and poor and blind. We can revel in Bible studies and neglect the starving; we can speak of love and neglect the emotional needs of our neighbours. Given the large volume of service that the churches in the West have given to Third World countries and to daughter churches, the service that demands we surrender much of our comfort and complacency has still not been greatly executed. *Kerugma* (proclamation) and *euangelion* (the Gospel) are undergirded by *didache* (teaching) in the rich context of *koinonia* (fellowship) and immediately lead to *diakonia* (service). They are all of the one piece. We can have no dynamic life-changing Gospel which does not involve all of these elements. To have the anointing of truth is to live in the truth, which is all the witness of Jesus—his life outworked in love, in unity, and in the practice of mutual service.

THE NATURE OF CREATION AND REDEMPTION

Any claim to know the truth of redemption cannot validly

be made apart from the knowledge of creation. Redemption rightly understood is the rehabilitation of man, who, through sin has been gripped by evil, anti-creation powers. It is rehabilitation to his true creational being. All self-justifying religious systems are built on a false view of creation. In fact they generally seek to save man from creation in that they have an inherent dualism. Man is called upon to deny that which is material. The seen is regarded as evil, the unseen as the true world. Asceticism is credited as being the true way to be saved from creation. The old Gnostics saw creation as originating from evil, not from God. For them, there was an essential dichotomy between the material and the spiritual.

Hebrew thinking has no dichotomy between the material and the spiritual. Both are of the one piece. Creation is God's glorious gift to His creatures. They are to revel in their creatureliness. His liberality of love is shown in wine and corn, in milk and honey. Life is to be enjoyed and lived to the full. No less, the New Testament teaches that there is nothing in all creation which is unclean of itself, and that everything created by God is good and to be enjoyed, for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and He has given us all things richly to enjoy. That is why water, bread and wine are fitting elements for sacramental exercises. That is why redemption is so exhilarating and dynamic, for it gives creation back to us, and restores us to the creation.

In living out the truth today as persons, and corporately as the church of God, we need to bring reform to our theology of redemption by recovering the theology of creation. We need to see why a man had to hang on the Cross, and how moral suffering is related to the physical creation. We need to understand why the whole creation is presently gripped by convulsive suffering; ie. it is because it is subjected to functional futility by reason of human sin, and so will suffer until its release through human glorification. We can see how far we have departed from the truth when such statements as

those we have just made are looked at askance as being part of some esoteric theology, and as not practical or relevant to our churches. Our blandness in these areas of thought is only matched by the incredible guilts which many members of the church have as they seek to obtain pleasure from the things of creation. The incipient asceticism of the church is continually fed and watered by the unrecognised dualism that exists because we have not understood the dynamic of redemption. What Paul calls—and with some sympathetic understanding—‘the weak conscience’ and ‘weak faith’ is the condition which issues from an inadequate grasp of justification. Hence we can never really enjoy the creation in which we live. We are in unease from pleasure, and we lack joy from seeing that all things are ours, ours as the gift of grace, and ours to enjoy thoroughly.

22

The Church Living Under Grace—1

THE MATTER OF THE CHURCH

The three theological notes or marks of the church are ‘holy, catholic and apostolic’. The church is a holy people, indeed God’s holy people, called not in uncleanness but in and unto holiness. It is clean through the word Christ has spoken. It has been cleansed by the washing of the water and the word. It has been crucified with Christ and had its guilt and pollution washed away.* It is catholic in the sense that, whilst being local, it is at the same time universal, ie. its thrust is to universality. In that sense, it transcends time and space, although on earth it lives within both those dimensions. Its catholicity relates to its essential unity, and in this sense it transcends the bounds of race and culture, whilst nevertheless living in them (Matthew 16:16ff., Acts 1:8, 9:31). It is apostolic in the sense that at Pentecost the truth came full-bloomed and they began immediately to live ‘in the teaching of the apostles’. The faith was laid, and the church built upon Christ the foundation, yet at the same time this foundation was the (teaching of the truth of) prophets and the apostles (Acts 2:42, Ephesians 2:18-22).

* Cf. John 15:3, 17:17, Ephesians 5:25-26, I Corinthians 6:11, Titus 3:5.

Besides these, there is an over-arching note or mark which, unfortunately, has not always been given its right place. Its neglect is destructive in the extreme, because it determines the quality of the life of the church, and the outworking of its holiness, its catholicity and its apostolic truth. It is the note and mark of grace! It is pointless to speak of truth without reference to grace. In practical fact it is through grace that the church 'holds the word of God and the testimony [witness] of Jesus.'

THE NATURE AND MEANING OF GRACE

In the New Testament grace is understood in two ways, both of which are the one. Grace (*charis*) is God's favour, undeserved by man, which brings salvation to man and then keeps him, motivating him to obedience, whilst being at the same time (so to speak) a form of power which enables man to live in God and for Him. *Charis* in the Greek version of the Old Testament Septuagint (LXX), is used 190 times to cover the two Hebrew words *chen* and *chesed*. *Chen* carries the idea of *favour*, especially of a stronger person helping a weaker. Noah is the recipient of this grace. Moses prayed, 'If I have found *grace [chen]* in thy sight show me thy ways, that I may know thee, to the end that I might find *grace* in thy sight.' *Chesed* can be translated as *loving kindness* or *mercy*. In Jeremiah 31:2-3 God says, 'The people who survived the sword found *grace [chen]* in the wilderness...I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness [*chesed*] towards you!'

Charis in the New Testament does service for both these words. The great covenant of grace in the Old Testament does not really differ from that in the New Testament but in the latter, it is personalised in the incarnation of Jesus and effected definitively in his atonement.

Grace and truth are linked together in John's Gospel. For

the Creator-Logos to become flesh is God's grace in immeasurable abundance. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. ..And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:14-17). We need not here examine the contrast between law and grace or even what John means by grace. It is true that it is a word more used by Paul than others—John uses it only once in his epistles—but all epistle writers use it. It was common coinage in Israel before Christ's coming and doubtless *chen* and *chesed* contributed greatly to understanding the brilliant revelation of *charis* by Christ. All we have to do is underline the fact that there is no grace apart from Christ and his Father. It is always 'Grace be to you...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.'

GRACE AND THE CHURCH LIVING IN THE TRUTH

Christ did not merely epitomise grace and the truth. He was both, and these in action. To say 'Christ appeared' is to say 'The grace of God appeared'. The true mark then of the church was '...great grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33). We may test the life of the church in this simple way, at any point in history. If great grace is not upon all, then the church is deficient. We do not say that from God's point of view great grace is not upon the church, but we say that the church's response to great grace is deficient where the signs of grace are absent.

