

Our Commitment to Truth

Series: Cracks – Engaging Our Divided Times
Brad Bailey – February 20, 2022

Intro

Continuing in our series focusing on navigating through our divided times. We are focusing on identifying some of the main issues which have been dividing both our culture at large...and within the Christian culture....and seeking to let God solidify some foundational understanding.

A few of us may recall the 1994 earthquake here in Los Angeles... an overpass had collapsed...and the significance was obvious... what would happen the next time pressure came upon some of the overpasses... and so they assessed them and began a process of restoring those which needed it. The cost was big... in money...in the inconvenience of closing freeways during the process...but it was worth it.

In a similar way we are looking at some of the cracks... and making sure that the foundations are sound and solid for building our future. And I appreciate your investment.

Part of what is dividing lives ... and the different narratives within Christian culture... is how we discern what is true and right.

The past couple years or more...have become known for issues related to “fake news” and “alternative facts” and “conspiracy theories”...and living in a “post-truth age”.

So I want to help us navigate this issue... to **help us affirm a commitment to truth that can serve our unity and witness.**

So let's move quickly in hearing how God speaks about the **SIGNIFICANCE of truth**... about the **NATURE of truth**... and then **some practical ways** to help guide our commitment to truth.

The Significance of Truth

It may seem obvious that truth matters. The word for truth is used 224 times in the Bible. Virtually every book in the New Testament warns followers of Jesus to be on guard against false teaching and lies. [1]

The Bible speak of ultimate truth as essential to life.

Some may recall that Jesus said...“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”(John 8:32)

This speaks of the spiritual truth that is essential for freedom. God is that truth. And Christ explained that he is the truth... the embodiment of God.

To know that truth...to know him... is to know freedom.

We might call that the highest of truths... the most essential of truths.

But the Bible also speaks of truth as a quality that is vital in how we live and relate to one another. God truth calls us to love the truth, delight in the truth, speak the truth, and walk in the truth.

A commitment to truth begins an appreciation for what it represents.

Zechariah 8:3,16-17 (GW)

This is what the Lord says: I will return to Zion and live in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth....

You must do these things: Speak the truth to each other. Give correct and fair verdicts for peace in your courts. Don't even think of doing evil to each other. Don't enjoy false testimony. I hate all these things, declares the LORD.

God is speaking to a nation that is in ruins... by it's own lack of righteousness... and the enemies that then came against it. God begins to speak of a potential restoration. And here He speaks of what they must do in order to be restored... in order to lay new foundations. And he speaks to the significance of truth... He calls them to be committed to truth.

Speak truth...

In their conversations

In their courts

In their claims against one another

Why? Because doing otherwise is to operate outside God's very nature. These things he hates... because these things are at odds with what is good. God wants us to love truth... not to see it as some moral obligation...but to love it because it is the source of all that is real...all that is good....all that establishes trust.

God says... truth is fundamental to being liberated from the powers of this world.

When God brought the people out of slavery... he could now help them to understand what freedom is rooted in.

So these people... as many as a million... newly freed from generations of slavery in Egypt... He gives 10 core commandments.

And the ninth...

The ninth commandment instructs us about the importance of truth:

Exodus 20:16

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

The reference to false testimony harkens to the way that all life between people relied on the honesty of one another. Instead of the formal courthouses we have today... they would bring conflicts and accusations to the leaders of the community...and witnesses would be called on to testify... to bear witness. The ninth commandment is essentially a call to be committed to the truth...because it is essential for trust.

Truth is foundational to trust.

Can I trust that you will act in a way that is sound and fair... or will you act in a way that is rooted in something else... perhaps trying to fulfill some unhealthy need.

If what you tell me is consistent and coherent with what I see and sense in you... then I can trust you.

If I hear you say something that was not true... perhaps exaggerated... and it appears it was connected to serving some pursuit of gaining power or money or harming another... then I lose trust.

And Jesus echoes how the heart is the source of choosing to act falsely.

Matthew 15:19

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

When our hearts begin to indulge in the vanity of gaining power over others... in contempt... we will be tempted to operate outside truth.

God knows that our commitment to truth is essential to operating in relationship with Him. We love truth because it's the way we're created by God. It's built in, so to speak. And every step we take in the direction of valuing truth and resisting falsity moves us closer to understanding that God is Truth and to fulfilling Jesus' promise that this all-important truth will heal us and make us free.

The Nature of Truth

It's helpful to understand that truth, in the most fundamental sense, is the simplest of all things. Because it simply is representing what is as it is.

When someone shares a challenging situation... perhaps related going through some legal proceedings ...I believe that the right way is the simplest way... just tell the truth. It is the only thing that actually exists. Everything else is a fabrication.

Now...as I said... it is simple in the most fundamental sense.

