

## Significant Lives — Chapter 6

By Jim Golden — The Truth, What Is It Really?

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*"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view"*

I used to think that "speaking the truth in love" was pointing out someone's faults and helping them set up a planned regimen to overcome them. While this could be part of the picture it's only a tiny part of the process, at best. The majority of the process we call, speaking the truth in love, should be proclaiming what God says in Scripture about us is true, *sometimes in the face of apparent contradiction*.

If the brand of truth you speak the most falls into the first category, you make sure you have God's permission to speak this way to his children. Have you ever listened to someone telling one of your children what's right or wrong, or what to do? I don't know about you but that just, *"chafes my hide."* This is a very sensitive area with me and should not to be taken lightly when it comes to speaking to **God's** children. Permission and presumption both begin with the letter "P" but that is where the similarity must end. As a father part of my role is to lovingly correct, admonish and guide the development of my children. We must remember that it is no different for our heavenly Father. He is desirous of fulfilling this role with his spiritual children if we will clear the way. God knows that if he fulfills his role in fathering each of us our eyes will be fixed primarily on him and not each other.

He is the God of all encouragement, not discouragement. He has given us an everlasting righteousness equal to his own righteousness. In His eyes his Son's sacrifice allows us stand above and beyond reproach forever. Jesus surely isn't the Accuser of the Brethren. He knew every single wrong thing we would ever do before He died for us. Even with this knowledge he accepted us unconditionally, and gave his life for us.

It is the Holy Spirit's "job" to convict the World of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. More often we are told to simply love and accept. To encourage each other daily is not only a command but has a protecting power for the heart. The salvation Christ sealed for us by shedding his blood is in effect eternally. *It is finished* and cannot be changed by mere mortals or any other power. Before we were even born or had a chance to sin he had written our names in his Book of Life. and our confession and belief has assured they will never be "blotted" out. This knowledge gives each one of us the courage we need to face each day victoriously. We must remember that the victory that overcomes the world is our faith. Satan is the one who tries to drag us down and steal our courage.

I am devoting a lot of time to this subject for two reasons: First, because Jesus said it was the truth that would set us free. Secondly, because knowing the truth about ourselves will affect the way we treat others.

Paul told the Romans that believing with the heart and speaking with the mouth justified and saved us. It is therefore imperative that what we believe in and speak of line up with God's declaration of salvation. We know in our

and speak of, line up with God's declaration of salvation. We know in our hearts that Jesus has justified us, but in the way we deal with each other's faults and shortcomings we seldom declare the authority of his shed blood or finished work to each other as the solution. We seldom direct the needy one's gaze to their victorious Savior, Jesus Christ.

Paul proclaimed Christ and him crucified! How easy it is to overlook the obvious. Speaking the truth in love is literally speaking Jesus into someone's heart. Speaking the truth in love is clothing the nakedness of our brothers and sisters in the righteousness of Jesus, not further exposing their weakness or failure. Speaking about his ministry to us and his finished work causes us to fix their eyes on him. The gaze that is fixed on the beauty of Jesus soon loses interest in the things of this world and its attractions of the flesh. This is speaking truth in its purest form.

I don't want to leave the impression that any mere mortal, redeemed or not, has the ability to create anything with their words. God alone can do this. We may, however, reveal his established truth with our words. The point I want to make is that in the multitude of "truths" being proclaimed today, there is only one truth that is THE TRUTH! *Christians are drowning in a sea of complexity today.* Their loyal support and allegiance is being solicited by every teacher and movement in existence. Where are the men and women who will simply lead us to the living truth, **Jesus Christ**? Everything we say and do should flow from and return to the Lord Jesus Christ!

Eternity does not possess enough time to proclaim the excellencies of God's glory yet, Sunday morning often finds the pulpits of our great nation hard-pressed to speak of this glory for only one hour. Is it because we cannot proclaim abundantly what we barely know superficially? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

I have noticed over the last 20 years a theology gain strength that centers mainly on what Paul called a "*worldly point of view*" or "sight truth" as I call it. This type of Christianity, I am convinced, brings no pleasure to God. On the contrary it is displeasing as well as dishonoring to him. It entrenches its followers deep in pride and self-righteousness, and at the same time, causes them to believe they are actually doing God a service.

