

What Is Truth?

Jack H. Williams

Jack is a native of Arlington, Texas. He was baptized into Christ in 1979. He is a 1982 graduate of the Brown Trail School of Preaching. Upon graduation he began labors with the 39th Street church of Christ in July of 1982. He has directed the annual Mid-West Lectures since their beginning in 1983. He is active in International Bible Studies and the Mid-West School of Biblical Studies which are works of the 39th Street church. He has written several tracts in the IBS series. Jack has held Gospel meetings in Texas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Tennessee, Nebraska, Missouri and Arkansas and spoken on several lectureships. He and his wife Lana have a son, Jarrod, who is a deacon at the congregation here, and a daughter, Mary. Jarrod and his wife Stacey have blessed Jack and Lana with two grandsons, Connor, age almost 3 and Cayden, born October of 2001. Mary is married to Robbie Shepherd and both are students at the University of Missouri at Kansas City.

In John 18 we have the record of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in the garden (1-11); the mockery of the trial before the Jewish authorities (12-27) and finally before Pilate (28-40). The Jews desired Jesus to be put to death but under Roman law they did not possess the power to put a man to death (31), thus they brought Jesus before Pilate, the Roman governor, that he might put him to death. As Jesus stood before Pilate he was thwarted at his attempts to find some fault in Jesus. As Pilate confronted Jesus, Jesus spoke to him and said He had come to “bear witness unto the truth” and that “every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (37). Pilate responded with a simple question – “*What is truth?*” (38). While Pilate’s question was probably in mockery (he didn’t even wait for an answer), it is a question that must be answered. It is at the heart of all communication. It stands as the foundation of every dispute man may have. Without truth there is no basis for communication or reconciliation among mankind (or between man and God!).

MAN’S IDEAS OF TRUTH

If you seek the answer to our question among the teachings of man you find several answers given.

Agnosticism is one of the philosophies men say is the answer. Agnosticism is the belief that man cannot *know* anything at all, thus truth would at best be an unattainable goal! While it is sadly a common teaching, even among some in the church, it is a doctrine which is fatally flawed.

- The idea itself is a direct denial of a statement of our Lord. It was Jesus who proclaimed, “ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). The idea that truth is unattainable and unknowable is thus to call Jesus a liar – surely none would condone any philosophy that would do such!
- Also agnosticism would make spiritual freedom (the universal need of mankind - Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23) an eternally unattainable goal since this freedom comes by knowing the truth (John 8:32)!
- Agnosticism is also a “self defeating” proposition. When confronted with the supposition of agnosticism one need only ask the one who espouses it – “Do you know that agnosticism is true?”

Agnosticism, though commonly taught, cannot be a possible answer for any thinking person – religious or not.

Pragmatism is another popular concept of truth that man has conceived. Pragmatism is simply “the end justifies the means” philosophy. Such a concept would condone lying if the result was that “it worked” but God has clearly condemned lying (Revelation 21:8) and even identifies Satan as a “liar and the father of it.” Clearly pragmatism cannot be a proper definition of truth for any with a concept of ethical behaviour.

Personal acceptance is another common idea of truth. Many believe truth to be that which they personally accept as true. Of course this creates a great problem – what you accept as truth may not be what I accept as true. The result would be that there may be many “truths” that contradict one another! God clearly condemned such a definition also when he said “There is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). The apostle Paul is an excellent example of such. He clearly believed what he was doing all his life was true (Acts 23:1), but he was clearly following a false way (Acts 9:5). Personal acceptance likewise fails as a workable definition of truth.

The correspondence theory of truth is a concept worthy of examination. This theory or definition of truth is simply that truth corresponds to reality. I can say that a ball is blue, I can believe it personally, it can “work” as far as meeting my goals – but unless the ball is in reality blue the statement is false. But if the ball is blue the statement is true – it corresponds to reality.

It is clear from the above that the only concept worthy of consideration is that of the correspondence theory – truth is that which corresponds to reality. But there is a problem even here. When we ask “What is truth” in the religious realm we are seeking not only a correspondence to reality but a “rightness” of the matter – man obviously fails to consider both aspects in a definition of truth. For example it may be *true* that one man steals from another, but it is not *right*. We must look elsewhere to find the definition of truth to will be complete from a religious standpoint. We must look to the Word of God, the ultimate and only standard of right and wrong. God has much to say about truth (the word “truth” is used 235 times), so we will have to limit our answer somewhat.

