

PENTECOST FIRE –2 UNLEASHING THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT... AGAIN!

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Today I'll continue my 6 part series on the Person, Purpose, and Power of the Holy Spirit by considering the 6 primary things the Holy Spirit came to do. Last week we talked about the fact that the Holy Spirit came to Convict us of our Sins. Do you remember? Before I reveal the second purpose of the Holy Spirit's coming, I want to ask you a couple questions.

I'm holding in my hand today a jar of pinto beans. On the back of your bulletin I want you to write down how many beans you think are in this jar...Do it, this is not a rhetorical children's sermon. Now, let me have a few of you tell us your guess. (Call on 4 people by name to reveal their estimate.) The actual number of beans in this jar is _____. So let me ask you, which of those guesses is closest to being the right answer? (Allow time to figure out who came closest – reward them with the promise to give them the jar of beans after the service.)

Now, I'd like you to write on the back of your bulletin the name of your favorite chorus, song, or hymn...do it, this is not a speculative worship exercise. Now let me hear a few of your favorite songs. (Call on 4-5 other people to reveal their favorite song name.) Now, I'd like to ask you another question: which of those song names is closest to being the right answer. I'm hearing (or assuming) that you are stuck on that one, because 'there is no right answer' to the question; choosing your favorite song is purely a matter of personal opinion and preference, right? True enough, but let me ask one more, most important question.

When you decide what to believe in terms of your faith, is that more like guessing the number of beans in the jar, or choosing your personal song favorite? Write it down, this is not just a hypothetical illustration.

This little exercise hopefully will help us demonstrate the second primary purpose that the Holy Spirit came to do. You see,

The Holy Spirit came to Convince us of the Truth.

Listen to just a couple examples of verses that illustrate this purpose:

*He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. John 14:17
But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative – that is, the Holy Spirit – he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. John 14:26*

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. John 16:13

Now here is the point. We live in a world where “truth” is willfully unknown, and woefully misunderstood. And I’m not smart enough, nor do I have time to deal with all of that in this sermon, but I want to scratch this itch...or maybe start you itching! Most people in this modern world are using their personal preferences to determine truth, and the content of their faith; when God has said that matters of truth and faith are more like counting beans. Let me try to explain by proposing two hypotheses, and drawing one conclusion. If there ever was a time we needed what the Holy Spirit was promised to do...Convince us of the Truth, lead us into truth, reveal to us the truth, teach us the truth...it is now...AMEN? On that question I believe we all can agree. Here is the first hypothesis:

I. IF TRUTH IS RELATIVE...

A. ALL SPIRITUAL TRUTH IS VALID.

This simply means that all religions and all philosophies carry the same weight. No one of the more than 11,000 religions over this vast world is any more right than any other.

It means that Christianity is no better than Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Mormonism. This sounds real nice on the surface, and many would ascribe to this philosophical reality of everyone believing whatever they want. But here is the rub. Jesus says that His way is the only way. Islam says that Christianity is false, and heaven knows after what we've been watching out of the Texas compound this week that just letting anyone and everyone believe and teach whatever they want does have consequences...and all of them are not..."RIGHT"! I hope you are already beginning to see the danger in ascribing to the predominant understanding that truth is relative. Here's the second implication of relativistic truth:

B. PERSUASION IS NOT ALLOWED – TOLERANCE IS KING.

Persuasion is not allowed, certainly there is no room or need for "conversion"! I find people who say they highly value tolerance; to be some of the most intolerant people. I know that I sometimes live under the pall of a suspicious conspiracy theory; but tolerance seems to apply to anything and everything except what God says, and what I seem to believe. I liken it to living in this Democracy that seems to be growing more liberal while espousing a great tolerance for everything; but anything conservative. Tolerance is often the feel-good preference of the majority, while the preference of the minority gets often overlooked. Just beware; though a 'relative truth' might sound good, that truth is usually determined by the majority, and excludes the minority. Tolerance is a good thing, but tolerating evil or injustice, or prejudice, or...a hundred other negative vices...might not be that good after all. The final implication of adhering to a relative truth is:

C. THERE ARE NO MORAL OR ETHICAL ABSOLUTES.

If there are no ethical or moral absolutes, then Adolph Hitler, Karl Marx, Fidel Castro, Charles Manson, Timothy Dohmer, Timothy McVay, Jim Jones,

Jimmy Swaggart and Warren Jeffs are or were within their “rights” to do what they did or are doing! Relative Truth is determined by only what feels good to each individual, thereby eradicating any moral or ethical absolutes, and therefore; why we need standards; Governmental and otherwise to protect and preserve the common good! Without some moral and ethical standards anarchy will rein; and unfortunately we are seeing this again in our world. I wish I has more time to explore this more fully but we have to move on to consider the implications:

II. IF TRUTH IS ABSOLUTE...

A. IT CAN BE DISCOVERED

I’m not going to try and sugar coat this to make it easier to swallow, discovering truth is not easy...but that doesn’t mean it’s impossible. And let’s not forget who has been sent to help us with this endeavor. I want to encourage you on your personal search for Absolute Truth. I believe it exists, and therefore, I pledge my life to discovering it. I know I’ll never get it all, I know I’ll never understand all its implications; but I cannot give up my search because of my limitations.

I also want to caution you to do your own search; and it’s not a search for “your Truth”, but for Absolute Truth. Don’t settle for believing what someone else...even ME tells you to believe, or what I think the truth is. I have come to believe that many Christians have become lazy, and just want someone else to do the hard work for them, and tell them what to believe. I believe that is how cults get started!

