

## How Do We Determine Truth?

John 18:37-38

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

- I. 2 There's nothing more important than truth! There seems to be precious little of it about these days!
  - A. For example, in our culture: "Hands up! Don't shoot!" (i.e., chant derived from incident in Ferguson, MO was repeated by many including Congressional representatives, TV & movie personalities, NFL and NBA players, etc.; it has become a slogan that has swept the nation and is emblazoned on T-shirts and caps, but has absolutely no basis in truth (e.g., Proven false by MO grand jury and DOJ investigation!).
  - B. University of Virginia rape story appeared in *Rolling Stone* (written by Sabrina Rubin Erdely).
    - (1) Story claimed several rapes took place at a particular UVA fraternity and went on to claim 1 in 5 (20%) of young women on American university campuses were victims of sexual assault.
    - (2) The story turned out to be 100% false. But to many on the political left the truth did not matter and they continue to advance the false narrative.
  - C. Politicians:
    - (1) Recall the president saying: "If we pass the *Affordable Care Act* you can keep your doctor." "The *Affordable Care Act* will save you \$2,500 per year on your health insurance."
    - (2) Recall former Secretary of State: (concerning murder of four Americans at the U.S. consulate in Benghazi): "What difference does it make now?!" "I only erased my personal e-mails."
2. 3 Many more examples could be cited, but the truth proves to be an elusive and rare commodity.
  - A. It drives me absolutely crazy. If I were Elvis I would shoot my TV!
  - B. I can only imagine how God must feel about the situation. As a result we should all highly value the truth and try to make sure we are never guilty of playing loose and fast with the facts (**Prov. 23:23**: "*Buy the truth and sell it not.*"; **Rev. 21:8**: "...all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire.>").
3. Today's problems with the truth have been exacerbated by the fact we live in what the experts tell us is the "postmodern" world, philosophically speaking.
  - A. Postmodernism's philosophy is very liberal.
  - B. According to postmodernism "All truth is limited, approximate, and is constantly evolving...metaphysics (which includes religion, cvt) is empty of content...Thus absolute truth that explains all things is unobtainable." (website: *On Truth & Reality*)
  - C. A quote by postmodernist philosopher P. K. Feyerabend sums up how "truth" is viewed by today's society: "The only absolute truth is that there is no absolute truth."
  - D. The postmodern philosophy is really nothing new:
    - (1) In the days of the Judges: "...everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25)
    - (2) Today everyone is left to define their own truth.
  - E. Was Pontius Pilate a postmodernist way before his time? "*What is truth?*" (Jn. 18:38)
4. However, the reality is that absolute truth does exist! Jesus uttered, "*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (Jn. 8:32). 4 Our problem is "How do we determine truth?"

### II. DISCUSSION:

- I. 5 Not By One's Conscience:

- A. Many try to determine truth by appealing to their conscience: “Let your conscience be your guide.”
  - (1) Our conscience is the product of what we have been taught.
  - (2) A child who has been taught that it is wrong to steal—his conscience will be pricked when he goes to take something that is not his.
  - (3) However, a child who has been taught that it is okay to steal will not be disturbed by his conscience when he commits theft (example from my childhood).
- B. Why the difference?
  - (1) It’s a difference in teaching.
  - (2) If we’ve been taught error, then we can practice error all the while thinking it to be the truth, and our conscience will not bother us the least bit (recall my chart on *Concepts*).
- C. Consider Saul of Tarsus for example.
  - (1) He consented to Stephen’s death and made havoc of the church (Acts 8:1-3). Saul, we have a question for you: “Did your conscience bother you when you did those things?”
  - (2) His answer: “...*I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day*” (Acts 23:1).
- D. “Let your conscience be your guide?” Not always! We need to beware of our conscience; it is not necessarily a reliable determiner of the truth.

