

“Some people say God exists. Other people say he doesn't exist. I think they may both be right.” It was almost 20 years ago when I first heard a college student make that statement, and I laughed. Two contradictory statements can both be true. That is elementary logic. Yet, today I increasingly hear phrases like “My truth and your truth.” “What is true for you doesn't have to be true for me.” “Truth is not out there, it is whatever each of us experiences in here.” This changing understanding of what “truth” means, causes people to reach conclusions like “I believe both Christians and Buddhism are true, in their own way. It is also reflected in the recent study George Barna did for Arizona Christian University. His survey found 58% of American adults said they agreed with this statement: “Identifying moral truth is up to each individual. There are no absolute moral truths that apply to every person all the time.” This explains why people say things like, “I am personally against abortion. I would never have one, but I can not say what is right or wrong for someone else.”

Friends, what I am describing is a result of decades of “Truth Decay.” And that is something fluoride can stop. I believe we face a “Truth Crisis” in American culture. Not only are people unsure about what is true and what is not, many question if there is ever such a thing as truth, a truth that is true for everyone. And they would add, even if there is such a thing as truth outside of ourselves, we would never be able to know what that truth is. Now, I realize that for many folks, including maybe some in this room, this doesn't seem like a relevant topic. “Pastor Dan I have bills to pay, kids that need help with their homework. Plus, I want to make sure I am reading my Bible and keeping up on what is happening in the political realm. And football season just started. I do not think I have time to worry about some philosophical discussion about truth.”

Friends, I understand that. I am going to do my best to make sure this sermon does not seem like an academic lecture. But folks, this is important stuff. We are going to have a very difficult time persuading people to embrace “The truth of the Gospel,” if they do not believe there is such a thing as truth. So let's pause and pray the Lord would enable me to speak the right words and help you

to hear, understand, believe and apply the truth today.

For decades, Dr. Billy Graham would stand up in front of tens of thousands of people and say, “The Bible says” And would rightly assume that for most Americans that was a trustworthy authority. The common understanding was, “If the Bible says it, it must be true.” That is no longer the case. (A candidate for office who says, “ I believe homosexual behavior is wrong because the Bible says it is wrong,” will quickly become the objective of ridicule and scorn.)

Now, some folks will point to supposed errors and contradictions in the Bible, or make the claim the Bible text has been corrupted and we really do not know what it originally said. These type of objections are often fairly easy to refute. Yet, in recent years things have become more complicated. Many say the problem is not that the Bible is an inadequate authority, but there simply can be no authority that applies to all people at all times.

A new understanding of truth has dominated American universities for at least the past couple of decades and has increasingly seeped into everyday life, even here on the Iron Range. Some of you are thinking, “Pastor Dan, truth is what is true. That is how it has always been.” Well, stick with me. This new view of truth is called Post-Modernism. There are various dimensions to it, but the primary one is this: The rejection of *Meta-Narratives*. Say what, Pastor Dan? Meta-Narrative. An all encompassing story. A story that explains everything. The clearest example of a Meta-Narrative is Bible Christianity. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible's story of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation, explains everything that needs to be explained. There are other Meta-Narratives. Religions such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Mormonism all fall in that category, as well as a secular philosophy's like Neo-Darwinism. Now Christianity provides a more clear and comprehensive explanation than any of these. However, post-modernism rejects all meta-narratives including Bible Christianity. They insist there is not one all encompassing story, but each culture, each community, maybe even each individual has their own story. They insist no

narrative is inherently truer or better than another. Which means each culture, community, maybe even each individual gets to determine their own truth.

So where does this all lead? Well, first to Moral Relativism. We have already mentioned this. This is the idea that there are no absolute moral standards. What is wrong for me, may not be wrong for you. So, when I tell my friend Joe that I think it is wrong for him to have an affair, he responds, "Well, if you think affairs are wrong, fine. You do not have to have one. But who are you to decide what is right or wrong for me? What I am doing feels right to me, and I am not going to let anyone else try to make me feel guilty." In the hit song "You Light up My Life" (1977) Debbie Boone sang "It can be wrong, when it feels so right," Debbie Boone! The problem with Moral Relativism becomes very clear in more extreme situations.

A question I often ask someone flirting with Moral Relativism is this: "Was it wrong for Nazi's to kill Jews?" Here is a conversation with my friend Sue on that topic. "Well of course, it was wrong," she says.

