

*December 22, 2019  
Sunday Morning Service  
Christmas  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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**THE TRUE LIGHT  
John 1:9-14**

One time I was in a conversation with a fellow Christian in which we were debating a particular issue. I will never forget what he said. I had proposed that a certain group of people were affirming things that were not true. This brother in Christ responded, “Perception is truth. The truth to them is whatever they perceive it to be.” That sounded pretty philosophical, but as I pondered it, I concluded that such a conclusion in and of itself was not even true. Truth is not what any person thinks it is. Truth is truth. Ultimately, we are not the inventors of truth. God is!

A problem is that sometimes we are not sure what was said, what was done, what was written, or such. In those cases, we ought to be willing to acknowledge that we are not sure what constitutes the truth. At other times we are well aware of what was said, or done, or written, but we really don’t understand it. It is okay to admit that we do not understand and, therefore, cannot perceive truth.

Another problem, a dangerous problem, is to know the truth but deny that it is true. It is possible that a person does know and understand what was said, or what was done, or what was written. However, the person does not agree with the truth, or does not like the truth, and chooses to deny that it is true.

Why would someone not like or agree with truth? Sometimes truth reveals that we are wrong, or it makes us look unacceptable, or it reveals that we are in deep trouble. But it is quite foolish to deny the truth in order to try to feel better about ourselves. That is like a person receiving a diagnosis from his doctor that he has a disease that left untreated will become fatal. Only a very foolish person would try to deny the truth of the diagnosis.

That problem of dealing honestly with truth is the framework, the background of our text. The truth is that Jesus is God the eternal Son, who came to earth in the form of a human in order to pay the penalty for sin, so that sinners can be reborn. Satan and, therefore, sin and, therefore, our natural fleshly condition does not like that inconvenient truth. Why not? Because it assesses us to be sinners. We are. Sin makes us look unacceptable before God. We’re not acceptable. It makes us feel uncomfortable about ourselves. It should. It leaves us feeling like we are not whole or self-sufficient. We aren’t. So does our denial of truth change truth? No.

This past week I went to a local store to purchase a Christmas card. I wanted to send a message of hope. Hope is found in Jesus. I thought that Christmas was the time when we celebrated the hope Jesus brought at His birth. Granted, December the 25<sup>th</sup> is rooted in a pagan festival that celebrated the change from shortest days to longer days of the calendar year. But, throughout a large part of Church history, December 25<sup>th</sup> has been a day set aside to celebrate Christ. That is true. The manifold traditions, songs, and focus has been on God’s great gift of salvation through the incarnation of God the Son. The true history of the American culture reveals that, as a whole, we Americans used to celebrate Jesus on Christmas – hence the name of the celebration – the “Christ - Mass”!

Well, when I went to get a card with a message of hope in Jesus, I found none. Not one! There were hundreds of Christmas cards on the rack. But no cards that mentioned Jesus. There happened to be a lady working with the cards, who worked for the supplier. I asked, “Are there no cards here that mention Jesus?” She said, “If there were any, they would be among those cards in the ‘Dayspring’ section.” So I looked at all 20 cards represented in that section. Again, not one card that mentioned Jesus. I turned to the lady and said, “That’s odd. I can remember when Christmas was the celebration of Jesus’ birth.” She said, “I know. It’s pathetic, isn’t it?”

Denial that God the Father sent God the Son to be born of a virgin does not change the truth. Denial that Christ the Savior was born does not change the truth. Denial that our horrible sinful condition is the reason we need the Savior does not change the truth. Denial that I am a sinner by birth, offensive to my Creator, and, therefore, deserving eternal punishment does not change the truth.

One day all the truth about God and about each one of us is going to be uncovered. What will you think then? At that moment, truth will not be what we perceive it to be. The truth will be exactly what God has already revealed in the Bible. And that truth is really not as confusing as people say it is. God has given us the Bible in such a form that truth is perceptible. You can perceive, that is know and understand, the truth of the Bible, especially the truth of this text.

The Christmas story is that God the Father sent God the Son to be our Savior from sin. The truth is that you must believe Him and must receive Him. And the truth also is that when you do, you will come to experience the peace in your heart that the angels promised.

### **True Light Has Dawned.**

The Bible argues here that full expression of the truth about God is obvious. Truth is obvious because the Living Word became flesh. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (v.14a)*. The English word “*Word*” is the same Greek word used to speak of a writing or a literal word as we know it. The Greek word *logos* comes from the verb *lego*, which is not a plastic building block kids play with. The verb *lego* means to say or speak. Much of the time this word is used in the New Testament to refer to things said, uttered, taught, proclaimed, decreed, declared, or just ordinary conversation.

