

## Teaching for 9-19-07

### I Tell You the Truth

*I tell you the truth.*

—Jesus

Jesus is the truth, and He is the ultimate truth teller. He is recorded 68 times in the gospels (New Living Translation) as declaring, “I tell you the truth.” He said it often in His teaching to emphasize key points and capture the attention of His listeners.

*I tell you the truth* are five words that are packed with powerfully challenging realities. It may be that we have often quickly glossed over those five words and not allowed the full impact of Jesus’ words to shape our lives. When Jesus says *I tell you the truth*, we had better stop and pay attention. Jesus is warning us that we will hear many things that will contradict His teaching, but that what He speaks is truth for all eternity.

You will never hear anything ever spoken that will more profoundly impact your life than the truth straight from Jesus! Let’s look more closely at the powerful truth of Jesus’ words.

#### The Reality of Truth

The first thing that we must understand is that there *is* such a thing as truth. Right now there is a battle in the Church over this seemingly obvious statement. There are those who would argue that truth can’t always be known. To declare that there is an unbending standard of truth is uncomfortable in a society that values “relative truth.” You get to decide for yourself what is truth, and in many ways the Church has begun to accommodate this belief.

This can be seen in the multitude of sins and compromise in the Church. It is astounding how many people who “name the Name of Jesus Christ” are willing to tolerate premarital sex, abortion, witchcraft, and dabbling in occult activity—even enjoying movies and books that glorify the occult. We can cleverly find some “loophole” in an argument to justify our behavior or cater to our fleshly desires.

But when Jesus said *I tell you the truth*, He was setting before us an uncompromising plumb line based on the righteous standards of a holy God. No matter how much we try to dodge the truth or make excuses, there is a divine standard of truth that we must measure our lives by. We do not measure ourselves according to standards set by others; we measure ourselves by the truth of God’s Holy Word. So when He says He hates a particular sin (and He lists many throughout Scripture), He means it!

#### A Truth Teller

For truth to prevail in any culture, there must be a truth teller. In Jesus’ time, it meant that the Son of God did not adapt His words to fit with the prevailing mood or political correctness of the day. He did not couch His words in a way that would not offend. Jesus considered truth to be a precious and powerful commodity that could not be compromised.

We would never acknowledge that we are “politically correct” in our language in the Church today, but yet how often do we hear the Word of God consistently preached, taught, and spoken with the unqualified conviction that it is the truth of God? If sin remains resident in the lives of people in our churches, then how clear are we being about what is acceptable and unacceptable to God? If people continue to walk in lifestyles of sexual sin, anger, deceit, bitterness, power, control, and witchcraft, they are missing the truth.

Could it be that there are so few truth tellers left in the Church today that sin is simply not exposed to the people? When Jesus said *I tell you the truth*, He did not hint around, hoping that people would “get His drift”

without being too offended. He did not ignore sin and hope it would go away or work itself out. He told the truth when necessary—and in an appropriate way.

### **Qualifications for Truth Telling**

Perhaps you have been confronted by someone who claims to be telling the truth, yet does it in such a vicious way that you feel like you've been assaulted by a gang of thugs. The truth is not some "club" that we can use to bully people into recognizing our agenda or personal crusade. The speaking of truth is a stewardship that carries with it accountability before God for how it is communicated. The truth must be spoken in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Truth must also start with our own lives. We must submit to the truth ourselves before we can expect others to respond to our call to the truth (Matthew 7:3). Paul teaches in Galatians 6 that the speaking of truth and correction must be done in humility—and by those who are spiritual. So before we charge off to use the truth as a weapon against someone we don't like, we must allow the Lord to use that same truth to examine our own lives. Paul also mentions being gentle in truth telling. This does not mean that the truth cannot be spoken forcefully under the power of the Holy Spirit, but we must remember that it is God's truth (Galatians 6:3-4).

### **Receiving the Truth**

Perhaps the greatest test is not whether you can *speak* the truth, but whether you can *receive* the truth. Truth is a divider, and the response to the truth of God will be an indicator of the condition of our hearts. The response will be quite obvious. Truly humble hearts that are seeking to love and follow the Lord will receive truth in humility, and will embrace it as God at work in their lives. Others will oppose the truth and will angrily denounce the message and the messenger. Others may ignore the truth because they choose not to allow it to expose the sin in their lives.

All of us have had opportunity to react to the truth. How we react to the truth presented—whether it comes as we read the Word of God, hear it from the pulpit, or receive it from a caring friend—is an indicator of the state of our hearts before God.

We all have moments of imagining ourselves confronting others with the truth that we think they need to hear. But a heart truly seeking after God will be even more eager to humbly and gratefully receive the truth. David, when confronted by the prophet Nathan, humbled himself and received the truth in brokenness—accepting the consequences of his sin (2 Samuel 12). Saul, on the other hand, sought to justify his sin and never humbly faced the reality of the consequences (1 Samuel 15).

### **We Need Truth Tellers and Truth Receivers**

Today we need those who will humbly—under the direction of the Holy Spirit and in line with the Word of God—speak the truth to a wandering and wayward Church. We also desperately need to be a people who are eager to hear and embrace the truth about ourselves, no matter how painful or embarrassing that may be.

*Lord Jesus, may we join You in telling the truth. Please raise up Your truth tellers—and make us a people who will hear and obey the truth.*