

“A Time for Our Truth”, or “Truth for Our Time”? (Part 1)

Daniel 12:4 reads that in the end time “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased”. Our world has never experienced such an explosion of information as we are seeing today. The pyramid of total knowledge and understanding is growing at a rate far greater than our ability to digest it. According to conservative estimates, knowledge doubles at least every 7-10 years. Some experts claim that the doubling rate may be two years or less!

As each generation builds on the discoveries of preceding generations, the world potentially knows more today than it did yesterday. This general tendency should mean that the current generation is closer to understanding “truth” better than any previous generation. However, is this necessarily so? Information, knowledge, and understanding fall into and out of the “sphere of truth” for many reasons. For example, “The World Trade Center towers are the tallest buildings in New York City” is a statement that was true 10 years ago, but is no longer true today.

The mere passage of time is not the only factor that affects information’s truth value. Consider other factors that can cause truth values to come and go: a change in circumstance or location or culture, the claiming author of the information, or the audience receiving it, to name a few. What’s more, some information cannot be classified as being either true or false! The sentence “this statement is false”—amazingly—cannot be labeled as either true or false using our natural system of logic and reason. By the same token, we can find questions which may not have a solid yes or no answer. “Have you stopped lying all the time?” is a question that most of us would not be able to answer. Saying “yes” would imply that we were pathological liars in the past, something not true for most of the population. Answering “no” would imply that we’re still lying, and in that case, is our answer truthful or not?

These examples simply serve to illustrate that it can be difficult to be certain about what really is “true”. Most of us would rather take someone’s “authoritative” word for it, or rely on our own feelings or instincts to discern what is unconditionally true or not. Even if we could take the time to validate our understanding, we would need to compare what we know to some “standard of truth” that we trust completely. The question is: who validates that truth standard? There exist many claims today that direct people to different “standards” of truth. Do they all hold up unconditionally? Are some truth systems sounder than others? Which one is the right one? Which one is the right one for you?

Is it any surprise why so many people hang their understanding on propositions whose truth values are conditional, and not absolute? It’s clear that we live in a world where a belief system that “works” for some may not “work” for others. Indeed, denouncing a belief system—even from the vantage point of more generally-accepted truths—is deemed a violation of the rights of others. Those who point out contradictions in the belief systems of others (even if the motivation is well-intentioned) are labeled “intolerant”, and accused of having no respect for other perspectives of truth.

Our western culture seems to thrive on the premise that everyone has a right to embrace his or her own version of the truth. But if all truth is relative, who decides what is right? What is bad? What is harmful? Consider atrocities such as the Holocaust, random killings, violence against innocent children – are these morally right, wrong or neutral? Are these various viewpoints simultaneously and equally valid? Even most supporters of relative morality would admit that they sense such atrocities are *wrong*.

Consider the investigation of a fatal crime scene where great resources are spent looking for evidence, interviewing witnesses, finding suspects, etc. When the case is brought to trial before a judge and jury, attorneys question witnesses for their testimony and the evidence is presented. Essentially there is one aim in order for justice to be served: to know the truth. Is the justice system concerned with the relative truth or the absolute truth? When the court listens to witnesses, is it interested in politically-correct statements, cleverly-constructed stories, or the witnesses’ personal opinions or biases? NO! In fact, each witness is made to swear or affirm under oath to speak “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth”. Examiners listen for inconsistency in each witness’s testimony, compare one testimony to that of another witness, and cross-examine witnesses. They compare statements against hard evidence, frequently calling in “expert witnesses” or authorities to testify regarding relevant facts or truths. The intent is to come up with a complete, coherent, absolutely true story of what actually happened. Judicial systems put so much emphasis and effort on due process because innocent lives could be falsely accused, or real-life criminals who evade penalty and rehabilitation pose a threat to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And that threatened life could be yours.

So why does the world continue to uphold relative truth, but make no room for absolutes? Could it be that acknowledging absolute truth makes one accountable to it? Isn’t it easier and more convenient to let our lifestyles dictate what we wish to be true rather than to have the truth dictate our lifestyles?

The very idea that truth could dictate a life change is at the root of a common assault on Christian believers who try to adhere to the Great Commission and witness the gospel truth to others: inviting others to consider the life-saving truth that is in Jesus is frequently interpreted as imposing one’s belief system on someone else and is deemed a “crime”. As gospel-bearers are we ready to don God’s armor to defend ourselves and our confidence in what the world would trash as a belief in obsolete morals and

maxims? How can we avoid discouragement, and even *continue* in love to share the gospel despite the accusations of disrespect, intolerance, and violating personal freedoms?

Jesus said “I am the Truth” and that “the truth shall make you free.” (John 14:6, 8:32) But as we witness to those long-steeped in the attraction of relativism, it’s unlikely that many will be able to make an immediate, quantum leap of faith and be enlightened by the truth that is in Christ Jesus. Even God had to guide His people “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little.” (Is 28:10) And often, we must use a similar ladder of guidance to convince the gainsayers, one rung of thought at a time.

One of the first progressive steps is to convince others of the existence of absolutes by using their own argument for tolerance. If the world is tolerant to other points of view, then it should be ready to consider the possibility that there does exist a nucleus of knowledge and understanding—and, yes, morality—that never moves out of the sphere of truth regardless of changes in time, place, authority, circumstance, or culture. Maybe, just maybe, such truths *do* exist and apply to all generations and cultures. Skeptics may cling to their arguments that deny its existence, but it’s easy to prove that absolute truth does indeed exist. Consider the statements “there is no absolute truth” or “all moral truth is relative”. These statements are themselves absolute, contradicting what they say about the absence of absolutes. In effect, these beliefs self-destruct, proving themselves to be false. A belief in the absence of absolute truth not only leads to contradiction and falsehood, then, but it poses danger to the one who supports it, as we have already seen.

Once the reality sets in that absolute truth exists, then pondering minds and hearts may be more open to the feasibility of stepping onto the next rung of the ladder to ask: where can I find this absolute truth? Next month’s article will explore how a sincere seeker can go about finding this truth, how it can be used to discern what is true and what is false, and what it says in regards to life’s most debated questions: How did we get here? What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of MY life? What happens to me after I die? The same argument that proves the existence of absolute truth makes it extremely likely that these questions also have absolute answers as well.

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