

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Jno.18:33-38

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Jno.18:33-38 contains the record of the conversation Jesus had with Pilate, the Roman Governor, when Jesus was before him, on trial for his life, which records the question we raise in our study: What Is Truth?
2. Let us take note of the questions and answers in this text.
3. No doubt, with some uncertainty, Pilate asked: What is truth?
4. Though people through the years have had different attitudes toward it and dealt with it differently, yet since at least from the time of Pilate they have been asking and/or concerned about truth in one way or another.
5. For instance:
 - a. Scepticism asks, "What is truth?" with the saddest doubt as to the possibility of attaining it.
 - b. Inquiry puts forth the question, "What is truth?" with sincere prayerful interest.
 - c. Faith asks, "What is truth?" and receives an answer to the question that is definite, assured, and satisfied because faith, not only believing there is such a thing, seeks it from the right source in the right place in the right way.
 - d. Also, there are at least two other concepts that approach and deal with the question "What is truth?" in two different ways.
6. But before considering these latter two concepts

II. DISCUSSION

A. WE TAKE NOTE OF SOME THINGS THE INSPIRED SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT TRUTH.

1. Exo.34:6 affirms that "The Lord God" is "...abundant in goodness and truth."
2. Deut.32:4 says that God is "A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."
3. Psa.146:6 declares that "God: which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth forever."
4. Jno.1:14 speaking of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth."

5. Jno.1:17 says, "...grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."
6. Jno.8:31,32 teaches that if we "continue in" his word, we "shall know the truth" that shall make us free.
7. In Jno.14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..."
8. Jno.17:17,19 reveals that people are sanctified through God's truth, which is God's word.
9. Rom.1:25 affirms that the unbelieving, sinful Gentile nations "changed the truth of God into a lie..."
10. Rom.2:2 says, "...the judgment of God is according to truth..."
11. Gal.2:5 speaks of "the truth of the gospel." Cf. Gal.1:6,7; Mk.16:15,16; Rom.1:16,17.
12. 1Pet.1:22 declares that we purify our "souls in obeying truth of the gospel..."
13. Prov.23:23 commands, "Buy the truth, and sell it not..."
14. See 2Th.1:10-12.
15. In spite of this, note

B. SOME PRESENT-DAY CLAIMS ABOUT TRUTH.

1. That which is known as Modernism
 - a. Centers on a belief in human progress, reason and scientific rationalism as the ultimate source of authority in religion, or what it recognizes as truth.
 - b. Centers on human autonomy, on discovering truth by scientific method, with science, in effect, becoming its god.
 - c. Is defined by Web. Dict. as: "A body of methods and tendencies in fields of Scripture, apologetics, dogma, history, and ethics, seeking to adapt church teachings to the conclusions of modern scientific and critical research."
 - d. Denies the existence of God, the historicity or divinity of Jesus, the inspiration of the Scriptures, and the reality of miracles.
 - e. Denies the truth of the Bible record.
 - f. Believes in what they call truth, but not the truth of Bible record.
2. That which is known as Postmodernism or the postmodern mindset approaches the question "What is truth?" in a different manner altogether. For instance, this concept calls in question all traditional ideas about truth in the following manner.
 - a. Every view is right.

- b. There is no such thing as absolute truth in the spiritual realm.
 - c. Every alternative is all right.
 - d. It assumes that either no rational structures exist or that we cannot know them. In fact, no one can know anything for sure.
 - e. There are no universally applicable truths; for truth is relative.
 - f. Questions about truth and right are dismissed as trivial and irrelevant.
 - g. What issue, moral or otherwise, is right or wrong to one is not necessarily either right or wrong to another. Again, because there is no absolute truth. Everything is relative. You can't say this or that or anything, no matter what it is, is truth or right for everyone, or wrong for everyone.
 - h. There is, of course, this exception in their mindset: We can know that we can't know anything for sure; and we can know that there is no such thing as absolute truth – no universally applicable truths!
3. Phil Sanders, "Adrift Postmodernism In The Church," (Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, TN), Appendix 3, Glossary of Terms, p.50, says, that which is called Postmodernism: "Is not a distinct set of doctrines or truth claims but:
- *a mood – a view of the world characterized by a deep distrust of reason, not to mention a disdain for the knowledge Christians believe the Bible provides.
 - *a methodology – a completely new way of analyzing ideas.
 - *a movement – a fresh onslaught on truth that brings a more or less cohesive approach to literature, history, politics, education, law sociology, linguistics, and virtually every other discipline, including science.
 - *a metamorphosis – transforming every area of life.
4. Phil Sanders, Ibid., p.41: "The term 'postmodern' refers more to a period of time rather than to a distinct ideology. Until the end of the 19th century, the Western world thought itself capable of arriving at truth in all arenas through scientific inquiry. We believed some truths were absolute. Believing we could know those truths, we also believed men could reason about reality. This mindset describes the modern world. Many people still consider

themselves to be living in the modern world. Yet that modern world has given way to postmodernity.

