



A Stranger
In
A Strange Land



Alienated by Truth

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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A Stranger in a Strange Land

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A Stranger in a Strange Land

“Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.”

Exodus 2:22 (ESV)

Moses felt like “a stranger in a strange land”.

He felt that way in the land of Jethro.

Jethro means “remnant”.¹

¹ *Dictionary of Scripture Proper Names*, J.B. Jackson. [Loizeaux Bothers, 1909]

Preface

I would hope that my friends who do not embrace biblical Christianity would be reading this along with my friends who are disciples of Jesus Christ. But I think that is highly unlikely. The reason I think that is because I have made this observation: People, myself included, very rarely invest time and effort investigating something that is contrary to the perspective they currently hold. Possibly, in a personal conversation, we may politely listen to the other person's perspective; but we will not invest the time and effort required to read something we think we will not agree with. It makes little sense to us to devote time and effort to something we are not interested in adopting. We hold our particular perspectives because we are at peace with them. Only if, and when, we are no longer personally satisfied with the perspective we have been holding, will we truly be interested in and be open to the possibility of adopting a different perspective. Theology has a term for this phenomenon – it is called “repentance”. The Greek word translated “repentance” is *metanoia*:² *meta* = change + *noeo* = perception or mind.

But only the Holy Spirit knows if you are at peace or not – or if you are ready to be interested in another perspective. He knows because He is “the Spirit of Truth”³ - the Spirit of the Father Who draws people to Christ.⁴ So, maybe

² Strong # 3341, W.E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*.

³ John 14:17, 16:13

⁴ Recommended Reading: My essay [“The Drawing of the Holy Spirit”](#).

some of my non-believing friends will read this. Actually, instead of an attempt to *“convince non-believers to become believers”* (which is not humanly possible), what I am sharing here has to do with what it is like for a believer in the midst of a predominantly non-believing world, relating to his non-believing friends and loved ones.

What I am sharing is highly personal. It is a painful spiritual and emotional reality in my life. I have no doubts regarding any aspect of my biblical faith. But not every aspect of that faith is pleasant. In a manner of speaking, I would prefer a faith that did not include the issues I’ll be discussing here. But I have no option but to say to the Lord – and myself – that which two of His other disciples said: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life⁵.... The love of Christ controls me.⁶” There are many people and many things I love in this life, but all of them occupy a place beneath Christ. I have discovered the harsh reality that my faith in Christ fundamentally conflicts with many of those people and things I love. And, I have also discovered that I am in the “yoke” of truth. I am reluctant to say that I love truth more than I love people, but in a sense, this may possibly be true – I don’t know. However, I consistently find that I am absolutely constrained to relate to those people only on the basis of the truth of God as He has revealed it in Scripture – “the written words of God”⁷. Jesus said, “I

⁵ John 6:68

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:14

⁷ Recommended reading: My essay, [“The Bible: The Written Words of God.”](#)

am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”⁸ I admit I no longer know how to live life outside of “the truth that is in Jesus”⁹ – namely, the Jesus whom the Spirit of God has chosen to reveal through the written words He has inspired.

⁸ John 14:6

⁹ Ephesians 4:21 NIV

Introduction

Exodus 2:22 reads: “Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.”

“Gershom” is a transliteration of the Hebrew words *ger sham*, meaning “a stranger there”.

As a follower of Jesus Christ and disciple of His Kingdom, I am feeling increasingly like a “stranger” here – in the world. I am identifying less and less with the surrounding society and culture. I have to admit that it has given me “*cause to think*” that, even with some of my own family members, I seem to have very little in common except “blood”. It is also a bit disconcerting to find that seemingly most of my friends whom I’ve known throughout the years have developed into people with whom I have increasingly little in common. And as I look out at the various people, I come into contact within my daily routines, I see myself more and more as a “**stranger in a strange land**”. I increasingly identify with this phrase from an old song - “*I can’t feel at home in this world anymore*”. ¹⁰

Can you identify with these things? Scripture tells disciples of the Kingdom that “our citizenship is in heaven”¹¹ and that we are “strangers and exiles

¹⁰ “*This World Is Not My Home*” by Mary Reeves & Albert E. Brumley, recorded by Jim Reeves in 1962.

¹¹ Philippians 3:20

on the earth”.¹² How “*close to home*” is this theological truth hitting? Do you really feel like you don’t “*feel at home in this world anymore*”? Like myself, are you feeling increasingly “disconnected” as you watch events transpiring around the world, as you observe the social trends and political developments in your nation, as you read what those who are considered highly esteemed personalities have to say, as you listen to the perspectives of the non-believers who come across your path? Does what is going on in the world seem increasingly bizarre? Like myself, are you finding it increasingly difficult to understand how people can actually believe what they are saying and doing? Do you feel you are markedly different from most people around you? Do you wonder if you are possibly developing some type of sociological psychosis?