But assessing many things... involves making deductions based on different elements of truth... different pieces of facts... and even increasingly emerging facts.

That is true with determining justice... with establishing what provides the best assessment of understanding who is responsible for what. It is often decided based on taking time to gather what is known... allowing different deductions... to arrive at the most compelling decision.

It's also involves making deductions when speaking about truth that is not simply a direct observation.

In fact the whole scope of life is beyond simply a direct and shared observation.

This leads to truth as a commitment based on valuing both knowledge and wisdom.

When God spoke in the previous passage from Zechariah... he called them to "correct and fair verdicts"... from Hebrew words that can be translated akin to factually sounds and wisely applied.

This is what we hear in the Biblical Book of Proverbs,

Proverbs 23:23 (CEV)

Invest in truth and wisdom, discipline and good sense, and don't part with them.

Proverbs 4:5 (NLT2)

Get wisdom; develop good judgment. Don't forget my words or turn away from them.

Truth and wisdom. I believe it captures something we all know...which is that many of the larger questions in life **involve more than a single simple fact...** they can involve **many findings** that have to be **assessed and evaluated with wisdom... with good judgment.**

This is so relevant today...because we now have limitless access to unlimited information. In fact that is a big part of our challenge.

When I was in elementary school... we all had one common source of information ...if you did a report you used the World Book Encyclopedia. Possibly... if you wanted to complicate matters... the Britannica Encyclopedia.

My reports were pure plagiarism.

But this was a source that by its nature was deemed to be peer reviewed and verified.

of information...and Now this complexity... can become an excuse for dismissing any ultimate truth.

Some propose that since each individual is part of the process....that there is not such thing as absolute or ultimate truth.

That is a huge topic in itself...but I would contend that it's fundamentally flawed. The subjective nature of the observer doesn't make anything less real about the observed. It doesn't matter which set of eyes and eyeglasses we have...there is an actual object.

There is something about gravity at work in this temporal world that is not going to change regardless of an individual's belief in it... or feelings about it.

"Believing, thinking and feeling do not substitute for reality."

But we are deeply finite creatures. We are limited. Limited in what we can see. Limited in our understanding.

The whole nature of what we call science is simply making observations and deductions... often of the small windows into realities that remain full of mystery.

Why do I note this? Because it is very helpful to both affirm that...

The nature of truth involves understanding the relative degree by which we have gained facts and applied reasonably objective assessment.

In fact... it can help to recognize the differences.

The nature of truth in relationship to our human perspective

- **Subjective Truth (Truth regarding our perspective and preferences) - "I like green."**
- **Limited / Emerging Truth (Objective truth for which we have only limited knowledge and emerging facts)**
- **Coherent Truth (Objective truth that has proven reasonably consistent and coherent with what is seen and experienced. Preponderance of evidence is arguably beyond a reasonable doubt as to a conclusion.)**

I want my doctor to base any medical treatments on the more objective side.

I hope these distinctions help us to see that ...

Truth isn't a simple matter... but neither is it simply a subjective matter.

If we don't root ourselves in a value for reality... and a reasonable commitment to truth...we will no longer be acting in unity with God nor one another.

And this leads us into the current challenges that have divided people throughout the recent season.

In just the past two to four years, every day the cultural conversation across our media is speaking about fake news to alternative facts... to conspiracy theories... to QAnon... to misinformation... and censorship.

These represent some real problems with truth.

These have become labels that have become a bit too easy to use as way of dismissing anything. There are true conspiracies... and plenty of spin... manipulation of facts. positions which are ignoring some countering facts... and that can raise distrust about what some dominant voices are dismissing as conspiracy.

The commitment to truth is a challenge that crosses the political spectrum. [2]

I recently had an exchange with a friend in the medical research field...and his last line said...

“The toll from this pandemic is truly shocking. The disinformation campaign on both sides has been soul crushing at times.”

The disinformation campaign on both sides has been soul crushing at times.

That line hung out there...it spoke to what has been difficult for me during this season.

I have had to face that Christian culture is the one that is the most consumed by what I believe are legitimately conspiracies... and can easily being the most consumed...and the one suffering with conflict.

I have heard many public declarations by leaders within the American Christian culture that I believe are both false and irresponsible... particularly in the certainty by which they are said.

I have heard,

“There is no pandemic.”

“This global pandemic is actually no more significant than the common flu.”

“This global pandemic is a conspiracy perpetuated by the Democratic Party.”

“Masks are just a placebo.”

“Any pastor who isn’t gathering people indoors as usual has allowed this demonic deception and fear to rule over the church...and is simply lacking courage.”

I want to be honest... these kinds of statements have been maybe the hardest part of the past couple years....for a few reasons I suppose.

First... simply because I would contend that they’re false.. I don’t begin to have had this all figured out. But these statements are outside the realm of consistent and coherent facts... and certainly beyond claiming them with such certainty.

