The Authoritative Nature of Truth
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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Iwant you to open your Bible as we turn to the Word of God tonight to the eighth chapter of the gospel of John...the eighth chapter of the gospel of John. I have been somewhat restrained over the last few years in not preaching more from the gospel of John because I've spent so much time working on the commentaries on the gospel of John. The first volume, John 1 through 11, was completed about a year ago. And the second volume, John 12 to 21 completing the gospel of John, was just completed a few weeks ago. In fact, I have the final galley proofs on my desk and have been reading through for any final corrections.

It's such a stunning, stunning book. It is relentlessly exalting of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, of course, that makes it a very special treasure to me. And so I want to steal away a little bit tonight, into a portion of the gospel of John, at least as a starting point, and that's the eighth chapter and in particular, I want to draw you down to verse 43 through verse 45. And there is a truth expressed here that I want to be a foundation for our thinking tonight.

Jesus in this particular context is speaking to the Jews who are defending themselves as to their place with God because of their Jewish ancestry, their Abrahamic heritage. Jesus takes issue with that. He says this, verse 43, "Why do you not understand what I'm saying? It is because you cannot hear My Word. You think you belong to God, you think you are children of Abraham, you are actually of your father, the devil. And you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, or essence. For he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me."

The world is divided into two people, two kinds of people, those who belong to the kingdom of Satan, who are the children of the devil, and those who belong to the Kingdom of God who are the children of God. Those who are in the kingdom of Satan do not know the truth. Satan himself does not stand in the truth. There is no truth in him. "Whenever he speaks, he speaks from his own nature, he is a liar and the father of lies. On the other hand, I speak the truth."

That draws the line boldly between truth and lies...truth and lies. This is a very important thing to affirm in the society of any time period, any culture because it is critical that if someone is to be saved from sin and escape hell and be brought to the glories of heaven, he or she must believe the truth. Anything that is not the truth is a lie. Everything God has said is true. Everything Satan says is a lie in

one form or another.

In light of this, it is a strange, strange thing that popular evangelicalism today seems to live with the biggest fear of all fears and that is that somehow the world that belongs to Satan will not accept their message. And so, we've got to soften that message. We have to make it something that is not threatening, that is not hard, that is not absolute, that is not narrow, that is not precise. The idea is to approach the Bible in a completely different way, a kind of a soft way and not be concerned at all about the interpretation of Scripture, for that in itself is offensive. And yet, the Scripture is very clear that you are either a friend of God or a friend of the world. And friendship with the world, James 4:4 says, is enmity with God.

This is one place where you have to pick your sides. You are for God, for Christ, for the gospel and for the truth or you are for the lie, for the devil. That is the line that is drawn biblically. There has always been, there always will be, a fundamental irreconcilable incompatibility between the truth and the lie, between the truth of God and the lie that dominates the world. You cannot have both. You cannot accommodate the Bible in some generic way to floating, changing, shifting, whimsical attitudes of people who live in the domain of Satan under the dominance of lies.

Back to Luke 6:26, Jesus said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets." It goes with the territory that if you believe the truth and preach the truth and preach it with authority, as we've been saying over the last several weeks, it will be rejected and resented. In John 15:18 and 19, Jesus said, "The world hates you because it hated Me. The world hates you because you're not of the world. I chose you out of the world." Again, there's only two kinds of people. Those who are in the world and those who are in the Kingdom of God. Those who are under the headship of Satan, those under the headship of Christ. Those who live in the lie, and those who live in the truth. And they collide, there's no way around it. They collide. There is a fixed animosity between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, between the truth and the lie.

Consequently, in the world there is naturally going to be contempt for the gospel, contempt for the truth. Jesus said in verse 43, "You cannot hear My Word," meaning you cannot comprehend it, you cannot understand it, you cannot affirm it, you cannot believe it. You don't have capacity for that, same as Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The natural man understands not the things of God, they are foolishness to Him because they are spiritually appraised, spiritually discerned, and the natural man is spiritually dead."

