

## **Now-Truths in Now-Tension**

Some time back, I kept seeing the picture of a high-wire walker with his very long horizontal balancing bar. I know this speaks of the middle road, the third way. Not a road of slushy compromise, but one of integrity, Biblical accuracy and Spirit insight.

We are right now at a critical time for the church at large. Major forces are at play. Major movements are on the move. Major enemies exist, timeless in their tactics.

And I believe that TRUTH must be the underpinning root of our walk together, not merely grace and kindness. This will spell the difference between being diplomats and devotees. We are called to show grace and kindness to all men.

Yes, but without Truth, our kindness is nothing more than worldly charity.

And for us in the church, how can two walk together unless they are in agreement?

In this regard, we know well that we need to hold God's truths in tension. In a global doctrinal atmosphere that seems to be charged increasingly with both extremism and reactionism, I believe we need to debate Truth more than Togetherness or Tactics.

The following Truth-Tensions I feel are of particular importance to us in our friendships into the future, and I want to express my own views on these truths, as well as the extremes that prevail in different quarters at present:

### **1. Truth-Tension #1: Between Faith as Fatalism and Faith as a Force, lies Faith as Friendship**

I agree with the wild charismatics, most of us are too tame when it comes to our expectations of God. We pray tame prayers, we speak tame words, we lead tame lives.

It is so easy to sweep the miracles of faith under the carpets of sovereignty. Likewise, we should be careful not to sweep Sovereignty under the carpet of miracles either. Whatever team looks like into the future, my oh my, it must mutually stimulate our faith. One man said to me recently, "I am looking for more than just words and passion", and Amen to that.

Without faith it is impossible to please God.

And this faith is specific, unprecedented, seeking what is impossible with man. Not just faith for finances when the salary is already mediocre to reasonable. Not just faith for more church plants if by "plants" we are merely referring to the mechanics of establishing a congregation.

Faith that moves mountains; faith for the unheard of; faith that brings heaven to earth daily.

But...

My alarm also goes off when I see the roots of eastern mysticism in the alternative forms of faith being pumped out over God channels every day.

The "faith" of the latter rain and word-faith moves is a polluted faith, a self-faith, a god-within-faith. If you can imagine it - if you can see it - you can name it - you can claim it - you can pass it on...

Hocus pocus.

Faith comes by hearing the word of God, so hearing is our responsibility. Then obeying when the Word comes. But it could be a while. Some want miracles NOW, but what if God only has purposed to do them later? To hyper-faith minions, this is fatalism, anathema. God is our bellhop on call.

But to me, this is worship. This is Job-faith, Abraham-faith.

Is it not sad how everything else becomes commoditized, once faith is commoditized? Then the weighting of "preaching" leans towards humanistic goals, and away from Divine ones. Divine goals for our lives include service, sacrificial love, witness, care, encouraging others, laying down my life, and a glorious resurrection. Humanistic goals include prosperity, wealth, healthy living, protection, provision, ease, and an un-challenging diet of teaching to prop up my temporal lifestyle.

For us, we need to choose the third way in this first Truth-Tension - "Faith as Friendship". Wherever I look in scripture for men of true faith, I see a deep relationship with God. A worshipful, reverential friendship. Moses, David, Paul, Abraham, Job, John. For them, faith was an accidental byproduct, as much as a little child sitting on a good father's lap, lovingly asks for his help. It was as coincidental as a son asking his father for a tool while they built something at the workbench together. Or the father asking his son for a tool, for that matter...

For those who preach, may they preach true faith

For those who priest, may they model an ease of reverential friendship we can have with the Lord, in an un-weird way

For those who lead, may they coalesce with other men and women of faith. May faith be the standard-bearer of God's army

For all who love God, may they show it in a desire to grow their knowledge of and friendship with God, rather than aim at growing faith

## **2. Truth-Tension #2: Between the Spirit as a Comet and the Spirit as a Commodity, lies the Spirit as our Companion**

By the "Spirit as a Comet", I mean the resigned posture that revivals only come around once every blue moon, as infrequently as the Halley's- or Hale-Bopp- comet. These are ghostly men who tell us that the dispensation of the Spirit has outpoured itself, that the fullness is received at regeneration, that a walk with God is more theological than experiential.

