

All Truth

Inch by excruciating inch, he painfully chipped away with his tiny spoon at the solid rock wall. Hour after day after week after month...for eight years, he desperately tunneled his way toward freedom beneath the dungeon chambers of the Chateau d'If fortress only to fail and narrowly evade a disastrous cave-in. However, when his only friend, a priest, dies in the accident, he trades places with the corpse and thus makes an escape from the island prison after he is thrown into the ocean.

If you've seen the movie or read the book, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, you know that although he escaped the bondage of his cell, the Count was still imprisoned with passionate hatred.

And thus is humanity – imprisoned. This planet is a 'Chateau d'If', if you would, amidst the cosmos and here mankind toils, scrapes and chips away at the meagerness of its existence, hoping to find escape. Chipping away at their jobs, scraping at school, scheming for power, position and/or pleasure, hoping for escape from the dungeon of life's vanity, to find answers, to fill a void within – hour after day after week after month...

Festering with suffering, hatred, death and every foul intention imaginable, it's a brutal place, this prison. And what worsens it -- the 'jailer' takes pleasure by inflicting pain on the inmates as well as duping them into endless pointless pursuits. Meanwhile, he assures

them there's no escape from this cosmic Alcatraz.

But that's not true.

For there is a key, an opening of the prison door, a freedom sublime and sure.

Yet understand, to have it can mean failure, disgrace, suffering, even death (John 16:33, 2 Tim 3:12). It can mean a humiliation which to many is abhorrent (1 Pet 5:5,6; Jam 4:10). To have it means realizing you're "undone" (Isa 6:5), (that's Bible-talk for a real mess, totally un-cool), that you're flat out sinful, destitute of redeeming virtue. It means accepting that you can't dig your own way out to freedom.

"Hold it!" you say. "I'm not that bad." (chip, chip, scrape, scrape) "I mean I help people and do good things." (chip, chip) "I go to church and even counsel other people." (scrape, scrape) "Hey, ...are you trying to ruin my self esteem?" (chip, scrape...chip, scrape)

OK, you just keep digging.

But there is a key, an opening of the prison door, a freedom sublime and sure.

As with the Count of Monte Cristo, it involves a death and a trading of places. It involves a baptism, an emersion. Many of you understand Jesus Christ died in your place. And now, if you believe in that and that He rose from the dead, you know that you get to lay your own life down (1 John 3:16), to die daily to your self-interests (1 Cor 15:31)

and to be buried with Him in baptism (Col 2:11,12).

Satan says that's fanatical and unnecessary. However, Satan, sin and self are all great deceivers. Jesus said concerning the devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources for he is a liar and the father of it." (John 8:44) And so, Satan has no key. Though a jailer of sorts, he is the most desperate prisoner of all. His lies, doubts and seducements are all designed to deceive.

But truth is the key. Spoken by God, it is totally pure.

Look around. You'll notice that we live in the age of deceit. People just can't dig out. Paul wrote, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." (2 Tim 3:13) As you observe today's communication environment, it is steeped in deception.

"Wait a minute, John. That's a bit extreme, don't you think?" you may say. "I mean, I think Wolf Blitzer, Dan Rather, and the 'guys' are quite objective – they even say so themselves." Surely not all we hear from the media is deceptive.

Please understand, I'm not saying that these folks are trying to deceive – rather that their communications are inherently biased and thus they fall short of objective truth. They want you to hear the 'story' the way they understand it and to thus form your perspective. I'm not dissing them -- the issue is that our mutual

human condition causes us to nest the 'truth' in subjectivity.

Here are two points to consider concerning deception: first, by definition, deception appears truthful, and second, motive makes a difference. That is, a true statement made with any motive other than God's is inherently a false witness. You may think those are overly radical statements, but hear me out.

Satan knows that if a lie did not appear truthful, it would fool no one and be useless to the liar. This isn't confined to the used car lot – it's the principle behind modern advertising and media programming – to deceive and manipulate. It is the principle behind politics, the principle behind cults and false religions, and it is even the principle behind way too many interpersonal relationships. What may look true can really be a sham.

Concerning motive, you may recall that when the religious elite of Jesus' day were looking for an excuse to get rid of Him, they found a couple of false witnesses: "...at last two false witnesses came forward and said, 'This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?"

Now, Jesus had indeed said essentially what these false witnesses reported (see John 2:19-21) so why were they "false witnesses"? Context and Motive. Their motive was to do evil, and what they said was taken out of context.

But by contrast, everything God says is completely true. In fact, here's something God can't do – He can't lie. (Num 23:19) That's not just because He's got all the facts, but also because His character and motive are absolutely pure. If you do a word study in the Old Testament on truth, you'll find that it is strangely linked, when attributed to God, to something else. Between 35 and 40 times truth is partnered with and mentioned subsequent to the Hebrew word – “checed”. Now, this word is mostly translated as “mercy” but is more accurately **“goodness, kindness or faithfulness”**.

That is, God prefaces, if you would, His truth with His goodness, kindness and faithfulness. When truth is given this way, it is “all truth”. (See John 16:13) This is one reason why Jesus could assert that **He was the truth** (see John 14:6)

In fact, the New Testament echoes with the Old on this point when it says that Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (See John 1:14,17). For you see, the Greek word for grace is Charis – which literally means, **“that which affords joy, pleasure, delight; good will, loving-kindness, favour; merciful kindness”**. Jesus was ‘the truth packaged in grace’ so to speak. Like the Father -- perfect, pure motive – always.

Oh, how we need truth! This kind of truth! Not the so-called truth that deceives and then destroys. Not the so-called truth that spews forth from sin-tainted motives. We need Christ's heavenly truth. It is this truth that sets us free! (John 8:32) It is this truth that sanctifies and sets

us apart from the world. (John 17:17,19) It is this truth that purges iniquity. (Pro 16:6) It is this truth that preserves us. (Psa 40:11)

The principle fruit of the Holy Spirit is love (see Gal 5:22) and yet He is repeatedly called by Christ the “Spirit of Truth”. This is why Paul exhorted us to speak the truth in love, in other words, to speak it as God does. (see Eph 4:15) I submit that apart from this, it may not even be truth – at least not from heaven's perspective.

If we as Christians could just get a handle on this, it would radically change us and the world around us. We are so quick to level people privately and publicly with “truth” and to think we're justified because “all I said was the truth...” But if we want to learn the lingo of heaven, we need to understand that Father God's ‘way’ is goodness, kindness and faithfulness with truth, Christ's ‘way’ is grace and truth, and the Spirit's ‘way’ is loving truth. As the psalmist writes, “‘Checed’ and truth are joined together” in God. (Psa 85:10)

Mankind fell through deception, is enslaved and imprisoned by deception and even when saved by grace, can be made ineffective because of deception. Soon, a grand deceiver, the son of perdition, will come on the scene. May we let the Holy Spirit lead us into “all truth” – not just more facts, more data, but into the place where we perceive and speak the truth as God does – with heavenly mindedness.