

TRUTH

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“We should seek the truth
without hesitation;
and, if we refuse it,
we show that we value the esteem of men
more than the search for truth.”

Blaise Pascal

*To Tony and Martha Cimmarrusti
and Mary Clayton Wood,*

Precious friends who love Christ's truth,
live it, and share it with others.

INTRODUCTION

Truth Matters

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Bilbo Baggins says to his young cousin, “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to.”

To “keep our feet” in this world requires putting our weight upon what is true.

Theologian J. Gresham Machen wisely said, “Nothing in the world can take the place of truth.” Yet we are constantly bombarded with lies that attempt to do just that.

Truth is not something we invent, only something we can discover. God reveals it to us in his Word.

Truth is rooted in the eternal, all-powerful, and unchangeable God. Therefore his promises cannot fail: “Every word of God proves true” (Proverbs 30:5 ESV).

As Christ the living Word is truth, so is his written Word. Though Heaven and Earth will pass away, God’s truth never will (Mark 13:31).

Truth is not just something we act upon. It acts upon us. We can’t change the truth, but the truth can change us. It sanctifies (sets us apart) from the falsehoods woven into our sin natures.

Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).

Truth in the Bible

A common Old Testament word expressing truth, *emeth*, speaks of a dependable reality that’s solid and binding. Truth is the bedrock of human relationships (Exodus 20:16), involving an integrity of thoughts, speech, or actions.

Over half the New Testament uses of *truth*, the Greek word *aletheia*, are in John’s Gospel. Truth is reality. What seems to be and what really is are often not the same. As I develop in my novel *Deception*, “Things are not as they appear.” To know the truth is to see accurately.

God has written his truth on human hearts, in the conscience (Romans 2:15). If truth is spoken graciously, many are drawn to it, instinctively knowing it will fill the moral vacuum they feel. Every heart longs for truth—even the heart that rejects it.

As followers of Christ, we’re to walk in the truth (3 John 3), love the truth, and believe the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). We’re to speak the truth, in contrast to “the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). We’re to be “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

Truth is far more than a moral guide, it’s inseparable from God’s own person. Jesus declared, “I am the way and

the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He didn’t say he would *show* the truth or *teach* the truth or *model* the truth. He *is* the truth. Truth personified.

That Jesus is the God-man, the second member of the Trinity come in human flesh, is central to our faith. To deny this is to be a “liar” (1 John 2:22). If we get it wrong about Christ, it doesn’t matter what else we get right.

The Holy Spirit leads people into truth (John 16:13). We’re commanded to know the truth (1 Timothy 4:3), handle the truth accurately (2 Timothy 2:15), and avoid doctrinal untruths (2 Timothy 2:18). Christ’s disciples do the truth (John 3:21) and abide in the truth (John 8:31-32). The “belt of truth” holds together our spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:14).

God “does not lie” (Titus 1:2). He is “the God of truth” (Isaiah 65:16 esv). “God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19).

Christ, as the Living Word of God, is inseparable from truth. He not only is the Truth, he is the source of all truth, the embodiment of truth, and therefore the reference point for evaluating all truth-claims.

Those in countries where democratic ideals are embraced might have the illusion they should have a voice when it comes to truth. But the universe is not a democracy.

Truth is not a ballot measure. God does not consult us to determine right and wrong. It's we who must go to revealed Scripture to find out what we should believe. Our culture appeals to whatever now *is*; God appeals to his intentions and design, to what *ought* to be.

When we wonder what's right, we're to turn to God's Word: "For the word of the LORD is right and true" (Psalm 33:4). As Psalm 119 depicts in every one of its 176 verses, God's truth is at the heart of the spiritual life.

Christ the Truth-Teller v. Satan the Liar

Unlike God, the devil promises without delivering. He's always denying, revising, or spinning the truth, rearranging the price tags. Jesus called him a "liar, and the father of lies." He said, "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language" (John 8:44).

Everyone speaks their native language fluently. Have you ever known people who lie so convincingly that it's difficult *not* to believe them? Satan's the best liar in the universe. "Go ahead, you deserve it. This won't hurt anybody." He's articulate, smooth, and persuasive. He murders people, and he lies to cover his murders.

When we speak the truth, we speak Christ's language. When we speak lies, we speak Satan's language. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice" (John 10:27). He says, "But

they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will flee from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice" (v. 5).

We're to become familiar enough with God's Word that we learn the sound of our Master's voice, and can tell the difference between his voice and the devil's impersonation.

Examining Truth-claims

In an age of endless Internet gossip, tabloids, false advertising, lying politicians, and "made up reality," how important is the truth? Reformer Ulrich Zwingli wrote, "The business of the truth is not to be deserted, even to the sacrifice of our lives."

Luke makes a profound observation: "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

They searched the Scriptures—probing, not just skimming. The Bible should be primary, all other truth-claims secondary. We need a worldview informed and corrected by God's Word.

They searched the Scriptures *daily*. (People died to get the Bible into our hands; the least we can do is read it!) Unless we establish a strong biblical grid, a scriptural filter with which to screen and interpret the world, we'll end up thinking like the world. We desperately need not only

Bible teaching, but group Bible study that explores the text and applies it to daily life.

