

### **What is truth?**

Folks, that is a question Pontius Pilate asked Jesus almost 2,000 years ago, and it is a question people are still asking today. And most folks seem to be just as confused as Pilate was.

In the political realm, we have descended into a “post-truth” era which seems dominated by “fake news.” Statements and stories are often evaluated not on their accuracy, but on whether they fit what is considered the preferred narrative.

I think of the case involving the students from Covington High School in Kentucky. Various parts of the news media reported the students had been disrespectful toward and were harassing a Native American activist in Washington, D.C.

When the evidence revealed that is not what happened, rather than acknowledge their error, some in the media doubled down. They claimed that even if these particular white students had not mistreated the man on this occasion, whites have frequently wronged Native Americans on other occasions. Thus, the story was still, in a sense, considered “true.” So, we now have a “true story” that never really happened.

### **So, what is truth?**

Post-Truth. Fake News. Incidents grow easily in the post-modern environment that has started to dominate our culture. In this view, there is no such thing as absolute truth. All truth is relative. Something may be true for you, but not true for me. We have freedom to create our own truth.

I remember seeing an interview with a young man on a Florida beach, probably during Spring Break, who said, “Some people say God exists. Other people say he doesn’t exist. I think they may both be right.” Really? His friends reacted as if this fellow was making a profound statement, but I was kind of wondering what he had been smoking. If contradictory beliefs can both be true, the word “true” or “truth” really doesn’t mean anything.

**Yet, I choose to describe CBC as a “truth-driven church.” So, what does that mean in**

**our post-truth, post-modern, relativistic society?** Well, that is the topic we will explore for the next 25-30 minutes. Let’s pause and pray that I will be able to speak truth clearly and that the Lord would enable each of us to hear and heed the truth this morning.

**#1 As a truth-driven church, we have an answer to Pilate’s question: What is truth? We know truth is what is real.**

Truth corresponds to reality. That is certainly how Jesus used that word when he said to Pilate:

**John 18:37b – I came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth will recognize what I say is true.**

Folks, I want to give a quick philosophy lesson this morning. The Bible warns us against vain, man-made philosophies and with good reason. Yet, unless we understand clearly what truth involves, we will not only be confused in our minds, but it will harm our souls.

**Here are seven truths about truth, which I borrowed from Professor Christopher Ullman. This is a classical or common sense understanding of truth:**

**1) A statement is true if it corresponds to reality. It is false if it does not.**

In other words, what I just said a moment ago – truth is about reality.

**2) All truth is exclusive.**

That simply means that anything that conflicts with the truth is false. If God exists, it cannot be true that he doesn’t exist.

**3) Truth is discovered, not invented.**

We don’t get to make up our own truth. Truth exists outside of one’s own mind.

**4) Beliefs cannot change a fact.**

Believing something to be true or false doesn't make it true or false. We can believe anything to be true, but we cannot make anything true.

**5) Truth transcends culture.**

No matter where or when you live, the truth is still true.

**6) Just because most people or everyone in a particular culture believe something is true, that doesn't make it true.**

The earth revolved around the sun in 2000 B.C., just as much as it does today, even if no one then thought it did.

**7) Truth is still true even if the people professing or proclaiming it have bad attitudes or actions.**

When Adolf Hitler said the grass was green and the sky was blue, he was speaking the truth. Many things Hitler said were false, but they were not false because he said them. They were false because they did not correspond with reality.

Okay, that isn't too hard to grasp, is it? As I said, this is pretty much a common sense understanding. Yet, it is a foundation of what it means to be a truth-driven church. We are about reality. We don't say, "Well, even if God doesn't really exist, our beliefs about God make us feel good or are helpful to us, so in that sense are still true." No! If God, the God in whom we believe, does not really exist, what we are doing is ridiculous. CBC needs to close its doors and the building can become ..... I don't know, a ..... We are about what is real!

**#2 As a truth-driven church, we believe truth is discovered through what God has revealed in the Bible.**

We believe the true and living God, the God who created and rules the universe, has spoken and speaks to us through the words in the Bible. We do not believe the ultimate source of truth is science or empiricism, what we experience through our five senses. Oh, many things can be learned that way, but so many important things cannot be:

Why are we here? What is the meaning or purpose of life? What happens to me after I die? What makes something good or evil? What does it mean to love? Why should we love? Folks, those are all questions, important questions that cannot be answered in a science lab.

Nor do we believe the ultimate source of truth is logic, rational thinking, or that we have an innate sense of truth where deep inside we just know what is true or not.

No, the truth about who we are, why we are here, and where we are going has to be revealed to us. And we are convinced this is what God has done through the Bible.