“Postmodernism describes a dislocating human condition that arose in the final years of the 20th century. It is dislocating because it throws people out of their traditionally held worldviews.

“Postmodernism refers to a new set of assumptions about reality, going far beyond mere relativism (i.e., that knowledge or truth is relative). It impacts our literature, our dress, our art, our architecture, our music, our sense of right and wrong, our self-identity, and our theology. Postmodernism tends to view human experience as incoherent, lacking in absolutes in the area of truth and meaning. Life and meaning are assigned to endless browsing of possible alternatives without the possibility of settling on any one as the rock-solid truth.

“Postmodernism is not so much a doctrine as it is a mindset or a mood.”

C. SOME CONSEQUENCES OF MAKING TRUTH RELATIVE.

1. It means one no longer believes in truth.
2. The only thing that can't be tolerated is intolerance.
3. All things are permissible, if not to you, then they are to me or to someone else.
4. Amoralism is the order of the day, with the inevitable result being the increase of immorality, with everyone doing what is “right in his own eyes.” Cf. Judg.21:25.
5. It results in no order, no purpose and no design.
6. One faith, one system or worship, one God or gods is as good as another.
7. Each individual becomes his own god.
8. It negates “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” of Jude 3.
9. It paves the way for one to hold to a practice any system of belief one chooses as long as one does not assume he can press it on anyone else or deny any other view.
10. It allows one to ignore the one truth and living God, to either deny or dismiss Him, and to regard the truth of His written word as irrelevant.

D. FOUR TRENDS HAVE COME INTO PLAY TO CREATE THE POSTMODERN MINDSET.

1. One trend is that of **SECULARIZATION** – which simply stated is the process whereby God is thrown out and replaced with man.

- a. In other words, “God is dead,” or that the thought of the traditional belief in God and Christ is now obsolete.
 - b. There is even now an effort to get rid of any reference to Deity in the way we refer to time.
 - (1) In stead of B.C. (“before Christ”) and A.D. (“in the year of our Lord”), those with the postmodern mindset are seeking to change these to a more “politically correct” B.C.E (“before the Common Era”) and C.E. (“Common Era”).
 - (2) “One scholar, Harold Bloom of Yale University, recently said, ‘Every scholar I know uses B.C.E. and shuns A.D.’” –Phil Sanders, *Ibid.*, p.47, as quoted in *U.S. News & World Report*, Aug. 4, 1997.
2. Another trend of this postmodern mindset is what is know as **PRIVATIZATION**.
- a. Which, in effect, means replace God with **SELF**, and a do-it-yourself religion designed to suit yourself, including or excluding whatever elements you choose.
 - b. With privatization, true and false, or right and wrong, give way to likes and dislikes as man decides.
 - c. No one is to judge anyone about religion because all religion is true; live and let live, never mind the truth.
 - d. Personal preferences serve to validate individual behavior. Things are wrong, then, only to the person who thinks they are; and then only to that person, not necessarily to anyone else.
 - e. You man believe as you please, but my truth is untouchable by anyone but me.
 - f. Privatization is hardly different from idolatry.
3. A third trend of this postmodern mindset is what is known as **PLURALIZATION**.
- a. This view recognizes everyone’s beliefs and/or all convictions about values with equal validity, which means in effect that no convictions about values have any real validity, because it is not willing to consider the contradictory and conflicting views that pluralism demands.
 - b. For pluralism in the context of spiritual matters is the state of things that permits several contradicting, competing, alternative theologies with the belief that such a state is not only approved by God, but is also healthy.