TRUTH IS GOD’S COMPLETE INSPIRED WORD

Some have the mistaken idea that truth as regards God and His word is a never-ending process, that God reveals His truth bit by bit in our day and time. Such is completely contrary to the Bible affirmation.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth... (John 16:13)

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth (John 17:17)

If we are to abide by the principles God has stated, then truth in religion is God’s Word and that truth has been completely revealed to mankind in the written word. In fact the Bible is plain on the

condemnation of any who would add unto this word (Galatians 1:6-9). If, as some would suppose, God is constantly revealing His truth to mankind through revelation, dreams and such, how could anyone fulfill such commands as the ones to ...

- contend for the faith (Jude 3)? Who would know from day to day what the faith is?
- search the Scriptures as to what is being taught is so (Acts 17:11)? If the truth is still being revealed there would be no basis for a search!

The only tenable position as regards truth and God's Word is just what He has proclaimed – we have, in the written Word, *all truth*.

TRUTH IS ESSENTIAL TO LIFE AND LIVING

God obviously desires that all mankind live according to the narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14). But without the truth one could not accomplish such. Note what the truth (God's Word) is able to accomplish. With the truth one can...

1. *Be Free*
... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32)
(cf. Romans 1:16; James 1:21)
2. *Live right before God*
Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth (John 17:17)
3. *Resist evil*
Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7)

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil ... He answered and said, "It is written..." (Matthew 4:1-11) (cf. Eph. 6:10-13)

3. *Grow*
But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (Ephesians 4:14)

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby (1 Peter 2:2)

4. *Worship properly*
The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24) (cf. Matthew 15:9)

God has a great and precious plan that He desires man to follow. That way leads ultimately to eternal life with Him. But the only way to find and follow that way is *through the truth – His Word!*

TRUTH CAN BE PERVERTED

One of the greatest dangers one can face is that of complacency. Paul stated that those who felt they could not fall were in fact in danger of doing so (1 Corinthians 10:12). We can apply that same principle to the truth. If we fall into a complacent attitude and think the truth can endure without contending for it we are in great danger! Jude desired to write about the “common salvation” but was compelled to write that the Christians “earnestly contend for the faith” because of the false teachers who would pervert the truth (Jude 3,4). The apostle Paul spoke of those “who changed the truth of God into a lie” (Romans 1:25). We must be constantly on guard against those who, for whatever reason, would pervert the truth. They may do it sincerely (as did the apostle Paul - Acts 23:1), to gain a following (Acts 20:28-31), because they have been “bewitched” by false teachers themselves (Galatians 5:7), to make the way of God seem easier – without restrictions (Jude 3-4) or even because they simply do not love the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11). Whatever the motivation behind it the result is the same – *the precious Word of God that provides for all mankind’s needs pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) is perverted!*

It is beyond this writer’s comprehension how any who profess to be children of God can stand idly by and watch God’s power unto salvation (Romans 1:16) be perverted! As the church we are to be the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). If we do not stand fast and strive for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27) ... *who will?! Truth is too dear to stand by as it is attacked - whether it be from the pulpits, in the media, in translations, in personal conversation – we must realize the preciousness of the truth God has given us and refuse to let it pass when it is mistreated!*

CONCLUSION

“What is truth?” Clearly truth must correspond to reality. God has given us in His holy Word that truth – *all truth* which will provide for all the needs of mankind. *Our response to this truth will determine our eternal destiny.* Those in the body of Christ, the church, have a responsibility toward it since God has entrusted it to US (1 Timothy 3:15).

What is our responsibility? Since the Truth is...

- # God’s Inspired Word – We must love and revere it! (Psalm 119:97)
- # Knowable – We must study it (2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 17:11)
- # Essential to life and living – We must obey it (Matthew 7:21)
- # Able to be perverted – We must defend it (Jude 3)

Seeing what God says about truth, let us follow the admonition by king Solomon: “Buy the truth and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23).