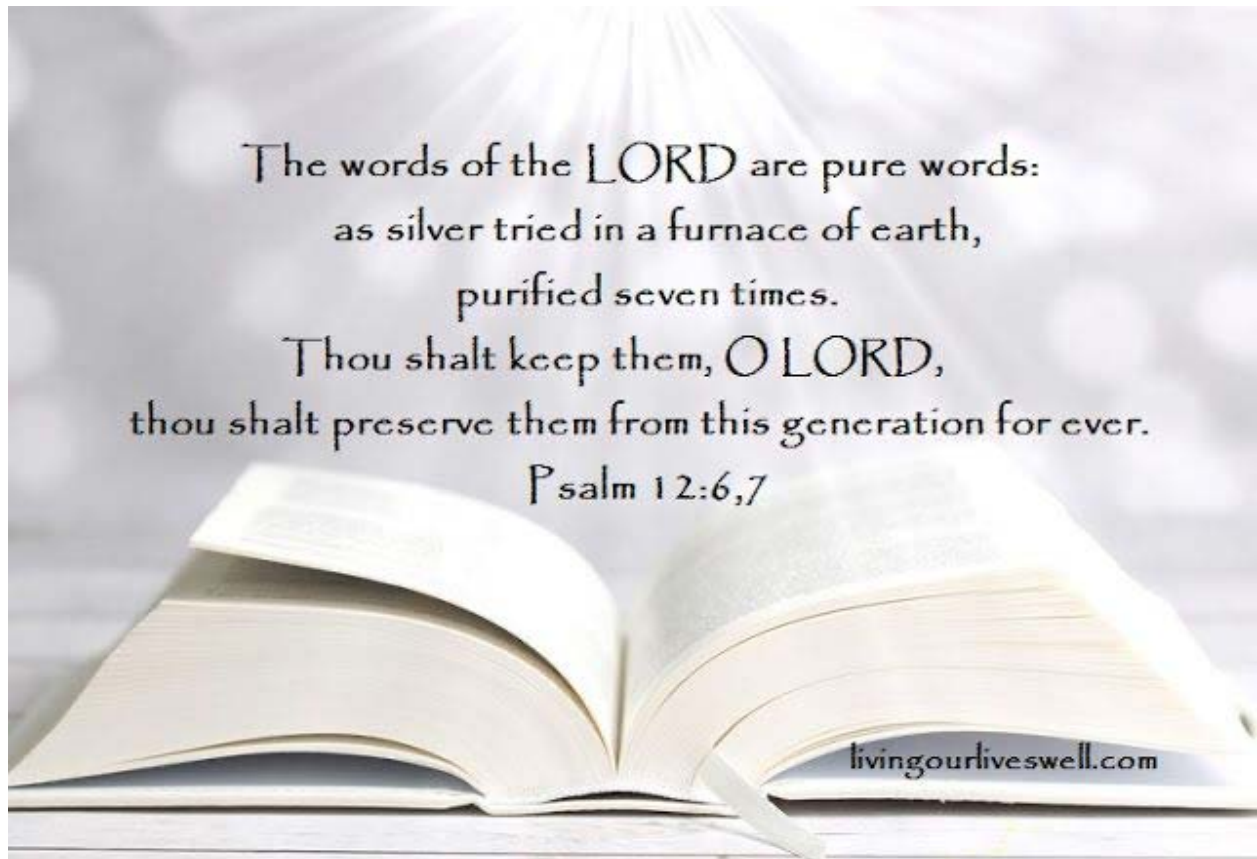


# THE TRUTH THAT MAKES US FREE

## LET GOD BE TRUE (1)



Standing under Scripture in an age of unbelief and lies.

T. M. MOORE

*A ReVision Study from*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

The Truth that Makes Us Free  
Let God Be True (1)  
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Contents

Welcome to <i>The Truth that Makes Us Free</i>	4
1 The Rock of Truth	5
2 The Truth about the World	7
3 The Truth about Us	9
4 The Truth about the Mess We're In	11
5 The Truth about Our Greatest Need	13
6 The Truth about What's Up	15
7 The Truth about Where We're Headed	17
Questions for Reflection or Discussion	19

## Welcome to *The Truth that Makes Us Free*

Our generation's cynicism, even *skepticism*, about truth has become so much a part of the spirit of the times that we give but little thought to the damage this can wreak on society and culture.

We live in a world of lies, half-truths, and outright deceit concerning some of the most important matters people can consider. Even in the Church, the tendency to try to "improve" on God's truth, or to force God's truth into the frail glass slipper of our preferred ways of thinking, is in many ways gaining ground.

Only those who stand firm *under* the truth of God will have the discernment, wisdom, and grace needed to help our world find its way out of darkness and unbelief into light and life in Jesus Christ. But this will only be the case as we resolve to let God be true with respect to all matters on which He speaks, and to regard alternative opinions as unreliable.

*The Truth that Makes Us Free* looks at the big questions that every human being needs to confront, and it urges us to do so from under the cope of divine revelation in Scripture. Only as we stand under the Word of God will be able to rise above the lies of our day and live fully and fruitfully within the light of truth. This is Part 1 of the series, "Let God Be True."

