

Holding The Truth In Unrighteousness

By: Jim Hohnberger

Is the "church" converting the world? or is the world converting the church? Do we see the "church" bringing its members into a living, vibrant walk with God? or do we see the world gaining its hold on the "church"? until the only difference between those in the church and those in the world, is a mental assent to some "truths" without the practical applications in the daily life.

Why is it that the church seems so feeble to finish the work entrusted to it by God? I believe it is because we are "Holding the Truth in Unrighteousness", where we have made the mental assent to truth, a substitute for the living experience. The world, the Christian community and the church are waiting anxiously to see a people whose profession and experience are one and the same. It is when these two essentials are inseparably one in our daily lives, our marriages and our families, then and not until then, will the church have the power to finish the work. When those who profess to serve God follow Christ's example by **practicing** the principles of the law in their **daily life**; when every act bears witness that they love God supremely and their neighbor as themselves, **then** will the church have power to move the world.

Some of us have wondered why men like John the Baptist and the apostle Paul were able to stir a whole nation and awaken a world wide multitude without the aid of TV, radio, videos, cassettes, CDs or the printed page. What these men had was the power of an inward experience. They held the truth in righteousness, not their own, but in a life fully and continually surrendered to Jesus Christ. The church and the world, saw that these men lived what they preached and thus, all that met them or heard of them were greatly stirred. Many

were stirred-up and enmity arose in their hearts, as these men's words and lives rebuked their sinful, selfish, indulgent ways and practices. Yet others were stirred to true repentance and a life surrendered to a living, vibrant dependence upon Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Saviour. It is thus that the early church had power because their experience, testified to their profession. When it can again be seen that in our lives, our marriages and our families that we live all that we profess, it is **then** that we will have the John the Baptist power to finish the work and not before.

What does it mean to, "Hold the truth in unrighteousness"? Simply put, it means we are not living what we profess. For example, about a year ago, I was one of the speakers at a camp meeting and was invited to have a meal with one of the other speakers. His message that hour was on being ready when Jesus comes, it was a moving message and I found myself saying, Amen, Amen. When he was finished speaking he drove us to the house where his wife was preparing a sumptuous meal. As we walked through the kitchen he handed his suit coat to his wife for her to put away. As I stood back and watched, how saddened I was to see the irritation arise in him as his wife declined, for her hands were busy preparing the salad and she didn't want to stain his nice coat. A few irritated words were exchanged, then the speaker for the hour, reluctantly put away his own suit coat.

Do you know what God was saying to me right then and there? God was impressing me with how often I've treated my wife in a similar manner. The Holy Spirit was

saying, Jim, you need to live what you preach. Your life needs to be an example of your profession, for the preaching of the truth without the living of it has no power to finish the work. The Holy Spirit brought to my mind Romans 2:21, "Thou therefore which teaches another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?"

Gentlemen, God is saying, if we are preaching to get ready, get ready, get ready, we had better stop handing our coats to our wives and start helping them in the kitchen. Gentlemen, do our wives really see us live the gospel that we profess? probably not, and so we wonder why they flounder in their Christian experience. Gentlemen, God is saying, we need to submit that self assertiveness, that irritation and frustration, that shortness and indifference, that inclination and impulse as it rises in our flesh, and live out the truth we profess by a continuous surrender of our wills and a constant trust in a present Saviour in all the circumstances that arise in our homes. Then our wives and our children will know that we have found not only the truth but the power of the gospel.

If not, though we may teach "the truth" to others, though we may have much zeal for the spreading of "present truth", though we may publish it, and discuss it and debate it and promote it, we dishonor God. "Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God." Romans 2:23. It is thus that we hold "the truth in unrighteousness".

Jesus Christ said to His followers, "If ye **continue in my word, then** are ye my disciples indeed." John 8:31. Continue in His Word, means that when going through the kitchen we live what we preached in the pulpit. Continue in His Word, means instead of yelling, scolding or sermonizing to my child, I take my child in prayer, teach him how to surrender his will and way, teach him how to trust in a present Saviour that gives him power over his feelings and emotions, over his impulses and inclinations. Continuing in His Word teaches the child how to apply the truth in his everyday life. It also works through **all** irritation and frustration that arises in the home life in a Christ-like spirit. We must become Continuists; ones who continually live out the truths they profess, instead of Theorist; ones who hold to the truth without the daily application of it in their everyday lives.

If we are not "continuing in His Word", then our spouses, our children and the world will not want our religion. Why, because it has no practical power and amounts

to no saving good in our every day lives. But when our wives, children and others see that our gospel has saving power that enables **us** to live above inclination and impulse, above selfishness, gossip and pride, then they will want, not only the truth we profess but the experience we possess as well.

