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The People of God Part Two: “On the Side of the Truth”

The Pharisees and the Sadducees, the chief priests and the older men, their scribes and those in first-century Jewish religious and political society who followed them considered themselves to be devout followers of the God of Abraham (John 8:33, 41). They fooled themselves and their followers into thinking that their opposition to the one who “told [them] the truth” (John 8:40) was a part of God’s purpose (John 11:49–52; compare John 16:2–3). Such thinking and actions are part of the reason why Jesus called those who considered themselves the people of God ‘blind men [who] guide blind men’ (Matthew 15:14). Though they had all the appearances of being righteous, though they were in fact “Abraham’s offspring” (John 8:37), in a spiritual sense Jesus actually considered them children of the Devil (John 8:44).

Just as the Devil himself “did not stand fast in the truth,” many of those to whom Jesus spoke refused to believe the truth (John 8:44–46). In contrast, Jesus himself was committed to the truth. In fact, he ‘came into the world’ in order to “bear witness to the truth.” When he was on trial for his life he told the Pontius Pilate, “Everyone that is on the side of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37). Pilate’s response to Jesus’ statement gives us a clue about why it is hard for many today to recognize, let alone to believe in, the truth. Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” (John 18:38).

Pilate’s question suggests that he, like many others today and in times past, often simply do not know how to identify something as true. People, past and present, believe things are true and they make decisions in everyday life based on what they think is true. But it is often difficult for people to consider greater, spiritual truths on the same or similar basis or by use of the same or similar reasoning that is used when deciding more common, “everyday truths.” But why should that be the case?

In this Part Two on “The People of God” we will consider how we typically go about determining something as “true,” to one extent or another, and also what it means in a Christian sense to be “on the side of the truth.” The basis for our consideration of the latter will be the earliest records of Jesus’ life and ministry as found in the four New Testament Gospel accounts and from the commonly accepted letters of first-century Christians, also as recorded in the New Testament. In this article I hope to provide a clear basis upon which people can not only evaluate different beliefs for their relative

truth value, but also provide guidance for those interested in standing up for what is believed to be true by accepting those beliefs that have the best available reasons supporting them. In so doing I hope to help further establish the basis upon which we can, and in fact already do answer the question, "What is truth?" so that we are not left subject to doubt or confusion over things that, though we may not know them for a certainty, we have reasons to believe confidently. I intend to make clear on what basis we should believe anything is true, and then consider how we can keep ourselves from compromising what we have good reasons to believe, and thus remain "on the side of the truth."

"What is Truth?"

Back to Pilate's question: We must first have an understanding of what truth is before we can consider what it means in a biblical sense to be "on the side of the truth." So, then, "What is truth?"

Rather than quote some "definition" of truth, consider this: How do you determine something is true every day of your life? For example, when it comes to your decision about what time you will get out of bed, on what basis do you accept the truth of a particular clock's "time" so that you structure your activities around it in order to get dressed, eat breakfast, and then go to work, school, or elsewhere? How is that you have the confidence that the world around you (your family, your employer, your teacher, etc.) will receive your decisions about time in a way that will fit with, not run contrary to, the way they have structured their life, work, or school? What about decisions you make when you drive a vehicle on public roads? If you drive a car and you live in the United States, on what basis do you accept as true the color of the stop lights so that you stop and go according whether the light is red, yellow, or green?

Let's take a closer look at "time." We view and treat time as a discernable measurement of events, actions, or periods. The "measurement" is in relation to accepted sequences that progress from event to event, from act to act, or from one point in a period to another point (such as in a period of "life," that is, the period [of time] in which a person is alive). For example, we may start work at 8:00 AM and end at 5:00 PM. The measured sequences between these points are usually hours, minutes, and seconds. The "time" of this period, lunches and breaks aside, is nine hours. This is the "measurement," or "time," from one point to another, from the start to the end. So it is with an "act." I may clench my fist (thereby beginning the act), hold it clenched for one minute, and then release it (ending the act). The "time" of this act is one minute, or sixty seconds. A "period," then, is an extent of "time" in which something occurs in one sense or another, usually (with an exception admitted for certain periods that may have had no beginning or ending, such as God's eternal existence) with a start and a finish. The period of our human life outside of our mother's womb begins when we are born, and it ends when we die. The "time" of this period is the length of years, months, days, and however many

other accepted life sequences can be measured. Again, as we use it, “time” is a discernable measurement of events, actions, or periods, or other similarly measurable things, that occur. Anything that is measurable in this way is “in time,” by being measured by time, at least in terms of how we actually view time and use time in our lives. Thus, “time” is as old as the first act, or as eternal as the acts, or even the thoughts (if sequential, as are our thoughts), of Jehovah God himself.