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Thank you.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 The Rock of Truth

*“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”* John 17.17

*“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* John 8.32

*Let God be true!*

In our day, it is increasingly unfashionable and oh so *outré* to believe in anything so worn-out and discredited as *truth*.

Claim to have the truth about anything, and you’re likely to be mocked, scorned, denounced, vilified, or condemned. The only truth most people accept is whatever is true for them. We should all just follow our feelings, and make lots of room for others to follow their feelings, too. Yeah.

*Truth* for most people is something that originates from within them, something which, if not absolute, then at least is absolutely personal, and not the sort of thing that others ought to be passing judgment on, least of all, God. *Truth* is something you *feel*, something you’re *really sincere* about, and therefore something you *know* deep inside. Who can dispute that?

Truth and tribe go together. We know that we can’t stand alone, waving our banner of sincerity and expect to be credible. So we gravitate to groups, communities, and tribes who think like we do, affirm our commitment to sincerity and the particular ways we express it, and thus reinforce our view of truth as merely personal.

We Christians like to think we are people of the truth; but even we reserve the right to pick and choose *which* truth we will embrace. Truths that we find uncomfortable or inconvenient we downplay or avoid. Among these would be such long-standing – but apparently now outmoded – Christian truths as repentance and sin, the Law and fear and wrath of God, holiness, tithing, the sanctity of the Lord’s Day, leading a disciplined life, and the like. We may acknowledge these in some way or to a certain extent, but we insist on scrubbing them down to fit our comfort level, and thus, we divest them of all vital truth so that we can put them on according to our own interests, needs, or tastes.

And there’s always some Christian tribe or other out there who will agree with my feelings on such matters and welcome me into their truth cadre where we can all enjoy *truth* as we like it.

God’s Word, however, is unfazed and unchanged by all such tinkering. Those who claim to believe in Christ and those who believe otherwise may feel perfectly justified in redefining truth to fit the temper of the times and the longings of sinful human hearts, but this does not at all affect the revelation of God and the truth about Him, us, and the world.

As the apostle Paul abruptly put it, “Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar.” (Rom. 3.4)

*God’s Word is Truth*

Unless we want to challenge or correct Jesus, we must contend with His uncomplicated declaration concerning the Word of God: The Word of God is truth. What the Scriptures, the Word of God, say about things is, simply put, the way things are, and the way we must learn to deal with them if we would enjoy truly free and abundant lives. Truth is not generated from within us, nor realized in some social consensus expressing some aspect of the temper of the times. Truth is neither a feeling nor a desire, be it ever so strong or sincere. Truth exists in God, is declared by God, sustained by God, acted on and enforced by God, and recorded in Scripture for our benefit by God.

This is true, in the first instance, concerning God Himself. In the Scriptures God reveals Himself. He tells us

what He's like, what kind of Being He is, and that there is no other being like Him anywhere. He makes His will known to us, especially as that relates to everything we need to know about life, salvation, and being accountable to Him. Jesus said that the truth of God in Scripture has power to *sanctify* those who believe in Him, to set them apart unto righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, which is the Kingdom of God (Rom. 14.17, 18).

That is, the truth of God, about God, and from God, which is revealed in the *Word* of God, can exert a formative influence over our lives, shaping us, from the inside out, so that we increasingly take on the character, convictions, and concerns of the very Son of God, Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). *We* can become people in whom the *truth of God* takes shape and comes to expression in time, and because of whom the truth brings freedom and life to the people in our lives.

But this doesn't just happen. If we want to be sanctified by the truth of Scripture, so that we express the truth of God, we must *submit* to God's Word, not merely *read* or *agree with* it. We must come under the Scriptures, not rummage through them as if we were selecting clothing from some rich man's wardrobe, taking what we like and passing up the rest. *All Scripture* is profitable to transform us into the good-works image of Jesus Christ. Unless we bring our mind, heart, conscience, words, and deeds *under* Scripture – rather than presuming to be masters *over* the Word – we will not gain the benefit God intends for us.

Instead, presuming to *judge* God and even to *correct* Him where we consider His Word to be, shall we say, *inconvenient*, we will ultimately be shown to be liars, pounding and roaring and being shattered like hapless waves against the immovable Rock of the truth of God.

All who resist the truth of God, who refuse to acknowledge and embrace it, and to bring their lives into line with it, will be shattered, scattered, and broken by the very truth which God intends as a means to free us from our foolish notions of "truth", so that we might have power to become more like Jesus Christ.

Truth exists, and God has shown it to us. We must decide, in every situation in life, whether to live by the truth that sets us free unto full and abundant life, or a lie that leads to disappointment, degradation, and death. God will always be true. Will we?

*For reflection*

1. How do people you see each day understand the concept of *truth*?
2. Why are *strong feelings* and *sincerity* not reliable barometers for discerning the truth of any matter?
3. Jesus said that those who know Him would know the truth that sets them free (Jn. 8.32). Free from what? For what?

