

THE HARD CORE OF TRUTH

by Ray C. Stedman

We have already noted that the first note of this letter of the Apostle John is one of power, the power of a Christian. And the power of a Christian is Jesus Christ himself, living within a human being today. It is Christ living in you, being God again in you, expressing his life in terms of your personality. Therefore, the key to this is fellowship, the sharing of the life of Jesus Christ. This is the note on which this letter begins.

The second note of the letter is one of purpose. What is the purpose of the Christian in the world? The answer is, to tell the truth! That is what we are here for. Every Christian exists to be an instrument and channel by which the truth is to be made known, the wonderful, delivering truth, freeing truth which is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It may sometimes be unwelcome, but it is the one thing for which men search, and the one thing they desperately need. The task of the Christian therefore is to declare and demonstrate the truth as it is in Jesus.

John began this theme (in Chapter 2, Verse 18) on a rather negative note. He talked about heresies, about perversions of the truth, about the distortions and counterfeits that will exist from time to time, in cycles, throughout history. He went on to give us certain general characteristics of these heretical ideas, these anti-Christian doctrines which come disguised as Christianity, but which are often widespread caricatures of Christianity which most people, hearing, reject and therefore think they have rejected the real thing. John will give us later, beginning in Verse 22, certain specific details which characterize counterfeit Christianity, but in between he gives us a positive word of reassurance and hope. These two verses, 20 and 21, will occupy us now:

But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. {1 Jn 2:20-21 RSV}

The King James Version, in Verse 20 says, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." Now that is certainly not what John wrote. He did not say of Christians, "You know all things." That would make Christians "know-it-alls" and there is nothing more universally obnoxious than a "know-it-all." Christians obviously do not know all things. The correct rendering, adopted by the Revised Standard Version, is "you all know." Because of the anointing which you have received from Jesus Christ, the Holy One, you all know. There is no doubt that this anointing is the Holy Spirit whom the Lord Jesus gives to those who believe in him. Remember in that great seventh chapter of John's Gospel we read,

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. ...'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" {John 7:37, 7:38b RSV}

Rivers of power, rivers of energy, refreshing, changing and affecting the lives of others -- out of his innermost being shall flow these rivers. John adds,

Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; {John 7:39a RSV}

When you received Jesus Christ, you received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you did not know it for you did not feel anything. This is what often leads people astray. They are often expecting some strange sensation when the Holy Spirit comes in. But the Holy Spirit is life: moral life, spiritual

life, God's life, and just as there was no sensation when physical life began, so there is no sensation when spiritual life begins. Yet it is there. If you have believed in Jesus Christ, you all have received this anointing from the Holy One, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, having received him, John says, "you all know," i.e., you have now been rendered capable of knowing as God intended man to know from the beginning. You have now had restored to you that which was taken away in the Fall, that which has been missing in your heart and life until you came to know Jesus Christ. No longer must you walk on in confusion, darkness and uncertainty, unable to find your way through the maze of contradictory opinions and forces, but you have something by which you can know. For the first time in your life, you have received the necessary equipment to know. To know what? To know the truth!

As he says, "I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it." Truth at the very center and ultimately, using the mind and emotions and will with which God has equipped you, and under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, to know truth out to the farthest reaches of its limitless shores, not only in time, but in eternity. That is a tremendous program, is it not? Yet that is the amazing program of God, which he has begun in those who have come to know Jesus Christ.

Look back at the Upper Room Discourse in the sixteenth chapter of John's Gospel, where our Lord is unfolding to his amazed disciples this fascinating, this almost unbelievable program of God for the future. They do not understand what he means, and are puzzled by what he says. It is not until the Holy Spirit comes on the Day of Pentecost that the pieces of this strange puzzle begin to fall into place. But, in Verse 12, he says to them, "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now," {cf, John 16:12}. Why not? Well, because they did not have the equipment. That is the trouble with fallen men. God has many mysteries hidden in the universe, mysteries about ourselves, mysteries about the world around us, and we do not understand them yet because we do not have the equipment. Unregenerate man lacks that which it takes to explore adequately himself and the universe in which he lives. Thus these men, not yet having the Holy Spirit, did not have what it takes to understand what he was saying.

