



Telling the Truth

By Andrew Comiskey

"Truth has stumbled in the streets,
Honesty cannot enter.
Truth is nowhere to be found."
(Is.59:14,15)

I write this article on the first day of President Clinton's impeachment trial. It is a solemn day for the American people. Each of us bears the shame of his failures and deception. Not only because of his office but because President Clinton is a fellow Christian. Those who call on the name of Jesus grieve as one body.

In light of his offenses, God seeks to reveal our own. Sexual addiction may not apply to all of us. But shame and secrecy apply to the majority. Most of us tend to conceal our failures. We deny the truth of the wrong we are capable of. When sin is conceived, we hide. We prefer the refuge of the fig leaf to naked honesty.

That also applies to our willingness to speak truthfully to one another. How readily we opt for the broad path of "tolerating" another's darkness rather than shedding some light on his or her predicament! We don't want to be unloving. But how loving are we who fail to express the hard truth that could become another's freedom?

The Truth of God

Truth and God are one. Belief in God anchors man in the truth that can only be imparted to him from his Creator. Jesus, as God the Son in human form, embodies truth. Receivers of Jesus receive the truth. James writes: "God gives us birth through the word of truth." (James 1:18) God's truth enlivens us as it takes residence in us when we believe in Christ. Paul writes: "God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the Truth." (1 Tim 2:14)

But salvation involves more than belief in the truth. Salvation involves being transformed by the truth. Paul writes that we are saved through "the sanctifying work of the Spirit." (2 Thes.2:13) That sanctifying work involves the way that Jesus trains us in the truth through His Spirit of Truth. (Jn 14:16; 16:12) Truth abides with us and refines, corrects, and guides the willing heart.

Through the Spirit of Truth, God seeks to make us truthful. Salvation involves more than mere lip service to faith in Christ: it involves a life becoming transformed by the truth.

Suppressing the Truth

Can one believe in Christ and yet suppress the truth of His ways? Sadly, yes. Every believer possesses the capacity to block and counter the transforming work of Christ in his or her life. Scripture describes deceived believers who "follow their shameful ways and bring the truth into disrepute." (2 P 2:13) Sin masters them, and the need to suppress the truth follows.

In fact, the "fig leaf" which covers the sin endangers souls more than the sin itself. At Desert Stream, the most powerful temptation faced by staff and participants alike is not sexual immorality itself but the lure of hiding the sin or struggle. False piety, not overt sin, is our greatest enemy.

Sex and Deception

We seem more prone to secrecy about our sexual desires than our other appetites. That makes sense in light of God's original intention about our sexuality. He ordained "shameless" sexual activity only in the privacy of heterosexual marriage. (Gen.2:25) Behind closed doors, conjugal love celebrates the union of man and woman. Passion and creativity burn brightly within the boundaries of monogamy.

But for many of us, our sexual experiences occurred outside of these boundary lines. Our shame results from the inner conviction that we squandered something precious. We hide. In spite of cultural norms to the contrary, our consciences tell us the truth that we've plundered our own and another's most cherished offering.

Boundaries are violated. And the modesty that God instilled in our humanity breaks down with each act of immorality. An armor of neurotic shame, marked by secrecy and deception, arises in an effort to stave off the guilt we feel for squandering the good gift.

Liberating Truth

Sexual sinners may tend more toward shame and deception than those addicted in other ways. The depth of violation prompts a thicker defense. All the more reason to embrace the truth that Jesus welcomes the truthful sinner. Unlike man's deception, which suppresses his soul, God's truth liberates the human heart.

Jesus frees us to be sinners! 1 Jn 1:9 reads: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Jesus' truth reveals deception and sin; His love dissolves the defense of shame and cleanses our hearts with the power of God's pardon.

Telling the Truth about Ourselves

Truth takes root in the heart of the sexual sinner by his or her ongoing willingness to be known by Christ and others. Even as sin flourishes in secrecy, sanctity thrives in ongoing accountability. Confession sheds stark light on sin and deception. Eventually, the truth prevails.

Here the authority of the church comes to play. As the "pillar and foundation of the truth," (1 Tim 3:15) the church helps to re-establish the truth in the lives of truthful sinners. Through ongoing confession, we discover that "truth is being wrought in our innermost parts." (Ps 51:6)

No-one can choose to be rid of sinful tendencies altogether. But we can choose to submit all of our "fig leaves" to the Truth. Through confession to Christ and His Church, we in our very weakness are strengthened and protected by the Truth. One prayer at a time, the truth transforms us. We fulfill Christ's words: "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." (Jn 8:32)

Becoming Truth Tellers

As the truth matures in us, God raises up truth tellers. These are men and women whose freedom to confess their own sin extends to proclaiming the truth to others. These are the ones who have "renounced secret and shameful ways, who do not use deception, nor do they distort the word of God. They set forth the truth plainly, and commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." (2 Cor 4:2,3)

Those who have discovered the truth of God in "their secret and shameful ways" are uniquely qualified to tell the truth to others. They can do so out of humility, as sin and a holy God have humbled them. They can tell the truth with compassion, as mercy broke the power of their shame. And they can tell the truth with conviction. They know that only Christ can set the sin-weary heart free.

Truthful sinners do not romanticize sin and deception. They know the devastation wrought by both. So they do not bless others' delusions. Nor do they fawn over those caught in lies and rationalizations. Truthful sinners dare to tell others the truth about their sin. They realize that Jesus doesn't heal one of sin: His kindness leads the sinner to repentance and forgiveness.

Truthful sinners do not need to be right. They simply want to contribute to the hope that one might turn to Christ and entrust his or her heart to Him. I am privileged to labor alongside of men and women who daily "speak the truth in love" (Eph.1:13) to those mangled by sin. Gently yet firmly these truthful sinners are helping others to discover the Truth.

Admittedly, the days are dark. Truth has stumbled in the streets. But God is on the move, transforming sinners through His truth. And from these truthful sinners, the glory of God arises.

"Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of God arises upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the people,
But the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you.
Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."
(Is.60:1-3)