

Truth (Part 3)

Light and Truth

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 05-Dec-92; Tape #050

My purpose last week was to help all of us to appreciate the importance of the truth that we already have had revealed to us and, hopefully, to play a role in motivating us to make even better use of that truth than we ever have in the past. I had to stop last week because of the lack of time, and we just reached a concluding scripture for that section anyway, but I want to go back to that last scripture so that we can pick up the flow once again as we begin.

You might recall a couple of sermons ago I spent some time going through Colossians 2: 8-10 and I did that for the purpose of showing that the Bible shows that even under the best of circumstances the philosophies of men that undergird all the societies and cultures on earth are at their very best nothing more than the conclusions that men have reached apart from God.

Paul also adds in that section the very distinct possibility that some of those philosophies, maybe the majority of them, may have their roots in demonism. That sometimes is not clear just from Colossians 2: 8-10, but if you read to the end of the chapter, you will find that he says in verse 18 that this philosophy that those people in Colossae were involved in included the worship of angels. We are not supposed to worship angels! He was talking about demonism.

We have to understand then that many of the philosophies that undergird the cultures of this world may have had their roots in demonism. At any rate, these traditions are what we have been redeemed from.

I Peter 1:18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

God shows very clearly in the image that was witnessed by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, and then explained by Daniel, that Babylon was the head of gold. He calls the whole system on earth Babylon the Great. The head shows the fount or the source of all of the systems that follow that point.

And so when the Medo-Persians came along their system was derived (at least in major portions of it) from Babylon. So when the Greeks came along, their system too had its derivation in the head, the head of gold. Then the Romans came along and their system too was just another derivation of what the head had passed on down through the ages, down through the generations, father to son, country to country, and we see on this earth philosophies that have their origin in Babylon. So at the end it is Babylon that is going to exercise the power on earth, and each nation, each group of people, each ethnic group, has simply put its own twist on that system that has its roots in Babylon.

This is what we have been redeemed from—traditions that we have received from our fathers. He says that these things are aimless. (That is what my *New King James Version* says, ". . . corruptible things, like silver and gold, from your aimless conduct.")

The New Testament uses two different words that are translated into the one English word vain. If you have a King James it probably says vain rather than aimless. The New King James has changed it into aimless, which is more accurate.

These two Greek words are synonymous, yet they have slightly different usages. The first one, *kenos*, corresponds more closely to the English word hollow, thus empty or vain. It stresses the quality of a person's conduct or thinking. The other one, which is the one used in I Peter 1:18 is *mataios* and it corresponds to the English word futile or aimless and it stresses conduct that produces nothing profitable.

We have been redeemed from traditions—conduct—that produce nothing profitable. We have to apply this to eternal life, because is that not what we are involved in? God has given us mortality. He wants to give us immortality. We have received the earnest of the Spirit of God which impregnates us with immortal life, eternal life, but if we do not have that impregnation, then we are going nowhere except to the grave. So the conduct is futile. It is not going to produce anything that is worth carrying through the grave. God simply has to reject that kind of conduct, that kind of tradition.

The reason is—and this begins to tie it together with these sermons on truth—that those philosophies, those traditions, do not deal with reality. They do not deal with the realities of God. They do not deal with the fact that we do not possess immortality from the time that we are born. That is something that has to be given. It does not deal with the realities of God's purpose and of the plan that He is working it out by. It does not deal with those things at all. It deals with things that are not reality.

I want to confirm this to you right in the context back in verse 14:

I Peter 1:14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;

Before we were redeemed we were ignorant of the purpose of God, of the reality of the true values of God. When God began to call us it is highly likely that almost every one of us believed that we were immortal. It is very likely that any of us who were religious were keeping Sunday, rather than the Sabbath. Sunday is not a reality in terms of God's purpose at all, and the same with the other practices of our life. Ignorance is the state of not knowing. You are not dealing with truth. You are not dealing with reality.

People who are ignorant of how to use a computer cannot use one. People who do not know how to drive a car cannot use one. People who are ignorant of God's truth cannot use eternal life. That is a reality, and so their lives are going nowhere because they are ignorant of truth. It is a life that is dominated by the desires, as it says here, or the lusts, of the flesh. I think that if you begin to look around with your mind you will have to agree with me that we live in cultures that are openly dominated by desire—instant gratification, fulfilling of desire.