This is not what I see in the Word. I see the wonderful manifestation of His person and presence so frequently in the book of Acts. I see men and women overcome with His power and glory, speaking His words and participating in His re-creational miracles.

But I guess the real question here is, what ushers Him in? Once again, the word-faith move seems to me to have treated the Holy Ghost like gasoline at the pump, rather than the Guest and Gentleman Within. This is "Spirit as Commodity"....

"Just come to the front and get some of the anointing!", is the cry.

But is the Anointing as much an object, as faith is a force? When you secularize spiritual things, you always end up putting them in man-made boxes.

So why does the Spirit manifest anyway, under such rude conditions? An often-asked question to which I respond, I don't know. But - here's a thought - is it always the manifestation of the *Holy Spirit*? Here are two contrasting scriptures...

**Mark 16:17-18** *And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."*

**Matt. 7:20-23** *Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*

Does this mean that the unsaved can do miracles, and that by the Holy Spirit? I do not think so, and this points to possibility of the powers of darkness at work.

Even in **Hebrews 6:3-8**, it is clear that a man can be part of a congregation, have all the outward manifestations of being a Christian, and yet be completely reprobate.

But the most worrying scriptures of all are those in Revelations, and it is worth quoting all three passages here:

- **Rev. 13:12** *He (the second beast) exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.*

Note well that the *first beast*, described in Rev 13:1-10, made war against the saints, flat out. But the second beast looked like a lamb (v 11), and did "great and miraculous signs", to "deceive the inhabitants of the earth".

If men seek signs instead of the Savior, then does God "give them over", in the way of Romans 1v24? Then "signs they shall have"...**Num. 11:18-20** *"Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard*

*you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" "*

- **Rev. 16:14** *They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.*
- **Rev. 19:20** *But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.*

It is clear to me that commoditizing the Holy Spirit lays us vulnerable to the working of evil spirits in counterfeit signs. Dudley Daniel once said, *"if you try to force the Spirit's hand, try to manipulate Him into appearing, a spirit you will get, but it shall not be the Holy Spirit"*. Even the ghost of Samuel could be called up by necromancy, and surely the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with it!

We also see in the Matthew 7 scripture that, where the Holy Spirit is in operation, this is not necessarily a seal of approval upon the man with the microphone. By our fruit we shall be known.

So the final, third way, is the "Holy Spirit as our Companion", our Parakletos. The One is now here, sent by Jesus, and because of Whom Jesus said, "it would be better for you that I depart". He is the PERSON OF GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT; to be loved, revered and spoken with as keenly as with the Father. He is the Empoweror of the Gospel, of resurrection power, within.

But He is a Person. And He is always to be referred to as "You" or "He", never "It". And I believe He delights in daily communion with us, ongoingly, rather than being hauled out of His Chambers when the stage lights are up and the cameras are rolling, as it were.

I do believe we should study and be aware of the workings of the gifts (by the way, are there more gifts than those listed in the Bible, as much as a Divine Personality must have infinitely more facets than the already complex human personality? Did He design the gifts for us to box ourselves and each other, or more as love-markers in our walk with him and with men? The answer to these questions will be shaped by our attitude towards the Holy Spirit Himself)

In this area above all others, I feel we need to be re-interrogating our base doctrines, especially in light of the current "latter rain" crisis:

- "Good morning Holy Spirit" is authored by a man who has denied the divinity of Christ and never recanted as far as I can tell. He states in the book that Christ was fully man and his blood would have been as tainted as ours if He had refused the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Is this the reason why so many "faith" preachers strut about with such

remarkable arrogance, because they may just truly believe that Jesus is merely an older brother and the Spirit is their commodity?

- Kenneth Hagin Snr, the father of the word-faith movement, once remarked, "man was created on terms of equality with God, and he lives on equal terms with God". If Jesus was just like us with the Holy Spirit, then we, once we have received the filling, ought to be just like Him, surely? This is the false gospel at play.
- Virtually all the big name word-faith preachers claim special revelations by the Spirit, by angels or by Jesus himself, as seals of their ministries

To counter this rubbish on the downside, and to lead our people well on the upside, we truly do need deep roots on this issue, given that TBN has spread the false gospel of human-godness to tens of millions across the world – and central to this is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

### **3. Truth-Tension #3: Between the Word as a Signpost and the Word as Sole-Source, lies the Word as the Sword**

For some in today's world, the Bible has become a parallel information booklet, happy to lend a helping hand in preaching tents and causes. Merely a signpost to happiness.

