

What is Truth?

John 14:6

Sermon

Hobart, July 20th, 2014

Devonport, August 16th, 2014

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John 14:6-10

⁶ Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is.* From now on, you do know him and have seen him!”

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

⁹ Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me.¹

* Some manuscripts read *If you have really known me, you will know who my Father is.*

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 14:6-10). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

A. TODAY WE ARE GOING TO CONTINUE OUR DISCUSSION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION;

1. What is truth?
2. Like many topics, it may sound overly abstract, academic or philosophical;
 - a) But it lies at the foundation of our faith, our beliefs and the way we live, and deserves some deep thought and discussion

S.P.S:

B. TODAY WE ARE GOING TO BE FURTHER EXPLORING THE QUESTION, HOW IS TRUTH REVEALED?

1. How do we grow in understanding the Truth?
2. How does Trinitarian theology help us approach truth and get us beyond the academic and technical aspects of truth?
3. We are going to be particularly looking at the role of Scripture

C. PRAYER

BODY:

II. "WHAT IS TRUTH?" - PILATE

John 18:29-40

A. LAST TIME WE EXAMINED PILATE'S QUESTION "WHAT IS TRUTH?"

1. What did we conclude regarding the question itself?

B. THE TRUTH ISN'T A WHAT?

1. What is truth?

a) The truth is a WHO

b) Jesus himself is "the truth"

C. HOW CAN THAT BE?

1. The ultimate reality and truth is God

a) That he is the creator and sustainer of all things

b) There is no being or thing that is greater

c) And everything that is, is from him and dependent on him

d) But he is dependent on nothing

2. Elmer Colyer;

The ultimate level of truth, of course, is the *supreme truth* of the self-existent being of God.²

3. So all truth begins and ends with the reality of God

² Elmer Colyer, How to Read T.F. Torrance, Wipf & Stock/IVP, 2001, p. 366

III. GOD AS TRUTH

A. AS WE WILL LOOK AT SOME MORE NEXT TIME:

1. for a statement or belief to be true, it must match the outside reality it is referring to or describing
2. In other words, because God is the ultimate truth, things are only true that accurately reflect and fit with who God is

B. BUT THE PROBLEM IS WE DON'T HAVE THE ABILITY TO SEE OR KNOW GOD OF OURSELVES

1. We can't comprehend or view, or fully grasp the truth that is God because we don't have the minds, the senses, the powers to discover or observe him, nor the language to describe him if we did

C. REVELATION:

1. So how can we know God, and believe in his true reality of nature and being?

a) We can only know him as he reveals himself

2. How does he reveal himself to mankind?

a) Through Jesus, *who* is the truth!

3. Elmer Colyer in his book, *How to Read T.F. Torrance*, writes,

...for Torrance, knowing the truth of God is quite impossible apart from God's condescension to be one with us in our creaturely conditions and therefore to sustain our knowing and our doctrinal formulation that arise out of a real relation to God through God's self-revelation. This is what God has done in the incarnation of his truth within our contingent creaturely existence in Jesus Christ within the matrix of Israel, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostolic community.³

4. And the truth is that God is a personal being, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

³ Colyer, p.368

a) Not a mere fact, or principle or piece of accurate knowledge

5. Gary Deddo;

Jesus tells us that he is, himself, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He does not show us a way or tell us about the truth or give us things that lead to life. He himself is these things. Thus God's gracious revelatory work reaches a qualitatively different level with the birth of the Word of God in human form.⁴

John 14:6-10

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6. So important to catch what is being taught here;

a) The truth we are seeking is not a set of facts, not a measurable and scientifically provable type truth, not some data, not information, formulas or principles or laws of life that we can grab hold of and use for our own ends or purposes

D. TO KNOW GOD,

1. We need God to share himself with us, and he does!

2. Jesus is God with us, Truth with us

a) God, the self-existent one, revealing himself—the truth of his being and reality and heart and mind—to us in human form, in our world

3. God has shared his being, his life, his nature with us through Jesus being one with us,

⁴ Gary Deddo, *Interpreting Scripture*

^{*} Some manuscripts read *If you have really known me, you will know who my Father is.*

⁵ *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*, (Jn 14:6-10). Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Ill., 2004

E. AND AS WE FOCUS ON AT THIS TIME OF YEAR, WE KNOW JESUS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT BEING SENT TO LIVE IN US

1. God's revelation is personal and relational,
2. It is not just written words, or facts or rules impersonally communicated and left with us to ponder on alone;
3. God communicates himself directly to our hearts and minds through Jesus and the Spirit
4. He wants to continually impact us personally, in a deeply intimate way
5. Elmer Colyer,

...when we know the love of God through the grace of Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit, "we know much more than we can grasp or express; we feel or experience far more than we can put into thought or word."

