

August 15th: Armour of God series. 3 "THE TRUTH BELT"

I am sure this morning that if I mentioned the term "Bible Belt", most if not all of you would know what I meant, for it is a well known expression used to refer to communities where Christianity is strong. Areas where churches abound and a large population attends them. We talk about the political impact of the Bible Belt States in America and we have Bible Belts here in Australia, especially in Queensland. Yet, having visited such areas in the USA many years ago I know from experience that Bible Belt does not necessarily mean Truth Belt. It doesn't follow that just because there is a lot of churches with a lot of attendees that Truth is high on the agenda. For Truth depends upon each person choosing to cultivate God's Truth in their individual lives by deliberate seeking out the belt of truth that is part of God's Armour, for themselves and supporting one another in the expression of that truth in their words and acts. Consequently as Christians our goal for our Christian Community should be that we are seen as God's People renown for upholding and encouraging the Truth, rather than aiming for large numbers and a big influence as our priority.

This means that the taking on of the Truth Belt is vital for us as church, and yet doing so is not an organizational thing. It's not a behavior that we demand as a requisite for being part of this fellowship as if we were demanding that ladies wear hats and men suits otherwise they can't attend services. Becoming a people that stands upon God's truth goes much deeper than that. It has to begin with each individual believer taking on this belt of Truth that Ephesians 6 prioritizes as the initial piece of the Armour of God, and then encouraging, teaching, and assisting other believers to put it on too.

Surely this is why Paul addresses the **whole** church when he speaks about buckling on the belt of truth, but makes it obvious that it is something **every** individual soldier in the army that is God's church must do. I must put on that belt and so must you.

Yet having said that, when we look at this picture of a Roman Soldier, the Belt doesn't really seem that important. Surely, with all the other rather impressive armour on you could get away without wearing the belt. You could forget it and be just as effective.

Absolutely wrong. Paul knew what he was doing when he chose the belt to represent truth, and he mentioned the belt as the first thing to put on for a very good reason. For with the Roman Soldier it was the belt that the rest of the armour was connected to, and it was also the belt that kept the underwear under control and stopped it getting in the way.

In fact the picture we get of a beltless soldier, is of some poor soul holding his undergarments together with one hand while clutching the rest of his armour to his body with the other. He has no sword, even if he had a hand to use it, because that's attached to his belt, and no hand to hold his shield because his hand is doing the work of the absent belt. As a soldier he is a walking disaster.

Along with that putting on the belt was a sign to the soldier that he was ready for battle. His mind was made up. He was going into war for his Emperor and his country.

Now the analogy for the Christian is clear. The belt of truth is the very first thing we need to put on if we intend to be successful in our battle against evil. It's importance is paramount. So the question we now face is: What exactly is this belt of truth and how do I buckle it on?

The answer is twofold.

First it is taking hold of the truth that God has given us. The truth about God....about the world.....about Salvation....about the future. All this truth is contained in God's written Word and in the Living Word; God the Son, who was in the beginning with God and is God.

We need this truth so that we will know what to believe about our Faith. So that we don't get led astray by different theories or ideas that sound good, but are not based on God's Truth. And it is this truth that comes to us from God. We don't make it up. We have received it from God. It is armour that is made in heaven for us.

Paul has already mentioned in this letter the need for this Truth amongst the believers at Ephesus. Look at chapter 4:11-13 where Paul tells them how God has given them Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers:-
v12.....¹²**to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up** ¹³**until we all reach unity in the faith and in**

the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

And then he goes on to say in v14:-

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

The problem those Christians had was that they had not set out to receive the truth from the Apostles etc, and consequently they did not know enough to recognize truth from error. So when the false teachers came along with their plausible yet wrong teaching, they followed after them.

And the Christian church is far from being immune to false teaching today. I can recall a group from the Revival Centre some years ago now who stood outside my church on a Sunday morning accosting those who had just been to our church service with the news that only they had the truth. And that unless people went to their church, were baptized by their Pastor, and spoke in tongues, they were not saved.

Not too long ago we had what became known as the Toronto Blessing with people roaring like lions, laughing uncontrollable, and running around the auditorium.

Then there's been the claim it and gain it group, the Prosperity Theology, and countless others. The devil loves to attack the church through falsehood and he fails where Christians are buckling on the belt of truth.

So how do we put on this belt of truth. By seeking out those who, by the Spirit of God, proclaim the truth of God from His Word, and consuming what they offer. Take notes and check out their words according to the Bible. Study with others or alone this Bible that is the Inspired Word of God. Get into the habit of absorbing the Word of God on a regular basis by going to God with the Bible and, through ardent prayer, having your inner eyes open to the Spirit of God who takes the truths of God and makes them known to us.