¹² Hebrews 11:13

Alienation

Webster defines “alienation” in this way: *“Separation of a person or a person’s affections from an object or position of former attachment”*. I’d like to suggest that you may quite possibly be experiencing very real and increasing alienation. Obviously, this is not alienation from God and that which is godly, but alienation from the world and the ungodly.

At first thought, this doesn’t seem healthy, or even right. I mean, *“How can a Christian minister to people, if he doesn’t identify with them?”* But, as I’ve thought more about it, I’ve realized: *“But actually, I DO identify with people – we are all human beings, all experiencing the same human condition in a very fallen and broken world.”*¹³ But, honestly, it seems that others just don’t think it is as fallen and broken as I do. They have all kinds of opinions and ideas about what will make things right and better. I find that, not only I don’t agree with their perspectives, but it also eludes me as to how they can still have this kind of hope in “the human spirit” and in humanity’s ability to govern itself.

Do you feel like everything and everyone is moving in a direction that is seemingly the exact opposite direction you are moving in? Do you acknowledge that *“change is the only constant”* and therefore *“the world is*

¹³ Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

changing”, but you honestly feel that it is not for the better? What most people consider “progress”, do you see as degenerating error progressing throughout human history? When you speak your perspectives, are you pegged as being “narrow-minded” and “antiquated” in your thinking?

Jesus asked the question: “ ... when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”¹⁴ The apostle John said that the Lord has given those who are born of God a “faith that overcomes the world”.¹⁵ This is a faith that stands even in the face of the whole world system moving increasingly away from the Biblical worldview.

In Galatians 6:14, the apostle Paul makes a statement: “... the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” What is Paul saying there? The cross of Christ has served a radical “death blow” to the world – and also to Paul. I’d like to offer my personal interpretation of what Paul is saying: *“I am no longer impressed with the world. In fact, I often look forward to leaving it. And it seems the world is no longer impressed with me either. In fact, when I do leave, they will most likely say, ‘Good riddance, we thought he’d never leave!’”*

So here we are – sort of “*standing on the sideline*”, watching the world playing its game; and we wonder if, or where and how, a Christian can fit in

¹⁴ Luke 18:8

¹⁵ 1 John 5:4-5

the scheme of things. Remember what the Lord said about His disciples: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world".¹⁶ That should help us begin to understand what it is like for a disciple of the Kingdom to live in this world. But I wonder if you fully appreciate the fact that what is alienating you from the world is – **truth**. And do you realize that this "alienation" will never "*go away*" or "*get better*", because it is the will of God?

Am I saying that it is God's will for us to be alienated? Not exactly. More accurately: **Alienation is a result of God's will being done. Alienation is a result of the world's negative response to God's truth.**

What I have to share in this essay is specifically this:

- 1) We are "sanctified" by the truth of God's word.
- 2) The natural result of "sanctification" - being set apart and dedicated to God – is alienation from the world and all that is ungodly.
- 3) God makes it possible for us to "love the world"¹⁷ as He does - sharing His love and truth, yet "not love the world" - namely, that which is "not of the Father"¹⁸, and yet be alienated from the world – all at the same time! Obviously, these things are impossible without the grace of God.

¹⁶ John 17:16

¹⁷ John 3:16

¹⁸ 1 John 2:15-16

Sanctified by Truth

From Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians:

"This is the will of God, your **sanctification**"¹⁹ - "wholly sanctified – spirit, soul and body"²⁰.

From Jesus' High Priestly prayer:

"17 **Sanctify them in the truth**; Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be **sanctified in truth**."²¹

In this passage, Jesus prays for His disciples as He sends them into the world. He said they are not *of* the world, but they are *in* the world. Think about that for a moment. Throughout its history, the Church has struggled to understand and walk in that truth; but the inherent tension that exists in being *in* but not *of* the world is always clearly apparent. We are living and ministering *in* a context which is not *of* our spiritual essence. We can identify with the world because of our human nature – that is, our fallen human nature. But because we are born of the Spirit – born from above – our spiritual essence is not *of* this world.²² We live and minister in the tension of this dichotomy – this irreconcilable difference which results in separation.

¹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:3

²⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:23

²¹ John 17:17-19

²² As disciples of the kingdom we are also experiencing the kingdom in the similar tension of "now but not yet".

And that aspect of **separation** is the very essence of the definition of **sanctification**.²³ That aspect of **separation** is also at the heart of **alienation**.

I'd like to focus on the verb form of the word "sanctify"²⁴ which Jesus used. In this passage, Jesus states that God's word is truth; and that truth "sanctifies". He specifically indicated that we are sanctified *in* the truth of God's word. We are sanctified, separated – and alienated - *in* the truth. The Greek word translated "in" is *en* – a preposition denoting a fixed position or state. By implication this preposition denotes instrumentality – that is, being sanctified, separated, and alienated *through* or *by* the truth of God's word.