I know that some have wondered of all the number of deaths could be false... I have certainly wondered if there was any large scale inflating of the losses... and found there is one rather simple way to confirm the scope. Excess death... difference between the usual number of deaths in any given country...which remain fairly steady...and these which have occurred these past two years. Excess death throughout the pandemic reveals numbers significantly HIGHER than the deaths that have been attributed to the Covid virus. [3]

As for comparisons to the flu... the annual death rate of the flu is significant... but Covid has been at least ten times greater... even with every measure to stop transmission.

As for the presumption that the pandemic has been a source of some unusual deceptive spiritual fear has never been my experience. I don't find any unique work of fear about this virus in myself... nor in any of those I am close to. I don't sense something dissimilar to how I tend to relate to the countless mandates related to following health care... driving rules... or building codes.

Second, because they are said by those with an ability to know that they would be difficult to defend in a public forum that they didn't control. They weren't intended to reflect a reasonably full and fair assessment of the facts. They are intended to serve a larger narrative. They represent truth based more on fit than on fact.

Thirdly, they set in place a judgment into the church at large.

They presume that how churches navigate connection and protection when there are threats to public health... is fundamental to faithfulness in following Christ.

My hope is that if we stop and look at those statements, we will recognize that they are neither centered in the life and teachings of Christ...nor the message of the Gospel. When such declarations are cheered as if they honor... or even represent...the life and ministry of Christ... it suggests that something is being given authority to define and divide that has no basis for such centrality or certainty.

I do not believe that the way in which local churches provide forms of connection and protection during a pandemic reflects a clear Christ-centered basis for the type of judgment which many have made publicly against others... nor the division which many have who claim to follow Christ have accepted.

If hurricanes were passing through an area.... each pastor would have to decide if their congregations should plan to meet. The hurricanes may end up striking hard or passing in another direction. That is the nature of hurricanes and viruses. After the events are over... the actual danger and damage may or may have not struck ...but the choice as to gathering in-person was not rooted in the certainty of an outcome. The outcome does not establish a definitive "truth" about the assessment of risk because it is understood that there are elements which are beyond any leader's control. I also do not believe that it would be appropriate to judge such a pastor's decisions based on the "Bible stating we should meet" ... or that we should "not fear"... or that "everyone should make their own personal assessment as to whether to show up because any imposed decision is discrimination against those who disagree." The point is, unless there are no fundamental reasons whatsoever, we should accept communal leaders are making "reasonable" decisions, regardless of our agreement with their reasoning.

These have become such a part of the narrative that it's **controversial just to say** there is a pandemic... or to follow the use of masks to reduce the potential transmission.

Fourthly, it's because of **what it communicates to the world at large.**

My reaction is not because of how those statements land here... personally...but how they land out there.

I would contend that none of these statements reflect the mind and message of Christ amidst the loss of over 930,000 lives in our country...and nearly 6 million around the world.

Lastly, because there is no need for being casual with the truth.

In nearly every arguably false claim that is case...it is made as part of a campaign to resist the increasing fears of government overreach... of reducing personal and religious freedom.

I've found I could share so much of the same fears... but with no need to dismiss the validity of a pandemic.

I remember when there was a culture war against rock music. Attending an event at a church... told stories of what was behind the various groups...and then the backmasking....that they were hiding statements in the music when played backwards...and using it to subliminally influence people towards evil.

I was a communications major... I knew that if something intelligible was there if played backwards... it wouldn't be heard forwards at all.

And then they tried to play examples.

I left thinking...I am in the process of trying to navigate what shapes my life...and there is enough there if you play it forward...to think about.

And all these years later... I don't sense that there is a need to read so much into the managing of a global pandemic.., no matter how crazy and controversial.

I believe that if we want to stay united in Christ...we need to embrace a commitment to truth that stay connected to the common ground...and if we want to maintain a credible witness to the world at large...we need to embrace a commitment to truth that doesn't suggest that we are just part of a war campaign... in which we think everything is acceptable for the sake of the war.

So let me conclude with ...

Some principles to guide our commitment to truth

Don't let legitimate fears create illegitimate facts.

Of course there are no actual illegitimate facts... the point is that sometimes we have fears about what we see that is wrong...and we can feel the point we are trying to make is no vital...that we feel justified with being casual and compromised with the facts.

Don't allow fit to matter more than fact.

In one issue I was engaged in... I summarized something too simplistically... I was confident on the point...but wasn't being as full and fair in the whole of the research. And I had to admit that... and because it wasn't a reasonably full and fair statement.

Don't presume to know more than we know... to presume "certainty" when it's not appropriate.