I think that you would also have to agree (those of us who understand a bit of history) that we have not reached the depths of let us say the Roman Empire yet just prior to its fall, but we are heading that way very rapidly and that is a reality. The signs are all there and if we are not dealing with that reality it is very likely we are going to be participating in it. That was a

concern of Peter's, why he was writing about it there.

In doing a little research on this verse I turned up some things that will help you to understand how wild things got in Rome just before they fell. Now remember we are looking at a society that was dominated by desire. It was not dominated by things practical even, or things that common sense would dictate. If people had a whim, or a desire, they felt free to carry it out. So what happened in Rome just before it fell was there was a very wide, a very tremendous gap between the haves and the have-nots. And the people who had not, they were so poverty-stricken it is almost beyond our belief. The people who had were so wealthy it was what we would call "filthy rich."

The filthy rich indulged in their whims in one way, and those who were not wealthy at all, the poverty-stricken, they satisfied their desires in other ways. But there was one area they all had agreement on and that was in the area of marriage. Writers of that period tell us, for example, of a woman who had eight husbands in five years. They write of another who was on her twenty-third husband and he was on his twenty-first wife. They write that homosexuality was so common that it became looked upon as normal, and heterosexuality was abnormal.

They were having banquets on peacock brains. Do you know how big a peacock's brain is? It's not very big. Their head is no bigger than a chicken. Do you know how big the brain is inside of that chicken head? Now can you imagine having a banquet in which peacock brains were the main course? Do you know how many peacocks they would have to slaughter to get the food for a banquet?

Or how about a banquet on nightingales' tongues? We have not reached that yet, but we are heading toward it. We can see very clearly in American, Canadian, English, Australian, New Zealand society that we are on the edge of that kind of thing, and it really drives home to us the importance of the responsibility that has been put into our lives by God's calling. If we do not follow His truth, then there is only one other way that we can go, and that is the way of the world. The only difference between us and them will be one of degree. And we will be following ways that are untrue, that are lies, and that are not dealing with reality, and perhaps worst of all is that there will be no witness of the truth of God. That is the responsibility that God has placed on you and me. We are His witnesses that He is God and the only way that can be done is to respond to His truth.

So that is Peter's concern when he writes this first chapter. What are we going to do with the truth that we have been given? He is urging these people in chapter one to take advantage of it because now we are capable of living purposeful lives—lived, spent, striving to attain to the Kingdom of God so that we can carry God's values through the grave. The only thing that counts is to carry God's true values through the grave.

I John 1:5-8 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

That last verse is exceedingly important to this series of sermons because it has been my contention in these sermons that self-deception (little fronts, little ways in which we use to kid ourselves) may lead us to believe that it really does not matter all that much whether or not we obey the truth of God.

Let us establish something here about the relationship between light and truth. I am going to turn to a series of scriptures beginning in Psalm 43 that will help us to understand this relationship between light and truth. I am not going to expound on these very much because they are pretty much self-evident.

Psalm 43:3 Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me.

Do not think that light and truth are in this context different. In the Hebrew language they have a way that they call "doubling-up" or "doubling-over" a word, a term, a phrase, in which one was given to emphasize the other, but they both mean the same thing. It is like hitting it from two slightly different angles so that there is more emphasis on what is said. Light and truth in this context are the same thing and the word "truth" emphasizes the author's point of what light means, what he means by light. Light means truth.

Psalm 67:1 God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us.

Something that shines gives light. Something that shines reveals itself; that is the point of the psalmist here. He is asking God to reveal Himself and he does it through the symbolism of light, or shining. You see, light cannot be hid in darkness. When it shines out, a person immediately sees it and his eyes are attracted to it. That is the psalmist's point here. "God make your face to shine on us so that I can see it and so that I will have direction and You will be revealed." Light and truth are in this context the same thing.

Psalm 19:8 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The commandments of God enlighten. Here it is not so much an environment in which one is walking or moving in, but rather enlightening gives understanding, gives perception of, a mental perception of something. The commandments of God give mental perception, and what do you think that is perceived? Well, truth is perceived, and the result should be more effective and better judgment as to how one should conduct his life.

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Here the symbolism of light or lamp is used in order to show direction that is received as a result of an understanding of God's Word. In other words the person can walk, live his life, because light, truth, is given to him.

Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light;

That is very plain. Let us go back to the New Testament.

