

## For the Love of the Truth

By Jane Titrud

Before Jesus was crucified, the Pharisees led Him up to Pontius Pilate to bring charges against Him worthy of death. The main accusation brought against Him was that He made Himself out to be a king in opposition to Caesar. Jesus explained that His kingdom was not of this world.

*“Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘So You are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’ Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’ And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, ‘I find no guilt in Him’”* (John 18:37-38 NAS, bold emphasis added).

Jesus did not answer Pilate’s question concerning the truth, probably because He knew he was not really interested and would not have believed His answer anyway. Pilate was just being sarcastic. He, like most of us, had likely heard many versions of “truth.” And, as a governing agent of Caesar over the Jews, he was not likely to become associated with a rival kingdom, whether spiritual or not.

In contrast to Pilate, true Christians openly identify with Christ, even bearing His name in the term “Christian.” It is likely that most would also say they are *“of the truth,”* for Believers must hold to certain fundamental beliefs if they are to be considered true Christians. And, one would think that anyone *“of the truth”* would love truth as well.

Nevertheless, those who hold to the fundamentals of the faith still differ amongst themselves in the realm of “secondary issues.” Such issues vary in significance. Yet, a few are important enough to cause division in the church and affect relationships between friends and even family members. It would seem, therefore, that these should be taken seriously.

What I am mainly referring to here are issues closely related to salvation. They include views on the nature of God, the nature of man, predestination, election, faith vs. works, the question of “free will,” and the security of the Believer. Views on these subjects are typically structured around predominant systems of thought, and the differences between them have maintained a steady tension and distrust between adherents over the years. Still, there should be some way of determining truth in these cases. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

My concern over this subject matter is twofold: 1) that people are merely being taught *what* to believe instead of *how* to think and apply the Scriptures—in particular, that various systems of thought end up determining truth rather than God’s Word, and 2) that due to the subject matter being so close to that which pertains to salvation, people tend to confuse the two and see certain beliefs in secondary areas of thought as a measure of one’s salvation.

The following Bible verses speak to the sufficiency of Scripture whether it comes to deciding matters of doctrine or needing direction on how to live a godly life:

*“Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And **Thy law is truth**”* (Psalm 119:142, bold emphasis added). *“Thou art near, O Lord, And **all Thy commandments are truth**”* (v. 151, bold emphasis added). *“The **sum of Thy word is truth**, And every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting”* (v. 160, bold emphasis added). *“Sanctify them in the truth; **Thy word is truth**”* (John 17:17, bold emphasis added). *“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Saying that the Word of God is sufficient and that God’s Word *is* truth does not just mean that it *contains* truth. It means that Scripture is sufficient for *determining* truth and that it is the *measure* of truth when it comes to subject matter related to the Bible.

The trouble in this case is that people on both sides of disputes in these areas generally claim to uphold what the Bible says according to the proper meaning of words and context. Yet, there must be

a problem with application. If each side were accurately applying God's Word of truth, then the Scriptures would appear to support vastly different and conflicting views on these subjects.

About the only solution put forth to avoid useless arguments in these cases is simply to "agree to disagree." That is even though such a practice contributes nothing to learning and promoting truth.

However, I believe that my coming out of a prior belief in evolution with a great deal of struggle has given me at least some insight into the matter, for I see some similarities between these two situations. The first relevant observation is that even after realizing that I needed to trust God's Word in the matter of origins, I still had trouble interpreting the world around me according to creationist views. My entire thought process needed to be revamped. What seemed to help me the most was teaching on the way people build and maintain systems of thought.

I came to realize, for example, how the same data can sometimes be viewed in different ways. It just cannot be viewed more than one way at a time. This is simply a matter of the way our brains work. In the case of an optical illusion, for example, one can look at a certain picture and see it one way, and then the image will suddenly change into something else. The drawing or picture stays the same, which is analogous to the data. It is just that our brains interpret the data differently. Two images may appear to flip back and forth, but one never sees the two of them together at the same time.

The way this applies in the case of origins is that scientists interpret the data in the world around them according to different fundamental premises. Secular scientists, for instance, prefer to interpret the data according to the belief that *naturalistic science* is the only true science. Invoking the notion of God as the Creator is not seen as valid science. Creation scientists, on the other hand, allow God in their thinking. They see plenty of evidence for intelligent design in the world around them and insufficient reason to conclude that the universe just popped into existence on its own. They also believe that the Word of God reveals things about a young earth and a worldwide flood that explain the data much better than natural processes working slowly over long periods of time.

Evolutionists and creationists thus come to have entirely different views on matters of the beginning. Moreover, unless a creationist has ever been deeply involved in evolutionary thinking, he or she has no idea how things look from the evolutionary perspective and how one simply cannot see things any other way. The same is true for the other way around too.

Science can be a very useful tool of reason in cases where the scientific method can be applied, and the results tested. But since one cannot devise an experiment to directly test the truth of either *natural* evolution or *supernatural* creation, the scientific method cannot be used in the usual manner. It can be used indirectly to test the predictions of corresponding models based upon what one would expect to find if one or the other were true. Creationists, therefore, use this method to demonstrate scientifically that creation is much more reasonable than evolution.

