

“CONTINUE IN THE TRUTH”
Psalm 15:1-5, Colossians 1:3-12, 2 Timothy 3:10-17
April 2 & 3, 2022

“In his novel, *A Painted House*, John Grisham describes a Sunday school teacher eulogizing a mean character named Jerry Sisco, who had been killed the night before in a back alley fight after he picked on one person too many.

“In the words of the little boy who had seen the fight with his friend Dewayne: ‘She made Jerry sound like a Christian, and an innocent victim. I glanced at Dewayne, who had one eye on me. There was something odd about this. As Baptists, **we'd been taught from the cradle that the only way you made it to heaven was by believing in Jesus and trying to follow his example in living a clean and moral Christian life. . . . And anyone who did not accept Jesus and live a Christian life simply went to hell.** That's where Jerry Sisco was, and we all knew it.’”¹

Well, that description of our human condition and the grace of God provided to us is in agreement with the way that Psalm 15 tells us of those who may enter into the Temple of the Lord. David states it well, “*A person who obeys God in everything and always does what is right, whose words are true and sincere, and who does not slander others. He does no wrong to his friends nor spreads rumors about his neighbors. He despises those whom God rejects, but honors those who obey the Lord. He always does what he promises, no matter how much it may cost... Whoever does these things will always be secure*” (Psalm 15:1-5). That’s David’s description of those who may enter the House of the Lord.

And the same is true with those who desire to enter into the kingdom of heaven. **We must follow the guidelines set up by the Lord God Almighty in order to receive His blessing for eternal life.** First and foremost, it requires that we believe in Jesus Christ, receive Him as our Savior, and then live according to His teachings and commands. Those who disregard the commands of the Lord, who claim to believe in Jesus but do not follow His teachings, will have a very tough time appealing to the

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 291)

Lord about how or why they should be allowed into His heavenly kingdom. It's not for me to judge if a person is going to heaven or not, but God has laid out His standards that explain it clearly. If a person fails to meet those standards, then God will not allow them into His kingdom.

The Lord tells us in Scripture; *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21). And again, He says, *“Nothing impure will ever enter [the Holy City], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* (Revelation 21:27). **We cannot live any ole way we feel like and expect to be received into the kingdom of heaven.** God has set the guidelines, and only those who follow them will gain access to heaven.

Now this sounds pretty harsh and restrictive. Yet how can our Holy God accept and tolerate in His presence anyone who has sinfulness in their life? God hates sin, and will not allow it in His presence. So those who live according to the ways of the world, in stark contrast to the ways of God, will not be allowed in God’s presence, much less be able to live and abide in the kingdom of heaven.

Folks, we’re not playing by our own rules here! God is the One who has established the guidelines and standards that enable us to receive eternal life and find our place with Him in His House. **We don’t get to set those standards! It is for us to follow God’s standards so that as we remain true and live consistently within His standards,** THEN we will be able to receive the reward He has established for all those who seek Him and follow His ways. Anyone who rejects God, who rebels against His ways, and disregards the teachings of Jesus, the Son of God, and fails to accept Him as Savior and Lord of their life, will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. It’s that cut and dried, plain and simple. If you follow the Lord God, claim Jesu as your Savior, AND follow His teachings and commands laid out for us in the Bible, you will receive eternal life. Nothing else will do!

We hear that echoed in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Colossians. Paul encourages the people to seek the Lord Jesus daily throughout their lives so that they receive the blessings of the Lord. He says, *“We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will, with all the wisdom and understanding that His*

Spirit gives. Then you will be able to live as the Lord wants and will always do what pleases Him. Your lives will produce all kinds of good deeds, and you will grow in your knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength which comes from His glorious power, so that you may be able to endure everything with patience. And with joy give thanks to the father, who has made you fit to have your share of what God has reserved for His people in the kingdom of light.” (Colossians 1:9-12).

If we do not know God, we cannot follow His laws and commandments. If we do not follow His laws and commandments, we will not be given the blessings God has for those who follow Him. If we reject God, He rejects us. If we remain faithful to God through Jesus Christ, He receives us into His heavenly kingdom so that we may delight in His presence through the grace provided for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is only through Jesus that we receive eternal life.

Sadly, here in our United States, we have seen the rise of those who would put God out of the picture. We see the rise of demonic influence in the lives of people who despise and reject God’s ways, inserting instead, the ruinous ways of atheism, humanism, paganism, materialism and socialism into our society. They seek to throw God out of all areas of our lives only to replace God with their own selfish and destructive ways, ways that bring poverty, despair, ruin and death to any who follow them.