What did the apostolic church understand by 'great grace'? Doubtless the whole Gospel and its impact upon the church, particularly through the revealing Spirit at Pentecost. However, we have a clear exposition of it in the fourth chapter of Acts, from verses 23 to 35. In this incident

the apostles had returned to the church after being warned —under threat—not to speak of Christ. The church immediately prayed with one voice (a miraculous event in itself) to the sovereign Lord, reminding Him of the meaning of Psalm Two in light of the events of the Cross and the Tomb. They saw the ‘anointed one’, the King, as Jesus, and they prayed that the apostles would therefore be emboldened to preach the word, whilst God worked through His holy servant Jesus to perform signs and wonders, accompanying the word and attesting to it. As a result of the prayer three basic things happened. The first was that those assembled were filled with the Holy Spirit at the moment when the place in which they were gathered was shaken. The second was that the whole church was wholly of one mind and one heart, and they shared all things. The third was that the apostles gave witness to the resurrection in great power. Luke says, ‘And great grace was upon them all’. He then goes on to show that the outworking of that grace was the selling up of lands and houses and the sharing of it with those who had need.

It is also significant that upon the heels of this ‘great grace’ came the hypocrisy and deceit of Ananias and Sapphira. This was an attack upon ‘great grace’, and had to be dealt with summarily for fear of the church being infected. We must conclude that ‘great grace’ was operative as much in the judgement of Ananias and Sapphira, as it was when the place was shaken and when it resulted in the Spirit’s infilling, the shared love of the assembly and the proclamation of the resurrection by the apostles.

THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

If we trace the word ‘grace’ in the Acts we see that it is a state of being of the church which comes through the working of God. For example, when the church formed at

Antioch (in Syria), it did not come into being through the apostles, but through Jewish Christian refugees scattered from Jerusalem because of Stephen’s martyrdom. The apostles sent Barnabas down to see what had happened and when he arrived he ‘saw the grace of God’. He was glad at what he saw, but the term ‘grace of God’ is interesting. It describes something God had done. In 13:43 Paul told those who heard his word to ‘continue in the grace of God’. It is worth noting that when Paul and Barnabas had set out on their missionary journey from Antioch, those there had ‘commended them to the grace of God’ (14:26). Again in 15:40, as Paul and Silas set out from Antioch for Paul’s second journey, they were again commended ‘to the grace of the Lord’. Later (20:32) Paul gave his blessing to the elders of the Ephesian church. He said, ‘And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.’ We conclude that ‘the grace of God’ or ‘the word of his grace’ are terms which indicate some grace entity under which the church is both edified and made secure.

The ‘word of grace’ is dynamic. Stephen who was ‘full of grace and power’ (Acts 6:8) could not be controverted, so powerful was his life and preaching. He did signs and wonders and spoke with such wisdom that his enemies were silenced. When the apostles arrived at Iconium in Asia Minor (Acts 14:3) they were strongly opposed but they spoke ‘boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.’ Grace is also linked with believing the Gospel, for we are told that at Ephesus, Apollos ‘greatly helped those who through grace had believed’ (18:27). Peter addressed the Jewish (Christian) Council at Jerusalem (15:11), telling them, ‘. . . we believe we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, just as they will.’ From these refer-

ences it is clear that the apostles expounded salvation by grace and, following that, living by grace.

When we come to Paul's epistles and see them headed by 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ', we understand that the early church recognised its daily need of grace. Paul speaks of having 'access to this grace in which we stand'; the believer as a person, and the church as a corporate entity are in daily need of grace. He talks about receiving 'the abundance of grace' and is referring to the gift of justification. However, he does not limit it to that. He says, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace' (Romans 5:2, 17, 6:14). Life is lived in grace. He also sees the gifts given to the church are from grace (Romans 12:6) and with the gifts is given grace to use such gifts. Grace (*charis*) is naturally linked with the gifts (*charismata*), and indeed no gift has any useful purpose unless it is used in grace, for the purposes of love.

Paul also sees the ministry to which he has been commissioned as being a matter of grace. In Romans 12 (verse 3), when he is enjoining a right use of the gifts, he introduces the passage by saying, 'For by the grace given to me I bid everyone among you. . . ' Again in the Ephesian letter he says, 'I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power', and adds, 'To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God. . . ' (Ephesians 3:7-8).

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The Church Living Under Grace 2

THE POWER OF GRACE

We have seen that primarily grace is shown as the saving work of the Cross. It is by grace that we are saved and justified and not, really, by faith. Examine some of Paul's statements on the matter: '. . . they are justified by his grace as a gift'; '. . . those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness'; 'By grace you are saved through faith. . . it is the gift of God' (Romans 3:24, 5:17, Ephesians 2:8). It is God's power that works in grace from His grace, and effects the basis for man's salvation. It is the grace which gives gifts for ministry, and then gives ministry, effecting this ministry in power.

Paul, at the same time, speaks of the power of grace for all of life. In Titus 2:11-14 he says,

'For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober' upright and godly lives in this world' awaiting our blessed hope' the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.'

An analysis of this passage tells us that the same grace that

brings salvation is the grace that teaches us to renounce the former evil things of our lives and to espouse the true life of obedience and holiness, living in hope of things to come, and to see that the goal of grace is the holy people of God doing God's good works. Hence we hear of being 'strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus' (11 Timothy 2:1) so that 'what you have heard from me [Paul]. . . entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.' Grace, then, is not only a power to save, but a power to keep the church, to extend its ministry, to mature its believers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRACE

In the foregoing chapters we have seen many of the problems of the church. It is fair now to say that *every one of them springs from failing to live under grace*. If grace is the mainspring of holiness, apostolicity and catholicity, then any drying up of this grace will lead us away from those inseparables—'grace and truth'—to the evils, heresies and aberrations which lie outside of grace. Both nomism (legalism) and antinomianism (lawlessness) begin to take over where grace is absent. The nature of the sacraments changes in understanding and practice. Instead of being the sacraments of salvation they become the *means* of saving oneself. Instead of good works being the *fruits* of salvific grace, they become the *means* of salvific attainment. Instead of justification being by grace as a gift, the works and efforts of salvation-aspirants become the ways in which they prove themselves, ie. self-justification.