That being said, here is a definition of truth that I’ve found helpful. For truth to be considered Real or Absolute, it must be Objective, (true for all people); Universal (true in all places), and Constant (true for all times). That’s just a starting point. I want you to remember one other thing. Who was it that inspired the writers of the Old and New Testaments? Yes, the Holy Spirit. And who is it that has been promised to come after Jesus’ departure? Yes, the Holy Spirit.

And what is the second major purpose that Holy Spirit came to do? Yes, reveal and CONVINCED us of what? TRUTH! Don't discount that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writers can still inspire the readers! If truth is absolute, #2

B. IT MUST BE ACTED UPON

I want you to notice something else Jesus said about this subject; and I want you to especially note the order of this instruction:

Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. "If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32

Did you see it? We don't first get the truth delivered to us neatly packaged, and ready to be opened and then put into practice in our lives. No, we just obediently follow, stick with this living out what He tells us; then we'll experience the truth... and that truth will set us free.

I'm occasionally asked, usually by desperate or hurting people; "how can I increase my faith?" I usually respond; "by exercising the faith you have." I think the lesson applies here. How can you discover more truth, how can you ever figure out this relative versus absolute truth debate? By choosing to live in the truth you already know! Choosing to obey even when it doesn't make sense. Choosing to hang on when hope seems lost. Choosing to trust when doubt seems to reign. Choosing to act upon the truth we already know, rather than being crippled by the truth we may never figure out! I want to assure you that you will not be held accountable for the truth you don't know. That is no reason or justification to cease the searching, just an assurance that we will only be held accountable for the truth we know. And lastly, the 3rd implication of Absolute truth:

C. ANYTHING UNTRUE MUST BE REJECTED

I honestly believe that many of the different religions of the world contain some truth.

I am a believer that even as followers of Jesus we have much to learn from people who choose other ways to see or experience God; and even from people who profess no belief in God. I believe that any person on an authentic search for truth; whether born and raised in India, Iraq, Indonesia, or the Ivory Coast; will one day run into and have to reckon with Jesus.

With that being said, I also believe that any authentic search for truth will involve a sifting and sorting...and eventually a rejection of things that are untrue. Not all roads lead to God, only those which set out to find God. You can't just believe anything you want or nothing at all and expect to end up in heaven. There is one way, and that according to Jesus is through HIM, so no matter where you start your journey, you will one day have to reckon with Him. Better to do it sooner than later I say.

And in conclusion, I want encourage you to make 3 commitments;

III. COMMITMENTS...

A. COMMIT YOURSELF TO DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

Don't be a slacker waiting for someone else to do the hard work. Don't cheat yourself out of the joy of personally discovering God's truth. Rely on the Holy Spirit to inspire you, and lead you into the truth, and don't underestimate His power and your ability to find the Truth!

B. COMMIT YOURSELF TO BELIEVING THE TRUTH YOU DISCOVER

It's one thing to come to know the or some of the truth; it's another to believe it, to move that knowledge from your head to your heart. It won't do you any good to learn some theoretical knowledge of truth, if that truth resides only in your mind, and never makes it to your heart, and changes what you believe.

C. COMMIT YOURSELF TO LIVING THE TRUTH YOU BELIEVE

And here is the "Bottom Line" for all you truth hounds out there...

You can't just keep your discovery of truth locked up in your theological heart... what you believe; what you come to know to be TRUTH... must be translated into the way that you live! Anyone can say they believe anything, but the proof is in the living.

A few minutes ago I suggested that how you choose what you believe is like guessing how many beans are in this jar. Well, that's not entirely "true". There is not much guesswork...if the TRUTH be told! It's really a choice. I'd never say it's an easy one, but it is a choice; will you fall in step with most of the rest of world that has no tolerance for anything absolute...except that there are no absolutes...! DUH! Or will you choose to listen to the Spirit as He leads, teaches, and confirms the Truth of God.

I also asked you to consider a favorite song; I'll close by sharing ONE of mine!

The Maker of Noses

Rich Mullins

I believe there is a place
Where people live in perfect peace
Where there is food on every plate
Where work is rewarded and rest is sweet
Where the color of your skin
Won't get you in or keep you out
Where justice reigns and truth finally wins
Its hard fought war against fear and doubt

And everyone I know wants to go there too
But when I ask them how to do it they seem so confused
Do I turn to the left?
Do I turn to the right?
When I turn to the world they gave me this advice

They said boy you just follow your heart
But my heart just led me into my chest
They said follow your nose
But the direction changed every time I went and turned my head
And they said boy you just follow your dreams
But my dreams were only misty notions
But the Father of hearts and the Maker of noses
And the Giver of dreams He's the one I have chosen
And I will follow Him

May we all follow the Father of our hearts, the Maker of our noses, and the Giver of our dreams. He is the way, He is the Truth, God's Spirit confirms it.

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A. ALL SPIRITUAL TRUTH IS _____.

B. _____ IS NOT ALLOWED – TOLERANCE IS KING.

C. THERE ARE NO _____ OR _____ ABSOLUTES.

II. IF TRUTH IS ABSOLUTE...

A. IT CAN BE _____

For truth to be Real it must be: _____, (true for all people)
_____, (true in all places)
_____, (true for all times).

B. IT MUST BE _____ UPON

Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. "If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32

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