"Holding the truth in unrighteousness" would be likened unto finding the pearl of great price and then not selling all and possessing it. It is in the selling of **all** and becoming the **possessor** of the pearl of great price that the parable woos us to, not just the finding of it. Many of us have found the pearl of great price, and are telling everyone,

but we haven't yet gone home, sold all and possessed it. Thus they don't believe it has the value we claim because they don't see it in our lives, in our marriages and in our children. They want to see it, friends, they want to see it work in our lives, they want us to demonstrate it in our marriages and they want to see it acted out in our children. Then, and only then will they be convinced to sell all in order to possess the pearl of great price. The world is waiting for us to move beyond, "Holding the truth in unrighteousness" to the Holding of truth Righteously. This means that we will not only have won the battle over truth and error

but also the battle over "self" and "selfishness" in our own lives. I know many who have won the first battle but few, very few who have or are winning the second battle. If we are, in the end, to receive the seal of God in our foreheads then there must be a settling into the truth both intellectually and experientially.

A few months ago, God had me share a message that agitated many who were in attendance. I was almost immediately reproached and censured by them. As they were in the process of reprimanding me, not the truth that I shared, but as the bearer of that truth, there was a tendency in my flesh to want to defend, to justify, to straighten them out and to prove them wrong. How easy it would have been to give reproach for reproach and censure for censure and reprimand for reprimand. But all this would have amounted to "no saving good". Oh how I wish their spirit would have been one of openness and true hearted searching, perhaps then, more open dialogue would have been possible.

During the reprimanding, the Holy Spirit brought to my mind, that my reputation was not important, only my character. The Holy Spirit also made it plain to me that I was not to enter into the defense of the truth in unrighteousness. I was to filter every word I spoke and every action of

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my being was to be under the influence of His Spirit. What a struggle arose within my flesh. Yes, what God had me present was heart searching truth, but would it be defended in the flesh or in the Spirit? Many times I had to resist the promptings of the flesh, many times I had to say "no" I will not allow their attack on me to raise irritation in me and gain control over me. Again and again I had to reach out to Jesus my Lord and Saviour for strength to remain in Him, for help to resist the flesh, for heavenly wisdom to know what to say or not to say, for power to live what God had me preach. It was only through a continual surrender of my thoughts, a continual surrender of my words and actions and a constant reliance upon His power that I did not yield to the defending of the truth in unrighteousness.

How easy it would have been to simply retaliate in the flesh, which would have been, "the holding of the truth in unrighteousness". But my God was right there with me and after about 30 minutes of remaining absolutely silent, God gave me permission to briefly reclarify the truths I had earlier spoken. With the reclarification came yet more reproach. During this reproach God simply impressed me to, "**be still**" to "**be quiet**" and to let the truth defend itself through the workings of the Holy Spirit on each individual heart.

There were many onlookers to this whole uncomfortable event and later, even months later, many shared that they were won to the truth God had me share as much through the viewing of this, "quiet ordeal" as well as the sharing of the spoken word. I praise God that they were both evident, the truth and the experience in the truth. But I tremble to think of how I could so easily have dishonored the truth if I would have resorted to defending it in the flesh or unrighteousness. If this would have happened, how many would have been confused, perplexed, unmoved and perhaps even lost!

Since this experience, God has had me reflect back at how many times in the past I defended the truth in the power of the flesh, rather than the Spirit. But if our presentation and defense of the truth is to have any "saving good" it must, by the grace of God and the continual surrender of our beings, be done **in Christ**. I pray that all of us can not only see this but enter into it, for upon it rests the power for the "finishing of the work".

Isn't it time that we all ask ourselves some heart searching questions? Is the present truth we hold, being held in unrighteousness? Has our defense of the truth been in the flesh or in the Spirit? Do our spouses, our children and the

world see us profess to be overcomers, yet see us daily being overcome by feelings and emotions, by irritations, appetites and passions, and by inclination and impulse. If all those we have a burden for, possessed the same experience as us, would they be safe to be translated to heaven? These are hard questions but ask them we must!

Is there a simple, practical, biblical prescription to this dilemma we all find ourselves in? Yes, praise God there is and it is called, "The inspired Injunction." It is found in James 1:19, "Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." If we will consent to follow this simple prescription, it means we will gain self-control and mastery over every thought, every spoken word and all our actions.

It says to me that, before I respond to those who may be a bit antagonistic towards my understanding of truth, I am to filter all my thoughts and all my subsequent words through Christ. This requires a continual attitude of "Lord what would Thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6. It requires not only a standing up for truth but a constant dependency in a power outside of my knowledge of truth and a willing surrender and cooperation with that power and that power is Christ! That's why He is called our Saviour, He saves us from ourselves.