F. WHAT IS HE SAYING HERE?

1. God's communicating of himself is a personal, intimate, relational experience
2. In other words, truth is not just facts and dry statements, rules and judgments about right and wrong
3. Colyer adds;

Torrance can even speak of theology as "a kind of ecstatic passion" in which we are lifted up by God's Spirit "to share in God's own self-knowing and self-loving."⁶

In light of God's self-revelation and self-communication through Jesus Christ and in the creative operation of the Holy Spirit, the human mind is renewed, transformed and spiritually reorganized, and it begins to reflect to a degree the triune God that we know in this way.⁷

⁶ Colyer, p. 137-138

⁷ Colyer, p.138

4. The ultimate truth is personal and relational, it involves all aspects of God's life and impacts all aspects of our lives and personhood

a) Not just our brain but also our hearts

b) Not just our decisions but also our feelings

c) Not just our feelings, but our conscience and our will

d) Not just our own desires, but the desire of God that we love others as ourselves

G. TRUTH IS A VITAL AND HUGE TOPIC

1. Everything we are, do and think and say is impacted by Truth or the lack of it

2. We will talk more about this next time

IV. TRUTH AND SCRIPTURE: HOW DO WE LEARN "TRUTH"?

A. SO IF JESUS IS THE TRUTH AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD WITH US REVEALING HIMSELF THROUGH JESUS

1. Where does Scripture fit in to our "truth" quest?

2. Is it on equal terms with Jesus and the Spirit as the source of truth?

a) Question 3 on our previous discussion list;

3. What benefit are you wanting, seeking from God's truth, from studying the Bible etc.?

3. What do you expect to learn from the Scriptures?

A. DOES THE SCRIPTURE STAND AS AN EQUAL ?

1. Gary Deddo in his series, "Interpreting Scripture" discusses improper and proper approaches to the Bible;

we aren't just mining for data, for information, for formulas or principles or for truths that we can possess or use for our own ends or purposes.

2. It is hard for us modern Christians coming from our western culture to read the Scriptures as they were intended
 - a) We are like the detective in that old American detective series, who “just wants the facts ma’am”, “just the facts”
 - b) It is a bit like the female French detective in the current series, “The Tunnel”, who is seemingly impervious to humour, nuance, emotions and to the reality that going strictly by facts and rules doesn’t work in relationships or in getting to the truth.
3. It is hard to avoid, but many of us find it hard not to make an eternal truth out of every statement in Scripture
 - a) At least those statements that suit us

B. BUT AS WE HAVE SEEN;

1. Truth is not about mere facts and rules of behaviour
 - a) Truth is a who
 - b) Truth is God
 - c) Truth is God revealed by Jesus Christ through the presence in our hearts as well as our minds of God the Holy Spirit
2. Gary Deddo continues;

In prayer we place ourselves before the living Lord trusting that he will make himself known to us and enable us to hear and follow him wherever he takes us. Faithful prayer to the Living God of the Bible is essential for our preparation for listening to Scripture.⁸

C. HOW DO WE AVOID ERROR

1. The Apostle John warned the church towards the end of the first century about discerning properly what is truth, and what isn’t

⁸ Gary Deddo, Interpreting Scripture,

1 John 4:3 But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here.

1 John 4:6 But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception.

D. THE SCRIPTURES WERE INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. To give us examples of how God relates to us, and how people down through the ages have related to God, rightly and wrongly
2. They are there to help keep us focused on the Father, through the Son, with the help of the Spirit
3. Elmer Colyer talks about Thomas Torrance's approach to this

For Torrance, accurate knowledge of God is not via a narrow Biblicist approach to thinking about God. Rather than piecing together various biblical statements about God, Torrance maintains that we have to look through the Scriptures to the truth of God out of which they arose (form in being) and to which they bear witness.⁹

E. THE SCRIPTURES DO NOT FUNCTION ALONE AS A SOLE AUTHORITY,

1. A book that can be read on its own, outside a relationship with God
2. But in a living relationship with God, the living truth, they are used by the Spirit to teach and inspire, as well to caution and correct us
3. Colyer;

The real content of God's self-revelation "is not the signifying truths of the Scriptures but the Truth of God revealed in and through them."

