

## What is Truth?

Knowing how to answer the question “What is truth?” is one of the foundational pillars of apologetics. The importance of the issue of truth cannot be stressed too highly, for if there is no absolute truth, Christianity is nothing more than one’s opinion about God.

To study what truth is, there are three major areas to study:

1. **Theories of Truth**
2. **Barriers to Truth**
3. **Objections to truth**

### I. **Theories of Truth** (What is Truth?)

#### **The Pragmatic theory**

According to the pragmatic theory, something is true if it *works*. Truth is that which is *fast* and brings the best *results*.

#### **Examples of Pragmatic Theory:**

Telling a lie in order to get out of trouble. The lie may work and prevent punishment, but that does not make the lie true!

Abortion – it is a solution to the problem of an unplanned pregnancy, but that does not make it correct or the true solution.

Euthanasia – it deals with the problem of taking care of the sick but it is still murder!

#### **Problems with Pragmatic Theory:**

This theory confuses what truth *DOES* and what truth *IS*.

Just because something works, it does not mean something is true!

#### **The Intentionalist theory**

According to this theory, truth is found in good intentions, not in reality. Something is true if we intend it to be true, and false if intended to be false.

#### **Examples of Intentionalist Theory:**

Giving someone the wrong medicine on accident – you *INTEND* on curing the sickness, but the patient dies.

Giving someone bad directions to your house – you say turn left but you *INTENDED* on saying turn right. The person shows up at the wrong house!

Grabbing the wrong bottle of shampoo in the shower – you intend on cleaning your hair, but instead it falls out!

### **Problems with Intentionalist Theory:**

This view mistakenly focuses on what we *INTEND* to say, and not what we *ACTUALLY* say.

No one could ever be wrong if they had the right *INTENTIONS!*

A lie may have good *INTENTIONS*, but that does not make it true!

The Old Testament showed that even unintentional things were wrong and required a sacrifice. (Leviticus 4:2-10, 27)

### **The perspective/relative theory**

According to this theory, truth is decided by the individual. Something can be true for one person, and not for another.

### **Examples of perspective/relative Theory:**

One person says it is hot in the room, another person says it is cold.

The clock is to the right of some and to the left of others.

God is different depending on your own worldview/religion.

### **Problems with perspective/relative Theory:**

Those who believe that truth is relative, that it is a matter of their own perspective are missing one big fact: **THEY ARE SAYING THAT TRUTH IS UP TO EACH INDIVIDUAL TO DECIDE, AND THAT IS TRUE FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS!!!**

This is called a “*SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT.*” When you turn the argument on itself, it collapses. Other examples of self-defeating arguments are:

- Never say the word never
- I can't speak any English
- Words do not have any meaning
- No truths apply to every person

If something is true, it is true for **ALL PEOPLE, AT ALL TIMES, IN ALL PLACES.**  
**2 + 2 = 4 for all people, at all times, in all places.**

### **The Correspondence theory**

According to the correspondence theory, a statement is true if it *corresponds to reality as it exists.* **TRUTH IS TELLING IT LIKE IT IS, AND NOT TELLING IT LIKE IT IS IF FALSE. THIS IS THE BIBLICAL THEORY OF TRUTH.**

**Definition of Truth: TRUTH IS TELLING IT LIKE IT IS.** Truth is contained and shown in the following forms:

1. Statements whether written or spoken that correspond to reality
2. Jesus as a person (John 14:6)
3. The Word of God (John 17:17)

### **Examples of the Correspondence theory of truth in the Bible**

- Joseph testing Brothers (Gen 4:16)
- Ananias and Sapphira lying about their finances. (Acts 5:1-4)
- The ninth commandment (Ex 20:16)
- Garden of Eden (Gen 2:17, 3:4)

## **II. Barriers to truth.** (Can truth be known?)

**Agnosticism** – One cannot know anything about ultimate reality (truth.) There are no absolute truth statements about reality. Knowledge of God is impossible.

### **Problems with Agnosticism**

To say that no one can know what truth is unknowable is a **SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT**. How do you know that statement is true?

To say one cannot know *ANYTHING* about God, you must believe you know at least **THAT MUCH** about God!

Scripture tells us over and over that God has revealed Himself/Truth to man. (John 17:17)

**Skepticism** – One should doubt everything and not make/hold off on judgments about reality.

### **Problems with Skepticism**

To say that people should be skeptical about all things, then they must also be skeptical about their own belief! **SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT**

To hold off on making a decision *IS* making a decision!

Jesus fought skepticism in His own disciples after the resurrection. He showed the His hands and feet (Luke 24:38-39) and ate broiled fish with them (Luke 24:42)

The Gospel's aim is to have people make a decision to accept the gift of salvation and follow Christ, or reject it.

**Relativism** – All truth is subjective or relative, not absolute. Truth is a matter of ones own perspective. Things are relative to either time, people, or places.

### **Problems with Relativism**

**SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT** once again! Saying that “all truth is relative” is making an absolute truth statement!

If truth is relative, what is it relative to? What is that thing relative to? This cannot go on forever, something must be absolute to base it on. (Tallest person in class)

Absolute statements cross religious, political, generational, ethnic lines.  $2 + 2 = 4$  for everyone!

### III. Objections

A. Truth is narrow

**SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT** (Is that statement true? Does it allow room for other views? IS that statement narrow?)

B. You're *exclusive* and *intolerant*

Truth is exclusive and intolerant.  $2 + 2 = 4$  and that is just the way it is!

C. All religions have equal truths

**SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT** (Religions have mutually exclusive truth statements. There is one God, there are multiple Gods, there is no God. Not all equal truths)

D. All truth is culturally relative

**SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT** (Is that statement only true in your culture or in all cultures?)

E. What is true for one person is not true for all

**SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT** (is that statement true for just you or for all people?)

F. If truth doesn't change there can be no new truth.

Truth can be discovered, but that does not make it new. (The Earth has always rotated the sun, but not discovered until later.)

G. There are no absolutes

**SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT** (Is that absolutely true?)

H. Truth cannot be known about God because finite human language can't talk about an infinite God

**SELF-DEFEATING ARGUMENT** (Is that statement about God true?)