Can you see the Lord "*drawing a line in the sand*" - a line of **separation** between the truth and the world? What **separates and alienates** us from the world is **the truth of God's word**.

²³ Greek: *hagiasmos*, Strongs # 38, W.E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

²⁴ Greek: *hagiazō*, Strongs # 37

Rejecting Truth

“... they did not receive the love of the truth” 2 Thessalonians 2:10

The word “receive” in this verse is a translation of the Greek word *dechomai*, meaning “to receive by deliberate and ready reception of what is offered”.²⁵ The English Standard Version renders this phrase like this: “... they refused to love the truth...” I believe another accurate translation would be: “... they chose not to love the truth when it was offered to them”.

The **alienation** I have been discussing is a result – an inevitable result - of the world rejecting God’s truth. Below are a few passages which explain Fallen Humanity’s predisposition to reject the truth of God’s word.

“**19** This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. **20** For everyone who does evil hates the Light and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. **21** But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” John 3:19-21

²⁵ Strong's # 1209, W.E. Vine: *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

Fallen Humanity is predisposed to “love darkness rather than the Light”, “not come to the Light”, and actually “hate the Light” simply because they love their lifestyle, even though they know it is wrong.

“18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, **19** because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.” Romans 1:18-19

People may like to pontificate the motto: *“Live and let live.”* But, in practice they actively “suppress the truth”. They “suppress truth” through promoting “unrighteousness”. They advocate “tolerance” only towards that which is unrighteous and actually practice intolerance towards that which is righteous. In these verses, the Spirit of God indicates that they do this knowingly – not unknowingly.

“10 ... and with all the (or “every”) deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. **11** For this reason God will send (lit. “is sending”) upon them a deluding influence (lit. “an activity of error”) so that they will believe what is false (or “the lie”), **12** in order that they all may be judged (or “condemned”) who did not believe the truth but took pleasure (or “approved”) in wickedness.”
2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 AMP

Because of all this, God intentionally sends Fallen Humanity that which they actually prefer to have: “the lie”. And all of this is taking place because Fallen Humanity does not love truth.

Receiving Truth

If we have insight into the fallen condition of Humanity, we realize that receiving God's truth is nothing short of enlightenment. This may sound a bit lofty (... or even sound a bit like Buddhism or Hinduism). But according to Scripture (the written words of God), this truth is not something *achieved* (as in Buddhism and Hinduism), but something **received**. Truth is not something *subjective* (as in Buddhism and Hinduism), but something **objective** which exists outside ourselves (not found within ourselves as with Buddhism and Hinduism). Biblically speaking, **truth is something which comes from and is given by God. When this truth is received, it imparts to the fallen creature a transformation from a state of blindness to illumination, and a transference of the soul from death to life.**²⁶ Admittedly, that is "lofty"!

1 Peter 1:23 says that one is actually *born again by the word of God*: "You have been born again (regenerated) not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God."

When we are "born again (regenerated) by the word of God", we are "*turned on spiritually*", so to speak. When the veil is taken away in Christ,²⁷ *the spiritual dimension is opened up – for the first time in our lives.*

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 3:14; 4:4, 6; John 5:24; 2 Timothy 1:10.

²⁷ 2 Corinthians 2:16

Before coming to Christ, I investigated a variety of Eastern religions and Occult sciences. Through various means I encountered the presence of spirits – I know now that these were evil spirits. But when I encountered the Holy Spirit – “the Spirit of Truth”²⁸, the experience was entirely different: Before being born of the Spirit, I was spiritually dead²⁹, and therefore, I encountered the spiritual realm only as it interacted with my physical senses, my mind and my emotions. But, when I was born of the Spirit, I encountered the Holy Spirit *with my regenerated spirit*. For the first time in my life my spirit encountered Spirit.³⁰ And, for the first time in my life, I was also able to perceive evil spirits with my spirit, and not merely with my soul. The whole spiritual realm opened up – for the first time in my life. Consequently, all of life – both good and evil - was very different. Over the years, my senses, that is, my “spiritual senses”,³¹ have been trained to discern – distinguish between – good and evil.³²

It is very different to be born again (regenerated) by the Spirit. For the first time in your life, you truly experience the spiritual realm. Before that, one is living merely in the soul realm. When you receive the Holy Spirit, you have

²⁸ John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6

²⁹ Cut off from the Spirit Who gives the spiritual life of God. John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6. Cf. Ephesians 2.

³⁰ Psalm 42:7 “Deep calls to deep”

³¹ In Acts 26, we read of Paul’s voyage from Caesarea to Rome Italy: **9** “When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul *began* to admonish them, **10** and said to them, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” How did Paul “perceive” this? Not through his “five senses”, but rather through his “spiritual senses”.

³² Hebrews 5:14

discernment – the ability to distinguish between spirit from soul, and the ability to distinguish the difference between that which is of the Holy Spirit, or of evil spirits, or of the human spirit.