Philosophically, speculatively, people can say whatever they want about “time.” But we actually have good reasons to define time the way I have done. These good reasons include the very treatment and use of time that we accept, whether we realize it or not, in our everyday lives. Unless someone is going to argue for some other time than that which we know and use in our everyday lives, then “time” must be defined in relation to what we know, or what we believe, which belief is shown by our actions relative to it. Our actions relative to “time” (our planning, our expectations for others, etc.) show that we accept as reliable the sequential measurements with which we act in harmony. Thus, for the truth about the time of day we have as good reasons such things as the time when the sun will rise, the time when the sun will set, and the fact that such things occur with predictable regularity absent any reasons for doubting that they will continue as they always have in our relatable and historical human experience.

Of course, not all human clocks are *exactly* the same. Some run slow and others run fast, but such clocks are considered to be “slow” or “fast” in relation to the most widely accepted clock or time which is set in relation to the time of day or night relative to our position on earth and in relation to the position of the earth relative to the sun, moon, and stars. Thus, if our watch is set according to the measurements of time accepted in accordance with our position and the position of our earth relative to these heavenly bodies and if someone then asks us, “What time is it?” we can give the time with a reasonable degree of confidence and expect that there will be no good reason that can be given as a legitimate contradiction to the “time” we give relative to such settings. So, if we are asked by the same person, “Is what you just gave me the *true* time?” we can answer “yes” because we know that the time of our watch is based on the accepted standards for which time can be given on this earth, according to such positions, without any reason to believe otherwise. We recognize such time because of its recurrence without contradiction. We are “on the side of time,” so to speak, when we accept the time that we have good reasons to believe. When the accepted time tells us it’s 8:00 AM, if that is when we are supposed to be at work then we do not show up at 9:00 AM and act as if there is something wrong with anyone who thinks that we should have been there at 8:00 AM.

Now consider the basis for your acceptance not only of the actual color of traffic lights, but also why you accept what those colors represent in relation to vehicle and pedestrian movement in most modern societies. The majority of people on this planet see in color, and the colors we see are not conflicting but consistent, allowing for a

general acceptance of colors as blue, green, red, yellow, and others, even if there might be some slight variation in shade or appearance of each respective color seen. Thus, when most of us drive or walk up to a traffic light we see the color of the light as red, yellow, or green, and those colors serve as indicators to us about how we should react. If the color of the light is red, we should stop. If the color of the light is yellow, then we should slow down and stop if we can. If the light is green, we can proceed through the intersection if it's otherwise safe. So when someone asks us, "What color is the stop light?" we can answer "red," "yellow," or "green" and expect that our answer will be accepted based on our shared visual appreciation for the color of the light we see. However, color is itself a product of how objects reflect and absorb wavelengths of light and of how these wavelengths are then absorbed by the cones in our eyes. Thus, it could be said that we do not truly know the color of an object we see with our eyes; we only perceive color as it is reflected and absorbed by an object so that our eyes "assign" a color to it. Based on the color assignments we perceive for various objects in the world (which color "assignments" remain consistent and allow for us to accept a particular color for an object as its "true" color), we react in accordance with accepted laws in association with others so as to safely drive or walk on the streets of society.

It is similar, though somewhat different, with our shared appreciation for historical truths. It is similar to our view of time and color "truths" in that we rely on good reasons that are not contradicted by reasons to believe otherwise when we accept something as "historical." It is different in that we can experience the accepted truths concerning time and color. We cannot "experience" a great deal of history in any living sense, though we can experience it in a different way, that is, through actual remains and records that can be read or studied. No human alive today, for example, actually witnessed the events recorded in the New Testament concerning the life of Jesus Christ. But we do have several records claimed to have been written by those who witnessed or who knew those who witnessed the actual recorded events. Therefore, as is true with any other historical event not witnessed or viewable by anyone living, we must evaluate the strength of the available historical evidence and recorded testimony, the same as we would do with any other event that we would represent as historically true but without having any actual, verifiable evidence beyond records and remains. To the extent that we can produce reasons based on such evidence for believing something as historically true, we can then accept and teach ourselves and others about it.

