

Does the Truth Exist? [Slide 1]

At the beginning of this century, George Barna conducted and published two national surveys of what Americans believe about truth. Sixty four percent of Americans said that truth was relative to the situation. Only 22 percent said that truth is absolute. Fourteen percent did not know. Among teenagers 83 percent said that truth depends on the circumstances and only 6 percent said that truth is absolute. When Barna separated out the data for those who claimed to be born again only 32% believed in absolute truth and among born again teenagers only 9 % believe in moral absolutes, less than one in ten. If anything, I suspect that things have grown worse since then.

[Slide 2] Dr. Allan Bloom opened his book, The Closing of the American Mind, with the following statement: “almost every student entering the university believes or says he believes that truth is relative.”

Let me put this in practical terms. A relativist believes that there are no overarching truths that are true at all times. A relativist believes that truth is relative to the person or to the situation. Relativism may be expressed in statements like these: “That may be true for you but it’s not true for me.” “History is written by the winners.” “We can’t make moral judgments of other cultures.” “All beliefs are equally valid.”

So, let me give you an example of moral relativism. In the Supreme Court decision, Planned Parenthood v. Casey, which was an abortion decision, the Supreme Court declared that it is up to each individual to determine the concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe and the mystery of human life. In other words it was quite reasonable to believe that one person would decide that the unborn child was really not a human being, abortion was not a case of murder, and permissible while another person could decide that abortion was a case of murder and completely wrong. Relativists say that both people could be right. The morality of abortion is decided by each individual based on their situation. There is no overarching truth about abortion that covers every abortion, according to the Supreme Court and relativists.

Just to point out the absolute absurdity of that position, just ask yourself what our nation would look like if we applied that reasoning not just to the unborn but to everyone. What if each of us could determine the concept of existence and meaning for everyone else? What if we could decide who was a living human and who was not and could terminate those we thought were not human beings? What would life look like if you applied moral relativism to adults?

Actually you don’t have to look far at all. Just look at the great evil that was American slavery. The Supreme Court in the Dred Scott decision ruled that blacks were not persons and thus there was no absolute truth that limited slave owners in regard to how they treated their slaves. The Supreme Court allowed black slave owners to decide their own truth and morality about whether they would mistreat their slaves or not, kill them or not, break up their families or not, treat them as persons or as property. That sin still reaps negative consequences even today. We are still paying a painful price for our sin.

An absolute truth is that God created all humans. All people bear his image and belong to him. How we treat other humans is how we treat God. We are to love our neighbor as we love our self and to do unto others as we would have others do unto us. If

we had lived out those absolute truths we would have walked a different path as a nation, a better path I believe. We are still challenged to live out those absolute truths even now in how we treat one another.

If you believe that truth is absolute what that means is that statements such as: Jesus is God and Savior is true for everyone under all circumstances. There is only salvation through faith in Jesus is true for everyone under all circumstances. Adultery is wrong is true for everyone under all circumstances. Homosexual behavior is sin is true for everyone under all circumstances. The Bible is the word of God is true for everyone under all circumstances. If you believe that truth is relative then you would say that none of those assertions is true for everyone under all circumstances, but that they are only true for some people in some situations.

I am not talking about whether people perceive those things to be true or not. Certainly, many people do not perceive these things to be true. I am talking about whether they remain true regardless of whether people perceive them to be true or not. An absolutist says that the truth is always true regardless of whether people perceive it to be true and regardless of the situation. A relativist says that truth depends on the situation. Something may be true at one time and in one situation and false at another time and in another situation.

If so many people in our country believe in relative truth, is it any surprise that lying has become so epidemic in our country? I look at our Presidential election and I think both candidates are liars. I think a lot of people in the media who are supposed to be informing us of the truth are a bunch of liars. I think most people in our nation are fed up with the lies and deceptions. What I find so hypocritical is that if over three quarters of adults and over 80% of teens don't believe in absolute truth anyway, why all the concern over whether candidates are lying? After all, they're just presenting their truth. It may not be your truth, but shouldn't you be tolerant and not try to impose your morality upon them? We have reaped what we have sown. If we discard absolute truth as a nation we should not be surprised when everyone tries to spin us their truth.

