

Article 2: The Transformational Power of Truth

Art Thomas

Fowlerville Freedom Center

Life is a journey. One road leads to the next until finally you arrive at a destination. Jesus said He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Life is a journey. Jesus is the Way. No one will arrive at the right destination apart from Him.

So Jesus is not only the Truth of God, but He's also the Way of God. This tells us that God's Truth follows a clear plan of action to bring you freedom and wholeness. Here's the course of movement that most typically plays out in a person's life:

Tolerance
Repentance
Understanding
Transformation
Holiness

Tolerance leads to repentance. Repentance leads to understanding. Understanding to transformation. Transformation to holiness. Each of these takes place as we build our relationship with Jesus Christ, who is Truth.

UNVEILING ABSOLUTE TRUTH

Why do so many people today struggle with the idea of absolute Truth? I would venture to guess that it's because God's Truth doesn't function the way we might expect. Perhaps we think that if there really is an absolute Truth by which the universe must function, then there should be immediate evidence when something opposes that Truth. In other words, if absolute Truth says we must be perfect, then why aren't we destroyed as soon as we mess up?

What we fail to see is that this Truth is not impersonal. Rather, He has compassion and love. Jesus does not bring down a fist of damnation every time someone acts contrary to His nature. The comically disturbing picture of God with His finger hovering over the "smite" button is just plain wrong. Jesus is patient, kind, and tolerant.

TOLERANCE THAT LEADS TO REPENTANCE

Romans 2:4—Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? (NIV)

God's brand of tolerance is one with a purpose. People seem to understand that tolerance means "not judging." That's true. The problem is that Satan has twisted the way we express tolerance so that people are now judging all the time and not realizing it.

Today's postmodern, skewed definition of tolerance says, "You can believe what you like and I'm alright with that—but don't you dare try to impose it on me!" Guess what? You just judged the other person's beliefs as unfit for you. You might even be right to do so, but don't think that such a statement is "nonjudgmental!"

Postmodern "tolerance" also says, "I have my own beliefs, and you have no right to tell me that I'm wrong." This time you judged the other person as unfit to offer you any counsel. You've also prejudged that what they have to say is a lie.

Postmodern "tolerance" says, "Every religion points a way to the same heaven—they're just different methods of getting there." Now you've made a different kind of judgment—you've judged Jesus as a liar. Hey, if Jesus says that He is the only way to heaven, and you say He's not, you've judged Him.

And the unfortunate response of many Christians—also under the guise of "tolerance"—is to say, "You can go to hell, and I won't say a word because I'm not supposed to challenge your personal convictions." See the problem?

Real tolerance, as defined by God, is refusing to cast immediate judgment on a person (even though they may deserve it) so that you can demonstrate mercy in the mean time. And hopefully you'll get to lead the person to change their lifestyle. Tolerance doesn't mean you call a guilty person innocent—it just means you don't condemn them before they have the opportunity to repent and receive God's forgiveness.

Jesus does not sweep sin under the rug. He doesn't just "tolerate" a world on the wrong path and look with apathy as we plummet into hell. NO! Paul's letter to the Romans says that God's tolerance, kindness, and patience are being demonstrated so that we can all be led to repentance! The type of "tolerance" we seem to promote nowadays, however, will never bring ANYONE to change.

This perversion of true tolerance is one of the most destructive things to have happened to our culture. Jesus hung out with tax collectors, drunkards, and prostitutes; but He did not tolerate sin!

While postmodern tolerance lets sin and the condemned state go unnoticed, godly acceptance says, "Jesus Christ is the only Way, Truth, and Life; but if you don't believe that, I'll still spend time with you so I can prove it through my active love and blameless lifestyle." Postmodern "tolerance" lets another soul walk blindly into hell; but godly tolerance brings that soul alongside so you can have opportunities to speak truth into their hearts and demonstrate the power of a transformed life!

Christians are called to be like Jesus—and that means we must participate in His form of tolerance as well! Godly tolerance builds relationships and draws people to God. Any time a person lets Jesus Christ shine through their life, they will find that people are drawn to His presence in them. People will

be attracted to the divine love expressed through their Christ-like actions. True expressions of God's tolerance—whether expressed through Christ or the Church—always have repentance as the destination.