I listened astounded to one Creflo Dollar the other day, as he sounded forth on the Abrahamic Covenant being a covenant of blessing, and this being our legacy from Abraham – blessing, blessing and more blessing, to summarize the message. What of "Abraham believed and it was counted to him as righteousness", I thought? What of Abraham living in tents, what of the sufferings of the saints, what of a world that is not worthy of men and women of the faith who, like Moses, chose to suffer with God's people rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time??

So, the Word is not merely a collection of handy signposts, pointing man in his blessed direction.

But on the other side, we have the Biblicists. The Biblical Fundamentalists. Those who declare adamantly, the Word is "Sole-Source"! These watchdogs are ready to shoot down anything that is not "biblical", failing to realize that much of their own lives contain un-biblical things – toothpaste, cars, computers, email, contact lenses, surgery, phones, websites, teamsport, the Star-Spangled Banner as well as all Italian food, plus coffee and the abolition of slavery. Not to mention their wives not wearing hats to church meetings.

It is these watchdogs that have threatened to make the gospel anachronistic to our day, and whose arrogance has declared that God has made an end of revealing His Son to us.

I believe wholeheartedly that God firstly has revealed Himself to us through His redemptive acts in human history, but not exclusively. God also wants a living relationship with every generation, every ethnos too.

So how do we avoid the signpost generation, but also not become the dry declarers of dead doctrine, the piledrivers of sole-source-old-truth that just must be forced into the current milieu?

I think firstly we DO need a holy reverence of the Word, because it is the Word *of God*. It is "the Sword of the Spirit".

I think we need to see the Word not as Glorious in itself, as ink on paper, but in its living-ness when read by a son or daughter of God under the illumination of the Spirit, Who wields the Sword.

I think we falter when we approach the Word to show us more how to conduct our lives, ministries and missions, rather than to get to know God and His ways – the real reason God left us this remarkable manuscript!

I think different gifts are given different insights into the Word, by the Spirit, and this is why we need each other

I think God has already revealed much wisdom to former saints, which is why serious learners and preachers need to be reading the dead authors

I think we hype the Word when we hype the "living". This generation is looking for the permanent-sensational, more than any other generation before it, thanks chiefly to the capitalism-technology-individualism triangle. And so, instead of seeing the Word primarily as wisdom for living well under Christ and with each other, it is seen as Wisdom for the Mysteries, for the Powers, for the Marvelous, for the Treasure-Chest.

I think we need to teach on the Bible itself, somewhere, and not just from the Bible itself. Just so we don't fall on our swords, as it were.

#### **4. Truth-Tension #4: Between the Mission as Myth and the Mission as Mantra, lies the Mission as a Man (and a Means!)**

For much of the church today, Mission is dead except for the coins they throw at threadbare missionaries, many of whom seem to be despised by the native people they have out-reached toward. I say this with great respect to the few who have become my heroes in the faith.

For much of the church the mission is a *myth*, as mythical as the news reports that have dumbed down our neuro-senses towards the pain of those multitudes in the valley of decision. The Reality is their own Consumptive Lives and Local Church.

It is easy to see this introspective extreme as foppish; useless to God and to the nations. But I think a more insidious danger in our ranks, is the extremism of mission-centricity. A form of Christian workaholism.

The "Mission as a Mantra"...

Yes, worship is our work and our work is worship, but only as long as it is sourced from the Upper Spring, and is not our own wooden buckets of dirty human effort. First comes the vertical, then the horizontal. In this, the threat of mission-centricity is made more threatening by the allure of nations. Men generally love the smell of pioneering, and no-one would deny God is in there somehow.

But Marthas can also lift their hands in an outward appearance of worship.

