

I heard this before, and I could not resist from adopting it to a particular situation that we now know. Some might find it cruel to judge the man, but the victims of his crime would not feel that way. Bernie Madoff is believed to have defrauded more than \$65B from thousands of trusting investors. From the rich to the regular retirees, from colleges to charitable organizations, they lost it all. If he is sorry, he has yet to offer to compensate his victims with the fund he is hiding. Now, imagine the court in which he will stand one of these days:

"Bernard L. Madoff," said the judge, "You pleaded guilty on all 11 counts. I therefore sentence you to a total of 150 years." Madoff is an old man. He burst into tears. The judge's facial expression softened. "I did not mean to be harsh," he said. "I know the sentence I have imposed is a very severe one. You don't really have to serve the whole of it." The prisoner's eyes brightened with hope.

"That's right," said the judge.
"Just do as much as you can!"

The truth is that the judge graciously reduced the sentence for the convict—perhaps by more than one hundred years. But the truth is that it did not change anything: it is still a life sentence.

Then there was another snip of a story I heard: A man was doing his Ph. D. in philosophy. His wife realized how seriously he was taking his studies only on the day she asked him: "Why is it you love me so much?" Quick as a shot came the reply: "When you say 'so much,' are you referring to intensity, depth, frequency, quality, or duration?"

The truth is that analytical philosophy does a poor job of winning a woman's heart. And by dissecting the petals, no one ever gathered in the beauty of the rose, so the story went.

Similarly, this is what my wife told me. She used to be an engineering student in the college.

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She was taking a course on Fluid Dynamics at the time, and was studying hard in the library among her classmates. She happened to look outside, and it was snowing. That was the first snow of the season, and it was snowing heavily. Everyone began to notice it, stopped their work, and one by one, joined at the windows, watching. For a moment there was this awed silence among the students captivated by the beauty of the fresh-falling snow. My wife could not contain her poetic inspiration, and broke the silence by observing out loud: "There are so many snowflakes per the unit volume!"

Leave it to a geek to ruin poetry. Of course, what she tried to say was that it was snowing very hard, and the flakes were very big. Because her mind was set in the engineering subject at the moment, it just came out that way. Sometimes, being precise just does not tell us much about the truth.

What is truth like, then? If it is not in number, or in analysis, or in precision, where does one find truth?

I assume that it is true that people in general are all for the education of the children. Some of us are active or retired teachers, and I can see that the commitment level to education is high in our congregation.

We realize that 26,000 teachers of the California public schools received the pink slip. They will be unemployed for a while, at least until the economy in this state improves. It had not been going well for some teachers, for many taught in the districts where the funding was limited. Probably some of you remember paying for the materials yourselves, so that you could teach the class. Probably, some of you still do.

With this kind of reduction of human power in the ranks of the teachers, the class size will have to increase, the work load will pile up, and chances are, the

quality in the public education will diminish to a certain degree. What is the solution to this?

The truth of the matter is not in the discussion of who is going to get the ax, so that others may be spared. That is how things get played out, but that does not really solve the problem. If we are really interested in the truth, and if we are really committed to the education of the children, there is one obvious thing that needs to be done: abolish the Prop. 13 that capped the property taxes.

Now it is said, how many of us believe it is a good idea? Isn't it true that the public schools depend on the property tax for its funding? Will the citizens of the blue-leaning state actually vote for the measure that will abolish the cap?

Truth is not found in discussions. Truth is not found in the political labels. Truth is found in *doing*—*in the actual commission of the deed*. By coincidence, that happens to be what the writer of

the Gospel of John says (depending on the version of the translation, the following could be interpreted to be the commentary of the writer, or the quotation of Jesus' saying).

²¹ But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.

Speaking truth is regarded as the sign of the high integrity of a person. But speaking what is true can be feigned easily. Just about any one can speak what is true. It is so easy to influence and mislead smart people.

There are three ways of doing it: tell them the truth, or hide the truth from them, or tell them what they believe is the truth. If they hear what they wanted to hear, then they believe it as true. Those who know this speak the truth all day long, knowing that they will influence many. But it is not what they say; it is what they do—the deed—that counts. Every greenhorn politician knows that.

The Bible goes one step further than merely speaking the truth. Truth, according to the Bible, is not as much speaking as is doing. Truth is in *doing* what is true. Many can speak what is true. But few can *do* what they say is true. That is exactly the point: doing what is true is what really matters. If one believes in what is true, one would do what is true. If taxpayers believe in the public education, for example, the taxpayers would not object to paying the property tax that is equitable to the value of their properties. But we know that is not the reality.

