

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

I John 1:1-10

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Mass.--Sunday, August 12, 1962, 9:30 A.M.

Introduction:

There are two conceptions of truth and as a consequence two ways of knowing. In the first place, there is the objective truth of the created universe as I perceive it through my reason. This is an impersonal truth, of which I am the master. On the other hand, there is the truth of revelation, which comes to me from God, who addresses me and calls me to love and responsibility. This truth dominates me and breaks the isolation of my existence. Let us consider successively these two concepts of truth.

- I. In the first place, there is the objective and impersonal truth that we discover in the universe and in our minds and even in the knowledge of other human beings.
 - A. Scientific truth is objective and impersonal truth.
 1. This is the truth of all the natural sciences -- chemistry, biology, mathematics, etc.
 - a. Our minds grasp after this truth as we endeavor to understand the universe.
 - b. The high school student who learns biology and other subjects is also grappling with this truth.
 - c. The physical scientist who masters the secret of the atom for constructive or destructive purposes also deals with it.
 2. This is also the truth of the humanities -- all human sciences.
The truth of the humanities is objective and impersonal truth.
 - a. Historical, philosophical, sociological and psychological truths
 - (1) Ex. Toynbee's monumental study of history. All this knowledge lies at Toynbee's command. He is indeed master of the historical field.
 - (2) Systems of Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and other philosophers.
All these are attempts to explain the reality of history and the universe in terms of ideas and systems of thought. The philosophers are masters of these systems.
 - b. The truth of religious systems which we create out of our minds is also objective and personal.
 - c. God is an infinite and perfect being, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. This God is also the product of our minds. We produce and control him. It is the God of the philosophers

and not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob --the living God.

B. What have we been saying?

1. That there is a truth and consequently a way of knowing that is objective -- We can weight it, observe it, grasp it, even condition it. This is the truth of natural and human sciences, of the universe and of the historical process.
2. This truth is impersonal. It does not speak to me, although we grapple with it. It does not address us, although we can use and manipulate it.
3. It is a truth that we control and dominate. We are masters of the natural sciences and the historical sciences; even of our religious ideas.
4. This truth does not alter my life. The greatest scientists can be traitors; the greatest philosophers cowards. There is a great deal of pride in men who have attained mastery of different fields of knowledge.

II. There is another truth that is personal and in a way subjective. It is the truth of revelation. It comes to us from the outside and its purpose is to create in us a response -- in other words, community or fellowship. This is what we affirm when we say that God has spoken to us in Christ. The Christian revelation introduces the reality of God actually stepping into history. Several observations must be made concerning this truth -- the truth of revelation.

A. The truth of revelation is a truth that happens. It is an event. John 1:1-18 The truth of revelation only remains truth for him who enters into that event which is Jesus Christ and remains in Him. This is the truth of God-for-us; of God's election; of grace.

B. This is not an impersonal truth but a "Thou" or personal truth. Christ himself says: "I am the truth."
In this Event of revelation, the Person of Christ, the divine "Thou", addresses you and me in love.
God imparts Himself to me in the life of Him who alone was able to say: "I came not to minister unto, but to minister, and to give my life a ransom for many."

C. In this revelation the dualism of truth and life is broken.
In daily life -- True man other than the actual man. True life other than the actual life. Idea and concrete reality are apart.

But Christ says: "I am the truth and the life." "Here, however," says Emil Brunner, "the eternal truth of God confronts me as the historical reality; the eternal truth of God and the eternal truth of man, which were both remote and distant from me, have now come close to me; as near as my own thought is to me, as the "Christ in me" through faith. To be in God

through Christ, that is the reality that has become true, and the truth that has become real of man. The true life is existing in the love of God.

- D. This truth -- the truth of revelation -- is personal encounter.
I no longer carry a monologue with myself or the objective reality. Now there is a life of dialogue between God and I. God now comes to me as the one who calls me. "But in this call," continues Brunner, "the man who listens & believes first becomes truly a person. We are always already persons; but we become truly persons in love only in that love 'which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.' We are truly personal only when we are in fellowship, when all 'it' relations with our fellow men, all cold objectivity or passionate desire, all desire to exploit other human beings have been replaced by that way of life in which each lives for the other."
- E. This truth can only be appropriated by an act of surrender and decision.
This is a truth that possesses and determines us. We must be in the truth. We must live in the truth. We must do the truth.
It is not an idea or a system.
Hear the apostle Paul: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Conclusions:

What are the implications for us of these two kinds of truth:

- the impersonal and objective truth of the world?
- the personal and revealed truth of God in Christ?

1. There is a hierarchical relation between them.
The truth of revelation is above the impersonal truth of the world.
All scientific and historical truth is to be viewed from this point of view of the center of revelation -- God for us in Christ and for all the world.
-- Use of atomic weapons (U.S. News & World Report)
2. The truth of the revelation of God in Christ makes the church an agency of true fellowship.
 - a. a life of faith in Christ
 - b. a life of love in the community of believers-- real encounter
 - c. a life of service
 - d. human being -- never impersonal reality
3. Above all the life of love I Cor XIII. This is true fellowship.