

Absolute Truth – Fight or Flight Part 1

By David Harrell

Preached on: Sunday, June 30, 2013

Once again, it is a great privilege to be able to minister the Word of God to you this morning. We are continuing our study of spiritual maturity, the dangers of being banished to an island of spiritual immaturity. We want to guard against that. This morning, I want to speak to you about the issue of truth, absolute truth. In fact, I've titled my discourse to you this morning "Absolute Truth – Fight or Flight."

We will be looking at various passages of Scripture today. Before we do, I want to ask you a few questions. Do you take seriously the fact that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, according to 1 John 5:19? Do you believe that? Do you believe that there is, therefore, an ongoing battle with the devil in your life, in the world in which we live? The one who Jesus calls "the father of lies." Do you ever ask yourself, where am I deceived? Where do I believe a lie? Perhaps as a Christian, do you ever ask yourself, where have I redefined spiritual truth to make it fit my own desires and my opinions? Where do I compromise truth? Or, where do I really proclaim the truth? Where can others see me protecting the truth? Do I fight for it or do I flee from it? If the answer is "I fight for it," then I would ask you what is your battle plan? Do you know what your battle plan is? Where are you actively engaging the enemy?

That's what we want to look at today because this is a very, very important issue. Frankly, the immature and naïve will not see any of this. They will see the Christian life as just kind of a fun thing, kind of a walk in the park, so to speak. They will not see it as a battle and, therefore, they will fall victim to deception and they will cower in retreat when it comes time to proclaim and protect the truth. You see, Satan wants us to believe lies that will damn our souls. And, because Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light, he will give us lies that are so appealing to our natural flesh that they will appear exceedingly fair, moral, even righteous. Appealing to the lusts of our eyes, the lust of the flesh, the boastful pride of life.

For example, two of the most despicable abominations that offend our most holy God is the murder of innocent children and homosexuality. We see this all through his Word, yet we live in a country where most people now increasingly justify both. After all, a woman needs to have the right to choose; it's her body. Or, we will hear, we need to protect the homosexuals from discrimination. After all, we don't want to treat anybody unfairly and so we have more and more legislation that really redefines morality to try to make this acceptable.

The problem with these two issues, along with so many others, is that these things are a lie. These are Satanic lies. God has very clearly said in the sixth Commandment that murder is absolutely wrong; it is a violation of his holy law. And repeatedly, throughout Scripture, we read how homosexuality is an inverse of the moral order; it's an abomination to God. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 we read that homosexuals that practice this will never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

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But man hates the truth because he is at enmity with God. For this reason, we read, for example in Romans 1 that the the wrath of God is poured out upon every man, every woman, every society, even a nation that rejects God. We read that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth,” the truth of who God is, the truth of his Word. This is called “the wrath of divine abandonment” where God just gives man over to the consequences of his iniquity. And as a result of that, we even look in our own country and we see a moral and economic freefall.

In Romans 1 we see that there is a progression of how God gives man over to his sin. First, he says, that he gives them over” to the lusts of their hearts to impurity.” This speaks of sexual sin where people dishonor the body and we are now examples of the sexual revolution that began, especially back in the 60s. Secondly, the progression moves on. He says that God gives them over “to degrading passions.” The text says there that “women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural.” He goes on to say “in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” And, of course, we can look at the results of homosexuality and see that that has unleashed the hideous epidemic of AIDS upon the world.

Then the third stage of God’s giving man over to sin is that he gives them over to “a depraved mind,” a mind that is capable of believing and condoning every imaginable abomination. A mind that ultimately hates God and loves sin. As a result, we see a culture that will redefine morality to fit what it believes is the truth. This is exactly what happened in Ancient Judah. For this reason, in Isaiah 5:20 God rebukes them and says, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness.” You see, here is how it works, my friends: Satan deceives, man believes and then God abandons. Man condemns what God affirms and so God gives them over to darkened hearts, hardened hearts, to believe Satanic lies.

