

Contending & Striving Together for the Truth of the Gospel of Christ

by John Glas

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Pilate saw that our Lord laid great stress upon the truth; and though he despised truth as a means of setting up a kingdom, when he proposed that scornful question, "What is truth;" and waited not for an answer; yet it becomes us diligently to inquire, till we be satisfied, what this truth is; and though it was not fit that Pilate should know it at that time, seeing, as we may hear, it respected Christ's cross; yet it is of the utmost importance and advantage to us to know it now.

We find God's mercy and his truth much spoken of and celebrated in the Old Testament. It is the promise of Christ that is intended; and truly God's mercy and truth together are nowhere to be found but with him. "My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him; and in my name shall his horn be exalted." {Ps.89:24} They that saw his glory, when he came in the flesh, found him "full of grace and truth." {Jn.1:14} He testifies of himself, "that he is the truth." {Jn.14:6} "In him," the Son of God manifest in the flesh, is "the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth," and "all the promises of God are yea and amen." {II Cor.1:20} So that he is the great subject of this his testimony in the Gospel; and in order to understand what he mainly intends by truth here, we must consider how he is especially set forth in the gospel, to be believed in unto salvation, and what doctrine of the gospel it is whereby it is especially distinguished both from Judaism and natural religion.

We shall find, that the great thing testified of him in the gospel is that he is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth; that he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification; and we are told that he that believeth this in his heart, and confesseth it with his mouth, shall be saved. {Rom.4:24,25, 10:4,8-10} When the Apostle declares himself not ashamed of the gospel, and calls it the power of God unto salvation, he tells us, it is because "therein is the righteousness of God revealed," from the faithfulness of God to the faith of every believer. {Rom.1:16,17} When he gives an account of the great subject of the gospel message, he tells us it is this, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto

himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;" "for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." {II Cor.5:18-21} And when he speaks of the testimony of God, the object of faith, he tells us, "it is Christ crucified." {I Cor.1:23,24, 2:1-2} This was the great intent of the prophecies, which spoke of the sufferings of Christ, and the following glory; "for to him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sin." {Acts 10:43} This therefore is that truth of the gospel which is especially witnessed unto, and whereby Christ says that, "his kingdom is advanced in the world;" and this may be further clear unto us if we consider:

1. That this is the distinguishing truth of Christianity, whereby it is differenced from mere natural religion, and from all the religions in the world that anyway compete with it. This is the great thing, the first thing that any religion can propose to sinful men; how they should be pardoned, reconciled to God, and justified in his sight. "I know it is so of a truth; but how should man be just with God?" {Job 9:2} If the Christian religion differ from others in anything, it is in this; for they all propose other ways of coming into favour with God, and false ways; but Christ has made peace by the blood of his cross, and thereby reconciled all his people, of all nations, unto God in one body; and has come and preached this peace to them that were afar off, and to them that were nigh; and this is the truth wherein the true God is gloriously manifested and distinguished from every religious idol.

2. God's truth in the just sentence of his broken law, and in the promise of life to sinners, meets and consists only in Christ, our Redeemer from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us, that the blessing might come upon us; and therefore this may well be called the truth. The Law condemned us in a head and representative; and there was nothing in it to hinder our suffering in another head, if God should think it meet; and they who are justified in Christ, were as verily punished in him, and as verily fulfilled the law in him, "as they sinned in Adam." {Rom.5:15-19} Thus, when God pardons a sinner, and justifies him in Christ, he in no wise makes void the law; seeing we have fulfilled it in Christ our Head unto far better purpose than if we had undergone the curse by ourselves without him.

3. This is the truth of the legal shadows. The law was given by Moses, but truth came by Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believeth. {Hebrews - chapter 9 & 10} And in this truth the promises of God are Yea and Amen; for it is either the accomplishment, or the foundation of the accomplishment of them all. {I Pet.1:11,12}

4. This truth concerning Christ delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification is that wherein the stamp of divine authority on Scripture revelation is chiefly manifest. All the parts of this revelation depend on this, and are connected with it; so that, take away this truth out of the gospel, it will be another gospel, and the whole doctrine of the prophets and apostles will be utterly made of none effect, as to eternal life

and salvation. That faith whereby we believe Scripture revelation, is faith in the blood of the Son of God; and by this faith we receive the whole Scripture revelation, which does all, from beginning to end, one way or other relate unto this. And this is the great touchstone for the trial of true and false doctrine. {See Heb.13:7-10, Eph.4:13-15} "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." {II Jn.1:10}