Now, our belief that the Bible is God's Word for us is not a shot in the dark. It is not an irrational faith, because there are reasons why we believe that. Though we cannot prove beyond reasonable doubt that the Bible is the authoritative source for truth, the preponderance of evidence points it to being just that.

The most significant evidence is Jesus himself. He established his authority by all that he did while he was on earth and especially by his resurrection from the dead.

**Romans 1:4 – He (Jesus) was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

If we choose to accept Jesus' authority, then we need to accept what he says about the Bible. Here, Jesus prays for his followers, including us:

**John 17:17 – Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.**

And, indeed, Jesus affirms both the authority of the Old Testament and the New Testament as he commissions his apostles to proclaim his truth to the world. Thus, the Bible is God's Word for us, what it teaches is true, and the words in this book are filled with the authority of God himself. Thus, when the Bible speaks, God speaks. And when the Creator and Sovereign of the universe speaks, we know we are hearing the truth.

**#3 As a truth-driven church, the Bible is our authority and guide for both our belief and practice.**

As David says:

**Psalms 119:105 – Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**

For those of us seeking to follow Jesus, the Bible is that bright flashlight which illuminates the path Jesus wants us to follow, both as a church and as individuals. The Bible is full of instructions of how to live in a way that honors the Lord. It also teaches us how we are to treat one another. And it tells us how to believe and live in a way that enables us to experience freedom, forgiveness, meaning, peace, joy, love, hope – and ultimately, eternal life.

The Bible also plays a crucial role as a moral guide. It is becoming more and more evident that without the Bible our society is engulfed in a thick fog of moral confusion. We seem to have no way of knowing whether a particular sexual practice is right or wrong, whether the lives of human beings are more important than the lives of animals, or whether there are any inherent distinctions between males and females.

As Tolstoy noted, “Without God, everything is permissible.”

And, even if we acknowledge God exists, but deny he has spoken through the Bible and insist God is silent, we end up in the same moral fog.

Yet, the most important role the Bible plays is guiding us to the path of salvation. Jesus says:

**John 14:6 – “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

We can experience God’s salvation only by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. That is an essential, but not a self-evident truth. The Bible helps us understand our need for a Savior, and the Bible points us to Jesus as that Savior.

In Romans 1, the Apostle Paul notes that people cannot believe the gospel, cannot put their faith in Jesus, unless they first hear the gospel. He then says:

**Romans 10:17 – So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**

The Word of God, the Bible. Over the years, I have heard a wide variety of testimonies of how people have become believers in Jesus, but they always involve reading the Bible or hearing its message in some way. The Bible guides us on the path to life, eternal life.

**#4 As a truth-driven church, we believe everything we need to know to be faithful to the Lord is found within the Bible.**

**2 Timothy 3:16 NLT – All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.**

**2 Timothy 3:17 NLT – God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.**

Folks, these verses point us to what theologians call, “the sufficiency of Scripture.” Everything we need to know to faithfully follow Jesus and live a life which pleases the Lord, sufficient knowledge, is found within the Bible.

Now, that doesn’t mean there are no other books worth reading or other things worth knowing. Studying Algebra, Chemistry, Psychology, or the History of the NFL can all be worthwhile endeavors. However, one can be a faithful follower of Jesus without knowing any of those things.

The sufficiency of Scripture also means we don’t need any other word from God, any other revelations, to be faithful in following Jesus. What we have in the Bible is sufficient, so that is where we should focus. This is something that often distinguishes us as CBC from other churches.

For example, the Roman Catholic Church believes the Bible is God’s Word. However, they also put emphasis on tradition, and believe God speaks through the traditions of the church. For example, they believe in the assumption of Mary, meaning she was assumed or taken up to heaven without ever dying. They do not embrace this doctrine because they think the Bible teaches this. Rather, it is because church tradition says so. The Roman Catholic Church teaches God speaks through both the Bible and tradition.

Many liberal, mainline churches refer to the Bible as God's Word, though they often say the Bible contains the Word of God. This means they think some parts of the Bible are merely human words. They also put a lot of emphasis on what they consider "reason."

For example, some pastors acknowledge the Apostle Paul, indeed, taught that homosexual behavior is wrong, but claim he was mistaken. Through science, they say, God has helped us understand that homosexuality is natural behavior for some. The assumption is God speaks through both the Bible and human reason.

Then, there are many charismatic churches who affirm just as clearly as we do that the Bible is the Word of God. However, they also believe God speaks through experiences such as dreams, visions and inner impressions. People in churches like this will say, "God told me the new carpet at church should be red instead of green." These churches claim God speaks to us through both the Bible and through spiritual experiences.