## 2. **6** Not By What We Think:

- A. What we think is very important (Prov. 23:7).
- B. Many, many times have I heard folks say, “Well, I think...”
  - (1) It really does not matter what you or I think! Such an attitude may be acceptable on some topics, but not when it comes to religion it is not.
  - (2) Remember Naaman who was told, “*Go and wash in Jordan seven times...*”? Recall what he said? “...*Behold, I thought...*” (2 Kgs. 5:11).
  - (3) But, it didn’t make a lick of difference what he thought, did it?
  - (4) He wasn’t made clean until he did what he was told!
- C. Paul, why did you shut up many of the saints in prison at one time in your life? “*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*” (Acts 26:9).
- D. A lesson we need to learn if we haven’t already is that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (**Isa. 55:8-9**: “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,*” says the LORD. 9 *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*”).
- E. It is amazing how easily and quickly men speak on behalf of God! For example, the *Presbyterian Church USA* voted (i.e., “we think”) that it is acceptable for their clergy to perform same-sex (i.e., gay) marriages.
- F. When we determine truth by “what we think” the floodgates of apostasy are opened!

## 3. **7** Not Determined By What Seems Right:

- A. Have you heard people say, “It just seems right to me”?
- B. Perhaps we need to be reminded of what the wisdom literature teaches us: “*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*” (Prov. 14:12).

C. Example: It “seemed right” to David to carry the ark on an ox cart:

(1) David was have a great time! **2 Sam. 6:5:** “Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the LORD on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals.”

(2) But they were not carrying the ark according to truth; instead they were following what seemed right to them! And here’s what happened:

**2 Sam. 6:6-8:** “And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. 7 Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God. 8 And David became angry because of the LORD's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah to this day.”

(3) The ark was supposed to be carried by the Kohathite branch of the Levites using poles and the rings on the side of the ark (Ex. 25:14-15).

(4) After three months passed David finally realized something: **Jer. 10:23:** “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” He realized: **Prov. 14:12:** “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

(5) Lesson learned, he said, **1 Chron. 15:13:** “For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order.”

D. When a question arise about truth and someone says, “Well, it just seems right to me.” Watch out! Remember Uzzah!

#### 4. **8** Not By What Is Right in Our Own Eyes:

A. Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes...”

B. Remember the period of the Judges?

(1) It was a time when “...every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6; 21:25).

(2) When we become the sole arbiter of what we do there is no end to what we will be doing.

(3) The floodgates of apostasy are opened when we do what is right in our own eyes! Recall last Sunday’s AM lesson? 33,000+ denominations; that is what is reaped when “what is right in our own eyes” is sown!

(4) If you don’t believe that just read the book of Judges.

C. Better yet, just take a look at our “modern” society:

(1) Sexual promiscuity, divorce, celebration of homosexuality, abortion, etc.

(2) These things are not just practiced; they are celebrated! And, if you don’t celebrate with them you are accused of being a bigot and ostracized.

D. When we “do what is right in our own eyes” we are fools, blind leaders of the blind! Matt. 15:14

#### 5. **9** Not By Personal Feelings or Emotions:

A. How you may or may not feel about a thing is not the standard. “God wants me to be happy.”

B. I’ll give you a good example: Jacob.

(1) He was deceived into thinking that his favorite son Joseph had been devoured by an evil beast and mourned for his son many days (Gen. 27:31-35). Was that true?

(2) No, it was false! Joseph was very much alive. He had been sold by his brothers.

(3) This shows you can’t trust your feelings or emotions in deciding truth.

- C. When we determine truth by our own feelings and emotions we are following the wrong path! Jer. 10:23 (recall: “God wants me to be happy!”)

6. **10** Not Within Us:

- A. Many think it is within them to determine what is right and wrong and know the difference between truth and error. Not so! (cite false exegesis by Henrietta’s son-in-law)
- B. Big ego! People just think they are as smart as, or even smarter, than God (Isa. 55:8-9; **Col. 2:2-3:** *“that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*).
- C. Adam and Eve thought they could become as smart as God (Gen. 3:4-6); how did that work out?
- D. It’s the basic error of today’s society; many think each man/woman establishes his/her own truth.
- E. When we begin to think we are the determiners of truth our lives become a mess and society is fractured (see today’s society to understand the truth of that statement).
- F. Jeremiah said it best: *“O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”* (Jer. 10:23).

7. **11** Not By Traditions of Men:

- A. Many want to do what is handed down to them.
- B. That’s what Paul did. When he persecuted the church and wasted it he said, *“...being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers”* (Gal. 1:14).
- C. The Jerusalem scribes and Pharisees *“... made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition”* (Matt. 15:6) and their worship was rendered vain (Matt. 15:9); tradition blinds us (**Matt. 15:13-14:** *“But He answered and said, ‘Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14 Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.’”*).
- D. Today there are many who follow traditions (e.g., Catholicism); we can easily see it in others, but can we see it in ourselves? Remember Matthew 15:9!

