



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume X
Issue 227

The Truth-Seeker

by – Cecil J. Blay (1916-1976)

Truth is like a jewel of marvelous craftsmanship; whichever way one looks upon it a fresh facet of brilliance presents itself, but it still remains a gem of uniform consistency, for truth is a Unity. Both natural and revealed truth spring from the same Source, so they can not be contradictory; indeed it is always a joy to the discerning mind to observe how each supports the other.

Appreciation and understanding of revealed truth should be the primary aim of those who claim to believe God, and such understanding is reached only by the reading and study of His Word, the Holy Scriptures.

Reading *and* study, be it noted, for many read this Word and have read it for years without finding in it more than some stately progression of beautiful phrases, often transmuted by them into a series of sentimental impressions, without very much attention being paid either to meaning or context. In fact, all of us need some similar experience to that of those two disciples on the Emmaus Road when to them the risen Christ “*opened up the Scriptures.*”

Spiritual things are spiritually discerned – this is why the soulish man cannot understand the things of God. Christ is the One in Whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid, and it is to Him we must look for that spirit of wisdom and spiritual understanding which Paul interceded for on behalf of the saints.

Truth resides not in a book but in a Person, One who is the Living Word, and only His spirit can unfold the wisdom of the written Word, the Word described as “*God-breathable.*” Knowledge about the latter without personal knowledge of the Former does not lead us into truth; it merely fills our heads with facts.

Among all Christians there is a considerable body of general truth almost universally held, if with variations of emphasis. It is this adherence to a number of Basic Beliefs which provides the entitlement to name the Christ as being our Lord. But (as Paul tells Timothy) only the Lord knows those who are truly His. The sorry fact is that apparently the great majority of Christians remain unenlightened, and they are unenlightened because they are either uninstructed or wrongly instructed.

The institutionalized church is greatly to blame for this state of affairs, and its leaders deserve the same reproof as that administered to the “*shepherds of Israel*” through the mouth of Ezekiel:

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel ... prophesy and say unto them, “Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Is-

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with
 - ... total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
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SEEKER (continued from page 2153)

rael that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? ... Behold, I am against the shepherds and I will require My flock at their hands." For thus saith the Lord God, "I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out ... I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down," saith the Lord God (chapter 34).

God pictured His people as sheep to be fed, and the "official" shepherds, all down the long years of history, have always failed Him. The bread of life and

the water of life have been there always for the dispensing, but only by a few faithful individuals have they been offered to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Our Lord described Himself as the "Good Shepherd," Who gave His life for His sheep, and contrasted Himself to their detriment with "hirelings."

As C.S. Lewis has written about the nominal church,

There is really some excuse for the man who said "I wish they would remember that the charge to Peter was 'Feed my sheep;' not try experiments on my rats, or even teach my performing dogs new tricks."

That the present deplorable state of confused thinking among Christians is due to the almost universal departure from Pauline teaching there can be no doubt. The inability to "distinguish things that differ" has produced a hybrid of Judaism-cum-Christianity which defeats analysis by anyone of normal intelligence, since truths for those under covenant simply will not mix with truths for those who come under no relationship whatever to covenant. What we see around us is the Galatian heresy multiplied and magnified to a degree almost beyond comprehension.

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No one has all the truth, and no one can be completely trusted who fears to admit earlier inaccurate teachings in the light of later research.

There is a mistaken tendency among some of those who have been delivered from this mental confusion to imagine that they are unique in this respect; but the truth is that God has never left Himself without witnesses – and right back to the days of the early fathers have been those, albeit few in number – whose writings testify that they knew and proclaimed many of those truths

wherein mature believers of our own day take particular delight and even sometimes imagine they have "discovered." Several of the early translations of Scripture show quite clearly that the translators

understood truth concerning the eons, or ages, and it was not until the translations into Latin were made that the entirely false concept of "eternal" came into being with all its attendant error and evil.

These errors, unfortunately, were carried over into the *King James Version*, with other Latin words which have no equivalent in the Greek originals, but have nevertheless become phrases completely sacred to many of the faithful among professing Christians, who honestly believe them to be part of the inspired Word of God.

It is difficult to persuade believers that inspiration is confined to the originals. The Adversary has been very daring in going so far as to defame God and defeat His saints by actually attempting to corrupt the articles of their faith, but this is a process he started in Eden where it worked with great success, as it has ever since.