In John chapter 3, in that familiar chapter in verses 19 and 20, Jesus says, "This is the judgment that the light has come into the world and men love the darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light." If you live in the truth, if you live the truth, you run to the truth. If you live in darkness and you live in death and you live in the kingdom of

Satan, you resent the truth, you resist the truth, you hate the truth, you cannot accept the truth, you cannot believe the truth. This is the foundational way to view the world. And you cannot be faithful to the Word of God and somehow mitigate that.

And you heard the testimonies tonight, didn't you? The sort of recurring refrain about how offensive I was when these people began to listen to what I had to say. It wasn't that I was personally offensive, they didn't know me and I didn't know them. The message was offensive. This is the nature of the truth.

Now we have been talking about how important it is to preach the Word. That was our theme the last couple of weeks. The week before that we reminded ourselves of Titus 2:15 where we're instructed to speak the truth with all authority...with all authority. And I want to reemphasize tonight a way to view that, if you will, a paradigm to borrow a modern word that will help you think it through. Here's a way to understand how we relate to the truth.

I put this in a book some years ago called Why One Way?...Why One Way? A little book of about 75 or 80 pages, it might be maybe the most important foundational thing that I've ever put in print. There is a way to understand how critical the truth is to us and to all people. And by the way, the only time the church makes any real impact on the world is when the people of God stand firm for the truth. First Timothy 3 tells us the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. If it is anything, it is the place where the truth is firmly established. We understand that the natural man doesn't understand it. We realize that the world resents it and hates it and thinks its narrow. That doesn't change the fact that it is the truth....it is the truth. And again I say, the church is only advanced genuinely, the true church, when it has been uncompromisingly committed to the truth. I know post-modernism says there is not truth, moral relativism says there is no authority, personal freedom says there are no rules, humanistic atheism says there is no judge, but the Bible disagrees with all of that. There is truth, that truth has authority, that truth is articulated in the Law of God, and God Himself is the judge.

So let me give you a way to think about truth, I'll give you six words, okay? Six words. The first one is objectivity...objectivity. When we say something is objective, we mean it is outside of ourselves. When we say something is subjective, we mean it is inside ourselves. We say something is subjective, it means that it has come up from within us. When we say it's objective, it means that we can only observe it outside of us.

We start then with the reality that the source of truth is objective. Luther called it "the external Word." This is critically important if you are to have a true Christian world view. You must understand that the truth of God is completely outside of us. It's outside of all of us. It's outside of each us individually, and it's outside all of us collectively. It is fixed.

In fact, it is unassailable and it is eternal. You can't change it. You can accept it or you can reject it. You cannot alter it. It is unalterable. This is profoundly essential. So ministers and preachers and Christians, we are brokers, if you will, of the truth transmitted by God in one book. And this is it. We may discover the truth, we must. We must learn the truth. We must understand the truth. We must love the truth, guard the truth and proclaim the truth and live the truth. But the truth itself is outside of us. We are not its source. We make no contribution to the truth. Authentic Christianity understands that the Scripture and the Bible is objective. It is absolute divine truth. No person has ever had in himself any idea or any experience or any thought or any intuition that determines the truth. The truth is already determined by God and revealed in Scripture. No human individually, no humans collectively are sources for establishing the truth. Neither is any angelic being a source for establishing the truth. That's why Paul says, "If anyone..anyone, even an angel from heaven teaches you anything other than this truth, let him be cursed." What someone thinks is true does not make it true. And there's so much of that folly floating around that you can by your own ideas and by your own will and even by your words create reality. That is not true. There is no such thing as personal truth, individual truth. Scripture is God's revealed truth. If you never lived and I never lived, it would have no bearing on the truth.

It is true, Scripture is. It is perspicuous, meaning it is clear. The meaning is evident on the face of it. There are no puzzles hidden in Scripture. There are no secret codes in Scripture. It is not truth concealed, it is truth revealed. Sure there are some things hard to understand. Sure you've got to dig a little to get to those things. But it is revelation not obfuscation. The message of Scripture is clear and unambiguous and it is not existential. You don't create it by your own ideas and your own intuition. None of it comes by the will of man. Second Peter 1, "Scripture comes not by the will of man but men were moved by the Holy Spirit to write it down." All Scripture, 2 Timothy 3, as we saw in our last little series, all Scripture is given by inspiration from God. Scripture is God's truth whether it affects anybody or nobody. It is God's truth whether you agree with it or disagree with it, like it or don't like it. And the worse possible statement, like fingernails down a blackboard for me to hear is, "Well, this is what the Bible means to me." And I want to say kindly, "Really, I couldn't care less what the Bible means to you since you are not the determiner of its truth."

