

192. The Gospel of John 18:38

Jesus on Trial-Part 4

“What Is Truth?”

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

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This morning in our study in the Gospel of John we have entered into Chapter 18—which **focuses on the morning of Jesus arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and the two trials He would be put through before being crucified.**

The first being a **religious trial** and the **second a civil trial**.

This first trial took place before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high council—the second one before Pilate the Roman governor of the region.

We've already looked at the religious trial Jesus was put through—and now we want to continue looking at the civil trial that He endured that morning:

2. The Civil Trial of Jesus

A. Jesus stands before Pilate the first time

John 18:28–38 (NKJV)

²⁸ Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. ²⁹ Pilate then went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?” ³⁰ They answered and said to him, “If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.” ³¹ Then Pilate said to them, “You take Him and judge Him according to your law.” Therefore, the Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,” ³² that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die. ³³ Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered him, “Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?” ³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” ³⁷ Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” ³⁸ 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 fault in Him at all.”

Pilate's question to Jesus when he asked Him if He was a King and Jesus told him **“I am a King—but not the kind of king that conquers earthly cities and kingdoms (at least not at His first coming)—I am a King that conquers hearts and minds by bearing witness to the truth. And everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”**

To which Pilate responds, **“What is truth?”** and walks away.

Commentators have debated for centuries whether this was the response of a broken, despondent man who had given up all hope of ever knowing what truth is—or was this the response of a hardened politician and cynical person who didn’t care about knowing what truth is—if he even believed it existed at all.

I’ll leave that up to you to grapple with and come to your own conclusions as to the nature of Pilate’s response, **“What is truth.”** But as I said to end last week’s message and serve as a segue into today’s—**without truth life would be impossible.** So even though Pilate may have asked this question in a cynical and dismissive way—the question itself is profound and its meaning essential to human life—so let’s look at it.

REFLECTION: In your opinion what does Pilate’s response “what is truth” mean?

What is Truth?

Many scholars, academics, and philosophers over the centuries have relegated the concept of ‘truth’ to the realm of the *abstract* or *theoretical*.

Because so many **secular intellectuals reject the concept of truth as an absolute reality** (something that is real, tangible and knowable)—**they conclude it is merely a subjective concept** (something based on personal feelings and/or experience).

So, they claim truth isn’t absolute—it’s relative—or in other words truth is whatever you want it to be!

But as I just said—**without truth people can’t live, societies breakdown, and life would be impossible without objective, absolute truth.** Because, without objective, absolute truth there can be no righteous standard of morality and therefore no righteous laws governing a society—both of which are based on the objective, absolute standard of right and wrong that we call *truth*.

In our culture today many have abandoned the idea of moral *absolutes* in favor of moral *relativism*—
“My truth is my truth and your truth is your truth—
if it works for you and feels good it’s OK.”

Because so many want to do whatever seems right in their own eyes without anyone opposing or judging them—they naturally don’t want to oppose or judge the way anyone else is living either. Therefore, their mindset is—**“You accept me and I’ll accept you”**—which is now the general attitude of our age. So, we hear a lot today in our society about **tolerance, inclusiveness and love— which the world defines as basically accepting whatever people want to do and how they want to live.**

If we do speak out against immorality and sin—they label us, ‘judgmental and bigoted’, ‘self-righteous and narrow minded!’—all based on their belief (ideology) that “there is no such thing as sin.” But you see, John the

Apostle said in 1 John 1:8 that **those who say “we have no sin” are deceiving themselves and the truth is not in them.**

Then he goes on to say in verse 10 of those who **won’t receive forgiveness from God (because they are deceiving themselves)—“If we say that we have not sinned…”**

Whereas the first group (verse 8) could be saying that ‘*they no longer sin*’ (after being saved—i.e., ‘Christian Perfectionism’)—this second group of people John is alluding to seems to be saying that—‘*they have never sinned at all!*’

➤ You might be thinking—**“How is it possible that anyone could believe they have never sinned?!”**

➤ **It’s possible if they change the rules or the standards** by which certain behaviors are called *sin* in the first place. So, in our culture today many have **abandoned the idea of moral absolutes in favor of moral relativism.**

They believe that there are no moral absolutes—no absolute standards of right and wrong—and that ‘truth’ is whatever they say it is. Of course, moral absolutes come from God—the Supreme Lawgiver and Righteous Judge of all the earth.

