

## The nature of Truth – Can we know there is a God?

*Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened. – Winston Churchill*

*The truth that makes men free is for the most part the truth which men prefer not to hear. - Herbert Agar*

I. Is there such a thing as absolute truth and if there is, can we know it?

i. Most people do not believe in absolute truth when it comes to morals – “Two-thirds of American adults either believe moral truth is relative to circumstances (44%) or have not given it much thought (21%). About one-third, on the other hand, believes moral truth is absolute (35%). Millennials are more likely than other age cohorts to say moral truth is relative—in fact, half of them say so (51%), compared to 44 percent of Gen-Xers, 41 percent of Boomers and 39 percent of Elders. Among the generations, Boomers are most likely to say moral truth is absolute (42%), while Elders are more likely than other age groups to admit they have never thought about it (28%).” Barna study 2016 <https://www.barna.com/research/the-end-of-absolutes-americas-new-moral-code/>

ii. This implies that as we try to discuss the subject of Evidences with people, there is a good chance that there will be no basis for a discussion unless agreement can be reached that there are moral absolutes.

iii. Things are NOT the truth but are often views expressed regarding truth.

Before discussing this, we should make the statement that truth is truth, regardless of whether it is dealing with things that we can sense (the law of gravity, how an internal combustion engine works etc.) or things that we cannot sense (God, love, hate, hope etc.). The same rules of truth apply in both the moral and physical world. There is also sometimes confusion regarding “opinion” and “truth”. You may have the opinion that the room is cold, and I may have the opinion that the room is hot, but the truth (fact) is that the room temperature is 74. Confusion between opinion and facts is often a problem.

a. Truth is “what works” – This is the pragmatic view of truth – something is true if it brings the results that we want. This can be shown to be false by considering the element of time. For example, it would “work” for you to be a member of the Nazi party in Germany during the late 1930’s and during the first part of World War II. You would have privileges that others would

not have. It would not work at the end of the war. What works today may or may not work tomorrow.

b. I have “my truth” and you have “your truth”.

i. This can be seen to be false in the physical world easily. If “my truth” is that I can take an entire bottle of pills at one time without any ill effect, one experiment along those lines will show how false the statement is. In fact, reality has nothing to do with what we believe or do not believe. Reality (and truth) is independent of what an individual believes.

ii. This argument also fails in the moral world. The “my truth” argument is often presented as an unarguable position (how can you disagree with the truth which is “my truth”?) The problem with this argument can best be seen with examples. If “my truth” is that (name a nationality) is less intelligent than (name a nationality) most people would disagree. Instead of “your truth” they would say you are stating “your opinion” - which is correct. “My truth” does not involve “truth” per se but is “my opinion”.

iii. This argument fails in the religious world. We preach that there is a God. The atheist teaches that there is no God. Both cannot be true.

c. Truth is what makes me feel good. Many people choose to believe things that help their self-esteem regardless of the facts. Using this argument, one could justify drug use because it makes one feel good (in the short term). As with many false views of truth, this view does not take the element of time into consideration. The consequences of what makes me feel good today may be feeling a lot worse tomorrow. Also, this view of truth cannot account for bad news. We all get news at times that makes us feel bad – our feelings about the news do not change the news in any way.

iv. **What is a good definition of truth?** - “Truth about reality is what corresponds to the way things really are. Truth is “telling it like it is”... There are mathematical truths. There are also truths about ideas. In each case there is a reality, and truth accurately expresses it.” Norman Geisler. Truth is not relative, it is absolute.

a. In the scientific world – Newton developed laws of motion and gravity which are useful but these were later refined by Einstein. Did Newton discover truth? – Yes. Did Newton discover all of the truth? -No. In the physical realm we never reach all the truth on a subject.

v. Can we establish absolute truth in a moral/religious sense? Moral and religious truth must be based on some authority and people have looked to several sources for this authority. Some of these are discussed below. The Christian is one who examines the evidence for a God and that the Bible is His word and reaches the conclusion that He is the source of moral truth.

- a. We must make assumptions – how is a moral/religious truth established?
1. By most people's view? - Consider the views of the Jews in Nazi Germany.
  2. By the government? - Consider problems with dictatorships, and even democracy
  3. By the individual – What happens when people's view of "right" and "wrong" differ?

Questions for consideration:

1. What tests can we suggest to see if something is true?
2. In the 1600's religious persecution was very common. When faced with questions such as "are you a priest" the person being persecuted/tortured would respond "no" in good conscience because although he was a Catholic priest, he was not a Buddhist priest. Was he being truthful?
3. When Abram told Abimelech that Sarah was his sister in Genesis 20 was he making a truthful statement? Was he telling the truth? Is there a difference?
4. How might someone go about deciding whether there is a God or not? Is this something that must remain unknown?