Again and again Scripture makes claims for itself, as we just read. It endures forever. It is trustworthy in every jot and tittle. It is unchanging and eternal, Isaiah 40 verse 8. Heaven and earth will pass away, My words will by no means pass away, Matthew 24:35, said Jesus. Authentic, genuine, true Christianity has always held that Scripture is absolute, objective truth. It is true for one person. It is true for another person. It is true for all people and it is the same truth. Our opinions, our spiritual experiences and our feelings have no bearing on its true meaning. It is not a clay model to be shaped into any form by anyone who wants to shape it.

That is why, I will confess to you, there are lots of things that dishonor the Lord that bother me. A zeal for His house eats me up, I confess to you that. I am angered, I am saddened, I am grieved about a

lot of things that are carried on in the name of Christ that I know brings dishonor to Him, but nothing...nothing is worse to me than a misrepresentation of the truth. That's inexcusable and it is constant, even in the name of Christianity. The truth of Scripture is not decided by your insight or mine, or your experience or mine. What it does for us or in us or to us or how it affects us has nothing to do with its actual meaning. Frankly, just saying that you would deal a blow to about 80 percent of what parades itself as evangelical Christianity.

So many people open a Bible and then they're being taught, "Listen to the voice of God and try to hear what God is saying to hear you through this Bible." I'll tell you what He's saying to you through the Bible. Put your head down, look at the words and read them. That's what He's saying. Biblical truth is objective. It is true in and of itself. It is true whether you know it or don't know it. It is true whether you understand it or don't understand it. It is true whether it's been experienced by you or not experienced. It is wholly true, it is true entirely, Psalm 119:160 says, "The entirety of Your Word is truth and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever." The proof of the truthfulness of Scripture is its everlasting character. This is the very starting point and the necessary foundation for a Christian world view. You give up anything on this ground and you've just given up truly Christian world view. Give up any ground on the fact that the Bible itself is the revealed truth of God, objective, external, absolute, give up any ground at that point and what you have left is not worthy to be called Christianity, even if it has vestiges of Christian lingo and symbolism. In fact, many who would call themselves Christians today are using the language of Christianity, the symbolism of Christianity, but their real source of authority is something inside of them, or something inside someone else that they think is a prophet or a seer or someone in touch with God.

True Christianity begins with objective truth, everything God has revealed in one book, that is the Bible. Second word, the first word, objectivity. You want a Christian world view? Here's your second word, rationality...rationality. This is good news, folks. This is good news. The objective revelation of God in Scripture is to be understood rationally...rationally. For years I've read so much about listen for the voice of God, listen for God to speak in your mind, listen for God to speak in your heart and show you what He wants you to do and show you the meaning of Scripture, etc., etc. That is mystical. That is irrational. I don't even know what they're listening for. Sometimes they're told to take everything and empty it out of their mind, a kind of Buddhist experience. Create a vacuum of nothingness in your mind and let God fill it with some mystical revelation of Himself unique to you. This fails to understand that an objective revelation of God is to be understood rationally. What do I mean by that? By normal reasoning, normal mental faculties.

I don't think it would surprise any of you in the church here if you were to ask me, "How do you come up with your sermons?" To find out that I do nothing mystical. I don't light candles. I don't put incense in the room to create some...some spiritual aroma as some do. I don't turn out the lights and try to empty my mind so God can deposit something there. I go to work. I go to work to work hard to understand the Scripture. Scripture is logical because God is logical. Scripture is non-contradictory