But not everyone accepts as "good" reasons given in support of a particular belief. Consider the recent, tragic events at Virginia Tech College. Here we have a person who believed he had good reasons for killing more than thirty people. No one seriously doubts that he committed the murders, and no one doubts that the killer had or at least believed he had reasons for murdering these people. But most people would say that his reasons were not good at all, and so most would not use those same reasons as a basis for committing the same acts. But on what basis do we say that his reasons are "good" or "bad"? In this case, people base their view of his reasons on laws that prohibit murder

and these laws are in turn based on either other (religious) laws or result from our human acceptance of what is right and wrong based on such things as our view of God, the consequences of the act for the innocent, and the preservation of human rights, rights we believe are ours because of how we in fact perceive human life itself. Thus, our “reasons” for believing and acting in certain ways, and for disagreeing with or even condemning the beliefs and actions of others often stem from accepted ways of evaluating or perceiving the evidence for and/or the consequences of our beliefs and our actions.

Any belief can be argued for in relation to the belief’s relative strength of reasons without anyone actually having to know for an absolute certainty which belief or action is absolutely correct. Thus, in almost all cases some dispute to any widely accepted belief or action can be made, but the dispute, like the belief, is itself only as good as the reasons for it. Even if we believe our experience with something (including an actual experience with the supernatural) was real, and thus potentially experientially certain, we could not expect those who did not share this experience to have the same level of belief as someone who did, or who thinks he or she did, experience it. Even potentially certain beliefs resulting from a person’s actual conscious experience could not be expected to similarly convince others who did not have the same experience. Thus, non-experiential evidence for the same belief would have to be brought forth to some degree if belief is expected on some level by those who did not have the same experience, which non-experiential evidence, if available, could then only result in a non-experientially-based belief for those who did not experience any supernatural event, and with the non-experiential belief accepted to an extent appropriate to the non-experiential evidence provided and any evidence to believe something to the contrary.

Based on the preceding, we can see how any “truth” in a religious sense is also that which is based on good reasons. Reasons for believing something as true in a religious sense would have to be considered “good” if they are the same type of reasons we accept as good for believing something in a non-religious sense. Again, while we might personally have experienced something “spiritual” or “supernatural,” if others have not had such an experience then the extent to which we might use our own experience as a basis for belief cannot be expected of others who did not have the same experience. That, again, leaves those without any experiential reason for believing in something religious or spiritual with having to choose whether or not to believe anything religious or spiritual based solely on reasons that are like the reasons we have for believing something non-spiritual, but historically true, for such historical “truths” are similarly accepted and acted upon in many cases apart from actual experiential evidence. In this light, consider the Bible.

The Bible as Truth

As discussed earlier in this article, people often accept something as true in a religious or in non-religious sense if the thing accepted has what are considered to be "good reasons," reasons that are not themselves contradicted by other reasons for believing something different. The degree to which good reasons for believing something exist in relation to any reasons for not believing the same thing should then be reflected in the extent to which the belief is practiced individually or taught to others. With respect to teachings of the Bible, as with anything else, belief in and practice of what it teaches should be preceded by or at the very least associated with good reasons, and if this is so then the resulting beliefs and teachings should not be contradicted by other good reasons to such an extent that the opposing good reasons rightfully, credibly neutralize or defeat altogether the reasons for belief. But why accept the Bible as a source for good reasons to believe in or teach anything historical or spiritual, at all?

As mentioned at the outset of this discussion of "truth" and of being "on the side of the truth," I am writing in reference to the truths of the Bible, specifically those truths taught by Jesus as recorded in the four New Testament accounts of his life and ministry in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, because I believe them to be "true" for many of the same reasons I believe many other historical events to be true: there is evidence from remains and historical records suggesting that what is written in the Bible actually occurred. What I accept as having occurred then provides me with a basis for further belief. The evidence that I perceive and can point to in relation to these beliefs is, I believe, better or more credible than any reasons given to date for not believing that what is written in the Bible actually happened in large part or entirely. But since I base my beliefs on such reasons, and since I myself did not personally experience what is recorded historically in the Bible, I do not argue for my beliefs with absolute certainty, even if I myself may believe some of them with as much certainty as can be argued for based on a spiritual experience I may have had. However, as with every other non-experiential belief of mine, I do not have to have absolute certainty in order to believe them. I simply need good reasons for my beliefs, and those reasons should not be contradicted by other experiential and non-experiential good reasons to the extent that the opposing reasons, again, neutralize or defeat altogether my good reasons for belief.

With this in mind, my reasons for accepting the Bible as historically true are, again, the same as those for which I would accept any other document as historically true. My belief in the history of the Bible is based on credible archaeological remains and recorded testimony sufficient to establish belief. These beliefs are thus based on reasons greater in quality to or absent of reasons to believe something different. In addition to the previously stated good reasons, namely, the Bible's well-known archaeological evidence and the historical testimony it contains (for example, four lengthy accounts of Jesus' life and ministry), the Bible also has some rather remarkable characteristics that mark it as deserving of serious historical consideration.

