

717 Is the Truth Important?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

A recent survey said only 22 percent of American adults believe there are absolute moral truths. Most people think that morality is relative and determined by what people think. Such surveys reveal a lot more: they reveal that most people don't think the truth is very important. Is it? Stay with us and we'll explore the subject.

Today we're asking the question, "Is the truth important?" Courts convene with a jury trial in order to determine the truth about a person's guilt or innocence. Doctors give blood tests, take X-rays and MRIs, and examine patients to figure what is truly causing the physical problem. Officials photograph the finish line and time athletes to a thousandth of second to see who truly won the race. Is truth important to courts, doctors, or athletes? Of course it is! Why is it then, that when we turn to religious matters, we ask if truth is important or even knowable? It seems that people want to know the truth about everything except what is most important. One day the only truth that matters is the truth about our souls.

The book of Proverbs was written by a father to his young adult son, trying to give him the wisdom and direction he needed to find "favor in the sight of God and man." He wanted to him to have a safe guide that would keep him out of trouble. Solomon said in Proverbs 3:1-8, "My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones." For Solomon, truth was very important. He said, "*Do not let kindness and truth leave you—bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart*" (Proverbs 3:3).

Solomon valued the "truth," whether it was truth about morals or truth about God Himself. He knew that there were some things you cannot afford to lose for any reason. Trust in God and in the truth are inseparably linked. When people leave the truth, they are showing disbelief in what God says. Moses reminds us in Numbers 23:19, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" God does not lie; it is against his very nature to ever utter an untrue statement. This is why Psalm 119:160 says, "The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever." We can trust the word of God to give us what is true, that is, what is consistent with reality, what is actually the case. Solomon in Proverbs 23:23 advised us, "Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding." Truth is worth our every effort; we should pursue it until we find it. David said in Psalm 19:9-11, "the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

The mindset of our time is to treat truth as subjective and disposable. "What's true for you is true for you, and what's true for me is true for me." Such a view of truth makes it worthless. Some are leaving the truth behind altogether. It is much today like it was in the days of Isaiah. Isaiah 59:14-15 says: "Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands far away; For truth has stumbled in the street, And uprightness cannot enter. Yes, truth is lacking; And he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey. Now the LORD saw, And it

was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice." It is startling that the one who speaks the truth about morals is made into a villain, while an evildoer is made into a hero. Only the devil and his followers would do that. The devil wants to turn everything upside down, making evil into good and good into evil. When this happens people practice evil very widely, and everyone loses.

Paul, in the last chapter of his writings warned the young preacher Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-4, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." We are seeing Paul's prophecy fulfilled today. Religious beliefs are more divided today than at any time in history. There seems to be "designer" churches popping up everywhere, so that people can pick and choose whatever appeals to them. No one is asking, "What does God want?" Rather, people ask, "what does the community want, so we can give it to them and fill our assemblies." Surely God is just as displeased today as He was in the days of Isaiah. Truth has stumbled in the streets.

When people leave God's Word for their own philosophies and desires, they leave the truth. They leave the wisdom and goodness of God behind. God's Word is true, because God knows everything and is good. He doesn't lie, and He means what He says. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:2, "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." Paul wasn't interested in hiding anything or twisting his words around to deceive anyone. He wasn't underhanded but told things like they were. You can count on what He says, and you can count on God. To tamper with the word of God is to distort it, to falsify it, to make it appear false by deception or distortion. When someone changes God's Word to fit their own desires, they falsify it and show that they don't really believe God.

The goal of tampering is to leave the impression the Word says something that it does not actually say. Some people intend to change the Word, and others unfortunately get fooled by the deception. The person who uses God's word cunningly to advance his agenda is in Paul's eyes disgraceful and underhanded. Paul said we must not be ignorant of the devices Satan uses (2 Corinthians 2:11). One of Satan's devices follows a common pattern. There are three steps in this pattern. Satan, first, loves to *ask questions that create doubt* in the Word of God. You'll remember that when he tempted Eve, he asked, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:2) Satan knew what God had said; he didn't want information from but wanted to cause Eve to doubt what God had said. Doubt is always the first step to apostasy. The devil knows if he can get you to question God's love, wisdom and truth, he can get you to follow him to destruction. Satan, second, *contradicts what God says*. Eve admitted they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and that they would die if they did so. But Satan said, "You shall surely not die" (3:4).

