



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

EPHESIANS 4

MAY 2021

TRUTH IS SUPREME

Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. (Ephesians 4:17-19, NRSV)

The war between truth and deception rages in our culture in such an obvious way that one must hide to keep from seeing it. Some may be so distracted by self-absorption that they don't bother to notice the battle, but most are aware... and nervous. Never in the history of this nation has the intensity been so high. Of course, other nations have faced this kind of conflict such as Germany's days of Nazism and Russia's of Stalinism. Many of the same dynamics that led to millions being tortured and killed in those societies are present today. Without being reactive and fear-motivated, we are being called to accurately distinguish truth from error, and the stakes are high. The sky is not falling, but dark clouds are on

the horizon, begging for the attention of those who know and love truth.

The war that rages in cultural conflict mirrors the war that rages in the mind of every human. The same voices of deception afflict all of us. Those who have come to know truth as the person of Jesus can offer hope to society when we stand up and speak up. But if we don't win the battle in our own minds, we have little to offer our culture except another opinion. This is certainly no time for cowardice. The courageous will be those who have refused to believe a lie, who have submitted to reality as defined by Jesus, and who have aligned behavior with His Word. In this article, I would like to explore the nature

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of truth and examine a biblical text to see how we apply truth to our daily lives in a way that liberates us from darkness and its deadly fruit.

I suppose we could select any of the New Testament Epistles for this exercise, but Ephesians may be the easiest. It is significant to note how the letter is written because it reflects how the apostles preached the gospel. First, there is the presentation of God Himself. He is introduced as the creator, covenant-keeping, sovereign, Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This presentation is vital because without knowing the true nature of God, we cannot accurately know who we are or what we are expected to do. A wrong concept of God inevitably leads to a wrong concept of reality. Second, there is a declaration of what God has done through the coming of Jesus. Paul spends the first three chapters of Ephesians presenting who God is, what He has done through the coming of Jesus, and how that affects us. Paul then describes our status: We are "in Christ." He tells us that we are sent with the same authority that sent Jesus into the world. He says that we are empowered by the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, and that we are guaranteed a future victory that establishes God's justice by His display of mercy. Our hope is secure and satisfying. He shows how Jesus' coming fulfilled the purpose of creation, election, sanctification, and mission. Because of what He has done, we are sons of God, members of God's covenant people, witnesses to His glory, truth tellers, and partners with God on earth. Third, there

is the application of the new reality to our lives. This is the part we often run to first because we want to do something to fix the problem quickly and have trouble waiting for our perspective to change before our behavior is addressed. This leads to failure and temporary disillusionment.

We have been affected by the intrusion of darkness into God's project. Our minds operated in darkness because we were alienated from the life of God. We erroneously believed that we could define reality on our own and that we could make life work without depending on God. We have therefore reduced our human dignity to that of biological beings controlled by appetites and struggling for survival. Beset by lusts, greed, and fear, we become more like beasts than humans made in God's image, yet we have tried while in this state to make sense of life and successfully manage the creation. Darkness! Paul says this is the futility that characterizes the minds of those not sharing the life of God through Jesus:

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Because God is love, He has acted to redeem us by beginning a new creation. Since Jesus' resurrection there is a new Adam in a new garden and a new people living by the new reality from His perspective. We can now "be renewed the spirit of our minds," and thereby align our choices based on the new perspective:

*That is not the way you learned Christ!
For surely you have heard about him
and were taught in him, as truth is in
Jesus. You were taught to put away
your former way of life, your old self,
corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and
be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
and to clothe yourselves with the new
self, created according to the likeness of
God in true righteousness and holiness.
(Ephesians 4:20-24, NRSV)*

The first dynamic here is actively rejecting the lie. We can do that because we are born of the truth. Truth lives in our spirit. We share the very life of truth. When we ignore truth, we slowly slide into deeper realms of deception until we are darkened like pagans. Rejecting a lie and embracing the truth is not as easy as it might first appear. Lies come with powerful motivations. Our culture is now facing such pressure. We can buy into a deceptive agenda to preserve our comfort, security, or status. Fear of rejection can motivate us to ignore the small lies that don't appear to carry dire consequences. But a lie in our minds is like cancer in our bodies. Tolerate it and it will eventually spread to the whole body. We might think that to refute every lie we hear would be a

full time job, and we would be constantly shouting against the voices we are hearing. It's true that sometimes we must speak up and confront those who oppose our belief with gentleness (2 Timothy 2:24), but at all times we must note the lie, refute it in our own minds, and replace it with truth. We must remember that if we can't detect lies in the conversation going on in our own minds, we won't be able to detect those in the public square. Just as we individually have an enemy wanting to devour us, our collective culture is being threatened by agendas that were hatched in hell. God loves His creation, and the devil hates God's world and His work. We don't have to be fear-based conspiracists to know there are lies being promoted that are designed to destroy. In fact, we are love-compelled agents of His kingdom equipped with truth. We cannot fail if we will engage.

Interestingly, as Paul begins to address daily issues facing the Ephesian church, he starts with a discussion of lies and truth (Ephesians 4:25). He exhorts us to put away lies and speak the truth—because we are members of the same body. Lying to each other is like injecting cancer in one member of our physical body. It will kill all the members if it is not eradicated. We don't just focus on the behavior of lying and try to curtail it to be perceived as virtuous. We speak the truth because it gives life to the body of which we are members. Lying injects darkness, suspicion, and fear.

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Next, Paul deals with anger. Anger is a normal reaction to what we see as injustice. However, it must not be given ground to fester and devolve into bitterness and vengeance. Truth will identify anger and trust God for justice rather than assuming His role as judge (Ephesians 4:26-27).

He then shows how to apply the new reality to the behavior of stealing. Put it away! Reject it as a viable option. How? Renew the mind to the new reality. We don't work just to make more money so we will have more and can secure our own future or satisfy our own wants. We work in order to give to other parts of the body in need so that the body can be healthy. Truth gives a new work ethic as well as eliminates stealing (Ephesians 4:28).

What about the sins of the tongue? The truth is that we have blessing power in the tongue, and we have the privilege of spreading life rather than death. What a privilege! We can be creative in finding ways of speaking encouragement and destiny rather than tearing down others to make ourselves look better. We already look better in Christ. Our Father delights in us.

Paul's letter continues on, but we can see from these verses how essential truth is to our lives. It is supreme. We are God's truth warriors, being trained by the conversations in our own minds. Detecting lies and replacing them with truth is the way of liberation. The only way. As we develop the sensitivity to truth in our own minds, we can more easily detect what those around us are saying and thereby

speaking the truth in love. This is the role we have been assigned as God's partners in our various gardens of influence. When we speak truth in love, we are displacing darkness with the light of life, and the dark clouds on the horizon start to lift. We cannot afford to be passive nor silent when confronted with lies born of hell. We are blessed to know truth as the person of Jesus. He has promised to never leave us and that when we need to know, He will make it known.



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