For example, it is a collection of books that has survived through an unusual history complete with fierce opposition from many nations with respect to both its Jewish and its Christian parts, more so than can be said concerning any other collection of books in the history of the world. It has the most diverse linguistic trail of any historical work. Its manuscript history is outstandingly superior to any other religious work of antiquity that is alive and thriving today in its influence among people living in all parts of the earth. The Bible contains a history of the creation of the earth and of mankind that extends back to the time of the first humans on earth, a history that, though contested on some levels (for example, the length of the creation “days” in Genesis 1), is actually very plausible under certain interpretations of the ancient texts. The Bible also teaches us how to live in ways that are pleasing, not only to Jehovah God, but also to our fellow man (Mark 12:29–31). It teaches us to look after orphans and widows (James 1:27). It teaches us to not be partial or to show favoritism (James 2:9; 3:17). It provides what is basically universally accepted as good for human families, namely, for wives to honor husbands and for husbands to honor their wives (1 Peter 3:1–7) and for children to be obedient to their parents and for parents not to irritate their children (Ephesians 6:1–4). These and many other simple yet profoundly moral and beneficial teachings are found in the Bible. While none of these things prove that the Bible is God’s written Word, these are good reasons to believe that the Bible represents the will of one who may be responsible for the creation around us, especially in comparison with other religious books or documents from throughout mankind’s history.

My reasons for believing the Bible as religiously or spiritually from God begin with my reasons for accepting the existence of a personal, intelligent God, and then end with the Bible as the best historical record of this God’s direction and actions with respect to others who have believed in him. I believe in the existence of an intelligent Creator on the same basis of good reasons that are more credible than any reasons offered against the belief in God’s existence, but without claiming to know for a certainty that God exists. The first reason to consider when it comes to belief in a personal, intelligent Creator is the fact that we are here. Everything around us is here, or at least we all move and exist on the basis that we are here, even if someone might call into question whether we are here or not. On the basis of this shared acceptance of our living existence (again, shared in action if not belief), we must account for it by arguing for a purposeful or an accidental cause. If it’s purposeful, or intentional, then its cause is intelligent. If it’s not purposeful, then its cause is accidental. Things that I associate with purpose and that also result from my own existence and from other living existences (other people, animals, etc.), such as houses, nests, computers, cars, are similar in form and content to my form and existence and the form and existence of the things that produce all of these. In other words, my form and content (physiological make-up) and that of other living existences around me represent structures or forms that are, at the very least, equivalent (if not far superior to) other purposefully produced forms or structures that we see created or that we ourselves create. Purposefully produced forms or structures perform intended functions or acts (computers process information,

launch programs, etc.), and they at times perform unintended functions or acts (computers crash, cars break down, houses fall apart, etc.) that are in some sense a necessary part or product of their designed form and content. In this, too, our form and content is similar to purposefully made things. Such parallels provide good reasons for belief in an intelligent Designer or Creator of all things living.

But others believe that an intelligent Creator, a God, does not exist and that my existence and other accepted existences around us can be explained outside of analogy with things that exist within and as a purposeful (thus, intelligent) result of our own existence. Our existence, some argue, and the greater existence of all things outside of our or other purposefully created things can be attributed to the eternal existence of non-intelligent "material" or some kind(s) of forces capable of generating material that over vast (billions, trillions, or even longer) years of time under gradually unfolding and evolving conditions based on prior and ongoing interaction of said material and forces has led to all present spheres of existence and that which fills them. I have considered these and other reasons, and the scenarios in which they might be said to explain our existence apart from an intelligent Creator. I simply do not believe that such or similar arguments, which arguments essentially contend that all that is has come from nothing or from that which is eternally material, forceful, or living in some sense though unintelligent, are plausible with respect to any natural analogy to which we can point in the world or in the universe around us.

Science can point to evidence of the development of a species within a species or to changes that occur over time in relation to various organic and environmental factors, but no amount of planets crashing into planets, volcanic eruption, comets, earthquakes, heat waves, ice ages (things all too often shown in association with presentations of scientific evolution of life on television shows and in scientific literature), or any interaction among different species has ever been shown to have produced the kinds of things that exist and which are said to exist from these and other forces and changes occurring over vast periods of time. Indeed, while science can rightly point to changes within a species and to the evolution of living things in a manner entirely consistent with what by analogy to the things we experience or make can be said to be consistent with changes and development intended by an intelligent Creator, that is all it can do: describe the existing processes of change and development which are at the very least consistent with almost every scenario which we might, by analogy to the things purposefully produced around us, offer to explain our own existence and the existences all other material forms and living organisms around us.

