

WHAT IS TRUTH?

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(8 pages)

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(3 pages)

WHAT IS TRUTH?

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A SIMPLE QUESTION

$$2 + 2 = ?$$

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GEORGE ORWELL - 1984

“In the end, the Party would announce that two and two made five, and you would have to believe it. It was inevitable that they should make that claim sooner or later: the logic of their position demanded it. Not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality, was tacitly denied by their philosophy. The heresy of heresies was common sense.”

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GEORGE ORWELL – ON THE DENIAL OF TRUTH

Nazi theory, indeed, specifically denies that such a thing as "the truth" exists. There is, for instance, no such thing as "Science". There is only "German Science", "Jewish Science", etc. The implied objective of this line of thought is a nightmare world in which the Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future, but the past. If the Leader says of such and such an event, "It never happened"—well, it never happened. If he says that "two and two are five"—well, two and two are five. This prospect frightens me much more than bombs—and, after our experiences of the last few years [the Blitz, 1940–41] that is not a frivolous statement.

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ROMANS 1:18-23

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes, that is*, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their senseless hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible mankind, of birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures.

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A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE?

$$2.4 + 2.4 = 4.8$$



$$2 + 2 = 5 \text{ Voilà!}$$

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WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY “TRUTH”?

1. The Lord Jesus Christ. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

Jesus is the very personification of Truth, perfectly aligned with the Father.

God Himself is the only standard, so Jesus is Truth because He is the perfect representation of the Father. “He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3)

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WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY “TRUTH”?

2. God’s Word. “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” (John 17:17)

Man, in his finite state, simply cannot comprehend the nature of God. Even before sin came into the world, Man needed to hear truth directly from God to understand anything about himself and the world around him.

“The sum of Your word is truth,
And every one of Your righteous judgments is everlasting.” (Psalm 119:160)

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WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY “TRUTH”?

3. Objective, observable truth within the world that God created. God is a God of order, and His creation reflects His character: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”
- Psalm 19:1-2

“For God is not a God of confusion (NIV – disorder), but of peace.”
- I Corinthians 14:33

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Hebrews 13:8

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OUR INABILITY TO FULLY COMPREHEND TRUTH

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” - Romans 1:21

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.” - Job 38:4

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, so that we may follow all the words of this Law.”
- Deuteronomy 29:29

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RC SPROUL ON OUR FINITE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

Theologically speaking, to say God is incomprehensible is not to say that God is utterly unknowable. It is to say that none of us can comprehend God exhaustively.

Incomprehensibility is related to a key tenet of the Protestant Reformation—the finite cannot contain (or grasp) the infinite. Human beings are finite creatures, so our minds always work from a finite perspective. We live, move, and have our being on a finite plane, but God lives, moves, and has His being in infinity. Our finite understanding cannot contain an infinite subject; thus, God is incomprehensible. This concept represents a check and balance to warn us lest we think we have captured altogether and mastered in every detail the things of God. Our finitude always limits our understanding of God.

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UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATING TRUTH

Humility toward our ability to observe and understand the world around us does not undermine the reality that objective truth exists. In fact, properly understood and expressed, such humility actually reinforces the reality of objective truth, because it exists independent of our ability to comprehend it.

Stating observations and conclusions about the matters of this world with the same certainty that we state the eternal truths of Scripture does not have the effect of elevating the temporal statements, it tends to diminish the Gospel claims and can often undermine our ability to clearly state the absolute truths of the Gospel in a way that people will receive it.

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EXAMPLES FOR CONSIDERATION

- Contact Tracing
- “Masks save lives”
- “The COVID vaccine has caused tens of thousands of deaths”
- “The 2020 (or 2018 or 2000) election was stolen”
- “Trans men are men, trans women are women”

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WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

Modern philosophies of Relativism and Postmodernism deny all aspects of truth: The person and deity of Christ, the validity of His Word, and even the recognition of observable, objective truth in favor of personal, experiential statements that must be accepted (“Respect my truth”).

This is not entirely new. Protagoras (5th century BC) said “Man is the measure of all things.” He is also paraphrased by Plato as saying, “As each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you.”

“Authenticity” has become the highest character trait for many, often as a misapplication of Psalm 51:6 - “Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being”

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BIBLICALLY GROUNDED DEFINITIONS OF TRUTH

“Therefore, truth is that which conforms to reality as it is perceived by God. He knows all things exhaustively, and so we can trust anything He reveals in Scripture. Truth is not defined by our own subjective standards; it is determined by the Source of truth Himself.” - R. C. Sproul

“Here's a simple definition drawn from what the Bible teaches: Truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God. Reality is what it is because God declared it so and made it so. Therefore God is the author, source, determiner, governor, arbiter, ultimate standard, and final judge of all truth.” - John MacArthur

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WHAT IS TRUTH?

Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in secret You will make wisdom known to me. Psalm 51:6

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.
So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free.” (John 8:32, 36)

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What Is Truth?

John MacArthur

One of the most profound and eternally significant questions in the Bible was posed by an unbeliever. Pilate — the man who handed Jesus over to be crucified — turned to Jesus in His final hour, and asked, "What is truth?" It was a rhetorical question, a cynical response to what Jesus had just revealed: "I have come into the world, to testify to the truth."

Two thousand years later, the whole world breathes Pilate's cynicism. Some say truth is a power play, a metanarrative constructed by the elite for the purpose of controlling the ignorant masses. To some, truth is subjective, the individual world of preference and opinion. Others believe truth is a collective judgment, the product of cultural consensus, and still others flatly deny the concept of truth altogether.