5. This truth, witnessed unto in the gospel, is that by which the power of God is put forth in the salvation of sinners, and to subject them to himself in his kingdom. {Lk.1:77, Gal.3:2, Rom.1:16,17, I Cor.1:18,23,24, Col.1:13,14} It was by the revelation of Christ's righteousness in the gospel, that Christ's kingdom was at first set up and advanced in the world; and it was by the revival of this great truth, after it had been buried under Antichrist's reign, that the Lord began to consume that wicked one at the Reformation. Luther said, "this article reigns in my heart, and with this the church stands or falls." Without this great truth, all other means for promoting or defending the kingdom of Christ will be altogether ineffectual; yea, on the contrary, serve to advance the kingdom of Satan. The strength of Christ's kingdom, and its safety, lies all in this truth; so that they who would advance this kingdom in the world, must bear it about with them in their hearts, in all their preaching, and in all their conversation in the ministry. And truly this would be a spring of daily refreshment to themselves, and of great liberty and boldness in all the labour of the gospel ministry, and in all the sufferings that attend it.

6. To the same purpose also we might consider the name whereby Christ is called among the subjects of his kingdom, "the Lord our Righteousness;" and that great motto of the church whereby it is distinguished from all other societies; "in those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." {Jer.33:16} Thus we see the connection between the kingdom of Christ and his Priesthood. This King is Melchisedec, King of Righteousness, and a priest on his throne; and the influence of his priesthood on his kingdom is set before us. {Psal.2:8, 100:1-7} All the glory of Christ's kingdom follows upon and flows from his sufferings; and they never served him in his kingdom, whatever they may pretend, that did not first submit unto his righteousness.

We have had some account of that truth by which our Lord here describes his subjects. Now, it concerns those that would know if they have any part in this kingdom of Christ to understand well what it is to be "of this truth." There is an expression, which seems to have a near alliance with this, and may serve to clear it; "Ye were the servants of sin; but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you;" {Rom.6:17;} or, more agreeably to the original language, "that type, or frame, or mould of doctrine, into which ye were delivered." The doctrine here pointed to by

the Apostle seems to be the same with that truth of which our Lord speaks, even the gospel of Christ; as it "reveals the righteousness of God from faith to faith," that the justified may live by faith; and manifests the righteousness of God without the law, "which is witnessed by the law and the prophets." {Rom.3:20,21} Of this great doctrine the Apostle had been treating in the foregoing part of the epistle; and in this chapter he is showing the connection between justification and sanctification, and declaring the influence that this blessed doctrine of justification has upon sinners to sanctify them; {to separate them unto Christ, and bind them together in the unity of the doctrine of Christ;} and this in opposition to a common objection, and an error into which men are very ready to fall, who have not a true insight into the doctrine of God's glorious free grace in the justification of guilty sinners through the righteousness of Christ alone. To this purpose he had said that "sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace;" {Rom.6:14;} and here he tells them to whom he writes, that "they were the servants of sin;" but it was matter of thankfulness to God, that they were delivered from that slavery; and by what means were they delivered from the bondage of sin and made servants of righteousness? He tells it was by that doctrine. Yet the bare outward revelation, and their hearing and having a notion of that doctrine, as they had of other doctrines they heard, was not sufficient unto this. "Ye have obeyed," says he, "from the heart that mould of doctrine into which ye were cast;" and so being freed from the service of sin, they became servants of righteousness. That blessed doctrine was as a mould unto their hearts, into which they being cast and new framed, became answerable unto it; and so were freed from the yoke of sin, and fitted unto the service of righteousness. Thus the Apostle expresses the work of regeneration, and our union with Christ, by means of the doctrine of justification by the free grace of God, "through the redemption that is in Christ's blood;" and so he shows the influence that this doctrine has upon our sanctification; as he does further. {Rom.7:4-6} And by this we may see what it is to be "of the truth." To be of this truth, is to be, as it were, cast into it as in a mould, and framed according to it; "that form of doctrine whereunto ye were delivered."