8. **12** Not By One’s Parents:

- A. Many follow what their parents are and do little if any investigation of truth on their own.
- B. Obeying our parents is a good thing (**Eph. 6:1:** *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”*); but if what our parents teach us is not the truth, we must reject it! **Acts 5:29:** *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*
- C. Some even refuse to obey the gospel because it would cast a negative light on what their parents believed and taught them.  
**Matt. 10:34-37:** *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; 36 and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ 37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”*
- D. It works both ways, children following error from their parents and parents rationalizing error in their children (e.g., Harry Pickup’s comment about parents and children).

- E. When it comes to our parents we must ever be mindful of what Jesus said, *“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...”* (Matt. 10:37). We will be saved or lost based on our own faith! Not on the faith of our parents!

9. **13** Not By What Men Say:

- A. Many follow what men say, because they consider them experts (e.g., “My pastor said...”); they completely hand over who determines truth to someone else.
- B. It doesn’t matter how many degrees one may have or how smart you think they are, or how many years of experience they claim; no man today is the truth; Jesus is the truth (Jn. 14:6).
- (1) When trying to establish truth and someone says, “Well, I graduated with X degree from Y university!” Be careful!
- (2) When trying to establish truth and someone says, “Well, I’ve been a preacher for over 30 years!” Be careful!
- C. It’s ok to use reference works by learned men (e.g., Thayer, Vine, Robertson, etc.); but we must always be exceedingly careful.
- (1) If our position totally hinges on a reference work, we are skating on very thin ice. More likely than not we’re wrong!
- (2) Many times the doctrinal bias of the authors shows through (i.e., Their theological slant is always visible if we look close enough!). Be careful!
- D. Paul wrote that our *“...faith should not stand in the wisdom of men...”* (1 Cor. 2:5). If we fail to heed that statement we are ripe for apostasy.

10. **14** Not Determined By the Majority:

- A. Democracy is great, but it does not necessarily determine truth.
- B. Just recently, by a majority vote, the *Presbyterian Church USA* voted to sanction same-sex (gay) marriage as something good, wholesome and holy. They claim to desire to be “more inclusive.”
- (1) They apparently don’t put much stock in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 (*“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”*).
- (2) They apparently are not familiar with the fact that God’s word is quite exclusive, not inclusive! The way to life is the way of the few (**Matt. 7:13-14**: *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*).
- C. When truth is determined by popular vote or majority rule, error will be the rule, not truth!

11. **15** By the Word of God:

- A. Jesus said, *“...thy word is truth”* (Jn. 17:17).
- B. It is so simple! When seeking truth we must always ask, *“...what saith the scripture?”* (Rom. 4:3); we must always appeal to a *“Thus saith the Lord”* (Jer. 2:2).
- C. Because God’s word is the ultimate source of truth; it must always be the final arbiter of truth (1 Pet. 4:11).
- D. Nearly everyone I’ve studied the Bible with has always agreed that God’s word is the sole source of religious truth, but so many dreadfully mishandle the scriptures! **2 Tim. 2:15**: *“Give*

*diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth."*

- (1) We must be careful not to twist the scriptures (**2 Pet. 3:16**: "*as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*").
- (2) This is something that Satan is very good at! **Gen. 3:4-5**: "*Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'*"; **Matt. 4:5-6**: "*Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'*"
- (3) Also, we must always keep scripture in its proper context: Judas "*went and hanged himself*" (Matt. 27:5); "*Go, and do thou likewise*" (Lk. 10:37); and "*That thou doest, do quickly.*" (Jn. 13:27).

E. God's word is our sole source of truth (Jn. 12:48; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

- (1) If we depart from it we are fools!
- (2) If we depart from it there is "*no light*" in us! (Isa. 8:20); regardless of how much we claim to "*love God*" (Jn. 14:15).
- (3) If we depart from it God will "*take away [our] part from the Book of life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this [God's] book.*" (Rev. 22:18-19)

### III. CONCLUSION: 16

1. Jesus said, "*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*" (Jn. 8:31-32)
2. Let us "*Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.*" (Jer. 6:16)
3. **Proverbs 23:23**: "*Buy the truth and sell it not.*"

Adapted from an article (*Determining Truth*) from the Terre Haute *SPEAKER*, by John Isaac Edwards.