

# Arbiters of Truth

- Last time, we talked about Decisions we make in life
  - Values -> Decisions
  - Decisions -> Actions
  - Where do our values come from?
    - They come from what we believe to be true
      - Our beliefs explain the “why” behind our values
  - Example in the garden
    - **[Genesis 2:16-17 ESV] [16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."**
      - Only command that God gave to Adam
      - God's truth: die if they ate from the tree
      - As long as they believed God, their values / decisions / actions would align
    - **[Genesis 3:1-6 ESV] [1] Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" [2] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"**
      - Enemy is calling Eve's beliefs into question
      - She wasn't solid on God's truth
        - He never said they couldn't TOUCH it
        - She didn't have a spiritually firm footing going into the trial
    - **[4] But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."**
      - Satan spoke definitively, as though it was fact
      - He produced an alternate truth (lie)
    - **[6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.**
      - Decision and action: eating the fruit
      - Valued: becoming wise
      - Believed: God was lying and that the serpent was telling the truth
- Today, we will talk about what we believe
  - “What a person believes to be true”
  - People don't normally KNOWINGLY believe lies
  - Since we seek to believe what is true, talking about truth
    - Not about “telling the truth”
    - Basing our beliefs on Truth which is the basis of our values, decisions, & actions
- Truth = “the body of real things, events, and facts”
  - Everyone has a belief system that is based on something they think is true
  - 4 common things that people base their beliefs on

- Science, Experience, Culture, Imagination
  - Another way to think about these is as “arbiters of truth”
    - Arbiter = “a person who settles a dispute or has ultimate authority in a matter.”
      - How do we determine what we believe to be true?
        - What is the final authority in our lives?
        - Everyone has one or more
      - When presented with a situation, where you don’t know what to believe, what is the standard that you use to answer the question?
        - This shapes the way that we do life, important that we choose very carefully
  - **Science**
    - Man’s understanding of what God has chosen to make known to man based on what can be observed and measured
      - Limited by:
        - Man’s cognitive ability to understand
        - What man has seen
        - Man’s tools for measurement
        - What God has chosen to reveal
    - Science has helped deepen my appreciation for how big God is
      - When confronted with something you don’t understand
        - Do we let go of what God says or what man says?
        - Remember we have an enemy who is actively trying to offer you an “alternate truth”, just like Eve.
        - **[John 8:44 ESV] [44] You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.**
        - Don’t trade truth for an imperfect understanding of an incomplete picture of the world.
      - Science is widely looked at and taught as absolute fact
        - When done right, it can be useful as we try to understand things
        - “Replication Crisis”
          - Can’t reproduce experiment results 70% of the time
        - So, what if that is my arbiter of truth?
    - People whose definition of truth is based upon science have a moving target
      - New discoveries / studies / observations
      - **[Daniel 2:20-22 ESV] [20] Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. [21] He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; [22] he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.**
        - There are things which are hidden from man, and no amount of science will discover it unless God is ready to reveal it.
      - We have a big God and one my favorite traits of God is that man will NEVER EVER be able to fully comprehend Him
  - **Experience**
    - Similar to science, but they rely on their own observation rather than those of others as their arbiter of truth
    - “We see the world as we are, not as it is”

- **[Proverbs 3:5-7 ESV] [5] Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. [7] Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.**
- David & his men were reminded of this principle:
- **[2 Samuel 6:2-5 ESV] [2] And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim. [3] And they carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, [4] with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark. [5] And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.**
  - To these folks, it was a time of celebration because the ark was being brought back to where it belonged
  - There was a problem:
    - They were handling the holy things of God in a way that seems right to them, rather than in the way God prescribed
    - **[Exodus 25:13-14 ESV] [13] You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. [14] And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them.**
    - **[Numbers 4:15 ESV] [15] And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, as the camp sets out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry these, but they must not touch the holy things, lest they die. These are the things of the tent of meeting that the sons of Kohath are to carry.**
    - **[Numbers 7:9 ESV] [9] But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because they were charged with the service of the holy things that had to be carried on the shoulder.**
      - Their experience was that it was easier to carry the ark on a cart
      - But, this wasn't aligned with the truth that God provided
- **[2 Samuel 6:6-7 ESV] [6] And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. [7] And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.**
  - Uzzah's belief: God would accept his good intentions
  - His values: do his best for God (best cart, best job driving cart, best to steady the ark)
  - His decision and action: reach out and grab the ark, despite God's clear warning
- There was a truth that existed outside of Uzzah's personal belief system.
  - Didn't matter if he agreed, understood, or even knew about it
    - God said that those who touched the holy things would die
  - Here's a principle to take from Uzzah's story
    - We do not get to approach God on our terms!
- We like to think we are "right"
  - It takes a lot of confidence to believe that you can be right about everything
    - Paul warned against this:
    - **[Romans 12:3 ESV] [3] For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but**