All who seek to discern the great Treasures of Truth

owe a great debt to those scholars who, under God, have enabled us to recover many of the facts of the originals. Even so, none of them would claim infallibility for their work, and it is still necessary in difficult passages to compare various renderings in an endeavor to arrive at exact meanings – and these are not always ►

expressible in English. Such a task needs the services of those skilled in ancient Hebrew and Greek, but those of us who are not thus skilled can obtain much help through the use of such works as *Rotherham's Emphasized Version* and the *Concordant Literal New Testament*, aided by such other works as Dr. Bullinger's *Companion Bible* – not overlooking such further helps as we may enjoy from the works of the great commentators of the past, who have left much for our aid.

It always has seemed a pity that there has been a strong tendency among the more enlightened believers to attach themselves to some particular leader and to regard his words as sacrosanct. After all, such an attitude began in Corinth as long ago as Paul's day, and he did not hesitate to condemn that as an insurmountable barrier to maturity. No one has all the truth, and no one can be completely trusted who fears to admit earlier inaccurate teachings in the light of later research.

When the Son of Mankind trod this earth He said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Religion and politics, THE TOOLS OF THE ADVERSARY, nailed Him to a tree, but His truth outlasts every religion and every empire. The cycles of truth are long, but they roll down the centuries with certainty and power.

The Holy Scriptures are complete, and they are the repository of truth but – like the precious jewel – they constantly flash with inspiring brilliance as the One who "breathes" them also at times impels one of His truth-seekers to take a different perspective from which he can see a former hidden meaning of some passage under new and better light. That is because the Word of God is not static but "living and active." We should be thankful indeed for all such "helps" as Paul calls those whom God from time to time (and not only

within our own time) has built into the church which is the body of Christ.

The seeker after truth is like the merchantman seeking goodly pearls, of whom the Lord spoke, and with us truth should be precious beyond all cost, even the cost of our personal status as dispensers thereof, if later we should find ourselves to be wrong. It is also important that we do not confuse knowledge of truth with an understanding of truth. Knowledge is purely intellectual, which determines only how much one knows. Men can know a lot about Scripture, unfortunately, without knowing the truth of God. The understanding of truth is found when the person is actually affected by what he has learned and reveals it in his actions.

The search for truth is a lifetime work and none of us will ever attain to a complete understanding of truth while we still remain in these mortal bodies. There is much that Scripture does not tell us, about many things, but in the wisdom of God IT TELLS US ALL WE NEED TO KNOW. We should be content with this, for none of us will ever learn all we need to know.

When we do something as a result of the truth we have learned, only then do we show that we have acquired wisdom, and not merely abstract ideas. Paul is always telling the saints about learning and walking, and John says much the same. That is, if we say one thing but walk differently, we are lying and not doing the truth (I John 1:6), and he adds much more along the same line in later verses. We may read the

Scriptures to increase our knowledge and leave matters there, or we may seek the truth of Scripture in order to practice it. Herein is wisdom!

When we seek the truth of Scripture, few things are more important than keeping in mind the context of every matter. To pick out isolated texts and ignore the context is the sure road to error. In common, no doubt, with others who write on scriptural subjects, the writer is receiving letters and publications from many sources, the sincerity of the writers being never for one moment in doubt, but the content of their publications becomes so unreasonable as to make a mockery of Scripture teaching.

The seeker after truth must keep continually in mind the context of every subject, which is sometimes far from obvious. When this is so it always means that there is some hidden truth awaiting to be discovered, and if we cannot understand at once what this is, we should await further light. Sometimes we are told unwisely that where there are two differing views of some passage, it does not make one a better Christian whatever view is adopted. If such an attitude to God's Word is right, why should we ever bother to study at all? No one can manage to reconcile two views if they flatly contradict each other, but at times there can be two different though not contradictory ways of understanding some passage. Then it may be possible to find a middle way between the two. That is quite different from a well-meaning but feeble tolerance of things that are manifestly wrong, which can never serve the truth but serve only the opponents of truth.

Those who read this are probably associated in some way with other groups of believers, and also know that many movements which were started in all sincerity by faithful men have been diverted from their original aim by these purveyors of pet theories and unscriptural teachings. It should be recognized that it must be so in this "present wicked eon" where the forces of evil are too strong for us. Yet for us to endure must be God's will; but this is very different from a spineless acquiescence.

It is pointless to start some fresh movement of our own, for this would only degenerate into another sect and become subject to the same abuse in the end. We are bound to tolerate genuine differences of opinion, for it probably indicates that the real truth lies midway between them. Yet we must not tolerate open maltreatment of God's Word, for to us that would be as bad and inexcusable as the offence itself.

All of us ... are bound to acknowledge that our knowledge of truth has been progressive, and that there are many things for which we once honestly and vigorously contended which, in the light of later understanding, we have found to be incorrect.

Mere speculation about Scripture is no way to discover truth.

As R.B. Withers once wrote,

Of all lying acts, that of listing Scripture references that have no bearing on what they are supposed to support is the worst.