"When the Spirit of truth comes [the Spirit of reality, the Spirit who gets right down to the basics, the fundamentals, the essential issues of life], he will guide you into all truth;" {John 16:13a RSV}

How will he do it? What is the curriculum, what is the course of study for this?

"...for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come [to you]. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." {John 16:13b-14 RSV}

This is the only way we can have Jesus Christ. By means of the Holy Spirit, the anointing which we have received from him, we can know him who says, "I am the ... truth," {John 14:6 RSV}. "All that the Father has is mine" {cf, John 6:37}, what a fantastic course of study! All that the Father has he will take and reveal unto you, "... therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." Paul enlarges on this same remarkable curriculum of truth in First Corinthians, Chapter 2. He is explaining to these Corinthians why he did not come to them discussing philosophy and the teachings of the Greek thinkers. He says, I deliberately set these things aside. I did not come to engage in debate with you in these areas. I came to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. Then in Verse 6, he says,

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. {1 Cor 2:6-7 RSV}

Read that now in Phillip's translation.

We do, of course, speak "wisdom" among those who are spiritually mature, but it is not what is called wisdom by this world, nor by the powers-that-be who soon will be only the powers that have been. The wisdom we speak of is that mysterious secret wisdom of God which he planned before the creation for our glory today. None of the powers of this world have known this wisdom -- if they had, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory. {1 Cor 2:6-8 J. B. Phillips}

What is missing from man's knowledge today? Why do we have a world so filled with such obvious confusion and uncertainty? No one seems to know the answers to the overwhelming problems that face us. Why is it that we cannot solve problems even on the material and physical level? Take, for instance, this matter of smog. I was in San Bernardino last week, 50 miles from the center of Los Angeles. I stepped outside and within seconds my eyes began to smart and water, my lungs were burning, and I literally could not stand to remain outdoors. Unfortunately, that is not limited to Southern California -- we have it here, too. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon, lest some uncircumcised Philistine from Southern California hear it!

This very week the papers reported that New York City almost had to shut down because of smog. What causes it? Well, they tell us it is primarily the automobile, these sleek chariots we enjoy so much, and spend so much time and money on, that are causing the smog. The obvious answer is, get rid of the automobile, or change it. But the problem is, our whole economy is geared to the internal combustion engine and the petroleum industry. To change it would wreck the whole American economy. How do you solve that problem? Obviously, there is something missing in man. He does not know enough, he does not understand himself. The New English Bible rendering of this verse in First Corinthians 2, reveals that what is missing is:

**God's hidden wisdom, his secret purpose framed from the very beginning to bring us to our full glory.
{1 Cor 2:7 NEB}**

That is what is missing. Man does not know how to bring himself to the glory God intended for him. He has lost the key, he has lost the program because he has lost the understanding of himself, and, lacking this, he gets involved in what seems to be perfectly right things but which end up as very serious problems. That is why he can build an automobile, complete in its technological perfection, but he puts a driver in the seat who cannot handle it, and within moments that beautiful automobile is a mass of wreckage. With that automobile we are killing 40,000 people a year, but, instead of solving the problem with the driver, we are trying to solve it by improving the car.

It is right here where philosophy and pseudo-Christian heresies come in. Every philosophy, every cult, and every heresy is an attempt to reveal how man can achieve greatness, how he can fulfill himself. Each is offering to unfold the secret to the nature of man, how he can operate correctly, how he can achieve what he longs to do. Each of these takes for granted that fallen man already has in himself all that it takes to understand himself and to explore the secrets of life, i.e., his reason and his observation. Therefore, each of them launches upon what they call, "a search for truth." They are looking for the key to all things. They are examining the mystery of existence, both living and inanimate, to discover the secrets of the universe, looking for that which can give purpose and meaning to life. Lacking the necessary equipment and refusing to acknowledge the need for another teacher beyond man, superior to man, they become those whom Paul describes as "ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of truth," {cf, 2 Tim 3:7 KJV}. Is that not a significant statement? That could be written above every school of philosophy in the land today. "Ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of truth."

