

His Truth

Exodus 34:1–9, Hebrews 6:13–20

This is the last in a series of sermons on Shorter Catechism Q&A 4, “What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” Previous titles: “God Is a Spirit”; “God Is Infinite”; “God Is Eternal”; “God Is Unchangeable”; “The God Who Is”; “Infinitely Wise”; “God Omnipotent”; “God Is Holy”; “God’s Justice”; and “Infinitely, Eternally and Unchangeably Good.” Today, our topic will be “His Truth.” The God of the Bible—Yahweh, the God who *is*—is truth. He doesn’t just *speak* the truth—he *is* the truth. The Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, declared, “I am the truth” (John 14:6); his assertion was a claim to deity: only God is truth; Jesus is truth; therefore, Jesus is God.

Pilate famously asked, “What is truth?” He who is the Way, the Truth and the Life was standing right before him, but Pilate didn’t get it, and died without Christ, lost in his sins. O sinner, today the Lord Jesus Christ is presented before you. It may be your only opportunity to repent and turn to Christ. Will you receive him, or turn him away? If you do not receive him, you will have rejected him. Our hearts by nature are dead and blinded by sin. We cannot come to him and receive eternal life unless it is given to us by his Holy Spirit. But let us not wait for a more convenient day. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). We cannot be certain of tomorrow.

1. The Context

Our Old Testament text is Exodus 34. Let’s set it in context. Israel is encamped around Mount Sinai. The people have been warned not to touch the mountain, or they will die. There were dramatic sensory manifestations: thunderings and lightnings, a thick, dark cloud, and the sound of a loud trumpet. Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. Think of the thick, acrid smoke that belches up from a house engulfed in flames; it is a frightening sight.

These sensory manifestations had a purpose: to declare the glory and power and holiness of God. He is not a God to be trifled with. He is real. He is the God with whom we have to do. We must come to him on *his* terms; we do not dictate the terms by which we approach God. Several commentators observe that “as the mountain burned with fire, God was exhibited as a consuming fire to the transgressors of his law.”¹

¹ So, for example, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/19-16.htm> accessed 10-14-23

There is a lesson for us here. We do not blithely waltz into God's holy presence and say, "Hi, there; how'ya doin' today?" the way we might approach a close friend or buddy. To come into God's holy presence is a bit like entering a courtroom, where the bailiff announces, "Everyone, rise," and if you do not observe proper courtroom decorum, you will be ejected. "The LORD is our *Judge*, the LORD is our Lawgiver, the LORD is our King" (Isa. 33:22). "The LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth" (Ps. 47:2).

So it is as the church gathers for worship. We hear the words "The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab. 2:20). The LORD himself is the host as we worship. We think of it as *our* church, but it is *his* temple; we enter on his terms. Our thoughts should not be on yesterday's game or today's fellowship meal. Our Shorter Catechism asks: "How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?" The answer, in part, is: "That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, *preparation* and prayer; [and] receive it with faith and love" (Q&A 90). We should spend time in preparation and prayer before coming to worship. We need to pray, "Lord, I am your servant. Search my heart, know my thoughts. Help me to seek your face; help me receive your word and put it into practice. Your ways are higher than my ways. If you do not lead me to heaven, I will die in my sins."

God had spoken out of the cloud. He gave his people the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments do not reveal to us steps we should take to be saved; they reveal the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ—the perfect righteousness of Christ that alone qualifies a man to enter heaven. Thank God for the gospel: Christ perfectly kept the law on behalf of undeserving sinners (active obedience), died for our sins (passive obedience), and gives us his own, perfect righteousness as a free gift (imputed righteousness). This is the only way of salvation. Old Testament saints were saved by looking to the Christ who was *promised*; New Testament saints are saved by looking to the Christ who *has come*. We are to "[look] unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). "Looking unto Jesus" is *believing* on him—ceasing to trust in our own goodness and putting our whole trust in him alone for salvation.

Moses had gone up into the mountain at God's invitation and spent 40 days and 40 nights in intimate fellowship with the living God. God gave him two tablets of stone on which were written, with his own finger, the Ten Commandments. He also gave him what is known as the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20, beginning at v. 22 through the end of chap. 23)—the initial ceremonial and judicial principles that would be fleshed out in the rest of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

When Moses came down the mountain he was appalled to find the people of Israel dancing around the golden-calf idol. He smashed the two tablets of stone, that had been given to him by God, at the base of the mountain and broke them to

pieces. Moses is never rebuked for having done this; rather, he did it justly as God's representative, "as a sign that Israel had broken the covenant"² and therefore "deserved to be broken in pieces and destroyed themselves."³ Israel's breaking of the covenant is emblematic of our own. Just as Israel broke covenant with God, so do we as well. "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. 64:6).

