

Friday, May 27, 2001—2011 Great Lakes Grace Bible Conference—What is Truth?

A study of how moral relevancy dominates society & the church. No final authority. Truth is fallen in the street. God is a God of absolute truth and man needs absolute truth.

Introduction

- John 18:38—Pilate asks Jesus a simple yet extremely profound question, “what is truth?” One can almost hear a tone of sarcasm in Pilate’s voice as he utters forth this infamous question. It is almost as if Pilate questions whether or not truth exists.
- Throughout history many philosophers have offered various perspectives on the nature and knowability of truth. Many in our current postmodern culture question whether absolute truth exists and/or deny that it can be known.
- In his 2006 book *The Last Christian Generation* Josh McDowell reported that 81% of teenagers said they believe “that all truth is relative to the individual and his/her circumstances.” The numbers for Christian teenagers are not much better, 70% of Christian young people surveyed said they believe that there is no absolute moral truth.
- McDowell’s commentary on the situation is both instructive and accurate, when he writes “they (Christian young people) have adopted the view that moral truth is not true for them until they choose to believe it. They believe that the act of believing makes things true. And then, once they believe, those things will be true for them only until they choose to believe something else. As soon as something more appealing comes along they are likely to begin believing that—whether or not it’s Biblical.”
- Americans are fickle when it comes to the issue of truth. On the one hand we demand the truth from our spouses, children, bosses, doctors, bankers, stock brokers, lawyers, and politicians. People expect to be told the truth when reading a reference book, pill bottle, road sign, food label, or watching a news story. In fact, Americans demand the truth in every facet of our lives that affects our money, relationships safety, or health.
- Why then when it comes to religion and morality all of a sudden truth is relative? Why do people demand the truth in everything but morality and religion? Why does one say, “That’s true for you but not for me,” when discussing morality or religion, when they would never accept such nonsense when talking to their banker about their money market account or a doctor about their health? Most people’s rejection of moral or religious absolutes is volitional rather than intellectual. Consequently, many have swallowed self-defeating truth claims in their attempt to escape being held accountable to any moral standards or religious doctrines.

Inadequate Views of Truth

- *Relativism (Truth is Individually Determined)*—simply stated, relativism is the belief that absolute truth does not exist.
- What is wrong with this statement? “There is no such thing as absolute truth.” It is self-defeating. It fails to meet its own standard. It claims to be absolutely true while denying the absolute nature of truth.

- “This sentence is not in English.”
- The biggest challenge to absolute truth our modern culture has to offer can be defeated simply by turning the tables.
- *Pragmatism (Truth is What Works)*—many people believe that truth is found in utility or what works. In other words, “Knowing is something we do, and is best seen as a practical activity. Questions of meaning and truth are also best understood in this context.”
- Pragmatist William James summed up his position when he wrote, “truth is the expedient in the way of knowing.” Thus, a statement is known to be true if it brings the right results according to Pragmatism.
- *Subjectivism (Truth is What Feels Good)*—supporters of this view argue that “truth is what provides a satisfying feeling, while error is what feels bad.” Thus truth is found in our subjective feelings, according to this form of subjectivism.
- It is readily apparent that bad news which makes us feel bad can be true. However, if what feels good is always true why don’t my students feel good when they receive poor report cards? How does that old saying go? The truth hurts.
- Furthermore, feelings are relative to individuals. Therefore, what feels good to one might not for another. Is truth how one is to account for these subjective differences? If so, then truth would be relative, however, it has already been demonstrated in the previous chapter that relative views of truth are self-defeating.
- All three of these views assume that they correspond with reality. Thereby they assume the correspondence view of truth.

The Correspondence View of Truth

- Simply stated, “truth is telling it like it is.” In other words, truth is that which corresponds to its referent, and therefore, truth is that which represents the way things really are. It does not matter if one is discussing abstract or actual realities, or mathematical, or theoretical ideas, truth is that which accurately expresses its referent. In short, truth is that which correctly depicts that state of affairs whatever they may be.
- In contrast, falsehood is that which does not correspond to its object and therefore misrepresents the way things actually are. One’s intentions or beliefs are inconsequential; if a statement lacks proper correspondence, it is false. Therefore, error does not tell it like it is, but like it is not. It is a misrepresentation of the way things are.
- A host of philosophical and theological arguments exist to substantiate the necessity of the correspondence view of truth.
 - First, *noncorrespondence views of truth are self-defeating*. One cannot deny the correspondence view without utilizing it in the attempted denial. For example,

the statement, “the noncorrespondence view is true” implies that the noncorrespondence view reflects reality.

