

What is truth?

By

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The Bible speaks a lot about truth. Jesus says He is the truth (John 14:6), Isaiah calls the Lord “ the God of truth ” (Isaiah 65:16), and the apostle John rejoices to find Christians “walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father” (2 John 1:4). So, what is truth and how can we find it?

The search for truth

For thousands of years, people have been searching for truth. Both the best way to discover truth and the very existence of objective and absolute truth have been widely debated.

Basically, there are two conflicting ways to view the concept of truth:

Absolutism refers to the idea truth is absolute, objective and universal. It is the same for all people at all times, regardless of their culture, context, or personal situation. Truth corresponds to reality itself. For example, water is

wet — everyone will agree on that. It's simply true. Absolutism was an unquestioned assumption of many ancient religions and philosophies, forming the foundation of their morality and perspective on society. Moreover, to most early scientists the whole point of science was to discover absolute truths.

Relativism says that there is no absolute standard of truth. What is true to one person (at a certain time and in particular circumstances) is not necessarily true to all people at all times. For example, person A claims the water is cold while person B thinks it's warm. Or person A finds it's cold today, but hot tomorrow. Even the fact that 'water is wet', can change if it freezes, and is thus dependent on particular circumstances. Although relativism has ancient origins, it has only gained significant traction in the twentieth century. Many started to consider absolutism an invalid and outdated concept. In the social sciences, scholars argue that individuals from different cultures hold fundamentally different assumptions about reality. Many philosophers question

whether the notion of objective truth is valid at all; they say there is no reality independent of our ideas.

In practice, most people are neither complete absolutists nor complete relativists. For instance, they may regard natural laws discovered through rigorous scientific research as objectively true, but political views as a matter of opinion. They may not have fully reflected on the domains in which they adhere to absolute truth and those in which they adopt a relativist stance, let alone they do so, yet they feel that both positions can coexist.

Why this question is relevant to all of us

The search for truth is not only relevant to scientists and philosophers. People tend to search for the meaning of life — not only in an abstract sense, but also on the personal level.

If absolute and objective truth exists, it can provide an anchor for our existence and a basis for moral frameworks that transcend differences in time and culture — such as universal human rights. If truth is just subjective, there is no longer an absolute starting point on

which to base our moral decisions. Without absolute truth, there is no absolute right or wrong, good or bad.

Similarly, to really understand other people, whether from different cultures, times, or backgrounds, we need to recognize that there are some basic things and truths we all share. If our beliefs about reality are nothing more than products of our personal perception and circumstances, then real conversation and understanding between people is impossible.

The absence of absolute truth also leads to religious relativism: everybody can choose which beliefs they prefer to follow, but nobody can claim that their faith is the only true one. This clearly clashes with Jesus' claim "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6| compare Acts 4:11-12).

What does the Bible say about truth?

The Bible does not extensively discuss absolutism and relativism on a philosophical level. It does make clear, however, that there is absolute truth in God. Truth is the

reality He has created and defined — not just a subjective, cultural construct. This truth is both doctrinal and moral in scope.

God's Word is truth (John 17:17). It is reliable , never changes and tells us some basic truths every human needs to know. It tells us (among many other things) that there is a God who created us. It tells us that, sadly, our relationship with Him was broken. And it tells us that Jesus provides a way to get right with God again. These are objective, universal facts. People can ignore or reject these, but that does not make them any less true.

God leaves no room for 'different opinions' or 'alternative facts' when it comes to Jesus' identity and His ministry of salvation. He announces His wrath against “ all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth ” (Romans 1:18).

Humanity is like a very ill patient. The Bible tells us what's wrong and shows us where to find the cure. If we disagree with the diagnosis, we're still ill, but we won't get better. If we look for other solutions while rejecting Jesus' help,

we'll face death. That's why the truths in the Bible aren't just ideas we can agree or disagree with—they're a matter of life and death.

How can we find truth?

The Bible does not claim to provide answers to all possible questions. It does not contain many details about biology, chemistry, or astronomy, to name a few interesting fields of research. First of all, the Bible is God's 'love letter' to humanity in which He reveals Himself. He is the truth, but cannot be described and analyzed in any scientific way. He far exceeds our thinking and understanding.

However, the Bible does answer the most fundamental questions about the meaning of life and it provides a consistent moral framework laid out by God that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries.

In the first place, Jesus says: “ I am the truth. ” (John 14:6)

Secondly, Jesus says when He prays to God the Father: “Your Word is truth.” (John 17:17)

Thirdly, He says that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17).

In this threefold presentation of truth, it is the specific task of the Holy Spirit to make the truth clear to us: The Spirit is the One that testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.” (1 John 5:6) The Holy Spirit testifies of Jesus as the eternal Son of God, who shed His blood on the cross, as an all sufficient sacrifice for our sins. The Holy Spirit also testifies to the truth and authority of God’s Word. In order to remain in the truth, we need the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

What implications does this have for our lives?

The existence of absolute truth revealed to us in the Word of God, the Bible, is highly relevant for all of us. Not only does it provide a solid basis for our world view and our identity as humans, it also gives us some basic rules of life that transcend the limitations of time and culture. You

can read more about this in a separate article called “How to walk in the truth”.

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