*Next steps – Preparation: Is there any sense in which your approach to truth is one of mere convenience? Spend some time in silent prayer before the Lord, allowing Him to search your attitudes toward His truth.*

## 2 The Truth about the World

*For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God... 2 Peter 3.5 (English Standard Version)*

*Truth and the “big questions”*

I suspect that most people in our society would be quite happy for us Christians to insist that the Word of God is truth, as Jesus said – as long as we mean by that something like “truth for me.”

I rather suspect that many Christians would feel more comfortable with that view as well.

The only notion of *truth* most people can grasp is one that leaves everybody free to decide about truth on their own terms. The notion of anything like *final* or *absolute* truth – truth that is such regardless of how we feel or think about it – just isn’t on most folks’ radar screen.

Except, of course, when it comes to the really big questions about such things as the cosmos. The cosmos is there, regardless of how we think or feel about it, a universe of facts that can neither be denied nor understood in merely subjective terms. But the cosmos is big, complex, and highly variegated. Getting at the truth of it can be a challenge.

Most people don’t expect the Bible to know anything about science, so they don’t consult it for knowledge about the world – what it is, how it got here, what it’s for, where it’s headed, and where we fit into the grand cosmic scheme of things.

No, for such *truths* our secular generation does not look to the Bible. They look to science. They have set the disciplines of science in the arbiter’s chair where matters of *material facts* are concerned – to tell us what is, what it is, and what it is for. From their position of authority, the mavens of the scientific worldview seek to spread its influence, especially by means of the “social” sciences, into all realms of human life, leaving no room for the Bible to speak any truth to anyone except the most gullible and naïve.

*However...*

But close examination of the Bible reveals that it has a good deal to say about the cosmos and all those related matters. It tells us how the cosmos came into being, that it is sustained and replenished by the work of God upon it, that it exists within a larger framework of realities which includes spiritual beings and places which we cannot observe with the instruments and methods of science, and that this cosmos is not the final destination either for it or for us.

It also speaks pointedly about those institutions, protocols, and conventions that make up the various domains of social science – economics, politics, education, psychology, and so forth. The Bible is not silent on matters of material or social science. Its teaching is plain and unequivocal.

Are these just opinions? Or spiritual myths? Or does the Bible represent a perspective on material reality – and all reality – that ought to be considered? The Bible has a lot to say about the cosmos and everything in it. Are we simply supposed to deny the teaching of Scripture? Wouldn’t that be a matter of *standing over* the Word of God, rather than *standing under it*? How can we expect to be sanctified by the truth of Scripture if we insist that, at least in certain areas, Scripture doesn’t know what it’s talking about?

Peter faced the same problem in his day. Certain teachers – pop philosophers, self-made theologians, and various slick talkers – were appearing in the churches Peter served, saying things like, “The world has always been here and always will be, although probably in some form other than what we presently observe” and “God doesn’t really trouble with the universe, which runs on its own principles and laws, quite apart from any

input from Him.”

By so saying, these false teachers marginalized God, minimized His influence over human life, and denied the plain teaching of Scripture – the better to make room for their own foolish schemes and teachings.

Peter insisted that these folks were overlooking something, and what they were overlooking were not myths or private opinions, but *facts*.

*The fact of the matter*

The fact of the matter, according to Scripture, is that the cosmos was created by God, not by chance; that the Word of God acted into a material void to bring the cosmos into being, and make it what it is; and that the material cosmos is simply part of a larger reality which includes heaven and its spiritual population.

Those are the facts, according to Scripture. To deny the facts of Scripture in favor of the opinions of men is to side with the lie against the truth of God.

By implication, Peter might have written, if it had suited his purposes, the cosmos continues as it is because God sustains it in every detail (cf. Heb. 1.3), and will until He burns it up (2 Pet. 3.7, 10). The entire cosmos serves *His* purposes according to *His* good pleasure and redemptive plan. And it is headed, after being dissolved, for a destination of glorious flourishing in a new world without end. And all this is because God loves the *cosmos* so much that He sent His only-begotten Son to redeem, reconcile, and restore it (Jn. 3.16; 2 Cor. 5.19).

Peter would have said this because, with respect to his understanding of the cosmos and everything else, Peter stood *under* the Scriptures and not *over* them.

Did his enemies consider him naïve or ignorant? Certainly they did. But Peter was content to be so regarded as long as he remained faithful to the Word of Truth which sanctifies our souls. He believed that God is true and those who disagree with Him are liars, and he resolved to take his stand with the truth.

His example should be instructive for us. We must not allow false claimants to truth, largely in the guise of sociological and political theories, to pipe the tune of truth. Jesus Christ is truth. God’s Word is truth. Faithful believers begin there, standing under the truth of God, to discern His truth for everything else in life. Thus we live free in the truth of God, and not subject to being jerked here and there by the changeable ideas about truth of finite and fallible people.

The truth about the world begins with God and His Word, not men and theirs.

*For reflection*

1. These days the scientific community has become the arbiter of truth for most people. And the scientific community has ruled out the need for God as in any way an explanation for or component of the material universe. Is this an assertion of *fact* or *belief*? Explain.
2. Why should we regard the teaching of Scripture as a matter of *fact* rather than *opinion* or *myth*?
3. What’s the difference between standing *under* the Scriptures and standing *over* them? How can we know when we have moved from the former to the latter?