REFLECTION: Why is it important to understand “sin” exists and we must acknowledge its real?

So those who want to get rid of God’s laws—
have to get rid of God Himself
(hence the rise of neo-atheism especially among young people).

Now, once they get rid of God, once they embrace the belief that He doesn’t exist—then neither do His commandments exist which causes them to say, **“I have not sinned, because sin doesn’t exist!”** You see, if there is no absolute standard of right and wrong—then sin is impossible because sin is a violation of God’s laws—which don’t exist if He doesn’t exist!

Again, these people don’t believe there is such a thing as sin—and they would tell you—**“I don’t sin, that’s your truth and not my truth!** When I have sex outside of marriage or lie to get that promotion or engage in homosexual activity or kill babies in the womb—it’s not sin because my truth says it’s perfectly right for me to do it!”

Well then, Hitler wasn’t an evil murderer—he was simply acting according to *his* ‘truth’!

This philosophy has brought us to a period in our nation’s history not unlike the period that the nation of Israel entered into under the Judges. That was one of the blackest periods in their history which was summed up with

the words, “There was no king (sovereign ruler and judge) in Israel therefore everyone did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.”—**a nation built on moral relativism!**

When a nation moves from *moral absolutes* (God’s commandments) to *moral relativism* (doing whatever feels right to each person)—that nation is ripe for God’s judgment—which in part is manifested in a total breakdown of that society!

REFLECTION: Try to define moral absolutes v. moral relativism:

Robert Winthrop, a founding father, and an early speaker of the House of Representatives said:

“Men in a word, must necessarily be controlled either by a power within or by a power without them, either by the Word of God or by the strong arm of man—**either by the Bible or by the bayonet.**”

James Madison, the chief architect of the Constitution said:

“We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions...upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves according to the **Ten Commandments of God.**”

So, in contrast to man’s relativistic moral insanity stands the Word of God which is true and righteous—

Psalm 19:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ The...judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

But I’m getting a little ahead of myself—so let me ask you again, **‘What is truth’?**

A good place to start would be with **how secular scholars define truth**—an example being Merriam/Webster’s dictionary:

1. the body of real things, events, and facts (*but who decides what is ‘real’—secularists who deny the existence of God, the supernatural, coming judgment or eternal life in heaven?*).
2. the property (as of a statement) of being in accord with fact or reality (*but who determines what is a fact or reality?*)
3. the body of true statements and propositions (*as in ‘Covid came from a wet market in Wuhan China’, or ‘that the vaccine will keep you from getting Covid’, or that ‘Trump colluded with Russia and stole the 2016 election?’—all propagated as truth for the last 2 years.*)

4. fidelity to an original or to a standard (*yes, but what 'original' or 'what standard'—'Rules for Radicals or Mein Kampf'?*).
5. sincerity in action, character, and utterance (*Really!?! If someone is sincere when they speak lies or when they do evil deeds like Hitler or the 9/11 Muslim terrorists—if they're sincere it is truth!?!?*).

First of all, did you notice how they used truth to define it?

Also, if those definitions seem a little ambiguous and 'unsatisfactory' in our quest to understand truth—it's because those 'definitions' leave out the source of truth that makes knowing and understanding truth possible—and that is God!

Trying to understand truth without God is like trying to understand sunlight without the sun! Truth emanates from God the way sunlight emanates from the sun. Just as trying to understand sunlight would be impossible without focusing on the sun as its source—so to understanding truth is impossible without starting with and focusing on God as its Source!