Two passages in the New Testament strongly emphasise the need for grace-living in the church. The first is Acts 15 where the Council at Jerusalem legislated in regard to the Gentiles who believed that they were free from Mosaic law, especially circumcision. The other really covers the entire book of the letter to the Galatians. Although Paul only

mentions the word 'grace' five times apart from the opening salutation and the closing benediction, this whole epistle is concerned with grace. The legalising Judaisers who had come from Jerusalem to Galatia had sought to present a hybrid gospel of grace and law. Paul, in a letter of fiery rebuke, castigates the errant Judaisers and reiterates the Gospel of grace. He calls down anathema on those who preach 'a different gospel'. For Paul there is only one Gospel, the Gospel of grace. In the famous passage of 2: 11-21 he spells out the grace which redeems Jew and Gentile alike—apart from law. His strong closing statement is, 'I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.' Later in the epistle he says, 'You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you *have fallen away from grace*' (5:4). He says elsewhere, 'Did you experience so many things in vain. . .?' (3:4)

We can see, then, that apart from grace, there is no true holiness, catholicity or apostolicity. Instead there is legalism, formalism, theology without substance, action without life, and the deadness and perils we have outlined in previous chapters.

THE HORTATORY SIDE OF GRACE

Paul's passage in Titus (2:11-14) tells us that grace teaches us to renounce ungodliness and other evils. It trains us to live godly and sober lives. It leads us to holiness and the life of hope. We saw the church in Acts chapter four when 'great grace' was upon it, and the summary judgement which came to Ananias and Sapphira on the heels of this 'great grace'. Grace also disciplines and chastens.

This comports with chapters two and three of the Revelation. Christ walks amongst the golden candlesticks. He knows the works of the seven churches, ie. the sevenfold

church, and tells them so. He then rebukes all that is not of ‘truth and grace’. If we examine his rebukes and exhortations, then we can see that the defective churches are not living under grace. It is his grace that he does not destroy them. The church at Laodicea is sternly rebuked, but then Christ says to it, ‘Whom I love I rebuke and chasten’. In other words, the rebuking and chastening springs from his grace. Even so the churches must heed his words, and return to the truth.

All of this brings us to the main point of our chapter: ‘How do we live in grace?’ One answer may be, ‘Walk in the Spirit; be led by the Spirit and you will not be under law.’ This is true. However, to walk in the Spirit is to be brought —time and again—to the heart of the truth, namely the Atonement. Speaking very loosely we can say, ‘To the degree that we understand and respond to the grace of the Cross and Resurrection, to that degree we will know the immense grace of forgiveness, cleansing and justification. To the degree to which we see God’s love (ie. His grace) in the Atonement, to that degree we will be gripped by grace.’ If the man in 11 Peter chapter one can be ‘blind and short-sighted, lacking fruitfulness in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ’, and all this because he has forgotten he was purged from his old sins, then so can we in that way and for the same reasons—the neglect of grace. When we say ‘neglect of grace’ we do not just mean neglecting the means of grace, the worship, prayer, fellowship and the sacraments; we mean the wrong attitude in our use or non-use of these means of grace. The means of grace must be used in grace itself or they become invalid. Hence when Jesus says to the seven churches, ‘He that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’, he is telling us that the churches do not automatically obey its Head or necessarily live freely in grace and love as they ought to do. He is reiterating the need to be subject to grace as well as be

saved by it.

What then is the solution? The solution is to penetrate daily deeper and deeper into the reality of grace. It may come to a person as a revelation—and even in a flash—what the nature of grace is, but it takes a lifetime to be habituated in grace-living. No sooner does release and liberty come through dependence upon grace, than we become proud of seemingly self-achieved spirituality. Paul’s translation to a glimpse of Paradise was too much for him. Indeed it never ceased to be too much, for he always needed his ‘stake in the flesh’, and had to be told, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness’ (II Corinthians 12:9). This is the lesson we need time and again. The upwards and ambitious rise towards prelacy is not confined to the ancient branches of the church. It is in every new church that is born, in every split away from the mother church, in every new schism and sect. There is prelacy in theology, in forms of evangelism, missionary activity, and church growth.

How then does one go more deeply into grace? It is surely in knowing more and more of the Cross and Resurrection, and seeing increasingly that man’s evil could be cured by no other means. So we must see this continually, but at the same time live in grace as a state of dependency. Yet dependency is always with a view to living dynamically, ie. doing the good works set before us. Paul speaks of Christ as the paradigm of grace. ‘You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for [our] sake he became poor, so that by his poverty [we] might become rich’ (II Corinthians 8:9). Grace issues in humility which serves others. In the serving we are aware of our limits. Again it must be the grace of Christ and the Father, all of which leads us back to ‘this grace wherein we stand’, and ‘Grace be to you . . . from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ’. When this grace comes to us then we naturally move in grace

towards others. We become gracious and graceful.

GRACE AND ITS CRITICISM

This leads us finally to the spirit of humility which allows us to accept true criticism and use the analytical-critical spirit towards ourselves. The epistles of the New Testament frequently and specifically instruct us that we must ‘exhort one another daily’, ‘. . . stir one another up to love and good works’, ‘. . . exhort and reprove with all authority’, ‘. . . command and teach these things’, and ‘set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith and in purity’. Paul also says we should examine ourselves to see whether we be in the faith. In worship we must ‘. . . teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. . .’.* Clearly we are to use the critical faculty, and use it in such positive ways as will build up the church.

It is surprising how some members of the church wilt in the face of the slightest criticism, and others bridle angrily when any kind of assessment is made as to the state of the church. Both are insecure in the matter of justification. The first lose heart, and the second are unsure. Some seem to consider any positive criticism as ‘demeaning the church’, ‘rocking the boat’, ‘giving away to the enemy’s accusation’, but it need not be any of these. Christ walks amongst the churches and he rebukes, but his rebukes generally come through the servants he has set in the church, particularly those of prophetic spirit. Hence the word of judgement is not to weaken but to encourage. If grace has gone into recession—partial or otherwise—then a strong prophetic word is required. If sin has gone underground then only its unmasking will bring relief to the person who is implicated and the church which is involved.

There is no reason why the church should be exempted from healthy criticism. It is not so sacrosanct that it may not be subjected to the ground rules of true grace-living. Prelacy has no exemption by the same token. Paul claimed that he knew nothing against himself, but did not say this vindicated him (I Corinthians 4:4). God would ultimately judge him. Meanwhile he trained his conscience to be void of offence before God and man (Acts 24:16). He would not hesitate—in his capacity as apostle—to come to a church of his founding and discipline its members. He even spoke of bringing every thought into the captivity of Christ.