A closer inspection of 2 Corinthians might help us see that the "unseen" claims of God have set into motion a salvation that MUST reach perfection no matter what the temporal or "seen" proclaims. I suggest you take a moment to read chapters 3-5 so that they might be fresh in your thoughts.

We must understand Paul's call and Apostolic mission to fully understand his writings. His orthodox life and subsequent conversion experience is the foundational platform on which God built Paul's mission and message to the world. He was raised as Saul, an orthodox Jew. His life and culture revolved around the Mosaic law and its observance. Hundreds of precepts and interpretations had been added to the Mosaic law that were tenaciously espoused and rigidly observed.

Paul's life was devoted to obeying these laws. His obedience to them was his basis for security and acceptance by God and his fellow Jews. The Law was meant to reveal the equity and holiness of God to his people, and eventually

meant to reveal the purity and holiness of God to his people, and eventually lead them to the Messiah. But the years distorted the Law so much that its precepts had taken the place of God and totally obscured Him from view.

On the road to Damascus Paul would meet his God for the first time and be blinded by his brilliance. During the ensuing weeks God would take this proponent of orthodoxy and systematically dismantle his theology through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Paul would enter into a passionate, and jealous love affair with the Son of God and grace would be the "tie that binds". This affair would cause him to be stripped of his notoriety and be considered deranged by his contemporaries. He would become an outcast to most of the Jews he proclaimed this Gospel of grace too.

He would spend much of his time trying to preserve the simplicity of the gospel from those who tried to add anything to its message of grace and hope in Christ. He would finally end up in prison and, as history records, beheaded for his witness. At the cost of his reputation and life he proclaimed the truth of the glorious gospel of God's grace and love. This works-versus-grace war filled all of his writings. It didn't stop with his burial, but continues to this day.

This "foolishness" remained with Paul until the executioner's ax silenced him and he could proclaim the truth of grace no longer. Only when death took his voice did he cease to declare, "for by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourself. It is the gift of God and not of works lest any man should boast." This theme is the heart and soul of his theology and from this perspective all that he writes is better read.

Paul speaks of the glory of the new covenant, telling us that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Is what you are doing producing that sense of freedom? Do you have the freedom to fail without fear of what others might think, or to simply be who and what you are without feeling ashamed?

"If the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed." His words are spirit and life. Speaking his truth in love is liberating, causing its hearers to enter his rest. You won't be worried about what others will think of you because you know that you have been clothed in God's precious Son's life and he thinks of you very highly.

Paul says, "...we do not lose heart. Rather, we renounce secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God." Remembering the place Paul is coming from we can begin to see what he really means. When it doesn't look like or feel like we are as saved as God claims, faith in Jesus is all the security we need, so don't lose heart.

Instead of trying to look good on the outside, we actually renounce this kind of shameful deception and speak openly of our weakness and failures. We don't try to distort the word of God to explain this apparent contradiction, or bring people into bondage by forcing them to adhere to anything or anyone but Jesus. It doesn't matter if unbelievers don't understand the light of the glorious gospel of Christ. Even if peer pressure is so great it becomes violent in its desire for us to accept "outward" forms of change, because of the Spirit's life in us we cannot relent!

Paul says later in chapter 5 that what we are is plain to God and he hopes that it is plain to our conscience. You might be able to fool others and yourself. Even Hitler began to believe his own propaganda. But we can't fool God. He knows that as long as we live in these mortal bodies we are naked, and exposed to being corrupted by our mortal desires.

Just prior to Paul's meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus he would have considered himself to be "as touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless." At the end of his life, from a worldly perspective, it would appear that he got worse not better. Statements like, "I thank God, who sent Christ into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief," only served to affirm his degeneration in the sight of his orthodox peers.

