

Defend Your Faith

Lesson 8

IS TRUTH KNOWABLE?

“Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?” (John 18:38)

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. We Must Be Ready to Give An Answer (1 Peter 3:15).
- B. The Importance of This Question.
 - 1. Arguments on both sides of an issue (origins, religion, etc.) between believers and unbelievers often come down to whether or not truth is knowable. Often when a believer sets forth his case in a rational manner, the unbeliever responds: “What you say may be true for you, but it’s not true for me.” The Christian as an apologist must be ready for this response.
- C. Four Important Questions Concerning Truth.
 - 1. Does truth exist?
 - 2. What is truth (John 18:38)?
 - 3. What is true?
 - 4. What is important truth?
- D. The Post-Modern Crisis of Truth.
 - 1. What is a postmodern world?
 - a) Our nation was built upon principles of truth: “We hold these truths to be self-evident...” (Declaration of Independence).
 - b) Our postmodern world is sadly suffering from truth decay ... among many, truth is no longer 1) knowable, 2) absolute, 3) objective), or 4) universal.
 - c) Our modern way of thinking can be summed up in one word: “Whatever...” (said with a tone of apathy). One of the most pervasive characteristics of our postmodern culture is the abandonment of absolute truth. We are experiencing a postmodern crisis of truth.
 - 2. What is postmodernism?
 - a) Three worlds:
 - (1) Pre-modern world (200 B.C. to 1600 A.D.) – life is governed by the accepted truths from the divine; truth is determined by empirical facts and moral principles.
 - (2) Modern world (1600 to 1960 A.D.) – life is governed by human discoveries and human reason (science, logic); truth is determined by empirical, scientific truth.
 - (3) Post-modern world (1960 to present) – life is governed by feelings; truth is a “construct” of our mind (a cultural construct or an individual construct).
 - b) Postmodernism, then, is a philosophical belief that one cannot be certain about things (truths, realities).

- c) Postmodernism has affected all major aspects of our society: law, politics, science, literature, education, architecture, art, the media, religion, etc.
 - d) The belief that one cannot be certain is not new (Genesis 3:1; Ecclesiastes 1:9).
 - e) Frederick Nietzsche once said that “convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies”.
 - f) A belief becomes “truth” for a postmodernist at the moment one makes a “choice” to believe something; a “truth” for that moment and time.
 - g) A “truth” for the postmodernist is what works, what one prefers, what brings one pleasure.
3. What are the catchwords and lingo of the postmodernist?
- a) Some postmodern catchwords: subjective, individual worldview, pluralistic, relative, construct, scripted, narrative, multi-culturalism, situationalism, deconstruction, tolerance, and choice.
 - b) Some postmodern lingo:
 - (1) “That may be true for you, but that doesn’t make it true for me.”
 - (2) “The way I live is my choice. You don’t have a right to impose your views on me.”
 - (3) “Whatever...” (said with a tone of apathy).
4. What brought about postmodernism?
- a) The failure of modernism to bring about a perfect world order (consider Hitler’s Nazi Germany or Stalin’s Communist Russia).
 - b) A cosmopolitan, multi-media-saturated environment.
 - c) The vast diversity of religious and philosophical perspectives available to everyone.
 - d) A fixed sense of identity, or one best way to live, had become lost.
 - e) The belief that language comes from man alone and cannot describe realities (truths) outside of man.
 - f) The belief that written texts do not have determinate, singular knowable meaning (truth).
 - g) The belief that truth is formed, not by reality, but by power relationships.
5. What effect did postmodernism have on religion?
- a) Religious beliefs (realities) are plural, subjective, and derived from one’s individual worldviews.
 - b) Individuals “construct” their own truths and values (realities); no pre-existing body of knowledge.
 - c) No one should impose his or her ideas on other people; all ideas are equally valid; tolerance is the only binding principle; no judging or criticism.
 - d) People will drift in a sea of constant doubt and change; agnostic; no certainty; no proof.
 - e) There are no objective truths; no fixed order; truth and morality are relative.
 - f) People will be shaped by an arbitrary set of values given to them by society.
 - g) If there is no objective truth, what is there to learn? Why read, study, prove, etc.?
 - h) If there is no objective truth, then there are no wrong answers to questions.

