

1 GUARDING OUR GREATEST TREASURE

(Proverbs 23:23)

“Buy the truth, and sell it not.”

Perhaps the greatest ongoing battle being fought on earth today is the battle for truth. The battle rages on many fronts and under many banners. For a Christian, the battle is simplified. The issue is the truth of God pitted against all the ideologies, philosophies and world-views that oppose it. Yes, they *oppose* it, adamantly and aggressively. You see, nothing is more infuriating to the natural human mind than the fact of the extreme narrowness of truth. Many of the opposing views are formidable and mouthed by militants, which increases the necessity of our side being fully armed with apologetic skill *and love*. We are to “speak the truth in love,” the Bible says. This is no easy assignment.

The Bible says that, no matter how a person is thinking before he meets Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, his thinking is wrong. He is “futile in his thinking and darkened in his understanding, *being separated from the life of God* because of the ignorance that is in him due to the hardening of his heart” (Ephesians 4:17-18). Every born-again person knows in retrospect how true that assessment is. In fact, just as only living people can assess death, so only born-again people can realize how ignorant and darkened their minds were when they were without Christ.

Lost people who are entrenched in their self-will and sin follow a succession of downward steps with regard to truth. First, they suppress the truth. Then they exchange the truth of God for a lie. Finally, they insist that their own alternative “truth” is the correct version. This sequence is traced in a horrible passage in Romans 1:18-32, and it can be seen in practical exposure all over the world today.

In contrast, a Christian is a person who has been revolutionized by Divine truth, truth that is both Personal and propositional. Christian faith has a great Personal object (!!), but it also has great propositional content (!). A true Christian will be constantly enlarging his awareness and experience of both the Personal object and the propositional content.

As *Personal*, truth is found in Jesus Christ, Who said, “I am the Truth” (John 14:6). As a circle must have a center, the whole realm of truth must have a point of reference. In the Greek text of John 1, Jesus is called the *logos*, which is the word from which we derive our word, “logic.” Jesus *is the Logic of God*. The Apostle Paul called it “the truth as it is found in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21). When Jesus introduced Himself and placed Himself and His truth on the public market (Luke 4:17-19), He used Isaiah 61 as His own point of reference to define His ministry, and four of the verbs in the text He selected have to do with *teaching*. Christianity is a faith driven by the power of truth. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

As *propositional*, truth is found in the Bible, God’s own Word. In John 17:17, Jesus said to His Father, “Thy word is truth.” The Bible is all true, and it contains all we need to know to “negotiate life in its eternal dimensions”—but not all truth is found in the Bible. Much truth is outside the Bible, and God is the source of all of it. However deep or far the human mind may move in a search for truth, no truth it may find is outside the realm of God. All explorations of “truth” will finally be judged by the question, “Is it true to the Word of God as revealed in Jesus Christ?” Let me make one differentiation

before we look briefly at the text: there is a difference between something being *accurate* and something being *true*. Truth is far more and far bigger than mere accuracy. It is accurate that I am over six feet tall, but that does not Biblically qualify to be called “truth.” C.S. Lewis helps us when he calls God’s truth “true truth.”

The tiny text that is at the head of this study gives to each of us a concise command that serves as a guide for our contacts with God’s truth. Let me deal with it under several headings.

First, it speaks of a *priceless commodity we are to possess*. “Buy the truth.” For a Christian disciple, this text reminds us of the vast information gap that characterizes a person when he receives Christ. In another study, I have called it an information *crisis*, and it is exactly that. “He knows nothing as he ought to know,” and he will not know what he needs to know unless he daily “buys the truth.” Disciple-making, by its very nature, assists the disciple in moving from what he *presently* knows to what he *should* know as a follower of Christ. The disciple-maker will “walk the disciple through the ‘purchase process’” by which he ‘buys the truth’ on a daily basis and with life-transforming results. The discipler will teach the disciple how to appropriate both the Personal truth (how to abide in Christ and be filled with His Spirit) and the propositional truth of God (how to study and incarnate the Word of God). As he grows, the disciple will happily “buy the truth” just as he shops in a market for his favorite item.

In summary, truth is *not variable* and *not negotiable* to a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Someone said, “We live in an age that grants plausibility to every idea and certainty to none.” But God’s truth is absolute, not relative, whatever the secular mind may think and the secular mouth may argue. And it is not negotiable in that no price will entice the true believer to sell out the truth.