We should then see the ministry of admonition as a work of grace, for the sake of grace. In some of our chapters we have seen the problems which arise when we seek to live in the truth. We need discernment in these matters when we can so easily swing to the right hand or the left. For this reason habituated living in grace is our only way of living in the truth. We should be glad when our waywardness is revealed, and our reversion from grace is uncovered. This helps us to get back to grace more quickly, and so to witness to the truth.

* Hebrews 3:13, 10:24, Titus 2:15, I Timothy 4:11-12, Colossians 3:16.

24

The Church and Revival in Truth

THE CHURCH THE LIVING AGENT OF THE TRUTH

We come now towards the end of our thoughts on the liberating truth of God. Knowing that man cannot be really man unless he lives in the truth, we have seen that in rebellion against God he exchanged the truth of God for a lie and went into false living which he told himself was true living. The grace of God did not abandon man because of his rebellion but persisted in communicating with him through various media. However, men—apart from the phenomenon of those known as ‘men of faith’—persisted in deafness. Because man is made for truth, he has never been easy in untruth, and never can be, however hard he may work at rationalising to convince himself that the lie is truth. Inevitably, the confrontation of truth must unsettle him when it happens.

The confrontation of truth is not only via the media of creation, angelic visitants, dreams and visions, the people of God, Israel, and the law of that people; it came in the most dynamic form of all—the incarnation of the Word, the eternal Son of God. Truth was spelled out in the humanity of Jesus, especially as he died for the sins of the world and arose to give hope of eternal life through resurrection from the dead.

The people of God who grew out of this event were anointed by the Spirit of God who is the Spirit of truth. Hence the church has become that dynamic unit which lives the truth, proclaiming it with the power of conviction that cannot be found in this authentic way anywhere else in the universe.

In one sense the truth is tenuous, especially in communication. If the people of God are not living fully in the truth, then to a great degree the rest of humanity is unable to see the truth. Whilst it is true that the inscripturated word is the truth, by nature of the case it requires the church to proclaim it by its own witness. The word apart from the church may well be valid as truth, but its dynamic action is wedded to the life of the church, as the life of the church is wedded to it. The church is given grace to proclaim the truth and liberate mankind from its error. If then the life of the church be bland, mediocre, dull, and apathetic, and if its proclamation is without life and not dynamic, then there is tragedy abroad. It is then that the Gospel will be seen as bland, mediocre, dull, traditional and apathetic.

THE REVIVAL OF THE CHURCH

We have seen that scarcely had the first century closed—some seventy years after Christ’s ascension—than the church was disturbed by inward problems. Within the first three hundred years it was in dire danger of being politicised to become an agent of the Roman Empire. In the first millennium the forms of its power were beginning to shape up, and then harden. From time to time within that millennium and the next, it went into dark periods when the truth seemed to be obscured, although never wholly. It was almost like the ebb and flow of a tide. That rhythm was from man and not from the truth itself, in which there can be no ebb and flow.

Because of this churchly decline, we need to read church history closely and detect the causes of its changes and the remedies for its healing and renewal. Since the church is virtually known in the New Testament as ‘the Israel of God’ it is helpful to study the nature and history of Israel and see the parallels in the life of Israel and the life of the church. Israel had its advances and recessions, its states of near-apostasy and its revivals which renewed it to life. In what are called by the Jews ‘the former prophets’ (Joshua to Nehemiah), we see the spiritual fluctuations of the nation, and in regard to these, the fluctuations of the rulers of Israel first, and then the rulers of the two parts of the Divided Kingdom—Judah and Israel. When the rulers were godly, the nation showed signs of covenantal loyalty and obedience. Under evil kings it often recessed badly, going deeply into idolatry. When the former happened, God blessed the land, and when the latter happened He judged and punished it. All this He did according to the principles He delivered to Israel through Moses, whose words are set out in Deuteronomy chapters 28-31, words verified by the former and latter prophets.

One of the key principles for steadily living in the truth was to understand the temple as being God’s (symbolic) dwelling place. Whilst the temple was there, God was listening to the prayers of His people. Israel the nation was epitomised by the temple. In the New Testament the church is God’s sanctuary or dwelling place:

‘So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the cornerstone, *in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*’ (Ephesians 2:19-22).

As for Israel the temple and people of God, so for the

church the people-temple of God. For both there is blessing when they are obedient and judgement when they depart from the truth. The principles laid out in II Chronicles 7:13-14 are the principles also for the New Testament church:

‘When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land’.

Whilst it is true that the church is not a nation but is *among all the nations*, yet it is also true that *it is a people*. The church has known its times when there has been no rain of the Spirit, and when the locusts have all but devoured it. These have been the locusts of error, false doctrine, destructive affluence, enchaining forms of lifeless theology, prelatism, internal politics, and in-fighting. The Galatian malaise has often infected the church; grace has given way to oppressive legalism and merit systems backed by heavy sacramentalism. Sometimes there have been seasons when the blind have led the blind. These times are all too easily traceable in church history. Often too, countries which have called themselves Christian have gone into a moral decline, and into spiritual poverty. Then, just when everything has seemed lost, something has happened. Unaccountably the people of God have humbled themselves, have prayed, have turned from their wickedness in weariness and despair and have sought the face of God. At that point God has visited His church, and often the nation itself, and revival has broken out. The church has been renewed. The truth has begun to flourish again.

REVIVAL FOR OUR TIMES

Students of revival note there are two kinds of renewal.

The first is one that is called ‘revival’ by those who seek to bring it to the church. It is, however, little more than bright evangelism, The methods used are the same as in most demagoguery, emotional speaking, methods of mass persuasion, the-lights and action of a vast rally, and a kind of biblical jingoism that fans old embers to flaming point. Some local and immediate impact is made, but rarely does anything enduring emerge.

True revival is undoubtedly a sovereign work of God and is vital to the life of the church. True revival has lasting results, although of course its phenomena (must) soon give way to the true (new) life of the church. Whilst it is a sovereign work, ie. God initiates it, yet, prior to revivals, the Spirit of God moves people to despair at their own state, to a strong recognition of the deadness of the church, and then to a hunger for Himself. The church is told to come to a humbling of itself, repentance, brokenness, and to earnest prayer. The sovereign act of God calls forth the change in heart that the church needs, and revival comes upon it.

It has been said that revival effects in minutes that for which the faithful have often worked for years and seemingly not achieved. Truth becomes indelibly imprinted on the mind and hearts of penitent hearers. Changes are effected which are permanent. What might be called ‘cosmetic ministries’ dwindle away as the truth becomes dynamic in its effects. All the elements of ‘love, joy, and peace’ with the other fruits of the Spirit present themselves. Love, fellowship and unity are heightened, and the desire to proclaim the truth becomes very strong. Because of revival, some nations have found a new moral surge and the rates of crime and immorality have been significantly lowered. Truth is now seen in the market place and social justice flourishes.

