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Viewpoint from the **Valley Grove Church Of Christ**

Pillar And Ground Of The Truth: The Local Church's Role In Supporting The Truth

By Jerry Fite

In the first century, one of the seven wonders of the world occupied prominence in Ephesus. It was the temple of the goddess Diana. One hundred seven columns, each sixty feet high, arose from a marshy bed to support the roof of the temple. What comparisons and contrasts must have crossed Timothy's mind in Ephesus when he read, *"These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground for the truth"* (1 Tim. 3:14-15). As the many columns provided support for a physical structure, the spiritual realm focuses attention upon God's household or family (cf. 1 Tim. 3:5), the church, supporting the truth revealed by God. But what a contrast! The church upholds the "truth" of "the living God", instead of the "lie" of "lifeless" pagan idolatry.

The church is a collectivity of people who are individually called out of the world of sin by the truth of the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13-14), and purchased or redeemed from sin by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28, Rev. 5:9-10). Therefore, each individual member of the church should be enthusiastically involved in offering helpful support to the truth of God. Is it not "the truth" of the gospel that gives each hearer eternal hope in heaven (Col. 1:5)? Is it not "the truth" which each person can know that frees the individual from sin (Jn. 8:32)? And, is it not "the truth" of the gospel that offers purification from one's sins when he or she obeys it (1 Pet. 1:22)?

The truth of God, because it is the message of salvation in Christ, must be proclaimed (Rom. 10:14-15). Because it is a message for practical living, it must be practiced (Eph. 4:20-24). Because it is the only power of God unto salvation, and cannot co-exist with soul damning doctrinal error, it must be defended (Phil. 1:16). When the church is involved in preaching, practicing and defending the truth of the gospel, it functions as a strong underpinning for the truth of God in any generation.

When each member commits to doing his or her part in supporting the truth of the gospel, then the church in any locality will be a strong buttress for truth. Each member should know God's plan for salvation found in the truth of the gospel. Did he not first know the truth before he obeyed it? Each member should engage in spreading the good news that he knows to the lost around him. Even when persecution arose in the church, *"They therefore that were scattered abroad, went about preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4). *"Faithful"* men and women in the household of God *"shall be able to teach others"* (2 Tim. 2:2).

When brethren view the church as a departmentalized organization with only a select few responsible for spreading the gospel, then truth's support weakens. It is not hard to see that there will be five times as much work extended in teaching the lost in a congregation of twenty working members, than in a congregation of a hundred members with only the preacher and three elders working to save the lost. Each congregation should therefore be busy in providing instruction which equips each member of the church with the knowledge of God's plan for salvation.

This small step can spark confidence in the timid Christian who would like to tell others about Christ, but does not feel suitably knowledgeable. Where ignorance and shyness once allowed doors of opportunity to remain shut, knowledge creates confidence and

generates excitement in the possibilities of opened doors. Knowledgeable, faithful members will be busy in *"holding forth the word of life"* to a dying world (Phil. 2:16). Reminders that God would have *"all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2:4) will embolden individual Christians in the quest for the divine goal, as reflected in the epitaph of one nineteenth century missionary: "When he came among us there were no Christians, when he left us, there were no heathen."

Newspaper articles and printed tracts offer the local church convenient ways of spreading the gospel of Christ. In some areas, community newspapers offer free space for religious articles. Receiving permission to place tracts in hospitals, doctor's offices and washaterias connects you with a "waiting" public who might pause to consider the printed proclamation of the truth.

Advances in technology offer many avenues for a local church to spread the good news of salvation. While a hundred years ago the steam engine helped navigate missionaries to the world's doorstep, air waves and cyber space now provide us quick access into the world's living room. Two-minute spots, or thirty minute radio programs can be effective in stirring up interest in communities. Call in radio and television programs offer immediate feedback regarding spiritual topics that interest the listening or viewing audience. Cable television in some areas offers reasonable rates for a local church to

reach thousands simultaneously. Setting up a web site for a local church is a fairly inexpensive way of literally connecting with the world by allowing anyone to download the various class materials, bulletin articles and sermon outlines that are made available.

Using modern technological tools can effectively extend the local church's support of the truth, but they can never replace the need for personal contact. Newspaper articles, tracts, radio and television programs, and web sites offer ways for disseminating truth, but baptism into Christ and encouragement in the way unto heaven demands personal contact. Knowledgeable, faithful members of the church are constantly on the watch for interested souls.

But what will an interested soul see, when he or she comes in contact with the members of the church? This is where the second supporting pier for the truth rises in prominence: members "practicing" the truth. Paul writes, *"Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his: and Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness"* (2 Tim. 2:19).

One of the protective seals of God's foundation is His people departing from unrighteousness. The truth is hindered, not supported, when people practice unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Members of a local church must be aware of their daily influence in their community. They either adorn and beautify the doctrine

of God before their employers (Tit. 2:9-10) , or they cause the truth of God's word to be blasphemed among their neighbors (Tit. 2:4-5). The saving truth of the gospel shines brightly when a community sees those who preach the truth diligently practicing the truth they preach.

A third important way a local church supports the truth is by defending the truth against doctrinal error. Error enters deceptively (Eph. 4: 14, 2 Pet. 2:1) and thrives in spreading spiritual destruction if unopposed (2 Tim. 2:17-18). While we defend the truth by unashamedly stating what we believe (Phil. 1:16, 1 Pet. 3:15), some mistakenly believe that if we just preach the truth, we do not have to be conversant with what others teach.

This is not how truth was supported in the New Testament. Jesus "contrasted" the truth of His new covenant sayings with what the Old Testament taught when He said, *"But I say unto you..."* (Matt. 5:22, 28, 34, 39, 44, etc.). Paul spelled out the "conclusions" regarding the Old Law being nailed to the cross when he wrote, *"let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day..."* (Col. 2:14-16). Peter did not just tell the truth that the day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night, but spelled out the error some will be saying: *"Where is the promise of His coming? For from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"* (2 Peter 3:4). He

followed by helpfully warning, “... *beware lest, being carried away by the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness*” (2 Pet. 3:17). Jesus, Paul, and Peter did not just preach the truth, but they were conversant with and opposed the error others taught.

The local church should be diligent in offering opportunities for men of the congregation to prepare lessons and preach the distinctive gospel of Christ. Elders help support the truth for future generations when they offer special instruction to encourage and help prepare younger men to someday be watchful overseers. In a class setting, they can highlight truth by contrasting it with the latest error that is being proposed. By presenting case studies that might occur in a local congregation, elders can offer guidance to potential elders in how a given situation could best be handled.

God organized the church on the local level only. Through its collected resources and the expended energy of its individual members, the local church is a powerful buttress for the truth. Committed individuals to the truth is where it all begins. Unite them in a local community in preaching, practicing and defending the truth, and you will see the truth of God standing firm and influencing the hearts of men, where it has always counted.

March Birthdays:

The 18th Amy Hisaw
The 25th Megan Morgan



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Sunday
Bible Study . . . 9:30 A.M.
Worship 10:30 A.M.
Worship 5:00 P.M.

Wednesday
Bible Study . . . 7:00 P.M.

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