**to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.**

- In the same way that the scientists have gaps in their understanding
  - Isn't it MORE likely that any one person will?
- Using our experience as an arbiter of truth is dangerous
  - Our experiences change over our lifetime
  - The attitude that "I'm right because I'm me" is steeped in pride
    - **[1 Peter 5:5 ESV] [5] Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."**
- **Culture / Society**
  - Scripture show lots of examples where the majority was wrong.
    - **[Numbers 13:2 ESV] [2] "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them."**
      - God sent spies to the land "which I AM giving to the people of Israel"
    - **[Numbers 13:31 ESV] [31] Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are."**
      - What is their arbiter of truth?
        - The spies trusted their experience over God's promise
    - **[Numbers 14:1-5 ESV] [1] Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. [2] And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! [3] Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" [4] And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." [5] Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel.**
      - These are the Israelites on the edge of the promised land
      - God was about to give it to them
        - "ALL THE CONGREGATION" turned from God and chose a lie
      - People who let their society or culture dictate truth were wanted back in Egypt
    - **[Numbers 14:6-10 ESV] [6] And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes [7] and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. [8] If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. [9] Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." [10] Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel.**
      - This society believed that God had lied
    - **[Numbers 14:11-12 ESV] [11] And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? [12] I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."**

- Moses pleaded for God to have mercy on them
  - **[Numbers 14:20-24 ESV] [20] Then the LORD said, "I have pardoned, according to your word. [21] But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, [22] none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, [23] shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. [24] But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it.**
- We live in a post-Christian society
  - Our nation was founded on Christian values
  - Our society's values have changed because our definition of truth has changed
- No matter how "spiritual" or "godly" any group of people may seem, we must remember that we will all be held personally accountable for the lives we live
  - It is critical that the church not tether herself to any society, nation, ideology, political party, or movement
    - If the enemy can corrupt the thinking of God's chosen people, don't you think the "father of lies" is willing to use these things as instruments to trade us down to "alternate truths"?
- The prophet Isaiah described a society that sounds similar to ours, today:
  - **[Isaiah 59:14-15 ESV] [14] Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. [15] Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.**
- As believers, we can not let our society and culture be our arbiter of truth
  - You may not be popular for it, but history shows that this is a particularly unstable place to anchor your life on.
- **Imagination**
  - Some people recognize that God is bigger than they can imagine
    - They then use their imagination to try to explain truth
      - Perhaps, they figure it will be closer than normal human reasoning
      - Not based on science, society, or their experience
  - Example
    - Believer says "God will be like whatever each person thinks he is"
      - This is what they really think is true
      - But it isn't based on anything except their own thoughts / opinions
    - Others search for truth in the spirit world:
      - **[1 Timothy 4:1 ESV] [1] Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,**
        - Some focus on angels and other spirits as a means to know truth
        - Though angels are real, scripture never tells us to make them the object of our attention.
          - We are to have our eyes on Jesus.
      - **[1 Timothy 2:5 ESV] [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,**
        - Satan uses real things / good things to take our eyes off of Jesus
  - As believers, we must not let mysticism / angels / our imagination determine truth in our lives.

- Science, Experience, Society, and Imagination are examples of what people use for the basis of what they believe to be true
  - They can all change
  - There is absolute truth in the world
    - Comes from God and exists whether we acknowledge it, believe it, seek it, or follow it
- If I will be held accountable by God for the actions of my life
  - Actions ← Decisions ← Values ← Beliefs
  - Then I want to know God's absolute truth