Paul also said when we beheld Jesus or reflected on his glory with an "unveiled" face we were transformed. My grandmother used to say that someone was "puttin' on airs" if they were pretending to be something they weren't. Putting on airs or putting a veil over our face has about the same crippling effect.

Roy Hession, in the preface of his book, **WE WOULD SEE JESUS** says, "Grace permits us to come (nay demands that we come) as empty sinners to be blessed, empty of right feelings, good character, and satisfactory record, with nothing to commend ourselves but our deep need, fully and frankly acknowledged. Then grace being what it is, is drawn by that need to satisfy it, just as water is drawn to the depth that it might fill it. ... The struggle, of course, is to believe it and be but empty sinners to the end of our days, that grace may continue to match our needs."

If this can be considered as the truth then we must consider most of the effort we spend in trying to make ourselves look better as wasted effort. Because Paul knew that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead would also raise all believers with Jesus and present them with him in God's presence, he considered any effort that produced external change only a waste of time and a degradation of God's promise to perfect us.

Paul's confidence in the often "unseen" results of the finished work of Christ stemmed from what he referred to as the "deposit of the Spirit." He claimed it was God's guarantee of the change that was to come in our hearts, throughout this life, and finally to be completed upon the demise of our earthly temples. To the Angels in heaven and the Jewish mind it was an awesome, almost unbelievable, proposition for mankind to be the living temple of a Holy God. Only those deemed absolutely acceptable by God could live through such an experience without being consumed. No wonder Paul was convinced that God's salvation was complete, since his flesh wasn't devoured when God filled him with his Holy Spirit. (*Selah*)

As long as Paul lived he struggled with the paradox of appearances vs. the finished work of Christ and the resulting war between works and faith as a means of justification. He tells us not to loose heart, even though outwardly we may appear to be wasting away, there is a glorious change taking place on the inside. It is this glorious truth that we must constantly proclaim to each other.

"So we fix our eyes NOT on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." He goes on to say how we

seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." He goes on to say how we long to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling so we won't be naked. For as long as we are alive in this body we WILL be unclothed. In other words we will never fully "arrive" while on planet earth. But there is this longing to be "perfect" or more "pleasing" to God beating within our breast. How can we be more pleasing or perfect than Jesus? While the difference between uncreated God and his redeemed created beings is beyond definition, when God looks at us he sees us clothed with the life of his Son, Jesus!

It is this longing however, to eliminate these "perceived inconsistencies" coupled with our insecurities I believe the enemy capitalizes on. We are such creatures of sight and feeling that Satan plays on the "apparent" contradictions that exist in our lives. God says we are changed but we don't act that way, and if we do act that way we don't always feel that way. Satan then gets us to doubt the completeness of God's salvation through these inconsistency" in our lives. Because we love God and don't want people to think ill of him, because of our actions, we allow Satan to seduce us into trying harder to prove that, "God isn't a liar".

Alas, for many, speaking the truth in love has become a burdensome effort to transform ourselves into an acceptable image of salvation. We want to look good for the world and Christendom and think this will "please" God. Yet we bring each other into bondage and actually, "make Christ of no effect"

If we want to make it our goal to please him then no matter whether we feel "close" to him or "away" we must live by faith and not by sight. To live, or be alive, is to experience God's uncreated life within us, transforming us from the inside out. Our faith in his salvation must fill our hearts and mouths, spilling out on each other every day. Without faith it is impossible to please God. *Faith IS the assurance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen.*

I heard one brother speak of the "error of emphasis" and believe that this is partially the cause of the dilemma facing us today. Simply defined this is putting more emphasis on something that God is doing than he puts on it. We may not think this is serious but it is. *I refer to the type of "speaking the truth in love" permeating the Church today that causes people to look at themselves 99% of the time and at Jesus 1% of the time. God's emphasis is for us to look at Jesus 99% of the time and at ourselves 1% of the time!* If we don't, we gain a distorted view of God and misrepresent him. *The pain of division that racks the Body of Christ today is largely due to the amount of time we spend looking at ourselves instead of Jesus.*

