

**“And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”
—1 John 5:20 (NASB)**

Our English word *hypocrite* is universally acknowledged to be a pejorative term. The *hypocrite* is the politician that pushes for Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns while enjoying an expensive meal with a sizeable group of donors at a private French restaurant. The *hypocrite* is the business owner who convinces his employees to accept pay cuts due to an economic downturn while giving himself a substantial raise. The *hypocrite* is the husband who demands respect from his wife in obedience to Ephesians 5:33 while secretly having an affair. Indeed, *hypocrites* like these are despised.

But the term *hypocrite* didn't always carry a negative connotation. It originated in ancient Greece, where the Greek word ὑποκριτής (*hypokritēs*) was coined to refer to a “play-actor” or “role-player” on a stage. Its literal connotation was “one who opines from underneath” (ὐπὸ [*hypo*, “under”] + κρίνω [*krinō*, “to judge”]). This combination of words precisely pictured what a stage actor does: he speaks from behind a mask, under an assumed character. In the Greek theatres of the day, the actors always wore masks disguising their true identities.

But over time the term came to be used outside the context of the theatre. In the figurative sense, the term came to be applied to those who *pretended* to be something they were not. It was used of those who acted a certain way to deceive others, but lived differently in secret where no one was looking. It made its way from the Greek to the French and then finally to our English vocabulary. Today, the *hypocrite* is the one who wears a figurative mask. What we see of him is not his true moral character. He speaks and acts in public under an assumed identity—a false identity.

Truth be told, we all are hypocrites. We all assume characters of varying degrees of opacity. Who we project ourselves to be when people are watching is not exactly the person we are in the depths of our being, where we battle against life's most pernicious sins. There is no one with crystal clear transparency, no one whose public persona displays exact consistency with what is in the soul, no one whose external expression perfectly reflects his internal experience. No one, that is, *except God*.

I. Definition of “Divine Truthfulness”

A. What truthfulness means.

The truthfulness of God refers to His perfect authenticity; everything in God, and everything He says and does, corresponds to what it means to be God.

What God reveals Himself to be is who He really is, His knowledge corresponds to the way things really are, He always speaks in conformity with His essence, and He always does what He says He will do. Consequently, He is the source and standard of truth for all His creation.

In other words, God is perfectly what God should be. There is no error or inconsistency in His character, in His knowledge, or in what He does or says. His words and deeds perfectly correspond with His character and His knowledge perfectly corresponds with the way things really are. As Louis Berkhof writes, **“The veracity or truth of God is that perfection of His Being by virtue of which He fully answers to the idea of the Godhead, is perfectly reliable in His revelation, and sees things as they really are”** (*Systematic Theology*, 69).

TRUTHFULNESS:
God's perfect
authenticity

When considering the truthfulness of God, it helps to answer the question Pilate could not: “What is truth?” (John 18:38). **“Truth” is best defined as *that which corresponds to reality as it has been determined by God*.** In pressing this definition, three important nuances standing out:

- Truth is that which **“corresponds”**—it is something which is in conformity, agreement, or equivalence to something else.
- Truth corresponds to **“reality”**—that is, it is in agreement with the state of things as they actually exist.
- Truth corresponds to reality as **“determined by God”**—in other words, God is the standard and judge of what reality is, and therefore, what truth must be. He defines reality by His unrestricted sovereignty, absolute knowledge, and perfect authenticity.

Having this definition in mind is helpful for tracing the perfection of God’s truthfulness in the following four categories:

1. **God is *true* according to His *essence* (ontology).** God is *true* with respect to His own *existence*. The God of Scripture is *real*, He indeed *exists* (Heb 11:6) and is not an illusion or a figment of the imagination. He is “the only true God” (John 17:3). He alone possesses all that perfect deity possesses. The difference between God and all other gods is the difference between *pure gold* and *fool’s gold*. All other so-called gods are *false*, *vain*, and *nonexistent*.
2. **God is *true* according to His *knowledge* (epistemology).** God is *true* with respect to what He *knows*—both about Himself (Isa 40:13–14) and about what He has created (Heb 4:13). What God knows corresponds exactly with reality. His knowledge is neither lacking nor inaccurate. As Wayne Grudem states, “To say that God knows all things and that his knowledge is perfect is to say that he is never mistaken in his perception or understanding of the world: all that he knows and thinks is true and is a correct understanding of the nature of reality” (*Systematic Theology*, 196).
3. **God is *true* according to His *communication* (revelation).** God is *true* with respect to what He *reveals* of Himself to His creation by word and by deed. All of God’s works and His words correspond to who He is in essence. His words never communicate lies (Titus 1:2), and His deeds never communicate an incorrect message (Psalm 111:7–8). What He has promised, He will always do, for to break a promise would be to act contrary to His own character—and God can never deny Himself. He always tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He will never contradict Himself. Consequently, this dimension of God’s *truthfulness* is often described together with His *faithfulness* to His promises and the *inerrancy* of His Word.
4. **God is *true* according to His *demands* (ethics).** God is *true* with respect to what He *requires* of His creatures. In other words, all of God’s laws correspond to the way perfect justice and equity and righteousness and compassion should be expressed. His laws are never arbitrary. His instruction is never illogical (Psalm 119:151). Moreover, how He judges His creatures is never inconsistent with His perfect standard of truthfulness. His discipline and correction are never haphazard or unjust (Rev 16:7). As John Feinberg states, “God’s moral laws ultimately express his own moral perfection. In saying that God’s rules match what he knows to be the objective standards of right and wrong . . . the biblical writers simply say his commandments are true” (*No One Like Him*, 373).

“Truth is what God thinks; it is what God does; it is what God is; it is what God has revealed of Himself in the Bible. Truth is found in its fullest form in God, for He is truth; He is the very source and origin of all truth.”

—Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, 94

B. What God’s truthfulness does not mean.

In response to these assertions about God’s absolute truthfulness comes an obvious question: “If God is so truthful in His essence, knowledge, communication, and demands, why is He not acknowledged as such by the world?” As the Apostle Paul rhetorically asks, **“What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will**

not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?” (Rom 3:3). He cannot help but answer: “May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found a liar*” (v. 4a). Man has been corrupted by sin, and in turn corrupts the true witness of God. In fact, all men have a vivid sense of God (*sensus divinitatis*), but their sinful nature takes direct aim at the very concept of truth.

- **1 Corinthians 2:14** – unregenerate humanity has both a *moral bias* against truth and a *rational inability* to think and appreciate truly true thoughts.
- **Romans 1:18–21** – when confronted with the truth of God’s witness, unregenerate humanity actively labors to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” directly distorting it to communicate something antithetical to God’s intent.

This anti-truth influence of sin on the human mind—understood as “**the noetic effects of sin**”—does not mean the unbeliever is incapable of understanding or expressing true things (he can count, for example), nor does it cast into question the clarity or efficacy of God’s truthfulness (Rom 3:3–4). It does mean that the closer his mind gets to thoughts about God, the more actively he employs his mind to discount and distort those thoughts. Only supernatural regeneration can cancel these effects (1 John 5:20).

II. Biblical Testimony to God’s Truthfulness

A survey of the biblical terminology used to describe God’s truthfulness is a good place to begin. In the Old Testament, the important Hebrew term for “truth” is *אֱמֶת*, *’ēmet*. More than communicating “truth” as we often consider it in our day, this Hebrew term also contains the added nuance of “trustworthiness” or “faithfulness,” indicating that “truth” not only relates to *knowledge*, but to *morality* as well. In fact, this term *’ēmet* often appears in the OT as the twin to the term *חֶסֶד*, *hesed*, a word that describes God’s “covenant love” or “lovingkindness,” implying that God’s “truthfulness” and His “covenant love” are interrelated concepts.

- Genesis 24:27; Exodus 34:6; 2 Samuel 2:6; Psalm 25:10; 57:3; 85:10; 86:15; 89:14; 108:4; 115:1; 117:2; 138:2; Proverbs 14:22

A similar connection is observable in the New Testament. The Greek term used there for “truth” is *ἀλήθεια*, *alētheia*, which is used to indicate “the quality of being in accord with what is true.” But it, too, often appears in the NT alongside the special term for “love” (*ἀγάπη*, *agape*).