Because of the Prop. 13, many people saved on taxes, but certain school districts were relegated to the poverty status. The truth is found in the action. That action witnessed to the truth that people believed: only those who lived in the affluent neighborhood are entitled to the quality education. That truth serves only certain people. The truth in the biblical sense, however, is the universal one. It should be true to every

one, and it should work for everyone.

What would God say about the inequality, poverty, and depravity that exist in the human society—especially when that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son? One might want to examine the characteristic of a religion that preaches love, salvation, and eternal life, but does not care much about the social conditions that separate people into different classes, or about economic injustice that plagues the poor neighborhoods.

Any one can quote from the Bible, and speak what is true. But that is not what the third chapter of the Gospel of John witnesses to. The Gospel writer witnesses to the truth that is found in the *action* of the believers. There are plenty of Christians who may love their God and the truth of the gospel, but don't carry out in the actual commission of the deed what they said to be true. Quite often, the Christian action betrays the

confession of the faith. They may say what is true, but do not do what is true. The wise ones, therefore, choose to keep their mouths shut, and let their action speak the truth.

What is the point of having someone accept Jesus Christ as one's Lord and personal savior, only to have the person perpetuate the age-old injustice and prejudice that separate the society into classes and factions? If we can not or will not work on injustice, prejudice, and other human evil, what is the point of becoming religious? Is it wrong to say that religion has become a fashion statement or a class distinction for some?

This past week, the head of the Catholic Church stated in Africa, where AIDS has ravaged many nations, that condom is not effective against the spread of AIDS. The only effective solution to the spread of AIDS, then, will be abstinence. Did you know that abstinence is 100% effective? There is no dispute about that. There is no

problem with those who practice abstinence. They do what is true to their belief, and that is good. The problem is: what percentage of the human population believes in abstinence and *practices* it 100% of the time?

The problem is with the vast majority of those who do not practice abstinence, and those who fail to practice it 100% of the time. If the world population is any indication, one should know that abstinence is not really an effective factor in persuading people away from having sex.

In the cases people decided to ignore the teaching of abstinence, not to care about abstinence, or, most importantly, do not know that they are infected with AIDS virus, what preventive solution do we have? Does increasing the intensity of the teaching of abstinence provide any effective solution to AIDS prevention? As far as AIDS prevention in the poor countries is concerned, what does it mean, doing what is true?

I do not really understand what is with all this outrage against paying bonuses to the executives of AIG that received the bailout money from the government. I do understand the outrage on the average, tax-paying citizens' part. But I do not understand the outrage on the Obama administration's part. As far as what I can gather, this is what happened:

- 1) the Treasury Department knew months ahead that the bonuses would be paid to AIG executives;
- 2) the Senate Banking Committee Chairman, Chris Dodd, first denied, then recanted and owned up to the fact that he inserted the loophole that allowed the bonuses;
- 3) he then pointed the lame finger, and said that someone in Treasury Department asked him to insert the loophole (did you also know that Dodd has been the major beneficiary of contributions from AIG?);
- 4) then the Treasury boss, Tim Geithner, finally admitted that he was the one who made that request after a careful discussion, because he was

concerned with possible lawsuits; and 5) then President Obama said to Jay Leno as recently as this past Thursday that he was "stunned" that AIG execs got paid the bonuses.

This means that the people in the Obama administration share the same chemical trait with common household wax: they become transparent when the heat is turned up. Maybe it's a good thing, compared to the previous administration. Too many things are still under the wraps, destroyed, or locked away behind the firewall.

I share the average Joe's outrage, because he will foot the bill while struggling to stop the foreclosure. But I just cannot understand the outrage in the administration, when it was the very Treasury Department and the Banking Committee that engineered the entire loophole that allowed AIG bonuses. Am I expected to believe that all this took place without the knowledge of the President Obama? If that were the case, it

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would make the President look as if he is not fully in charge. If that were not the case, it would make the President look really bad. Nevertheless, I must still ask the question: what does it mean, *doing* what is true?

As for the church of Jesus Christ, we should not forget that we are called to the prophetic ministry. The prophetic ministry of the church holds accountable those who are in power, and keeps them transparent. There are those who confuse the prophetic ministry with the political partisanship. This is the salient difference between the two: being partisan shows the inability to see one's own party's shortcomings while being critical to the other party's mistakes. Jesus had already said something about that:

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye (Mt. 7:3)?

The Gospel of John bears witness to the eternal life for

those who believe in the name of Jesus:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (Jn. 3:16)".

From the outside, it is hard to tell, if a person is just saying the truth, or quoting from the Bible as a fashion statement. So John provides the litmus paper. This is the outward sign of those who have eternal life: they *do* what is true, and they come to the light. And that is the distinctive identity of the children of God.

The spoken truth, unless practiced, has yet to become truthful.