

In this session we are going to answer the question Pilate asked in **John 18:37-38 (NKJV)** ... *“What is truth?”*

The Goal Of Apologetics

To establish the truthfulness of Christianity. To achieve this goal the foundation of truth must be laid first!

Why is truth important?

1. Someone who doesn't believe that truth exists will not believe us when we claim the Christianity is true.
2. A personal relationship with truth in Jesus Christ is impossible unless we believe that truth is real and discoverable (John 14:6).
3. Unless truth is real, how are we going to tell “the truth” about Christianity, God, and His Son?

What is truth?

Truth is *“telling it like it is.”* That is, our statements about something must match the real facts as they actually are in the world. Statements have *“truth value”* ... they can either be true or false. The process of discovering truth asks whether someone's words match reality.

The fancy name for this definition of truth is the **CORRESPONDENCE VIEW** ... because truth corresponds to reality (i.e. as it actually is). Reality can be the ground by which all truth claims are tested ... whether Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Mormon, Christian, Atheist, etc.

Biblical Examples Of The Correspondence View

Genesis 42:16; Acts 5:1-4; Genesis 2:17; Exodus 20:16; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 4:3-4

Is truth what works?

Some say that truth is found in whatever works or brings the best results. This view has confuses what truth *does* with what truth *is*. Although truth does work (the way God intends it to), what works is not always true. ILL: Lying may work for us, but this does not make the lie true. There is no such thing as a “true lie.” It's contradictory.

Is truth found in good intentions?

According to this view truth is found in what we *intend* to say instead of what we *actually* say. ILL: If I tell you to turn right on Wilder Rd. to get to my house, but really intended you to turn left, the directions would be considered correct according to an internationalist.

This view fails for several reasons:

1. Mistakenly focuses on what we intend to say rather than on what we actually say ... truth is found in what we do say, not what we don't say.
2. If true, there could never be a sincere, well-intending person who is wrong. ILL: If truth is found in good intentions, then a well-intending atheist is telling the truth about God's non-existence. What about a well-intending Jehovah's Witness or Mormon? Do their good intentions make their doctrines true? ILL: What if a student placed the wrong answer on the test sheet but had every intention of marking the right answer? Should the teacher give him/her full credit for the wrong answer?
3. Lies can have good intentions, but this does not make a lie true.
4. The OT considers certain unintentional acts as wrong, therefore requiring a sacrifice.

Is truth a matter of perspective?

This view is perhaps the most popular ... says that truth is a matter to be decided by the individual ... *“all truth is a matter of one’s perspective.”*

At least two problems:

1. The statement boomerangs and destroys itself because the statement would apply equally to everyone else on earth. If true for all people, then the statement “all truth is a matter of one’s perspective” may not be true. *Develop an eye for statements that boomerang and destroy themselves ... for example:*
 - *Never say the word never.*
 - *I can’t speak any words in English.*
 - *Language doesn’t have any meaning.*
 - *Absolutely no truths exist that apply to everyone*
2. If something is true, it is true for all people at all times and in all places regardless of a person’s awareness or beliefs. ILL: If it is true that George Washington was the first president of the United States, then it would be true for everybody in all places and at all times.

What are the barriers to truth?

Now that we know what is true ... *namely that which corresponds to reality or telling it like it is* ... we can evaluate some of the most formidable barriers to truth that challenge the Christian position.

1. Agnosticism: Nobody Can Discover Truth

This barrier claims that truth can’t be known ... nor can anyone have knowledge of God. “Agnosticism” comes from the Greek = “A” + “gnosis” ... which literally means “no knowledge” or “no truth.”

Several serious flaws:

1. When examined more closely, agnosticism self-destructs ... an agnostic fails to see that he does indeed know something about God ... he knows that he can’t know God.
2. The very assertion that “humans can’t know truth” is a truth statement in itself ... if an agnostic can’t know truth, then how does he/she know agnosticism is true? In other words, the agnostic uses truth to say there is no truth ... the boomerang principle strikes again.
3. When the agnostic makes a negative statement asserting he “can’t know about truth or God,” he presupposes knowledge about truth and God. Every negative claim presupposes positive knowledge. ILL: The statement “The shirt is not white,” assumes he knows something about white and what the shirt color actually is ... or he could not know for sure.

2. Skepticism: Doubt Everything That Claims To Be True

This is the belief that we should doubt everything, including the truth about Christianity. *“Just be skeptical about everything,”* the skeptic says. It is the philosophy of uncertainty. Skepticism says, *“Hold off on that decision and set it aside.”*

Why reject skepticism?

1. Skepticism self-destructs as did agnosticism. It is impossible to be skeptical about *everything*. To do so, we would have to be skeptical about our own skepticism.
2. To “hold off” on making a decision about the world is actually making a decision about the world. Many persons fail to see that making *no decision* is indeed *a decision*. ILL: If your car were stopped on a railroad tracks with an oncoming train one hundred feet away, would it be wise not to make a decision? If no decision is made to move the car forward or backward, you have actually made the decision to stay in harm’s way.

Jesus combated skepticism in His own ministry (Luke 24:38-39; 42).