But there is a Second facet of this Belt of Truth. It is the truth that we live out daily in our lives. It is the Truth that affects how much like Christ we become. It is the Spirit of truth who gently comes alongside us and says, this is the way walk in it.

He, God the Holy Spirit, proclaims in our heart the truth that regulates our behavior, our attitudes, our priorities, our character. His Word to us is not to

be seen as the same as human instructions about right living, although the behavior and attitudes addressed are mainly practical and very human. He speaks as God to a professing child of God, and we choose whether to take His voice on board and seek to live by it or not. When we do so, we are putting on the Belt of Truth.

The Christians at Ephesus needed to do that because their behavior was so un-Christ like in many areas, yet they saw nothing wrong with it. So Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit lists several things in chapters 4 &5 which the Truth calls them not to do. I listed them in my sermon two weeks ago:-

4:25....Lying

4:26....anger

4:28....stealing

4:29...unwholesome talk...bad language...swearing...

5:3.....sexual immorality or hint of sexual impurity....greed

5:4....obscenity, coarse joking

5:18.....Drunkenness

There are others that he mentions and we know the things that the Spirit speaks to us about too. Like forgiveness, compassion, gentleness and purity. Things we struggle with and try to avoid dealing with. Changes that only the Spirit can bring about as we put on the Belt of Truth by deliberately choosing to submit ourselves to His voice within us.

Andrew Wilson in his book God's Stories(David C Cook publishers, U.S.A. p132) writes this:-

"In spite of the way we often talk, you see, you and I are incapable of pleasing God without the Holy Spirit living in us. It's not that it's difficult; it's impossible. Telling me to walk in God's ways with my natural heart of stone is like telling an apple tree to produce oranges. The apple tree can strain and go to an accountability group and screw its eyes up tightly, but it is never going to produce oranges unless it is given completely new DNA. We're like that. Our hearts of stone, try as we might, are not going to bring about obedience to God; instead we need completely new DNA—the Spirit of God within us, in every cell, so that we may live to please Him. Without the Spirit, the Christian life would be impossible, a futile life of straining and accountability groups and screwing our eyes up tightly. With the Spirit, though, we produce godliness as naturally as an orange tree makes oranges.

Lots of people are baffled by this, because it sounds like there's nothing we can do by our own effort; it's all a question of being given something by God. It is!"

That something is not just the Holy Spirit but the Belt of Truth that is His gift to us.

Andrew Wilson goes on to say:-

"That's not to say that obedience is automatic. There are disobedient people in the New Testament church just as there are some obedient people in the Old Testament church. (In that sense, we are different from the orange tree, because we have the choice to ignore our new DNA.) But if obedience isn't automatic with the Holy Spirit, it isn't difficult, either. In fact, it comes naturally as we walk with Him. I cannot count the number of people I know who have become Christians and then, without ever being told what to do, have stopped doing drugs and swearing and getting drunk and sleeping around—not by straining or by being threatened, but by walking in the Spirit. That's because God gives us new DNA, a new heart and a new spirit, not a new rule book or a new method. It's because He makes us want different things, not just strive for them; He gives us new desires, not just new disciplines."

Again let me say, that putting on the belt of truth is choosing to respond to the Holy Spirit every moment, as He directs us in the right way of living. Something which will delight our hearts, for the Holy Spirit helps us not only to do what is right, but He encourages us to rejoice when we do so.

Before we visited Rome we were aware of the old Audrey Hepburn film, Roman Holiday. In that film several sites in Rome are visited and we wanted to make sure that we checked them all out. One place was called the Mouth of truth:- This very ugly image that has a hole where the mouth is. The theory is that you put your hand in the mouth and make a statement about yourself that could be true or false. If it is false, so the legend goes, the image bites off your hand.

God the Holy Spirit within us is not like that. When we put on the belt of truth, and then do what is wrong He doesn't bite off our hand, but puts in our heart the desire to do what is right, to seek forgiveness, and to overcome in Christ the next time.

But there is something which is just as precious that the Spirit of God does within us when we take on the Belt of Truth, and it's something I discovered afresh the other day. I was thinking back on the previous day and asking the

Holy Spirit to show me where I had let Him down so that I could claim forgiveness. And there was a sense that He did that. But then, deep in my heart, I sensed Him showing me the areas where I had lived out Jesus that day. Areas where I had pleased Almighty God. Where I had followed the way of the Belt of Truth faithfully. And it was as though He said to me, you did well. Rejoice with your father and be thankful.

That's the huge blessing of taking on the Belt of truth. Of committing ourselves each day to trust the Spirit's leading and to follow His inner voice of Truth. The blessing of encouragement. Of the joy of knowing that you have pleased Almighty God. Of hearing the Spirit whisper in one's heart, "well done. For today you have stood firm, and in the power of God have won the battle for Truth".