I think one bridge that could help us...is simply to qualify the degree of certainty about claim. I think it is very different to say... there are some studies that make it unclear whether masks are effective...than to state that there is no evidence that masks are effective. The first one expresses curiosity... openness...and the latter... speaks with a certainty that defies a lot. There is so much space for people to question what may be the best ways to guide the public through a pandemic... really good points that can be made about the limits and trade-offs... so raising those seems fitting. But claiming there is a simple solution that is being hidden by a nefarious plot... will serve some drama...but at the lack of credibility.

Don't accept various claims without reasonable and objective verification.

We are living in a time in which the very means by which information comes to us makes it hard to discern what is really true.

In such an obvious cultural setting, simply discovering a viral video, without discerning the veracity of its claims, should not be an acceptable source of truth about any claim that is controversial and consequential.

If we are going to consider a claim about an issue that is controversial and consequential ... we should invest in some degree of reasonable and objective verification.

“Reasonable”... because we all have limits of time... but we also have a responsibility... and “objective”... means from a source that is not as invested in making a point.

I realize that can be a bit relative....because even the source for fact checking may have some degree of bias. But they also will focus on the actual facts of the matter.

Standard counsel includes checking with nonpartisan, fact-checking sites, such as Politifact, FactCheck.org or Snopes.com.

I believe that we need to embrace a commitment to truth that is willing to...

- **Consider our motives. (Am I willing to embrace inconvenient truth... for the sake of integrity?)**
- **Consider the author and the source. (Who is claiming this and why? Is this source reliable and reputable?)**
- **Consider the facts. (Are these claims logically consistent? Are they confirmed or challenged by other evidence?)**

There were claims that Covid was spread through 5G networks... an interesting idea...but COVID-19 is spreading in many countries that do not even have a 5G mobile network. That's a good example of stepping back and considering of the claim corresponds to reality.

Closing:

Let's close with stopping before God's invitation...and invitation not to just see truth as a weapon... but to love truth... out of devotion to God... to love it so much that we will accept inconvenient truth... truth that may not serve what we had planned... and to know that our commitment to truth is what builds trust with our neighbor.

Closing Prayer

Closing Song: For the one

[For The One \(Lyric Video\) - Jenn Johnson | Starlight](#)

Further Reading:

Clinging to Truth: Biblical & Practical Guidance for Competing Narratives by Rich Nathan - [here](#)

Discipleship in the Age of Conspiracy Theories: How Church Leaders Can Nurture the Evangelical Mind by Ed Stetzer - [here](#)

Notes:

1. We can hear this call similarly in...

“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish” (Prov. 19:9).

We are called to put our trust in the true and living God, “who never lies” ([Titus 1:2](#)).

And of course Jesus is the very embodiment of truth. As Dustin W. Bengtson summarizes, “Standing before Pontius Pilate during the final moments of His life, Jesus declared the reason He came into this world was to “bear witness to the truth” ([John 18:37](#)). Jesus added, “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Notice in His testimony that Jesus proclaimed that He came to bear witness to *the* truth—not a vague, obscure concept, open to one’s own personal interpretation of what truth is. Jesus came to bear witness to God’s truth, the objective truth. The whole of His ministry fulfilled this divine charge of truth bearing. It was prophesied that He would be “full of . . . truth” (1:14). He later calls Himself “the truth” (14:6). His whole teaching and preaching ministry was characterized as one of “the way of God in truth” ([Matt. 22:16](#), NASB). Jesus entered this world proclaiming the truth, pointing to the truth, bearing witness to the truth, and confirming the truth in all those who listen to His voice. Jesus is the full and definitive expression of God’s absolute truth.”

The Book of Acts commends the commitment to truth: “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men” (Acts 17:11–12).

2. Many in the science community... are committed to God... they know that the scientific field can cultivate an arrogance and pride like any field can...but science is fundamentally the forefront of our exploration as managers of the earth. It is about exploring truth...by way of facts and deduction.

Former National Institutes of Health director [Francis Collins](#) and Deborah Haarsma, an astronomer... are both followers of Jesus. They are deeply and thoughtfully and committed to Christ and the authority of the Scriptures. In a recent interview with the two, Haarsma said...

“The world has become so aggressively polarized that it seems like every issue has to land in a red camp or a blue camp, and when you view the world that way, somehow Christian faith gets assigned to red and science gets assigned to blue. And for scientists who are Christians, like myself and Francis Collins, this just doesn’t make any sense to us.”

From Francis Collins on COVID-19 Politics: ‘The Culture War Is Literally Killing People’

By [Adelle M Banks](#), February 4, 2022 - [here](#)

3. See Excess mortality during the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) [here](#). *The Economist* built a [machine-learning model](#) to estimate the number of excess deaths during the pandemic for 223 countries & regions.¹⁹ From these country-level estimates they calculate a global figure.

Globally, the model estimates that the total number of excess deaths is two to four times higher than the reported number of [confirmed deaths](#) due to COVID-19.