11 Corinthians 4:4 Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

What does the gospel do? It reveals to us what God's purpose is. We are to grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ so that we can be in the Kingdom of God, so that we can be born into the Family of God. But in order to do that we need light. God has given us free moral agency. What are we to do in the way of making choices? What direction are we to head in? What is our motto? What are our standards? What are we to live up to? It is the gospel that reveals those things, gives us the right kind of perception, understanding, judgments are improved, conduct is improved because light, truth, the truth of the gospel is given to us.

II Corinthians 4:6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Back in I John 1 again. Send out the revelation of Yourself which is truth. That is what these scriptures add up to. It is the revelation (truth—light is the revelation) of His way, of His doctrine, and so the metaphor of light in scripture signifies information being given or asked for whereby then we know that darkness indicates ignorance, confusion, misunderstanding. And when light comes those things are dispelled. Now when darkness is replaced by light then there is the opportunity for what? Right choices, right understanding, an improvement in judgment, and repentance, which one really cannot do until he has truth, until he can turn to the right standard. Otherwise he is going to turn to standards that may be different from what he already has but are equally wrong until God chooses to light the way with His truth. We are helpless before the onslaught of tradition, the traditions of men.

Thus we can begin to understand why sin is defined as it is. Sin is the transgression of God's law. That is very plain. But the words that are translated sin into English do not mean that specifically. They mean such things as missing the mark, wandering from the path, or even rebelliousness. Now think about this. God is light. It is one of the ways that He is described in the Bible. God is light. God is love. God is Spirit. Jesus Christ said, "I am truth." Light is truth.

All of these words are descriptors to help us to understand God somewhat more. Light emphasizes a characteristic or quality or attribute of God and that is truth in all of its purity. It stresses His willingness to communicate. Do you know how it does that? When a light is turned on in darkness, you cannot miss it.

God wants to reveal Himself! He is light. He is willing to communicate. He is willing to have a fellowship. And He is showing us that it is His willingness to do so. He is showing us that it is His nature to reveal Himself to us without limit. How does He do it? He does it by providing guidance. He does it by providing for us an understanding of what He is, you see, His standards.

Light enables us to see our way. Remember light and truth. Truth enables us to see our way. When God reveals Himself He turns on the light. It is that simple. How does He do it? The mechanism is truth. He reveals truth about Himself. How important is this truth to us?

Let us just take what we might call a practical situation. Imagine yourself walking in darkness. I am not talking here about an ordinary darkness. Even at midnight, or 2 A.M., there is a certain amount of light that is available to us, reflective light usually coming from the moon. So what we normally see in nature is not total darkness, but we see things in the dark of night as

varying shades of black, or varying shades of light.

But have you ever experienced absolute, total, pitch darkness? Anybody who has ever toured something like Carlsbad Caverns or some of the other caverns that you can go down into in the east, you have experienced this because normally part of the tour that they give you, they take you into a big room and sometime or another they are going to shut off all the lights. And if you have never experienced that, you have not experienced an unusual experience that you need to have. It can be terrifying in a very short period of time because you feel absolutely helpless. There is no way you can turn and begin to move and feel secure in your movement.

Even when we are able to see somewhat as out in nature, and we will just say the dark of night, we do not see things in their true shape and form. It is very likely that even under that circumstance we are going to move with a great deal of hesitancy. We are going to, every once in awhile, run into things and we might run into them very hard and we might get very badly hurt trying to move around freely, even in the dark of an ordinary night. One thing for sure is that it is going to be, at very best, difficult to move about in darkness. It is going to impede your progress considerably.

I remember reading in one of Laura Ingalls Wilder's books, *Little House on the Prairie* (or one of those), an amusing chapter that she wrote about Pa, her father. I do not know what the reason was, but for some reason it was the dead of night. It was December or January. It was a zero kind of night and he had to go into town. He left in the daytime, but by the time he got to town and turned around (he wanted to get back to his home that night) it became dark. He was walking, and so he was on the path on the way home and suddenly in the dark of night (it just happened this way that there was no moon and it was unusually dark, and bitterly cold), Pa was brought to a sudden standstill by a bear standing in his path with his arms up in the air. For hours, Pa did not move, and neither did the bear, until finally the sun came up and he saw that the bear was simply the stump of a tree with two branches that were "v-ing" off.