REPENTANCE THAT LEADS TO UNDERSTANDING

The word “repent” literally means “turn around.” I’ve heard many people say things like, “Repent of your sin;” but I don’t think this really conveys the full picture of repentance like Acts 20:21 does: “...repentance *toward* God.”

To repent is to utterly change your mind and choose to pursue a different form of life. No longer will you live for yourself; now you will live for God. This looks easy on paper, but in practice it’s impossible. Lucky for us, God can do the impossible!

Acts 5:31 reveals that Jesus Christ *gives* repentance. That means it’s not something we can muster up on our own. It is Jesus who rescues us out of the muck and sludge and sets our feet on the solid Rock—which is Himself. Repentance comes from Christ alone—and He is the Truth. When you know the Truth, He makes you free!

Repentance comes when we accept the reality of Truth and see our own sinful lives bent on destruction. We see how we’ve fallen short of Truth. This leads to a genuine inner sorrow—and that sorrow helps us desire change.

The trouble is that we are personally powerless to change our lives into a reflection of Truth. The Truth—Jesus Christ—is just too perfect and holy for us to match in our own strength. That’s why repentance is called a gift—we must depend on Him.

There is a partnership issue here: Jesus won’t grant you the gift of repentance if you don’t really want it! And for that matter, once He’s given you the ability to repent, you need to live accordingly!

Matthew 3:8—*Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God (NLT).*

You must choose openly that you want to give up your prideful and self-centered ways of living in order to please God and serve His purposes. God will bless this choice with the gift of repentance if you will rely on the sacrifice of Jesus to make it available to you! “Ask and you shall receive!” And don’t stop with the decision itself—go on to live a life befitting of the repentance you received!

This kind of genuine repentance and the corresponding action will undoubtedly lead you to a true understanding of God.

UNDERSTANDING THAT LEADS TO TRANSFORMATION

Americans tend to think the word “understanding” means “mental comprehension.” But in the language and culture of the Bible, it refers to experience. It was commonly accepted that you could not truly understand something until you experienced it.

Given this, do you truly understand God? Do you experience Him and encounter Him regularly in your life? If you are not aware of His presence in your

life right now, you need to ask Him for the gift of repentance because you have separated yourself from Him. Repentance in the form we discussed will always lead to an encounter with God; and thus we can come to truly know and understand Him. Repentance leads to understanding!

It has always been God's intent that we would understand Him. He wants us to have a relationship with Him and to know Him. The more we know God, the clearer we can see the Truth. The clearer we see the Truth—Jesus—the more we are able to become like Him. In this way, understanding leads us to genuine transformation.

TRANSFORMATION THAT LEADS TO HOLINESS

An experiential relationship with God will always lead to genuine transformation. I'm not talking about mere "changes." Anybody can make changes in their lives. Anybody can choose to do more for their spouse or clean up more around the house. Anybody can stop a habit if they really truly want to and they have the right support systems in place. Change is nothing supernatural.

But real transformation is something different altogether! A caterpillar can't squeeze out some wings any more than a monkey can. But the caterpillar CAN put themselves to rest in a cocoon and allow the natural design of God to take action. Before you know it, you've got a butterfly. And that creature lives a completely new life! It doesn't eat leaves; it drinks nectar. It doesn't crawl; it flies!

Are you still crawling around, trying to make changes in your life? Or are you encountering God so that He can increase your understanding of Truth? If you know the Truth—if you KNOW Jesus—the Truth will set you free! You'll be living as a new creation who is utterly different than you used to be.

When you know the Truth, He tells you the truth about yourself! The lies you may have believed all your life begin disintegrating. Suddenly you see the reality that you have a purpose as God's child, and you begin to live accordingly!

***Romans 12:2**—Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is (NLT).*

God's tolerance leads to repentance; and true repentance enables you to know and understand God. Understanding God will lead naturally into genuine transformation. And what are you transformed into? The likeness of Jesus Christ! You will take on the nature of Truth! You will be holy!