HOW REVIVAL COMES AND WHAT IS NEEDED TO BE DONE

We must not think of revival as a spiritual flash-flood, suddenly coming upon the church and as suddenly gone so that little has been permanently changed. This is not the case, or rather it need not be the case. The study of historic revivals is a serious matter, and when we trust God for revival then we must undertake preparation responsibly. That moral and spiritual levels seem low in the church (and the nation) need not make us despair. It may be a fact that the church seems powerless, unauthoritative, bent on entertaining rather than exhorting, attracting rather than confronting, persuading rather than proclaiming, but these things simply tell us of the need for revival and the fact of its urgency.

If the matter is tackled only emotionally it will come to little. If a mere formula is followed, then it will prove fruitless. If induced remorse is present and not genuine repentance, then the outcome will be harmful. If true teaching, exposition of the Scriptures, and attention to right doctrine are neglected for a simplistic approach to the renewal of the church, then nothing lasting will result. It may happen that the guilt of many will produce an emotional response and even psychic phenomena. These may appear impressive, but the movement will dissipate, leaving nothing of value and perhaps largely create destructive mischief. Human enthusiasm—especially that enthusiasm which guilt and remorse engender—can be most dangerous. What we need is a renewed understanding of the truth, a fresh approach to the great doctrines of grace and justification, a hunger for holiness, and a sensitive awareness both of God’s demanding holiness and His unconditional love for us. Then true revival can come and its

effects will not be easily dissipated.

WHEN REVIVAL COMES TO THE CHURCH

Jacob's spirit revived within him when he heard that Joseph was alive. Samson, at the point of death through exhaustion and dehydration, felt his spirit return to him as he drank of the God-created spring which opened up before him. As he drank he was renewed. So with the church. Whilst inner reforms are required and a deliberate return to truth is mandatory, yet the freshening of revival is the miracle the church needs. It can examine its failures, look critically at itself, bemoan spiritual listlessness and apathy; but somehow nothing of a dynamic nature really happens until the Spirit comes freshly upon it.

Wonderful as are the effects, the grace of revival requires consolidation, a return to biblical preaching, an establishment of the new spirit of loving, concern, and serving. The release that repentance, confession and faith bring is needed, but the steps or acts that brought it do not have to be repeated. Indeed we must be wary of making a formula. A stereotyped methodology must not be formulated whereby the sweets and joys of revival may again be induced, especially if there appears to be a lull in the action of revival. Revival will pass in the same way that floods must give way to the warm, regenerating sun. The fruits of revival must be consolidated, and the foundations laid by it (to change the figure) must be built upon. Unusual phenomena must not be sought for their own novel nature, their pleasing stimulation, or even their attestation that the movement is of God. The people of God must give themselves to prayer and the word of God. They must seek continually the deep things of God—not merely esoteric but plain and practical —so that the fruit of the Atonement may be forthcoming continually. Justification, calling and election, the Atonement,

ment, the anointing of the Spirit, the entrance into and living in the truth must be known and habituated in understanding and practice. The means of grace must be highly regarded and utilised. The church must come alive to the nature, meaning, power and practice of the sacraments.

Without this revival of the truth, the church cannot be salt in the affairs of mankind, nor light in the darkness. It cannot be the bearer of the great news of redemption, and the body of Christ announcing the new day and the new order—the climactic act of God to redeem all history and establish the new creation.

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The People of God and the History of Creation

We have come to the final chapter of the truth of God; so we must draw our practical conclusions and encourage ourselves in the face of this cosmic battle for the truth. We must never let ourselves forget that it is a cosmic battle, and that we—the people of God—are not spectators. Revival in the church is not merely an in-house matter, a refreshing of the weary saints, a tidying up of the household of God. Revival of the church comes only from a revival of the truth in the hearts of the people of God. Revival is not a *modus operandi*, but the required cleansing from the lies which have insinuated themselves into the body of Christ and posed as part of the truth. The church has therefore to expose itself to the Gospel through the Spirit of truth, and come back to its foundational basics, its true origins, its authentic goals. It has to re-learn its true function.

THE CONFLICT WITH EVIL

We have already examined the cosmic battle in which Satan and his evil powers defy God and seek to unseat Him from His throne of authority and grace. It is true that good angelic powers fight their evil opposites, but it is even more true that Christian people are the key contestants in the

battle. The truth of God vitally concerns them, for God has incarnated the truth in His Son, and it is the truth which liberates man. Man too has to take the truth to his fellow man. It is a matter for agonising thought that even redeemed man can come under the attraction of seduction, can give way to the threatening roar of the prowling lion of evil. He can be hoodwinked enough to turn and fight his own flesh and blood, and often the very flesh and blood which is part of the body of Christ.

TAKING UP THE WEAPONS AGAIN

We have seen that our weapons are not worldly, nor carnal. Some readers of apocalyptic take the symbol for the literal. They see God as battling with evil and using the range of the human arsenal, even to nuclear armaments. It may be true that some of God's most spectacular judgements come in the ethos of man's wars, but God's weaponry is not of that nature. It is spiritual, and by 'spiritual' we mean 'of the Spirit of God, rooted in the spirit of man, confronting man as spirit'. In practice we mean anything that meets man in his need as a spiritual creature of God, that effects divine surgery on the carcinoma of deceit, and brings him into the virility and health of the truth. We mean that which goes to the heart of evil and strikes it dead. We mean that which unmasks the great lie perpetuated by evil creatures, whether they be angelic, demonic or human.

In practice, this is worked out in the painstaking—and courageous—daily maintenance of personal integrity. Spiritual warfare is often (wrongly) presented as flamboyant, its militant songs as jingoistic and exhortations to battle demagogic. Paul, in the powerful passage of II Corinthians 4:8-15, gives the true picture as he speaks of the constant pressure of evil upon the Christian warrior. It is unrelenting, never letting up.

‘We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed’ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.’

This powerful passage is saying that spiritual victory and the fruits of salvation are won only as we remain fast in the spiritual conflict. The blows that come upon us strike, not primarily at our bodies, but at our minds, our hearts, our spirit, and our theology. They strike at the truth. Paul has those powerful autobiographical passages (11 Corinthians 6:3-10, 11:22-29) which tell of his physical suffering, but it is the flaming arrows of accusation that he most fears and respects. He needs his armour to defend himself, and his weaponry to attack the enemy so that the strongholds of evil are breached and taken, pulled down and destroyed. This language is not that of romantic heroism but of deadly necessity, for the Lie is lethal.