I tell you this to illustrate that when a person does not have truth, his judgment about what he does see is impaired and he does not see the reality. He does not see things as they really are, but he sees things that are conceived of his own thinking about what he thinks they are. So we see life becomes aimless and purposeless with progress hindered a very great deal and an awful lot of hurt and pain being suffered by people because they do not have the truth.

So darkness symbolizes a life lived in ignorance of the truth of God. It is a life that is in reality hostile to truth and tries to snuff it out, and so darkness also stands for chaos and immorality of a life lived apart from God and His truth. Do you not think that it is interesting that when the Bible begins in Genesis 1:1 that it begins with the earth in darkness and chaos and the first thing God does to put things in order is allow the light to shine through. It is a very deep and important spiritual lesson that God begins the very Bible with. In order for people to get out of the chaos and confusion of their life, they have to have light, truth.

So truth then, or light, is reality and it reveals reality so that we are able to see things in their true character. Now how much is our judgment improved when we know the truth? Anybody who is a mother or father knows this. "Johnny did this." "Mary did that." And so they are arguing different sides asking mom or dad to make a decision about this, and mom or dad are

confused because they are getting conflicting stories from the two kids. If you just know the truth, your judgment is immediately improved.

It is the same thing with God. It is the same thing with us. Our judgment about life is immediately improved when we know the truth. God's Word is truth. God's Word is light. Light is truth. We see here that even though we have words that are not specifically the same, they are very much interchangeable. So to walk in truth is to walk in the light, to walk in reality, or to walk in His Word.

It is to walk or conduct our lives as things are rather than as we wish they were, or as tradition or feeling tell us they are. God gives us His truth because He loves us, because He wants us to quit running into things and hurting ourselves and others.

If we claim to be Christians and then deceive ourselves into consistently ignoring reality—truth—then we are in truth playing the hypocrite. Probably the most difficult area in this whole process that we are talking about here is I John 1: 5-8. The most difficult thing for us is to acknowledge the reality of sin, to pierce through all the sophistries with which we can so easily explain away or excuse sin in ourselves. We say, "Yes, but . . ." We say, "I only did it because . . ." "I did it because they treated me so mean."

I will give you an up-to-date example. Senator Bob Packwood from Oregon is now excusing his harassment of women on the basis of alcoholism. That is a dodge. He should not have been an alcoholic in the first place, if he is one. He may not be one. He may drink, but now this is a convenient way to excuse the charge, the more serious charge, on to something else.

To admit sinfulness as a blanket term is one thing. To admit to a specific sin in specific situations when being branded a liar, a cheat, or sensual, or jealous, or covetous, now that is another thing altogether. Here we come to the important part. Apply this to I John 1: 5-8. To have fellowship with God we must walk in the light, truth. That is what he is saying.

Now carry it a little bit further. John is saying that walking in truth creates and strengthens fellowship with God and with others who are also walking in the light. It creates and strengthens fellowship.

Think of this in this light. Can you imagine maintaining a human relationship with someone with whom you are constantly at odds? That is why bitterly fighting married people get divorces. They are not having a good fellowship. They are at odds with one another.

Now think of this in terms of God and His truth and walking in the light. Can two walk together except they be agreed? That is what John is expounding upon here and this is why walking in light or truth is so important to us. If we permit this carnality that is within us to deceive us into making justifications, rationalizations, and excuses for not following the truth, we are cutting ourselves right off from God. And that is what John hopes will not happen and why the exhortation is here for us to walk in the light.

Do you know what the word fellowship means? It means joint participation, doing something together. It means sharing in common. It means having common likes and dislikes. It means having a common nature—the divine nature. This is why the carnal nature and the nature of God, the Spirit of God, the divine nature are at odds with one another. Two different approaches

to life, two different attitudes.

There is a war. The flesh against the spirit is the way Paul put it. That is what we are talking about here. A fellowship.

Now a question: Is Jesus going to marry (that is, if they are fully into the New Covenant with) those with whom there is disagreement about a way of life? That is how serious this is. Our being in the Kingdom of God depends on what our response to truth is. The relationship with God requires moral and ethical behavior like God. When we do this, when we are really walking in the light, we are worshipping God in spirit and in truth. All these things begin to tie together and the common thread in every one of them is response to truth.

True Christian fellowship is possible only among those who believe in a God of absolute pure goodness and take up the obligation despite their failures to live like He does. God would like for us to be perfect, but we are not perfect. In the human sense we may think that a little child, a two, three, or four year old, that they are just perfect. Well we understand what we mean. That they are perfect as far as they have gone with life and we accept them with their imperfections because we also know that that child is trying the best it knows how to grow up.