*Next steps – Conversation: Meditate on Psalm 104. How many different ways can you see that God is actively involved with the cosmos? What are the implications of this for us? Are these facts or something else?*



### 3 The Truth about Us

*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Genesis 1.26, 27*

*This is like that*

Human thinking is based entirely on analogies. We learn and know things by association, by recognizing that something is like something else.

This, at least, is the argument of Douglas Hofstadter and Emmanuel Sander in their book, *Surfaces and Essences*. They write, "the central thesis of our book – a simple yet nonstandard idea – is that the spotting of analogies pervades every moment of our thought, thus constituting thought's core... We swim nonstop in an ocean of small, medium-sized, and large analogies, ranging from mundane trivialities to brilliant insights."

Analogies work by comparison: This is like that. Poetry abounds with analogies. We use analogies in everyday conversations. Today, for example, it may be "hot as blue blazes outside." We may not know what "blue blazes" are, but we have a sense that they're really, really hot. "She's sharp as a tack," we say about someone whose wit we admire; or "He's not the sharpest knife in the drawer," the meaning of which we all understand.

Human beings live by analogies; we think along analogical lines. Because analogies form the way we think, the *particular* analogies we embrace determine how we live. Put another way, what we think we're like is likely what we'll become. The more widespread the analogy, the more it dominates our life.

And when those widespread analogies are *false* – when we insist on believing that we are like something when in fact we are not – it can be difficult to realize the *truth* about who we are and why we're here.

*A disastrous analogy*

Disastrous in the extreme is the widespread analogy which insists that human beings are more like animals than any other beings. From elementary to graduate school, students are told that human beings are simply a higher form of animal. Animal studies form the basis of much scientific research, both in the natural sciences and the social sciences. "We're *like* monkeys or ants or bees or starfish" researchers insist, and so, if only indirectly, we teach our children to take their behavioral cues from animals. Animals tell us the truth about who we are, our teachers maintain, and we politely nod and head off to do whatever human animals do, according to the patterns and practices discernible especially among our primate "brothers and sisters."

While, of course, people share certain features with animals, this way of thinking about human beings is reductionistic, for it defines people in purely material terms. The idea that people have a "spirit" or a "soul", an immaterial essence that connects with transcendent realities, is regarded as just so much rhetoric. It's not to be taken seriously. Researchers question the existence of the mind. They reduce "heart" to a blood-pumping muscle. And "conscience" becomes nothing more than a form of social consensus. Everything about us reduces to electro-chemical processes and influences in a world devoid of transcendent realities and ultimately without meaning or purpose.

This is a cruel joke. Rather, a cruel *lie*. The evolutionary view of human beings operates on a false analogy, and thus strips people of their essential core spirituality, as C. S. Lewis argued so powerfully in *The Abolition of Man*.

*Made in God's image and likeness*

The Scriptures teach that human beings are not animals; rather, we are a kind of "in-between" creature. We're neither gods nor angels, and we are not animals. We are the *image-bearers* of God. Originally made in God's

image – so that we may know Him – and likeness – so that we may be like Him – we have fallen from that pristine condition and are subject to an inherited law of sin, the spiritual bequest of our first parents.

The image of God in us continues as a “memory” in the soul – the mind, heart, and conscience. By coming to faith in Jesus, we are indwelt by the Spirit of God, and He begins the work of restoring us into the likeness of God in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.2-18). People are made in the image and likeness of God, and this fills life with meaning, purpose, and joy as we seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God.

As God’s image-bearers, we’re more like God than animals, and we will realize our true fulfillment and greatest happiness only when we think, feel, value, speak, and act like Jesus Christ – not like animals. To achieve full humanness, we must look to *God*, compare ourselves with *God*, and aspire to know and be like *God*. To think properly about ourselves and our purpose, we must think with the mind of God (1 Cor. 2.16), not the brain of a beast.

Take God out of the equation and point people to animals – to a world “red in tooth and claw,” as evolutionists like to put it – and you obscure people’s proper aspirations for grace, good works, nobility, civility, and the glory of God, and you make them instead content to compete, struggle, grunt, and grovel like the lowest beasts of the earth.

This is a lie, part of the larger lie which will one day be blasted to smithereens against the Rock of God’s truth. Even Christians fall prey to this lie, especially when they neglect proper care of their souls and when they fail to insist, in every forum and at every opportunity, that we are not animals, but image-bearers, made to be *like* God by looking to Him and submitting to His Word.

The Word of God tells us the truth about who we are, what we should aspire to, and how we should live. It tells the truth about *us*: We are image-bearers of God. Every other analogy for thinking about people is a lie.

*For reflection*

1. Should it trouble us as believers that this false analogy comparing people with animals has become institutionalized in America’s public schools? Explain.
2. Do churches in any way abet this false analogy? Explain.
3. Meditate on Hebrews 12.1 and Colossians 3.1-3. Do you see why focusing and meditating on Jesus is so important to realizing our full humanity? Explain.