False religions teach that man *saves himself* by doing good works. But the gospel—God's good news revealed in Holy Scripture—is that our Savior, Jesus Christ, saves undeserving sinners. As Paul put it: "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world *to save sinners*; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15). Listen carefully: the biblical teaching is that *Christ saves sinners*. Sinful man fancies that he can save himself by doing good works. Of course this is utterly impossible, because God's standard is absolute perfection, and we've all fallen short of that. But some professing Christians imagine that there is another way: that man can save himself *with Christ's help*, that Christ infuses grace into a sinner, enabling those sinners to *save themselves with his help*. The problem with this teaching is twofold: the Bible does not teach it; and it is directly contrary to the Bible's teaching on justification by grace, through faith. Our salvation is not by works, that no one should boast. The Bible does not teach that man can save himself by doing good works, either by himself or with Christ's help; rather, *Christ saves sinners*. Salvation is by grace, through faith in Christ alone. It is a free gift that must be accepted, rather than a prize that must be earned. This is good news to those who, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, realize their need, but it is humbling to our natural human pride. Human nature trivializes sin and imagines that we earn God's favor with just a few adjustments to our behavior. But as our Confession teaches, the distance between God and the creature is actually "infinite"; our best works cannot "satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants."⁴

Do you want to be saved? Do you want to go to heaven when you die? Then you must not try to earn salvation by your good works but put your whole trust in Christ, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification. If you try to earn salvation by your good works, there is no hope for you; you will go to hell. Salvation cannot be earned, it can only be received as a gift from the hand of a loving God. This is God's *truth*, and it must be accepted, or the sinner will go to hell. Good works are necessary as the *fruit*, not the *basis*, of our justification.

² Keil & Delitzsch, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/32-19.htm> accessed 10-14-23

³ Gill, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/32-19.htm> accessed 10-14-23

⁴ https://opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter_16

Moses had earlier spent 40 days up on the mountain with God, but now he is invited up again. Whereas the first time, God had given him the two tablets of stone that he had smashed in righteous anger; this time Moses “cut two tablets of stone like the first ones” (Ex. 34:4). How did he do this? Jamieson, Fausset and Brown comment that “as Moses had no [assistant] to divide the labor of carrying them, it is evident that they must have been light, and of no great dimensions—probably flat slabs of shale or slate, such as abound in the mountainous region of Horeb. An additional proof of their comparatively small size appears in the circumstance of their being deposited in the ark of the most holy place.”⁵ The ark was a wooden chest overlaid with gold; its dimensions were two and a half cubits in length, a cubit and a half in width, and a cubit and a half high⁶—about 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high. So don’t think tombstone-size tablets; they were smaller than that. Moses carried the tablets up on the mountain, where the hand of God engraved the words of the Ten Commandments on both sides. Wouldn’t you love to see God’s handwriting! Nowadays we have computer-controlled engraving; I’m sure God’s is even more exquisite than that.

The most important place to have God’s law written is in our hearts. The writer to the Hebrew, citing Jeremiah 31:33–34, quotes God as saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them” (Heb. 10:16). Again, “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts” (Heb. 8:10).

In the providence of God, the original stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments have been lost, but the thrilling news is that in regeneration the sovereign Spirit of God continues to write them on human hearts. When he does this, the human person is changed forever. Whereas before, he loved sin, he loved having his own way, doing his own thing; but when the Holy Spirit of God writes his law on your human heart, then your whole orientation changes. Once you were blind, but now you see. Once you loved your sin; now you love God, you want to do *his* will—not your own—you want to join with God’s people and worship him. As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Are you a new creature in Christ? Do you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? Do you delight to do his will? Do you grieve over your sins and desire to yield yourself more and more to Christ? To the born-again Christian, God’s commandments are not burdensome; rather, they are something to be desired. As the Psalmist said, “Behold, I *long* for Your precepts; revive me in Your

⁵ Jamieson-Fausset-Brown commentary, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/34-4.htm> accessed 10-14-22

⁶ Ex. 25:10

righteousness” (Ps. 119:40). “I opened my mouth and panted, for I *longed* for Your commandments” (Ps. 119:131). “I *long* for Your salvation, O Lord, and Your law is my delight” (Ps. 119:174). Do these words describe the longing of your heart?

2. The Heart of Our Text

Moses spent a second forty-day period up on the mountain with God. We read that “the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and *truth*, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.’”