Satan’s greatest target for deception is in the realm of truth, saving truth, spiritual truth. You will recall all the way back in the Garden of Eden, Satan had a cunning, a diabolical plan, to somehow seduce man and bring sin into the world. And he focused on two things: deceiving man about God’s character and God’s Word, to doubt the goodness of God, the character of God and then to doubt the authority, even the infallibility of his Word. As a result, we have seen many professing Christians succumb to all manner of deception. And I want you to ask yourselves this morning, am I in that category somewhere in my life?

We must remember that from the beginning there has been a war against the truth, spiritual truth, a concept that the world considers laughable. But, may I remind you, that truth exists. Truth is an ontological and objective reality that exists in the universe because it emanates from our immutable and omniscient God who is truth and he has

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revealed truth to us in his Word, the Bible. For example, Scripture has revealed that Jesus Christ is the Creator, the Sustainer of all things and that he was the Living Word that became flesh and dwelt among us and the Word of God says he was full of grace and truth. He even said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

My friends, whether we know it, whether we understand it, whether we believe it, whether we like it or not, truth exists because God exists and he is the source of all truth. Because he is omniscient, truth encompasses all things. Because he is immutable, truth never changes. Because he is holy, truth will uphold righteousness. Because he is Sovereign, having ordained the end from the beginning, his truth will accomplish all that he has decreed. Because he created us to give him glory, truth is glorious. And because his lovingkindness is everlasting, truth will provide for us as sinners to be reconciled to a holy God that loves us. But, the world hates the truth and, therefore, they cannot say with the Psalmist in Psalm 115:1, “Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your mercy, because of Your truth.”

Think how the world hates truth. Imagine if our President were to have a special delivery on television and he said something like this, “My friends, the truth is, God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. The truth is, that the Bible is the inspired Word of the Living God, the only source of spiritual truth; all other documents are lies. The truth is, all religions except biblical Christianity have been inspired by Satan and they are false. The truth is, all humanity sinned in Adam and, therefore, all stand guilty before a holy God. The truth is, that God in his infinite love and mercy and grace provided a way for sinful man to be reconciled unto himself. The truth is, that God sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be a sacrifice to sin, to be the substitute for all who would put their faith in him. The truth is, that the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. The truth is, there is no other name in heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. The truth is, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The truth is, both heaven and hell are real and all who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and serve him will be condemned to an eternal hell. The truth is, Jesus Christ is the Messiah King of Israel and he will physically return in power and great glory to judge the nations of the earth. The truth is, that today the world is being prepared for the Antichrist and according to the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2 beginning in verse 9, he is ‘the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.’ And for this reason, ‘God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.’”

Imagine if he said, “The truth is, God once destroyed the entire world with a world-wide flood because of sin but, according to 2 Peter 3:7, ‘the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.’”

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Imagine if our President then would go on to say, “This means that anyone who rejects these truths, rejects God because truth and God are inseparable.” We cannot make up our own truth. We cannot create arbitrarily our own reality. Truth is not determined on the basis of our experience, on the basis of our intuition, on the basis of our personal preferences. Truth is not determined by majority opinion. Truth is not determined by Presidents. Truth is not determined by legislatures or philosophers, or Supreme Court justices. Our opinions have nothing to do with truth. So, when we come to the Word of God, we don’t say, “What does this mean to me?” but we ask, “What does this mean to God who authored it?”

Well, of course, if our President were to say all of these things that are true, he would probably be impeached within the week. Why? Because sinful man hates the truth; it is offensive to him. But, aren’t you thankful that by God’s grace the Spirit has taken the scales off of our eyes and we see the truth for what it is. It’s the truth that liberates. It’s the truth that has given us eternal life and yet the world hears it and they sneer, they laugh uncontrollably and they mock, they malign and then they scheme in silence to somehow silence people that believe the Word of God. And they do this because of their nature. According to Romans 3:10, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS.” And in verse 18, he says, “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

You see, friends, man has an innate hatred for God and this manifested in our culture’s aversion to truth. Paul says in Romans 8:7 that “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.” Until a man or a woman is born-again, he is unable to see the truth.

