

What is Truth?

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Our understanding of what truth is affects how we think, what we do and how we live. Knowing what truth is impacts us morally, emotionally and spiritually. Having a right concept of truth is one of the most important things one can have in life. The question of what is truth has been debated since the very beginning of humanity. In Genesis chapter 3, Satan disguised as a serpent, asked Eve, “Did God actually say that?” Satan was putting the issue of what is truth up for debate. The debate over truth has continued ever since and has grown increasingly louder. According to many in our society, there is no such thing as objective truth, everything is relative. This false understanding of what truth is has created a culture that is caught in a downward spiral until hardly anything matters. Nancy Pearcey writes, “The danger is that if Christians do not consciously develop a biblical approach to the subject (truth), then we will unconsciously absorb some other philosophical approach.”¹ The culture that we live in has unconsciously absorbed the wrong concept of truth.

This pervasive thought is rampant in our film culture as well. In 2006, directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris released a film titled *Little Miss Sunshine* in which they promoted their version of relativistic truth. In one scene of the popular film, the grandpa, who is completely obsessed with pornography, drills into his grandson the importance of having sex with as many women as he could while he was still a teenager. The teenage boy who wears a T-shirt that proclaims “Jesus was wrong” has taken a vow of silence so it is impossible to ascertain what he thinks of his grandfather’s monologue. It also turns out that grandpa was teaching his seven-year-old granddaughter performance art so that she would be prepared for the sunshine

¹ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 44.

pageant. Her perverted grandfather was actually teaching her how to perform a strip tease for a pageant that she was hoping to win. And she proceeds to do so for the talent portion of the pageant. She doesn't take off anything that exposes "skin," but she does mimic a series of sexually oriented moves, ripping off her costume hat, pants and jacket in the process. But this is tolerated, because our society says that truth is relative.

The family is totally dysfunctional with everyone cursing at each other, using drugs and alcohol and living as they choose to live. In another scene, the mother tries to prepare the kids for the worst by telling them that if God wants something to happen, they'll have to be OK with that. That prompts seven-year-old Olive to ask her homosexual uncle if he thinks there's a heaven. He says he doesn't know for sure and acts really nervous as she questions him. In the end, Olive counters that she's sure there is a heaven, and that she is convinced that her uncle will go there when he dies.

One of the major problems in our culture today is relativism. Relativism says what may be true for you isn't necessarily true for me. And one gets the impression from this film, *Little Miss Sunshine*, that truth is relative and subjective. There is no such thing as an absolute truth. If it works for you, do it. And if you don't think its right, don't be judgmental of those who believe that it is right, we are to be tolerant. And our society applauds this type of system of belief. All around us we hear "if it feels good, do it. If it is right for you, then it is right. If you believe it, then that is enough." Peggy Noonan warned about this mentality when she wrote in Forbes Magazine that "As we've gotten more open-minded we've gotten more closed-hearted. What you applaud, you encourage. Watch out what you celebrate."² In large part our society is celebrating

² Peggy Noonan "You'd Cry too if it Happened to You," [peggynoonan.com](http://www.peggynoonan.com), September 14, 1992, <http://www.peggynoonan.com/article.php?article=7> [accessed October 5, 2009].

relativistic truth by applauding movies, television shows and literature that portray relativistic truth. More recently ABC network, a family channel, released a television show titled *Modern Family* which follows the lives of three inter-related families. It seems harmless until one realizes that the show includes homosexual parents and is full of sexual double entendres and situations. This show is promoting truth that is subjective. These are just two examples in our world of entertainment. That is the relativistic culture that we live in. We seem to be applauding and encouraging relativism. And this mindset has settled into the church world. With homosexual ordained pastors and loose-living “christians”, it is no wonder why the church lacks the power it once had.