THE BATTLE OF THE SMALL THINGS

When the church has dreams of its own imperialism then it has become political. When it lives in the headiness of the numbers or the power game, then its spiritual warfare has all but ceased. If we look at the warnings, admonitions, rebukes, injunctions and encouragements of the epistles, the gospels and the Revelation, then we see that they are often directed at the simple matters, and what we might even call the small matters. They are to do with speaking the truth and not the lie, having speech that is seasoned with grace and not bitterness, of love that gives freely and bears everything that is contrary to it. It speaks of being joyful under oppression and persecution. These are the weapons of truth

that we must use.

In practical fact, we know our integrity is eroded when we give way in the small things. We tell a lie, we give way to wrong thoughts, we let ourselves sip at lust, we refuse to speak the truth in a compromising situation, we have a pang of jealousy here and a spasm of hatred there. We neglect the means of grace, letting prayer slide for the moment, having thoughts about the dullness of the written word. Our worship must come spontaneously or we will be loath to praise. We let a friendship fragment and shatter, we feel disaffection towards another person. We let bitterness lodge, a small impurity take root. We allow an evil in ourselves, our group or in the larger society without any kind of protest.

If we look to do battle in the major issues—so called— then we must see the importance of these so-called minor issues of which we have just spoken. We must brace ourselves, being vigilant and sober, being aware of the cunning devices of the enemy. To the last it will not be battle on a grand scale—ie. on a grandiloquent scale—for it will be battle in these seemingly minor things. It will be a warfare waged against triteness and smallness of mind; against an inhibited vision, human pettiness, and a puny domesticated spirit with its irrelevant trivia. It will be a battle carried out in the grand dimensions of the Gospel. Time and again we must penetrate to the magnificent secrets of grace. Time and again we must see our own innate weakness, but grow powerful in the strength of the Lord and the might of the Spirit of life. If the principles we state seem general, then the battle will nevertheless take us to the specifics all too quickly. Every day we will be faced with the practical and stark demands of spiritual warfare.

THE COURAGE WE NEED

John’s revelation of those ‘who hold the word of God

and the testimony of Jesus' stands as a constant encouragement to us. Somewhere in history it has happened. Those under the altar who cry to God to avenge them and vindicate His own righteousness and justice come not only from the past but the present. Our generation has seen its own martyrs for the faith. Christ's words, 'Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life', is the spur to unremitting resistance to evil. Human courage will quickly fail. Unless we are gripped by the gratitude of grace, caught in the irresistible love by means of the cosmic victory of the Atonement, then we will not battle long. We will be licking our imagined wounds—our insignificant scratches—up in some churchly 'rest area' whilst the battle rages elsewhere.

Courage comes only from the care of the Father-King, the Lordship of Christ the Warrior, and the innate power of the truth as the Spirit clarifies it to our minds and with it, impregnates our spirits. That is why we need a revival within the church, not only from time to time, but continually. We need a revival of genuine godliness so that the truth does not seem like some nice theological dream; so that our churches do not become mere Sunday social clubs, or—at best—simply service agencies, servicing the material needs of man but denying him the bread of life.

When the great eternities are not preached; when we are so small that we shrink from the grand dimensions of the Atonement—fearful perhaps of seeing God in His awesome holiness and love—then we breed a brood of therapies, a gaggle of cosmetic ministries, all of which weaken our moral fibre, and make us a self-indulgent community, ministering among ourselves, but never being wonderfully liberated to God, never understanding the truth. When we receive the true courage of the Atonement, then proportionately as we preach the eternities, we see the Gospel grow to grand heights, and the cosmetic therapies dwindle to their true insignificance. Only then do we realise how compromised we

have become in and by the lie.

THE EVOCATIVE FRUITS OF THE TRUTH

It was said of the Suffering Servant, 'He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied'. Christ was that Suffering Servant who came to serve and give his life a ransom for many. He said, ' . . . unless a grain of wheat fall into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit' (John 12:24). His death has borne the fruit of man's redemption, man's sanctification, and man's ultimate glorification. This is the truth of God.

When the eyes of God's redeemed people are set on the ultimate outcome of Messiah's suffering, then they too will battle gladly and fiercely in the cosmic struggle for the truth. Messiah is Lord of history because he went down into death for man and rose again for man and creation. Unless we live continually in the grace of that atonement, and unless our eyes are fixed on the goal made factual and authentic by that atonement, we will not battle in the truth. Paul said, 'We are not ashamed to hope because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (Romans 5:5). The love we already know is what inspires us to hope. It also motivates us to live in the truth, to 'truth it in love'. It empowers us to proclaim the truth in love. This is what we mean by 'the evocative fruits of the truth'.

That is why we go out into the midst of humanity which is deceived by the lie, and proclaim the truth in love. That is why we set ourselves strongly to know and live in the truth.

EPILOGUE

What if?

I saw in this dream of mine that, by some strange happening in the history of the world, men and women had come at last to see, acknowledge, and accept the truth. This truth to them was not simply right ideas in their minds, but genuine actions in their lives.

At first, frankly, I felt suspicious. There must be some other motive (or motives) behind their actions which prompted them to do the things they were doing. I remembered William Congreve's couplet,

‘No mask like open truth to cover lies,
As to go naked is the best disguise.’

Was this truth then a subterfuge? So used are we to not hearing the truth that the genuine living of it was at once stunning, elevating, incredible and humorous. If I could spare the time to tell you of the processes through which the human race had to go, not only to come to the truth—for they had come to this by the time of my dream—but to live it out, then you would be doubled with laughter.

Take, for example, the sudden change in receipts and records. Where there is total trust records are not needed. I was reminded of the principle they adopted in Israel in regard to the finances of the temple. Workmen were not required to give an account of the money spent on the holy

building. Repairmen asked for money and it was given to them. Now on a worldwide basis this truth was operating on the same principle.

You will have to believe me when I tell you that millions of social workers, medical men, psychologists and psychiatrists went out of business—not of course that they minded. Politics were now a different matter. In Chaucer's words,

‘Trouthe is the hyest thing that man may kepe,’

and this being so, political conniving had ceased. The law courts were silent, bankruptcy had ceased, prisons were empty, divorce courts were unvisited. Instead, the generality of mankind was serene, sincere, filled with genuine fun and pleasure. Homicide, parricide, suicide and genocide had ceased. Whilst circumstances of nature, heredity, and environment often seemed to threaten the even (but exciting) tenor of life, yet they did not succeed. Truthful living meant wholly loving living, and so the needy were helped, the weak were assisted, and no one sought to gain anything from this. Love was getting its true and full mileage.