Satan always wants people to know how much he knows. He knows things others don't know. He has the inside tract to what is

really true, so he contradicts God. The desire to know His secrets, to be one of the elite, to buy into his arrogance, has led many unfortunate souls down the path to perdition. Jesus said this about the devil in John 8:44, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies." You can just expect the devil to challenge any truth that God reveals to us. Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, said, "If you tell a lie long enough, loud enough, and often enough, the people will believe it. The secret to get someone to believe a lie is constant repetition. Just tell it over, and over, and over again." The devil has told the same lies for thousands of years, and people are still gullible enough to believe them.

Satan will tell you what he thinks you want to hear. Eve was deceived by this lie; Adam was not. Adam knew that eating the fruit was wrong, but he followed his wife in rebellion to God. Satan, third, *produces an alternate version of "truth."* He said to Eve, "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (3:5) The devil's alternate always has a mix of truth in with the error. There is enough truth to sound persuasive, but his message is full of misrepresentations and distortions. In the end, it's nothing but a big lie! Satan has always pretended to be holy. Paul said of some false teachers in his day in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds." The devil wants everyone to believe he has a better way, that God is trying to fool you, and that God is not your friend but is cheating you out of something you really want. His strategy is to get people to rely upon him for real "progress."

He always says he has a better way than Christ or the church. There simply is nothing better "out there" than New Testament Christianity. The entertainment religions don't have anything better than congregational singing in worship. The church growth experts don't have a plan better than preaching the truth in love. You can't improve on God's way or God's will. The devil will always ask questions to create doubt, contradict the Bible, and provide an alternative. But what the devil delivers is simply a counterfeit religion. Don't fall for it. Paul called for the elders at Ephesus and warned them of problems. He said in Acts 20:28-30, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." Through the centuries we have seen how ungodly men have taught strange doctrines that contradict God's word and lead people into error and to be lost.

What can we do about it? Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Check your preacher out. Ask if he is preaching what God says in the Scriptures or if he is giving his own opinions. A sweet lady—not a member of the church of Christ—recently came by my office and told me how much she enjoyed this program. I thanked her kindly. She explained, "the preacher where I go to church doesn't use the Bible much; he tells lots of stories. I like it when you preach the Bible." My friends, as long as there is breath in my body, I intend to preach the word of God and not the opinions or stories of men. I am not interested in alternative religious experiences; I want God and His Word to be the source of truth for my life. I can count on that. The apostle John said in 3 John 3-4, "For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." There is no greater joy, no greater blessing than to come to God's word and know that it is true. Truth is important, because it assures us that our sins truly are forgiven, that Jesus truly will come again and raise us from the dead, and that we have a home in heaven. That, my friend, is the most important thing of all!

How we view the truth of God's Word really does matter. Paul prophesied that before the Lord returns, there will be an apostasy. Included in that apostasy is a deluding influence. He said in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." When people won't listen to God, they will falsely believe anything. Solomon's advice to his son is valuable for us too: "*Do not let kindness and truth leave you—bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart*" (Prov. 3:3). The truth is precious. Don't let anyone steal it from your heart or your life by trickery or deceit. Nothing will set you free but the truth.

Peter said in 1 Peter 1:22-23, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God." It is not enough to simply know the truth, we must obey it as well. We obey the gospel of truth by placing our faith in Christ Jesus, repenting of our sins, by confessing the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, and by being baptized (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of our sins. It is in the obedience of baptism that God causes us to be born again. It is at that time we have newness of life (Rom. 6:4). My friend, have you obeyed the truth? Have you been born again?

Copyright 2007, Phil Sanders
Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org