Along with being blinded to the illuminating “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”³³, people who are not born of the Spirit, are also blind to all things spiritual – not perceiving the Holy Spirit, nor evil spirits. In fact, because they actually don’t believe in the God Who is spirit,³⁴ they also tend to not believe in the existence of the spirit entities of Satan or other evil spirits. Consequently, they live and experience life only in the physical and emotional realms.

When you listen to people who are not born of the Spirit speak of “spirituality”, they actually are speaking merely of the physical and emotional realms – that is, their physical, sensual, mental and emotional experiences which they deem to be “higher” experiences. But they still have not had the spiritual dimension actually opened up to them. When you talk with them of “spiritual” things, it is obvious they do not perceive the spiritual dimension of reality – only the physical, mental and emotional, mistaking the soul realm for the spiritual realm. With friends who are not yet born of the Spirit, I am

³³ 2 Corinthians 4:4

³⁴ John 4:24

continually amazed to realize that they cannot perceive the spiritual things which have become “second nature” to me.

Without the spiritual dimension, life is flat – one dimensional. Without the spiritual dimension, one is actually missing much of reality – in fact, missing the essential aspects of reality. Having only the physical and emotional aspects of reality is not only inadequate but can actually be deceiving.

Of course, to embrace the things I am talking about requires faith – specifically faith in God and in His word, Scripture (the written words of God), where most spiritual realities are revealed. The reality of God can be easily and clearly seen in His physical creation; but there are many spiritual realities of human life which are only revealed in the Scripture. For example: the nature of Sin, the Fall of Humanity, the Atonement and Redemption through Christ, the Mysteries of the Kingdom of God, the meaning and the progression of Human History, et al. Without the spiritual dimension, one has no other option but to approach the issues of life only within the limitations of empirical knowledge.

Of course, the disciple of the Kingdom can see and believe the spiritual realities in the Bible, because he has faith in the Author of the Bible (the Spirit of Truth) and therefore can trust the veracity of the scriptures themselves, all because he has been born again (regenerated) by the word

of God. But those people who are not born of the Spirit, cannot see or believe these spiritual realities. In fact, non-believers view these things as either non-realities (Atheists) or questionable realities (Agnostics). In western cultures, belief in Scripture (the written words of God) is increasingly viewed as both deceptive and dangerous.

But the disciple of the Kingdom rests in this explanation given by Jesus of Nazareth:

“11 Jesus answered them, *“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand. You will keep on seeing but will not perceive. 15 For the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.’ 16 But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.”* Matthew 13:11-16

If you are willing to consider the possibility of being “alienated by truth”, you may be asking: *“How does truth alienate you; and what does truth alienate you from?”* Well, in a very real way, truth alienates us from all that belongs to a

worldview which perceives only the natural dimension and therefore lives and operates solely in the natural dimension.

I realize that in using the term “alienation”, I am using a strong word. But I think it is an accurate word and an appropriate word. I’ll continue to say more about what I mean by using this particular word. But I would also like to try to prevent any misconstrued notions. In saying that one who believes the truth of the Bible is “alienated” by that truth from others who do not believe, I am not saying that the believer sees himself somehow “above” or “better than” the non-believer. This is not a “state of enlightenment” attained by devoted effort, as is claimed in Eastern philosophies and religions. Everyone who is truly born of the Spirit knows that what I’ve been discussing is part of “receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit” – it is a gift freely given by God and can be *received* by anyone who believes – there is no special achievement here.³⁵ Paul, the apostle, put it this way: “For who considers you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”³⁶

Grammatically speaking, the term “alienation” has an inherent “passive voice” construction (at least with my use of the term). In a sentence using the verb form, the noun would be the object. In my use of the term, one is not alienating himself – he is being alienated. In other words, alienation is

³⁵ Acts 2:38 (Cf. Acts 8:15-16); Galatians 3:2.

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:7

not something one initiates. It is something that happens to you. We, of course, freely choose to believe truth; but after that personal choice, it is the truth which alienates one from “all” that is not in the truth. My point is: This is not some psychotic form of withdrawal and isolation from "reality".

Just a comment on that word “all”: While in certain forms of government, “the majority rules”; I don’t believe we can say that the “majority” holds a corner on truth. At least that has not been the case throughout all of human history. But, today, and increasingly in the future we will see “the majority” dictating “the truth” (Of course, as always, the majority is manipulated by the few who are actually in control of human society.) Without going off on a different tangent, all I would like to point out here is that if one stands with the majority, one may not have truth, but you have access to all of the benefits that come with socio-political power. Truth is almost always the “minority view” so to speak. So, while pursuing truth is, or should be, the noblest of goals, it brings with it a cost. This is why Jesus told us to “count the cost”.³⁷ There is the well-known saying: “*The truth hurts.*” I would like to offer a not-so-well-known saying: “*The truth can get you hurt.*” While there are many verses in the Book of Proverbs which assure us that having truth is the most valuable thing one can possess in this life (and on into eternal life), Scripture also speaks of truth being a rare commodity in human

³⁷ Luke 14:28

society. When “truth has fallen in the streets”,³⁸ the “cost” and the “hurt” of the truth is alienation.