Natural science, by definition, cannot explain anything supernaturally. Thus, when asked how matter could always exist, or how life could come from something that does not exist in any physical or natural way, scientists cannot answer the question scientifically for there is nothing they can point to in analogous support for either that which is eternal or that which is not natural. While scientists often do try to explain the evolution

of existing things by analogy with the evolution of that which is already existing, they can only answer the question concerning the ultimate origin of life and matter with, "We cannot explain such things; not yet." But any possible explanation that might be discovered, at least at this point, cannot be presented scientifically by analogy with any presently existing but previously non-existing thing! Thus, if the answer cannot be said to be "natural" or scientific at this time, then that leaves us with only a supernatural answer, which is consistent with the belief in a supernatural God.

The supernatural is beyond our natural world, and thus capable of explaining that which cannot be explained by analogy within our world. Most everything else can be explained by analogy with what we know from within our world, so that belief in a supernatural God, the only kind of God that could account for what is not yet otherwise naturally explainable, is in fact based on good reasons, though not something we can say we know for a certainty, even as science cannot defend with certainty their understanding of the ultimate origin of life and matter. But the difference is those who believe in the supernatural are not contradicted in their belief by what we see in the world around us, for it is all consistent with our belief in the supernatural. Those who believe only in the natural existence of life are still left without any answer to the ultimate question of the origin of life and matter, for they do not accept the supernatural and the natural does not yet provide them with any answer to this question.

I understand that others do not share the same level of belief about God's existence or his use of the Bible as I do, primarily because they do not consider the reasons that I accept as sufficiently supportive of my level of belief. We simply disagree, then, on the value of the reasons for these beliefs. But I wanted to at least explain the general basis for my accepting God's existence as true and the Bible as his written communication to mankind, before I speak about what it means to be "on the side of the truth" when it comes to biblical Christianity. There are many other points that I could offer in relation to the reasons for belief that I have primarily given here, and I know that those who believe differently could likewise present more details regarding their reasons for their beliefs than I what I have outlined on their behalf in this article. But those details that I know of at present would not change the conclusions I have reached regarding the existence of God and the truthfulness of the Bible. Therefore, for those who believe like me in the existence of God and in the Bible as the preeminent collection of his written communications to humankind, for those who worship Jehovah, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:6; compare Micah 5:4), the balance of this article is for you.

"A Pillar and Support of the Truth"

In the first-century Christian congregations, there were many problems and few apostles. Similarly, there are many spiritual needs today, as there were back then (compare Matthew 5:3), but not everyone is willing to meet them. As the apostles died

off, existing problems continued to grow into outright heresy and eventually into widespread apostasy (Matthew 13:25; Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Thessalonians 2:23; 2 Peter 2:1). Yet, today, as in the first-century CE, we are not left completely without those who are willing to confront such wickedness, no matter what the cost (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3-5; Revelation 2-3). Thus, when the apostle Paul found a young man named “Timothy” willing to deal with the problems and meet the needs of others he wrote him at least two letters, letters that are now a part of the New Testament. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote about how Timothy should handle a variety of things occurring or needing attention in relation to the Christian congregations, which congregations he described as “God’s household” and as “a pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Again, “God’s household” was to ‘support the truth.’

In my study of the Bible it seems that the thing which matters more than anything else is truth. It was obedience to the truth that was at the heart of the issue in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:4-6). It was the truth concerning Job’s reasons for serving God that led to his severe trials and persecution at the hand of Satan (Job 1:9-12; 2:1-6). The very purpose for which Jesus was born into this world was to “bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37). Of faith, hope, and love “the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13), and yet love “rejoices with the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6). We are told to have “faith in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). We are taught to “worship “with spirit and truth” (John 4:23, 24). Christians are “sanctified by means of truth” (John 17:19). And we are implored to ‘continue considering whatever things are true’ (Philippians 4:8), for “no lie originates with the truth” (1 John 2:21). Indeed, “the truth came to be through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

But if even during the time of the apostles people were “tossed about as by waves and carried hither and thither by every wind of teaching by means of the trickery of men, by means of cunning in contriving error” (Ephesians 4:4), how can we avoid being “misled from the truth” today (James 5:19)? Having considered earlier in this study ways we can identify beliefs that are true, how can we remain “a pillar and support of the truth” after we have found it?

