

PREPARED

with a REASON

ADULT
STUDENT BOOK



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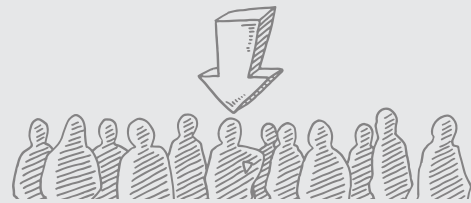
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TOPIC ONE:

The Truth Is Greater Than Ourselves

What is truth? Can we know it?

WHY YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS

Answers to the questions “What is truth?” and “Can we know it?” fundamentally affect our everyday lives and our faith. For example, if what Jesus said is true for some people but not others, then why would we think His words are true for anyone at all? Or why would we bother to share His words? By what authority do we say Jesus is the Savior of the world? In this Bible study, we are going to tackle some of these difficult questions from a biblical perspective. At the end of this topic, you should have a better understanding of the truth and how it is connected to your faith.

A BIT OF HISTORY

Any discussion about truth, what it means, and how we may know it is significant. Yet questions such as “What is truth?” and “Can we know it?” can trivialize the importance of discussions involved in answering those questions. It is tempting to toss such questions and their answers into the dustbin of a purely academic discussion. However, understanding the questions asked and then offering scriptural answers is incredibly practical and comforting. Knowing the answers to these types of questions is not solely a matter of having head knowledge. Rather, answering the questions “What is truth?” and “Can we know it?” from a biblical basis will render answers grounded in the person the Bible tells us is the truth, Christ Jesus.

The subject of truth and how it arises from general human experience has mostly been discussed among theologians, philosophers, and poets through the ages, yet it affects us all. The general study of truth and whether we can know it falls under the discipline of philosophy called epistemology. According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, *epistemology* is “the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity.” As an academic discipline, epistemology gained importance with the emergence of modern science and philosophy in the seventeenth century. Philosopher and scientist René Descartes (March 31, 1596–February 11, 1650) was a seminal figure of epistemology at that time.

Why Does This Matter?

Human beings bump into the furniture of God’s creation and wonder if they can have certainty about what they bumped into. We want to know if things are really the way we think they are. We want to be certain that when we talk about our experiences with other people, our words match up with the world we experience.



What the World Says

Check Yourself

ASSUMPTION ONE

People cannot know the objective truth.

REFLECTION

When you have experiences in the world, how can you be certain they are objectively true? If you say to another person, "I am sitting on a rock," how can he or she be certain what you said represents reality?

How has the view that nobody can know objective truth (truth for all people) affected how you talk about your faith? Can you give an example?

ASSUMPTION TWO

Truth is relative to the individual. Therefore, there is no such thing as objective truth.

REFLECTION

When you bump into reality, how can you be certain of what you bumped into? Can you convince another person that the world you experience is not a figment of your imagination? How would you do that?

Have you ever heard someone say, "That is your truth," when you talked to him or her about your faith? How did you answer? Provide examples.

ASSUMPTION THREE

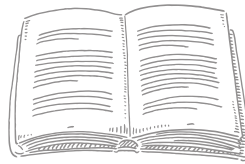
Truth is a social construct.

REFLECTION

Is truth what a culture generally regards to be certain? Is truth a matter of consensus? If different cultures have different viewpoints concerning what is real, then how can there be a truth for all people?

When you engage media, such as the news, do you think assumptions are being made about what the culture accepts as truth? Can you give some examples?

What the Word Says



Christian Response

ASSUMPTION ONE

People cannot know the objective truth.

JOHN 8:32

JOHN 14:6

ROMANS 1:18–20

The Christian response must be that everyone may know what truth is. The apostle Paul teaches the Church that God has made Himself known in the things He has made (see Romans 1:20). In Psalm 19:1, David writes, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.” What this means is God has created a world in which we can know that our experiences comport with reality. We can have certainty of truth. For example, we can be certain there is a Creator when we observe the complexities of nature, which reveal His design. Jesus said, “You will know the truth” (John 8:32). Jesus is the truth (see John 14:6).

ASSUMPTION TWO

Truth is relative to the individual. Therefore, there is no such thing as objective truth.

COLOSSIANS 1:16

HEBREWS 1:2

1 JOHN 2:20–22

The claim that truth is relative or there is no such thing as objective truth does not make sense. The claim for relative truth is a generalization implying its own objective truth. Is the claim “There is no such thing as objective truth” objectively true? If so, then the claim proves itself to be false. When the apostle John writes, “No lie is of the truth” (1 John 2:21), he is authoritatively stating that truth is objective. That is how we know what is false. Furthermore, God speaks to the world through His Son, Jesus, through whom He created all things. God speaking to the world is not a matter of human perspective but a reality for everyone.

ASSUMPTION THREE

Truth is a social construct.

ISAIAH 40:8

JOHN 16:13

1 PETER 1:24–25

Jesus makes the truth personal. He said He is the truth (see John 14:6). The Bible refers to Jesus as the eternal Word of God (see John 1:1) who upholds the universe by the power of His Word (see Hebrews 1:3). Truth is contained within the very nature of God as we see in Christ, who is the Word Incarnate. Christians must conclude that the truth is greater than any of us and the culture we live in. The truth is not what we construct through a culture, but the truth is what agrees with the speech of the eternal God. The bearer of truth is God Incarnate, who leads us into all truth (see John 16:13).

What Does This Mean for Me?

Today we are inundated by voices in the culture telling us we cannot really know the truth because there is no such thing as the truth with a capital T. The claim that we cannot really know the truth is a universal truth claim that makes no sense if there is no such thing as the truth for all people. Indeed, the claim there is no truth, or there is only your truth, sounds much like what Satan asked Eve in the Garden of Eden: “Did God actually say . . . ?” (Genesis 3:1). The devil may as well have said, “How can you know what God said is true?” At work and at home, you may have to face tough questions about how you can be certain God’s Word is the truth for all people. Consider the following questions to prepare you in giving biblical answers in two contexts: at home and away from home.

AT HOME

What are some truths from the Bible you can speak in your household to prepare family members in response to assertions such as “That is your truth” or “We cannot know the truth”?

Can you think of scenarios in the home where you might have to give biblical answers assuring your family that not only is God’s Word true but we can know it is true? Which Bible verses might you use?

AWAY FROM HOME

What are some circumstances away from home where you may be asked to give reasons justifying Jesus’ truth claims, such as when He says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)?

How might you explain to an unbeliever what Jesus means when He says He is “the truth”? How might you explain that Jesus is the truth to a person who does not believe we can know the truth?

Go Further

Can you defend from the supplied Christian responses on page 7 that God gives all truth for all people?