

## **What Is Truth? The truth about truth!**

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What is truth? Put simply, truth is “telling it like it is.” When the Roman governor Pilate asked Jesus “What is truth?” nearly 2000 years ago, he did not wait for Jesus to respond. Pilate immediately acted as if he knew at least some truth. Concerning Jesus, he declared, “I find no fault in this man” (John 18:38). By exonerating Jesus, Pilate was “telling it like it is.” Said another way, Pilate’s perception of the situation corresponded to reality; he perceived the truth.

Truth can also be defined as “that which corresponds to its object” or “that which describes an actual state of affairs.” Pilate’s judgment was true because it matched its object; it described an accurate state of affairs. Jesus really was innocent.

Contrary to what is being taught today in many public fora and in many public schools, truth is not relative, it is absolute. If something is true, it is true for all people, at all times, in all places. All truth claims are absolute, narrow, and exclusive. Think about the claim “everything is true.” That claim is absolute, narrow, and exclusive. It excludes its opposite (i.e., it claims that the statement “everything is not true” is false). In fact, all truth and all truth claims exclude opposites. Do not miss this point – it is true even of religious truth claims.

Norm Geisler recounts a story that illustrates this truth.

*A number of years ago I debated religious humanist Michael Constantine Kolenda. Of the many atheists I debated, he was one of the few who actually read my book Christian Apologetics prior to the debate.*

*When it was his turn to speak, Kolenda held up my book and declared, “These Christians are very narrow-minded people. I read Dr. Geisler’s book. Do you know what he believes? He believes that Christianity is true and everything opposed to it is false! These Christians are very narrow-minded people!”*

*Well, Kolenda had also written a book which I had read beforehand. It was titled Religion Without God (which is sort of like romance without a spouse!). When it was my turn to speak, I held up Kolenda’s book and declared, “These humanists are very narrow-minded people. I read Dr. Kolenda’s book. Do you know what he believes? He believes that humanism is true and everything opposed to it is false! These humanists are very narrow-minded people!”*

*The audience chuckled because they could see the point. Humanist truth claims are just as narrow as Christian truth claims. For if H (humanism) is true, then anything opposed to H is false. Likewise, if C (Christianity) is true, then anything opposed to C is false.*

## **What We Can’t Change**

There are many truths about truth. Here are some of them:

- Some things are recognized as truth as a result of definitions. A circle is round (and cannot not be round) by mathematical definition.
- One must distinguish between legitimate definition and hypotheses. A hypothesis is often accepted as true until the evidence is available to prove that it is false (not true). For example, in the development of the science of nuclear physics, what is taught as truth has changed. When I studied science in high school and the university 50 years ago, some of the truths that are today readily accepted about quantum physics were brand new.

- My school experience leads us to another truth: truth is discovered, not invented. Truth exists independent of anyone's knowledge of it. (Gravity existed prior to Newton.) Undoubtedly, truths exist in the realm of medicine and science which human beings have not discovered.
- Truth is objective, not subjective. Objective truth exists, even if no one recognizes it.
- That objective truth exists means that it is impossible for two people to have two different (and conflicting) truth claims. It is impossible to say "that is true for you but not for me," or "that is true for me but not for you."
- Truth is transcultural; if something is true, it is true for all people, in all places, at all times (for example, in the decimal system,  $2+2=4$  for everyone, everywhere, at every time).
- Truth is unchanging even though our beliefs about truth change. (When people began to believe the earth was round instead of flat, the truth about the earth did not change, only the belief about the earth changed.)
- Beliefs cannot change a fact, no matter how sincerely those beliefs are held. (Someone can sincerely believe the world is flat, but that only makes that person sincerely mistaken.)
- Truth is not affected by the attitude of the one professing it. (An arrogant person does not make the truth he professes false. A humble person does not make the error he professes true.)
- All truths are absolute truths. Some truths that appear to be relative are really absolute. (For example, "I, Bob, felt hot on September 5, 2019 after mowing the lawn" may appear to be a relative truth, but it is actually absolutely true for everyone, everywhere that I experienced the sensation of heat on that day.)
- Contrary beliefs are possible but contrary truths are not possible. We can believe everything is true (although we would be mistaken; the statement cannot be true because opposites exclude each other), but we cannot make everything true.

#### **What this means for Bible study**

- One must be prepared to show objective proof of the truth that God exists (or to show that God's existence is the best hypothesis and should be accepted as true until denied)
- One must be prepared to show objective proof that the Bible is God's inspired word (or that such is the best explanation or hypothesis for the existence of the Bible at present)
- One must be prepared to show objective proof that Jesus lived, died by crucifixion, and was resurrected.

#### **Once the Bible is accepted as God's truth, Bible study follows certain guidelines.**

- One must distinguish between clear teachings of Scripture and personal interpretation.
- One must understand methods of interpretation (hermeneutics) and make judgments concerning the resulting interpretations: does the interpretation fit all of the evidence, is the interpretation the best explanation?
- One must not force personal interpretation on another person as God's truth.

These and other "rules" constantly drive us back to the Bible as the source of truth. When someone speaks for God, that person should be prepared to show that why certain ideas and phrases are the best explanation.