In Part One of this series on “The People of God” I discussed several things you will find among the Pharisees and the Sadducees and those like them in first-century Jewish religious and political society, and also among those who are like them today. The “Seven Levens” and other characteristics that the Bible associates with such people are signs of spiritual corruption, the kind which led those people to actively oppose the truth and to mislead others in furtherance of their own desires. Yet, it was just such persons that were the closest organized representation of God’s people on earth at the time when Jesus condemned them in the harshest of terms:

John 8:44–45 (NWT)

YOU are from YOUR father the Devil, and YOU wish to do the desires of YOUR father. That one was a manslayer when he began, and he did not stand fast in the truth, because truth is not in him. When he speaks the lie, he speaks according to his own disposition, because he is a liar and the father of [the lie]. Because I, on the other hand, tell the truth, YOU do not believe me.

Amazingly, those who perceived themselves as ‘pillars and supporters of the truth’ were nothing of the sort! Jesus saw this, clearly, in spite of the various accouterments of religious devotion such persons displayed or pointed to in support of their claims (Matthew 3:9; 23:5, 27–28; John 8:39). But while “The Seven Levens” can help you identify spiritual corruption among those who claim to be the people of God, and while having good reasons for your religious beliefs and actions (good reasons that outweigh any other good reasons to believe something to the contrary) can help you identify what it is you should believe and how you should act, there are several things you can do to keep yourself always “on the side of the truth” (John 18:37).

On the Side of the Truth

As discussed in Part One of this series, Jesus said concerning those who are truly his followers, “By their fruits YOU will recognize them” (Matthew 7:16). He also taught that those who worship his God and Father would do so “with spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24). A key ‘fruit’ of his followers, then, would be that they believe truth, teach truth, and worship in truth. But it is one thing to find the truth by means of the best available reasons for believing something and quite another to stay “on the side of the truth,” which is where Jesus said his followers would be (John 18:37). How, then, can we remain “on the side of the truth” after we have found it?

Here are some important points from the Bible you might consider:

1) ‘Do nothing according to a biased leaning’ (1 Timothy 5:21):

I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels to keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing according to a biased leaning.

Once you determine something is true based on the best available reasons, it is tempting to never again question your beliefs or to continue checking your reasons for them against other beliefs or reasons that may come along. But if your current belief in what is true resulted from the best available reasons, why should that same approach ever fail you in the future? As long as you are consistent with what it is that you consider good reasons for the things you believe, for beliefs both religious and non-religious, it is unlikely that the same approach to the determination of truth will cause you to accept something that you would not want to believe, for the same types of reasons that you believe other things. Not allowing yourself to ‘prejudge’ something or to approach

reasons for belief with “a biased leaning” will help you make sure you have the truth, or help you actually find it.

While the best beliefs are those that are unlikely to be ongoingly replaced or contradicted by better reasons, you can only know that you have the “best beliefs” obtainable if you are truly committed to considering things with “soundness of mind” (Acts 26:25). Such a mind is always open to the best reasons available for belief in anything, especially for belief in something important, such as “walking straight according to the truth of the good news” (Galatians 2:14).

2) Do not ‘speak according to your own originality’ (John 7:16–18; 8:44; 16:13):

“What I teach is not mine, but belongs to him that sent me. If anyone desires to do His will, he will know concerning the teaching whether it is from God or I speak of my own originality. He that speaks of his own originality is seeking his own glory; but he that seeks the glory of him that sent him, this one is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him. ... When [the Devil] speaks the lie, he speaks according to his own disposition. ... However, when that one arrives [the holy spirit], the spirit of the truth, he will guide YOU into all the truth, for he will not speak of his own impulse, but what things he hears he will speak, and he will declare to YOU the things coming.

Contrast Jesus, with Satan, and then Satan with the holy spirit. Two are sent from God (Jesus and the holy spirit) and they represent or embody not their own will but that of the one who sent them. They know or otherwise represent only the teaching from the Father, who “is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him.” The other (Satan) lies. He has to lie in order to oppose “the God of truth” (Psalm 31:5). To gain that which he desires (his own glory) Satan must advance that which God does not. Speaking of our own originality will only lead us to seek our own glory in connection with the things we speak, like Satan. Speaking and teaching in accordance with what we have received from the Father, God, and from those clearly sent by him who in turn represent only his will, not their own, will not only ensure that what we speak is true but it will keep us from seeking our own glory. If we do find that we have spoken according to our own originality then, if done by mistake, it will be easy to retract and express regret over the error. If we find that we cannot easily retract something said in connection with God, something that we now know to be false, then our disposition is one that seeks our own glory. Seeking our own glory can only result in our deviating from the truth that we have received and learned from God.

3) Do not ‘deviate from the truth’ (2 Timothy 2:16–18):

But shun empty speeches that violate what is holy; for they will advance to more and more ungodliness, and their word will spread like gangrene. Hy·me·nae´us and Phi·le´tus are of that number. These very [men] have deviated from the

truth, saying that the resurrection has already occurred; and they are subverting the faith of some.