- Second, *noncorrespondence views of truth make lying impossible*. “If our words do not need to correspond to the facts, then they can never be factually incorrect. Without a correspondence view of truth, there can be no true or false.”
- Third, *noncorrespondence views of truth lead to the breakdown of factual conversation*. “Factual communication depends on informative statements, but informative statements must be factually true (that is, they must correspond to the facts) in order to inform one correctly.” If facts are not to be used in evaluating a statement, then one hasn’t really said anything. Even literary devices such as metaphors have no real meaning unless one understands that there is a literal meaning with which the figurative is comparable. One who seeks to deny the correspondence view does so at one’s peril. Consider the following example: if one was seeking to board a plane and was informed that the plane had no wings, how long should one wait to see if the statement was in fact true? In the final analysis all communication depends on the correspondence view of truth.
- Exodus 20:16—the veracity of this statement rests upon the correspondence view of truth. According to this verse, “false witness,” equals spreading information about one’s neighbor that is not correct and thereby does not correspond with the actual state of affairs.
- Genesis 42:16—by sending one of his brothers home Joseph is testing the veracity of their claim. In other words, Joseph is testing the witness of his brothers to see if corresponds with the way things really are.
- Proverbs 14:25—this verse teaches that what is factually correct is the truth.
- Acts 5:1-4—Ananias and Sapphira received swift destruction for misrepresenting the facts regarding their financial situation. The testimony of Scripture is clear; lying is not possible without recognizing the correspondence view of truth.
- Ephesians 4:25—Paul clearly juxtaposes lying with the truth. Truth equals telling it like it is. Anything less is a lie and therefore devoid of the truth.

Thy Word is Truth

- John 17:17—in this verse Jesus indirectly answers Pilot’s question. The bottom line here is that absolute truth does exist and the Bible claims to be the sole source of this truth.
- Psalms 199:142
- II Timothy 2:15—while the entire Bible is true, the portion of the truth which is applicable and in force today can only be discerned through rightly dividing the word of truth.

- John 14:6—while most religions have some beliefs that are true, not all religions' beliefs can be true because they teach opposites. So it is with the word of truth. All Bibles cannot be right since they teach opposites.
- Seven truths about truth.
 1. Truth is discovered, not invented. It exists independent of anyone's knowledge of it. (Gravity existed prior to Newton)
 2. Truth is transcultural; if something is true, it is true for all people, in all places, at all times. (2+2=4)
 3. Truth is unchanging even though our beliefs about truth change. (The earth is round)
 4. Beliefs cannot change a fact, no matter how sincerely they are held.
 5. Truth is not affected by the attitude of the one professing it.
 6. All truths are absolute truths. Even truths that appear relative are really absolute.
 7. Truth is that which corresponds to its referent.
- Contrary **beliefs** are possible, but that contrary **truths** are not possible. In short, we can **believe** everything is true but we cannot **make** everything true.

Answering the Charge of Circular Reasoning

- *Definition*—a use of reason in which the premises depends on or is equivalent to the conclusion, a method of false logic by which "this is used to prove that, and that is used to prove this"; also called circular logic. (*Dictionary.com*)
- *Definition*-- a formal logical fallacy in which the proposition to be proved is assumed implicitly or explicitly in one of the premises. For example: "Only an untrustworthy person would run for office. The fact that politicians are untrustworthy is proof of this." (*Wikipedia.org*)
- All of the men this weekend are going to use the King James Bible to prove that the King James Bible is the inerrant Word of God for English speaking people. Are we holding a logically fallacious position? Are we engaging in circular reasoning?
- Not if we can conclusively prove that the Bible is unlike any other book. The Bible is unlike any other book ever written because it is God's book. But the Bible was not written in an historical vacuum.
- If the Bible can be proven to be correct in all areas in which it can be checked extra Biblically then we have the most compelling evidence for accepting its spiritual truth claims including its own teaching about its origin and preservation.
- Archeology, History, and Manuscript Evidence all speak to the reliability and uniqueness of the Bible.
- *Archaeology/History*— Time and again, the archaeologist's spade has confirmed Biblical events, customs, cities, and nations mentioned in the Old Testament that skeptics had dismissed as mythological. Dan Story, author of *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer*

the Tough Questions offers the following summary of the archaeological reliability of the Old Testament:

- Archaeology has proven that Israel derives its ancestry from Mesopotamia, as the Bible teaches (Genesis 11:27-12:24).
 - Archaeology suggests that the world's languages likely arose from a common origin, as Genesis 11 teaches.
 - Jericho, and several other cities mentioned in the Old Testament, previously thought to be legendary by skeptics, have been discovered by archaeologists.
 - Bible critics used to claim that the Hittite civilization mentioned in Genesis did not exist at the time of Abraham because there was not record of it apart from the Old Testament. However, archaeology has discovered that it not only existed but lasted more than 1,200 years. Now you can get a doctorate in Hittite studies from the University of Chicago.
 - Social customs and stories in the Old Testament credited to the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) are in harmony with archeological discoveries, casting additional light on the historical accuracy of the Biblical record.
- No archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. In other words, in every instance where the Bible could be checked-out historically against extra-biblical sources, the Bible has always been found accurate in what it reports.
 - Classical scholar and Roman historian Colin Hemer chronicles Luke's accuracy as a historian in his landmark book, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. Hemer identifies eighty-four facts in the last sixteen chapters of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archeological research:
 - Refer to handout
 - Acts 13:11—blinding of the sorcerer
 - the natural crossing between correctly named ports (Acts 13:4-5)
 - the proper port (Perga) along the direct destination of a ship crossing from Cyprus (Acts 13:13)
 - Acts 14:8—healing of the man crippled from birth
 - the proper location of Lycaonia (Acts 14:6)
 - the correct language spoke in Lystra—Lycaonian (14:11)
 - to god known to be so associated—Jupiter and Mercurious (14:12)
 - the proper port, Attalia, which returning travelers would use (14:25)
 - *Manuscript Evidence*—there is also much evidence to support the reliability of the New Testament. Let's consider the following three areas: eyewitness testimony, space of time between the events recorded the earliest surviving documents, and the number of available witness compared with other works of antiquity.
 - Eye Witness Testimony—the New Testament writers were either eyewitness themselves or interviewed eyewitness to the events they recorded.
 - Luke 1:2

- I Corinthians 15:4-8
- II Peter 1:16—we convict people in a court of law everyday in this nation based on the testimony of eyewitnesses.
- Good Eyewitness Testimony: the New Testament documents are written within 35 of the events recorded. No other religious or secular document from antiquity can make such a claim.
 - Luke 1—Acts 1—Acts 28
- Short Time Gap—many other religious documents have tremendous time spans between when they were transmitted orally and when they were eventually written down. For example, the sayings of Buddha were not recorded until five hundred years after his death.
 - Use charts to make comparisons
- The New Testament documents unlike other ancient works whether secular or religious, not enough time elapsed between when Jesus spoke and when his words were recorded to allow for misrepresentation or the development of legendary material about him.
- Copies Galore—there are more manuscripts of the New Testament than there are of only 10 other works of ancient history combined.
 - Use chart to show the number of copies of the New Testament compared with Homer’s Iliad.
 - There are over 86,000 known quotations of Scripture made by the church fathers. Even if we did not have any copies of the New Testament we could still reconstruct all but 11 verse of the entire New Testament from material written within 150 to 200 years from the time of Christ.
- There is more evidence for the reliable of the New Testament text than any ten pieces of classical literature combined.

Conclusion

- Regardless of what the culture says, truth is not relative, subjective, or pragmatic. Truth is that which corresponds with the way things really are. Absolute truth does exist.
- The Bible is the only source of absolute in the entire universe.
- Because the Bible can be verified extra Biblically we are not engaging in circular reasoning when we utilize it in answering the Bible version debate.
- God’s Word is our final authority.