



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Volume 8 Issue 25

June 21, 2009

## Perseverance in Ministry, Part 4

The past couple of weeks we have been addressing the issue of “weariness” when it comes to ministering in the Kingdom of God. Now it should be noted that just as with love, anger, mourning, and the like, there are different types of weariness. There’s a weariness that arises on account of our humanity. We read of Christ who after a long day of ministry “...was in the stern, asleep on the cushion...” (Mark 4:38). Isaiah speaks of “youths grow[ing] weary and tired...” (Isaiah 40:30).

There is a weariness that arises on account of over-exertion:

Jeremiah 12:5, “If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses?”

There is a weariness that results from sorrow such as the disciples in the garden “sleeping from sorrow” (Luke 22:45). There are indeed numerous types of “weariness” which are part and parcel of our humanity and frailty.

Yet there is another type of weariness which arises on account of sin; that is, from wrong motives, misplaced trust, or doing the work of God in one’s own strength. That is the weariness addressed in our

text.<sup>1</sup> It is the weariness seen in Rebekah when she said to Isaac, “I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth” (Genesis 27:46).

Christ never experienced this kind of weariness; a weariness that comes from fear and bitterness. Hebrews speaks of a weariness which comes from being preoccupied with the things of this world:

Hebrews 12:3, “For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”

We read of Christ:

Luke 18:1, “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.”

Gaius indeed was a candidate for the weariness that results from sin. Like many throughout church history, he was being persecuted for righteousness sake. Now as painful as that is, it cannot compare to the hurt that comes when the attack arises from ones who ought to be our support, encouragement, or friends. David describes this weariness:

Psalms 55:12-14, “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear *it*; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend. We who had sweet fellowship together, walked in the house of God in the throng.”

In Gaius’ case, the one who inflicted the deepest blows was his pastor, Diotrephes. Rather than being a support and encouragement as he ought to have been, Diotrephes was out for himself and so consumed the members of his congregation unto his own personal gain (3 John 9). Accordingly Gaius’ attempts at service were met with ridicule, opposition, and threatenings (3 John 10). Thus John penned this epistle in order to encourage Gaius (one of his children in the faith, compare 3 John 1, 2, 4) when it came to his service in the Kingdom of God. He must not grow weary and lose heart!

What specifically is it that Gaius needed to know in order to remain in the ministry? The “close friend” that hurt Gaius was his pastor. For us this day it could a parent, a sibling, a spouse, a child, or a close friend. So what is it that will keep us from washing out of ministry? What is it that would keep Gaius from washing out?

### *Living According to Truth*

The passage at which we are looking answers these questions! Thus far we have seen three words of encouragement that Gaius might continue in his service of Christ. We turn now to the last word of encouragement. Perseverance in ministry is a matter of Living According to Truth 3 John 8.

3 John 8, “therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth.”

This is another profound word of encouragement. Yet to understand it and so appreciate it, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Compare also Colossians 3:21; 2 Corinthians 4:16; Galatians 6:9; Ephesians 3:13.

important that we be familiar with the Biblical concept of “truth.” See, today, “truth” is not a self-defining term. In the Philosophical schools of the west a distinction was and is made concerning three different types of truth...

- Moral or personal truth.
- Cognitive or propositional truth.
- Ontological or universal truth.

Francis Schaeffer in his writings coined the expression, “true truth” because in our day, truth is more personal than it is objective and so

- Mutable.
- Changing.
- Subject to circumstances and perception.
- Today, A can equal non-A in many people’s minds.

Now as irrational as this may be, it is not hard to understand why this thinking has arisen. We all know the story of the three blind men arguing about an object before them:

- One claimed that it was a snake because it was long, thin, and wiggly.
- Another argued that it was a wall because it was flat, hard, and immovable.
- The third argued that it was a tree as its base was large, cylindrical, and seemingly permanent.

The truth be known, they all were wrong for each was confronted with a different part of an elephant. *Now if it could be true of say these blind men, goes the thinking of some Couldn’t it be true of us who do NOT and CANNOT see reality objectively? Is it possible with such limited perspective that anyone of us can genuinely know truth?*

Indeed! We recognize that in and of ourselves our grasp on truth is limited and most often confined to perception. So we talk about “a truth for me” and “a truth for you”- and so “truths by which we personally live.” These “truths” are separate from mathematical facts which also is different from scientific laws. In this regard, there is a distinction today that is drawn between truth and fact. And so recall Indiana Jones’ statement at the beginning of his archaeology class in the movie, “The Last Crusade:”

If you are interested in truth, the philosophy department is down the hall. In archaeology, we are only interested in facts — as if “facts” also were not interpreted and so not subjective.

