

What Is Truth?
John 18:38
Pastor Will Cornell

“So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.” (John 18:33–38)

What is truth? Brothers and sisters we live in a confused world that is asking this question and coming to terribly wrong conclusions. We live in a world where everything is regarded as relative; sin without consequence, no objective truth, and certainly no absolute truth. There are questions that beg answers. First, what is truth? What does truth look like? Does truth matter? Does truth have consequences? What about God, where does He fit into this concept of truth? How about Jesus?

Tonight as I share with you from God’s Word, I want to suggest three answers to Pilate’s question, “What is Truth?”

I. Truth is that which is consistent with reality.

Douglas Groothius, a Christian philosopher states “the correspondence view of truth holds that any statement is true if and only if it corresponds to or agrees with factual reality.”

Let’s take a look back at our passage. Pilate asks the question, “What is truth?” Was he really looking for an answer? The answer to that question is in the context: “After he had said this he went back outside to the Jews and told them ‘I find no guilt in him.’” (v. 38b) Pilate didn’t stick around for an answer. There are a couple of options here. Either Pilate was convinced

there was no answer to that question or if there was he didn't want to hear it (perhaps it was both).

Pilate was not asking a question, he was making a statement! He was making a very curt, flippant, scoffing, scorning, and sarcastic statement. However, whether Pilate knew it or not, he would immediately demonstrate that he at least had some grasp of what truth was. He told the Jews: "I find no guilt in him." The very concept of justice, the contrast of one being guilty or not guilty presupposes truth. Yes he is guilty/No his is not guilty. If there is no such thing as truth, there is no such thing as justice or injustice. Pilate had a God given knowledge that there is true and there is false, guilty and not guilty.

When I was around eight years old, I received an Old Timer knife for my birthday. My parents had a gorgeous 1970 Chevelle SuperSport with brand new tires. Unfortunately, these two items didn't mix. I wanted to test out the potential of my new blade. Car tires seemed like a good place to test out that potential. The next morning, when my mother approached me and inquired whether or not I sliced into our car's tires, I didn't venture into a dialogue of whether or not we could know for sure because there is no such thing as absolute truth. I knew that mom was looking for an objective answer: "did I or did I not slice the tires of the car?" That truth had consequences, by the way; we'll discuss consequences later.

It wasn't until much later in life that I became "educated" enough to question truth. After graduating from our very own Rock Springs High School, I went on to study at Harvard on the Hill; WWCC. I supposed that I was a brilliant thinker by this time. One day at the beginning of a new semester, a certain professor asked the class make introductions: name and a little about yourself. I knew some of the people in this class. They were smart individuals, intellectuals; free thinkers. When it was my turn to share, I wanted to impress. I wanted to show them all how advanced and open-minded I was. "Hi, I'm Will Cornell..yadda yadda yadda...and I don't believe there is any such thing as absolute truth. Wow! That sounded really intelligent! And boy did I feel like an intellectual.

In actuality, I had a greater grasp on truth as an eight year old. You see, there is a gaping hole in this argument that there is no such thing as absolute truth. You may have heard it phrased this way: "All truth is relative." This relativism is commonly called "post-modernism". I would suggest to you,

however, that this is not new. Solomon said there is nothing new under the sun. He was right! Just look at our passage. Wasn't Pilate suggesting something very similar to this in his "question"? May I submit to you that this type of thinking goes back even farther than Pilate, even beyond the philosophers that predated Pilate? This twisted thinking goes all the way back to the Garden.

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."" (Genesis 3:1-5)

So, where does this twisted thinking originate? In John chapter 8, Jesus addresses the Pharisees with some harsh words:

"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44)

When I made that statement that there is no such thing as absolute truth, I was making what philosophers call a "self-defeating argument". You see, I was making a truth claim myself! In order for that statement to be true (there is no such thing as absolute truth), the assumption must be made that there *is such a thing as truth!* Let me give you a more obvious illustration. What if I were to say, "I can't speak a word of English"? You would laugh! Why? Because the very sentence I spoke was spoken in English. This is a self-defeating or suicidal argument.

So the next time someone tells you "there is no such thing as truth", ask him or her "is that true?" The next someone says "all truth is relative", ask him or her "is that a relative truth?"

We live in an age where tolerance is king. The spirit of our day dictates that we do not want to hurt feelings, and absolute truth hurts feelings. That is why the world hates Christianity! Christianity makes claims that are

exclusive. Christianity makes claims that are absolute! The world sees this as selfish and unloving. The broken logic of our day goes something like this: “what is true for you is true for you, but what is true for me is true for me” My question to that statement: “is that true?”

This leads me to the next point:

II. Truth is consequential.

Perhaps a better statement would be “truth has consequences”. We all know this to be true from God’s Word. Open up your Bibles to John 3. Most of you have John 3:16 memorized. How about verse 18? Let’s read the whole passage.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:16–18)

Verse 18 shows us the consequence of belief and unbelief! This is the ultimate example of this concept that truth has consequence.

Carmelinda and I are in the grueling process of purchasing a home right now. Please pray for us. When the seller read the clause in the contract we submitted, he made the decision to deny the condition of making repairs to the home. This is no big deal, my realtor told us because the house is in great condition. She was concerned, however, over what would happen should a high level of radon be detected. She asked the seller if he would pay to have the radon mitigated. The seller replied, “I don’t believe in radon”.

Obviously, the fact that one does not believe in something does not change the consequences of the truth. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer behind smoking. Our inspector and Blake Wollman gave us eyewitness account of individuals who had died of lung cancer that precipitated from radon exposure. Just because I don’t believe in gravity doesn’t mean it won’t affect me. If I step off of that sixty-eight foot cross out there, I can shout, “I don’t believe in gravity!” all the way down to my painful death. Truth has consequences!