Several brief observations. First, the emphasis is on *God*, not man. The problem with many churches today is that the emphasis is on *man*, not God—creating an environment where people feel comfortable, where they hear music they like and messages that put them at ease. A.W. Tozer observed that “it is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God.” Brothers and sisters, church is to be that kind of meeting, where the only attraction is God, where the regenerate soul can sing with the Psalmist, “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Ps. 84:2). Notice in our text, Exodus 34:5–7, the word LORD (יהוה) occurs five times. Moses didn’t go up the mountain to discover his inner goodness! He went up that mountain at God’s invitation to discover *God*—the true and living God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God with whom we have to do, the God before whom we will stand at the Day of Judgment.

Second, the emphasis is on God’s mercy—that he is a God who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. How thankful we are for the forgiveness of our sins through Christ. God’s word declares, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The Lord’s Prayer teaches us to say, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” In the Lord’s Prayer we are taught to pray according to God’s will. The Bible assures us that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. If Jesus taught us to pray, “forgive us our debts,” then it must be God’s will to forgive. We don’t have to persuade an intransigent, unyielding God—no! He delights to forgive.

Third, note the emphasis on God’s truth. Here is a God who abounds in goodness and *truth*! Strong gives a thorough definition of *truth*: “*real, true, genuine . . . opposite to what is fictitious, counterfeit, imaginary, simulated or pretended.*”⁷

⁷ Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon, ἀληθινός (Logos Bible Software)

The Hebrew word for *truth* comes from the word *Amen*.⁸ The typical English speaker doesn't know much Hebrew, but two Hebrew words definitely made it into the English language: *Hallelujah* and *Amen*. "Hallelujah" means *Praise ye the Lord* and "Amen" means *truly* or *so be it!* In Hebrew, the verb form of the word *Amen* means to *confirm, verify*. Christian, your God abounds in truth. His Word is sure, confirmed, settled. Amen!

In the final analysis *truth* is conformity to God's character and God's word. This is clearly taught in many places throughout the Bible. "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of *truth* and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). "Thou, O LORD, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and *truth*" (Ps. 86:15). "His merciful kindness is great toward us: and the *truth* of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD" (Ps. 117:2).

3. Our New Testament Text

It is expressed negatively in our New Testament text: "That by two immutable things, in which it was *impossible for God to lie*, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:18).

Christian, thank God that it is impossible for God to lie—utterly impossible! For God is a God of truth. If he were to lie, he would cease to exist; he would cease to be God. As you study your Bible you can have absolute assurance that what you read is God's truth, for it is impossible for him to lie. His word is truth (John 17:17).

A lot of people who through a thoroughly secular and values-free, godless education have accepted evolution and moral relativism are turned off by Christian moral standards. They see nothing wrong with sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, same-sex "marriage," no-fault divorce, and the intentional killing of unborn babies. The fact that such things are contrary to the Bible does not bother them. "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18). They may have heard of the final judgment, but they do not fear it. They think they will be fine, that God will have to accept them. This may be a popular idea, but it is not *true*.

Truth should be a paramount consideration for every Christian. We should not bare false witness but speak the truth every man with our neighbor. We should speak the truth because God himself is truth; our speech should reflect our God. We should attend a church where the truth of God is both taught and put into practice. It may not be convenient, it may not be close, but truth should be all-important—it is to God. The Proverbs instruct: "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (Prov. 23:23).

⁸ אֱמֶת – firmness, faithfulness, truth; contraction for אֱמֶתֶת, from אָמַן, verily, truly (BDB)

The patriotic song “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” which begins with the words “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,” was written by Julia Ward Howe. Howe was a Unitarian (Unitarianism is a false religion: Unitarians deny the Christian doctrine of the Trinity; of necessity they also deny the deity of Christ, a core doctrine of Christianity). While the “Battle Hymn” is a stirring patriotic song, it is inappropriate for Christian worship, yet some churches use it on Armed Forces Day; they shouldn’t, as the purpose of worship is to give glory to *God*, not to the military. Despite its questionable theology, the “Battle Hymn” ends with the refrain “Glory, glory, hallelujah! *His truth* is marching on.” There’s the phrase that forms the title to this sermon: “His Truth.” God himself is the God of truth: truth originates with him, and he is the very embodiment truth in his eternal Son who became man in order to die for men.

All truth must conform to the truth of God; if anything does not conform to the truth of God, it is falsehood, and to be rejected. This is a lifelong process for the biblical Christian, but in Christ we are promised success. As stated by the apostle Paul, “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4–5). God’s Word is *truth*; everything that is opposed to it is error. Amen!