- 1 Corinthians 13:4; Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:18; 2 John 1, 3; 3 John 1

Regarding the four categories of God’s truthfulness cited above, the biblical witness is as follows:

A. God is *true* according to His *essence*:

Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 32:39; Psalm 31:6; 96:5; Isaiah 44:6; Jeremiah 10:10–11; John 5:43–44; 14:6; 17:3; Acts 14:15; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6; Galatians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 4:1; 5:20; Revelation 6:10; 19:11

B. God is *true* according to His *knowledge*: Psalm

147:4–5; Isaiah 40:13–14; Romans 11:33–35; Hebrews 4:13

C. God is *true* according to His *communication*: 2 Samuel 7:28; Psalm 12:6; 111:7–8; 119:160; Proverbs 30:5; Daniel 4:37; John 8:14; 17:17; Romans 3:4; 2 Corinthians 1:18–20; Revelation 15:3 (see also Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; 2 Timothy 2:13; Titus 1:1–2; Hebrews 6:17–18)

D. God is *true* according to His *demands*: Nehemiah 9:13; Psalm 19:9; 51:4; 119:142, 151; Revelation 16:7

TRUTH AND THE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY	
God the Father	Deut 4:35, 39; Ps 31:5; Isa 65:16; Jer 10:10; John 3:33; 17:3
God the Son	Matt 22:16; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21; John 1:14, 17; 14:6; Eph 4:21; 1 John 5:20; Rev 3:7, 14; 6:10; 19:11
God the Spirit	John 5:32; 14:17; 15:26; 16:7, 13; 1 John 5:6

III. What God's Truthfulness Demands from Us

- A. **Truth cannot be known apart from God.** The very concept of truth can only be accounted for when considered in relation to the one true God. All quests for truth that do not have Him as the goal are futile, for only in His light can the light of truth be truly seen (Psalm 36:9). Furthermore, all quests for Him that do not proceed through Jesus Christ will fail: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).
- B. **Sin is rebellion against the truth.** At the root of any sin is always a rejection of the truth (Rom 1:18, 25). Sin cannot stand in the presence of truth (Daniel 9:37) but thrives in deceit (Hebrews 3:13). The father of all sin is the devil himself, whose title is "the father of lies" (John 8:44–47). Consequently, a most effective strategy in conquering temptation is asking and answering the question, "What is the *truth*?"
- C. **Only God's truth can set you free.** One of the most abused quotations of Scripture is John 8:32: "And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." People use it all the time to justify all kinds of personal ambition. But the verse cannot be understood correctly apart from the statement that leads up to it: "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine" (v. 31). This freedom is submission to Christ; this freedom is found in Christ's word.
- D. **God's Word must be accepted as true.** What Scripture describes must be accepted without skepticism. What it commands must be accepted without exception. As David Farnell states, "The importance of inerrancy generates from the very perfections of the character of God Himself who cannot lie. To say that His Word errs or is imperfect is to blaspheme God Himself who is the Author of His Word."
- E. **We must speak the truth.** Truthfulness is a *communicable* attribute. As God's image bearers, we have been created to imitate Him in His truthfulness (Exodus 20:16; Proverbs 12:22; Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 3:9). This includes keeping promises (Matthew 5:33–37) and confronting error (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- F. **God is worthy of worship because He is truthful.** As is so often seen in Scripture, God's perfection of truthfulness must ultimately lead us to adoration (e.g., Psalm 108:3–4; 115:1; 117:1–2). In the end, He is the only One with perfect, eternal truthfulness, and for that He alone is worthy of praise.

For Further Study

Memorize: 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 5:20

Sing: "Speak, O Lord " (*Hymns of Grace* #368)

Pray: Praise God for being perfect and absolute truth. Give thanks for the implications this perfection has for your life—particularly in what He has revealed in His promises of the gospel. Confess the sins of lying and deceit. Ask the Lord to instill within you a greater desire to reflect His truthfulness and to bring that desire to increasing expression in your daily practice.

Discuss:

- 1) In your own words, define God's "truthfulness." How are you to answer the question, "What is truth?"
- 2) How different is your public *persona* from the *person* you are in reality?
- 3) How would you assess your own commitment to truth in speech? Consider not only the practice of telling direct lies, but presenting half-truths and exaggerations as well.
- 4) What practical ways will you employ to mortify the practice of speaking falsehood?
- 5) In what contexts are you most prone to remaining silent when the truth is ignored or maligned?
- 6) When is it appropriate to be silent in response to error, and when is it necessary to speak truth?
- 7) How does God's perfection of truthfulness give you peace and joy? How does it increase your adoration for Him?

Audio, video, and handouts for this session: gracechurch.org/motw

Next meeting: 7pm, March 1, Goodness (livestream at 8pm)