Having a love for truth can even alienate you from your family. In Matthew 10:37 we find Jesus saying: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is no worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." Jesus did not say that we cannot love our family members. He said we cannot love our family members more than we love Him. What or who we love determines our choices, decisions and actions. Either Jesus is going to be Lord or, effectively, someone else is going to be lord. We cannot separate loving truth and loving Jesus, since He *is* the truth.³⁹ This is not a play on words - effectively speaking, we must love truth more than we love our family members when the two come into conflict.

³⁸ Isaiah 59:13-15a

³⁹ John 14:6

Speaking the Truth in Love

Ephesians 4:15 is where we find this phrase, “speaking the truth in love”. “Speaking the truth” is the translation of the Greek word, *aletheuo*, which alternatively can be translated: “be true” or “deal truly” – that is, live out the truth or “*walk the talk*”. We are called to both – walking in the truth and talking the truth. Truth is not elusive – it is apparent – it is simply Scripture (the written words of God). What is more problematic for us Christians is the “love” part. How do you “speak truth in love”? Personally, I think it is impossible without the grace of God. But with the grace of God, what does “speaking the truth in love” look like? Well, we have a good picture of what love looks like in 1 Corinthians 13: “4 Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” So, “speaking the truth in love” means speaking the truth with patience, kindness, without arrogance, crudity, or provocation, taking the other person “*at his word*” without assuming to know his heart motivation, yet maintaining the standard of righteousness inherent in absolute truth.

We all know that *agape* love has nothing to do with “nice” feelings. *Agape* love is not an emotional feeling; it is a free-will action. Godly love has to do with a moral goodness. “Speaking the truth in love” is speaking the truth

without sinning – that is, speaking without being impatient, unkind, arrogant, crude and provocative. But, for the love to be in truth, we also must maintain the righteous standard of absolute truth.

Respect

“Respect” is an essential ingredient of love. We must respect non-believers as free-will agents. I respect the fact that they are free to believe whatever they choose to believe - just as I am. And they are free to live - and they will live, according to what they do and don’t believe – just as I do. I respect the fact that I am neither their “god” nor their “master”, and I have no control over their beliefs or their lives. They are free to try to “play god” or to submit themselves to the Living God. Everyone does one or the other.

I find it difficult to find the proper words to express this but – since I am not ultimately responsible for the beliefs and lives of people, this seems to give me a certain *“I don’t care what you believe”* and *“I don’t care how you choose to live”* attitude. Having said that, I must admit, the level of “caring” or “not caring” has to do with the nature of my relationship with the non-believer. But, even with someone who is not a “friend” or “family member” – that is, someone I’m not “close” to - if they sincerely are looking for truth, I find that I indeed do “care”.

My non-believing friends and family members all say they “respect” my beliefs. Short of saying I think they are being insincere; I must conclude that their definition of the word “respect” is not the same as mine. This is how I understand their use of the word “respect”: Truth by nature and definition is

“absolute”. But they do not believe there is such a thing as absolute truth. Therefore, there really is no such thing as ‘truth’ – unless, of course, you choose to change the definition, as is the norm in our postmodern times. So, for them, “truth” becomes merely whatever one chooses to believe and however one chooses to live. Those choices are considered “good” if it “works” in the “life” one is “creating” for himself. Pragmatism “respects” what “works”, not what is true. So, they theoretically can “respect” anything that you say is “working” for you.

So, in the context of this humanistic philosophy, I can understand what they mean when they say they “respect” my beliefs. But since I love and respect truth – absolute truth - I cannot reciprocate with the word “respect”. That is, I cannot say I “respect” their beliefs. In all honesty, if I truly respected their beliefs, I would also choose to believe what they believe. So, all that I can “respect” is their freedom of choice.

Love “Growing Cold”

Even now, I can still visualize in my mind the setting and still feel the disturbance in my heart of something which first impacted me decades ago. It was in a cottage in the quaint village of Greyton, South Africa, while taking a break from being on the road. I read something in Matthew’s gospel which the Lord said, and many times since then, it has come to mind accompanied by the same disconcerting thought. And that is this: The Lord said, “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.”⁴⁰ I didn’t, and I still don’t, want to figure into that statistic of “most”.