We hear quite a lot about "the Gospel and the modern mind," but we must not let ourselves be deluded by this kind of talk, for God's evangel does not change – nor does it need to. It is far in advance of even the most "progressive" human thought. It is still what God calls His "foolishness," which is wiser than men. The inescapable fact is

that, upon believing this evangel, we are duty bound also to search out and obey the truth regarding our faith.

Our Lord, before Pilate, said,

Everyone who is of the truth is hearing My voice.

We need the love of truth to enable us to believe, but we must not make the mistake of confusing knowledge with truth; they are intertwined, but truth is embodied in a Person, the One Who said,

I am the Truth.

In Him is the fullness of truth, and nowhere else. All previously revealed truth pointed to Him, and all subsequently revealed truth points back to Him, and all prophetically revealed truth for the future points forward to Him.

One of the best definitions of Truth that I know is this: Truth is correspondence with things as they actually ARE. Scientific truth is of this nature, and can be proven by experiment; but some forms of truth have to be accepted by testimony, for there is no other means of verification. No one can ►

prove, experimentally, that William the Conqueror invaded England in the year 1066, yet the fact is indisputably true. Yet some statements are made of such an impossible nature that we need not entertain them for one moment, because they don't correspond to what actually is, and we can prove this is the case.

Reality, or things as they actually are, must correspond with some standard of comparison, a standard which is not subject to change and which is always available for reference.

When we ask ourselves whether such a standard of comparison does exist – one so transcendent and all-embracing that everything else has to be compared against it – we who believe God must admit that the answer is an unqualified “Yes.” We believe unreservedly that such a standard exists in God's Word.

It is obvious that those who profess to “believe” can be readily recognized as two different classes, for this becomes at once apparent when they speak or write on theological matters. There are those who believe God's Word as it is, and those who claim to believe it but cannot refrain from adding to what it really says such other things as they say they “see” in it, under the extraordinary pretense that these are improvements and helpful to Bible Study. It is sad to say so, but such people are a far more serious menace to the truth than out-and-out unbelievers. They are handling the Word of God deceitfully and they grope their way from error to error, always finding plenty of followers.

Mere speculation about Scripture is no way to discover truth. The pursuit of some line of thought said to be “suggested” by Scripture may seem harmless enough, if it is meanwhile clearly distinguished from frequent attempts to advance some teaching not supported by Scripture, but too often it leads only to confusion and deception. This is partly

because of the failure in the case of many to think clearly, especially because of the failure to distinguish between what Scripture actually says and the mass of theological “explanation” which has been imposed on Scripture down through the centuries. To anyone of sober thought, it is an amazing thing that Christians are often so

eager to accept something only because it was said or written by someone they revere, and consequently they cling to some belief which, to the normal mind, is not only void of logic but scripturally untrue!

However long cherished and firmly held our beliefs might be, the only safe course is to bring them constantly into the light which shines from God's Word.

All of us who write and speak about the things of God are bound to acknowledge that our knowledge of truth has been progressive, and that there are many things for which we once honestly and vigorously contended which, in the light of later understanding, we have found to be incorrect. If we are honest, we must admit this. The search for truth is a lifetime work, and none of us will ever attain to a complete understanding of truth while we still remain in these mortal bodies. There is much that Scripture does not tell us, about many things, but in the wisdom of God *IT TELLS US ALL WE NEED TO KNOW*. We should be content with this, for none of us will ever learn all we need to know.

We may often regard Nicodemus with a certain degree of patronage, but it may well be that in future glory the Lord must say also to us,

It is pointless to start some fresh movement of our own, for this would only degenerate into another sect and become subject to the same abuse in the end.

Art thou a teacher and knowest not these things?

What then must be our defense? Might it be, for example, “Please, we thought we knew it all”? or “Please, we taught what we accepted from the honored scholar ‘X’” – or might we have to admit that we were quite lazy not to check all teaching against the facts of God's Word? – and for those of us who teach, the

(See **SEEKER**, last page)

How Can You Be Right, and the Whole Church Wrong?

by – Bob Evely

When I first began to talk openly about why I believed God was in the process of ultimately saving all mankind, I remember the response I heard more than once: “How can you think that you are right, and the entire church that teaches about hell is wrong?”

I just read a biography of Martin Luther entitled, “Here I Stand” by Roland Bainton (Abingdon Press). I found it most interesting that as Eck interrogated Luther as to Luther’s critique of the Church, he asked:

Martin, how can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of Scripture? Would you put your judgment above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than they all? (page 185)

Had the “majority position” been maintained, we would all still be a part of the Roman Catholic Church, and many of the subsequent reforms even within the Catholic Church would not have come to pass. Most in the Christian community today would agree that Martin Luther was correct in his stand against the teachings and practices within the Church of his day. But Luther was part of the minority at the time! ...