- c. The press for political correctness has found its way into liberal religious thought of our day, branding those who dare to believe one way is right and another is wrong as inflexible, bigoted, mean-spirited, loveless, and certainly politically incorrect. And that will never do! That can't be tolerated! That is a no! no!
4. The fourth trend of this postmodern mindset is what is known as **RELATIVIZATION**.
- a. Truth is relative, which means all absolutes are abandoned.
 - b. This is the thinking where situationism, i.e., truth is determined according to the circumstances or the situation at hand and is to govern all of one's thoughts and actions.
 - c. In the world of relativism two conflicting and irreconcilable views may exist – but neither is allowed to be rejected, because that would infer the existence of an absolute.
 - d. In relativism, two conflicting and irreconcilable views can both be correct and equally valid, which, of course, makes truth hopelessly confused and insane. But that is just more of the ridiculous consequences of this postmodern mindset!
 - e. Geo. Barna, "If Things Are So Good, Why Do I Feel So Bad?" (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994)pp.176,177) as quoted by Phil Sanders, Ibid., p.51, argues that this mindset has left America "emotionally, morally, and ethically paralyzed" by a seriously flawed philosophy. He also argues that our time may be represented by the phrase "Because I said so."
 - f. Nowadays men, in effect, cheerfully and unashamedly abandon the whole substance of true Christianity; but they will hardly be persuaded to completely surrender the name.
 - (1) They really wish a creedless Christianity.
 - (2) "Creeds" they shout, "are divisive things; away with them!"
 - (3) If there must be such things, at least let us prune all their distinctive features away and give ourselves a genial and unpolemic Christianity, one in which all the "stress is laid on life, not dogma," which is not Christianity at all!
 - (4) For an undogmatic Christianity is no Christianity at all.
 - (5) Those who want to think it is, are known to contend that "Christianity is a person, not a doctrine." By that

they mean “doctrine doesn’t matter” – that one doctrine is as good as another, or no doctrine at all really matters.

- (6) But in true Christianity one can’t divorce the Person, Jesus Christ, from the doctrine of Christ; that is, from what he did and why; from what he taught and why!

III. CONCLUSION

1. These four trends which have come into play to create the postmodern mindset – secularism, privatization, pluralization, and relativization – have made a profound impact upon American religion, even upon digressive churches of Christ.
2. The prevailing concept in the mindset of postmodern thought is no longer “Is my faith pure and true?” But is “Does my faith make me feel good and help me understand the world in a way I find reassuring and personally beneficial.”
3. The postmodern mindset can tolerate a warm and fuzzy faith that judges little and accepts all; but it can’t really tolerate, or hardly live with, the bold teaching of the Bible, the written word of God, and the true teaching of N.T. Christianity.
4. True Christianity as revealed in the inspired Scriptures, the Bible, is in serious conflict with the postmodern mindset. And as time goes by, it will get worse. And true Christians can expect a more hostile attitude in a world that neither understands nor respects them anymore – nor wants to understand them!
5. Individualized religion and the so-called Christianity of the postmodern mindset is so attractive today because the world in general is ripe and ready for the idea that people are able to become the judge and arbiter of their own religion.
 - a. Thereby each one may decide how he interprets Scripture, or even if he accepts the inspired Scriptures.
 - b. Each one may have his own subjective faith.
 - c. Each one can speak of and defend his own peculiar experiences with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, or with other deities of his choosing.
 - d. Each one can define what he believes in terms of his own experience and culture.
 - e. Therefore, when people disagree, each one can merely reply, “Well, that’s your interpretation or your privilege. I can let all others have a right to their own faith or opinion, and I can have right to mine. I do not judge them, and I will not let them judge me. I refuse to let any church doctrine or tradition tell me what to believe or practice.
6. Such people are so busy listening to themselves they have no time for and no desire to listen to God.
7. When one has reached the point that he worships and serves at the altar of individualized religion, which is the consequence of postmodern thought, he

has granted himself the privilege to set aside the commands or directives of any Supreme Being.

8. Finally, What is postmodernism?
 - a. It is rebellion toward God.
 - b. The postmodern mindset arrogantly dares to treat the God of the Bible as a trivial non-issue.
 - c. With a wave of the back of the hand, it dismisses the Creator and Lord.
 - d. It robes itself with self-made laws, values and religion.
 - e. It grants all others the right to design their own faiths or no faith at all.
 - f. It is willing to entertain any notion except an absolute truth.
 - g. It is willing to believe in anything, as long as no view wins out over any other. It is committed to a diversity of truths rather than to one truth.
 - h. It loves the freedom to be adrift in the sea of uncertainty.
 - i. It wants no part of and will never know the true and living God.
9. Postmodernists do not really make arguments against true Christianity; they simply dismiss it as one option among many in a sea of beliefs and ideas. However, they cannot tolerate those who insist that “the faith of Christ” is the one true faith with all others being false.
10. In spite of its claim that there is no such thing as absolute truth, there are one or two things they claim to know for sure: That we cannot know anything for sure; that there is no such thing as absolute truth!

(All thoughts in this lesson on Postmodernism are from Phil Sanders book quoted in the body of the lesson.)