

What Is Truth?

Steve Watson; June 2, 2019

John 18:37b-38 CSB

"...I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸ "What is truth?" said Pilate.

In this study, we will consider the question, "What is truth?" by looking at four aspects of truth:

- "Truth is a gift God instilled into creation so that we can properly engage reality."
- Truth embraced has the power to set people free and transform lives from the inside out.
- Truth is the first, and arguably the most essential, facet of effective spiritual warfare.
- The truth is an entrustment given to the church.

1) "Truth is a gift God instilled into creation so that we can properly engage reality."

The first of our four-part answer comes from Dallas Willard. In *The Divine Conspiracy Continued*, Willard writes:

"Truth is a gift God instilled into creation so that we can properly engage reality. In this way truth is like aiming a rifle. If our aim is right, or true, then we are able to hit the target. Likewise if our ideas and beliefs are true, we are empowered to engage with the reality of our lives."

Throughout the Scriptures we find statements, declarations, prayers and insights that are obviously grounded in an understanding of this aspect of truth. Consider these:

Psalms 25:5a ISV

Guide me in your truth and teach me; for you are the God who delivers me.

Psalms 86:11a ISV

Teach me your ways, Lord, that I may walk in your truth.

Proverbs 17:17 (literal rendering)

Truth buy and do not sell – wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

At the core of humanity's sin and brokenness problem (and every individual human's sin and brokenness problem) is a denial that God's truth is, actually, true and reliable. This is what Paul addresses in Romans 1:21-25a:

For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie.... (CSB)

It's also what he addresses in Ephesians 4:17-19 (below in The Passion Translation):

So with the wisdom given to me from the Lord I say: You should not live like the unbelievers around you who walk in their empty delusions. ¹⁸ Their corrupted logic has been clouded because their hearts are so far from God—their blinded understanding and deep-seated moral darkness keeps them from the true

knowledge of God. ¹⁹ Because of spiritual apathy, they surrender their lives to lewdness, impurity, and sexual obsession.

Paul could have easily, and correctly, ended this passage with "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" as well. Instead he makes a powerful declaration to those who have chosen to surrender their lives to Jesus. In this declaration, we find a second aspect of truth:

2) Truth embraced has the power to set people free and transform lives from the inside out.

Ephesians 4:20-24a TPT

But this is not the way of life that Christ has unfolded within you. ²¹ If you have really experienced the Anointed One, and heard his truth, *it will be seen in your life*; for we know that the ultimate reality is embodied in Jesus! ²² And he has taught you to let go of the lifestyle of the ancient man, the old self-life, which was corrupted by sinful and deceitful desires that spring from delusions. ²³ Now it's time to be made new by every revelation that's been given to you. ²⁴ And to be transformed as you embrace the glorious Christ-within as your new life and live in union with him!

Jesus is addressing the same aspect of truth in John 8:31-32:

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. ³² You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

He also addresses the same transforming power of truth embraced as he prays in John 17 (verse 17):

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

3) Truth is the first, and arguably the most essential, facet of effective spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:10-14a CSB

Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. ¹³ For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. ¹⁴ Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist.... (CSB)

Paul speaks to the power of truth in spiritual warfare in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.... (ESV)

And again in 2 Timothy 2:23-26:

But reject foolish and ignorant disputes, because you know that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, ²⁵ instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the

truth. ²⁶ Then they may come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

4) The truth is an entrustment given to the church.

The underlying issue for both 1st and 2nd Timothy is the sad fact that a number of leaders in the Ephesian church had abandoned truth in favor of various doctrinal deceptions. Paul saw this as part of a larger problem that would become full blown in the last days. His concern is stated bluntly in both letters.

1 Timothy 4:1 TPT

The Holy Spirit has explicitly revealed: At the end of this age, many will depart from the true faith one after another, devoting themselves to spirits of deception and following demon-inspired revelations and theories.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 CSB

For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. ⁴ They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths.

In spite of the discouraging situation in Ephesus and the heartbreaking prophecies that many would abandon truth in the last days, Paul makes a powerful proclamation with regard to the church and truth:

1 Timothy 3:15 CSB

But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Paul declares that the church is, by God's design, "the pillar and foundation of the truth," as the ESV translates it. Other Bible translations render it:

- the pillar and ground of the truth
- the backbone and support of the truth
- the pillar and mainstay of the truth
- the pillar and bulwark of the truth

The Message says it this way: "this God-alive church, bastion of truth."

The truth, as revealed in the Bible, is an entrustment that God has given to the church. It is an entrustment we must take seriously in the day in which we live.