I suspect that the vast majority of people who say they believe truth is relative do so out of ignorance. I don't think they have ever seriously considered the consequences and ramifications of believing that truth is relative. I think what happens is that most people run up against an absolute truth they don't like, and so they deny that absolute truths exist so that they do not have to conform their life to that truth. Most people want happiness and personal comfort, so they will believe in relativism when it suits them and in absolute truth when it suits them, and they a quite unconcerned they are living an intellectually and morally bankrupt life.

[Slide 3] What are the consequences of relativism for a society and for an individual? What about the laws that govern our society? Suppose everyone was allowed to decide their own truth about traffic lights. Your truth may be that the red light means stop, but my truth is that the red light means go. Would you then want your fellow citizens to be relativists? What if the courts could no longer force people to honor their contracts because what someone promised to pay or to deliver is no longer true for them? Would you care if someone stole your patent or your copyright or your trademark claiming that their truth was that those things belonged to them and the courts could not intervene because all the judges were relativists? Would that make a difference to you?

Do you want your service providers to be relativists? Would you care that your doctor thought that arsenic in large doses is not fatal and that it would make a great pain reliever for you? Do you want your auto mechanic to be a relativist who returned your car with the transmission still not working, but who claimed that his truth was that he had fixed it? Would you want your banker to be a relativist who discarded the simple rules of mathematics for his own truth about how to calculate the balance in your account?

If you were a relativist, how could you do science? You could claim your truth but then everyone else could claim a different truth. How do you resolve any dispute about truth unless you agree up front that there is an absolute truth that can be known?

How can you have conversation with anyone if we don't all agree that the English word "horse" refers to the large four legged animal people can ride rather than to the small four legged reptile with a shell that moves slow?

How can you have any educational system if there is no absolute truth? If all truth is relative, why learn math and science and history and grammar? If my truth is just as good as your truth, why do I need to be educated? Why do I need to take tests to conform to your idea of truth?

Focus on the Family did a study where they concluded that when children do not accept an objective standard of truth they become 48 percent more likely to cheat on an exam, two times more likely to watch pornographic film, two times more likely to steal, three times more likely to use illegal drugs, six times more likely to attempt suicide, two times more likely to be angry with life, two times more likely to be lacking purpose, and two times more likely to be resentful. Do we really want to live in a world where no one believes in absolute truth?

Richard Neuhaus in his book, the *Naked Public Square*, argued that when a society abandons absolute truth you have to come up with some kind of alternative to persuade the people. If there is no commonly accepted truth to which you can appeal, then you have to resort to power and manipulation to convince people. Consider these examples where power was employed rather than any appeal to truth.

This year Dr. Lawrence Mayer and Dr. Paul McHugh of the John Hopkins research community published an article entitled *Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences*. They wrote:

Some of the most widely held views about sexual orientation, such as the 'born that way' hypothesis, simply are not supported by science. The literature in this area does describe a small ensemble of biological differences between non-heterosexuals and heterosexuals, but those biological differences are not sufficient to predict sexual orientation. . . . The strongest statement that science offers to explain sexual orientation is that some biological factors appear, to an unknown extent, to predispose some individuals to a non-heterosexual orientation."

The Human Rights Campaign immediately demanded that John Hopkins disavow the report or face consequences. They threatened to lower their Healthcare Equality Index score they give out in ranking the quality of healthcare hospitals provide, if John Hopkins did not repudiate the conclusions of its own researchers.

World Magazine in September reported that even scientists don't always react objectively. Valentina Zharkova of Northumbria University presented research that low

solar activity could lead to a little ice age this century. Some of her fellow climate scientists tried to pressure the Royal Astronomical Society to withdraw her press release. Too many people don't care what the truth is, they just want their "truth" to prevail, and they will use whatever means they can to ensure it will prevail other than a full and open debate of the issues.

Relativism is a threat to most religions. Relativism will undercut Christianity and any system that claims to teach the truth. If you can deny the existence of absolute truth, then truths such as Jesus being our Savior, dying on the cross for our sin, and being the one way to God are only relative truths, only true for certain people. If the truth about Jesus is not true for every person under every situation, then there is no reason to believe in Jesus. If truth is relative I can simply say that Jesus being the Savior is not true for me and I can brush off Christianity without a second thought. If you are a relativist you don't have to come up with a reason for your disbelief, you just pronounce Christianity as being untrue for you.

