

“WHAT IS TRUTH? WHO IS TRUTH?”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

August 16, 2015, 10:30AM

Text for the Sermon: John 18:37-38; 14:6; 8:31-32

Introduction.

What is truth?

When Jesus stood before Pilate and said He came to bear witness to the truth, Pilate asked, “What is truth?” For the past two thousand years philosophers and theologians, politicians and scientists, poets and bloggers have been trying to answer that question.

The sound they make is as one man put it, “like the sound of empty pails falling down the cellar stairs” (Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*, p. 94).

When Pilate asked Jesus the question, how did Jesus answer? He just stood there, He just stood there in front of Pilate staring right into his soul. The Truth just stood there.

It was one of the greatest ironies in human history, the Truth of God standing right there in front of him and he’s questioning, “What is truth?” The judge of the people without a clue.

Pilate is the modern man, or I should really say the post-modern man. What is truth? Is there really any such thing as truth, are there any absolutes? And who is the final arbiter of truth? For us in this post-modern culture of ours each individual and his own experience is the judge and arbiter of truth. We each have our own personal and subjective perspective and who is anyone else to argue with or challenge us. Each of us gets to do whatever is best in our own eyes.

Of course this means that no one can ultimately be right or wrong. This means that the Christian faith can only be subjective and experiential.

You have seen those Coexist bumper stickers with the symbols of a bunch of religions. The implication is all religions are equal, equally true and equally false, so let’s just tolerate each other and realize whatever we believe tolerance is more important than truth.

But the truth of the matter is truth is not determined by political correctness. Truth is not determined by the shifting sands of time and culture. Truth is not determined by majority votes or Supreme Court decisions. Truth is not determined by the Pilates of the world, nor is it toppled by the questionings of the Pilates of the world.

The question is not what is truth, but who is truth?

Who is truth?

The Bible paints a completely different picture of truth and what is truth or rather who is truth. God is the only one true God and God is truth, God is the God of truth, He is the source of all truth and the standard for all truth, whether that truth is moral or mathematical. There is nothing true in this universe that is not either in God or from God.

God is faithful and true (Revelation 19:2). Because God is faithful and true everything God has said about Himself, every Word that God has spoken in human language, every promise and every judgment God has made are all faithful and true. God cannot lie or be inconsistent or hypocritical. Even if we are faithless, God cannot be faithless (II Timothy 2:13).

Let me make five brief statements about the nature of the truth of God.

First, the truth of God is *eternal*, from everlasting to everlasting, absolute and unchangeable. It can never go out of fashion or get obsolete. The Word of the Lord will never pass away.

Second, the truth of God is *universal*, it is completely relevant and applicable to all peoples in all places at all times.

I Corinthians 4:17 I sent you Timothy ... to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Third, the truth of God is *infinite*, it is immeasurable, incomprehensible, unsearchable, and never ending. We will never plumb the depths of the truth of God.

Psalms 108:4 For your steadfast love is great above the heavens;
your faithfulness [truth] reaches to the clouds.

Fourth, the truth of God is *exclusive*, it's incompatible with anything that contradicts Scripture. Some years ago one of our Chinese students said he would take the best of Buddhism and the best of Christianity and put them together. He was very naïve about the nature of God and God's truth. It's interesting that other religious systems don't have a problem with syncretism, with conflicting truth claims. It exposes their low view of truth and their own beliefs.

Some people oppose absolute truth because they say it's immoral, it leads to arrogance and intolerance and prejudice and hate speech. They say the only path is tolerance and to walk that path everything has to be relative, equally true and false. Relativism is the mother of peace and getting along, coexisting. Relativism is rebellion against the reality of absolute truth in God.

It's just a fact our faith that if we believe in a truth that all people must embrace in order to be saved, we will be called arrogant. But we cannot live without absolute truth. We cannot live without Jesus Christ. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth.

Fifth, the truth of God is **Christ-centered**. If we do not have Christ we don't have the truth and if we stray from Christ we stray from the truth.

John 18:37-38 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.

Jesus came into the world to make clear that there is such a thing as truth, truth that comes from outside our world, truth that can be known and truth in fact that everyone must know.

Jesus doesn't let us get away with saying that one person's idea of God or of truth is as good as the next person's.

Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

They say there are no dumb questions, but if there are Thomas' question might be a dumb question and thank God then for dumb questions because the response he got is one of the greatest texts in Scripture. No one every spoke the way Jesus spoke.

Jesus is the truth because He reveals and reflects the Father, He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), the exact imprint of His nature (Hebrews 1:3), He is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). Truth became incarnate in Christ, it came in the flesh.

Apart from Christ we cannot know the most important truth, the truth about God and how to get to God.

Implications and Applications.

Pilate asked, "What is truth?" and then he walked away. He didn't wait for an answer. That's like so many today who don't believe in any objective or absolute truth or God of truth. They see all the religions and all the divisions and controversies in Christianity and they just throw their hands up.

