

Thoughts on Truth

Dub McClish

Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth” (John 18:38)? Many today echo his question. Many have been persuaded to believe there are no absolutes, but that all principles and values are on a sliding scale. In his book, *Situation Ethics*, the Humanist, Joseph Fletcher, states this popular philosophy plainly:

Truth is only relative and may vary from time to time, place to place, culture to culture and individual to individual.... No law or principle or value is good as such – marriage or anything, but love.

In religion, this philosophy means that there are no absolutes relating to truth or error, right or wrong. In morals, it ultimately means that even incest or bestiality are permissible as long as they can be credited to “love.”

This view denies that any given proposition (e.g., “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” [Mat. 16:16]) is absolutely right or wrong. Such relativism is the forerunner of what philosophers are now calling “postmodernism,” in which everyone’s views are his own “truth,” even though their views may be directly contradictory. Those who subscribe to this premise recognize no such thing as doctrinal truth to be proclaimed and defended or doctrinal error to be refuted and exposed. (Could this commonly held concept help explain why it is increasingly difficult to find honest and good hearts who will study the Bible and who are seeking the Truth?)

What was Jesus’ concept of “truth?” He identified the Word of God as “truth” (John 17:17). While this expression implies that our Father does not lie, Jesus meant far more than this. Here, and in numerous other passages, the Lord (and later the apostles) used *truth* in an objective, absolute sense. *Thayer’s Lexicon* defines the term Jesus used, translated *truth*, in reference to religion, as follows:

The truth, as taught in the Christian religion, respecting God and the execution of his purposes through Christ, ... opposed alike to the superstitions of the Gentiles, the inventions of the Jews, and to the corrupt opinions and precepts of false teachers even among Christians” (p. 26).

Simply put, God’s Truth in His Word stands apart from the confused opinions of men and applies equally in all times and situations and for all people, unless that Truth itself specifies otherwise.

Jesus was the perfect embodiment of the Truth (John 14:6). He not only personified the Truth, but He revealed it to men and bore witness to it by His mighty works (John 1:17; 18:37; 20:30–31; et al.). Before He left the earth, He promised the apostles He would send them the “Spirit of truth” who would guide them into “all the truth” (John 16:12–13). The **very words** they preached and wrote are **the Truth** because God revealed them through His Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10–13). The teaching of Scripture is Truth, whether men ignore, reject, pervert, or believe it, just as $2 + 2 = 4$ regardless of how men “feel” about it or even if all men reject it. So it is with God’s Truth. Spiritual and moral Truth does exist (just as mathematical “truth” does). Jesus identifies it in general as the Bible, and specifically, the New Testament, which is God’s law for all men since Christ died on the cross.

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