So we have a society that is rampant with a relativistic understanding that truth is subjective, everything is relative. This philosophy is wrong on all accounts and destructive when it comes to religion. Relativism gives the false understanding that all religions take us to the same destination. Christianity, or for that matter, all religions are not exclusive. They all point toward the same direction. The only thing that matters is your preference. But Ravi Zacharias destroys this relativistic argument when he writes:

“The issue is not whether the belief system you espouse—monotheistic, atheistic, pantheistic, or otherwise—is exclusive. The issue is whether the answers to the four basic questions of life pertaining to origin, meaning, mortality, and destiny within the context of each of these world-views meet the tests of truth.”³

³ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 125-126.

Realistically, all religions are not the same. At the core of every religion, there is a system of belief, a statement of defining who God is or isn't. Even religions seem to indicate that truth, as defined, is objective, not subjective.

The question, "what is truth" has been asked for centuries. One of the famous times was when Jesus of Nazareth was standing before Pontius Pilate and declared that "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:37). Pilate seemed to mock Jesus when he asked "What is truth?" Christians believe that Pilate was staring in the face of truth when he asked this question. For earlier when Thomas, the disciple of Jesus, asked him how they could know the way, Jesus replied, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 ESV).

We live in a society that separates the secular and the sacred, thus having a dualistic view of faith. As followers of Jesus Christ, we must show our culture that Christianity alone is the whole truth, not just a collection of truths. Objective truth, prime reality and morality do exist. And this means that we must live accordingly rather than pretending that they don't exist.⁴ There is a meta-narrative of truth that exists. If we believe that truth is made up of collections, then that indicates that the collector is in charge.⁵ If that is true, then the collector picks and chooses what he believes to be truth.⁶ By doing that, the collector is committing idolatry by trying to be like God by choosing truth subjectively. But God has given us absolute truth, and as we try to

⁴ Pearcey, 121.

⁵ Kenneth Miller, "Christian Faith and Truth, Part 2" (lecture, Evangelical Theological Seminary, Myerstown, PA, October 1, 2009).

⁶ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 195.

understand Him and His truth, He has laid out a framework, a meta-narrative of what truth really is.

The meta-narrative of truth begins as described by John, who wrote in John 1:1-3, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” The story of truth begins when God created the world. He was the master designer. He created man and woman in His image. Dualism says that matter was pre-existent; but the biblical truth is that nothing existed before God. He is the only source of creation. Every part of creation bears his fingerprints and reflects his character.⁷ God remarked that his creation was good when it was completed. This is affirmed multiple times in Genesis 1:4,10 and 1 Timothy 4:4. No part of his creation was evil or bad. So what happened? How did we end up from a perfect creation to a very imperfect, relativistic world that we live in today? The problem began when Adam and Eve rebelled against God. They took something that God intended for Himself and used it for evil purposes. Sin entered the world. Sin is seeking to become oneself, to get an identity apart from God.⁸ And when we are without God, in whose image we are made, there is a void in our life. Pearcey says that “the line between good and evil is not drawn between one part of creation and another part, but runs through the human heart itself—in our own disposition to use the creation for good or for evil.”⁹ At the core of every human, we make choices to do either right or wrong. We choose what we believe truth to be.

⁷ Pearcey, 83.

⁸ Keller, 190.

⁹ Pearcey, 85.

Once Adam and Eve sinned, God set in motion a rescue mission to redeem humanity, His creation. At the heart of this rescue mission, the Father sent His Son to die for the sins of the world. As ludicrous and horrible as that sounds, forgiveness was costly and it cost Him His son to atone for sin. Keller states that “the fact that Jesus had to die for me humbled me out of my pride. The fact Jesus was glad to die for me assured me out of my fear.¹⁰ Thankfully, truth didn’t end there; Jesus rose from the dead conquering death and the grave. God’s ultimate promise is a new heaven and a new earth. Currently, he is interceding for us, praying that we will make it to heaven. He is interceding that we will choose total truth over relativism. Truth is totally grounded in God. God is absolute truth; there can be no other.

¹⁰ Keller, 233.

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