because God is non-contradictory. Scripture is clear because God is clear. There are no errors, no discrepancies, no lies, no unsound truths, no fantasies, no absurdities, no inconsistencies, no myths. It is infallible, it is inerrant, it is true and it is to be understood by normal mental powers. We all remember 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to show yourself approved of God, a workman needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.” This is a mental exercise, not a mystical one. You remember the great revival in Nehemiah chapter 8 when they brought the Scripture and they read the Scripture for most of the day? And it says that after they read it, they gave the sense of it. And the people understood it and they repented and a great revival broke out. And that, of course, was led by Ezra himself who gave himself to study the Scripture and to do it and then to teach it. Scripture is understood by the process of reason, in the same way you would solve a math problem, in the same way you would solve a science problem, in the same way you would solve any issue, the same way you would deal with an engineering problem, or any other problem that you’re trying to solve. You put your brain in gear. You’re not going to solve a math problem in your calculus class by lighting candles, turning on the incense and hoping something comes down out of the sky. You’re not going to understand the Bible that way either.

And, of course, the meaning of the Scripture, and I tell preachers this all the time, the meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. Scripture meaning the writings from God, the meaning is the Scripture. If you don’t have the meaning, you don’t have the Scripture. If you don’t know what it means, you haven’t heard God. The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. And the worst thing you can do is take it and abuse it and make it mean what you’ve already predetermined you want it to mean to fit your scheme. The truth is in the meaning. The truth is in the interpretation of the words themselves. And this is an exercise in reason. You use your mind and your faculties.

There are, of course, a growing anti-theology bent in evangelicalism, anti-doctrine bent. People see doctrine as divisive. With it is a growing anti-intellectualism.

Every time I hear Joel Olsteen interviewed, he says this, “O, I don’t know...I don’t know. Oh, I don’t know. O, I think Mormons worship the same Jesus we do. I know there are some differences but I don’t know what they are.” Is that some kind of virtue that you don’t know? You think that’s the right answer when somebody confronts you with something to say, “I don’t know,” which is to say, “I don’t know and I don’t really think it’s important to know?” That’s a view of truth that is non-Christian. That’s a non-Christian view of truth.

The growing anti-intellectuals in the church has, I think, sadly marginalized Christians. I really don’t think the world respects that. I don’t think they respect whimsical superficial shallow people who call themselves Christians and have absolutely no interest in rigorous mental rational work to understand the Scripture and to be able to defend it effectively. I don’t think we gain any ground in the world by parading indifference toward the truth.

This has been coming for a long time, by the way. You can go way back to the American Puritan era when colleges in the Ivy League were all founded as seminaries to train pastors and they decided they didn't want to be faithful to the truth and began to jettison the truth for the sake of broader tolerances. You can go back to Charles Finney, and his kind of evangelism which depreciated biblical truth and tried to create an experience. Finney had a powerful, powerful impact on people's psyches up in New York. But when he was done, people weren't converted. He himself said, "I think it's been my unhappy lot to have produced many half-converts." He was appealing purely to their emotions. And when he was finished in that area, it became known as the burned over district, full of unstable, untaught and unconverted converts. And what came in his wake? The establishment of Mormonism in that area sucked up those people who had no doctrinal protection.

And the trend has continued even today, especially through mystical charismatic and now seeker-friendly emotional kind of intuitive personal interpretations of spirituality. There's a whole lot of talk today about spiritual formation which first came out of Roman Catholicism where they were trying in a non-Christian environment, Roman Catholics who are not true Christians, to do something about their sin since they weren't justified, didn't have the Holy Spirit, it's kind of hard to be sanctified. And so they came up with these mystical movements of spiritual formation that have now jumped across into contemporary evangelicalism, people trying to form their spiritual lives apart from an understanding of the Word of God in the mind that then prompts the emotion to act responsibly in response to the truth. Careful cultivation of the mind is to be high on the list of priorities for Christians. This is not intellectualism, this is not academic pride, this is having a sound mind.

Now by rationality, what do I mean? I mean this, you interpret the Bible in normal ways, the way you would interpret a letter or any other book or historical document, common language, okay? It is common language. That is to say the language is to be understood as it would have been understood in the day it was said or written, it means what it says. Secondly, real people. It's not a mystical language, not a secret language, not a hidden language, common language, second, real people...not fake people, not allegorical people, not poetically created people, real people.