It’s important to understand what Jesus is talking about here: The Greek word for “love” used in this passage is *agape* – *the love God has for Humanity*, not *eros* – human physical attraction, not *philia* – the human affection between friends, and not *storge* – the human affection in families, but *agape* – *God’s love* which resides only in those who are born of God.⁴¹ It is, of course, obvious that God’s love is not prevalent in the world. But to be accurate, I believe Jesus is referring to Christians when He says that God’s love within them will “grow cold”.⁴²

⁴⁰ Matthew 24:12

⁴¹ Romans 5:5; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 2:5; 4:7-8

⁴² Greek: *psucho*, Strongs # 5594

Regarding the phrase, “grow cold”, Greek scholar, M.R. Vincent says it means to be “*chilled by a malign or poisonous wind*”. Jesus identified this “poisonous wind” as iniquity⁴³ - “wickedness”, “unrighteousness”, that is, violation of God’s law. Because of the general climate of Humanity becoming increasingly morally degenerate⁴⁴, and also because of ourselves becoming increasingly victimized by such, *God’s love within us will grow cold*. This is not a reflection on the power of God’s love. This is a reflection on how we watch over the deposit which God has given us.

When I read this passage in Matthew, it made me think of another passage written by Peter: “7... He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds.”⁴⁵

I identified with Lot being “oppressed” and “tormented” by the iniquity around him. The phrase, “He rescued righteous Lot” was comforting. But I immediately wanted to know about my love that is “growing cold” – is it my love for non-believers? Is it my love for Christian brethren? Is it my love for God? It was very disconcerting! Since iniquity is obviously something done by humans – not by God - then our likely reaction would be for our love

⁴³ Greek: *anomia*, Strongs # 458

⁴⁴ For those reluctant to accept that Humanity's moral condition is, in fact, degenerating, I refer you to what Jesus said in Luke 23:31.

⁴⁵ 2 Peter 2:7-8

toward humans “growing cold” – not our love for God. We, of course, want to guard against our love “growing cold” for those whom the Lord loves and died for.

But we also need to guard against the Accuser of the brethren attempting to make us feel condemnation by believing the lie that our love for God is “growing cold”. We need to assess our love for God spiritually, not emotionally. *Agape* love has a moral basis rather than an emotional basis. We express *agape* love to God through our obedience and submission.⁴⁶ “This is the love of God that we keep His commandments....”⁴⁷ One aspect of loving people is expressed by not sinning against them – that is, by keeping the Lord’s commandments. The other aspect of loving people is expressed through sacrifice.⁴⁸

Our “spiritual worship”⁴⁹ is not assessed emotionally – it is the presenting of our physical lives as “living sacrifices”. The Greek word for worship here is *latreia*⁵⁰– our service for God, how we live our lives for God – it has nothing to do with how emotional we feel about people. I referred to the Accuser of the brethren attempting to make us feel condemnation, but the modern understanding of “worship” as singing praise songs may be another

⁴⁶ John 14:15-23; 15:10; 1 John 2:5; 5:2-3; 2 John 6

⁴⁷ 1 John 5:3

⁴⁸ John 13:34; 15:12-13; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 5:2, 25; 1 John 3:16, 18; 4:9-12

⁴⁹ Romans 12:1 (ESV)

⁵⁰ Strong's # 2999

source of condemnation which we can bring on ourselves, if we think we are not feeling certain emotions during praise songs.

We read in Daniel 7:25 that the saints will be “worn down”⁵¹ by the Evil One. I find it interesting that language scholar James Strong says that the “wearing down” is not physical, but mental.⁵² There seems to be a definite correlation between the “growing cold” and the “wearing down” – I think both can serve to weaken our passion for the things of God and the cause of Christ. Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”⁵³ Steal, kill and destroy what? He has no use for our health and wealth. He wants to weaken or dilute our love and passion for the Lord God. In the same discourse Jesus said: “And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”⁵⁴ So, we all *will* be affected by this phenomenon of “growing cold” and “wearing down”.

But, having said that, there is something else we need to take into account with regards to being concerned that our “love is growing cold”: As we said, *agape* love is God’s love residing within those who are born of God. *Agape*

⁵¹ Hebrew: *below*, Strongs # 1080

⁵² *Strongs Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew, Chaldee and Greek Dictionaries*

⁵³ John 10:10

⁵⁴ Matthew 24:22

love is not “feelings”. Our feelings can “grow cold” without our love growing cold. We limit the authenticity of *agape* love if we limit it to feelings.

We also tend to limit *agape* love if we limit it to certain stereotype expressions. In other words, we think God’s love looks like “this” or like “that”; and if we are not expressing “this” or “that”, then we feel we are not reflecting God’s love. But, in reality, it may not be that God’s love is absent, but merely incomplete. God’s love is incomprehensibly immense. No one person, no one spiritual movement, no one church, and no one spiritual gift can totally express God’s love. We all have only facets of God’s love. We each give expression of God’s love according to the gifts and callings He has given us. We have a tendency to stereotype expressions of God’s love by limiting it to spiritual gifts like serving, giving and showing mercy. To prophesy, and teach, and exhort, and lead, are also authentic expressions of God’s love;⁵⁵ but those who are so motivated may feel guilty if they think that God’s love is expressed only through serving, giving and showing mercy. It takes the whole Body of Christ to reflect God’s love.⁵⁶

Not only will the expression of God’s love be *incomplete* for each of us, but it will also be *imperfect*. Paul said: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.⁵⁷ And John said: “If we say that we have no sin, we are

⁵⁵ Romans 12:3-8

⁵⁶ It would be good to review what the apostle Paul had to say about these things in 1 Corinthians 12-13.