Truth doesn't exist apart from God as an independent or stand-alone reality—any more than sunlight exists as an independent reality apart from the sun. God is truth—which means that what **God calls truth is an expression and extension of Himself**—as something that emanates from Him as part of His nature—even as Jesus (Who is God) said of Himself in John 14:6 *"I am the way, the truth, and the life..."*

Pastor John MacArthur presents his thoughts on the subject of truth—

"Ask anyone today, *"What is truth?"* and you're sure to start an interesting conversation. Try it on a university campus and you're likely to receive laughter, scorn, and derision. The concept of truth has clearly fallen on hard times, and the consequences of rejecting it are ravaging human society. So, let's go back to the starting point and answer the question: What is truth?

One of the most profound and eternally significant questions in the Bible was posed by an unbeliever [Pontius Pilate]. Pilate, the man who handed Jesus over to be crucified—turned to Jesus in His final hour, and asked, *"What is truth?"* It was a rhetorical question, a cynical response to what Jesus had just revealed: *"I have come into the world, to testify to the truth."*

Two thousand years later, the whole world breathes Pilate's cynicism. Some say truth is a power play, a metanarrative constructed by the elite for the purpose of controlling the ignorant masses. To some, truth is subjective—the individual world of preference and opinion. Others believe truth is a collective judgment—the product of cultural consensus, and still others flatly deny the concept of truth altogether. So, what is truth?

Here's a simple definition drawn from what the Bible teaches: *Truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God.* Even more to the point: *Truth is the self-expression of God.* That is the biblical meaning of truth. Because the definition of truth flows from God, truth is *theological*.

Truth is also *ontological*—which is a fancy way of saying it is the way things really are. Reality is what it is because God declared it so and made it so. Therefore, God is the author, source, determiner, governor, arbiter, ultimate standard, and final judge of all truth...In fact, the one most valuable lesson humanity ought to have learned from philosophy is that it is impossible to make sense of truth without acknowledging God as the necessary starting point.

Truth is not subjective, it is not a consensual cultural construct, and it is not an invalid, outdated, irrelevant concept. Truth is the self-expression of God. Truth is thus *theological*; it is the reality God has created and defined, and over which He rules. Truth is therefore a *moral* issue for every human being.

How each person responds to the truth God has revealed is an issue of eternal significance. To reject and rebel against the truth of God results in darkness, folly, sin, judgment, and the never-ending wrath of God. To accept and submit to the truth of God is to see clearly, to know with certainty, and to find life everlasting."

I believe that people today really want to know what truth is but are just as confused as Pilate was and because of it **many have come to the conclusion that:**

1. It doesn't exist,
2. It's **totally subjective** ("Truth is whatever each individual person believes it to be."),
3. It is **hopelessly unknowable**.

But again, **Jesus said that He had come to this world to bear witness to the truth**—in other words, truth is real and knowable. Earlier in the evening He defined what truth is—He said that the Word of God is absolute truth:

John 17:17 (NKJV)
¹⁷ ...[Father] **Your word is truth.**

As we said earlier, truth is essential for life and Jesus told us that—God's Word (the Bible) is TRUTH! Many people are frantically looking for truth and yet—they don't or won't come to the Bible for the answers on how to live their lives.

As one author said,
"[the Bible] is the truth about life and death, time and eternity, heaven and hell, right and wrong, men and women, old people and young people. It is the truth about children. It is the truth about society. It is the truth about every relationship between God and man, between man and man, and between man and creation. It is the truth about everything that's needful."

REFLECTION: What does it mean to you – Jesus came to this world to bear witness to the truth?

In the New King James Version, the word "truth" occurs 237 times—and basically has two meanings in Scripture:

1. *Temporal facts man may observe about himself and the physical universe, including the truthful reporting of the facts.*
2. *Eternal and spiritual reality pertaining to God and the relationship of the creation to Him.*

When the Bible speaks of truth it is usually referring to the latter of those two meanings—spiritual truth pertaining to the character and actions of God; and that which deals with our relationship to God.