Mary Lefkowitz, a professor of classical studies at Wellesley College, states it very well. She says, “The notion that there are many truths might seem well suited to a diverse society. But when everyone is free to define truth as he or she prefers, as at [the present time], the result is an intellectual and moral shouting match in which the people with the loudest voices are most likely to be heard.”²

With the rejection of God’s truth, our world makes up its own “truth” of which to sell to or force onto the people. China is trying to force the false truth upon the people that their leader, Xi Jinping, is the true God, and that no worship of any other god is legal. All people of China must worship him. If people are caught with any Christian media on their phones or computers, if they have connections to any Christian organization, they find their bank accounts frozen or seized, their homes

² (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 283)

taken from them and often their children also removed from the home. And yet, Chinese Christians continue to put their trust and faith in Jesus Christ, and the church is growing. They continue in the truth that Jesus is Lord because they know it is much better than anything we can establish for ourselves.

Afghanistan and several other countries are dominated by Islam, and Christians are highly persecuted, if not martyred for their faith. To be a Christian is to be outcast from your family, to be released from your occupation, to have your house burned down, to have your church razed and the leaders arrested and tortured, and to become the refugees escaping to another country. Yet, they continue in the truth of Jesus as our Savior, convinced that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

And the war against Christians is becoming strong in our own nation. It started back in the 1960s when prayer was kicked out of the schools. Then the 10 Commandments were outlawed in public spaces, including court rooms where they are needed the most. Then there has been a regular influence and introduction and incorporation of anti-Christian books and teachings in schools, even as early as kindergarten.

The war against Christians was only beginning, but now it is active in almost every arena of our society. College campuses are being taken to court for rejecting Christian clubs and groups as being recognized organizations. High schools are disallowing Christian groups. Christian coaches are being fired because they pray after sporting events. Christian homeschools are regularly being attacked or questioned or scrutinized unfairly by the Department of Education. Christians are being taken to court because they practice Christian values in their businesses, not accommodating the demands of the world. Christians are losing their jobs and being forced out of the military because they refuse to follow unjust mandates from the government. Churches are being vandalized and burned. And mass shootings are taking place in houses of worship. But this is nothing new; Christians have always been on the hit list of the world's agenda because **the traditional Christian faith contains the Truth of God's Word, and discloses the standards of God before the world as to what is right and wrong.**

Listen to the way that the Apostle Paul describes it to Timothy. This is 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

(READ 2 Timothy 3:10-17) **Paul experienced the persecution of the world for being a follower of Jesus Christ.** He was threatened with death threats, he was shouted out of the Synagogues, he was attacked and beaten and even stoned to within an inch of his life. He suffered imprisonments, spent many a night in jail, endured shipwrecks and was hauled into court in so many cities that his name was known to all of the governmental leaders across the Roman Empire. **Yet, he continued in his faith in Jesus Christ, convinced that it is only through Jesus that we have real life, and ultimately we find eternal life only through Him.**

Paul is clear, *“Everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted; and evil persons and impostors will keep on going from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves. BUT AS FOR YOU, continue in the truths that you were taught and firmly believe...”* (2 Tim. 3:12-14).

It’s no secret that those who follow the Lord’s standards will be different than the rest of the world, so they will be singled out as being contrary to the ways of the world. When we fail to fall in line with the ways and standards of the world, we will be vilified, ostracized, and ridiculed. But Paul tells us not to be surprised, but rather to *“continue in the truths that we were taught and firmly believe.”* **We are to seek to please God rather than to please Man.** We are to strive to live so differently than the world so that we might be living witnesses for the rest of the world that they may see the benefits of living according to God’s standards. As we use Scripture to guide us and expose the evils of the world, we will provide the world the knowledge of the way of the Lord Jesus that leads to life. And the lives of the people around us will change as they come to know Jesus. Let me give you an example.

“In his book, *More Jesus, Less Religion*, Steve Arterburn writes:

“Some time ago, I read about the work of a Wycliffe Bible translator in a remote village in Papua New Guinea. When the opening chapters of Genesis were first translated into the native language, the attitude toward women in the tribe changed overnight. They had not realized or understood that the woman had been specially formed out of the side of the man. Without even hearing this concept

developed, these people immediately grasped the ideas of equality between the sexes and began adjusting their behavior. The people heard. They believed. They obeyed. They changed. Just like that.

“That change doesn't mean everyone in the tribe immediately came to faith in Christ, however. While they immediately recognized the respect God has for both men and women, the members of this tribe had their own hard-to-abandon gods and superstitions. One of their practices was to spit on the wounds of the sick. Their medicine men were known as the spitters, and they did not want someone like Jesus to take away their status in the village.

