

Sunday, May 21, 2017—Is Absolute Truth Absolutely Necessary, Part 1

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.