Now, because the world hates God and his truth, many Christians also succumb to the way the world views truth and, therefore, they compromise the truth in order to be accepted. The attitude is basically this: can’t we all just get along? And the answer is: no, we can’t just all get along because Satan is constantly trying to deceive man by distorting the truth and replacing it with lies. This is why Jesus said that “true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.” This means, dear friends, that as Christians we are at war with deception. This means we are warriors for the truth. This means that we must be engaged in a battle for sound doctrine. Does that describe you? Do you understand how important this is in your Christian life? Do you understand that your flesh actually prefers lies over the truth? This is why so many Christians just make up stuff. This is why so many Christians believe things that are just blatantly false.

According to 2 Timothy 4, beginning in verse 3, we are warned of this. He says, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” So, I would

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challenge you this morning, as we look at these issues, to ask yourself, what truths have I rejected? What myths have overtaken me without me really even realizing it?

But, may I suggest that perhaps the greatest myth of all is this: truth is really not that important, it's certainly not worth fighting for. Such an attitude will banish you to an island of spiritual infancy. But, my friends, this is the mindset of contemporary evangelicalism. All you have to do is go to the Christian bookstore and you will see that. In fact, one lady that works at one of them here locally said that she was going to have to leave because she was so disgusted with the false teaching that was being sold there in the store and, in fact, she has left.

But, the attitude today is one of being tolerant of everybody regardless of what they believe. You say $2 + 2$ is 5, that's okay. I think it's six, other people think it's seven, it really doesn't matter as long as we all get along. So, the attitude is: let's all be agreeable. Let's all find common ground and affirm others wherever possible. Let's dialogue with opposing views, those that have differing faiths. Don't be dogmatic, don't have doctrinal preaching. Let's replace that with conversations. There are many churches where if you were to come into them right now we would just be having a give-and-take conversation. Let's recognize that we all live in a highly pluralistic culture. So, we all need to be flexible, willing to compromise with others. Let's not be so arrogant as to think that there is absolute truth. Let's don't be bigots that believe what God says. Just don't be some naïve Bible-thumper. Let's avoid offending at all cost. Don't hold too tightly to your understanding of truth, that's arrogant. Be humble. Admit that we really don't know a lot of things spiritually.

That's the mood today. It's the mood to pursue doctrinal minimalism. Let's find the lowest common denominator theologically so that we can all agree upon something. Let's all be cordial. Let's all be agreeable. Let's all be amiable. Don't challenge, confront or seek to correct others. To be sure, that kind of mindset will promote ecumenical tranquility but it will also promote soul damning error. It will fill buildings, it will even fill stadiums but it will not build the church which is to be the pillar and the support of the truth.

I wish to refute this mindset especially in evangelicalism today by examining three things: we want to look at the example of Jesus, the exhortation of Jude and then we want to look at practical ways we can fight for truth. We will look at the first two this morning, the third the next time we are together. It's my prayer that each of you will examine your life in light of these great truths and be engaged in the battle for truth and not run from it.

Take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 4. First we want to look at the example of Jesus. You would think that if God truly advocates the modern evangelical mindset of conforming to the culture rather than confronting it, of having conversations with those who have a different world view rather than refuting their position, if this all true, you would think you would find that in the life and the ministry of Jesus, but I would submit to you, that you see just the opposite. If you will look at Matthew 4, especially verse 17.

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Let me give you the context here. Jesus is beginning his ministry and the very first thing he does is blasts his self-righteous Jewish brethren by exhorting them to repent. Notice in verse 17, we read, “From that time Jesus began to,” dialogue with the Jews. Is that what it says? He began to have a conversation. He began to try to build consensus with them. No, it says, “From that time Jesus began to preach.” He didn’t begin to dispute or argue or debate. There is no indication that he tries to dance around any issues that might offend people. It says that “Jesus began to preach.” And the word simply means “to publicly proclaim the truth.” Not offer some helpful suggestions and opinions worthy of consideration. Preaching is, biblically, the authoritative proclamation of divine truth.

I recall a lady who came to our church several years ago and she didn’t like the phrase in our statement of belief that says, “We believe that the Word of God is objective propositional revelation verbally inspired in every word and is absolutely inerrant in the original documents.” She especially disliked the phrase “propositional revelation.” By the way, a proposition is a logical statement that affirms or denies something as being either true or false with no middle ground. She insisted that such a statement was arrogant, it was too black-and-white, it’s too restrictive, it’s too offensive to those who might disagree and she said, “I just can’t embrace that kind of a mindset.” She preferred what we call the post-modern hermeneutics of humility that favors uncertainty, favors flexibility over truth in propositional form.

