

## **Absolute Truth**

A proper view of truth is essential in theology. It has become the common view today that truth is not absolute but relative. Since the Bible is absolute truth, if absolute truth is questioned then the truth of the Bible loses credibility. Furthermore, if absolute truth is denied, then the truth of the Bible cannot be fully embraced as truth, nor communicated as truth.

### **Examples of relative truth**

*"It is true because I believe it"*

The most common perception regarding truth is that truth is defined by the person. Truth then is not discovered but it is constructed by the person. Yet belief in itself, regardless of sincerity, does not define what truth is and sincerity does not create truth. Truth is that which corresponds to reality. A person can believe something strongly and yet be wrong.

*"It is true because most people think so"*

In the age of public opinion polls, when most people believe something it carries more weight. If a person can persuade enough people, then truth can be created. Yet sheer numbers of adherents do not create truth. Many people can be wrong.

*"Two contradictory truths can both be true at the same time"*

The law of logic known as the law of non-contradiction is not taught in the Bible, but it is clearly presumed. Yet more and more people are willing to adhere to two or more opposing ideas. This is the case because of the mistaken notion of relative truth. This then allows people to claim to accept the truth of Christ without denying competing ideas that contradict Christ. This syncretism allows people to "accept Christ" without true faith. While more common outside the U.S., it is becoming more common in our society.

### **Definitions of absolute and relative truth**

Relative truth can be understood in two ways:

- All truth is relative to time and space (true now but not then)
- All truth is relative to people (true for me but not for you)

Absolute truth implies:

- Whatever is true at one time and in one place is true at all times and in all places.
- Whatever is true for one person is true for all people.

### **False claims of relativists**

Truth is relative according to *perspective*. What is true from one observer's perspective may not be true from another observer's perspective. For example, "The pencil is to the left of the pad" is true or not true depending upon the perspective of the observer.

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Truth is relative according to the *person*. What is true about one person may not be true for another person. "I feel sick" is not true for everyone but only for me.

Truth is relative according to *time*. What is true at one time may not be true at another time. For example, "Clinton is the President" is not now true though it once was.

Truth is relative according to *meaning*. The same statement can mean two different things when said by two different people. For example, "Jesus is God" means something different to a Mormon a Buddhist than to a Christian.

### **Critique of relativism**

#### 1. Critique of the belief that truth is relative to people

What is true for one person is true for all people.

If ancient men believed the sun moved around the earth, then it is true for all men that ancient men believed this.

This does not mean that it was true in ancient times and false now that the sun moves around the earth.

It will never be true for anyone anywhere at anytime that ancient men did not believe the sun moved around the earth.

What is true for all persons all the time and everywhere is an absolute truth, by definition.

#### 2. Critique of the belief that truth is relative to time and place

What is true at one time and place is true always and everywhere. "Clinton is President" (said in 2000) will always be true. It will never be true that Clinton was not President then. Each statement must be understood in its context. If the statement were made in a country other than the USA in 2000 it would not be a true statement, unless it was clarified to mean the USA.

If the statement is true at all times and places, it is by definition absolute.

### **Additional critiques of relativism**

#### 1. To say "all truth is relative" is a self-defeating statement.

It in effect says, "there is one absolute truth, that all truth is relative". Therefore, all truth would no longer be relative for there would be at least one absolute truth.

2. If relativism were true, then the universe could contain contradictory conditions and truths (which is impossible). It is impossible for what is true and its opposite, what is false, to both be true.

For example, "I am Gerry" and "I am not Gerry" cannot both be true.

Jesus could not be born both in Bethlehem and in Nazareth.

#### 3. If relativism were true then nothing could be true.

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One could not claim that it is an absolute truth that something is only a relative truth for him.

That relative truth claim is not enduring, since it can be changed at any point in time.

4. If relativism were true, we could never be mistaken, learn or lie.

For everything would be true, even when I am wrong.

And one cannot be wrong unless there is an absolute truth that is different from what he believes. There is no need to learn truth.

### **Misunderstandings of Absolute Truth**

- One does not have to have absolute evidence in order for there to be absolute truth. Truth itself is absolute even if our grounds for believing it are not absolute.
- Borderline or in-between conditions (i.e. "the water is warm", "he is strong") do not make truth relative. What is in-between to me is an absolute truth for all men everywhere that it is in between to me. The difficulty of determining where something is on a scale is irrelevant to the truthfulness of the statement.
- When someone claims only to believe something is true, but not that it is true, then they make no truth claim as to what they believe at all. Their statement only regards their belief, not in regard to its accuracy.
- A date does not have to be stated in order to be implied in the truth claim. For example, if I say "Clinton is President" on December 31, 2000, my statement is then true for all time because of its context.
- If no time is meant at all in a statement about who the president is, then the statement is neither true nor false. In other words, statements that are too ambiguous or vague carry no meaning.
- If I make the same statement at different times, then two different truth claims are being made, not one. For example, if I say "Clinton is President" in 2000, my statement is true. If I say, "Clinton is President" in 2002, my statement is false. What is said by these identical words differs.
- Just because truth is changeless does not mean there cannot be any "new truth." For example, when January 1, 2222 arrives it will be a true statement to say, "today is January 1, 2222." That statement made at that time will forever be true.

**Application of Absolute Truth**

1. To the Bible

If truth is absolute, then if the Bible is true then it is also absolute.

If the truth of the Bible is absolute, then it cannot change with the reader.

If biblical truth cannot change with the reader, then what is true in the Bible for me (given proper interpretation) is true for everyone.

2. To Morality

If truth is absolute, then truth about morality is absolute.

If truth about morality is absolute, then it does not change from person to person.

If truth about morality does not change from person to person, then we are all obligated to the same moral code. While the Bible describes us as having a conscience, this conscience ought to be identical to God's moral desires. To the degree that our conscience deviates from God's moral desires, it is weak. We ought not to act against our weak conscience, but God's ideal is for our conscience ought to mature (Romans 14). In no case is it ever right to depart from God's moral code on the basis of our conscience.