

Tuesday, July 12, 2016—Grace Impact Summer Family Bible Conference—Is Absolute Truth Absolutely Necessary?

A study of the nature and meaning of absolutes and how to be absolutely sure what you believe is absolutely true.

Introduction

- John 18:38—Pilate asks Jesus a simple yet extremely profound question, “what is truth?” One can sense the sarcasm in Pilate’s voice as he utters forth this famous question. Pilate’s question is just as pertinent today, if not more so some 2,000 years later.
- 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 issues of religion and morality is truth is relative and/or individual determined? 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 speaking to their retirement broker about their 401K 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 Biblical truth claims.
 - Tell the story of my student’s philosophy paper on the relative and subjective nature of morality.
- I would like to address my assignment this morning by looking at the following four points.
 - Inadequate Views of Truth
 - The Correspondence View of Truth

- Thy Word is Truth
- Final Thoughts and Practical Conversational Tips

Inadequate Views of Truth

- *Relativism* (Truth is Individually Determined)—simply stated, relativism is the belief that absolute truth does not exist.
 - Proverbs 3:7, 12:15, 16:2, 21:2, 30:12
- 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.
 - Daniel 5:16—Belshazzar is only interested in what Daniel has to say when everything else doesn’t work.
 - II Corinthians 4:17-18—Paul instructs believers to not look at their present circumstances to determine what is true but to focus their attention on the eternal/unseen things.
- Pragmatists do not want us to accept a pragmatic view of truth because it seems to be effective but because it corresponds with the way they believe things really are.
 - Lies often work, but their effectiveness doesn’t make them true; they remain false, regardless of the result.
 - $5+5=10$ not because it works but because it is correct.
- *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 grades on their 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 above that relative views of truth are self-defeating.
- All three of these views assume that they correspond with reality. Thereby they assume or presuppose 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 own 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 42:14-16—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 it 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. Notice that the Bible clearly states in the positive that God’s word IS truth.
 - It is always easier to argue in the negative than in the positive. The verse does not say, “thy word is not error” in the negative. Rather it affirmatively asserts in the positive that God’s word IS truth.
 - Hebrews 11:1—tells us what faith IS not what faith IS NOT.
- Psalms 119:142
- 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. Right division of God’s word is about dividing truth from truth not truth from error.
- John 14:6—the truth is also a person i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only are the Bible’s truth claims absolute but there are also exclusive. According to John 14:6, there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ.
- Not only does the Bible claim to be the truth in an absolute sense but God puts his own integrity on the line by predicting the future.
 - Isaiah 46:9-10, 48:3, 5
 - Numbers 23:19
- The greatest divine apologetic as to the absolute truthfulness of the word of God is the issue of fulfilled prophecy. In addition, the Bible has never been proven to be inaccurate in anything that reports in terms of: archeology, history, geography or science. No extra-Biblical discovery has ever contravened a Biblical reference.
- In other words, the Bible is absolutely true because it corresponds with reality and doesn’t report information that is false.

Final Thoughts and Practical Conversational Tips

- John 14:6, 17:17—while most religions have some beliefs that are true, not all religions' beliefs can be true because they teach opposites. Our current culture has redefined words like tolerance. Instead of meaning that one respect someone's right to believe as the wish. In contrast, the new tolerance promotes the idea that everyone's truth claims are equally valid and correct. Logically this won't work.
- Seven truths about truth.
 - Truth is discovered, not invented. It exists independent of anyone's knowledge of it. (Gravity existed prior to Newton.)
 - Truth is transcultural; if something is true, it is true for all people, in all places, at all times. (2+2=4)
 - Truth is unchanging even though our beliefs about truth change.
 - Beliefs cannot change a fact, no matter how sincerely they are held.
 - Truth is not affected by the attitude of the one professing it.
 - All truths are absolute truths. Even truths that appear relative are really absolute.
 - 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.
- Philosophers often use the following epistemological definition to define knowledge.
 - Knowledge = Properly Justified True Belief
- Knowledge starts with belief. We believe in order that we might know. Just as one can shoot a basketball and not score a basket, one can believe something that falls short of knowledge. Why because their belief is not TRUE.
- In order to equal knowledge one's believe needs to be TRUE. I can believe that David Reid is a Green Martian. But if he is not in FACT a Green Martian than my belief is meaningless because it doesn't correspond with the actual state of affairs.
- When it comes to the scriptures, I believe them to be the word of God and without error in all they report. Why? Well for a few reasons. First, and most importantly, the scriptures claim to be the word of God and be of absolute authority. Second, the Bible has never been proven to be wrong in anything that it reports.
- Lastly, not only is my belief that the scriptures are the word of God TRUE but I have PROPER JUSTIFICATION for believing so. There is both internal and external evidence for the reliability of scripture.
 - Internal Evidence:
 - Fulfilled Prophecy
 - Undesigned Coincidences—the internal marks of authenticity.

