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Smile For The Camera – Pt. 2

By Mark Gorman

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Proverbs 3:3. It says, "Let not mercy and truth forsake me..."

Did you know that every person in the world clings to mercy and truth? Even those who have not read the Bible embrace mercy and truth. How do they do this? Basically, most people say, "When we're talking about me, I want mercy. But when we're talking about you, I want the truth."

What are the most popular magazines in the supermarket checkout stands? They're the tabloids, which detail the rumors and gossip about the famous people in our society. The most popular new television programs are also tabloid-style programs, which tell the "dirt" on well-known personalities.

Why are we so fascinated with the faults and failures of others? I believe it is because it makes us feel better about ourselves. If I can look down my nose on someone else for something they have done, it helps me to feel that I'm not so bad after all.

If that really is the best way to live, then the next time you go to a doctor, and he shows you a problem on your X-ray, ask him if you can see the X-rays of some of his other patients who are worse off than you. Perhaps if you see enough terminal illnesses in others, by the end of the day, you'll be feeling great. Do you see how silly this is?

What did God mean when He told us to cling to mercy and truth? I believe He was saying just the opposite of what most people say. God wants us to say "When I'm talking about you, I need to show mercy."

Remember that every word we speak is a seed, which we are planting into our own future. The day will come when we will harvest every word, every thought, and every deed we have planted. If I'm going to plant too much of anything, I'd prefer mercy rather than judgment.

Planting judgment gives us a feeling of superiority over those we criticize. Finding the faults in others is a cheap way of making us feel better about ourselves.

My contention is that if we must criticize others in order to feel good about ourselves, we're only trying to pull them down to our level. I would rather be guilty of giving a person too many second chances, than to be too judgmental.

If I'm going to harvest too much of anything, I don't want it to be judgment. Wouldn't it feel awful to have someone ask you where to put the harvest that just arrived - a harvest of judgment?

I want to hear someone say, "Mark, you just received a harvest of mercy, and it's more than you have room for. Apparently, you planted too much mercy in the past, and now, your harvest is overflowing with mercy. Where do you want it?" I'd say, "I'll take it right here. Pour it all over me."

Yes, I believe that God meant for me to be merciful when I am speaking of others, but when it comes to myself, I need the truth. You see, truth is the only safe thing there is. The pursuit of truth is, in my opinion, the noblest journey one can take. The more truth I know about myself, the safer I will be. But what is truth?

Unfortunately, many of us cannot even recognize truth.

When I was 8 years old, our family moved to New Orleans, where my father accepted the position as pastor of a church with a congregation of 100 people. Over the next 20 years, the church grew to more than 6,000. My dad was one of the leading ministers in our denomination, and pastored one of their largest churches.

Unfortunately, over the years, I came to think that "truth" was anything that we believed in our church, and that anything which I hadn't heard taught from our pulpit, was "heresy" (a lie – untrue – false doctrine). And I don't think I was alone in that "view" of things. In fact, many of the people I knew in that church organization, let it be known that they felt the same way.

My basic definition of heresy was "anything I haven't heard before."

And I defined truth as "anything we believe. If I've heard it preached in our churches, then it must be true."

This is called "having your loins gird about with tradition."

Just in case you didn't catch my humor, the Bible says in Ephesians 6 that we should have our loins gird about with truth - not tradition. Notice that the portion of the armor, which is made of truth, is used to protect our reproductive organs. I believe this is because it is so dangerous for us to reproduce our philosophy and theology in others if we have not first done our "due diligence" to confirm that what we teach is true.

In my lifetime, have encountered many people who not only believe that everything they say is true, but what is even more dangerous is that they refuse to subject their beliefs to any scrutiny. They are unwilling to even consider the possibility that what they believe and teach, may be incorrect. Therefore, they basically forbid anyone to even ask questions about their belief system.

But think about this; If my beliefs are true, then they will stand up to the "litmus test" of truth. So, why should I fear that scrutiny?

I'm not saying that every church service should be an "open forum", allowing people to yell out their viewpoints from the audience. No, that would create chaos.

But, we should remember that, when Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, He told His disciples that He would not leave them alone. He said that He would send a Comforter, the Spirit Of Truth, who would lead and guide them into all truth – The Holy Spirit.

And from that time until now, The Holy Spirit abides with believers – Christians, to guide and direct us into all truth.

So, as a minister, I came to a place many years ago, when I laid all my beliefs on "the table" and asked Holy Spirit to teach me – to help me to know what is truth.

That was a "scary" time at first, feeling uncertain as to how much of my belief system would be proven right, and how much may have been simply tradition, which "felt right" because it was familiar.

But as frightening as that experience may have been, I wouldn't trade it for anything. Because I came to a place where I was willing to allow God to scrutinize everything I believed – to shine the light of His Word and His Spirit on all of my beliefs, to reveal any error or inconsistency, however small or subtle.

I was willing to do this because I had come to understand that the pursuit of truth is a very safe journey – but ONLY when your guide is The Holy Spirit – The Spirit Of Truth, and your map is the ONE AND ONLY BOOK OF AUTHORITY FROM GOD – THE BIBLE.

If your beliefs won't stand up to the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit and the Bible, then you are in trouble.

Look for "Smile for the Camera - Pt. 3" next week.

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