- i) People are afraid to be certain, afraid of authority or to speak with authority.
 - j) People are free to believe whatever they want.
 - k) Religion is about “feelings” not a set of values and ideals (true or false).
6. For further study on the subject of postmodernism, consult the following:
- a) Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994).
 - b) Donald Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).
 - c) Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
 - d) Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

II. PRESENTING YOUR CASE.

A. Truth Is Knowable.

1. Two clashing views of truth.
 - a) Our modern world is suffering from truth decay ... among many, truth is no longer 1) knowable, 2) absolute, 3) objective, or 4) universal.
 - b) The Bible speaks of many things that are true, but it also speaks of the nature of truth (what makes truth, true). “Truth” is found approximately 220 times in scripture.
2. The truth about truth.
 - a) What is truth? We are not asking for a list of things that are true. We are asking about the *nature* of truth. What makes something truth or not.
 - b) “Truth” in the OT comes from the Heb. *’emet* (support, stability) and speaks to that which is faithful and conforms to fact; that which is real and not erroneous; that which is authentic and reliable. “Truth” in the OT did not mean a personal belief formed by social custom, construct, and creation (as per postmodernism).
 - c) “Truth” in the NT comes from the Gr. *aletheia* and speaks to that which is faithful, reliable, genuine, accurate, factual, real (veracity); opposite of falsehood, lies, error. “Truth” in the NT did not mean a personal belief formed by social custom, construct, and creation (as per postmodernism).
 - d) What makes something true?
 - (1) For something to be truth (true), it must first correspond to reality; what is real and factual; what actually exists (Genesis 42:11-20; Deuteronomy 13:12-14).
 - (2) What makes truth, truth? What is truth (John 18:38)? Truth corresponds to reality (Matthew 26:73; Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59).
 - (3) Statements of truth (1) accurately reflect or represent factual reality (no fables, fiction, or myths); and (2) stand on rational verification (Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-19). When we love truth, we love reality!
 - (4) What is true? We accept things to be true because...
 - (a) We have personally experienced them. For example, we know fire is hot because we have been burned by it.
 - (b) We have the reliable testimony of someone (or the corroborative evidence of many). For example, we know something happened

because of a reliable report (newspaper, court testimony, the Internet?). The truths of Christianity come to us this way (Luke 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; 1 John 1:1-3; etc.)

3. The biblical view of truth.
 - a) Truth is divine, not human (Romans 1:18,21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13) (Note: The existence of God and the truthfulness of the Bible has already been established in Lessons 2 and 3 of this series.)
 - b) Truth is objective, not subjective (John 8:40; 17:17)
 - c) Truth is knowable, not unknowable (John 8:32; 1 Timothy 2:4; 4:3)
 - d) Truth is exclusive [narrow], not pluralistic (John 14:6)
 - e) Truth is absolute, not relative (James 1:17-18)
 - f) Truth is universal, not cultural (Galatians 2:5,14; Ephesians 1:13; Mark 16:15)
 - g) Truth is liberating, not enslaving (John 8:32)
 - h) Truth is systematic, not unorganized (Psalm 111:7-8; Revelation 15:3)
 - i) Truth is ultimate, not passing (Proverbs 4:7; 23:23)
 4. The problem today with truth.
 - a) The problem today with truth is not that it is unknowable, the problem is that one's attitude and responsibility toward truth is not always what it should be (Isaiah 59:14-15; Jeremiah 7:27-28). Many do not have a love for truth in all areas of their life (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Why is this? Many love friends and family more than truth (John 12:42-43)? Others try to stamp out truth (Acts 4:17)? What attitude toward truth will you have today?
 - b) We must desire "*nothing but the truth*" (1 Kings 22:16). We must "*buy the truth and sell it not...*" (Proverbs 23:23).
 - c) We must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), stand with truth (Ephesians 6:14), uphold the truth (1 Timothy 3:15), and accurately handle the truth (2 Timothy 2:15).
- B. Postmodernism Is Illogical and Self-Defeating.
1. Postmodernism does not play by its own rules.
 - a) "There is no absolute truth..." (except for the statement that there is no absolute truth).
 - b) "All social constructs (beliefs) should be deconstructed..." (except the belief of postmodernism which should not be deconstructed).
 - c) "People should not condemn..." (unless its condemning condemnation) and "people should be tolerant of all others..." (except for people who are intolerant).
 2. Paul's response to postmodernism in Romans 1.
 - a) There is such a thing as objective truth (vv. 18-19).
 - b) There is such a thing as objective truth because God is real (v. 20).
 - c) If you reject God and his objective truth, you no longer have a basis for either reason or morality; anything goes; man is god (vv. 21-31).
 - d) If you live a life of vain reasoning and immorality, you will reap serious consequences (v. 32).

