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Truth's Assault on Modernity

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Within the Christian hope is the knowledge that all this will one day be reversed. By God's grace, the imperfect will give way to the perfect, confusion will give way to clarity, modern ideologies will be seen to be empty. Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And yet even now we can see that, just as modernity has launched its attack on truth, the truths of God's Word are launching an assault upon modernity. To all who have eyes to see, the secular idols of modernity are visibly falling. With the eyes of faith, we see that truth is the hound, and modernity is the hare. Modernity, postmodernity, hypermodernity, and whatever yet may come are all evidence of modernity's last gasp. God's truth abideth still.

We confess that all we truly know of God and ourselves, of meaning and life, we know by the revealed Word of God. Thus we acknowledge that without the Word of God, we would be lost and ignorant, blind and hopeless. Our powers of discernment are so limited, and so devastatingly corrupted by sin, that we know nothing of eternal consequence but for the Scriptures, and even here we are dependent upon the illumination of the Holy Spirit for our understanding.

Modern naturalistic scientism claims that "The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." But the Word of God declares, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Modernity is predicated upon the assumption that natural order is the product of a cosmic accident: the chance explosion of time, energy, and cosmic dust. The natural order of planets, cells, atoms, and galaxies are objects of scientific study, devoid of any meaning. Yet the Bible asserts that "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Ps. 19:1).

In essence, the universe is either meaningful or meaningless. The question hangs on the declaration of a Creator. The Scriptures reveal that nature itself reveals the Creator—even his personal attributes. But this is a knowledge we have corrupted. As Paul wrote to the Romans, we sinners have so corrupted this knowledge that, surveying the creation, we turn to worship the creature rather than the Creator. The naturalistic worldview of modernity insists that human beings are merely a complex order of evolved organisms—simply one animal among other animals, one accident among other accidents. But God's Word reveals that "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth'" (Gen. 1:26).

Modernity debates whether the world will end with a bang, or with a whimper, exploded by the force of the atom or dissipating into a quiet cosmic entropy. The Word declares that the Lord shall return with a shout, and all things will be brought to consummation by his decree and power. The modern worldview is predicated upon chance and contingency, but the Word of God reveals the unconditional nature of divine providence, that God governs all that occurs and has

surrendered none of his power. The modern humanistic worldview assumes and asserts that human beings are basically good, even perfectible. Any undesired behavior is redefined and dismissed as the result of an abusive childhood, environmental deprivation, emotional illness, genetic predisposition, or uncontrollable urges. The awful despotisms of the twentieth century have been driven by utopian visions, attempting to create the “new communist Man” or the *Urbarmensch*. At the root of these is the lie of humanism. But the Bible reveals that we are the children of Adam. We bear his mark, in Adam we sinned, and we have sinned on our own, for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

In so far as modernity allows for God, it permits the notion of a blithe spirit or a cultural symbol. The rise of new and old paganisms in our mainstream culture is but one indication of the very tangible idolatry in our midst. Americans are not troubled by the presence of non-threatening deities, and will even commercialize their paraphernalia.

Scripture, however, reveals the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This God is jealous and will allow no rivals. He is omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, immutable, personal, transcendent, indivisible, merciful, gracious, and yet filled with wrath against sin. Most supremely, he is holy. He is infinite in all his perfections. It is against this God that we have sinned.

He has revealed himself in His Word as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—a Trinity of three persons who are yet one. This, too, is a mystery beyond our comprehension, but it is a truth revealed in the Word of Truth.

The modern worldview suggests a message of secular salvation through self-improvement, self-denial, self-gratification, self-empowerment, and self-consciousness. The Bible reveals that salvation is all of grace, and made possible and actual by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, who died as our substitute and the propitiation for our sin.

The Bible reveals to us the truth about God, about ourselves, about our sin and condemnation, about our salvation and redemption, about our sanctification and eventual glorification. We must preach the Word—and the whole truth of the Word.

The sad reality is, however, that modernity’s assault upon the truth has taken its toll, not only in the world, but also in the church. Within the organized and culturally recognized church are those whose worldview and doctrinal commitments are more humanistic than the humanists, more naturalistic than the naturalists, and more secular even than some secularists. Vast segments of the organized church in Western societies reflect little more than a thin crust of religious language spread over modernity’s most cherished secular assumptions.