In the Introduction to his book “A Generous Orthodoxy,” Brian McLaren who was one of the leaders of the avant-garde evangelical movement known as the “Emergent Church” echoes the same kind of mindset. He said this, “I have gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous and unclear reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated. And that shock and obscurity, playfulness and intrigue, carefully articulated, often stimulate more thought than clarity.”

Contrast that with the attitude of our Lord Jesus when he described the purpose of the Holy Spirit that would come into the world in John 16:8. He says, “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” And in verse 13, he says, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.” In other words, he will guide you into propositional revelation, statements that will affirm or deny something as being true or false. My friends, how can we possibly be saved, how can we possibly be sanctified apart from the truth? “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth. Thy Word is truth.”

Back to the text, “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Repent. It literally means to completely change the direction that you are going and proceed in a different direction. In this case, you must completely change your perspective on sin, on righteousness and judgment. In other words, he’s saying, “There is a right way and there is a wrong way. Your way is wrong. I want to tell you the right way. Your opinion is wrong. Your attitude and your heart is wrong. The direction of your life is wrong. Your religion is wrong. And unless you

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change, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” He says, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” In other words, “The King has arrived. He’s standing right before you. I am the Son of God, the promised Messiah. I am here to usher in the age of righteousness, to establish the long promised earthly kingdom, to establish my covenant people Israel in their land forever so that I can reign upon the throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords.”

But we know, unfortunately, that they did not believe the truth. They did not repent. They crucified their Messiah and the earthly kingdom was postponed for a period of time. We are still awaiting it. Of course, now the spiritual kingdom exists in the hearts of those who have believed in him, all who have believed his authoritative proclamation and have repented.

Beloved, this is what we are to do: we are to proclaim, we are to preach the truth. When I come into the pulpit I have to say, “Thus sayeth the Lord.” It’s not my opinion. This is God’s Word that must be preached. We must preach a message of repentance. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You must embrace the Gospel or you will be damned.

Of course, we are never to be harsh or pugnacious. We read that we are to manifest a “spirit of gentleness” in Galatians 6:1. Paul even urged Timothy to pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love and patience and gentleness,” in 1 Timothy 6:11. But he also exhorted him to “fight the good fight of faith,” in verse 12. We are, according to Titus 3, to speak evil of “no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.” We read according to 2 Timothy 2 that “a servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome but be gentle to all, able to teach, be patient,” but he goes on to add, “in humility correcting those who are in opposition if God perhaps will grant them repentance so that they may know the truth.” In Galatians 1 we read how Paul strongly condemned those who were preaching a different, a distorted Gospel, even within the church, contrary to what the Apostles taught saying “let him be accursed.”

My friends, when Satan’s wolves attack the truth, it is time to get out the rod and to go to war. What loving father or mother would allow their children to be attacked by wolves? What pastor would allow his sheep to be attacked by wolves in sheep’s clothing, heretics that speak error? There is a time to protect the innocent and the ignorant and the confused even from the roaring lion that seeks to devour.

Let me give you another example how Jesus confronted error. We see this in John 2. The context there is Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the first of four Passovers that would span his earthly ministry. Instead of him befriending the religious elite of Israel, instead of him finding some common ground to begin a collegial conversation and hopefully build consensus, we read this, beginning in verse 14, “And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep

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and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, ‘Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise.’” So much for finding common ground. We see the same kind of righteous rampage at the end of his earthly ministry immediately after his triumphal entry and just before his crucifixion. You see, my friends, Jesus was constantly at war against deception.

Another example in Matthew 23. We have there recorded his last major public discourse. It was hardly a cordial collegial give-and-take of opposing views for the purpose of building consensus. Instead, we see that Jesus spoke to the crowds, to his disciples and here he absolutely excoriates the Scribes and the Pharisees. He repeatedly said, “Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Woe to you blind guides. You fools. You blind men. You blind guys who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” Verse 33 he says, “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?”