So what did John have in mind here when he said that as a servant of Christ, Gaius, and for that matter all Christians, would be “fellow workers with the truth” if they maintained their faithfulness to God? In the words of Pilate, “What is truth?” (John 18:38)

When we look at Scripture and ask, “What does God mean when He speaks about truth?” we discover a couple of important observations. First, notice that the Bible uses “truth” quite differently than do we. When we speak of truth with any classical notion we think of it as a property or characteristic of an assertion; hence there is a detachment between us and truth. Yet in the Bible, truth first and foremost

is bound up in God.

John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.’”

In other words, Jesus/God just isn't true; He is truth! Think about that; the implications are legion!

Accordingly and secondarily truth is a moral attribute of the Lord which results in God being faithful, upright, and trustworthy. John the Baptist stated it this way:

John 3:33, “He who has received His witness has set his seal to *this*, that God is true.”

Thus truth is not something from which we can be detached. Rather it is something into which we seek to enter. Dr. A. F. Holmes, Philosophy professor at Wheaton College, put it this way:

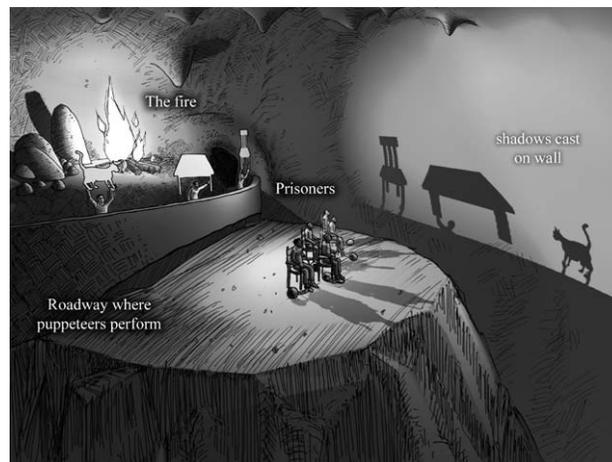
“[In Scripture] a true statement is not just accurate, eliciting a detached kind of assent: it is reliable, [and so] worthy of personal commitment and trust.”<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly in the Bible, truth constitutes reality,<sup>3</sup> reality as God made it, NOT as we behold it or imagine it.

- It is objective, John 5:33; 2 Corinthians 12:6; Galatians 2:5.
- It is knowable, Luke 1:4; John 4:23; 8:32, 40; 16:7; 18:37; 19:35; 2 Corinthians 7:14.

It is a realm which we ought to inhabit.

### *Plato's Cave Analogy Described*



In Platos' *Allegory of the Cave*, he imagined a group of people who had lived their entire lives in a cave chained facing a blank wall. These people watched the shadows projected on the wall by things passing

<sup>2</sup> *New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 695.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Galatians 2:5; Titus 1:1

in front of the cave entrance. These prisoners began to ascribe forms to these shadows. According to Plato, the shadows are as close as the prisoners ever got to seeing reality.

Plato used this to describe how a philosopher is like a prisoner freed from the cave that comes to understand that the shadows on the wall are not constitutive of reality at all. Once freed from the cave, he now sees the true form of reality rather than the mere shadows seen by the prisoners.

The gospel of Jesus Christ sets the prisoners of sin free. When Christ died, a part of the cave was torn away and some of the enchained prisoner's were loosed and so they are now able to see reality.

- A bird.
- The sun.
- A chair.

Indeed! Now they are in reality by which truth is understood NOT via dialogue BUT God's word! That which the Christian receives by grace in Christ is "Eternal life." And "Eternal life" is life pertaining to the age to come! Truly, in Christ we pass out of fantasy into reality!

Amazingly as a realm of existence, the gospel of Jesus Christ was and is rejected outright by sinful man. This rejection began in the garden<sup>4</sup> and continues to this very day.<sup>5</sup> See mankind is in the dominion of Satan who is a liar, does not know truth, never speaks truth,<sup>6</sup> and so hinders as many as he can from obeying the truth.<sup>7</sup> Satan's kingdom constitutes a break with reality; that is, the Kingdom of God- and so is characterized by deceit.

It is interesting to note that in Scripture, the opposite of truth is not error, but a lie or deception.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, being deceived fallen man moves in and out of "spiritual schizophrenia" by which they fashion the world and reality according to their own "wants, desires, and pleasures" (1 Timothy 6:5). Occasionally they are forced to live in the real world (the world as God created it); yet they do so blindly and arrogantly. Paul speaks of the non-Christian as one who is "Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

On account of this, Peter and Jude liken fallen men to unreasoning animals driven NOT by truth, BUT ultimately by their passions and desires.<sup>9</sup> Yet this is no accident. By the providence of God the world remains in a darkened state such that they hate, reject, and so malign truth. Speaking of the non-Christian Paul wrote:

2 Thessalonians 2:10b-12, "...they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Romans 1:25

<sup>5</sup> Compare John 8:45; Romans 1:18; 2 Corinthians 3:13

<sup>6</sup> Compare John 8:44

<sup>7</sup> Compare Galatians 5:7

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Matthew. 22:16; John 3:33; 8:44-46

<sup>9</sup> Compare 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 10

<sup>10</sup> Compare also 2 Peter 2:2

Such is the passing world in which we live! It is NOT reality! It is a fantasy world subject to the whims and will of Satan who has "...blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

In this regard, a characteristic of the non-Christian is a darkened and so enslaved mind.

