

The Battle For the Truth: 'The Truth Shall Make You Free'

In 1957 William Sargent published a significant book *The Battle for the Mind* (Pan Books). Later a book followed this, *The Battle for the Soul*, whose author and publisher escape my memory. The second book was intended to correct statements made in Sargent's book. Both books were of great value, but I want us to look at present truth and error. We are in an age soaked with deceit and error of all kinds, both evil and charming, error seeming to be truth, so clever is the seduction of lethal error.

The story of truth and deceit begins for us in the garden of Eden, where the primal couple lived in serenity and joy in the presence of their Creator. The serpent—that wily one—set out to do what today we call 'spin doctoring', diverting from the truth by clever means and putting forth another agenda than that of the truth. Paul said that he deceived the woman, the Man knowing the deceit and yet choosing to go along with it. The human race was henceforth involved in deceit. In Scripture a lot is spoken about deceit, especially that of false witness. Satan is said to have deceived the nations. We are told of human beings, that some use 'deceitful wiles', some deceive their neighbours, some deceive themselves, sin deceives Man, idolatry likewise deceives, human lusts are deceitful, false prophets deceive—and so on. All this emphasises the difference between God's truth and evil's deceit, the latter being called 'error'. John speaks in his First Letter of 'the spirit of truth and the spirit of error', and says that 'the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth'.

It is imperative and urgent that we know how to discern between deceit and truth. God has always communicated the truth, Satan the lie. The final and radical break into the human dilemma of knowing or not knowing what is truth, and what is deceit or error, came when the Word 'became flesh' and was 'full of grace and truth'. 'The law', John said, 'was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'. Christ, we find, had much to say about truth. He said, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free'. In Romans 1:18–25 Paul talks of the horrible change in hitherto innocent Man when he 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator'. Jesus talks of the beautiful transformation which will come to fallen Man when he comes to know the truth. James described this, 'Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures'. In John 14:6 Jesus described himself as the way, the truth and the life. He meant he was the way to the Father, *the truth of the Father* and the life of the Father whom he called 'the only true God'. He told Pilate that he had come into the world 'to bear witness to the truth'. He added, 'Every one who is of the truth hears my voice'.

In John 8:31–47 he said many things in regard to the truth. He spent time exposing Satan as a liar and a deceiver. 'He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him'. This alerts us to the horrifying nature

of Satan and the dangers of his deceiving works. Jesus also told the Jews opposing him that they were of their father the devil. How could they be so far deceived? He told them, 'Because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me.' Later he said that the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of truth and true witness—would convict the world of sin, 'because they do not believe in me'. He said of himself that he was 'a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God', and, 'If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?'

On the last night Jesus told his disciples that 'the Spirit of truth' was to come to them, that the Spirit would bring remembrance to them of *everything* Jesus had spoken, that he would teach them *all* things, that he would lead them into *all* the truth, and that he would glorify the Son and the Father. He also pointed out that because he had told the truth the world had hated him, and would likewise hate them. Also Jesus told them that when the Spirit of truth came, then he would bear witness to the truth to all who were against Jesus, showing Christ to be the true One. 'You also', he said, 'will bear witness to me'.

It was clear that the disciples had rarely understood what he taught them, though they had confidence that he was the true One. 'To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.' They knew he was of the truth, but despaired in knowing that truth. Even so, three times Jesus told them they would bear witness to him. In John 15:27, Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8 he said they would bear witness to him, that is, tell the truth of him who is the truth. For this they would need the baptism or outpouring of the Spirit upon them since the Spirit is the witness to the truth and the Spirit is the truth. Acts shows that at Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out, the apostles and all other believers came to know the truth. The whole book shows that once the truth came to the new people of God—the church—then it so gripped them that they could not but tell what they now knew so vividly, so clearly and so powerfully. What Jesus had predicted had clearly come to pass, 'You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free'. They were a free people because, 'Where the Spirit is, there is liberty'. Living in the truth they proclaimed the truth effectively. We see, then, that the way to fight the error and deceit of Satan was—and is—to be filled with the Spirit and thus with the truth. Just being critical of Satan, and seeking to devise ways of unseating him are not the proper way to combat evil. It is to tell the undeniable truth of the gospel. The Apostle John had the following good advice to offer. In I John 2:18–25 he wrote:

Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour . . . But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.

How, then, shall we go about 'the battle for the truth'? Firstly we must recognise that the battle has been won in Jesus Christ through his great work of the incarnation, his ministry, his death on the cross and his resurrection from the tomb, as also his ascension, his present work of his enthronement at the right hand of God, and the promise of his coming—his *parousia*, or appearance. Men and women who are 'fervent in spirit', 'being filled in spirit', being 'led by the Spirit' and 'walking in the Spirit' are people filled with the truth, knowing it and proclaiming it. By the Spirit they are in Christ and Christ in them. This is the way of being 'valiant for the truth'. We, then, are witnesses to the truth, the very truth of God. Let us keep in mind the fact that the forces of error—Satan and his hosts—are working day and night to draw us into error of thinking, error of action, error

within the church, error within the world, and error in our minds and hearts. The only defence against these cunning wiles of the serpent, is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as he is always bringing us to the truth of the Word of God—Christ himself as the Word, and the Bible as the inscripturated word.

Geoffrey Bingham, 10/11/98