We can go to John 6 and read of the massive crowds clamoring after Jesus. The very thing that modern evangelical pragmatists long for, to have a massive audience, the more the merrier. But, what does Jesus do? He exposes their selfish motives in following him. He exposes their phony religion, their works righteousness religion. He affirms his deity and he explains to them how that he is the only way that they can have eternal life, through faith in him. And even goes so far as to tell them the truth about the utter sovereignty of God in salvation. Verse 65, he says, “no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” And as a result, in verse 66, “many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.”

Obviously Jesus did not understand the methods of the seeker sensitive movement. See, beloved, Jesus spoke the truth regardless of how people might respond. Certainly, we long for people to respond positively but we know ultimately that's a work of grace. On numerous occasions I've had people say to me, “Pastor, I can't believe that you tell people that Jesus is the only way. Nobody's going to buy that message these days.” I've had many of them say, “I can't believe that when you come to these passages that speak about the sovereignty of God and salvation that you actually preach on those things. Doesn't that turn people off?” And the answer is, “Well, yeah, of course it does.” There have been literally hundreds, maybe even thousands of people who have become aware of this church and want absolutely nothing to do with it. What does that have to do with the truth? I'm not called to tickle ears, I'm called to give you God's propositional revelation.

Beloved, Jesus does not call us to take up physical arms and go to war against people but he does call us to take up spiritual arms and go to war against deception. 2 Corinthians 10:3, Paul says, “For though we walk in the flesh,” in other words, though we have

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human limitations, “we do not war according to the flesh for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” By the way, those weapons all through Scripture are twofold: the Word and prayer. The Word and prayer. He goes on to say, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.” Beloved, this is why we are told in Ephesians 6:17 to take up “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” This is how we parry the blows of the enemy with respect to his deceptions. What you must hear if you are ever going to grow in Christ, is that we are at war. Christianity is under attack. Truth is under attack. You and your families are under attack and you must learn how to defend the truth as well as proclaim it.

In order to better understand this, let’s look secondly at the exhortation of Jude. You want to turn to that little epistle right before the Book of Revelation. You have a fascinating text here. Jude says this in verse 3, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” It’s interesting. What he’s saying here is that he changed his mind. He was originally going to address the issue of doctrines pertaining to our salvation, a glorious topic, but he was so burdened over the issue of false teachers invading the church that he wants to speak to us now about contending earnestly for the faith. You can just feel the sense of urgency here that is being prompted by the Spirit of God. And rightfully so because later on, in Revelation 2-3, we discover that five out of the seven churches in Asia Minor were already in varying stages of apostasy. If that was his burden in those early days of the church, how much more should it be our burden today when because of television and radio and the internet and publishing, heretics can spew their venom of error every minute of the day and impact literally millions.

So, he appeals to believers saying, in verse 3 at the end, “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Let’s look at this closely. To contend earnestly: this is a power packed Greek verb, *epagōnizomai*. It literally means “to agonize against,” and it conveys the idea of defending or struggling with all of your might. It means to battle with the intensity of a wrestling match. In fact, the grammar indicates that it is a continuous exertion. In other words, there’s no sleeping at your post here. This is an intense strenuous life-long battle. Mature saints will understand this and live consistently with it. Immature saints will not.

What are we to contend earnestly for? What’s the cause? He says, “for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” What is this? It is the body of divine revelation, the truth of God, the objective truth of the Gospel that encompasses our common salvation. In fact, in verse 17, he says, “remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And this, notice, has been entrusted once for all. Very interesting in the original language. It means that something has been done for all time with lasting results that never needs any repetition. Once for all delivered. The grammar, an aorist passive participle, indicates that this is an act that has been completed in the past and it has no continuing elements; it is over, it’s been completed in the past. In

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other words, if I can put it this way, there's no more special revelation so when somebody says to you, "Well, God told me this. God told me that." No, sorry, God didn't tell you that. Maybe a demon told you that or you're making it up, but what God has said is it's been delivered once and for all and it's right here.