They in whose minds and hearts this truth is engrafted, and who are begotten and born again of this incorruptible seed, are "of the truth;" and these are they whose souls are cast into the mould of the Gospel-revelation of righteousness in Christ, "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." {Rom.4:25}

So then, whosoever is verily persuaded of this truth that Christ bears witness unto, and that upon the credit of his testimony, and the evidence that it carries in itself, is of this truth; and this faith or belief is the fruit of the soul's being cast into the mould of that doctrine, without which no obedience can be given unto it. They that are of the truth obey it from the heart, for they love it. As this testimony of Christ is received by faith,

whereby we set to our seal that God is true, having the witness in ourselves; so there is the greatest good proposed in this truth to be embraced by us. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." {Mic.6:8} "Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." {Is.55:2} This is the proper object of love; as faith respects the truth witnessed unto, so love respects the good in this truth. This love is an immediate effect of grace, flowing from true faith; and is never, nor can ever be separated from it. We read of some professors of the truth perishing because they received not the love of the truth, and this is made an evidence of their not believing it. {II Thes.2:10-13}

This love acts upon Christ in this truth in a way of esteem, valuing him above all things, and counting all things besides him, all things that stand in competition with him, "loss and dung." Thus they that truly find Christ, are with him, as the wise merchant with the pearl of great price, which when he hath found it, selling all to buy that pearl. Christ is indeed precious to all them that believe, and that to such a degree, that he is their only glory.

The subjects of Christ's kingdom are "everyone that is of the truth;" and these things are imported in this: By this truth Christ's subjects are all distinguished and differenced from all others, howsoever agreeing with them in other things, and however related to them, and bound together with them by many other ties. The church stands distinguished from all other societies, as has been noticed, bearing this motto, "the Lord our Righteousness." This truth lies at the bottom of all that division and enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and of all that hatred of the men of this world at the subjects of Christ's kingdom; for whatever fair pretenses the world may make for this hatred, yet our Lord tells us the true cause of it, when he says that, "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." {Jn.17:14} The men of this world may love Christ's subjects on account of other things common to them with the world appearing about them; but as they appear to be of this truth, and keep the testimony of Jesus Christ, they cannot love them; neither do they hate them for those same things that they find with others who are not of this truth, in whom yet they take pleasure. However we be joined with the people of Christ, if we be not with them in this, we are none of Christ's subjects, nor have we any part in the kingdom of Christ. And all separations from the world, that flow not from this truth, are none of that controversy which the Lord hath established in the earth between the seed of the woman and the serpent, and are not separations from the world, but divisions in it. In this truth all Christ's subjects are one, however otherwise differenced. They are of different nations, different stations in the world, and of different parties in the world; they have different measures of gifts and grace, different measures of light, whence differences of opinion and practice will be found among them, and they are liable to error in many cases while they are in this world; so that

uniformity, in all these things, which some of them may judge very necessary, is not to be expected here; but herein they are all one, they are every one of this truth. This is that unity of the faith wherein all the members of the body of Christ, even the babes not very skillful in the word of righteousness, are everyone according to their measure, growing up into him. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." {Eph.4:13}

Thus they are united by Christ's word, according to his prayer to the Father, that they may be one. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." {Jn.17:20,21} They are more closely joined together in this truth, than they can be by any other means whatsoever; and it is of more force to unite them than anything can be to divide them; so that it is impossible for any difference to break this union. Here is Christ their peace, on whom all their iniquities met; and his righteousness, which is unto them all, and upon them all without difference, and is the foundation of one and the same hope unto them all. {Is.53:6, Rom.3:22, Gal.4:5-7, 5:5} His blood, his cross, whereby the enmity is slain, and they all reconciled to God in one body. By this truth they are all made to drink into one Spirit, which they receive through the hearing of faith, and are all related to God as their Father, "and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," their one Lord Redeemer; and in being of this truth, they are all united to Christ in it, as fellow-members of that one and same body whereof he is the Head; and though the members be many ways differenced, yet there is but one body, wherein all the members are growing up in this unity of the faith, and knowledge of the Son of God. Ought they not therefore to "endeavour to keep the unity of spirit in this bond of peace, forbearing one another in love," as to other differences? Should any party of them rise up to oblige all others to uniformity with them in matters of difference, and so to establish another bond of peace, to the dividing of the body of Christ, which yet must remain united in this bond in spite of all differences? Or dare we exclude from the privileges of Christ's kingdom, and reject from our church-communion, the least of them that are of this truth, because they follow not with us in our uniformity; and this after the only Lord of the church has declared that, "to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." {Jn.18:37}