

“Absolute Truth”

All Nick Cox wanted to do was get out of the classroom and never return. He couldn't believe how much his science teacher, along with several other students, was berating him. As he sat receiving the piercing words with no less force than a quarterback being sacked by a linebacker, he almost felt as if he were having an out-of-body experience—looking on while the group mangled him.

It had started innocently enough. The class was covering Darwinian evolutionary theory. The first semester junior had raised his hand and asked what the teacher thought of the Intelligent Design movement. After the teacher dismissing the movement as nothing more than the “ramblings of fundamentalist religionists,” Nick responded that many scientists are questioning evolutionary theory and turning to Intelligent Design. Before he finished, he was cut off by the instructor's rants. “I bet you're a Christian, aren't you Cox?” “Yes, but I don't see what that has...” Cutting him off, the teacher inquired, “Do you believe that Christianity is the only way to God?” “Yes, but...” Again, he was not allowed to finish.

In light of the response to his last answer, you would have thought he had personally attacked the mothers of the teacher and several students. They could not believe that someone would be so judgmental as to think that his was the only way. “Cox, don't you know that what is true for you may not be true for me or the rest of the class? I can't believe you are so arrogant!” yelled Julie Shelley, a senior sitting in the back.

Now, Nick felt like a car being sucked off a collapsing bridge by flood waters. He wasn't quite sure how he got himself into this mess so quickly, but it was clear that he had broken the only commandment to which this teacher and most in the class held—there is no such thing that is true for all people at all times and anyone who claims such a handle on truth should quickly be put down.

Such interactions happen quite often in high school and college campuses across our country, as well as in water cooler conversations at work. One of the shared assumptions by a growing number of people in our society is that there is no such thing as absolute truth and those who think so are dangerous to the rest. In an October 6, 2006 article, syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman decried those who speak of “evil” and then concluded, “The vocabulary of absolutes freezes the way we think and act.” (Coloradoan)

Leviticus 19:11: "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another."

“Therefore, having put away all falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor....” Eph. 4:25

“[Many have] leaped beyond the common sense observation that people's descriptions of reality differ to the conclusion that there is no independent reality and thus no basis for making judgments about truth—or falsity.” -Lynne Cheney, Telling The Truth

Previously it was common to believe that there were things true for all people everywhere, even if not everyone would agree on that body of truth. With the onslaught of so many differing opinions being peppered into our cultural stew—a pot which was already weak in the ingredients that supported truth-- it has resulted in many people abandoning the whole idea of truth. Something is true in the postmodern mind, if you like it, if it works for you, if you believe in it. Yet, it does not necessarily have to have any connection to reality.

Yet, one of the results of the existence of the infinite personal God and that He has spoken to us, is that there is such a thing as truth and we can know it. Let's look at a couple illustrations to understand what we mean.

Let's say that you are out walking in the mountains and come upon a very interesting rock whose color and texture match the surrounding terrain. It appears that merely by chance it was broken off of another formation. However, after picking it up, you announce, "Wow, this looks like it is an arrowhead." Your friend quickly responds, "It looks to me more like it is the end of a spoon." Both of you are telling the truth in this sense: you are merely sharing how you perceive the shape. What is more, there is nothing or no one around greater than you to referee the difference and give the definite word on the shape (such as an expert on native American weapons who could affirm or discount that it was an arrowhead).

This scenario illustrates how a growing majority view all truth claims. The thought is this, "Hey, if we are here by chance and there is no one greater than us to communicate what is true or not (or there is one greater, but he has not communicated), who are we to say that one version of something is more true than another?"

Yet, what the Bible reveals about the impact of God upon truth is closer to this scenario. Suppose you are walking down a city street and come across a box sitting on the sidewalk. After grabbing it and removing the lid, you see that inside is a miniature car. What is more, you notice underneath the car there are instructions from the manufacturer for how it operates. A quick perusal of the literature lets you know that with batteries installed and the use of the remote control (also in the box), the car will move and can be steered by you. Now, there is no question that this is a car as opposed to, let's say, a tooth brush or a cat. It could not be all three. Also, there is no question that the car really was designed to move and be controlled remotely since the manufacturer's instructions reveal as much.

God, the creator of the universe, has revealed to us not only who He is and who we are, but also what this world is all about,

"He is there and is not a silent, nor far-off God."
Francis Schaeffer, in He Is There And He Is Not Silent

"The Bottom line for our modernized world is that there is no truth; the bottom line for Christian consciousness is precisely the opposite. The Christian predisposition to believe in the kind of truth that is objective and public and that reflects ultimate reality cuts across the grain of what modernity considers plausible."
-David Wells, No Place For Truth

how we are best to function, and a standard (the teaching of the Bible) for determining what is true or not.

What is more, God has communicated to us in such a way that we know that something cannot be one thing and its opposite all at the same time. Such is made clear in God's use of reason (Is. 1:18; Rom. 12:1), as well as the teaching that there is a body of truth we are to believe and to contradict that standard is to move away from truth. It is not a matter of finding an alternative truth. (See Rom. 6:17; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:16-17) Finally, it is clarified by the fact that God is very jealous to protect who He is and not to have us twist His nature or attributes in any way (cf. Exodus 20:4-6). This means, for example, that God cannot be a holy, loving, just God and, at the same time, an unholy, unloving, unjust God.

We must also know that God is the source of truth (John 14:6)—as He is the source of all that is right and good (Lev. 19:2) and He does not lie (Titus 1:2). Additionally, He calls us to shape our thoughts, behaviors, words, and relations by truth (e.g. Ex. 20:16; Lev. 19:11; Phil. 4:8).

So, now, we are ready to define truth. "Truth is that which corresponds to reality as perceived by God." (R. C. Sproul, The Holiness of God) We can know the truth because God has revealed it sufficiently to us. He has given us explicit communication on some things (It is wrong to steal [Ex. 20:8]), implicit direction on others (It is immoral to take life without a just cause, therefore abortion is immoral [Ex. 20:6]), and a foundation of truth by which we can gauge all other things (e.g. 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:16-17; Acts 17:10-11) with the result that we can not only know there are things which are true for all people everywhere, but we can be reasonably certain we can come to know that truth.

Why is this important? Because if we do not see that absolute truth exists, we will never come to trust in God as He really is. Nor, will we trust in His Word. We will always believe, for example, that God can be loving and unloving at the same time; that the scriptures could be true and false all at the same time. Such not only hinders our ability to communicate God's will, but also to believe it.

Discussion Questions:

1. What, if any struggles, do you have in believing that there is absolute truth?
2. In what ways have you experienced the belief that there is no absolute truth?

"What is it that makes a proposition true? The best answer is facts. A fact is some real...state of affairs in the world, for example, grass's being green, an electron's having negative charge, God's being all-loving. ...Returning to present purposes, consider the proposition that *grass is green*.... If Sally has the thought that *grass is green*, the specific state of affairs (grass actually being green) "makes" the propositional content of her thought true just in case the state of affairs actually is the way the proposition represents it to be. Grass's being green makes Sally's thought true even if Sally is blind and cannot tell whether or not it is true, and even if Sally does not believe the thought. Reality makes thoughts true or false. A thought is not made true by someone believing it or by someone being able to determine whether or not it is true." –J. P. Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and The Postmodern Turn," Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society, 48, 1 (March 2005)

"One must keep pointing out that Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, of infinite importance." C. S. Lewis, God In The Dock

3. What difference(s) do you believe this whole subject makes, if any?