

Your Word is Truth

John 17:16-19

When we say that God's Word is true, what are we saying? And, to what extent do we believe it?

We believe that the Bible speaks truthfully to whatever issue it addresses. It is not a science textbook, but to any scientific issue to which the Bible speaks, it speaks the truth. The Bible is not a history book but to any historical issue to which it speaks, it speaks the truth. The Bible includes many types of literature. Poetry, prophecy, narrative, legal, gospel, apocalyptic, wisdom and so forth. Each passage should be understood in the context of the kind of literature that it is. For example, the 10 commandments have a moral component so that they define right and wrong. The wisdom of Proverbs offers advice that distinguishes the wise from the foolish. There is a wisdom component in the commandments and there is a moral component in the proverbs but they are not the same and are not meant to be received in the same way. We could go on but the point is that the Bible is true and that it must be read and thought about in an intelligent way.

We should probably stipulate here that while the Bible is true, in every respect, the church has often been wrong. It has not been wrong because the Bible is difficult and who can know what it really means? But the church has been wrong in its interpretation of the Bible when it has been wrong in its motives and priorities. Back in the day Copernicus was called a heretic when he claimed that the earth revolved around the sun. The official position of the church was that the sun revolved around the earth. But the church in that time viewed the people as property to be controlled and taken advantage of. The church was (with a few exceptions) wrong about slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries because it gave greater weight to the rationalizations of the culture than to the clear teaching of Scripture. The church has been wrong about the issue of the woman's submission to her husband in the home by giving unbalanced attention to the woman's obligation to submit rather than a balanced teaching that also gives attention to

the husband's obligation to "Love his wife as Christ loved the church." This has given rise to a circumstance that has seen the church become attractive to men who have control issues and who seek a rationale for being domineering and abusive. The church has been wrong again and again with predictions about a date for the second coming of Christ in clear contradiction of Jesus' own teaching. This has largely been caused by the egotistical ambitions of manipulative church leaders.

In every case cited above, the root problem has been a heart of pride rather than the spirit of humility, sacrifice, and service that Jesus taught. And, most often, there has been a witness of the truth in contrast to a prevailing spirit of error in these and many other issues.

But, when Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth." He knew and had taught the disciples that he was the living Word. He spoke the words that God gave Him to speak so that what He spoke was the Word of God. But even more, Jesus, who was God in the flesh was also the Word of God in the flesh. John 1:1,14 "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." And Jesus had said just moments before in the upper room, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one can come to the Father except through Me." So, a true reading of John 17:17 will understand that while the truth of the Scriptures was included in what Jesus prayed, Jesus' own ministry of person and teaching would have been the first and most natural way the disciples would have heard the prayer. For Jesus was to them above all other sources the Truth and the Word. Jesus did not contradict the Scriptures but was in Himself the true interpretation of those Scriptures. What did the 10 Commandments really teach? They teach us how to love God and our neighbor as our self. Who has perfectly demonstrated how to both love God and your neighbor as yourself? Jesus. He is the only one.

Jesus did not just declare Himself to be Truth and Word. He prayed (made a request of God) that as Truth and Word he would be so powerful in the lives of His disciples that they would be sanctified. (made holy or set apart by Him as Truth and Word in their lives) The Word is empowered by Jesus' prayer and by

His presence in the truth of the Word. The Word is empowered by the Holy Spirit who teaches and convicts in and through the Truth of the Word. The empowered Word is effective. It changes us. It changes our minds. It softens our hearts. It motivates activism. It molds us into a shape that we had never imagined.

But to be effective the Word must be heard. Rom. 10:13-15a "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" To be believed, the Word must be heard. When it is heard, it will nearly always be convincing. It is an empowered Word. Preaching is not a presentation of the ideas of the preacher about the Bible. Preaching is the means by which Jesus makes Himself known to those who hear. He is the one who is convincing. If you want to grow and be transformed to be sanctified made holy and set apart by the Word, then come and hear the Word. If you want to be the sanctified disciple then you must come and hear the empowered Word because there is no other way (than by means of the Word) to reach that state. The Word transforms by whatever means we receive it whether through personal study, or preaching, or by voice of the Spirit.

So we have moved on to our second question. To what extent do we believe the Word? We believe it to the extent that we hear and receive it. If you come to church faithfully on Sundays and give attention to the Word, then you will witness the effect that it will have on how you think and live. If you also come to Sunday School and to Bible study on Wednesdays then the impact of the empowered Word will be even greater in your life. If you take the time to purposefully incorporate the Word into your life then the impact will be still greater. If you consistently read the Word daily, learn the discipline of personal study, and prepare from the Word to teach and preach to others then the impact will be greater still. The question that we all will encounter eventually will be how much of God and the life He generates do you want. When you ask Him to fill your cup, this is what He does.

Sadly, as much as the Word has its effect in our lives, a dearth of the Word will also have its effect. If you are not listening to God through the Word then you will find yourself more and more the victim of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The big three enemies are a team. Open the door to the flesh and the world and the devil will soon come in. In the absence of the Word, the big three enemies will step into the vacuum. When our kids stop going to church, they stop believing the Word. It is not an intellectual experience. It is a spiritual experience (or lack thereof). If you love the world you will not believe in or want to have anything to do with the Word. Those who come out of the world and to the Word are convicted by the Spirit of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. This is the work the Spirit does by means of the Word. How will they call upon the Lord if they haven't believed? How shall they believe if they haven't heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach if they are not sent?