“However, the attitude changed as more of the Bible was translated into the tribe's dialect. When translators read the passage where Jesus cured a blind man in a most unusual way, the medicine men pricked up their ears. The Master spit on the ground, made a paste of mud, put it on the man's eyelids, told him to wash it off—and the man was healed. When these tribesmen heard this story in their own language, they saw that Jesus was not against them, but for them. They found one of their own, a Savior who was also a spitter! And they came to the Lord because of this connection.”³

Unless we live differently than the world, how will they come to know the truth of God?

Unless we are willing to “*continue in the truth that we have been taught and believe,*” (2 Tim. 3:14) how will those around us come to understand the standards that God has put before us that enables us to gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven? Unless we boldly stand up to the evils of today, how will the people of our world come to understand that God has something much better than what we have to offer? We must continue living in the ways of God through Jesus Christ so that our world can come to know what God expects.

But how can we continue in the truth? We need to remember that we cannot continue very well on our own. If you've been attending our Wednesday night Lenten studies, you'll know that **we have to have Christ Jesus at the center of our lives.** Without Him we have no direction or purpose in our lives. Without Jesus with us, inside of us, leading us as our Savior, our bent is to do what we want,

³ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, pg. 244-245)

when we want it, to satisfy our human cravings and desires, no matter if it hurts someone else or not. Without Jesus inside of us at the center of our lives, we wander aimlessly, lost, alone, hurt, angry and empty.

So we have God's Word to guide us and direct our lives as a *"lamp to our feet and a light to our path"* (Psalm 119:105). The Word of God teaches us the truth, helps us to rebuke error, enables us to correct faults, and gives us instruction on how we can live rightly before the Lord. This enables us to serve God being fully qualified and equipped to do all kinds of good in our world (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

But we also need to be people of prayer, staying connected to God so that He can lead us into righteousness, for *"the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective"* (James 5:16). Unless we have communication with the Lord our God, we can interpret His Word inaccurately, taking verses out of context and doing great damage against one another. When we have no connection with God in prayer, we do what is right in our own minds, even if we have God's Word. Prayer opens up our eyes to begin to see the needs that are around us as we lift up adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplications to the Lord.

It is also important that we have fellowship with other believers who *"stir us on to love and good deeds"* (Hebrews 10:25). Fellowship provides opportunity to support and encourage and love one another so that we can mature in our faith and live as servants for the Lord. Without fellowship in our lives, we become isolated, and that often leads us to discouragement, depression and even despair or hopelessness. Fellowship gives us the knowledge that we're not alone in our journey of faith, and that others have been where we are and can help us stay on the journey toward life.

It is in these ways that we become, and remain, obedient Christians in action, faithfully continuing in the truths we have learned and believe. As obedient followers of Jesus, we can address those who seek to separate us from Jesus, or to eliminate the truth of Jesus all together.

Nancy Cheatham, of Olathe, Kansas, explains it this way. "My sister bought a new car that was loaded with high-tech options. The first time she drove the car in the rain, she turned a knob she thought

would start the windshield wipers. Instead a message flashed across the dash: "Drive car in 360 degrees." She had no idea what that meant, and so when she got home she read the car manual.

“She learned that while trying to turn on the windshield wipers she had inadvertently turned off the internal compass, and the car had lost its sense of direction. To correct the problem, the car had to be driven in a full circle, pointed north, and then the compass had to be reset.

“Each time we gather to worship, we are resetting our internal compass. [When we worship] we establish "true north" in our soul, remembering who God is and what his truth proclaims.”⁴ By joining together in worship with other Christians, we are exposed to God’s Word, telling us what is good and right in God’s eyes, we are reconnected to God in prayer, listening to His guidance as to what we need to do, and we encourage each other in fellowship so that we might boldly live for the Lord in all we do and say. In this way we can become the evangelists to our world, telling them and showing them all that Jesus invites us to do. Then, we demonstrate the difference that living according to God’s standards makes in our lives.

When we remain connected to one another as the church we encourage each other to continue in the truth of Jesus Christ, and we can fight together against the evils of our day so that everyone has the chance to come to know the love and grace of the Lord our God. Let’s pray...

Father, thank You for establishing this body we know as the Church. As we profess our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, help us to continue to seek His truth in our lives. Give us the courage to live for Him each day, so that by our witness, others will see His great love through us and be drawn to Him. Keep calling us closer to You so that we might grow in our faith, be strong in our witness, and be encouraging for others to come to know You, too. Thank You for Your Word that guides us, for prayer that keeps us focused on You, for fellowship that supports and builds up, and for the opportunities we have to draw all people to You. Use us, grow us, challenge us, and enable us to live each day for You, for we pray this all in the Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

⁴ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, pg. 306)