Our confidence must be that here, too, the truth is assaulting modernity even as modernity is assaulting the truth. The knowledge that modernity has given birth to a culture of death is dawning in enclaves where the light of Scripture may shine but dimly. In some churches and denominations where the maxims of modernity have reigned for most of this century, by God’s grace the light may yet again shine. This must be our hope and prayer.

Nevertheless, our primary concern must be to see our own houses are put in order. Evangelical compromise and disarray demand our humility and our urgent prayer for revival, reformation, and renewal. We must take measure of our own doctrinal fidelity and acknowledge the extent to which we have failed to apply the truth of God’s Word and to embody that Word in doctrine, worship, and life.

We are not without assistance from the saints who have gone before us. With humility and gratitude we look to the Reformers with the humble acknowledgment that our churches are in need of reformation, even as were the churches of the sixteenth century. Our churches are worldly in lifestyle, worship, and piety. We have too often sacrificed doctrinal clarity on the altar of progress, statistics, and public opinion. We have seen the worship of God too often made into a human-centered entertainment event. We have allowed our confessions of faith to be historic markers rather than living affirmations.

In the spirit of the Reformers, and following their example, let us determine to confess the truths of God’s Word—and all the truths of God’s Word.

Let us confess *sola Scriptura* and therefore submit ourselves before the truth of the Word of God, preaching, teaching, and applying that Word to all dimensions of life. Let there be no rival authority, and let us never apologize for our

confession of the Scriptures—inerrant, inspired, infallible, and unbroken—as our sole authority for knowledge and doctrine.

Let us submit to no other authority, whether a pope, a self-declared prophet, or ubiquitous public opinion. We stand by the Word, even as we stand under the Word.

We also confess *solus Christus*, for we have nothing to claim for our salvation but the mercies and merits of Christ and his atonement. This is all we need, and unspeakably more than we deserve. We must confess Christ—from his preexistence and virgin birth to his exaltation and glorious return. Furthermore, we must confess that Christ is the only Savior, for there is salvation in no other name. Christ's work is sufficient for our redemption and all God intends for us. Nothing can be added to that work or taken from it.

We confess also *sola gratia*, for salvation is by grace alone. Indeed, all that is ours is by grace—even the very knowledge of God. We must resist every effort to rob grace of its simplicity, and thus make of Christ's work a mockery. We are sinners who were spiritually dead, and but for grace would die not only lost but ignorant of our lostness. By grace we have been elected unto salvation by the sovereign act of God. By grace we are kept by the power of God.

We preach justification by faith—the material principle of the Reformation—and thus we confess *sola fide*. By this article the church stands or falls, for justification by faith is the essence of the gospel. To make this assertion is to admit that the contemporary evangelical movement has sadly, tragically, and progressively abdicated justification by faith, and thus in some sectors is preaching a false gospel. We stand by the chief article of the Reformation—not as a historical referent, but as our living confession.

Most important, we confess *solī Deo gloria*, and we pray that in all things God alone will be glorified. To him all glory is due, to him all glory belongs. He is the King of glory. Let us therefore reject the glorification of any substitute, of any rival.

We pray that God will be glorified in our confession, our churches, our discipleship, our preaching, our teaching, our witness, and our living. We must acknowledge that this is a true test of our faithfulness, and perhaps our most essential test.

In an age of untruth, we contend for the truth—knowing that it is not our own, but that truth which is revealed by God in his Word. Such contending calls for a holy boldness wedded to a proper humility. Writing to Emperor Charles V on the necessity of reforming the Church, John Calvin sets a worthy example: “But be the issue what it may, we will never repent of having begun, and of having proceeded thus far. The Holy Spirit is a faithful and unerring witness to our doctrine. We know, I say, that it is the eternal truth of God that we preach. We are, indeed, desirous, as we ought to be, that our ministry may prove salutary to the world; but to give it this effect belongs to God, not to us.”

Indeed, the effect belongs to God, not to us. But we pray for reformation in our midst and in our churches, acknowledging that this will come only by the grace and mercy of our sovereign God. We stand by the truth of God's Word—and the truths of God's Word. The effect belongs to God. *Solī Deo Gloria!*