That's what, "Swift to hear" means. It means, "Be still and know that I am God."

Psalms 46:10. In other words, Our only safety is in a constant distrust of self combined with a dependency on Christ. Why is this? Because we are all prone to wander, we are all prone to leave the God we love! Even in the midst of defending the truth? Yes! Even when walking through our kitchens, after having preached a sermon on getting ready? Yes, a thousand times yes. You see, we are all encumbered with an independent SELF. That's why all of our good works are dependent on a power outside of ourselves. Therefore there needs to be a **continual** reaching out of the heart after God. That's being *swift to hear!*

Being "*swift to hear*" means that we become so sensitive to Holy influences that the **lightest whisper** of Jesus will move our souls. In my previous illustration when I was under reproach by those who didn't see it my way the whisperings of Jesus, not audible, but through the avenue of my conscience were saying, "Let the truth defend itself." "Do not enter controversy." "Your reputation is not important, only your character." A tremendous struggle went on in my heart to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, versus those of the flesh. My flesh wanted to cry aloud and prove my accusers wrong. But I could hear the whis-

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perings of God's Word in my mind. "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." Proverbs 15:1. And again His word came to me, "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge **aright**: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness." Proverbs 15:2. So I remained quiet and after 30 minutes, God gave me permission to briefly reclarify my position in a calm Christ-like spirit. Then I was again to remain quiet. We are told in Desire of Ages 483, "Through all our trials we have a never-failing Helper. He does not leave us alone to struggle with temptations, to battle with evil, and be finally crushed with burdens and sorrow. Though now He is hidden from mortal sight, the **ear of faith can hear His voice** saying, Fear not; I am with you." Yes, "the ear of faith can hear His voice", but are we cooperating with that voice? No we are not! Most of us are going it alone, thus we are not truly, "swift to hear" and because we are not truly "swift to hear" we are not "slow to speak"!

It was over a half an hour before God had given me permission to speak to my reproachers. That's "slow to speak" and we can only be "slow to speak" if we have been "swift to hear" His voice. John 10:16 says, "They shall hear my voice." I had a Christian brother say to me, "I don't hear God's voice." I said, "Yes you do." For example the last time you were in the check out line at the supermarket and your eyes fell upon the fleshly newspapers and magazines in front of you, did you hear God's voice? Yes I did, and what did God's voice say? It said look away, do not behold those suggestive pictures. Did you obey? He did not answer me! There was no response!

Friends are you obeying? Are you responding to the call of God upon your conscience? Is your mind, intellect and reason enlightened and refreshed daily by the Word of God? If so then it is our privilege to have communion throughout our day with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Christ was "swift to heart", He said, "I can **of myself** do nothing." He was ever dependent upon His Father and filtered everything, absolutely every thought, word and action through His Father.

In the illustration of the vine and the branch found in John 15, we find Christ calling us to "Abide in me ... as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine... for without me ye can do nothing."

"Swift to Hear" means exactly this, total dependence upon Christ in every circumstance, throughout our entire day. It does not mean just swift to read God's Word in the morning, nor swift only to memorize God's Word, but **swift to obey it and depend upon its Author**, as He brings it back to us in every circumstance of the day.

Too many of us have read and memorized the Word but are not receiving it and cooperating with it as God re-

echo's it to us throughout our day. Thus we "hold the truth in unrighteousness." We try to produce the fruit without abiding in the vine, this cannot be.

We must all come to see that our sufficiency is in Christ alone and that through a constant surrender to God we **will be enabled** to live the new life, even the life of faith. In other words we will put absolutely **no** confidence in the flesh. One of my favorite authors wisely exhorted: "Fear lest your will shall **not** be held in subjection to Christ's will, lest your hereditary and cultivated traits of character shall control your life... Fear lest self shall interpose between your soul and the great Master Worker. Fear lest self will, shall mar the high purpose that through you God desires to accomplish. Fear to trust to your own strength, fear to withdraw your hand from the hand of Christ and attempt to walk life's pathway without His abiding presence." Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pg 161.

Yes friends, this is what it means to be "swift to hear", this is the first part of our prescription for "holding truth in unrighteousness". If we will be swift to hear, then truly we will be "slow to speak" and "slow to anger", for the power is initiated in the "swift to hear". God is teaching me day by day, as I cooperate with Him, He is moving me out of "holding the truth in unrighteousness".

Let us all take a firm hold on the truth in the one hand and an equally firm hold onto the Truth Giver in the other and in an embrace that refuses to let go, reach out to a perishing world and finish the work God has called us to.

Power for Living



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