III. ANSWERING OBJECTIONS.

- A. Objection #1: There is no absolute, objective, knowable truth.
1. If there is no absolute truth then the statement, “there is no absolute truth,” is itself not absolutely true.
 2. You cannot simply remove truth by thinking it gone and take refuge in your subjectivism or relativism. This is destructive not only to apologetics, but also to intellectual honesty and to life itself. It would be like closing your eyes while driving thinking that nothing bad will happen. It would be like ignoring the doctor’s warnings about your cancer thinking that nothing bad will happen. (And what if the doctor closed his eyes while operating on your cancer?)
 3. What does objective mean?
 - a) It does not mean unemotional. It does not mean known by all. It does not mean publicly proved.
 - b) It means truth is independent of the knower.
 4. What is truth?
 - a) Truth is not “what works” (the pragmatic theory of truth).
 - b) Truth is not “what we can sense” (the empiricist theory of truth).
 - c) Truth is not “what can be understood by reason” (the rationalist theory of truth).
 - d) Truth is not “what is in harmony with other ideas” (the coherence theory of truth).
 - e) Truth is simply what corresponds to reality.
 5. The person claiming “subjective truth” (in religion and other areas of life) cannot claim that his is the correct view of truth because his subjective view of truth is just for him, not for everyone.
 6. The postmodern individual today accepts the *theory* that there is no absolute truth, but not the *practice*. He does not actually live by his own theory on a daily basis and therefore, does not really believe it. Post-moderns don’t live it and therefore, don’t really believe it.
 7. If there is no absolute truth, why worry about “error”? Why do newspapers print corrections / retractions? Why do students give “wrong” answers on a test? Remember, we can’t be “wrong” unless there is something to be wrong about? There can be no error without truth.
 8. Unbelievers generally gravitate toward relativism (no absolute truth) since it enables them to justify their immoral behavior (Romans 1:21-31).
- B. Objection # 2: We cannot know religious and moral truth.
1. Why is it that we supposedly cannot know religious and moral truth, but we can know other kinds of truth? The truth is, we can know religious and moral truth just like we can know other truths in our world.
 2. We can know...
 - a) Historical truth – George Washington was our first president.
 - b) Mathematical truth – two plus two equals four.
 - c) Scientific truth – when you release a ball it falls to the ground.
 - d) Geographical truth – the direction of north, south, east, or west.
 - e) Etc., etc., etc.

IV. CONCLUSION.

A. Four Questions Concerning Truth.

1. Does truth exist? Yes, truth exists in all areas of our life, including morality and religion.
2. What is truth? Truth is that which corresponds to reality – what actually exists.
3. What is true? Something is true when we personally experience it, when it is reliably reported to us, or both.
4. What is important truth? Truth that pertains to our eternal destiny.
 - a) Countless numbers of truths exist everyday all over the world. Out of all the truths that exist each day, what truths are important to believe concerning our eternal destiny? (Let me be clear: I am not talking about important and non-important things in the Bible ... what some call, “essentials” or “non-essentials”. I am talking about important things in the New Testament – all matters pertaining to one’s salvation; and non-important things in life – all matters not pertaining to one’s salvation.) Consider some of these important truths:
 - b) The truth of the new birth is a “must” – *“You must be born anew”* (John 3:5-7)
 - c) The truth of worship is a “must” – *“They that worship him must worship in spirit and truth”* (John 4:24).
 - d) The truth of obedient faith in Jesus is a “must” – *“What must we do...?”* (John 6:28-29).
 - e) The truth of salvation from sin is a “must” – *“What must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 16:30).
 - f) The truth of obedient faith in God is a “must” – *“For he that comes to God must believe that he is...”* (Hebrews 11:6).

B. Yes, Truth is Knowable and There Is Nothing As Good As the Truth. There Is No Substitute For Truth!

C. Do You Have the Will to Believe (John 7:17)?