However, the *Word* in our text is special. This *Word* is defined in John 1:1 as the Living Word. It means that this particular *Word* (unlike ordinary words) is life, has vitality, and, therefore, is a person, a being. This *Word* is eternal (v.2). This *Word* is in the presence of God (v.1). In fact, this *Word* is equal to God, equivalent to God (v.1). Therefore, this *Word* must also be our Creator (v.3).

The astonishing truth in this text is that this *Word* became flesh, came to be a person like us. That is a miracle. And even more miraculous is the fact that our Creator God was born to a virgin. It had to be so in the larger scope of Him being our substitute for sin. Our Savior had to be born of the woman, but not born of sinful man. He was born of the Holy Spirit and the woman.

Can you believe it?! This is truth. This is difficult, yeah, impossible for human wisdom to comprehend. But it is still truth. Denying it does not change it. For a moment, do not fall back to your

default mode of thinking, but contemplate this truth. Do you really believe that God the Son was born to a virgin?

As a result of the *Word* becoming flesh, we have seen God’s glory. *And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (v.14b)*. Because the God/man was dwelling among people, people saw Him. The author of this Gospel account was an eyewitness of the Living Word become man.

What did the author, the eyewitness, and everyone else see? He and others saw glory. Obviously, glory speaks of grandeur, majesty, that which is superior to the norm. The word is *doxa* and comes from a classical Greek root that speaks primarily of a right opinion or view. But in the New Testament, the noun has lost all sense of that common use. There is not one example in the New Testament or early church fathers where *doxa* means to have a right opinion of God. Rather, the New Testament usage always describes the brightness, splendor, majesty, the radiance of God.

Therefore, when people observed God the Son, they saw a God-kind of glory. They acknowledged that special glory when they concluded that He taught with super-human wisdom and authority. They acknowledged Christ’s majesty when they experienced His supernatural miracles of healing, feeding, controlling weather, and raising the dead. They rightly concluded, “How can anyone but God do these things?”

But the part of God’s glory that many people missed was grace and truth. Jesus demonstrated undeserved favor many times as He poured His life into the lives of the needy. The very presence of God the Son in this world was a vast manifestation of God’s grace. And truth? Jesus was the exact display of God’s truth. Jesus lived truth. He taught truth. He uncovered truth.

This is where the conflict between Jesus and religious people centered. People who loved truth, longed for truth, and even wanted to know the truth about themselves sought Jesus, followed Jesus, and became wholly dependent on Jesus. People who feared truth, who were uncomfortable with truth, who denied truth, who preferred to live in “untruth” rejected Jesus.

One who displays glory, being full of grace and truth, is what we would expect from the perfect expression of God. That is precisely what the writing to the Hebrew Christians stated at the

opening of his letter. *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:1-3).* The people saw God's matchless glory in Jesus.

Jesus is the truth that impacts everyone. Therefore, it must stand to reason that Jesus is true enlightenment. He is *The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world (v.9)*. God the Son is by nature true light. This means that He is authentic light contrasted to "fake" light or deception that sounds like truth. Satan makes himself and, therefore, his teaching to appear to be light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Satan's counsel sounds "religious" or even Christian as he sprinkles just enough Bible into it to deceive the unenlightened. Don't forget that Satan quoted God's Word to Eve and to Jesus. Jesus, in contrast to untruth, is the perfectly honest light.

Jesus is the true light in that He is the real light. He is real truth as opposed to the pictures and shadows of the law and ceremonies. Jesus completes the exposing that the law begins.

Jesus is the true light in that He is the original light. The moon derives its light from the sun. Religion and religious advice derives its light from others. Christ the creator of all things is the light of truth, the source for all others.

Finally, Jesus is the true light in that He is the preeminent light. All other light sources pale in comparison. Eventually, God's people will see the light of truth while those who are merely religious will fall into many traps because of their spiritual blindness.

Where there is interaction with true light, there will be enlightenment just as surely as sunshine reveals all the flaws. When I am working on a project like a cabinet or a tile floor, I will try to get the sunlight to shine through a window onto the floor, or I will take the item outside into the sunlight in order to inspect it for flaws. The sunlight exposes flaws better than any manmade light source. On the other hand, I hate to have portraits of myself taken in raw sunlight. In such cases, I try to explain the many wrinkles and flaws in my skin as not fair or realistic. In my heart I know they are actual.

This simple truth explains why many people do not like Bible preaching, Bible counseling, or Bible conversation. The Bible is the character of Christ in written form. To come into contact with the written Word is to come into contact with Christ. Through His written Word, Christ enlightens – shows us the truth about who and what we are. And when Jesus the light reveals the truth about us, we often do not have good feelings about ourselves. And human nature believes that if something causes us to have negative feelings, we are wise to stay away from it. Which is why people have no problems with gentle Jesus, but they hate the penetrating gaze from His eyes that are like refining fire.