In stark contrast, Genesis 1v28 clearly says *fruitfulness* will lead to *filling the earth*. Nothing less. Jesus cursed a leafy tree. One more year He prunes and turns the soil. So a model that encourages, endorses and reinforces every saint, elder and 5 fold gift abiding in the vine, is imperative.

So, the church needs fathers who can discern between irrevocable giftings and true anointing, which is the smell of the Groom's Cologne – either the stench of death or the aroma of life in the nations. To many are sent with no scent at all.

Now in avoiding the Mantra and the Myth, none of us are flatline perfectly intimate with the Father and the Son, none of us walk 24-7 in unhindered fellowship with the Holy Ghost - but this must be our aim. Crowds gather to miracles, thirsty men come to a full stream.

So....

The Mission is a Man. Jesus, our Man in Glory. When He is evident in us, the gospel is no longer mute, our preaching shall bear fruit and the church will take root

Of course this requires hard work. But the motive is love and sonship. God loves hard workers. But servants by serving cannot become sons. Sons go into the harvest fields of their Father, to serve, but always as a son, always as an heir, never as a hired hand or wage earner.

*Going is the Means by which we reveal the Man to the Multitudes*

[We need to cultivate this as an ongoing atmosphere]

### **5. Truth-Tension #5: Between Team as Neutered and the Team as Gnostic, lies the Team as Natural**

For some, team is either irrelevant or so soaked in organizational culture-bubble thinking as to be useless. Team is not "a collection of individuals all motivated by common self interest", as the secular gurus speak. But neither is it irrelevant. Team is most necessary.

Firstly, let us agree not to neuter team by reducing its importance.

Big churches become rogue when they see no real need of partnering beyond their parishional, parochial and financial boundaries. They become "a law unto themselves".

Translocal gifts neuter team when they always travel alone, or never with a ministry peer and brother. They become the "guest speaker", no matter how hard they preach against it.

And team is neutered when the culture forbids or frowns upon debate, dialogue and discussion as peers. When team is built more around the "leader" than our Lord.

When team emphasizes team, rather than the goal of that team.

But on the other side, we have Gnostic thinking alive and well in our ranks. Gnostic doctrine centres on the lonely and dislocated "divine spark"

within, wherein different men received different sized sparks, and some even receive none. The herd, and those "above" the herd (like Tony Hancock in "The Blood Donor", when he told the doctor he suspected he had a rare blood type, because he "always somehow felt separate from the crowd"!)

My sense is this spiritual snobbery is a real enemy to us. If I discount a man's word simply because he does not fit my "spark-sense", and I call this "spiritual discernment", to me that is spiritual arrogance and a form of grand-mastery. Men should be judged at face value, and their words weighed no matter how obtuse the personalities, histories, church flows or ecclesiastical vocabulary. Anything less is the same Gnosticism that led to the believers in Bible days looking down on the poor.

Further, when men preach big, but then live small, they need to protect themselves in private from truly big men. This closes the door on transparent dialogue, and opens the goat pen to camps and collusions, to words like "betrayal" and "treachery" being flung at any man who dares hint that the core truths need altering. This is denominationalism, but what is the root? Is Gnosticism involved?

Either way, team is neither neutered, nor gnostically tiered. For me, the middle path for us when it comes to team, is the word "Natural"....

There were natural connections in the Bible. Barnabas was compelled by the Spirit to fetch Paul. They connected, their ministries combined to chemical excellence, they endured and chatted together. Paul walked with friends, lived with those who loved him. He did not force fellowship. Peter went one way and Paul another. Even his "team" were free to follow the Spirit and Paul! Apollos remained; Titus was in Dalmatia; Priscilla and Aquila made appearances in four different churches.

The dominant theme was Christ and His Unfinished Work.

Let this be our dominant theme. Let's call a spade, a spade. And let's discern between flesh and spirit; man's ways and God's ways; friends and partners; allies and accomplices; traveling companions and opportunism.

Who is God knitting your heart with? Why? Is it just for heaven? Surely not? Surely for earth too!

So, the truths truly are in tension, for the tensile strength of the church to be made manifest. May we uphold the amazing legacy of the church fathers, as their lives and words made good on the Bible's claim that "the church of the living God is the pillar and foundation of the Truth" (1 Tim 3:15)

Love, Nick