Why not? Because truth is a Person. Truth is Jesus Christ. The fundamental characteristic of truth is consistency. It must fit every fact, every known and unknown situation. If you have something you think is the truth, but you must force things to fit, or squeeze pieces in because they do not quite fit, then you

do not have the truth. The glorious thing about knowing Christ is that the longer you live and the more you observe life, with him at the center, you find that everything fits. Without struggle, without pressure, without twisting or turning, all of life fits, for he is the truth. You know that truth, John says, "that is why I write to you."

That is why man without this knowledge hasn't a clue as to the secret of his own existence. The only principle he knows is that of demonstrating his inherent ability. Is that not what you see around you? Did you ever hear someone say "Just let me show you what I can do"? Is that not the basis upon which most humans live? "Just give me an opportunity to show you what I can do; give me an education by which I can develop what I can do." This is fallen man's understanding of the secret of his existence. He has in himself, he thinks, that which it takes to handle life properly. If he only has the opportunity to show what he can do, he can demonstrate his greatness. Now that works just well enough to give the appearance of actually being the secret, and most men are thus deluded. But man cannot understand why he cannot ultimately solve his problems. He is baffled and bewildered. He sees this principle work in certain areas, but he cannot understand why it doesn't work everywhere.

The apostle says it is because he is forever ignorant, apart from Jesus Christ, that the secret of a man's greatness, God's secret purpose, framed from the very beginning to bring us to our full glory, is not that of trying to demonstrate our inherent ability but that of declaring our utter dependence upon another. The man or woman, boy or girl, who learns that God living in him, and his utter dependence upon that God to make life full and rich, is the one who discovers what he is here for. The apostle says, because men did not know this they crucified the Lord of glory. If they had known it, as the Lord Jesus kept constantly setting it before them, trying to arrest their attention if they had but heeded him, they would never have crucified him. But because they rejected the principle he presented, because they would not believe what he said, in the end they became the murderers of the Son of God, and their hands were stained with the blood of the Lord of glory.

Now, John says, this is why I am writing to you Christians. You now are equipped to understand and know. I can point out to you the nature of error. You are worth writing to, for two reasons. He lists these for us in Verse 21:

I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, {1 Jn 2:21a RSV}

That is, you now have the ability to grasp and understand truth. It is profitable to explain to you, for you are able to grasp the secrets of living. There is no longer any reason for weakness in your life. If you will pay attention, if you will listen, if you will give heed to the anointing, the Secret Teacher within who will take these things that are written and explain them and unfold them, you can fully lay hold of life, life in all its fullness. That is why I am writing to you.

There is no use writing to someone who does not have this anointing. You cannot explain life to those who have never met Jesus Christ, they cannot understand it. To them, what you say is threatening, and they reject it. It looks to them like you are cutting the ground out from everything they built their lives on. They must start with receiving Christ before you can explain life to them. John adds also a second reason:

...you know that no lie is of the truth. {1 Jn 2:21b RSV}

Do you know that? Have you learned yet, as a Christian, that no lie is of the truth, that there is no possible harmony between a lie and the truth? In other words, that there are no grey areas in life? That a thing is either black (a lie) or it is white (the truth), and there are no gray areas though there may be a mingling of black with white. By virtue of the anointing, every Christian has an ability to exercise moral

judgment to distinguish right from wrong. It is amazing how many Christians have not learned this yet, and still go on echoing the lie of the world that there can be a blending of truth and error, and, therefore, there are areas of life that are gray where you cannot tell the difference between right and wrong. John utterly cuts the ground out from under that. He says it is not true. I wrote to you, he says, because you have found this out, if you know Jesus Christ. You may not have thought through the implications, but you must know that there is no possibility of blending a lie with the truth. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all," {1 Jn 1:5b}.