Thirdly, actual history...actual history. So you're looking at language that is normal. You're looking at people that are real. You're looking at history that actually happened. There are no secret meanings, no allegories, no transcendental insights, no divine voices, no mystical interpretations. So this is critical to a Christian world view...objectivity, rationality.

Third, veracity, is to keep our endings similar. Veracity which is a word for truth. We are sure that the objective revelation of Scripture interpreted rationally yields the truth. I'll say it again, the objective revelation of Scripture, the absolute external Scripture interpreted with the mind using all of its faculties, comprehending the meaning of language, the reality of the people and the actuality of the history yields the truth in perfectly sufficient measure to accomplish God's intention for that revelation.

You can only have the truth if you get the meaning right.

That's why it grieves me to hear Scripture mishandled, misrepresented, misinterpreted then misapplied, misappropriated. Look, we just have this, this is all we have...that's all we have. You know, ministry is simple in that sense. We just have one book, that's it. It's all we have, just take this book, understand that it is the objective revealed Word of God without error, that it can be understood by the careful, thoughtful use of all your mental skills, drawing on all the mental skills of other people who have also applied themselves to the Word of God and written about it, you can enrich yourself fully in an appropriate and accurate understanding of its truth. And the yielding of that is the truth of God.

I know I have been accused through the years of being narrow minded, I heard it again tonight. I understand that. I know that I have been accused of being dogmatic. I know that I have been accused of acting like I know the truth and I just have to tell you this...I believe that if I am to preach the Word of God with authority, which I'm commanded to do, then I must be safe in saying that if I understand the Word of God accurately, and if I've done everything I can and tested it against every other passage in the Scripture, and tested against all other sanctified, illuminated scholarship of the past and the present and here is the consensus of meaning about this text, the best I can do that I can preach it with conviction, assuming that God wrote it, not to make it unclear but to make it clear. And I understand that it will offend people who have other views.

But they're never going to come to the truth unless their false understanding is exposed. Right? The Word of God is not just another source for discussion, it is the final authority. I was reading an article today in which one of the modern Emerging Church preachers was demeaning and mocking preaching as far to authoritarian. This goes way, way back, this has been around for many, many years, this mocking of those who speak the Word of God with authority. But it is, after all, the final authority. We believe that. Some people may prefer a conversation. They may prefer dialogue. The new trend, believe it or not, in the Emerging Church is to have the non-believers lead the discussion because they also have natural illumination. But the Bible says, "Preach the Word...preach the Word in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all patience. Do this, let no one disregard you, do it with authority." We don't put it on the table for discussion. Obviously there's discussion about the application. There can be discussion about the interpretation. That's helpful. But we're all working to come to a true understanding. Salvation is by the truth. Romans 6:17 tells us that we were saved because we came an understanding of the truth. We were delivered from error to that form of doctrine which saves us.

Now, objectivity, rationality produces veracity. That leads unarguably to authority, that's the fourth word. If this is what the Bible means, it's authoritative. Plain and simple, it is the oracles of God, it is the oracles of God. It is the final Word on everything of which it speaks. It is the mind of Christ, 1 Corinthians, it is the mind of Christ.

We’re so thankful. First Corinthians 2 talks about how that the Spirit of God illuminates our minds as we study. It’s not just a rational exercise. We use our rational powers, of course, aided by the indwelling Holy Spirit who leads and guides and directs us into an understanding of the truth. But when we come to that truth, we speak it with authority. God intended it to be spoken with authority. People don’t like to hear the Law of God preached. They don’t like to hear that. They don’t like to hear the thundering message of the law. They don’t want to hear the Ten Commandments. They don’t want to hear the Law of God and that they are violators of the Law of God and therefore they are under sentence by God to final damnation, and one day God will be their judge and send them to everlasting hell. They don’t like to hear the Law of God. They don’t want to hear God’s Laws, they don’t like them. They don’t like that they’re not to commit adultery, that they’re not to lie, that they’re not to steal, etc., and all the rest of the things the Scripture speaks of.