The test of whether Scripture is my authority is this: Do I allow God's Word to convince me to believe what I don't like, what's contrary to what I've always believed and wanted to believe? Do I believe it even when it offends me?

It's impossible for me to write a book on truth without repeatedly citing God's Word. John Newton said, "He has not promised to reveal new truths, but to enable us to understand what we read in the Bible." Jesus said he would send us the Holy Spirit who "will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you" (John 14:26 NLT).

This book contains reflections not only on the general topic of truth, but also on many facets of truths found in Scripture, including eternity, purity, holiness, and happiness. I hope you'll spend time meditating on the brief reflections, great quotations, and Scriptures. Ask God's Holy Spirit to illuminate your mind as you read.

I always encourage readers to carefully evaluate my words and thoughts in light of Scripture, our objective standard of truth. "This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true" (2 Samuel 22:31 ESV).

As you read and contemplate and share these insights with others, may you gain a deeper, more worshipful appreciation for our wonderful Savior Jesus, who is the perfect embodiment of Truth.

DAY 1

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

JOHN 14:6

Of all truths in the universe, the most important is the truth of who Jesus is. After all, Truth is not merely an impersonal moral standard. It is a living Person who loved us so much he bears on his hands eternal scars because he rescued us.

The phrase "truly I tell you" appears 79 times in Scripture, 78 times spoken by Jesus. He is the Truth, and he tells the truth. We can fully trust everything he says. His promises are written in blood.

"He who believes the truth enters on the enjoyment of a happiness which is of the same nature, and springs from the same sources, as the happiness of God."

John Brown

DAY 2

*“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.
Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In
fact, the reason I was born and came into
the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone
on the side of truth listens to me.”
“What is truth?” retorted Pilate.*

JOHN 18:37-38A

What is truth? It is reality. Truth exists whether or not anyone believes it.

When Pilate said of Jesus, “I find no basis for a charge against him” (John 18:38b), he affirmed what he believed and what was indeed true: Jesus was innocent.

Truth-claims are exclusive. Jesus didn’t say he was *a* truth, but “*the* truth” (John 14:6). If someone says Jesus isn’t the primary truth, then either he’s wrong or Jesus is.

“If there is no absolute beyond man’s ideas,
then there is no final appeal to judge between
individuals and groups whose moral judgments
conflict. We are merely left with conflicting opinions.”

Francis Schaeffer

DAY 3

Jesus said, "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."

MATTHEW 10:39

If we grasp this truth, we'll undergo the ultimate paradigm shift: without Christ, any sacrifice we make is worthless. We are miserable without Jesus. Nothing we have can satisfy us. And even if it did, we couldn't hold on to it.

When we hear Jesus tell us to take up our crosses and follow him, and say we should lose our lives for his sake, we're tempted to think, "Then I will never be happy." But in fact Jesus is saying our short-term sacrifices for him are a means to an end, and that end is true and abundant life: "Whoever loses their life for my sake will *find* it."

"Without the way, there is no going;
without the truth, there is no knowing;
without the life, there is no living."

Thomas à Kempis

DAY 4

*The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.*

JEREMIAH 17:9

Scripture is full of disheartening diagnoses, including that the heart is “desperately sick” (ESV).

But the Great Physician must tell us this hard truth so we can say, “Create in me a pure heart, O God” (Psalm 51:10). The Physician also promises, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

So words that at first sting us deeply don't mean we're without hope, only that we cannot cure ourselves. But God has provided the cure: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

“Scripture considers repentance a path
to liberation, not condemnation.”

Edward Welch

DAY 5

Jesus prayed, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

JOHN 17:3

Eternal life is not found by believing in just any god but by believing in the “only true God.” False gods, both religious and secular, litter the landscape. The only true God is the one who sent the only true Savior, Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives us more than eternal existence. He gives us *eternal life*: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6 ESV).

This great truth all hinges on the person and work of none other than Jesus Christ.

“We weren’t meant to be somebody—we were meant to know Somebody.”

John Piper

DAY 6

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

JAMES 1:17-18

God's best and most perfect gift to us is Jesus himself: "All things were created through him and for him...and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17).

If everything that comes into our lives is Father-filtered, how can we be anything less than optimistic? Our optimism is based squarely on realism: Jesus is real, atonement is real, resurrection is real, Heaven is real, and the gospel really is "good news."

"It is a glorious thing to know that your Father
God makes no mistakes in directing or
permitting that which crosses the path of your
life. It is the glory of God to conceal a matter.
It is our glory to trust him, no matter what."

Joni Eareckson Tada

DAY 7

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

COLOSSIANS 2:13

Scripture tells us that apart from Christ, we were “dead in [our] sins.” This sounds like bad news since a corpse can’t raise itself from the grave.

Salvation is a gift: we contribute absolutely nothing. When Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb, he did the work, not Lazarus. Salvation depends on God’s mercy and his faithfulness to his promises.

Faith saves us, and we stay saved because of the sustaining, persevering work of God in our lives. The “good news” includes the fact that we needn’t live in fear of losing our salvation: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28).

“The only thing of our very own which we contribute to our salvation is the sin which makes it necessary.”

William Temple