



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Equipping to Defend

“When I speak of the need for a Christian apologetic, I’m often approached afterward by those who say, ‘I wish I could make the arguments for the historical fact of the Resurrection, but I just don’t have the time to read up on the issues.’

“Sure, studying how to best articulate a Christian apologetic takes time. But didn’t the apostle Peter command all of us to *always be ready to give a defense of our faith?*

“It is inexcusable for mature disciples to allow themselves to be intimidated. The Christian world-view is not unscientific or simpleminded or anti-intellectual. It is the only plausible explanation for the universe.

“And when it comes to a defense of the gospel, personal experience is not enough. Secularists believe that religion is private, cannot be affirmed by evident reason, has no public role or relevance; when we say it’s true because we’ve experienced it, we simply let them off the hook. ‘Each to her or her own,’ they’ll say.

“So we need to equip ourselves to offer a reasoned, coherent, thoughtful defense of the biblical world-view.” ~ Charles Colson, with Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *The Body: Being Light in Darkness* (Word Publishing, 1992), 196

“What Is Truth?”

David Anguish

“And the lonely voice of youth cries, ‘What is truth?’” ~ Johnny Cash

Because of its airplay, my awareness of the question “what is truth?” at age 15 owed more to Johnny Cash’s 1970 [song](#) of that title than to Pilate’s question in John 18.38. But knowing that both men, 1900 years apart, asked the same question, and that they are but two of many who have, underscores the importance of determining “what is truth?”—especially as we contemplate the task of equipping believers in a culture where relativism has become the default understanding.

Our challenge is to respond in a way that is accurate as well as honest about the issue’s complexities and nuances. We also aim to be clear, heeding the advice of C. S. Lewis who urged would-be faith defenders to understand their subject so well that they could translate the specialized terminology of theological treatises into the vernacular. This is a necessary step for communicating in “the language of our audience” even as we understand that “uneducated people are not irrational people.” Even as we aim to be clear, we must “not attempt to water Christianity down.”¹

Our first order of business is to define what we mean by *truth*. Cash’s lyrics and, contextually, Pilate’s question show the importance of this step; both were asking about statements or actions that claimed to conform to an external standard—a claim others disputed. But what is that standard? Can we meet it? How can we tell if we have?

Until relatively recently in the West, truth has been defined in terms of “realism” or that which “reflects or corresponds to the reality it refers to.” That’s descriptive, “commonsensical,” and helpful.² But can we state it more simply? I believe we can and thus propose this simple statement as a beginning place to talk about truth: *Truth is what is; it is what conforms to reality.*³

As an example of this concept, imagine you’re visiting me

Discipleship At Its Most Basic

“The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death.... When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”
 ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller, rev. ed. (Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1959; 1st paperback repr. ed., 1963), 99

Important Thoughts on a Familiar Story

“The parable of the lost son [Lk 15.11-32] is difficult to hear, since it has been heard so often. Modern readers should keep in mind that it was spoken in order to justify associating and eating with despised groups. It is particularly reprehensible for modern readers to feel superior to the older brother, whose sin was feeling superior to the younger brother.” ~ Mark C. Black, *Luke*, The College Press NIV Commentary (College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 272

“Why did the older brother react this way? Jesus did not tell us. As a result it is illegitimate to question the thinking of this fictional character. Fictional characters do not exist and therefore cannot think. It is legitimate, however, to ask why Jesus’ opponents reacted so negatively to Jesus’ ministry to publicans and sinners.” ~ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Broadman Press, 1992), 408

and I tell you it’s raining outside my house. If you go outside and find water droplets falling from the sky, you’ll conclude I spoke the truth. But if you see a sunny sky, with no falling water, you’ll say I spoke falsely. Your conclusion depends on the reality you experience.

Thinking of truth in terms of reality leads us to consider its characteristics. First, statements that contradict each other cannot both be true, though both can be false. At the same time and in the same place, the reality of whether it is raining at my house cannot be both that it is and is not raining.

Second, it is generally important to know truth.⁴ Decisions about attire or carrying an umbrella are affected by what you believe about the reality of my statement about rain. Alternately, if a doctor says you have a malignancy, you’ll want to know if his diagnosis corresponds to reality; you might even seek a second opinion. Furthermore, knowing the truth affects subsequent actions. If you do have a malignancy, you’ll want to begin treatment and make the necessary arrangements to facilitate it. The reality is important to you.

Third, truth does not change because we deny it, refuse to think about it, or wish it was different. It’s possible for the truth of the statement, “it is raining” to be different tomorrow than it is today; weather conditions typically change over time. But, assuming everyone involved defines “rain” the same way (does mist qualify?), if it is raining in a certain place at a specific time, then everyone who is at that place at that time will experience the same reality. To deny it’s raining, or wish it was sunny instead, does not change the truth.

Nor does ignorance of reality change it. Some have suffered the effects and progressive debilitation of cancer for weeks before learning of their malignancy. But ignorance of the truth did not change the reality of their illness.

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Notes

¹ C. S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Eerdmans, 1970), 96-100. Read it online [here](#).

² Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (IVP Academic, 2011), 123-124.

³ In anticipation of studying the biblical perspective on truth, consider that the idea of Jesus being “the truth” (John 14.6) is rooted in the idea of truth being what is real; Jesus speaks true words, but also embodies what is genuine or authentic. See Horst Balz & Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Eerdmans, 1990), 57-60.

⁴ Note the nuance existing in the word *generally*; not all aspects of reality are equally important to know.

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