Sinners don’t want to hear that. They reject that. There’s an interesting trend today in the church, evangelical church, to dismiss the Law, to get rid of it because, they say, it is: one, offensive, and two, it is somewhat obscure to a post-modern generation that doesn’t believe in absolutes anyway. So there is a very, very aggressive trend to take the Law out of evangelism. Instead of confronting sinners about their sin and violation of the Law of God, and the impending judgment of God upon that sinner for those violations, you remove that because they don’t understand absolute law. We can’t talk about that. They don’t get it. And so, this is a very rapidly moving trend among some of the better of the preachers and leaders in the Evangelical Movement who want to substitute something else. And the trend now is to substitute the idea that people kind of worship the wrong thing. They worship their career, they worship money, they worship sex, they worship whatever goal they set for themselves, a house they want to get, a car they want to get, and they’ve got all the things, all the idols of the heart...that’s the way to approach them because that’s what they understand. They don’t understand absolute Law.

I can understand how somebody can come up with that idea. However, there’s a problem there. And here’s the problem. Scripture says, Romans 7, the Law is designed to reveal sin. The Law is designed to arouse sin, Romans 7:7 and 8. The Law is designed to bring the sinner to ruin. The Law is designed to reflect the sinfulness of sin and that it is so bad that a holy God must judge. The Law is our school master to bring us to whom? To Christ. The purpose of the Law is to lay us under a curse.

You say, “Well sinners don’t really understand that.” Yes they do understand that. Yes they do understand that. I’ll tell you why. Because not only is there the Law of God written in His Word, but according to Romans 2, there’s the Law of God written in the heart. And the Law of God written in the heart is an ally to the evangelist who is approaching the sinner on the basis of his violation of the Law. This is the authoritative note in evangelism. You are violating the absolute Law of God.

Furthermore, John 16:9 through 11 says, “The Holy Spirit who is the only one who can save, the only one who can bring a sinner to repentance, convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.” Those are allo terms connected to the Law. Sin is a violation of the Law, righteousness is the standard by which that Law is given and the standard by which the sinner’s failure is measured and judgment is the outcome. That is what the Holy Spirit works in the heart of one He is convicting. The Law written in the heart, which is an ally to the evangelist, you have the work of the Spirit. Why do we have to come up with other ways to do this and avoid the very things the Spirit of God has called us to do. We preach Law. We preach sin. We preach guilt. We preach fear. The most necessary, the most successful, the most powerful preaching is that which aims at radical conviction of sin. I’ll say it again. The most powerful preaching is that which is aimed at radical conviction of sin. And sinners do not become concerned about their lives and they do not become concerned about their idols, until they are face to face with God and become very concerned about Him and what He’s going to do.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said, “The sinner is a monstrosity in God’s universe and he needs to know it.” Proverbs 16:6 says, “By fear of the Lord men depart from evil.” We have to preach with authority. The objective Word of God understood rationally yields the truth, we preach it with authority to alarm the sinner, to activate the conscience which accuses or excuses to face the sinner directly toward the Law and the standard of perfect righteousness to tell the sinner you must be holy. And if you’re not, you need a Savior. The initial objective for evangelism is to bring people under the powerful authoritative Word of God’s holy Law. And then to take them to Christ.

Thomas Scott, 1793, said, “Leave out the holy character of God and the holy excellence of His Law and the wholly condemnation to which transgressors are doomed and the wholly loveliness of the Savior’s character, the holy nature of redemption, the holy tendency of Christ’s doctrine, the wholly tempers and conduct of all true believers, then dress up a scheme of religion of this unholy sort, represent mankind in a pitiable condition, rather than through misfortune than crime, speak much of Christ’s bleeding love to them, of His agonies in the Garden and on the cross without showing the need or nature of satisfaction for sin, speak of His present glory and of His compassion for poor sinners, of the freeness with which He dispenses pardons, of the privileges which believers enjoy here, of the happiness and glory reserved for them hereafter. Clog this with nothing about regeneration, nothing about sanctification, or represent holiness as somewhat else than conformity to the holy character and Law of God and you will make up a plausible gospel, calculated to humor the pride, soothe the conscience, engage the heart, raise the affection of natural men who love not God but themselves.” Thomas Scott.