I could tell you more things out of my dream—for dream only it was—but I shall not do so. I do however leave you to contemplate a world in which truth would be wholly lived. The mind certainly boggles at the thought of it, and one's sense of humour is immediately tickled. Improbable though it may seem, I understand that this dream of mine will not—in the ultimate—be merely a dream. I am told that what I dreamed will in fact happen—one day.

That thought is a great comfort, and I rest in it. Even so I believe we must not wait for ‘that day’. I believe we can come—each one personally—to live in the truth. Of course we will have to learn, and the process—having been given a good initiating crisis—may prove to be long and slow. No matter! It is giving us practice for the ultimate day of truth.

There are worse things to do with life and time than use them as practice for ‘that day’.

As I said, the dream will surely be reality one day. This is what we mean by the power of the truth.

APPENDIX ONE

The Form of the Truth

THE UNCHANGING NATURE OF TRUTH

The truth must be as immutable as God who is the truth. At the same time the modes of life in which and by which the truth is known, lived, and proclaimed will differ from situation to situation, culture to culture, generation to generation. We will not always see the truth and express it in the manner that previous generations or even decades have done so. Within the New Testament the common denominator of the apostles and leaders was the truth, but the vantage points from which various leaders and teachers saw and expressed the truth were certainly varied. Paul’s writings and thought patterns differed greatly from those of John and Peter who themselves also differed.

It was Paul who protested against a monochrome faith. His famous argument of I Corinthians chapter three needs to be studied time and again. He considered party-spirit and party emphasis to be fleshly and divisive.

‘For when one says ‘I belong to Paul’’ and another ‘I belong to Apollos,’’ are you not merely men? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed’ as the Lord assigned to each. I planted’ Apollos watered’ but Cod gave the growth. . .all things are yours’ whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas’ or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s and Christ is Cod’s’ (I Corinthians 3:4-6’ 21-23).

It is exciting of course to think that all things are ours—no matter what—but then all these things find their place and function within the entire spectrum of the truth.

At the same time there must be a stock of truth which is common to Paul, Peter, John and Apollos, and that is what Paul, in Romans 6:17, calls ‘the *form* [Gk: *tupos*]’. He tells Timothy, ‘Follow the pattern [form, Gk: *hupotuposis*] of the sound words which you have heard from me...guard *the* truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us’ (II Timothy 1:13-14). John really equals this with ‘the anointing’ of the Spirit.

What then is that truth? Can we compile a body of acts and facts which comport with the living God as the truth? The answer is, ‘Yes!’ and so we set out this form of truth below, commencing with God’s intentions prior to creation and following through to the end time and happenings, and even into the new state we will know in what we call ‘eternity’.

THE FORM OF TRUTH

- Before the beginning God was as Father, Son and Spirit.
- The three were one Godhead, their unity being their love: God is love.
- In the wisdom of the eternal God, the plan for creation was formed.
- The glorification of all things was the heart of that plan.
- Ultimately, all things would be unified, filled up, and harmonised in love.
- In creation this is how things became—out of nothing, by the word.
- The Spirit was the Spirit of life, creating, sustaining’ giving identity to all things.

- So the creation came into being. Man was the high peak of that creation.
- All celestial creatures were unseen but nevertheless real.
- For a time man was to be lower than them—that is until the ultimate glorification.
- Rebellion began at some point in time amongst some of the celestials.
- The first couple, created as contingent upon God, were tempted to become self-ruling, and self-sustaining’ and to know—of themselves—what is good and what is evil.
- They fell for this serpentine ploy and so exchanged the truth of God for a lie.
- In history, all men came under death. In the mystery of God, some came to faith.
- The others lived on in the lie. Those in the truth had always to fight the lie, and fight against it within themselves, and outside themselves.
- God never abandoned His creation but proclaimed the truth by angels, acts and prophets.
- He formed for Himself a special people to be a light and witness to the nations.
- This son of His, this Israel, also came under the influence of the idols, as did other men. For such it was punished, that exile from its own land might bring it to repentance and purification.
- This people was to be the matrix of Messiah: the prophets said this.
- Messiah came as predicted, for He was God’s messenger and wisdom to bring light.
- He had been the Son, the Word, creating and upholding all things. This did not change.

- He became man, a servant to all men, serving by saving, saving by serving.
- In his death he took upon himself the sin and death of man, tasting it for every man.
- He bore the sins of mankind in his body on the cross; he took upon himself the evil of the world and all its rebellion and moral pollution.
- In doing this he became curse for mankind; he was made to be sin for it.
- He fought the enemies of man and defeated them.
- He died of his own will and not by the ravages of evil which he had borne and defeated.
- Of his own volition he lay in the grave, and, as predicted by the prophets, he rose from it on the third day, thus certifying the defeat of sin and death.
- He abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.
- The Father raised him up, giving him the resurrected body of flesh and bones.
- The Father raised him to His own right hand in heaven.
- This being seated at His right hand was the sign of God's acceptance of him and approval of his redemptive ministry.
- By doing all this the Son revealed the Father as the Father and love.
- By these same acts he witnessed to the truth, the truth of God.
- He thus defeated the lie that God is not love, that God is uncaring, that God is remote from man.
- He defeated the lie that man lives, showing it to be fraudulent.
- To bring the truth to man's heart and mind as one entity, He sent the Spirit.

- The Spirit was and is the Spirit of truth; through him the truth comes to man.
- It came to man at Pentecost, the day of the Spirit.
- God's community of faith, hope and love was born that day.
- It was new Israel out of old Israel, old Israel into new Israel.
- It was the community of the Father, which lives the truth in love and which loved the truth.
- Through this community, the kingdom of priests, the truth has been proclaimed.
- It has been told in every generation, reaching out to every nation.
- It has had to battle for the truth, and sometimes it has been seduced into elements of the lie.
- Within its bosom there are many—by nature of the case—who have not been born of the word of truth, and who are not a kind of first fruits of His creation.
- In spite of them, and in their presence, and in the presence of the human race, the community of the truth lives on, proclaiming the truth.
- It says nothing that is not the word of God.
- It says nothing but what the prophets have said and what Jesus has said in conformity with those prophets.
- The word of truth causes persecution and death to those who proclaim it, but they persist.
- Those who proclaim the truth must first live the truth: then the Spirit will reveal the truth through them.
- At Pentecost the last days began and are continuing.
- The last days lead to the last day, the great day of the Lord.
- At that day, in that time, the final judgements will come.