Also, interestingly enough, once for all delivered is in the passive voice which means the faith was not discovered by men but it was given to men by God. Therefore, we didn't make it up, we didn't discover it even. It was given to us. As it was once delivered, he says, to the saints, the ones whom God has set apart for himself in eternity past. So what he is saying here, beloved, I have a burden for you. You must understand that we need to continuously fight with all of our might to be able to interpret and understand and proclaim and protect the truth of God that's contained in the Holy Scriptures that have been revealed to us once for all time and eternity never again needing to be repeated. Abide in truth and that was not discovered by men but given to men by God and delivered to the ones whom he has set apart for himself in eternity past. Beloved, God's Word is his final, all-sufficient revelation to man and it alone, his authoritative and binding upon the church. And for this, we must contend.

The Apostle Paul understood this relentless battle for the truth. It was at the every end of his life that he had the faith and joy of saying in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." I can only hope and pray that my life, your life will approximate such a glorious testimony. When we fail to contend earnestly apostasy will inevitably gain ground in our lives and wreak havoc in the church, wreak havoc in our family and since it's inception, the church has had to battle against false teachers who attack the truth of Scripture on many fronts.

Over the years, and especially here of late, I have once again pondered this tsunami of seeker sensitive movements that have brought such destruction to so many churches around the world, the breeding ground for apostasy. A movement that knows nothing of contending earnestly for the faith. It's been over ten years now since Rick Warren released "The Purpose Driven Life." I was reading, the other day, that it has sold over 32 million copies and has been translated into 50 different languages but there are more than 30,000 churches that have participated in the accompanying "40 Days of Purpose" study and campaign. Now, Warren, has implemented the "Purpose Driven Network" in 162 countries. That book has been selected as one of the "100 Christian Books that Changed the Twentieth Century." Of course, as you may know, its principles caused a fledgling little church in Southern California that was meeting in a house, to grow to now over 22,000 people. Although, I would humbly submit that it does not meet the criteria of a church according to the New Testament. Moreover, God's standard for success is never numbers, it's always faithfulness to the truth of his Word. Yet, millions of people prefer Warren's model and others that have added to it, over God's. A model where the message and the method are determined by the seeker not the Savior. Where entertainment replaces exposition. Where pleasing the audience has a higher priority than pleasing God. Where the Gospel is so diluted that it is beyond recognition when you compare it to what is written in the New Testament. But, it certainly makes it easy to believe. In fact, the

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Absolute Truth – Fight or Flight Part 1

By David Harrell

Preached on: Sunday, June 30, 2013

clear Gospel message cannot be found in “The Purpose Driven Life.” A movement where the sovereignty of God’s grace and salvation and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit to save sinners by the power of the Word are all denied.

In his “Shepherd’s Conference” seminar “evaluating the church growth movement,” Dr. Rick Holland identifies several other problems with Warren’s seeker sensitive model. Again, thousands and thousands of churches have now embraced. Paraphrasing what he says: Warren assumes that the primary purpose of Sunday morning church services is to reach out to unbelievers. Yet, in the New Testament, we see the reason the church gathers is to worship and be equipped. Evangelism is to primary take place in the life of the believer. Matthew 28:18-20: as you go, you make disciples rather than being the main focus of a Sunday morning service. Warren assumes that unbelievers are “seeking” yet Scripture says there is no one who seeks for God, Romans 3:11. Warren assumes that the Gospel can be made inoffensive to unbelievers if presented correctly. And yet, Scripture teaches that the Gospel is inherently, by its very nature, offensive to those who hate God. Warren assumes that the style of music in a church is one of the most important keys to reaching the culture. And yet, in the New Testament, we see that there is nothing said about that; it is completely silent about this so-called critical element for church growth. Warren assumes the large numbers indicate true success. He even says, “never criticize any method that God is blessing.” And he interprets the blessing as that which draws a crowd. But, again, we never see a New Testament church affirmed for its numbers. What about the prophet Jeremiah’s ministry? He faithfully proclaimed the truth his entire life, saw no fruit. I guess he was a failure.