*Next steps – Conversation: Would it make a difference if more people began to know about Jesus and His way of life, than about the latest research on primate social behavior? Ask a friend or co-worker about this matter, and follow the conversation wherever it leads.*

## 4 The Truth about the Mess We're In

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—... Romans 5.12*

### *A matter of opinion?*

Ask a dozen people what they consider the greatest problem facing our world, and you're likely to get almost as many different answers: "More justice!" cries one. "Economic opportunity," insists another. "Less government"; "More government"; "Better education"; "Free health care"; "Environmental reform!" – the list goes on.

Most of these answers identify real problems, but they don't quite get at the true nature of the mess we're in as human beings. They're rather like Yossarian, the character in Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22*, who believed that covering his cold comrade with his flight jacket would relieve his suffering, only to discover that the reason he was cold had nothing to do with the outside air, but everything to do with the life-blood oozing out through a wound which Yossarian was not able to see.

We may have firm convictions about the problems that face us, and effective and perhaps even noble solutions or technologies for addressing those problems. But if we have misdiagnosed the *truth* of the situation, we'll only end up making matters worse. What we *fail* to consider or see about a situation can be our undoing.

Unseen things are like that, and *sin* is the greatest unseen and unacknowledged problem facing the human race, the planet, and the entire cosmos. The mess the world is in is not simply a matter of opinion, of political persuasion, of material want, or of who has the most or best facts or leverage. It is the problem of sin. And while the world may scoff at such a notion, and while many Christians don't like to talk about sin, because it makes us feel uncomfortable and judgmental, the Scriptures are not in the least shy about shoving the problem of sin in our faces over and over again.

### *How sin affects us*

Sin is a spiritual condition which entered the human situation through the machinations of the devil and the disobedience of our first parents, as Paul, echoing Moses, explained. The Scriptures teach that all descendants of Adam and Eve – and that would be all of us – have inherited this condition, even though we will never be able to pinpoint the gene which bears the fatal disease. Sin being a *spiritual* condition, it cannot be located on one strand or link of our DNA; rather, it pervades the whole genome, orienting us by nature *away* from worshiping God and submitting to His Word, and causing us to look to ourselves and our own best ideas concerning how to make our way in the world.

Once we embark on such a course, however, the problem of sin becomes even more acute. Welling up from within the depths of our souls, a law of sin prevails so that sin affects all our words and deeds, and most of what we do in life is undertaken out of mere self-interest. Even the good things many people do can have deeply selfish motives, which is why they allow buildings and parks and highways to be named after them, so that everyone can admire them for the good works they have done.

The sin that thus infects our words and deeds is transmuted by our decisions and actions into the culture we create and use in order to define, sustain, and enrich our lives. Institutions become corrupt; conventions of language and law and social protocols deteriorate and degrade. The artifacts of culture we create reflect the selfishness in our souls and reinforce the notion that, in the end, it's really all about me.

Of course, a certain amount of beauty, goodness, and truth appears in various ways throughout the world, but this is only the work of God's common grace as He strives against our sinful tendencies to continue

bearing witness to Himself and calling us to repent.

Thus sin, like an unseen spiritual virus or mold, attaches to everything we do and use, all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, so that it creates an environment of looking out for number 1, doing unto others *before* they do unto us, and using whatever lies at hand in as many ways as we can think of to gain an advantage over others, regardless of how that affects them.

And the longer we *deny* this unseen menace, or *tolerate* its presence, or *rationalize* its relative importance, the more firmly entrenched the lie of sin becomes established within and among us, where its corrupting influence wreaks havoc, decay, and destruction on everyone and everything.

*The solution*

Thus, the answer to the problem of sin is not education or justice or economics or government. They *lie* to us who insist these are our best hope.

The answer is what God reports in His truth – repentance, and looking to the God of Scripture to bring us the gift of forgiveness through our Lord Jesus Christ. No, your unbelieving friends won't agree with this – at least, not right away. And yes, even certain of your Christian friends will find you tiresome because you insist on calling us to repent and pursue holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1).

But we must let *God* be true; and all who deny Him or seek to avoid His Word must be seen to be *liars*. The mess we're in will only begin to heal when hearts are turned away from sin and self to grace and God, and we are the frail vessels tasked with the duty of making this necessity known to the world (2 Cor. 4.7, 15). To the extent we minimize the devastating effects of sin or neglect our calling to expose it and call people to turn from it, we add to the burden of lies that weighs our world with woe.

As the people in your life begin to see the power of God's Word at work in you, producing the love of Jesus Christ with ever-increasing glory, they might be enabled to see the sin in their own lives and become willing to take another look at God's truth and its explanation of the serious mess we're in.

*For reflection*

1. What is sin? How can we know when sin has established a foothold in our lives?
2. What is repentance? When is repentance necessary? Meditate on Psalm 119.59, 60. What do these verses suggest about the nature of repentance?
3. Meditate on Hebrews 12.1, 2. How does meditating on Jesus help us in discovering our sins and repenting of them? Should this be part of our normal "race" in this world? Explain.