However, as I have already argued, no one truly lives like a relativist and society could not function if everyone held to their own truth all the time and did not respect any absolute truth claims. Also, relativism as a philosophy is self-defeating. Relativism claims that all truth is relative, but that claim itself is an absolute statement. The claim can only be true if that absolute statement is true, but if that absolute statement is true then relativism cannot be true. It's a hopeless contradiction.

[Slide 4] Truth is what corresponds to reality. However, the Bible provides a deeper, more detailed picture of what is truth, so I want to spend the rest of our time seeing what the Bible says about truth. I refer you now to John 18:36-38 in your Bible, which is a conversation that Jesus Christ had with the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. I've included the Scripture on your outline. Read.

Jesus said he was a king, but not an earthly king who ruled over a nation. Jesus said to Pilate, "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth." Jesus claimed to know the truth and to be able to share it with us. Then he told Pilate, "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." If you hear Jesus then you are aligned with and in harmony with the truth.

It is much like singing with a musical instrument. The keyboard or piano plays a note. That instrument produces a sound of certain frequency. When you match that frequency with your vocal chords then you are singing on key with the instrument. Jesus is the master musician. The song he sings is the truth. Anyone who hears him and responds with the same frequency will be producing the same song. Hearing Jesus voice does not refer to the passive act of merely registering a sound in one's mind. That is what Pilate did. Pilate literally heard Jesus' words but he did not receive them with understanding or acceptance. We know that was the case because Pilate's next statement was, "What is truth?" Jesus was playing the song for him but he did not really hear it.

To hear Jesus' voice means that not only do you listen to what he said but also you receive it positively and respond to it by reproducing its sound in your life. Jesus is the truth. He said in John 14:6, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." So, when you are in harmony with Jesus you are of the truth because Jesus is the truth. All truth finds its ultimate origin and explanation in Jesus. Jesus is the creator. Therefore all reality, all truth ultimately goes back to him as the source. The eternal, infinite Son of God holds all truth together and originates all truth.

Of course, Jesus is not present on the Earth now, but that is not a problem because we have his written word in the Bible and we have the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit's truth telling ministry in John 16: 12-15. Read. The Holy Spirit teaches us the truth.

Jesus promised that if we live out his truth, we will experience true freedom, freedom from sin, freedom from falsehood and deception, freedom from worry and guilt, to name a few. In John 8:31-32 Jesus said, "Read." A lot of universities and places of education quote verse 32 and omit verse 31. The quote, taken out of context, implies that any truth obtained through education will set you free. It may set you free from a very narrow area of ignorance, but knowing math or scientific principles or English grammar rules or any set of knowledge is not really going to set you free. Believing in Jesus and obeying his word is what will truly set you free, as verse 31 says.

The apostle Paul lays out the prescription for living God's truth in 2 Timothy 2:15. Let's read that. Read. We are to be diligent to handle the word of truth approaching it like a workman whose work will be inspected by God. Being diligent means that I am intentional in reading and learning the Bible. I have some kind of plan or practice I follow that enables me to study it regularly.

Paul says I need to handle the Bible accurately. There are sound principles of interpretation I need to follow. Most of the erroneous interpretations people come up with while reading the Bible occur because they don't carefully observe what it does and doesn't say or they don't take the time to understand the context of the verse. They force modern meanings and concepts into the Ancient Near Eastern setting of the Bible. A really good resource for how to study the Bible is the Joy of Discovery by Oletta Wald. I checked and it's listed with Amazon. It's a relatively small book packed with a lot of practical suggestions to learn how to correctly interpret the Bible.

Paul says that if you are diligent to accurately handle the word of truth you will not be ashamed to stand before God when he inspects the work of your life. You will have confidence that you believed the truth and that you lived out the truth's demands. You will be confident that your life and your accomplishments mattered and that you achieved something worthwhile in this life. You will be confident that you were not only on the right side of history, but also on the right side of eternity.

Truth is an attribute of God. God is unchanging in his character and nature. Thus absolute truth does exist. We proclaim that God exists as a triune being of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is fully God and fully man. All humans except for Jesus are born as sinners and sin against God. Jesus died on the cross to pay the sins of everyone. He rose from the dead on the third day. Whoever trusts in Jesus Christ will have their sins forgiven and will receive eternal life. God is sovereign over all history and some day will reestablish his Kingdom on the Earth with Jesus as king. These are some of the absolute truths in which we place our confidence. We have hope because they are always true. Without absolute truth there can be no hope and no confidence. Thank God that his truth endures forever.