"Why was it wrong?" I ask. "It just was. Are you saying it was ok for Nazi's to kill Jews." "No, not at all," I reply. "I am just curious why you think it was wrong. I believe murder is wrong because God has commanded us not to murder. That is what the Bible teaches. You have told me you don not really believe the Bible, so I am curious why you think it was wrong? Many of the individual Nazi soldiers thought they were doing the right thing. It felt right to them. The German government and apparently society said what they were doing was fine. So why do you think it was wrong?"

Often what is comes down to is that people believe there are no moral absolutes when it come to things like sexual behavior, telling the truth and relationships with other people. They believe, however, that some things that are absolutely wrong...murder, torturing children, and racism show up on many people's lists. Yet, if there is no absolute truth, no absolute moral standards, how do we really know those things are wrong? I believe that is would be impossible to convict any Nazi leaders of war crimes today, as they did at Nuremberg over 70 years ago, because we no

longer have the common moral standard that was built on foundation of Bible Christianity.

The other point I like to make with Moral Relativists is that their position is really contradictory and self-refuting. "So Sue, you are telling me there are no moral absolutes?" "Correct." "Are you sure about that?" "Yes." "Absolutely sure?" Well.... Folks, that is the Achilles Heel, the great weakening of all Post Modern thinking. If you claim that nothing is true for all people, at all times and places, then you can not claim, with any certainty, that your own statement is true. If there is no absolute truth, then there is nothing we know for sure. If we embrace Moral Relativism, we condemn ourselves to wandering around in a thick moral fog where we will never be certain about what is right and what is wrong.

Second result of Post-Modernism thinking is Pluralism, especially Religious Pluralism. A common idea today is that everyone is free to choose their own religion and that one should not question or criticize another persons beliefs. Now, I agree with the first part. Both as American and as a Christian, I do not think people should be coerced into affirming religious or political beliefs. But, I think a quest for truth means it is healthy to have those beliefs questioned and even criticized. In the Post-Modernism perspective, all beliefs are pretty much reduced to opinions, and no ones opinions are inherently better than anyone elses. I do not buy that. I am convinced that facts and logic matter. It is certainly possible to compare two religions and seek to determine which is true or best and which is not. I would love to see all religious groups peacefully coexisting on this planet. But claiming that all religions are true or all have equal value can not be the foundation for co-existing. Two religions can both

be false, but they can not both be true. Why? Because they make contradictory claims about essential realities. They can not both be right.

For example, we as Christians believe that Jesus was the Eternal Son of God, and by His life, death and resurrection provides salvation to all who trust in Him. Islam, however, teaches that Jesus was a great teacher and prophet, and denies that he was God the Son. It denies He ever died on the cross, much less rose from the dead. If you believe

Jesus rose from the dead, you are not a Muslim. And if you do not believe in His resurrection, you are not a Christian. One can't be both Muslim and Christian. The reality is Jesus either rose from the dead or He did not. Now, Post-Modernism will say something like, "A belief in the resurrection was very real to Jesus' followers and motivated them to share the Gospel with many. And yes, a Muslim could affirm that and even an Atheist could. Yet, it was not a belief in Jesus' resurrection that motivated Jesus' followers, it was the fact, the truth of His resurrection. Or as the Apostle Paul put,

1 Corinthians 15:14 – and if Christ has not been raised (from the dead,) then our preaching is in vain, and so is your faith. Folks, the exclusive claims of Christianity are such that if any other religion is true, Christianity can not be true. And if Christianity is true, no other religion can be true. Now, that doesn't mean that there are not some truth and helpful teachings in other religions. It doesn't mean that all adherents of other religions are evil people. It just means that Jesus was either the Eternal Son of God who died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead to guarantee our salvation or he was not. Post-Modernism likes to opt for the both and over the either or. Sometimes, however, the truth, reality, is very much either or.

There are other dimensions of Post-Modernism that we will not focus on today. Much of what is labeled Diversity and Multi-Culturalism in American culture today flow out of Post-Modernism thinking. These are often in contrast with the celebration of diversity and unity among individuals and cultures to which the Bible calls us. In recent years, Critical Theory, especially Critical Race Theory, has been the subject of a lot of discussion in many circles. However, these flow out of Post-Modernism thoughts and are in contrast to Bible's goal of racial reconciliation. Those will have to be topics for another day.