A message of Christ only makes sense, the doctrine of justification through substitution and imputation only makes sense in light of the Law and the violation of that Law. One writer said, “We live in an era which places a high value on hardness of heart. We can tell this by our love of soft teaching.” Further says, “We like to believe that this love of soft words, words which will trouble neither the mind nor heart, nor anything in between, is a deep love of tenderness. Such a condition

flatters us, but our love is exactly the opposite of tenderness. The one who really wants a tender heart would be calling for the jack hammer. Hard words, hard teaching are the jack hammer of God. It takes a great deal to break up our hard hearts and the God of all mercy is willing to do it. But He always does it according to His Word and His Word is not as easy on us as we would like. Jeremiah 23:29, “Is not My Word like as a fire,” says the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

Listen to what he says. “When Christians call for smooth words, easy words, the result is hard people. When we submit to hard words, we become the tender hearted of God. But let soft words have their way in a congregation, let soft words dominate the pulpit and hardness of heart manifests itself in countless ways. Marriages dissolve, heresies proliferate, parents abandon children, churches split, children heap content on their parents. Quarrels erupt on the church board, in the choir, bitterness rancor, envy and malice abound all because the people will not abide the loathsome jack hammer.” That’s right. You preach the hard truth, the hammer of God breaks up the hard hearts. Preach the soft message and all you’re going to get is unchanged people.

There’s a fifth word as we rap up, incompatibility...incompatibility. The truth which itself is authority is incompatible with error. Here the noose is tightened on our paradigm, so the victim can feel the burning of the rope around his neck. The truth is absolutely incompatible with error. It makes no sense to say we need to hear the opinions of the other religions. We need to take what’s good from Hinduism and Islam and blend it together with Christianity.

First John 2:21, “No lie is of the truth. No lie is of the truth.” No lie is of the truth. Incompatibility. We have a ministry with an objective source of truth, rightly understood yields to us God’s absolute truth. That truth is authoritative in every area of which it speaks. And it is incompatible with error. Truth is intolerant. Truth is absolutely intolerant...intolerant. And in this culture it sets off all the alarms. I understand that...I understand that. Tolerance toward people, that’s good...gracious compassion, compassionate attitude toward people, that’s a biblical virtue. Tolerance toward error, that’s a sin...that’s a sin. God hates lies, hates lying tongues. And Satan is the liar and the father of lies.

One final word, integrity...integrity. Objectivity, rationality, veracity, authority, incompatibility and integrity. What do we mean by that? Once we know the truth, we know the truth has divine authority, we know the truth is separate from and incompatible with error, integrity becomes our responsibility. What do I mean by that? The truth is to be applied, it is to be applied. If we believe that divine truth is authoritative and incompatible with error, reflecting God’s holy will and purpose, then we must be faithful to live it and proclaim it. To do otherwise is equal to denying the truth.

Titus 1:16, “There are those who profess to know God but in works they deny Him.” Wow. Those who profess to know God but in works they deny Him, they are abominable, disobedient and disqualified for every good work. Integrity says this is the truth, this is the truth, it’s authoritative, incompatible with error, this is the truth, I believe. This is the truth I live.

Job 32:1, “Then these three men ceased to answering Job because he was righteous in his own eyes.” Wouldn’t it be wonderful to come to the place in your life where you said, “Yes, I believe the truth and I can say this, I live the truth?” That’s my testimony.

There’s no way around it, folks. The Word of God is the authority. That’s why we’re told pay close attention to yourself and to the doctrine, continue in them. That’s God’s Word for us. Let’s pray.

Father, we thank You for the call to the truth that is so replete in Scripture. I thank You for this blessed congregation here at Grace Church, this wonderful, wonderful Holy Spirit filled part of Your Kingdom where people love the truth written and incarnate. And I can say with the Apostle John, I have no greater joy than to know my children walk in the truth. I thank You, Lord, for the integrity of this congregation, that because it is true and authoritative and incompatible with error, we affirm that and that affirmation is a true expression of our hearts because we endeavor to live that. This is Christianity, this is what it means to be a Christian, to live lives consistent with Your Word. Lead us in that way, Lord. Forgive us for our failings and shortcomings. Help us to walk with integrity where there’s no breach between what we say we believe and how we live. Be honored and exalted, we pray in our midst in the name of Christ. Amen.

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