But, Pastor Dan, don't you believe God can speak to someone through dreams or visions? Certainly. God can do whatever he pleases. And I think sometimes he speaks that way. And sometimes he speaks through tradition. And sometimes he speaks through human reason.

**Yet, because I believe in the authority and sufficiency of the Bible, there are two things I keep in mind:**

**1<sup>st</sup> – What the Bible says trumps these other sources of revelation.** If there is any contradiction or tension with what the Bible says, then these traditions, human reason and spiritual experiences are to be rejected. Period.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Any revelation God does provide through these other sources is not essential.** It might be encouraging, even helpful; but it is not necessary to faithfully follow Jesus.

We don't need it to live in a way that pleases the Lord. Everything we need to know, God has revealed through the Bible. That is why we want to make the Bible the focus of our church's ministry and our individual lives as Christians.

Tradition is fine. Human reason is wonderful. Spiritual experiences are great. But it is the Bible that is God's Word to us. It is the Bible which is the infallible guide along the path of life. And it is through the Bible we find everything we need to be a faithful follower of Jesus.

**#5 As a truth-driven church, we strive to understand the Bible.**

Hearing God's Word is important, but we also need to work at properly interpreting what those words mean. As Christians study the Bible, they often end up in one ditch or the other.

Some decide the Bible is so difficult to understand that ordinary people cannot be trusted to even read it. That was the mistake made by the Roman Catholic Church for centuries, as they insisted only trained clergy be allowed to read the Scriptures.

The other ditch, this is one into which some Baptists fall, is thinking the Bible is easy to understand and no work is necessary to properly interpret Scripture. That is simply false.

Dr. Haddon Robinson was President of Denver, Dallas and Gordon Theological Seminaries. He died a couple of years ago, but I like what he said:

*"The people involved in the public relations department of the church always make Bible study sound as though it is easy. It is not. It takes effort to understand this text, and even more to understand how it applies to our lives."*

Friends, that is why the Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:15 that "rightly handling the word of truth" requires study and diligence. We should also be listening to gifted and trained teachers whom God has called to help people understand the Bible. It is really quite arrogant for someone to say, "I don't need anyone else to tell me what the Bible means. I can read it for myself."

Now, along with studying, we need to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to teach us through his Word. One of the most important roles the Holy Spirit has today is called "illumination" – shining his light on the Bible so we can understand what God's words mean for our lives. It is through diligent study and sincere prayer that we come to

understand God's truth. Every time we open the Bible, it might be good to pray:

**Psalm 119:18 – Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.**

In other words: Lord, open our minds so we can intellectually understand what the Bible means and open our hearts so we can comprehend what these words mean for our lives.

However, even with much prayerful study, we should never make the mistake of thinking we have “mastered” the Bible and understand it completely. We all have more to learn. We all see through a glass darkly. Yet, we keep in mind the words of:

**Deuteronomy 29:29 – “The LORD our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us, so that we may obey all the terms of these instructions.**

We should also remember what D.L. Moody said:

*“The Bible was not given so much to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.”*

**#6 As a truth-driven church, we should have a deep hunger for God's Word.**

We need to realize that the Bible is a marvelous gift from God. I was struck by this report from a missionary a few years ago. He was in an African airport where he encountered a pastor from Chad traveling home to that war-torn, North African country.

The missionary learned the pastor was allowed to carry twenty more pounds of luggage onto the plane. He asked, “What can I send with you? Sugar? Powdered milk? Medicine?”

The pastor replied, “If you please, sir, I would like some Bibles. Back home in Chad, we lost almost everything in the civil war. We learned to place less importance on that which passes away and more importance on that which lasts.”

The missionary was surprised because he had assumed that food would have been a bigger need than Bibles. Later he wrote:

*“We have heard so often, ‘The hungry stomach has no ears’ that we misread the Book of Romans to say, ‘Faith comes from what one eats,’ instead of ‘Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.’ We must not fail to share our bread with those who are hungry, but neither dare we forget that ‘man shall not live by bread alone.’”*

Friends, that is so true. There is little value in having a stomach that is full when one's soul is starving. The Bible provides wonderful nourishment for our souls.

This truth is illustrated beautifully in an old Jewish ceremony. The Feast of Shavuot commemorates Moses receiving the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, from God. Part of the Feast involves fathers taking their young sons to the rabbi. The rabbi sat each boy on his lap and then showed him a slate on which were written the Hebrew alphabet, a passage from the Scriptures, and the words, “May the Torah be your occupation.” Then the slate was covered with honey, and the child licked it – figuratively consuming the Holy Words which would nourish his soul.

Oh friend, in a similar way, may the Lord give you a hunger for his word.

**As you read and study the Bible, may you find its taste sweet, may it bring strength to your soul, and may the truth it contains enable you to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ!**