3. Relativism: Truth Is Different For Everyone

This view makes truth a matter of one's own perspective ... this view is called "relativism" ... it denies that truth is absolute and that it applies to *all people in all places* and at *all times*. Relativism, and its many forms, is by far the most popular view of truth on university campuses today. It is so popular in High Schools and colleges that Christians who believe truth is absolute are considered closed-minded, exclusive and intolerant. ILL: Professor Allan Bloom says in his book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely sure of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative."

Three different kinds of relativism:

1. **Truth is relative to time** ... what was true then is not necessarily true now
2. **Truth is relative to persons** ... whatever is true for you is not always true for others
3. **Truth depends on location** ... what's true in China may not be true in the United States

Reasons to reject relativism:

1. As were agnosticism and skepticism, relativism is self-destructive. The statement "all truth is relative" is impossible. To affirm relativism, a person must use an absolute truth.
2. If truth is relative to something else, what is it relative to? Truth must have something fixed and absolute by which to correspond in the real world. If nothing in the world to correspond to, then no test to see whether it is true. ILL: Clock on the wall ... to the professor's right in back of him, but to the students left in front of them. However, the clock is in a definite and fixed location which corresponds to reality.

4. Subjectivism: Truth Is What Feels Right

Belief that feelings, emotions and intuition are the keys to discovering what is true ... it is what feels right ... truth feels good ... error feels bad. ILL: Momorns appeal to the "burning in the bosom" feeling as a test of whether the Book of Momon is true.

Fatal flaws:

1. Feelings are a poor test for what is true because feelings and emotions change. Changing feelings can't be used as a basis for unchanging truth ... otherwise, truth can change along with our feelings. ILL: Law of gravity revised depending on which scantiest felt it was true.
2. What if two people have different feelings about the same statement? Which feeling should we accept? How do we find out whether the statement is true? Proper to use feelings while expressing, sharing and holding truth, but not to prove, test and support truth.
3. It is obvious that bad news can be true. If only what feels good is true, we would have to reject all news that makes us feel unpleasant.

NOTE: Feelings can be a result of or reaction to truth, but not the basis of truth.

Are those who believe in absolute truth intolerant and narrow-minded?

The most frequent charges against Christians in light of their belief in absolute truth and morality are intolerance and narrow-mindedness.

This attitude is misdirected for several reasons:

1. Truth is narrow by definition. If something is true, then its opposite must be false. ILL: If Peter's car is totally red, and it's true, then all other statements claiming that his car is a different color is false. ILL: What about math teachers who only accept one true answer on the exam? Are they narrow-minded also?
2. The one making the statement that "absolute truth is too narrow" is in fact giving an absolute truth. Thus, the one making the statement is narrow-minded too.
3. Those charging Christians with intolerance are confused about the meaning of intolerance. Intolerance refers to the manner or attitude in which one holds truth, not to the truth itself. This claim confuses what one holds (truth) with how he holds it (attitude). If holding to absolute truth makes someone intolerant, then the one making the truth claim of Christian intolerance is equally intolerant.

4. To be labeled as intolerant simply because you disagree with someone is mistaken. To be “tolerant” of other views implies that there is a real disagreement between viewpoints. Nobody tolerates what they already agree with. People who charge intolerance because of disagreement really want you to acknowledge and accept what you disagree with under the disguise of “tolerance.”

Questions To Ask People Regarding Their View of Truth

1. Pragmatic View: Truth is what works

ASK: “Lying may work at times. Does your view make those lies true?”

2. Intention View: Truth if found in good intentions

ASK: “Could there ever be a well-intending person who is wrong?”

ASK: “Liars can have good intentions. Do their good intentions make the lie true?”

3. Perspective View – Truth is a matter of one’s perspective

This view corresponds with relativism. Ask questions under relativism.

4. Correspondence View – Truth is that which corresponds to reality

Truth is discovered by asking if someone’s statements correspond with reality ... if facts support the statement, it would be considered truth. If something is true, it is true for *all people* at *all times* and in *all places* regardless of a person’s awareness or beliefs.

Questions To Ask People Regarding Barriers to Truth

1. Agnosticism: Nobody Can Discover Truth

ASK: “Are you certain? How can you be certain if you can’t know for sure that anything is true?”

2. Skepticism: Doubt Everything That Claims To Be True

CHALLENGE: “You must, therefore, be skeptical about your own skepticism.”

CHALLENGE: “Do you doubt everything that claims to be true? If not, then why do you accept some things to be true?”

3. Relativism: Truth Is Different For Everyone

ASK: “What is truth relative to? Is it relative to time, persons or location?”

ASK: “Why is truth relative time, persons or location? Why isn’t it the same for *all people* in *all places* at *all times*?”

ASK: “Doesn’t truth need to correspond with reality? If not, why not?”

4. Subjectivism: Truth Is What Feels Right

ASK: “Since feelings and emotions change, does truth change along with our feelings?”

ASK: “What if two people have different feelings about the same statements?”

ASK: “Can bad news be true?”

ASK: “If only what feels good is true, do you reject all news that makes you feel unpleasant?”