



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Looking at the Word “With Eyes Wide Open”

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Introduction

1. A preacher I know tells of receiving an appreciation note from a member of that congregation in which the member complimented the preacher for looking at God’s word “with eyes wide open.”
2. What the member meant by that was that the preacher was more concerned with following and teaching the truth of the word than with merely parroting what he had always heard, was “supposed” to defend, or echo as the party line.
3. I can think of no greater compliment for a preacher.
 - a. First, it indicates what a preacher’s primary concern ought to be as a teacher of God’s word.
 - b. Second, it indicates a conscious determination to pursue that concern regardless of any pressure to do otherwise, whether it originates within or out of the body.
4. With this lesson, we resume our look at “things we should believe.”
 - a. We’ll follow the lessons we’ve done on God’s existence, Jesus’ nature, covenant, salvation and especially baptism by first looking at the importance, nature, and identity of Christ’s body.
 - b. Remember what we declared at the beginning: we are not looking at “things we believe” but at “things we *should* believe.” Our goal is always to align ourselves with God’s word rather than merely traditional ways of looking at that word and its teachings.
 - c. At the heart of the matter is the issue of what we pursue.

Body

- I. What Are We Expected to Pursue?
 - A. The answer most will give first is the Bible; as far as it goes, that is correct.
 1. God’s word to his people has always stressed that point (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 12:32; Hosea 4:6).
 2. As New Testament preachers faced problems, they appealed to the revealed word as normative (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:15; 4:2).
 3. Peter’s summary of what was vital to the well-being of his readers shows the importance of the word in the context of the Christian life generally (1 Peter 4:8-11).
 - B. But we need to see why the Bible matters; the answer is, because it is true.

1. The connection between the word and truth, and the importance of the latter, is illustrated in passages such as John 8:32; Romans 2:8; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Timothy 4:4.
2. Truth should be pursued passionately, not casually; it should be emphasized, not tritely mentioned (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 12).
3. Thus, we are to seek truth, interpret Scripture correctly to arrive at the truth, and test *everything* we hear against the standard of the truth; 2 Corinthians 13:5-8 illustrates these ideas.
4. We should be concerned enough for the truth to risk disfavor from some because we tell the truth (cf. Galatians 2:5, 14; and especially 4:16).

II. How Are We Challenged in Our Pursuit?

- A. Most would agree with this aim, but our stated desire is not always easy to enact.
 1. We are tempted to relax our pursuit when truth confronts or demands too much of us.
 2. All of us are subject to blind spots that can divert us from the truth.
- B. The circumstances in Galatians illustrate the challenge.
 1. As noted above, Paul had to speak boldly in his effort to persuade the Galatians to remain with the truth; even Peter was temporarily sidetracked (Galatians 2:11-14).
 2. Galatians 1:6-7 is especially enlightening.
 - a) Notice that there had been a departure away from the way of grace (cf. 5:4).
 - b) But notice also that Paul said it had happened “quickly” (ταχέως, *tacheōs*).
 - c) If, so shortly after coming to faith at the teaching of Paul, they could be diverted from truth, we dare not smugly imagine we are immune from the danger.
- C. The problem can develop from simply not being as painstaking as we should be.
 1. To illustrate, a few months ago, I preached a sermon in which I used a slide with a quotation from a commentary. I miscopied the word “metals” as “medals,” changing the focus of a statement about the nature of wealth in antiquity (consisting of “precious metals and cloth”). Even though I remember thinking ahead of time that something wasn’t right about that slide, and though I spell fairly well and know the difference between “medal” and “metal,” I had a blind spot regarding that error.
 2. I once made a similar mistake while studying a Bible text dealing with marriage and divorce, mistakenly equating two Greek words (similar spelling and form) and thus changing the meaning of one of the verses (and my conclusion!) in the text.
 3. Fortunately, both times someone challenged my mistake and I was able to realign my thinking and practice with the truth.
- D. Here is where our desire (or lack of desire) for the truth becomes so important.
 1. When we begin a study of a text or subject, do we approach it with our minds made up, to prove what we already know, or with an attitude that is willing to see our thinking changed (or understanding tweaked) if that change brings us closer to the truth?
 2. Do we confuse honest study of the word with rejection of the word? Do we let emotions and ulterior motives cloud our view of the word?
 - a) “If I’m wrong, I’ll change” becomes “I’ll look weak [and lose the whole debate] if I admit I’m wrong.”
 - b) “If I take that position, I’ll be more in line with Scripture” can easily get lost in the concern that acceptance of said view will mean I’m saying my teacher was wrong.

- c) A more elaborate example of the same thing is an exaggerated concern that the admission of the correctness of a certain point goes against what “we” believe.
 - (1) But what if what “we” believe got sidetracked somewhere?
 - (2) Is the standard God’s tradition (2 Thessalonians 2:15) or ours (Matthew 15:6)?
- 3. We must emphasize the difference between turning our back on what we have been taught (assuming it’s true) and *confirming* what we have been taught is true.

III. How Are We to Proceed in Our Pursuit?

- A. If we love the truth:
 - 1. There can be no “sacred cows” in its pursuit.
 - 2. The old adage is correct: truth has nothing to fear from examination.
- B. Two things are mandatory in our search.
 - 1. We must actually look at the word, all the word (cf. Acts 20:27). This is not the same as memorizing a set of beliefs, what we’ve been told the word says, or merely a few selections from the word (a canon within the canon).
 - 2. But, we must look at it “with eyes wide open,” i.e., with an attitude that acknowledges that there is truth yet to learn and additional understanding of truth we can gain even in areas where we are sure we know it well.

Conclusion

- 1. We should not think that the ideal we have declared here will be easy.
 - a. It’s easier to master a list of “correct” answers that we believe than to really dig in and make sure we believe what God’s word teaches.
 - b. It’s easier to assume that, because our generation knows and has settled things on a given issue, the next generation must also know it; it’s harder to actually teach the word.
 - c. It’s easier as hearers to ask teachers to just give us “answers” than to allow them to lead us through the process of studying and searching for God’s answers.
 - d. It’s also disorienting to find ourselves going in directions we had not expected to go, something that has often occurred when people turned (or returned) to God’s word.¹
- 2. But, for the sake of our faithfulness and our testimony (is not this what we ask of others?), we must make the effort. A love for truth demands it.

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* Note: much of the above was originally presented as part of an article entitled, “Simply Christians: Seeking God’s Ideal Today,” in *First Century Christian*. For the points included in this outline, see the third installment, published August-September 2001, pp. 8-9.

¹ The above are repeated from my sermon, “How To Have a Restoration,” March 15, 2009.