

The Love of the Truth

By Pastor Jeff Alexander

"They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul rejoiced in the believers' rapid spiritual development that resulted in an abounding love for the brethren. In spite of this progress, these wonderful Christians were the objects of misinformation that threatened their continued advancement (2:1-3). Thus, Paul wrote this letter to comfort and correct them and to urge them to "stand fast" in the doctrines they had received from him (2:15-17).

Paul had warned them not to let anyone deceive them. The day would come when the "man of sin" would deceive those who had not received "the love of the truth . . . that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2:10, 12).

However, lest these believers should think that they, too, had been deceived to the damnation of their souls, Paul quickly reassured them by declaring his thanks to God for them (2:13). He had already done that once (1:3), thanking God for their responsive faith. Now, he thanks God for the source of their faith—their election of God to salvation (2:13-14).

THE EVIDENCE OF SALVATION

The comfort for these troubled believers centered in their apprehending the truth. God had "chosen [them] to salvation," which included "belief of the truth." This belief placed them in the counterpart of those who had not received "the love of the truth" (2:10). This fact effectively made their response to truth a mark of the genuineness of their salvation. It should also have relieved their troubled minds and assured their anxious hearts.

Here we have a black-or-white issue: If an evidence of salvation is a love of the truth, then, how much of God's truth does one refuse or ignore and still have a claim on eternal life (Hebrews 2:3)?

Of course, the Thessalonian situation implies that true believers may be temporarily deceived by misinformation. Therefore, we ought to be cautious of judging those, who, for the moment, are in the throes of wrong thinking. However, this condition should be short-lived, since its continuation raises the question of one's salvation, putting the doubted in danger of God's judgment. So, we wish to warn and confront those who are apparently deceived by error. We certainly do warn those not possessing a "love of the truth."

LOVE OF THE TRUTH DEFINED

The term Paul uses, translated "love" (2 Thessalonians 2:10), is the Greek word *agape*. The Holy Spirit chose this word to express the love which God has for His covenant people. The other Greek words for love are based on warm feelings; however, *agape* is defined as "an intelligent, purposeful attitude of esteem and devotion" (Donald Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle*, 177).

"In secular Greek it represented a love in which the mind analyzes and the will chooses the object to be loved. . . . *Agape* is a deliberate, free act that is the decision of the subject" (Burdick, 140).

Thus, to not love the truth is to willfully not choose the truth as an object of esteem and devotion. This does not mean that those thus described do not appear to be Christians or followers of God. Paul speaks of some who have a "form" of godliness but deny the power of it (2 Timothy 3:5). Not simply lacking the power of godliness, they actively refuse or

neglect the power (or means) of godliness. The power of godliness is the truth. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). It is the truth that sets men free from the power of sin and Satan's deception (John 8:32). Therefore, Paul warns those who, being not simply ignorant of the truth, are willfully ignoring or outright rejecting the truth.

Let us be clear in this. The truth is everything God is and everything related to Him. It is an insult to the Lord Jesus Christ for a person to say he will have Christ as Savior but that he does not care to love God's truth! There are those, who, when confronted with some difficult teaching that they have never heard before, will refuse to take the opportunity to learn whether it is true. They just would rather not know.

For example, most Christians today are not familiar with the doctrine of election because it is so rarely taught. When it is taught, however, few are willing to give the doctrine an open-minded hearing, weighing the facts objectively and then determining whether or not it is biblical. They do not want to confront the issue at all!

BLACK OR WHITE?

How can one hold Christ in esteem and devotion and not so esteem His truth? Here is a simple proposition: One cannot be saved if he does not love Christ. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha [condemned at the coming of Christ]" (1 Corinthians 16:22; see also Ephesians 6:24). The same proposition holds for the love of the truth. God intends to condemn those who do not love His truth. That is what Paul is teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. Again, we ask, how much of God's revelation do we refuse before we are guilty of not loving the truth?

"And he [Jesus] said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that [time] many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:65-66). The word time is not found in the Greek. It was supplied by the translators to make sense of the phrase "from that." However, "from that" does not have any reference to time. It does have reference to the truth Jesus had just uttered. The phrase may be translated "because of this." "Because of this message many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

Many of Christ's professing "disciples" left Him on that occasion because they did not like what He had just preached to them. They did not want to hear the sovereignty of God in salvation taught. The Twelve, however, in reply to Christ's inquiry (John 6:67), said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). One cannot separate Christ from His truth.

So, then, what about the preacher who says, "Well, I believe in the doctrine of election, but I do not teach it or preach it." Now, why does he not do so? Perhaps he fears offending or upsetting some dear soul?

But for those who are so cautious or fearful that they desire to bury predestination in order not to disturb weak souls—with what color will they cloak their arrogance when they accuse God indirectly of stupid thoughtlessness, as if he had not foreseen the peril that they feel they have wisely met? Whoever, then, heaps odium upon the doctrine of predestination openly reproaches God, as if he had unadvisedly let slip something hurtful to the church" (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, V. 2, Book 3, Chapter 21, 926).

Is not the real reason a man does not preach election rather that he fears the departure of some of his "disciples"? He would rather avoid the angry and ugly reactions of some. Or perhaps he dreads being labeled a "Calvinist" and facing disfellowship from his friends?

What of the missionary who fears that he will lose his support if he embraces the truth?

Oh, but we have learned to justify ourselves in avoiding the truth and its consequences! We can remain "ignorant" of all the difficult doctrines by saying we would rather be practical than theological. We can just skip over and ignore those troublesome verses that deal with God's sovereignty in salvation. We say, "Do not these verses belong to the secret things of God into which we are forbidden to inquire?" Now, are we not rather deceiving ourselves in order to avoid admitting to cowardice?

When a preacher takes the easy path, (1) he reproaches God for revealing these truths that cause so much trouble (1 Corinthians 11:19); (2) he robs the saints of their rightful food (Ephesians 4:11-15); and (3) he rebels against God's command to preach all the Word no matter what (2 Timothy 4:1-5). A refusal to preach "sound doctrine" because of the fear of reaction will not change the fact that Paul prophesied: "*The time will come when . . . [people] will turn away their ears from the truth*" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Thus, we ask, what right does any man have to pick and choose which parts of God's revelation he will believe and teach? Paul is our example: "*For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27).

CONCLUSION

Paul sets forth a very serious warning: Therefore, each one of us needs to take serious stock of our relationship to the truth (2 Corinthians 13:5). Do we love Christ? Do we love His truth? Do we love His truth no matter what it will cost us?

If we do, Christ exhorts us, "*Do not fear what you are about to suffer. . . . Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10).

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