⁵⁷ Romans 3:23

deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”⁵⁸ In other words, in one way or another, our expression of God’s love will always fall short of the perfect expression of God’s love. Never-the-less when Jesus’ words prove true, and we find our love “growing cold”, the godly response would be to look to the Spirit of God to continue to manifest “the love of God (which) has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us”⁵⁹ - looking to the Spirit to manifest 1 Corinthians 13: “4 Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Verse 8 gives the wonderful promise that “love never fails”⁶⁰ – “it endures all things”.

⁵⁸ 1 John 1:8

⁵⁹ Romans 5:5

⁶⁰ Greek: *ekipto*, Strongs # 1601

Addendum

Concerning "Speaking the Truth in Love"

Firstly, the phrase in Greek means more accurately, "*Living out the truth with love*" – in other words, "*Walking the Talk*". However, it is also true that we are called to *speak* the Truth. Just a couple of observations and suggestions:

There is the saying, "*The truth hurts.*" I would like to suggest that the Truth only effectively "hurts" those who are open to receiving it. Those who are closed to the Truth, reject the truth, and even suppress the Truth, do not take Truth to heart, and may even not take it in at all. So, it is more likely that the Truth is *not* "hurting" them. And when people are humbly receiving Truth, I don't think it actually "hurts" them. Truth is from God. God is Love. I know from personal experience that Truth from God may cause me to be "undone"⁶¹, yet the experience is bathed in love.

By the way, we don't need to "strike the rock twice".⁶² People can't receive the truth until the Spirit of Truth has prepared and enabled them to. It really doesn't matter how effectively you communicate it.

⁶¹ As was Isaiah: Isaiah 6:5, Hebrew, *damah*, Strong's # H1820.

⁶² Numbers 20:10-12

There may not be any need to "hurt" people with the Truth in any case: Sometimes Jesus spoke the Truth in no uncertain terms, for example to the Pharisees. But at other times He posed questions - soul-searching questions. When those who are open to the Truth are asked a soul-searching question, I believe they themselves "hear" the truth speaking to their hearts even without having to hear it from us with their ears. I think more often than not, following Jesus' example of asking soul-searching questions is a more effective way of pointing to the Truth. But, if led to speak words, it is best to do so with straight scripture, even if it is paraphrased. God's words work so much more effectively than ours.⁶³

We must remember that *we are not peddling truths* - we're talking about "the pearl of great price" that costs *all*. So, we don't need to *"throw our pearls"* to people who don't know the difference between pearls and kernels of corn. They will just trample it.⁶⁴ There is only one absolute Truth - God's Truth - and The Spirit of Truth is perfectly capable of speaking it into human hearts. It may be that more often than we think the perfect vehicle for Him is a question posed by us.

⁶³ Hebrews 4:12

⁶⁴ Matthew 7:6

Concerning Persecution

It was not within the scope of this essay to address the very related subject of "persecution".⁶⁵ But I would like to leave just one thought: Persecution is ultimately directed at Christ.

When Israel imposed on the prophet Samuel to follow the ways of the world and appoint a human king for Israel, God indicated that "they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them."⁶⁶ In the same way, when Saul was persecuting the Church, the Body of Christ, Jesus challenged him with this question: "Why are you persecuting Me?".⁶⁷ Jesus told His disciples in no uncertain terms: "Whoever listens to you listens to Me; whoever rejects you rejects Me; and whoever rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me."⁶⁸ Persecution is ultimately directed at Christ.

⁶⁵ I have discussed "Persecution" at length in another essay entitled [*"Facing the Future"*](#).

⁶⁶ 1 Samuel 8, verse 7

⁶⁷ Acts 9:4

⁶⁸ Luke 10:16. Also: Matthew 10:40-41; 18:5; Mark 9:37; John 13:20

Postscript

So, what is accomplished – or what did I even hope to accomplish – in the writing of this essay? I hope that it proves to be more than just a personal emotional rant. Yet, I cannot say that it presents any “solution”, in the sense of changing the situation we find ourselves in – that is, *alienated by Truth*. Hopefully, if Truth was presented here, it may change us - if not the world. So, why have I shared this? I think it is important for people to understand the Truth. Jesus said, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”⁶⁹ What did He mean by that? It is sort of like when He said, “I came that they may have life...”⁷⁰ – He said that to people who were already alive. He obviously meant that he came to give something more than biological life – namely, the spiritual life of God.⁷¹ So what is the freedom that Truth brings? Freedom from external circumstances in the world? There are different views - Premillennialism, Postmillennialism and Amillennialism. Only Postmillennialism entertains the thought of the condition of the world in which we live getting “better”. Personally, I just don’t see that in human history. The other two views do not see the condition of the world in which we live getting any better.⁷² But, irrespective of which “ism” we think makes the most sense scripturally, I think Scripture is quite clear that “in the world