‘Deviating’ from something does not always mean you have turned away from it entirely. But deviations from the truth, deviations of any number and kind, will only serve to lead you further and further away from the truth and eventually you will turn away from God completely (see below). Hymenaeus and Philetus started to deviate from the truth of the resurrection and they ended up ‘advancing to more and more ungodliness’ (2 Timothy 2:16). How? By “saying that the resurrection,” a Christian belief (1 Corinthians 15:20–23), “has already occurred”! The end result of deviating from the truth of the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead was that “the faith of some” was ‘subverted.’ So no Christian today should be associating dates, times, or expectations of any kind to the fulfillment of any Christian belief prophesied about concerning end-time events. Doing so is a deviation from the truth of what is clearly taught in the Bible itself. But there are other biblical beliefs where many have set aside what is clearly taught in the Bible and have chosen instead to ‘deviate from the truth.’ Because of the impact that deviations from clearly expressed biblical beliefs can have on Christian faith and unity, let us consider two familiar examples of modern-day ‘deviations from the truth,’ and how you can avoid them and deviations like them.

If the Bible teaches that “to us, there is one God, the Father,” and it does (1 Corinthians 8:6), then that is what we should teach. Christians do not change this to “there is to us one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” just because, for example, Jesus is also presented as ‘our God.’ We present the clear teaching (“one God, the Father”), then cite the texts that call Jesus “God” (John 20:28) in association with those that also bear on his relationship to the “one God, the Father” (John 20:17), thus making clear the teaching from within the Bible itself, not from outside of it. We do not try to avoid calling Jesus “God,” nor do we invent meanings and understandings of the word “God,” meanings and understandings that are not expressed in or consistent with what the Bible plainly teaches. For example:

John 14:9–10 (NWT):

Jesus said to him: “Have I been with YOU men so long a time, and yet, Philip, you have not come to know me? He that has seen me has seen the Father [also]. How is it you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in union with the Father and the Father is in union with me? The things I say to YOU men I do not speak of my own originality; but the Father who remains in union with me is doing his works.

And:

Hebrews 1:1–4 (NWT):

God, who long ago spoke on many occasions and in many ways to our forefathers by means of the prophets, has at the end of these days spoken to us by means of

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a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the systems of things. He is the reflection of [his] glory and the exact representation of his very being, and he sustains all things by the word of his power; and after he had made a purification for our sins he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty in lofty places. So he has become better than the angels, to the extent that he has inherited a name more excellent than theirs.

Thus, since there is “one God, the Father” then there is only “one God” that Jesus could be, namely, “the Father”! He is this God to us (thus, ‘our God’) in that he “is the reflection of [his] glory and the exact representation of his very being” and because he does “not speak of [his] own originality; but the Father who remains in union with [him] is doing his works” (John 14:10). Therefore, Jesus is God to us for he perfectly expresses the Father’s glory and he does not represent his own will (which would make him a separate “God” from the Father), but he expresses only the will of the “one God, the Father” (Luke 22:42; John 6:38; Revelation 1:1).

This absolute refusal by God’s exact image, by God’s “firstborn” (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:6), to use his exact correspondence to God for any other purpose than for doing, again, not his own will, but only the will of the “one God” whom he ‘reflects,’ is the greatest act of worship that could be shown in reverence to God. Why? Because it is done by one who is the “exact reproduction of his very being” (Hebrews 1:3) and who could therefore have chosen to do his own will more so than anyone else who chose to do so, but who did not and who instead chose to submit himself completely to the will of the Father, his God (Matthew 27:46; Philippians 2:5–8). It is no wonder, then, that we find God in turn glorifying his Son, the one who worships him in such a perfect way by completely rejecting the way of others who ‘speak according to their own disposition (John 8:44; Philippians 2:9–11).

Consider also the Bible’s clear teaching respecting the eating of blood as food. Texts from the Noachian Covenant (Genesis 9:4), from the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 17:10–14), and from the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:29; 21:25) can be cited to show that God does not desire his people to ‘eat blood.’ Eating blood as a food does not show respect for the “soul” or for the life that “is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:14), nor does eating blood for food that is subsequently digested by the body allow blood to remain as blood for use by the body as blood, which is the very purpose for which God created it. But it is a ‘deviation from the truth’ to claim that such texts teach that God clearly forbids the use of blood as blood, for example, by transfusing one’s own or another person’s blood to serve as blood in the same or in another person through purely medical procedures intended to save human life. Using blood as blood is not the same thing as eating blood as food, and it cannot be argued in relation to any biblical text that trying to save a person’s life by using blood as blood shows disrespect for life.