- Meanwhile God is active in history, judging and punishing, meting out justice.
- Such action should be powerful to bring repentance, faith and liberation.
- Even so men-in-the-lie persist in the lie; they hate the judgements and accuse God.
- Their accusations spring not from the truth, but the lie.
- Even so, God is unswerving: His active judgements of wrath reach across all history, not omitting any generation. By such He vindicates His own holiness and sets the stage for the final judgement of all evil.
- Celestial evil powers are also under judgement: the day of reckoning for them is near.
- Always in the present, the people of the truth are building: love is the building power.
- It builds processively and progressively: it is oriented to the unifying of all things.
- Evil seeks to break up and shatter the truth of all things: it cannot succeed.
- The end is near: all evil will be judged definitively at the coming of the Son.
- The dead will be raised up: the justified will be resurrected in glory.
- All evil of men and angels will be cast into the lake of fire: this lake is of God.
- It is the place of the finally impenitent, and only for such.
- Then shall take place the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb: this is the climax of present history.
- All the nations and people who have come under the truth shall constitute that Holy City: they shall also enter it for it will contain the glory of the nations.

- All people of truth will personally see God who is Father and His Son who is the redeeming Lamb, the Bridegroom of the Bride, and the elder brother of his people.
- All people of truth will be wholly like him.
- This end of time, as the human race has known it, shall be the beginning of eternity. In that eternity the people of God will be a kingdom of priests, a royal people.
- They shall see God face to face: they shall reign upon the earth, the new earth.
- They shall belong to heaven, the new heaven: the new heaven and the new earth shall be as one.
- The glory of God will then be seen in all its fullness: all creation shall praise the Father and the Son incessantly and for ever.
- And the children of God—the glorified people of the truth—shall reign with Him for ever.
- This then is the form of truth that God has planned and worked and which He is now bringing to its consummation.

APPENDIX TWO

The Testimony of Jesus

‘For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’
(Revelation 19:10)

Because of the importance of this term we append the following interpretations and commentaries regarding its meaning.

Swete (p.249): ‘ “Those who have the witness of Jesus” are those who carry on His witness in the world.’ (*The Apocalypse of St. John*. London: Macmillan, 1907).

Caird (p.238): ‘ “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit that inspires the prophets.” It is the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus that the Spirit takes and puts into the mouth of the Christian prophet . . . It is the Gospel of the Cross that gives to the prophets their assurance of their mission and its ultimate success (cf. 10:7). To be a prophet in the streets of the great city is to follow the steps of the master (11:3, 10).’ (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966).

Wilcock (p.174): ‘Does it mean, “He who has the spirit of prophecy will witness to Jesus”, or does it mean, “He who has the witness of Jesus will prophesy”? The more acceptable meaning will be the one which fits better in the general sense of the passage; and the view taken here is that the

second interpretation is more likely... John himself has “the witness of Jesus”; therefore he too can prophesy, and has words to proclaim which are just as amazing [as the words of the angel].’ (*I Saw Heaven Opened*. London: IVP, 1975).

Eller (p.173) paraphrases as follows: ‘ “1, the angel, like you, John, the prophet, have significance only in the testimony I bear to Jesus; so let’s keep our attention on *martyria Jesu* rather than upon the bearers of it! “ ‘ (*The Most Revealing Book of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

Beasley-Murray (p.276): ‘ . . .the . . .sentence must mean, “The testimony given by Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.” . . . We should, therefore, interpret verse 10 as meaning that the testimony borne by Jesus is the concern or burden of the Spirit who inspires prophecy.’ (*The Book of Revelation*. London: Oliphants, 1974).

Morris (p.228): ‘The “testimony of Jesus” might mean “the testimony which Jesus bore” (and is now committed to his servants), or it might mean “the testimony borne to Jesus”, If we take the former meaning the whole will signify that the message of Jesus is the spirit, the heart of all prophecy. . . If we accept the latter meaning, then the significance is that the true prophecy will always manifest itself in bearing witness to Jesus. The Old Testament prophets, New Testament prophets such as John, and the angels, all alike, bear their witness to the Son of God.’

Morris quotes Preston and Hanson (*Torch Bible Commentaries*, 1957), ad loc, ‘Jesus and his revelation of God, which Paul calls “the mind of Christ”, is the content of the prophet’s message as it is of what John had been told to write in his book.’ (*Revelation*. London: Tyndale, 1969).

Hailey (p.380): ‘The testimony of Jesus is that truth to

which he bore witness (John 18:37) which was the word given to him from God (John 8:28, 12:47, 14:24, Rev. 1:1, et al). This testimony borne by him must be held faithfully by all disciples.’ (*Revelation—An Introduction and Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

Smilax (p.177): ‘ . . . what is said to St. John as a prophet is in its measure true of all Christians. All in their measure are witnesses for Christ, and all are partakers of His Spirit; and therefore all are prophets in the same sense that they are all priests and kings.’ (*Cambridge Creek Testament*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1893).

Moffat (p.465): ‘ “for the testimony or witness (ie. borne by) Jesus is (ie. constitutes) the spirit of prophecy”. This prose marginal comment specifically defines the brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus as possessors of prophetic inspiration. The testimony of Jesus is practically equivalent to Jesus testifying (22:20). It is the self-revelation of Jesus (ie. according to Rev. 1:1 due ultimately to God) which moves the Christian prophets. It forms at once the impulse and subject of their utterances (cf. Ignat. *Rom. viii.; Eph. vi.*). The motives and material for genuine prophecy consist in readiness to allow the spirit of Jesus to bring the truth of God before the mind and conscience (cf. 3:14, 22).’ (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol.5. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951).

Lenski (p.546): ‘What the “testimony of Jesus” is, the speaker states: it is “the spirit of prophecy,” which may be explained: By holding firmly to the testimony which Jesus made and conveyed to us, thou and I and all the brethren hold the actual spirit of the prophecy, the inner content of the divine prophecy. “The prophecy” is defined like “the Word,” “the salvation.” Some restrict this to the prophecy contained in these visions of Revelation, but there is no need

for such a restriction. Because we have and hold this testimony, which is no less than here stated, we worship no one but God while we are here on earth or, like this speaker in heaven and on the throne.’ (*The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963).

Trites (p.157): ‘In other words it is the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus that the Spirit takes and puts into the mouth of the Christian prophet.’ (*The New Testament Concept of Witness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).