PURSuing HOLINESS

The ultimate result of God's living and active Truth in our lives is holiness—also known as "purity" or even "wholeness." He works out a process in us called "sanctification." To sanctify something is to make it holy. God's Truth—Jesus Christ—sanctifies us.

John 17:17—*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth (NKJV).*

“Word” in this passage comes from the Greek word *logos*, which happens to be the same word used to describe Jesus in John chapter 1: “In the beginning was the Word (*logos*)...and the Word (*logos*) became flesh...” Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is the Truth of God. Only by Jesus can we be sanctified! Jesus Christ makes us holy.

So what exactly is holiness? It is to be devoted to the service of God. It is to be morally and spiritually blameless. It is to be set apart from the broken condition of the world around us.

That’s right! We are called to be separate from the rest of the world, and it’s a lifelong process. Hebrews 10:14 says that through the one sacrifice of Jesus dying on the cross, God has permanently made perfect those who are being made holy. In other words, our spirits have already been made perfect in the sight of God—which is why we can have a relationship with Him. Sanctification is the process by which the rest of us comes into line with the Truth already being expressed in our spirits.

As we live our lives in relationship with Truth, we are made more and more holy. Transformation comes as we put more and more of our sin-sick lives to death so that Jesus Christ can live through us and express His holiness.

In Christ, we are set apart from the world. This doesn’t mean that we are removed from the world but rather that we are set free from its influence on our choices and actions. Consider the following prayer Jesus prayed:

John 17:14-19—*I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified (NIV).*

Jesus is talking about the difference between insulation and isolation. American Christians have a tendency toward isolation. Many believe that if we isolate ourselves from the world, we’ll be more pleasing to God. So they leave all their unbelieving friends. They begin doing business only with people who they know are Christians. They separate themselves from the world, but they do it in fear.

God’s method of separation from the world is not a matter of isolation, but of insulation. He becomes our stronghold and our refuge. He protects us from the godless systems of this world. He’s like wearing a spacesuit on the moon—we can still interact with our environment; it’s just that we’re kept safe from the negative effects! Trouble doesn’t come when we interact with the world—it comes when we decide that we can compromise and return to our old ways of sin and death. Guess what—that’s like taking off your helmet on the moon! Choose life, and don’t abandon the gift that God has given you!

To those who rely on their own strength, isolation may be the only way to keep from slipping up. And to be honest, for the brand new Christian, it's often best to avoid former relationships for a while until you have strengthened your personal convictions about maintaining relationship with God. But the ultimate goal for any Christian is to be so free from sin that we don't need to avoid people who don't yet know God. We who are in Christ are insulated from the world. We need not fear Satan or his grip on the world. We live safe and free—insulated by God; set apart by Truth.

THE SOURCE OF HOLINESS

Ever heard of the Holy Spirit? After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit. First Jesus had to die so that our sins could be put to death. But then the Holy Spirit had to come so that we could effectively serve God.

See, there are two sides to holiness. On one hand it is separation from the world, and on the other hand it is dedication to the service of God. We first have to encounter the Truth: Jesus. Only then can we be empowered by the Spirit of Truth. Consider these words of Jesus:

***John 16:12-15**—“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (NIV).*

Without the Holy Spirit, we have no way of interacting with Jesus. The Holy Spirit, then, is both the source and stimulus of Truth. He brings us into contact with Christ, and then He guides us through the process to holiness. Who better to help us become holy than the HOLY Spirit?

The Holy Spirit guides us into the fullness of Christ. He doesn't speak on His own. He only speaks what He hears from Jesus. The Holy Spirit makes known to us the depths of Christ's nature so that we can be formed into His image. The Holy Spirit awakens our spiritual senses to encounter God and receive all the blessings of heaven that are ours in Christ! The Holy Spirit empowers us to live lives dedicated to the service of God.

The Holy Spirit—the “Spirit of Truth”—is the One who enables you to know God. His method is to remove the obstacles between you and your Father by convicting you of sin, righteousness, and judgment. It is my prayer that as you read the following chapter, the Holy Spirit will do His work and help you identify areas of your life that might be separating you from the fullness of God.

[NEXT ARTICLE: Obstacles to Intimacy with God](#)