I give that example to say, how did we get here? How could so many people be that undiscerning? The answer is, because people failed to contend earnestly for the faith. We especially failed to contend earnestly against the attack of the inerrancy of Scripture by theological liberalism. Let me give you a definition of inerrancy. This is very important to see how the trend has worked. According to Paul Feinburg, “The doctrine of biblical inerrancy is the claim that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted, will be shown to be without error in all that they affirm to the degree of precision intended whether that affirmation relates to doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, etc.”

Let me give you an example of what happens when you disregard the inerrancy of Scripture and this is what has really been the legacy of theological liberalism. Dr. Robert Bracher was chief translator of the American Bible Society’s “Good News for Modern Man.” Maybe some of you have that on your shelf. You will probably get rid of it when you finish hearing what I have to say. He was a former Southern Baptist missionary and he was invited to speak at the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention on March, 1981. He addressed the topic “Biblical Authority for the Church Today.” Here’s what Bracher said, “Only willful ignorance or intellectual dishonesty can account for the claim that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. No truth-loving, God-respecting, Christ-honoring believer should be guilty of such heresy. To invest the Bible with the qualities of inerrancy and infallibility is to idolatize it, to transform it into a

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false god. No one,” he goes on to say, “seriously claims that all the words of the Bible are the very words of God. If someone does so, it is only because that person is not willing thoroughly to explore its implications.” He writes, “Words spoken by Jesus in Aramaic in the 30s of the first century and preserved in writing in Greek 35-50 years later do not necessarily wield compelling or authentic authority over us today. The locus of scriptural authority is not the words themselves, it is Jesus Christ as the Word of God who is the authority for us to be and to do.”

So, what’s the logical consequence of this? If you believe that the Word of God is something that contains a mixture of some truth and some error and you don’t really know where it is - by the way, a concept that is totally foreign to Scripture itself - then there’s no need to be careful of how you handle the Word of God. An errant text will obviously be devoid of any spiritual power so interacting with it, calling people to submit to it, would be a waste of time. Exegesis, applying the principles of hermeneutics and an expository preaching would be utterly absurd.

I was talking to a man the other day who is heavily involved in part of the Southern Baptist Movement, he was saying that most of the Southern Baptist churches in the middle Tennessee area are dwindling, are dying out. Only the big seeker sensitive churches are exploding. And I asked him, “I’m curious. Do any of those men, those pastors, preach expositively?” And his response, with kind of a smirk, was, “Oh no, nobody does that.”

You see, the preacher and teacher must become the higher authority to determine the true meaning of Scripture if, in fact, the Word of God is filled with some errors. So, no one can honestly say, “Thus sayeth the Lord.” Because God has not been effective in communicating truth, we have to back off and say, “We really don’t know for sure, so it may mean something different for you than it does for me. So, once again, let’s just all get together.”

My friends, this is the legacy of theological liberalism. This is what happens when you fail to contend earnestly for the faith. There are thousands of other “isms” promoted by thousands of other false teachers that are equally devastating. Perhaps this will awaken you a little bit to the importance of this topic.

The next time we get together, we will look at some practical ways to fight for the truth as a church and as individuals. But I want to leave you with this thought: I want to challenge you to challenge yourself. Ask yourself the question, where might I be deceived in my Christian life? Where are my children being deceived? Maybe for some of you, you don’t know Christ. You need to ask, do you really believe what you think you believe? Do you really believe that the Word of God is faultless? By the way, I can answer that for you: you know that it is true, the Word of God tells me that it is true and tells me that you will suppress the truth in unrighteousness. So I would plead with you to humble your heart and to embrace the truth of the Gospel and be saved.

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Believers, ask yourself, am I contending or am I pretending? Am I one that will fight for the truth or will I flee from it? And I pray that the Spirit of God will bring conviction where necessary.

Let's pray together.

Father, these are sobering truths and we thank you that they are truths because they come from your Word. Cause us to see them for what they are and to submit to them with all of our heart that you might receive the praise and the glory and that we might experience the blessings that you long to lavish upon us as your faithful servants. Speak to those who do not know you as Savior. Lord, only you can break through that rebellion. Help them not to try to understand that they might believe but believe that they might understand. We commit them to you. Thank you. Be pleased in all that is said and done here today. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.