Who can find fault with the views of Martin Luther when he said:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. (page 185)

But like the Catholic Church of Luther’s day, the majority within the Church today accepts the authority of councils, denominations, articles

of religion, pastors and teachers ... We need to understand that “orthodoxy” is not truth as compared with falsehood ... it is simply the majority opinion, and it can be wrong. We cannot cling to a set of beliefs or interpretations simply because the majority that preceded us has worked through these issues and developed what they have passed down to us as orthodoxy ... the “majority opinion.”

What if they were wrong?

Read the histories of the church and its councils ... especially those in the 5th century when many of our current beliefs were decided for us, and when “orthodoxy” was born. Persecution, manipulation and impure motives abounded. The “Church” was by no means perfect ... yet today we fall back on the theological thinking they packaged for us as “orthodoxy,” and we cling to it as if it were unquestionable truth ...

We need to escape the shackles of those who preceded us, to seek truth only from the Word of God, freshly studying and thinking through and discussing what God’s Word is telling us.

“Orthodoxy” is widely viewed as a safeguard against heresy; but what if the “majority opinion” is wrong, and what if orthodoxy now prevents us from rooting error out of the teachings of the Church?

Consider this: When in Scripture was the majority opinion correct? Were the Jewish leaders (the majority) correct, when God’s prophets (the minority ... like Jeremiah) were proclaiming things that were “unorthodox” in their day? Were the Pharisees (the majority) correct when Jesus and later His apostles were proclaiming things that

(see **RIGHT**, next page)

RIGHT (continued from previous page)

were “unorthodox” in their day? Were the majority of believers correct as they clung to legalism, as Paul spoke of things that were “unorthodox?” (See Acts 21:20-21, when the majority of believers in Jerusalem opposed Paul when he returned to Jerusalem.)

Today if one challenges the viewpoints of the denomination, or the articles of religion, or the pastor ... they are asked to leave the congregation to keep the unity. This allows for no honest discussion or study. If one strays from the positions that have been determined to be correct, he is cast out ... and the prevailing system of beliefs remains intact and unchallenged. This is true of denominations, individual churches, seminaries, Christian colleges, Christian associations ... where thinking and Bible interpretation have already been done, and members are simply handed a package of beliefs ... and there is no way to present individual viewpoints and bring correction where there is error ...

The issue of eternal torment, the authority of pastors and other church leaders, viewpoints concerning baptism, the gospel that is proclaimed ... all of these issues are too “sacred” to touch in today’s churches, and we as individual members of the Body of Christ are locked in error ... unless we can escape the biases and study and think for ourselves!

The gospel being proclaimed by most of today’s churches and individual Christians is **wrong**,

SEEKER (continued from page 2158)

most painful admission might well be this; that having committed our labors to print, **we were so jealous of our reputation among fellow saints that we could not meekly admit we had been wrong.**

However long-cherished and firmly-held our beliefs might be, the only safe course is to bring them constantly into the light which shines from God’s Word. There is always something fresh for us to learn, even about the most basic and universally held teachings of the sacred Word.

In all this, we must bear in mind a Pauline axiom,

and the way we present God to the world is blasphemous! ...

Cast off the biases, and question the “system of theology” that has been handed to you. If you are active in a traditional church, study and think for yourself. Ask questions and discuss biblical interpretation openly. Seek truth from the Word of God, and question those things that are being taught that do not appear to be right. Do so in love, and attempting to maintain unity ... but do not sit silently as our Heavenly Father is being maligned ... and while God’s message is being so distorted that many in the world reject the notion of God as presented by the Church.

We are Christ’s Ambassadors, proclaiming God’s message to the world. Let us be sure we are not simply passing along an incorrect message that has been handed to us. Be sure it is the correct message.

*Yet all is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ, and is giving us the dispensation of the conciliation, how that God was in Christ, conciliating **the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them**, and placing in us the Word of the conciliation. For Christ, then, are we ambassadors, as of God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ’s sake, “Be conciliated to God!” (II Corinthians 5:18-21).*

*Grace Evangel Newsletter, 2005
Wilmore, KY* ■

that “knowledge puffs up, but love edifies,” and as much as we may love God’s Word as it is written for us, we must never forget that it exists to testify of Him Who is the personal embodiment of God’s love, and unless our studies lead us closer to Him in our personal devotion, resulting in not only hearing His truth but also, as we are reminded, “doing the things that I say,” we shall not really accomplish our object.

*Treasures of Truth
Installment One, June 1971* ■