Second, the text suggests a *practical course to pursue* with regard to truth. “Buy the truth.” This means that a disciple of Christ must take measures to possess the truth. Purchases don’t just “happen.” Commodities don’t fall into the trunk of your car while you are playing in the park or drinking a cup of coffee with a friend. A true disciple will understand how high the stakes are with regard to truth, and will give up anything and everything else to possess truth. Furthermore, he will enlarge his supply of truth at every opportunity, paying whatever price is necessary to stock his mind, his heart and his life with this treasure. He remembers that Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32).

Third, if we are to practice the admonition of the text, there is a *perpetual cost to pay*. “Buy the truth.” The word “buy” suggests giving up something of value to possess the item. It also suggests an exchange of that valuable thing in order to possess the desirable commodity. It is apparent that truth has a price tag—and it may be exorbitant! “Every road taken is every other road forsaken.” When a person consolidates his time, attention, effort and energy to “buy the truth,” he won’t be found in lesser markets and bartering for lesser commodities.

Finally, the text specifies a *precise caution that must be taken to protect the possession*. “Buy the truth, and *sell it not*.”

Just how would a believer “sell” truth? He might sell it by being too *casual* with it. As he neglects it, maintains a casual indifference toward it, or drifts away from it, he is selling the truth.

Then he might sell the truth by *compromising* it. He might twist or distort it in his handling of it, both in public discussion or private consideration, or he might shade it in order to be socially acceptable among co-workers or associates.

He might sell the truth by not *championing* it. If the penetration of Christian truth into the market of world ideas depended totally on *you*, how much truth would be available for somebody else's "purchase" on the market? The man who refuses to champion truth while still trying to believe it is a coward. He simply walks away from a discussion rather than staying to present the truth. "Peace at any price" calls for too *great* a price to be paid when truth is the issue.

He might sell the truth by not *communicating* it. The Christian simply remains silent when Jesus and His truth need presentation and expression. "I believe, therefore, I have spoken," but this Christian practices a convenient and self-protective reserve instead of speaking the truth.

Brothers and sisters, God has gone to enormous trouble to make the truth available to us, and we should surely be willing to go to enormous trouble, if necessary, to hear, learn, heed, obey and repeat the truth He has given. A. W. Tozer said, "What divides us Christians is the degree to which we take truth; that is, how fervently we do or don't believe a particular truth," and he was right. In fact, if we genuinely love God (what's not to love?), such a "purchase" will not be seen as trouble at all. It will be viewed as pleasure and not pressure. It will be "an unspeakable joy and full of glory." We need truth more than we need comfort, convenience, happiness, affluence, possessions. "Better to die with a grip on truth than on anything else life offers." The more we "buy the truth," the happier we are. Christians are born (born *again*) to shop—for God's truth. "Buy the truth, and sell it not." Is the possession and practice of Divine truth a priority on your agenda?

Some years ago, I was captivated by the story of a Greenland Eskimo who was taken on one of the American polar expeditions. As a reward for his faithful service, he was brought to New York City for a short visit. He was amazed at all the miracles of sight and sound. When he returned to his native village, he told stories of buildings that rose into the very face of the sky. He spoke of streetcars, which he described as houses that moved along the trail, with people living in them as they moved. He told about mammoth bridges, artificial lights, and all the other dazzling delights of the great metropolis. His people looked at him coldly and walked away. Throughout the village he was dubbed, "The Liar." This name he carried in shame to his grave. Long before his death, his original name was entirely forgotten in the village.

Sometime later, a man named Knud Rasmussen made a trip from Greenland to Alaska. He was accompanied by an Eskimo named Mitek from the same village. Mitek visited Copenhagen and New York, where he saw many things for the first time and was duly impressed. Later, upon his return to Greenland, he recalled the tragic story of "The Liar" and decided that it would not be wise to tell the truth. Instead, he narrated the stories that his people could grasp, shaded them to their understanding, and thus saved his reputation.

He told them how he and Dr. Rasmussen maintained a kayak on the banks of a great river, the Hudson, and how each morning they paddled out for their hunting; ducks, geese and seals were plentiful. And Mitek said they enjoyed the visit with the "natives" immensely.

In the eyes of his people, the truth-teller was a liar, and the man who shaded the truth to fit the minds of the Eskimos was a very honest man. *But all the while, truth stood alone, unchanged, unscathed, and largely unknown—but still truth!*

**“GUARDING OUR GREATEST TREASURE”
(Proverbs 23:23)**

I. A Priceless Commodity to Possess

II. A Practical Course to Pursue

III. A Perpetual Cost to Pay

IV. A Protective Caution to Perform