It is the same way with our relationship with God. He wants us to grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That is the epitome. That is perfection, but we are not there yet. So He accepts us in the perfection that He expects us to be at the time that we are living. So we could be acceptable before Him even though we have failures based upon the fact that He knows that we are striving with all of our being to walk in the light.

He is faithful. He will continue to reveal more and more of that light of His perfection and then that fellowship can continue and we can continue to grow. Now here's the beauty of it, one of the beauties. John says,

I John 1:7 If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin

How is that possible? It is possible by the process that I have just explained to you. As we grow He keeps revealing more and more of His perfection to us, and as He reveals His perfection, His light, His truth, we continue to do what? Repent. Go to Him for forgiveness of what we are and what we have done, and He continues to cleanse us by the blood of Jesus Christ, and imperfections are washed away.

Are you beginning to see that everything in this Christian life ultimately comes down to the relationship with God? The fellowship and then undergirding that is the response to truth, light. Without the relationship, without the fellowship that is made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ which bridges the gap between us and God and enables us to have the relationship, then no growth will take place. We can say the practice of walking in the light makes perfect. It is not a matter of changing and cleansing ourselves, but rather that the fellowshiping with God has a transforming and perfecting quality.

We know that evil communication *corrupts* good manners. Now the obverse of that is that wonderful, pure, good communication *produces* good manners. Another way of saying it is this: When you are around evil people, you are going to pick up their habits and their ways. When

you choose as your companions people who have the standards of God and fellowship with them, it is going to very likely rub off on you. You cannot fellowship with anybody better than God. That is the whole purpose. When you are around Him, you become like Him, unless you consciously decide to cut yourself off from Him by rejecting His truth.

It is a wonderful system. Everything hinges on the relationship, on the fellowship, and then ultimately to the response to truth. We cannot afford to allow our carnal nature in us (it is still there, as Paul said, sin was still in him) to gain the upper hand and keep us from working and building on this relationship.

In Leviticus 19:2, it tells us that we are to be holy because He is holy, and that is what this fellowship is doing. It is equipping us for holiness on a day-to-day basis. Now maintaining that fellowship is not always easy because of the prejudices that we bring with us because of the traditions of man, the traditions of our culture.

As I explained in another sermon we were helpless before them and we just absorbed what our parents taught us until God opened our mind. So it takes conscious effort for us to respond to the truth.

Let us go back to I Peter 1. This was written to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

I Peter 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ

What Peter wrote here is intended not merely to instruct, but also to encourage. We are here listening to God's Word because God Almighty Himself personally chose us to be here. That needs to sink into our brain and become part of what we operate our lives by. We are the chosen of God, elect according to His foreknowledge. That is, before we ever knew of the true God, He was watching our lives. He was monitoring it and waiting for the opportunity, that at just the right time, He would reveal to us Himself in just the right circumstance, just the right environment, so that we would have the best opportunity to respond to His truth.

We expand this whole thing out to include the whole church. The church exists because God willed it so. The church does not exist because of human goodness or in human hopes and aspirations or vision or dreams. It exists because of the eternal purpose of God and that is a tremendous honor, and responsibility. It is both at the same time.

It is God working through His Spirit (notice that in that verse, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification [or setting apart or consecration] of the Spirit"), Who sets us apart or consecrates us or makes us fit for His calling. God is a creator. That is what Peter is explaining here. It is God who is making us fit for His calling. His calling is to have us born into His family. Let us not limit the calling just to the time that He entered into our lives and we began to understand. The calling includes the whole process.

The goal He has in mind is stated here as "obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." It is the Spirit of God which makes the calling of God effective. His calling is a singular act, but at some time in our lives, you might say, He messed with our brain and He turned the light on and we began to respond. That was a singular act in time that He did that, but that

calling is also a process that begins with that singular act and ends with a resurrection into His Family. The process is both at the beginning and the end and everything that comes in between, and it is the Spirit of God which ties all of these things together.

It ties in the initial act by God to open our mind, the beginning of sanctification. I should go back to another word. You hear the Protestants using this. It is not one that we have used frequently, but it is the word "regeneration," and it does appear in the Bible. It is like having a second start—being regenerated. And then comes sanctification