Ephesians 4:17-18, "This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart."

Now God in His compassion wasn't willing to allow us to remain enslaved to this "darkened understanding."<sup>11</sup> Accordingly He Himself became man and so manifested/bore witness to the truth via His life<sup>12</sup> and His word.<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly for a man to know truth/reality, he must be brought into a saving relationship with Christ.<sup>14</sup> This saving relationship can only occur by the Holy Spirit<sup>15</sup> working by and with the word.<sup>16</sup> When this occurs, the saved individual not only is illumined in his mind and so reintroduced to truth/reality,<sup>17</sup> but he is given the charge to...

- Profess it (James 2:19).
- Proclaim it (2 Corinthians 6:4 & 7; Ephesians 4:15), and most importantly...
- Live in it (John 3:21; Romans 2:8; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 2 Corinthians 11:10; Ephesians 4:25, 26; 5:9; 6:14; 1 John 1:6; 2:4; 3:18; 2 John 4).<sup>18</sup>

1 John 5:20a, "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding..."

In Christ's first advent, truth/reality violently broke into this world of fantasy. Accordingly, to be brought to Christ is to be reintroduced to reality. In this regard, a man of God is one who "rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). In other words, he dives into it and lives in light of it.

The Biblical use of truth points to a kingdom which has intruded into the present age of sin and misery. This kingdom constitutes reality- life as God created it to be. Thus the child of God will be one whose longing, passion, and joy will be learning about the kingdom of God and living in light of it!

Now in this context there always will be the threat for the child of God to "turn away their ears from the

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<sup>11</sup> Compare also 1 Timothy 6:5

<sup>12</sup> Compare John 1:17; 14:6; 2 Corinthians 4:2

<sup>13</sup> Compare John 17:17; 2 Timothy 2:15

<sup>14</sup> Compare Galatians 2:5; Ephesians 4:21

<sup>15</sup> Compare John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:7

<sup>16</sup> Compare James 1:18

<sup>17</sup> Compare John 8:32; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25

<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly therefore in the Bible truth is the key to sanctification (2 Thes. 2:13), genuine appreciation for the pleasures of this life (1 Timothy 4:3), and love (2 John 1). As such we are called to obey it (1 Peter 2:22), be established in it (2 Peter 1:12), practice it (1 John 1:6), avoid all forms of deception (1 John 2:21), and to be fellow workers with the truth (3 John 8).

truth” (2 Timothy 4:4; James 3:14; 5:19, 20) and so listen to a lie. Like Christian in Doubting Castle, this so often is the reason behind our misery in this life- weariness!!

Thus the calling that rests upon us as Christians is “sober mindedness” (cf. 1 Timothy 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2) by which we are called to...

- Live in light of reality- the forever kingdom of God (Psalms 145:13) that is not passing away (1 John 2:17).
- Be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2).
- Seek the things above (Colossians 3:1, 2)
- Hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God and so the coming of reality (2 Peter 3:12).

When we do this, we cease being animals and so live as human beings created to commune with God, co-reign with Him, and so exalt His grace and glory.

In light of all of this, do you see that when John sought to encourage Gaius to persevere in His service in Christ’s name, by exhorting him to be a “fellow worker with the truth” he was dangling a carrot before Gaius which would be very difficult to pass up.

- *Gaius, to do anything else in your life is to break with reality, live in a fantasy world, and so further the kingdom of Satan, 2 John 11.*
- *Satan and the world says...*
  - *“Popularity is something we can’t live without.”*
  - *“Fulfillment and/or pleasure is most important.”*
  - *“Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is your right.”*
- *Yet this is all a lie! Life in this current age is about serving the Lord in a world hostile to Christ. If you get as your “thanks” grief, mourning, opposition, or persecution, you ought not to grow weary.*
- *In fact, we have been destined to suffer when we do what is right (cf. 1 Peter 2:20-21). Such ought to be the expectation of all who would live according to reality in a fantasy world...*

Isaiah 59:15, “Yes, truth is lacking; and he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey.”<sup>19</sup>

Such is the fourth and final word of encouragement given to Gaius. And such is the word of encouragement given to us in Christ this day. Truly, and by way of summary...