⁶⁹ John 8:32

⁷⁰ John 10:10

⁷¹ Greek: *zoe*, Strongs # 2222

⁷² Again, for those reluctant to accept that Humanity's moral condition is, in fact, degenerating, I refer you to what Jesus said in Luke 23:31.

you will have tribulation”⁷³, “iniquity will increase”, “the love of most will grow cold”⁷⁴ and that the Antichrist system will “wear down the saints”⁷⁵, “And if those days (are) not cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”⁷⁶.

But the Lord also promised that He would be “with us always even until the end of the age”.⁷⁷ He said: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”⁷⁸ When the Spirit of the Lord “speaks” the Truth of God’s word to our hearts, that word will be “living and active”,⁷⁹ giving us a faith that “overcomes the world”,⁸⁰ shaping us into overcomers,⁸¹ able to “endure to the end”.⁸² Knowing the Truth can enable us to be as “... the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”⁸³

So, what is the freedom that Truth brings? Freedom from external circumstances in the world? No, at least not until the passing away of this

⁷³ John 16:23

⁷⁴ Matthew 24:12

⁷⁵ Daniel 7:25

⁷⁶ Matthew 24:22

⁷⁷ Matthew 28:20

⁷⁸ John 10:27

⁷⁹ Hebrews 4:12

⁸⁰ 1 John 5:4

⁸¹ Romans 8:28-39; Revelation 2-3

⁸² Matthew 24:13

⁸³ 1 Chronicles 12:32. Cf. Proverbs 9:7.

earth and the creation of the new earth.⁸⁴ Isn't it rather an internal freedom – a freedom of spirit and soul?

I cannot honestly offer a “solution” on how to escape being “alienated by Truth” – or how to avoid being a **Stranger in a Strange Land**. But I do believe that the truth of Scripture offers hope and imparts “encouragement” – that is, courage imparted into our spirits and souls. “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”⁸⁵ While it may alienate us from the world, never-the-less, “knowing the truth” provides an inner strength that will help us not to “believe the lie”;⁸⁶ and help us to remain faithful to Him Who is “the Faithful and True”.⁸⁷

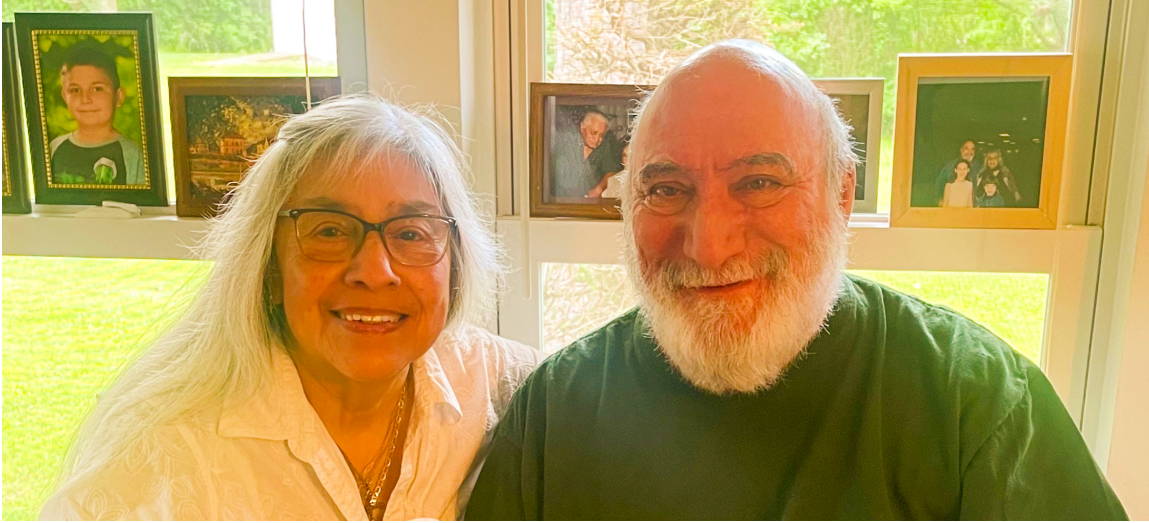
⁸⁴ 2 Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 21:1. Yet, even in Old Testament Egypt, God had special provision for His people in the land of Goshen (Genesis 45-47). (See [“Facing the Future”](#).)

⁸⁵ Romans 15:4

⁸⁶ 2 Thessalonians 2:11

⁸⁷ Revelation 3:14; 19:11; Cf. Revelation 3:7; 21:5; 22:6

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