So, what is truth?

Here's a simple definition drawn from what the Bible teaches: *Truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God.* Even more to the point: *Truth is the self-expression of God.* That is the biblical meaning of truth. Because the definition of truth flows from God, truth is *theological*.

Truth is also *ontological* — which is a fancy way of saying it is the way things really are. Reality is what it is because God declared it so and made it so. Therefore God is the author, source, determiner, governor, arbiter, ultimate standard, and final judge of all truth.

The Old Testament refers to the Almighty as the "God of truth" ([Deut. 32:4](#); [Ps. 31:5](#); [Is. 65:16](#)). When Jesus said of Himself, "I *am*...the truth" ([John 14:6](#), emphasis added), He was thereby making a profound claim about His own deity. He was also making it clear that *all* truth must ultimately be defined in terms of God and His eternal glory. After all, Jesus is "the brightness of [God's] glory and the express image of His person" ([Heb. 1:3](#)). *He is truth incarnate* — the perfect expression of God and therefore the absolute embodiment of all that is true.

Jesus also said that the written Word of God is truth. It does not merely contain nuggets of truth; it is pure, unchangeable, and inviolable truth that (according to Jesus) "cannot be broken" ([John 10:35](#)). Praying to His heavenly Father on behalf of His disciples, He said this: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" ([John 17:17](#)). Moreover, the Word of God is eternal truth "which lives and abides forever" ([1 Pet. 1:23](#)).

Of course, there cannot be any discord or difference of opinion between the *written* Word of God (Scripture) and the *incarnate* Word of God (Jesus). In the first

place, truth by definition cannot contradict itself. Second, Scripture is called "the word of Christ" ([Col. 3:16](#)). It is *His* message, *His* self-expression. In other words, the truth of Christ and the truth of the Bible are of the very same character. They are in perfect agreement in every respect. Both are equally true. God has revealed Himself to humanity through Scripture and through His Son. Both perfectly embody the essence of what truth is.

Remember, Scripture also says God reveals basic truth about Himself in nature. The heavens declare His glory ([Ps. 19:1](#)). His other invisible attributes (such as His wisdom, power, and beauty) are on constant display in what He has created ([Rom. 1:20](#)). Knowledge of Him is inborn in the human heart ([Rom. 1:19](#)), and a sense of the moral character and loftiness of His law is implicit in every human conscience ([Rom. 2:15](#)). Those things are universally self-evident truths. According to [Romans 1:20](#), denial of the spiritual truths we know innately always involves a deliberate and culpable unbelief. And for those who wonder whether basic truths about God and His moral standards really are stamped on the human heart, ample proof can be found in the long history of human law and religion. To suppress this truth is to dishonor God, displace His glory, and incur His wrath (vv. 19-20).

Still, the only infallible interpreter of what we see in nature or know innately in our own consciences is the explicit revelation of Scripture. Since Scripture is also the one place where we are given the way of salvation, entrance into the kingdom of God, and an infallible account of Christ, the Bible is the touchstone to which all truth claims should be brought and by which all other truth must finally be measured.

An obvious corollary of what I am saying is that truth means nothing apart from God. Truth cannot be adequately explained, recognized, understood, or defined without God as the source. Since He alone is eternal and self-existent and He alone is the Creator of all else, He is the fountain of all truth.

If you don't believe that, try defining truth without reference to God, and see how quickly all such definitions fail. The moment you begin to ponder the essence of truth, you are brought face to face with the requirement of a universal absolute — the eternal reality of God. Conversely, the whole concept of truth instantly becomes nonsense (and every imagination of the human heart therefore turns to sheer foolishness) as soon as people attempt to remove the thought of God from their minds.

That, of course, is precisely how the apostle Paul traced the relentless decline of human ideas in [Romans 1:21-22](#): "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools."

There are serious *moral* implications too, whenever someone tries to dissociate truth from the knowledge of God. Paul went on to write, "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" ([Rom. 1:28](#)). Abandon a biblical definition of truth, and unrighteousness is the inescapable result. We see it happening before our eyes in every corner of contemporary society. In fact, the widespread acceptance of homosexuality, rebellion, and all forms of iniquity that we see in our society today is a verbatim fulfillment of what [Romans 1](#) says always happens when a society denies and suppresses the essential connection between God and truth.

If you reflect on the subject with any degree of sobriety, you will soon see that even the most fundamental moral distinctions — good and evil, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, or honor and dishonor — cannot possibly have any true or constant meaning apart from God. That is because truth and knowledge themselves simply have no coherent significance apart from a fixed source, namely, God. How could they? God embodies the very definition of truth. Every truth claim apart from Him is preposterous.

Elaborate epistemologies have been proposed and methodically debunked one after another — like a long chain in which every previous link is broken. After thousands of years, the very best of human philosophers (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Marx, James, and others) have all utterly failed to account for truth and the origin of human knowledge apart from God.

In fact, the one most valuable lesson humanity ought to have learned from philosophy is that it is impossible to make sense of truth without acknowledging God as the necessary starting point.

Truth is not subjective, it is not a consensual cultural construct, and it is not an invalid, outdated, irrelevant concept. Truth is the self-expression of God. Truth is thus theological; it is the reality God has created and defined, and over which He rules. Truth is therefore a moral issue for every human being.

How each person responds to the truth God has revealed is an issue of eternal significance. To reject and rebel against the truth of God results in darkness, folly, sin, judgment, and the never-ending wrath of God. To accept and submit to the truth of God is to see clearly, to know with certainty, and to find life everlasting.

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