Yet, an additional factor also plays a role in determining what is supposedly true in the case of origins. That is, scientific truth can also be affected by what a person is either *willing* or *unwilling* to believe. For instance, if one does not believe in God and, consequently, refuses to consider evidence for design or any guidance from biblical revelation when it comes to interpreting the data, but instead *assumes* that the only real science is *naturalistic* science, then that is exactly what one's conclusions will reflect. It is not that the evidence *proves* evolution. It is just that the evidence in such a case gets interpreted according to prior *assumptions* that rule out the existence of God as Creator. The only alternative then is to side with evolution. Thus, many a brilliant mind among men has fallen for the lie that evolution is a fact. That which was merely *assumed* to be the best way of interpreting the data becomes the basis for an entire system of thought, which *seems* capable of explaining the meaning of everything in the universe and even to judge the truth of God's Word. The ability to so order and explain such vast amounts of information *appears*, in turn, to validate the original assumption and lend even more credence to this world view. Consequently, it also becomes very difficult to exchange this point of view for any other way of thinking, as so many elements of thought are involved.

There are several important lessons to learn from all of this:

First, even when knowledge seems to fit together into a satisfying, logically consistent picture of reality, human reasoning is still subject to error. All reasoning begins with various assumptions, and if they happen to be wrong, our reasoning will be unsound and our conclusions likely erroneous.

Second, the ability to form systems of thought around a central belief greatly heightens the potential for hidden error. For coordinating one's thinking around one central theme or assumption seems to validate the original assumption and makes it extremely difficult to see things any other way.

Third, faulty assumptions can be behind even the most all-encompassing systems of thought. The ability to incorporate substantial amounts of information within one system of thought is, therefore, no guarantee of truth.

Fourth, holding to a faulty system of thought is not a matter of inferior intellect and the need for expert advice. There are intelligent experts on both sides of the creation vs. evolution debate just as there are among those who argue from opposite points of view about issues secondary to salvation. Some people attempt to gain a stronger handle on the truth in certain situations by getting more formal education in a matter. Yet, that may only amount to becoming increasingly indoctrinated in a point of view that is actually not true at all, as in the case of evolution.

Finally, one's willingness to accept or reject certain assumptions can greatly affect the outcome of one's conclusions. Once one is caught up in a system of thought, it is likewise difficult to exchange it for another, for one must be willing to change his or her thinking in several different areas of thought, all at the same time.

Being aware that such limitations accompany all systems of thought can potentially make them less powerful in their ability to deceive. Still, it is not easy for anyone to subject an entire way of thinking to potential upheaval. We tend to hold onto world views and other systems of thought precisely because they give structure and stability to our way of thinking.

At the same time, realizing that rival systems of thought are likely associated with the secondary issues related to salvation can explain much of the controversy. Sometimes people emphasize different Bible passages over others, and sometimes the same verses are interpreted differently depending upon prior assumptions and beliefs. These practices lead to different results. It would seem in the best interest of the body of Christ, therefore, to get to the bottom of this situation and give serious attention to the assumptions that are behind such opposing views instead of ignoring the problem.

We Christians also need to appreciate the fact that we owe no allegiance to any particular system of thought just because we happen to be involved in one. These are just man-made mental constructs designed to help us make sense of the information presented to us. They can be wrong. We do, however, owe allegiance to the perfect Word of God. Those who truly love God and His Word should, therefore, be strongly motivated by such love to make sure they believe the right things. To that end, there are many things we can do to facilitate communication between Believers.

We must be careful not to become involved in efforts to manipulate Scripture, trying to make it say what we want it to say merely for the benefit of a thought system. We need to avoid injecting unwarranted emotion into a situation in the hopes of swaying an argument by making such things appear to be matters of salvation when that is simply being dishonest. By the same token, we must pray and ask for guidance with a willingness to admit we are wrong if we are convicted by a multitude of biblical evidence that goes against an assumption we have always believed was true. We do not want to subject ourselves to deception. Yet, this is about loyalty to biblical truth, not tradition.

Those who love truth may even benefit from listening to other Believers who do not share the same understanding. Other people often see things we do not see.

In short, we need to work together to achieve proper understanding. There is only one true faith (Ephesians 4:5) just as there is only one body (Ephesians 4:4). We are supposed to be about building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith (Ephesians 4:12–16)—not separating. Unity comes from *the proper working of each individual part* (v. 16). Thus, we all have a role to play when it comes to achieving unity in truth.

Pastors, evangelists, and teachers are specifically called for the purpose of building up the body to a mature faith (Ephesians 4: 11–13).

*“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love”* (Ephesians 4:14–16).

Nevertheless, the ability to properly interpret Scripture is not limited to a select few (2 Peter 1:20). Upon salvation, we all receive an anointing from God that enables us to receive and judge truth according to the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20-21). We must, however, be diligent to remain in God’s truth (1 John 2:24–27).

The most important thing those who love truth must do, therefore, is to read God’s Word regularly and thoroughly and become ever more grounded in it—not just listen to what others say about it. Teachers who have not remained in God’s truth can actually draw people away into subtle lies that undermine the truth. This has been the case from the beginning of the church (Acts 20:28–32) and still is today. What Paul instructed Timothy is, thus, good advice for us all:

*“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15).