

The Splendor of Truth

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As religious groups abandon firmness in doctrine, they have a tendency to become pretentious in outward displays as they become irresolute in conviction. When truth doesn't matter, we are left with just the pretense of faith - all sizzle, no steak. This loss of meaning and content has been evident for over a century among the liberal Protestant denominations and is a hallmark of the progressive movement among churches of Christ.

The Irrelevance of Unconditional Acceptance

Like the psychologist discussing inkblots, the progressive religion provides no certain answers. Biblical faith is replaced by a blank canvas on which we are free to place our own ideas. Whether your ideas are compatible with my ideas or whether either are compatible with the Word of God is brushed aside. Self-affirmation and absolute acceptance have replaced the quest for truth.

Avoiding any appearance of being judgmental, Christian doctrine gives way to a pooling of ignorance. However off-the-wall a false teacher may be in his or her aberrant theology, no one is allowed to mark the offender and contradict the error. We are, rather, to go along, get along and avoid the modern unforgivable sin of making a judgment.

Sermons devoid of judgment have no means of calling men and women to repentance. Convicting preaching has been replaced with mere storytelling, following the current fad of narrative theology. When a progressive preacher spins a yarn, he (or, sadly, she) is striving for dramatic impact; truth no longer matters. The progressive approach to worship eclipses substance with style. But where there is no truth, there is no meaning - nothing left that really matters.

The loss of truth alters every aspect of our faith. Without truth, religion is irrelevant. We used to be able to talk with our friends and neighbors about religion and make meaningful statements. Reaching a point of disagreement, we would have something meaningful to discuss; we could talk and attempt to agree on the truth.

Following the progressive line, no matter how much someone contradicts the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, we are to smile blandly and utter an insipid "That's nice."

This absolute nonjudgmental mindset has removed the basis of meaningful discussion. Religious talk slinks to the margins of society because if the words we say have no truth, they also have no relevance. We are left with trite platitudes and pointless theatrics. Popular for the moment, they have no lasting value, as Scripture warns, "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?" (Jeremiah 5:30-31 ESV).

Contentless Christianity is frivolous and inane, but it is also deadly. Like fraudulent medical snake-oil, keeping patients away from real healing, a religion without judgment, having eliminated a call to repentance, keeps sinners away from salvation. The most relevant question in all of life is the one Jeremiah asked, "What will you do when the end comes?"

Return to Relevance, Return to Truth

Solomon surveyed the whole scope of human life summing up his findings: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ESV).

This eternal perspective provides relevance to our message. A commitment to truth is essential if we want to be the church God intends us to be. The absolute standard of the Word of God shows us what may and what may not be done in the work and worship of the church. It is essential for the proper functioning of congregations.

A commitment to truth is essential for evangelism. Unless we can say something and mean it, our words are just gobbledygook. The truth of the gospel is uncomfortable precisely because it is true. The truth of the gospel shows us the strength of self-denial rather than the indulgence of self-affirmation. Clearly stating the truth of the gospel, we have a message with substance and relevance for all of life. It is the way of salvation.