So why do people still get truth mixed up if it is so highly consequential? They get the objective mixed up with the subjective. Objective truth is something that exists outside of our opinion. It is verifiable, it is empirical, and it is unchangeable. Subjective “truth” (I am reluctant to even classify the subjective as truth) is based on opinion and perspective. It is someone’s interpretation. People get mixed up and make the objective sound subjective: “what is true for you is true for you, what is true for me is true for me.”

Many of you have heard the oft used parable of the blind men and the elephant. In this parable an elephant is being examined by six blind men. Each man feels a different part of the elephant and thus reaches a different conclusion about the object in front of him. One grabs the tusk and says, “This is a spear!” Another holds the trunk and says, “This is a snake!” The one hugging the leg claims, “This is a tree!” The blind man holding the tail thinks, “I have a rope!” The one feeling the ear believes, “This is a fan!” And the one leaning on the elephant’s side is certain, “This is a wall!” These blind men are said to represent world religions, because they each come to a different conclusion about what they are sensing. Like each blind man, we are told, no one religion has the truth. Religious truth is relative to the individual. It is subjective, not objective.

In their powerful book *I Don’t Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist*, Norm Geisler and Frank Turek wisely point out “This may seem persuasive until you ask yourself one question: “What’s the perspective of the one telling the parable?” Hmmm, let’s see, the one telling the parable... He appears to have an *objective* perspective of the entire proceeding because he can see that the blind men are mistaken. Exactly! In fact, he wouldn’t know that the blind men were wrong unless he had an objective perspective of what was right!”¹ In fact different world religions make different truth claims, they cannot all be true at the same time.

A group of students was asked the question, “What is the greatest problem in America today, ignorance or apathy?”, to which one student replied “I don’t know and I don’t care!” This is the attitude many have taken with regard to the truth claims of the Bible. If Pilate were here today, he would tell you: truth matters!

¹ Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 48-49.

You all inherently know this! We all want doctors to be grounded in absolute truth. When you go to the hospital to undergo surgery on your left arm and the nurse starts marking up your right leg to be operated on, you don't say, "oh well, what's true for them is true for them, it doesn't really matter."

When you travel by air, you want your pilot to be a believer in absolute truth. You want a pilot who knows that 3,000 feet is 3,000 feet. You want a pilot who isn't going to argue over relative truth with air traffic control when they tell him that his landing gear is not deployed.

Friday the 15th is tax day. How many of you still have to do your taxes? I can promise you that the IRS is not relativistic. If the IRS says you owe \$1500 dollars and you call and tell them that is true for them but not for you, how do you think that will work out?

These examples are funny because they are so glaringly obvious.

Why do people throw their brains in the dumpster when it comes to spiritual and eternal matters? The sad truth is that they are blinded and dead in their trespasses. The truth is that they don't know Jesus, which leads me to the final point:

III. Jesus is Truth

Let's go back to Pilate. He asked the question "What is truth?" The devastatingly sad thing about this situation is that Pilate was face to face with *Ultimate Truth*. Pilate had standing before him the Creator of the Universe, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Word, almighty God.

God is Truth. In fact, the whole Godhead, the Trinity is Truth.

This is true of God the Father: Moses before God at Mt Sinai as God made covenant with Israel:

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth," (Exodus 34:6)

“He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4)

“For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth.” (Psalm 33:4)

The Holy Spirit is also truth.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” (John 16:12–13)

“This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.” (1 John 5:6)

What is the function of the Spirit, though? Jesus tells us in John 15:

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (John 15:26)

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth points to the Truth Incarnate, Jesus Christ.

But what about Jesus in relationship to the Father? Colossians helps:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:15–20)

John helps us understand Jesus in relationship to the Father:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”
(John 14:1–11)

When Jesus said something important, he often began by saying “verily, verily” (KJV) or “truly, truly”. The word translated verily or truly is AMEN. I love that our church often resounds with “AMEN!” When someone cries “AMEN” when a preacher proclaims God’s Word, what are they communicating? They are in essence saying, “That is true!”

Jesus is TRUTH! In Revelation 3:14, John records the address to the Laodiceans, speaking of Jesus calls Jesus the Amen, capital A!

Revelation 19:11 John said he saw heaven opened and beheld a white horse and the one sitting on it is called Faithful and *True!*

In John 14:6 Jesus says I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

In 1 John 5:20 we read:

*“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is **true**; and we are in him who is **true**, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the **true** God and eternal life.”*

In John 17 we read about a beautiful prayer, often referred to as the High Priestly Prayer.

In verse 8, Jesus says:

*“For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in **truth** that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.” (John 17:8)*

He continues in verses 17-19:

*“Sanctify them in the **truth**; your word is **truth**. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in **truth**.” (John 17:17–19)*

Jesus said that God’s Word is truth. We all know who the Word is, John 1:1!

And finally, back to our passage, where Jesus is responding to Pilate:

*“Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the **truth**. Everyone who is of the **truth** listens to my voice.”” (John 18:36–37)*

Friends, we must contend with Jesus, we cannot dismiss Him! We must contend with the Truth!

In his brilliant work *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis presents the fallacy and the facts about how we can contend with Jesus.

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither

a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God."

Would you bow your heads? My question for all you tonight is, are you a Pontius Pilate? Will you dismiss Jesus, the Ultimate Truth?

I left out a couple of passages. Jesus said:

*"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only **true** God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* (John 17:3)

*"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are **truly** my disciples, and you will know the **truth**, and the **truth** will set you free"* (John 8:31–32)

Tonight, you have come face to face with the Truth! Will you embrace it or dismiss it?