It is not a question of whether or not God might be “triune in nature,” of whether or not Jehovah may disapprove of temporarily removing blood for the purpose of reusing it as

blood. The issue is, as we have discussed, what we have the best reasons to believe. What does the Bible actually, clearly teach? It teaches that there is “to us one God, the Father” and that it is wrong to ‘eat blood as a food.’ If we ‘deviate’ from these or from other similarly clear teachings by adding to them meanings and beliefs that the stated teachings do not themselves express or contain, then it will not be long before our and other peoples’ faith is ‘subverted’ and we “turn [our]selves away from the truth.”

4) Do not ‘turn away from the truth’ (2 Timothy 4:3–5; Titus 1:11, 13–14):

For there will be a period of time when they will not put up with the healthful teaching, but, in accord with their own desires, they will accumulate teachers for themselves to have their ears tickled; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, whereas they will be turned aside to false stories. ... It is necessary to shut the mouths of these, as these very men keep on subverting entire households by teaching things they ought not for the sake of dishonest gain. ... For this very cause keep on reproofing them with severity, that they may be healthy in the faith, paying no attention to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn themselves away from the truth.

If things have reached this point, then serious correction is needed before you or those to whom you have taught such things suffer greatly. The apostle Peter found himself in just such company and was himself one who was “putting on [a] pretense” and “not walking straight according to the truth of the good news” by “compelling people of the nations to live according to Jewish practice” (Galatians 2:13, 14). Thus, Paul had to stand up for the truth and ‘reprove him with severity’ so that Peter and those with him might “be healthy in the faith” and cease ‘turning themselves away from the truth’ (Titus 1:13–14; Galatians 2:11).

If truth is what you want, then look to it as your guide, and not simply to men’s teachings (compare Isaiah 29:13). Be consistent with your means of determining what you believe to be true and then do not let anything keep you from following it, that is, unless you find better reasons for believing something different. But be careful of your “own desire” (James 1:14), which is nowhere, really, used as a basis for determining what is truth. If we have good reason to believe in Jehovah, if we have good reason to trust that we are made in his image, and if we have good reason trust that when he tells us we know “good and bad” (Genesis 3:22), then when he ‘opens our ear’ let us not “turn in the opposite direction” (Isaiah 50:5) by ‘turning our ears away from the truth’ (2 Timothy 4:4).

5) “Whatever things are true ... continue considering these things” (Philippians 4:8):

Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are of serious concern, whatever things are righteous, whatever things are chaste, whatever things are lovable, whatever things are well spoken of, whatever virtue there is and whatever praiseworthy thing there is, continue considering these things.

It is a fact: The more our minds are concentrated on the pure and simple truths of God's Word, the less likely we will be to do anything according to a "biased leaning" (1 Timothy 5:21), the less likely we will be to 'speak of our own originality,' and the less likely we will be to 'deviate from the truth' or to 'turn away' from it.

Conclusion

There are many things Christians can do to "go on walking as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). I have tried to list some of the more outstanding things to keep in mind so that you "are not in darkness ... for YOU are all sons of light and sons of day" (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5). But there are many other things you can do to protect yourself from "misleading inspired utterances and teachings of demons, by the hypocrisy of men who speak lies" (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

Prayer, for example, is something more powerful than all of the above because it keeps our minds on God and Christ and puts them in a position to grant us "no matter what it is that we ask according to his will" (1 John 5:14; compare Matthew 21:22; John 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24; James 4:2-3; 1 John 3:22). Many people pray to God and to Christ, however, and then choose to lose sight of the truth. But prayer, a form of worship, must be "with ... truth" (John 4:24). Therefore, we should work hard at 'putting away falsehood' and at speaking "truth each one of YOU with his neighbor, because we are members belonging to one another" (Ephesians 4:25).

The people of Jehovah God and Jesus Christ know the truth, they believe the truth, and they remain "on the side of the truth." The "truth" is not an organization, nor is it any man or woman except for the sense in which it rightly applies to Jesus Christ himself (John 14:6). The "truth" in terms of our spiritual beliefs, as with all of our beliefs, is that which has the best quality of reasons for believing in the first place. Now that we have a good understanding of how to find truth, and of how we can stay "on the side of the truth," should we not be able to look around the world today and find the people of God who are in fact "practicing the truth" (1 John 1:6)? In Part Three in this series on "The People of God" I invite you to take just such a look with me, to see what, or who, we might find.

Greg Stafford

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***This article was revised only with respect to its formatting. No changes were made to the content of the original article.**