One of the glorious things about God's secret purpose, i.e., the restoring of the life of God to the spirit of man, is that it also re-establishes standards of absolute values and makes possible moral judgments. It shifts us from control by a conscience of convenience to control by a conscience of conviction, from fear of consequences to faith in a Conqueror. That is the great difference. These days we are hearing much about what are called "situational ethics," relativism in the realm of moral judgments. What are these? Well, if the boss sees you take fifty cents from the petty cash drawer, then obviously you have disgraced yourself and the company's name, having been caught red-handed, and that is wrong. But if you do it without getting caught, it is all right. That is situational ethics.

If you cheat on an examination because you do not like the teacher, then that is wrong, that is not reason enough. But if you do it because you are desperate to get a good grade and there is no other way to do it -- you have been letting the whole thing slide until exam time and there is no other way but to cheat, and obviously, the important thing is to get a good grade -- well, then, that is right. Is that not what you hear? It is this thing that results in a double standard in life. You borrow a book from your buddy and when you have finished reading it you put it in your own library. Later on, as you are running around together with the gang, he suggests to you that you steal a sports car out of the parking lot. You look at him in horror. "What kind of a guy do you think I am? I only steal books!" It is what makes it possible to stand in church and sing with full-throated soprano,

Be like Jesus, this my song,
In the home and in the throng,
Be like Jesus all day long,
I would be like Jesus."

But when you finish the song, you put the hymn book down and turn to the one beside you and say, "Get a load of Susy Jones -- boy, how fat can you get!" That is situational ethics, lumping together right and wrong, smoothing over the difference between truth and error. John suggests that once you could do that without any concern at all, once all you needed was a desire to do something and you would soon find a way to do it, and make it look right. You would soon find some way to justify it, and make it look even necessary for you to do. That is the terrible power of the human mind called rationalization.

But John says, "No more!" Now you know the One who is the truth, and you cannot get by so easily any more. Sooner or later you must explain your actions to him, and all those wonderful excuses that went over so smoothly with your wife or husband or friends or neighbors sound very lame when repeated to him. He is totally unimpressed by them. He does not say anything; he simply folds his arms and looks at you, and when you feel his eyes upon you all your excuses sound watery and weak. You start stammering and pretty soon you stop. Because, as John says, "no lie is of the truth" and you know that now.

Therefore, he says, I am writing to you because you can be helped. You are not like these people that are caught up in the human falsehood, swept along by a lie, carried about by every wind of doctrine that blows. You are not like that anymore. I am writing to you because you can learn, you can grow, you can be helped, you are worth writing to.

Now give heed to these things. Begin to examine the voices you hear, the philosophies around you, the suggestions and explanations of life that are presented to you. Measure them according to the truth. Bring them to the One you have learned is the Truth. That makes you worth writing to. Have you come to know the truth as it is in Jesus? Are you ready to listen to the Word of God, unfolded by the Spirit of God, in order that you might understand the world in which you live and the person who lives in it -- you? Are you willing to understand how God made you, how he intends you to function, how he wants you to react to situations? Will you let him teach you no longer to depend upon the false sense of ability that you have lived on all your life, but to renounce that, and rely instead upon his life within? That is why John is writing. He writes these things, he says, because he knows the necessary equipment is there. Now use it!

Prayer:

Our Father, teach us this great principle. Help us to understand the truth as it is in Christ. Make us to understand that he is the key to reality, the secret behind all things, the key to our own lives, and the key to the universe in which we live. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Help us to turn from every siren voice that beckons us away from him and to bring all the things we discover, all experiences, all observations, all reasonings, unto him, unto the testing of his Spirit and of his eye upon it. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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