Obviously we must confront sinfulness, but with the "good news". How many of us remember what the good news is? If we do then why do we change the rules for the believer? Ern Baxter said he wasn't ashamed of the Gospel (good news) for it was the power of God for salvation ... and if it is THE power then there is no *the'er* power, IT'S THE POWER! In our striving for excellence we would do well to remember this. We do not have the ability to effect change in each other that is acceptable to God. It is his good news alone that can do this. At best we may have the privilege of being His instrument. NOW THAT'S THE TRUTH!

Proclaiming such a message seems utterly foolish to the natural mind. We must remember that it is the foolish things that God uses to confound the wise. While the scripture declares that we should all be fools for Christ it also says of

While the scripture declares that we should all be fools for Christ it also says of the Romans, "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for..." You fill in the blanks. They traded God for images. Have we exchanged him for prestige or reputation? In our desire to be wise many have become "fools" and have actually done more damage than good.

We can become pharisaic proselytizers easier than we think and turn those seeking to enter the kingdom of God into twice the "sons of hell" we are. I believe the phrase, "sons of hell" could more accurately be defined as the "proponents of the law". A proponent is someone who supports and promotes something actively. This is not written to everyone who reads it. To those preachers of God's gracious good news I say, "well done." Never stop proclaiming the finished work of Christ that those seeking to enter in may do so. To you who have fallen into Satan's age old trap and have mistakenly perverted the good news, BEWARE!

If you have taken pleasure in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart, take heed, for you too will stand before the judgment seat of Christ that you may receive your due reward for what you have done while in the body. Will he merely wipe the tears from your eyes as you gaze at the ones who were brought into bondage by your message? Or will there be overwhelming joy filling your heart as you gaze at those who gained entrance to the everlasting kingdom through your proclamation of the Gospel? It is a feeling and privilege beyond compare to know that you have been a vessel used by the living God!

I urge you as does Paul, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.... Therefore if anyone is in Christ HE IS a new creation; the old has gone, (no matter what it looks like) the new has come." Stop trying to change people and proclaim God's change if you want to see true change! It was the love of Christ that compelled Paul to proclaim this good news without any distortion.

It is God-consciousness, not sin-consciousness, that has the power to transform the unbeliever and the Christian alike. Looking at Jesus, not ourselves is the petition of scripture! What does the type of truth you speak cause people to do? Speaking His truth in love will cause us all to grow up into Him who is the head. From God's point of view this will prepare the Bride for the wedding supper. It will clothe her in Christ's salvation and remove the stains of self-righteousness, pride and division that keep her from the banqueting table.

What Jesus builds from the inside out will stand in the day of judgment. What we build from the outside in will be utterly consumed in the fire. Our over-emphasis on "becoming" the perfect example of what New Testament Christianity should be, individually and corporately, has created a desire and obsession to put forth the veneer of a good reputation. But God desires truth in the inward parts not truth that produces only external change.

In closing, it is my desire to speak the truth in love to those who have forgotten that our salvation is good news. I want to remind you that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. People who build from God's point of view quickly work themselves out of a job. There will always be a need for leaders to lead people to Jesus by proclaiming the truth of his Gospel, but not much need for constant oversight of the same people if they

Gospel, but not much need for constant oversight of the same people if they have been solidly espoused to the Lamb. If you can hear his voice you can follow him. People who build from a worldly point of view put themselves in a place of control and strive to become invaluable. Their followers become inordinately dependent on them instead of developing a healthy dependency on Jesus.

The King, not the kingdom, is our one vital need! True change brought about by the power of the Gospel not imposed structures, visions and causes must become our pursuit. If you would confront someone with what you call truth, make sure it is God's truth! Often we can become enslaved by "a" truth but we will always be set free by "the" truth! Jesus alone, is the way, the TRUTH, and the life! "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view."