I am sure you have heard the objection, "Well that's just your interpretation. There are hundreds of translations and thousands of denominations and millions of interpretations, so who should we believe and why should we believe you?"

This is a huge topic and I can't unravel all of it, but at the core this argument is an attack on the truth and clarity of Scripture. They are saying we can't really know or understand anything in the Bible and we can't trust it. Let me make six brief responses.

First, it's dishonest, there is remarkable agreement on many of the essentials of Christianity.

Second, the problem isn't the Bible, the problem is a human problem. The Bible itself isn't ambiguous, we are. We have differences and disagreements about lots of things besides what's in the Bible, like the climate and politics and immigration and how to build a county jail.

Third, there are actually good rules for interpretation that if followed help us get to the right place. Jesus used the OT and fulfilled prophecy to defend His truthfulness. Paul used the OT to defend the truth he was teaching. Scripture interprets Scripture. The plain texts help us with the obscure texts, the NT makes the OT more understandable.

Fourth, it's true there are parts of the Bible that are harder to understand than others, and these require study and diligence and hard work. To just dismiss it all because there are lots of interpretations is laziness and intellectual dishonesty.

Fifth, God has given us His Holy Spirit to illumine our minds and to help us. We should pray as the Psalmist prayed, "Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful truths in your Word."

Sixth, God is a speaking and communicating God and He has spoken. He didn't do it in a way to be intentionally misunderstood, but rather in a way to be known. He wants to be known correctly and to be interpreted rightly. Rightly divide the word of truth, Paul says.

God has something to say and He is very good at saying it. The problem is our willingness to humble ourselves and submit ourselves to God's truth. Sinful rebelliousness makes us hard of hearing. The problem isn't the voice, the problem isn't the clarity, the problem is our hard hearts and that we aren't listening. Why does Jesus so often say, "Him who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15).

God never leaves the honest inquirer in the dark. Those who humble themselves before God and His Word, those who ask and seek and knock, those who earnestly take the effort and sacrifice to search the Scriptures will find the answer.

Friends, don't play games with the Word of God, don't be dismissive of it. When you can't reconcile something or make sense of something, pray and study and wait on the Lord and in due time He will show you.

Proverbs 2:3-5 If you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,
4 if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,
5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

If you love God you will love the truth. If you are indifferent about the truth, you are indifferent toward God. You cannot separate God and truth. Loving the truth is a matter of life and death. To hate the truth is spiritual suicide.

If God is truth then we should be like Him in truth.

Jesus gives an enduring principle of life, “By their fruit, you shall know them.”

Truth bears fruit. People who know the truth and walk in the truth and live by the truth show the evidence of it in all they say and do.

What we do with the truth says what we think about God. We should imitate God’s truthfulness. We should be like God in our responses to the truth and in our responses to falsehood. We should love truth and hate falsehood and lies.

There should be no deceit in our hearts and actions, no deception, no secret sins. We should not lie; we should not engage in guile, we should never bear false witness against anyone. We should not say one thing to a person’s face and the opposite behind their back.

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight.

When we speak the truth our voice is most like God. A liar is the most opposite to God.

Lying isn’t wrong just because of the harm it causes to others, lying is wrong because it dishonors God and diminishes His glory, because we are acting in a way contrary to Him whose image we bear.

Our profession of faith should match our actions. Hypocrisy is a form of lying. Our words and deeds should match. Let’s us not be among those who have the form of godliness but no real power, no real holiness of heart.

God is the God of truth, strive to be more like Him in your words and deeds. Be true to yourself, a person of your word. Make integrity and honesty the hallmark of your home life and your work life.

We are called in Scripture to seek the truth (Jeremiah 5:1) and to speak the truth (Psalm 15:2) and speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and walk in the truth.

III John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Are we speaking the truth to one another? Do we know someone who is believing or living a lie, living in sin, saying things that are not true or helpful and we are silent? Speaking the truth is love as long as we do it in love, gently, with the goal of redeeming or restoring or correcting.

The truth of God is the foundation and pillar of our faith and hope and trust.

As God is true so He is faithful. God's truthfulness leads to His faithfulness. He does all He says. He's reliable and dependable, He has never failed us and He can never fail us. We can rest secure in Him. If we can't trust in God, then there is nothing trustworthy in this world. To not trust God is an affront and offense to Him and His character and nature.

All His Words are right and all His ways are right. He will only do what is right and always do what is right. This is the ground for our hope and trust, this is the ground for casting our anxiety on Him and being free from fear.

John 8:31-32 So Jesus said ... "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and ***you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.***"

People are not set free by tolerance, people are not set free by relativism, people are not set free by sincerity, people are not set free by coexisting or political correctness or by denouncing the one true God.

We are set free by the truth and by the one who is the truth, Jesus Christ, who said:

John 17:3 This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.