⁹ Colyer, p.138

While the Holy Scriptures are the mediate source of doctrine, doctrinal formulations—when they are true—are objectively grounded in God’s own self-revelation that resounds through Scripture as God continues to address us anew. In this way theology does greater justice to the Holy Scriptures, Torrance contends, for it seeks to establish its doctrinal formulation not simply in the signifying truth of the biblical statements but in the solid truth of God which the Holy Scriptures serve.¹⁰

F. THE SCRIPTURES CORRECT AND REORIENT US

1. When we start orienting our hearts and minds away from the truth that is Jesus Christ
2. Because that is what the Scriptures do;
 - a) Their role is not as the definitive resource or repository of truth, but to point us to and help us know and relate to the one who is the truth
3. Colyer writes;

For an objectivist, impersonal and uncommitted theology is incommensurate with the living and loving, personal being of God the Father whom we come to know through the incarnate Son and in the outpouring of the Spirit.¹¹

G. THE SCRIPTURES SHOW US THAT WE NEED A RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT

1. That life includes being part of and actively participating in the life of the body of Christ the church,
2. We learn more about God not only through the Scriptures
3. We also learn more about him through our Christian life;
 - a) Through living and sharing God’s life here on earth with one another
 - b) And through fellowship and worship together as his people
 - c) And learning through the church’s teachings and doctrines as they focus on God as he truly is

¹⁰ Colyer, p.368

¹¹ Colyer, p. 139

4. Colyer talks about how we live our lives within the biblical witness as members of the body of Christ

We indwell the biblical witness within the evangelical and doxological life of the church and allow the Scriptures to direct us to the divine realities to which they bear witness and then to articulate accurately and precisely what we come to know of God (integration of form in knowing). This does not mean that we leave Scripture behind. Indeed it is through the Holy Scriptures alone...that God's self-revelation and self-communication reaches us. ¹²

5. He is saying that we need to treasure and study the Scriptures because through them God reveals himself to us in order for us to have a relationship with him

H. BUT WE MUST NOT LIVE BY THE BIBLE ON ITS OWN

1. As Colyer continues on to say;

Yet we cannot be satisfied with simply quoting and summarizing Scripture, for we should try to ground "our thinking and speaking upon the truth of God himself who addresses us through those biblical statements." ¹³

2. The Scriptures lead us to live the Christian life in community with God and the rest of the body, worshipping, living and sharing the life of God continues to build our knowledge of God and his love and life

a) So studying the Scripture is not enough on its own, but it plays a vital part in helping us know God, who is the full and total truth and reality

b) They help us grow to know him and become more like him through sharing in his life that is in us through Jesus and the Spirit

c) Colyer continues;

At this evangelical and doxological level, human reason is molded and adapted to real knowledge of God according to God's trinitarian nature so that we are initiated into an accurate knowledge of God in which we "are enabled to apprehend" God "in some real measure" of conformity to what God is in himself.

¹² Colyer, p.136-137

¹³ Colyer, p.136-137

In light of God's self-revelation and self-communication through Jesus Christ and in the creative operation of the Holy Spirit, the human mind is renewed, transformed and spiritually reorganized, and it begins to reflect to a degree the triune God that we know in this way.¹⁴

CONCLUSION:

I. IN OUR HUMAN WORLD

1. we are confined and confused by our constricted view in which we seek to sort out good and evil on our own, in reference only to our minds and world around us
 - a) Because God is precluded, our quest for truth becomes a "what", a quest for materialistic answers that will always be incomplete and unsatisfying
2. It is important that when we seek truth from the Scriptures that we don't do so in a similar, earth bound, legalistic manner,
 - a) Seeking benefits for our lives—seeking happiness, and success and inspiration from the book and the principles we find within it—as an end in itself
3. It is only when we lift our eyes to the Son of God, the one we crucified because we insisted on judging and evaluating truth on our own, apart from and in resistance to God
 - a) It is only when we look to him, and listen to the Spirit of God he sent, and let him guide us and share his life with us that we begin to have our eyes open to who truth is
 - b) It is only then we can begin to see who God is, and know and experience the truth of his life and love, and the future he holds out to us all

J. THE SCRIPTURES PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN THAT PROCESS

¹⁴ Colyer, p.138

1. They are a help and a tool in the Spirit's hands to help us know God and to share in his life through Jesus
 - a) After all, the Spirit inspired them in the first place
2. They by themselves, are not "the truth",
 - a) But we need to study them because they lead us to know the truth, the truth that is God, Father, Son and Spirit
 - b) Who loves us and wants to share his life with us and all his creation, now and forever
 - c) And they lead us to indwell the truth that is God, and to live and share in his life
3. We will talk more about Living in the Truth that is God, next time

K. PRAYER