*Next steps – Preparation: How would you describe the state of repentance in your own life? Is this a practice you engage in frequently? Should it be? What can you do today to make repentance a more consistent part of your walk with the Lord?*

## 5 The Truth about Our Greatest Need

“*You must be born again.*” John 3.7

### *Only one way out*

The greatest problem facing the human race, and all the people with whom we have to do each day, is the problem of sin. People – including many Christians – may not *believe* that. That does not make them *unbelievers*. Rather, it makes them *wrong* believers, because having refused to believe God and His truth, they choose to believe something else.

Rather than accept the Bible’s assessment of the mess we’re in, they point to secondary issues and dilemmas, denying the truth of God and turning to whatever wheel of culture or social policy may be squeaking for the grease of attention and effort. Social justice, climate policy, educational reform, critical-this-that-or-the-other, defunding police, funding police – all these, while not to be neglected, are but fleas on the elephant in the room.

And the elephant in the room is sin. When we let God be true, every denial of His truth will be seen to be a lie. And God in His truth explains that all who turn from Him to lies will multiply problems, stress, difficulties, and disappointment for themselves as long as they deny the root cause of all our ills – sin.

Christians fall prey to the ravages of lies whenever they feel, for whatever reason, they cannot take God at His Word but must temper or add to or otherwise qualify the plain teaching of Scripture by embracing beliefs, views, trends, or practices which have their origin not from within the Word of God but in the world of rebellion against God.

This is the clear teaching of Scripture from cover to cover, and though many may scoff at the idea and insist on a wide range of other ills needing more urgent attention, and though Christians may pragmatically seek to justify compromising with lies, the fact of sin remains; and unless we deal with the problem of human sin, it will continue to drain every semblance of goodness and hope out of our culture, society, and our very lives.

The Bible teaches that there is only one way to escape the death grip of sin. We must be born again.

Now there’s a solution to our ills that our wrong-believing age finds completely, well, unbelievable. Does that surprise us? Should we back away from what the Scriptures teach, simply because our wrong-believing contemporaries find that solution simplistic, naïve, or insane? Or out of touch with history?

Not at all. Let God be true, though everyone in the world considers His Word to be laughable. The Word of God is true and reliable, as countless millions have known from every nation, tribe, and culture, and for thousands of years. That our age in flight from God scorns the Word and its solutions to our ills should neither surprise nor faze us. Indeed, the world’s hostility to what the Bible teaches is *exactly* what the Bible says we should expect. So even their looking at us as fools, simpletons, meddlers, self-righteous know-it-alls, and unwelcome nuisances demonstrates the reliability of the Word of God.

### *Why it must be so*

As the Bible explains, every human being is born into this world incapable of knowing the life for which he or she has been created. We are all dead in our trespasses and sins from the moment we are conceived, and this is how, kicking and screaming, we enter the world as babies and prosecute our lives apart from Jesus Christ (Ps. 51.5; Eph. 2.1).

In short, we are all born dead. Thus, the only way to recover from this condition is not by trying to *improve* it through external means – education, possessions, government policies, better health care, income

redistribution – but by going to the root of the problem, sin, and submitting to the spiritual surgery of the Scriptures and the Spirit of God (Heb. 4.12; Jn. 6.63).

Jesus explained that we can be born again by receiving the teaching of His Word concerning Him and the work He has done for our salvation. By believing in Jesus, acknowledging and repenting of our sins, and looking to Him and His Word for the sustenance and direction we need, we are born again into the kind of life that overcomes the power of sin with good works of love (Rom. 12.21). We can escape the womb of death and breathe the true air of God's Word and Spirit that brings life and truth to light within us for every area of life – the truth that makes us free.

This is the condition referred to in Scripture as *salvation*. Salvation is what every human being needs, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God to accomplish salvation for us (Rom. 1.16) As we listen to the Word of God, speaking to us in the Scriptures, the Spirit of God opens our minds to understand, engages our hearts to receive, roots in our consciences to make us willing, and actually commandeers our voices, enabling us to cry out to God as Father and be born again by His grace (Gal. 4.4-6; Jn. 1.12, 13).

*They all laughed at Jesus*

Our message to the world is the message of Scripture and of our Lord Jesus Christ: “You must be born again.” Nothing else the Bible has to teach us – about ourselves, our world, and our greatest need – will make sense until we come to the place where we submit to God as our Father and Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. We must be born again. Attempting to clean up the mess we're in – whether personal, social, cultural, or universal – without addressing the problem of sin will find us always falling short and grasping at straws.

And though our neighbors, friends, and co-workers may respond to us like Nicodemus did to Jesus – “How can these things be?” – we must stand firm on the *truth* of God, explaining, as the children's song insists, “the Bible tells me so.”

They laughed at Jesus as He proclaimed that message, and they're likely to laugh at us. But the laughter of wrong-believers might just be a cover for the unease they feel at the thought that God has somehow found them out and is, through your word and His, calling them to face up to the lies they've been living and submit to the truth that is in Jesus for a new way of life.

God's Word of truth can bring life to our dead-in-sin neighbors and friends and our blinded-by-sin fellow believers, so let us be bold about telling them this wonderful Good News. This does not mean we ignore the great issues of our day, only that we keep them in a proper perspective, insisting always on first things first.

*For reflection*

1. Why is “You must be born again” the solution to the human problem of sin?
2. How has “You must be born again” proved true in your life?
3. What can keep you from telling your wrong-believing friends, neighbors, and co-workers, “You must be born again”?