As a result of human sin and weakness, not everyone acknowledges the enlightenment that Jesus brings. *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him (v.10)*.

The Creator of this world came into His creation. He perfectly assessed and commented on every aspect of creation (especially people) all the time He was here. He gave sufficient proof that He is the Creator who deserves respect, honor, and full submission. But His creation prefers not to know Him. The Greek word for *know* is *ginosko*, which means to acquire knowledge through personal involvement and experience.

Jesus comes to us and, shining the light of His Word on us, desires for us to give up on ourselves and embrace Him. But human nature prefers not to give up on self and, embracing self, rejects Jesus. The result often is knowing a lot ABOUT Jesus, but not gaining knowledge of His character through personal experience. In other words, people are content to be religious, but not interested in being like Christ.

Therefore, not everyone receives the truth when they come in contact with Christ the Light. *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him (v.11)*. Even the most privileged people in history did not take Jesus to themselves. He demonstrates perfect truth to religious people, and they still prefer their "Christian" ideas to embracing the person of Christ.

The key word here is control. We can control religious ideas and concepts. But we cannot control Christ. He demands giving up on self in order to become enveloped in Him. The astonishing, and

difficult, principle here is that the one thing religious people are trying to achieve, “peace in their hearts,” is found only in giving up control in order to be controlled by Christ.

Listen again to the angels’ announcement when the penetrating Light of Truth came to earth: “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!*” (Luke 2:14). Then why are there so many professing Christians who do not have peace? Is God not pleased with them? Submission to God’s truth is the only means to enjoy what the angels promised. *Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble* (Psalm 119:165). If we “stiff arm” the *Light of Truth* (the Living Word of God), we will never take Jesus to ourselves, and we will never have God’s promised peace. So what are we to do?

### **Truth received is truth believed.**

Some people believe the truth. *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God* (v.12). Some people still believe. To believe is to be so convinced about something that you act according to what you believe. We demonstrate this all the time. Why do you walk into a room and flip the light switch? You do that action because you believe it will cause a light to come on. Can you explain the details about how electricity is created, how it is transported to your house, how it interacts with the switch, and how it makes a bulb burn? No. But you believe it. And your action is commensurate with your belief.

Do you really believe all that is wrapped up in the name of Jesus? His name is not just how He is known or addressed. His name represents all that Jesus is. His name is the demonstration of His character in attitude and actions. So, do you believe that Jesus is your Creator and, therefore, He has the right to control you? Do you believe Christ has won your freedom from the penalty of sin and deserves to be your Lord?

People who believe, receive. If you truly believe who Jesus is, you will receive Him. This simply means that you will take Jesus to yourself. But that is not a picture of you pulling Jesus alongside and adding him to your plan. In reality, at the point of faith, you realize that God has put you “in Christ” so that you are inseparably

connected within Him. You cannot get more closely “alongside” than being “in Christ.”

People who believe Christ, and receive Him, are given an astonishing right. We have the right to become God’s child. Becoming a child of God is an amazing gift. It is God’s work of giving us His Son, our Savior. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit doing the miracle of recreating us. This is the miracle of being reborn that Jesus explained to Nicodemus. In conversation with this well-known teacher, Jesus answered, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit*” (John 3:5-8). That is God’s amazing miracle.

Furthermore, all who believe truth receive God’s grace. The invitation is given to all. It is the same invitation God gave in the Old Testament. “*Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David*” (Isaiah 55:1-3).

This is the invitation God told His followers to give to everyone. *And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation”* (Mark 16:15). Our Master’s will is the Good News “*that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem*” (Luke 24:47). That wonderful invitation comes with the eternal promise: *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame”* (Romans 10:10-11). And *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”* (Romans 10:13). God invites you to trust Him completely and embrace His gift.

But at the same time, the new birth is God's gift, not something we can create or acquire in our own strength. The children of God are those *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (v.13)*. This is a miracle. Maybe the most miraculous part is that God must do the birthing because human wisdom cannot even perceive the truth about the matter. *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14)*. And so we are by nature like Nicodemus and wonder what happens at the miracle of the new birth.

God must do the "new birthing" or there is no new birth. Apart from God, there can be religion and religious ideas. Apart from God and in human strength and wisdom, we can experience a deep feeling or strong emotionalism. In our own wisdom, we can develop an extreme commitment. But we cannot make ourselves God's children.

Jesus, truth incarnate, came to us. He came to reveal who God is and who we are. He invites us to believe Him and receive Him. How will you respond? Will you say the same thing about yourself that God says? Will you trust Him completely? The truth reveals that if God the Holy Spirit does not do the miracle of regeneration, there is no receiving of God's gift, no new birth, no becoming a child of God, no hope for eternity, and no peace in life. The challenge ultimately comes down to this question: "Are you actually born again, or are you just religious?"