So, in America today, many people are embracing a Post-Modernism understanding of truth, which includes both Moral Relativism, what is wrong for you, may not be wrong for me, and Religious Pluralism, which tends to view all religions as equal, by assuming that religious beliefs are not really connected with facts, but are merely opinions. This again is all rooted in a belief that there is no Meta-Narrative, no one story that

explains everything we need to understand. And so it provides a different

perspective of truth, one which is far more solid, far more appealing and far more connected to reality.

In **John 18:38a**, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus this question: **What is truth?** Now I do not think Pilate was intending to ask a deep, philosophical question. He was really responding to the statement Jesus made in **John 18:37b – I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.** Jesus really had answered Pilate's question back in **John 14:6** When he said, **"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** Indeed, Jesus is the one who (John 1:14) is full of grace and truth. So, the question should not really be "What is truth?" As much as "Who is truth?" The answer to that question is the Triune God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the Eternal Son. To know Him is to know the truth. Truth is what corresponds to reality, and whatever God considers to be reality is the truth. Whatever God says is good is good. What God says is wrong is wrong. What God says is beautiful is beautiful. God only speaks truth.

And how do we know what he says? Does he speak to us in an audible voice? On occasion. But for the most part God speaks to us through His word, the Bible. The Old and New Testament scriptures are the means through which God communicates the truth to us. In **John 17:17**, Jesus prays for His disciples, including us, **"Father, sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth."** So the Christian understanding, the view of truth taught in the Bible, is this: God is the Eternal Creator, Ruler and Sustainer of the Universe. Thus, what He views as reality is the truth. The truth corresponds to that reality. His truth is not contingent, it does not depend upon the thoughts or actions of human beings or anything else in the universe. Thus, it is absolute, unconditional truth. Francis Schaeffer called it true truth. I call it truth with a capital "T." If God says something is wrong, it is wrong, period. God has chosen to reveal part of this truth to us through the Bible. Now, he doesn't reveal everything to us. Yet, He gives us sufficient truth that enables us to live in a way that is pleasing to him. Or we could say, God doesn't explain

everything to us, but explains everything that needs to be explained to us. That is reflected in **Deuteronomy 29:29 – The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.** Thus, through the things that have been revealed, through the Bible, we have been given the knowledge that enables us to think and act in a way that is consistent with the truth.

Now, this doesn't mean anyone always sees clearly the truth that has been revealed. As Paul reminds us in

1 Corinthians 13:12 – Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror. This means even though God has revealed what we need to know, we don't always understand what it

means. That is part of what growing as a believer in Jesus is all about, understanding what He has revealed in His word more clearly. As I like to say, the Bible is like a pool of water that is shallow enough for children to wade, and deep enough that elephants can drown. Understanding the basic message of the Bible is not rocket science. It is very clear and understandable to even a child. Yet, understanding all the nuances and implications of what the Bible teaches doesn't happen with even with a lifetime of study. There are still plenty of things I am trying to figure out. For example, I was thinking the other day about the fear of the Lord, which **Proverbs 1:7** says is the beginning of wisdom? But what exactly does it mean to "Fear the Lord" and how does that relate to **1 John 4:18 – There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.** God has revealed truth on that topic, but I do not see very clearly at this point.

Perhaps the most disturbing findings in Barna's survey is that many who claim to be Christians really do not see God or the Bible as the source of truth. Barna simply asked that question: What is the basis of truth? And then gave six choices: God, science, inner certainty, tradition, society consensus, or there is no truth. Now 72% of people who go to Evangelistic churches, said God was the source of truth. But that leaves 28% who did not affirm that. In Mainline Protestant churches, the

number who said God was the source of truth was only 37%, with many folks opting for science or their inner thoughts as the basis for truth. The numbers were only a little better among those who attend Roman Catholic churches. The reality is a lot of folks who consider themselves Christians, do not embrace the Bible perspective, that God is the source of all truth .

I hope that is not true of you. At Chisholm Baptist Church we describe ourselves as God centered, truth driven, Gospel focused, grace saturated church. That truth driven part is what we have been talking about today. We believe that God is the source and that He has revealed this truth, not exhaustively, but sufficiently to us through the Bible. We spend a lot of time seeking to discover what the Lord has said to us in His word, discern what these words mean, and then determine how they apply in our daily lives. We do this because we believe the Bible is not just one of many sources of truth, but because it reveals ultimate truth. Yes. Experience and logic are helpful in understanding this truth, but the focus needs to be on the words of this book through which God has revealed His will and His ways. And most importantly, it is through this book that God reveals Himself to us and we come to know Him. Because God is not only the ultimate source of truth, He is truth, the God of truth.