In the Old Testament we read—

Deuteronomy 32:4 (NKJV)
⁴ *He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.*

Psalms 31:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.

Psalms 33:4 (NKJV)

⁴ For the word of the LORD *is* right, And all His work *is done* in truth.

Psalms 119:160 (NKJV)

¹⁶⁰ The entirety of Your word *is* truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever.

Psalms 57:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, And Your truth unto the clouds.

In the New Testament we read—

John 1:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..."

John 17:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

John 18:37 (NKJV)

³⁷ "...For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Yet God's Word is clear that the truth will either save us—or judge us someday:

Psalms 96:13 (NKJV)

¹³ For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.

Romans 2:8 (NKJV)

⁸ but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness--indignation and wrath,

Romans 1:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The Word of God brings life to unbelievers and victory to believers in this battle with the devil and because of it the devil has declared war on the Word of God!

Way back in the Garden of Eden the devil declared war on God's Word when he first tried to get Eve to doubt what God said—"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1)

The Hebrew in this verse could be translated—**“So God has said, has He?...”**—as Satan subtly sows doubt in Eve’s mind as to what God said.

One author put it well—

“Here we have the first question in the Bible posing the first dilemma in human history—there were no dilemmas before this one. The question is carefully crafted by Satan to start Eve down the path of doubting God’s Word. He knows that doubting the Word of God will inevitably lead to rejecting the will of God and then doing whatever seems right in her own eyes. And so, for the first time in human history the most deadly spiritual force was covertly smuggled into the world—what was it? The assumption that what God has said is subject to human judgment.”

But today the attacks have become far more blatant and **‘in your face’** as Satan seems to have thrown off all subtlety and has now adopted a **‘direct frontal assault’** approach in his attacks on the Word of God. The attacks of the enemy against the Word are happening on a number of different fronts—**not the least of which is the attack we are currently seeing in our culture—the attack on human sexuality.**

As I said to close last week’s message (and set up today’s) was that the human race cannot exist without truth—which doesn’t simply have *moral* implications—it has physical implications as well.

During the COVID pandemic, people on the left were always shouting **“follow the science”, “we believe in the science!”**—and yet these same people have rejected the most basic science with regard to the human race—the science of male and female genetics!

Human genetics are not a matter of conjecture or subjective beliefs—they are a matter of basic science.

Genetically speaking—boys are born with X and Y sex chromosomes, while girls are born with two X sex chromosomes.

This is science in its most basic form—deny it and you not only deny science—you destroy the foundation of civilization itself—and society crumbles. (Psalm 11:3)

“Gender Confusion” as they’re calling it is an attack on God and His Word—make no mistake about it!

Genesis 1:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 5:2 (NKJV)

² He created them male and female and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created.

Yet our leaders, like the Governor of Illinois, J.B. Pritzker just came out and said, **“biology is meaningless.”** I’m sure the Governor didn’t realize it when he made that statement—but he was acting as a mouthpiece for the devil—and someone needed to say to him—**“Get behind me Satan!”**

So, how can we know truth in a world full of lies?

John 8:31-32 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Jesus said... “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² **“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” [from lies]**

2 Peter 3:16–18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ [Paul] as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures. ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

REFLECTION: “Follow the science”, “we believe in science” and “biology is meaningless” – are all statements from various doctors, media personalities and government leaders – what’s the problem with these kinds of statements?

One author said—

“Scripture is God's truth, whether it affects anybody or nobody. It is God's truth whether you agree with it or disagree with it, like it or don't like it. The truth is offensive, and there will always be a fixed animosity between the culture and authentic Christianity. The divide or chasm between the two could not be any wider than it currently is.”

So, in conclusion—“**What is Truth?**”

Simply put — **Truth is God who has expressed Himself in the pages of Scripture, His Holy Word!**

God’s Word is Truth—believe it and you’ll be saved and live a blessed life—reject it and the consequences will be eternal separation from God.

What did Pilate do with the Truth when presented to him?

We’ll see that next time!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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