*Next step – Preparation: Are there people in your life who need to hear the Good News of being born again? What is your plan for reaching out to them? Have you mapped out your [Personal Mission Field](#)?*

## 6 The Truth about What's Up

*"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Matthew 4.17

*Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,  
And gathered out of the lands,  
From the east and from the west,  
From the north and from the south.* Psalm 107.2, 3

*Here's an idea*

"What's happenin'?" "What's goin' on?" "I'sup?"

Have you heard any of those expressions yet this week? How did you respond? "Not much"? "Same old same old"?

Our language these days has become trite and trivial in many ways. It can be easy for us to miss an opportunity to insert a word of truth into the fabric of lies that constitutes our society (cf. Ps. 12). We who want to live under the Scriptures can do better than just to go along with the flow of insipidity. The next time someone greets you with one of those phrases, don't just jerk your head up and say "Hey." Rather, respond by saying, "The Kingdom of God is at hand!"

At the very least, that will give an entirely *truthful* summation of precisely "what's up" in the world.

Because the Kingdom of God is *definitely* what's happenin' now, and the fact that it is, is very Good News.

*The Good News of the Kingdom*

Jesus came to earth to bring, not just salvation for men's souls, but a whole new era, realm, and quality of existence, a new age and reality, down from the lofty heights of heaven, where it had been held in reserve for millennia. His coming signaled the arrival of the Kingdom of God into the everyday experience of human lives everywhere.

Jesus came to embody, proclaim, bring near, and establish the Kingdom of God on earth, as it is in heaven. The Kingdom of God is the reign of Jesus Christ over all men and things. It is a new economy of righteousness, peace, and joy which is unfolding and advancing throughout the world. It brings real and transforming spiritual power, in the Person of the Holy Spirit of God, making all things new and bright and filled with the glory of the unseen eternal God.

This is Good News, and the people we see each day, steeped in lies and wrong belief, need to know it.

The Kingdom of God is the *truth* of God and Jesus Christ, ruling over and subduing all things, making all things new, bringing life and immortality to light through the Good News of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God brings freedom from bondage to sin, from the fear of death, and from the frail and foolish limits of human good intentions. The Kingdom of God brings life to dead sinners, hope to desperate people at every stage and level of life, power for selfless and virtuous living, and love like that of Jesus Christ which gives and edifies and comforts, without the slightest hint of self-interest.

Jesus Christ holds the keys to the Kingdom of God, and He offers them freely to all who believe in Him and are born again by the grace of God. From the moment that someone comes to faith in Jesus, everything begins to change. Escaping the lies of this age, those who believe in Christ step into the light of truth and

start to see the world differently. They learn to love the things God loves and to value what He holds dear. They grow in new ways and find themselves overcome with peace and joy in even the most difficult or adverse situations. Believers in Jesus become part of a new community of people who are working to help the world overcome the problems of sin and know more of the light and truth of the Word and Kingdom of God.

We pray for the Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, and we know that Jesus has commanded us to make seeking the Kingdom the defining priority of our lives (Matt. 6.10, 33). The Kingdom is what's up for those who believe in Jesus, and we want everyone around us to know it.

*So why not say so!*

The Kingdom of God is growing on the earth like a wondrous, brilliant jewel, overcoming all other worldviews and realms and shining the light of truth and life into the ever-receding darkness of unbelief and death (Dan. 2.44, 45; 1 Jn. 2.8). The Scriptures teach that all who believe in Jesus Christ are citizens in and ambassadors of His Kingdom, sent to the world to bear witness to His reign (2 Cor. 5.17-21; Jn. 20.21; Acts 1.8). We are called to represent this new reality, by our words and deeds, so that others can enter with us into this incredible Good News and the salvation that comes with it.

“Let the redeemed of the LORD say so” the psalmist declared (Ps. 107.2), and this certainly falls within our job description as ambassadors and witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Do we believe the Scriptures? Are we submitted to the Word of God as the truth about what's up and everything else as well? Then let the world oppose or oppress us, let our believing friends caution or avoid us, but let us take every opportunity God provides to make known the Good News of the Kingdom of God by every means, in every season, so that some, at least, of the people to whom God has sent us might be saved.

*For reflection*

1. What is your strategy for being a witness to the lost people around you?
2. What should local churches do to equip and encourage their people to fulfill their calling as Kingdom citizens and ambassadors?
3. Besides the Gospel, what other hope do people have of escaping the darkness of sin and unbelief and entering into light and life? What are the implications of this for all who would follow Jesus?

*Next steps – Preparation: Suppose someone were to ask you to explain the Gospel. What would you say? Make a brief outline of the Good News of the Kingdom, and how we may come to know it. Then start sharing this with all your friends – saved and unsaved alike!*



## 7 The Truth about Where We're Headed

*... that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2.10, 11*

*Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless... 2 Peter 3.13, 14*

*Hot or cold?*

Physicists, astronomers, and cosmologists still sometimes debate the question of how the cosmos as we know it will come to an end. Some insist that the mass in the cosmos is too great to allow it to keep expanding indefinitely. Ultimately, it will all just collapse back in on itself in another “Big Bang” – a kind of cosmic implosion and bonfire, if you will.