- The Bible describes two kingdoms that currently co-exist in this world: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.
  - The Kingdom of God constitutes reality and is so referenced by the word “Truth.”
  - The Kingdom of Satan constitutes fantasy and is so referenced by the word “deception.”
- Consequently, since God created this world and so created reality, it only is His commentary on reality- His word- that is reliable and dependable.
  - We cannot look to ourselves or to a majority to determine what is true verses what is false.

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<sup>19</sup> Compare also 2 Timothy 3:12

- Any and all truth claims are subject to the word of God.
- Now when our minds are renewed by the word and so are thinking Biblically, we recognize that “being a fellow worker with the truth” means far more than simply proclaiming the word of God. Rather, it involves working by and with the word as...
  - Reality is reintroduced into this world of fantasy.
  - God’s regency expands, extends, and so destroys the principalities and powers of this darkness.
  - The Kingdom of God comes and God’s will is done on this earth.

### *The Video Game Craze*

How does this translate to perseverance in ministry? There is a growing trend in our day which is quite alarming. More and more men, women, and children are living their lives in various and sundry Fantasy Games on the internet. There are people who in addition to their 40 hour work week spend 60 hours online living out a role or a part in an internet game.

I personally am aware of an individual who got caught up in one such fantasy game. He’d work long hours during the week only to come home on the weekend and spend 30 hours in front of a computer playing a game online. I learned about it because his wife called me in tears one day asking for advice. It seems as though he not only was neglecting her and his children, but when he did take breaks to eat or relieve himself, his mood was determined by what was happening online in the game. If he was being successful, he was kind and gracious. If he was failing, being crossed, or losing a match, he was irritable, irrational, and easily set off.

I dare say that there is not one here who wouldn’t look upon this with amazement. This man’s addiction to fantasy was negatively affecting how he viewed his wife, his children, his responsibilities, his worth, etc. Forget the time he wasted in front of the computer; the “crime” really was his allowing his fantasy game to...

- Compromise his faithfulness and service in the Kingdom of God.
- Influence over his family.

And herein we all stand guilty! See, Satan’s kingdom continues to be THE fantasy world by which most of us live! Though in Christ we have been brought from fantasy into reality, nevertheless how many Christians have allowed the spirit of the age, the fantasy world created by Satan, to negatively impact how they serve the Lord?

Because they’ve bought into the world’s standards when it comes to their values, goals, service, success, and the like, they look upon their God-given responsibilities and resent them. And so they walk around irritable, angry, and disillusioned. It is little wonder at times they find themselves weary and on the verge of giving up.

So the questions are these:

- What is that will keep you in reality... faithfully serving Christ when He comes for you?
- What is it that would keep Gaius in the ministry having encountered the setbacks we’ve detailed

throughout this series?

Working our way backwards through this text:

- 3 John 8, Gaius first must be sure that he was living according to reality- and not the fantasy land of this passing world...
  - As a Christian, he had become a “fellow worker with the truth” and so no longer could he be concerned about the opinions and assessments of man.
  - That Diotrephes, the church, or both viewed Gaius with suspicion and so considered him to be a failure, must be water off his back.
  - Gaius was not a servant of man, but a servant of Christ, His Kingdom, Reality, and so the Truth.
- 3 John 7, now speaking of reality, Gaius secondly must allow Christ’s character — His love, compassion, sovereignty, and grace — to be that which moved him in life.
  - Yes, the people for whom he ministered were ungrateful, unworthy, and at times mean-spirited.
  - Yet he was no servant of man. His work was “unto the Lord,” and it was in “that name” and for “the name” that he fulfilled his obligations!
- 3 John 6, speaking of the “name of Christ,” how did the Lord view Gaius’ labor?
  - Because Christ’s offering not only is the basis of our forgiveness, but also our acceptance as ministers, Gaius could have the confidence that not only was he pleasing to God, but so also was his labor.
  - And so though Diotrephes threatened to excommunicate Gaius for what this disciple of John did was odious in his sight, nevertheless God was well-pleased.
- 3 John 5, accordingly, Gaius’s focus as a servant must NOT be on the fruit of his labor or its return. Rather, he must continue to aspire to that which distinguishes any and all servants in the Kingdom of God: Faithfulness. The highest commendation he could ever hear.

Matthew 25:21, “Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.”

This together constitutes the life of faith to which we’ve been called. In this regard, I want to close with the word that Isaiah gave to the genuine servant of God facing exile on account of the wickedness of Judah.

Isaiah 40:30-31, “Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up *with* wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”

If you want to become immune from “weariness” in ministry; the weariness that arises not from a weak disposition, but sinful motives, passions, and desires, “Wait for the Lord!” What does that mean? I don’t think we could get a better explanation than what John gives us here:

- Live according to His kingdom.
- Live according to His character.
- Live in light of His acceptance.
- Live for no other achievement than faithfulness.

## **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 21, 2009. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.