- External Evidence:
 - Archeology/Geography
 - Historicity of the Old & New Testaments
 - Manuscript Evidence
- The Bible's truth claims are absolute and exclusive. If the Bible is true than anything that disagrees or contradicts the Bible is wrong. Bible Believers are often accused of being closed mind, exclusive, or to dogmatic.
- Please consider this sample conversation I had recently with an acquaintance:
 - Acquaintance: "The trouble with you Ross is that you just think your right."
 - Me: "That must mean you think I am wrong."
 - Acquaintance: "Yes, I think you are wrong."
 - Me: "So what would I need to do be right? Agree with you?"
 - Acquaintance: "Yes, you should agree with me."
 - Me: "The trouble with you is that you just think your right."
- Generally, speaking most rational people don't believe things they know are FALSE. They believe them because they think they are RIGHT. Which means that everyone you will ever deal with regarding truth is just as closed minded as they are accusing you of being. In order for you to be right in their eyes you must agree with them.
- Atheism is just as exclusive as Biblical Christianity. Take a moment to ponder the following statements:
 - The Skeptic is not skeptical about their Skepticism.
 - The Agnostic is not agnostic about the Agnosticism.
- So it turns out that the most vocal proponents of the new tolerance in the public square are in actual fact the most intolerant folks around.
- The following is a different conversation initiated by a former colleague.
 - Colleague: "Ross, don't you know that science is the only source of absolute truth."
 - Me: "(After a pause to get my wits about me.) Can you prove that to me scientifically?"
- When we are engaged in conversations with lost people regarding the nature of truth we need to pay attention and be aware of the things they are saying that don't make sense. If you can learn

to do this you can winsomely turn the tables of the conversation in your favor and point out the inconsistencies in their thinking.

- Philippians 1:7—Paul was set for the defense and confirmation of the gospel we need to be as well. In addition, to establishing a command of the verses presented in this message I highly recommend the believers pick a copy of Gregory Koukl’s 2009 book [*Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*](#). As the title suggests the book presents a game plan for how to engage people in meaningful and productive conversations while remaining calm and maintaining your composure.
- I am fully persuaded that the word of God possess absolute authority. My conviction is based upon the abundance of internal and external evidence referenced above. Truth must be absolute because is the only position that is logically consistent and does not defeat itself. Consider the following examples:
 - Either God exists or he doesn’t.
 - Either the word of God is true or it isn’t.
 - Either Jesus Christ was to son of God or he wasn’t.
 - Either Jesus Christ rose from the dead or he didn’t.
 - Either Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles or he isn’t.
 - Either God set Israel aside or he didn’t.
 - Either we must needs be circumcised or circumcision availeth nothing.
 - Either we are living in the dispensation of grace or we aren’t.
 - Either the mystery was keep secret since the world began or it wasn’t.
 - Either Israel enjoyed a favored standing before God in “time past” or she didn’t.
 - Either we have been made nigh by the blood of Christ or we haven’t.
- The laws of Noncontradiction and Excluded Middle are unavoidable when distinguishing between: prophecy and mystery, earthly and heavenly programs, Israel and the Body of Christ, or law and grace. Simply stated, when you have two things that are different, they both cannot be the same.
- Consequently, one is forced to conclude that mid-Acts Dispensationalists utilize logic and philosophical argumentation when formulating and articulating their theological positions. In my opinion, instead of running from this conclusion, as some have done in the past, efforts should be made to present the mid-Acts position for what it is, the only theological position that is not contrary to reason. Think about it for a moment. Virtually every other system of Biblical interpretation glosses over or flat-out denies that there are contradictions in the Bible that need to be recognized. The result is a theology which makes the untenable assertion that passages which plainly contradict each other are in fact the same.
- Acts 2 or Acts 28 dispensationalists may attempt to cry foul on this conclusion, but there are details of those positions that defy logic. For the Acts 2 position to be correct, prophecy would have to become a mystery. Moreover, how can the last days of prophecy be the beginning of the Body of Christ? Similar problems exist for supporters of the Acts 28 position. Paul writes to the Corinthians about the Body of Christ prior to penning the Prison Epistles in Acts 28. If the Body of Christ did not begin until Acts 28, one is left with the bizarre conclusion that there were members in the Body of Christ before it began.

- If sound reasoning is important to your belief system, look no further than the Pauline position. Mid-Acts Pauline Dispensationalism is the only theological viewpoint that consistently applies the fundamental laws of logic. It is time for the supporters of the mid-Acts position to acknowledge and stand for the rational roots of our viewpoint.
- I am absolutely persuaded that what I believe is absolutely true. In fact, I am willing to assert that when one combines our position on the Bible with our mid-Acts Pauline dispensational position along with the practical issues of the Grace Life and impregnable fortress of truth of truth is erected that is unshakable.