Others disagree. They believe there isn't enough mass to provide the gravity necessary for a cosmic implosion. Instead, they predict the universe will continue to expand and expand until everything is so far away from any nearby heat source – such as the sun – that the whole cosmos will simply freeze to death.

Death by fire or death by ice. These are not what you might call encouraging scenarios.

However, scientists advise us that, whichever of these outcomes awaits us, it's still pretty far off in the future. In other words, we don't have to worry about that.

But we do have to think about our own death: When? By what means? And what's after that?

*Neither heat nor cold, but a Person*

The Bible presents a different view of where the cosmos is headed, and everyone who has ever lived in it. Ultimately, the Scriptures teach, it all ends up at the feet of Jesus – every person who ever lived, every creature great or small, all the whole vast cosmos, everything will come into the hands of Jesus Christ, and He will rework and reassign all creation according to His eternal counsel and plan.

The cosmos itself is scheduled for an entire makeover. I sometimes wonder: Is our fascination with reality TV “makeover” programs some echo of the divine image in us, looking forward, if only subconsciously, to what by our very nature we know is awaiting the world at the end of time? Do we all inherently know that a wondrous “reveal” awaits us at some point?

The truth of Scripture explains that the current heavens and earth will be destroyed, but not completely obliterated. Rather, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, will reconstruct the cosmos and fuse it with the world of angels and departed spirits, so that a new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells will come into being.

Then, all who are qualified through the new birth to dwell in that glorious new creation will be welcomed and receive glorified bodies like that of Jesus Himself. It is in anticipation of that ultimate disposition that believers sanctify themselves in this life and thus bear witness to their hope for the life to come. Those who are not thus qualified, who have rejected the free offer of the Gospel and the witness of the Lord, will be separated from the new heavens and new earth and consigned to eternal solitude, darkness, loneliness, and misery – the consequence, not of some mean streak in God, but of their own choice, their own refusal to *submit* to the truth of God and enjoy the benefits of the new birth and the Kingdom of God.

Of course, secularists scoff at such an idea. This is, however, what the Scriptures teach; and the Scriptures,

which seem to know so much about everything else, are surely to be trusted over the best ideas and highest hopes of even the most “enlightened” human beings.

*Get ready*

Death is the end neither of the cosmos nor of every person. All human beings will one day appear before Jesus Christ to hear Him utter the sentence they have pronounced on themselves: Either “Enter the Kingdom prepared for you from before the foundations of the world” or “Depart from me; I never knew you.” At that time, every knee will bow, in acknowledgment of the holiness and Kingship of Jesus, and every tongue will confess what the Scriptures throughout declare, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

For some, this will be a most joyous bending of the knee, the glorious culmination and eternal new beginning of a confession to which they have firmly held while living, and the consummation of the hopes which sustained and guided them through all their days. They who have *known* the truth and have *submitted* to it, will now realize the *reward* of truth which, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has been preparing for them from all eternity past. All who believe in Jesus, the Truth of God, will enter into the joy of their Father and be eternally secure and at peace and rest in the full presence, promise, and power of His glorious Kingdom.

For others, alas, it will be a day of deep horror and regret. For while those who have submitted to the truth of God are rejoicing to see Jesus face to face, those who have preferred the lie to the truth of God in Scripture will learn at last that the Bible is true – as is God Who gave it – and the lie they have believed is not.

God is true. His Word is true. Jesus is the truth of God. All who deny this, or who seek to use this truth for their own ends, are living a lie, *the* lie, which insists that they know better than God how they ought to live. In that great coming day, it will be seen at last that God *is* true, and all who insist otherwise are liars, and doomed to the consequences of their own bad choices.

And we who know this truth have been entrusted with the sacred mission of making it known to the world. The challenge to us is to stand firm in the truth of God, living that truth, exposing the lies of idolatry and wrong belief, and calling the people in our world to repent and believe the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom (Prov. 24.11, 12).

*For reflection*

1. What is hell? What will it be like to experience this forever? Do you believe this?
2. If your neighbor’s house were on fire, would you alert him? If your neighbor’s life were headed for hell, should you warn him? Why or why not?
3. What can you do to become more consistent in preparing to reach out, and then in reaching out to the people in your Personal Mission Field?

*Next steps – Preparation: Meditate on 1 John 3.1-3 and 2 Peter 3.10-18. What should believers be doing in order to prepare for seeing Jesus face to face? How should this affect their relationships with others? The work they do each day? How does your own daily schedule and practice match up with this?*

*The Truth that Makes Us Free*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What's the difference between saying that truth is *objective* and truth is *subjective*? Which view does the Bible support?
2. Why do you suppose many people, including many Christians, are reluctant to trust the Bible as reliable, objective truth?
3. How can we know when we're *standing over* the Bible rather than *standing under* it?
4. Why is it so important to follow the Biblical teaching about the image of God, rather than the secular teaching about the image of animals?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson into practice in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship to help us extend our ministry and resources to others. You can contribute to our ministry by using the Contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

Thank you.

