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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, all 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 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’ 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 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 or “New Testament” today. 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 to 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 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.

Therefore, 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. Most people on this planet see in color,

and the colors we see are not conflicting. They are consistent, allowing for a general acceptance of colors among most people as blue, green, red, yellow, and others, even if there might be some slight variation in shade or appearance for 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.

This means 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 most of us can 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, that is, 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, witnessed the events recorded in the New Testament concerning the life of Jesus Christ. But we do have several detailed and, for the most part, well-established records claiming to have been written by those who did witness 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 good reasons based on such evidence for believing something to be historically “true,” we can and should rely on and teach others about it. This is the essence of Christian ministry, namely, being convinced by what we consider the best reasons for the historicity of Jesus and for the God of Israel and, ultimately, teachings others these things inclusive of the reason for the death and the resurrection of the Messiah.

However, 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. Still, 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 in relation to the belief’s relative strength of reasons without anyone knowing, for a certainty, which belief or action is correct. Thus, in almost all cases any widely accepted belief or action can be “disputed,” but the dispute, like the belief, is itself only as good as the reasons for it (or should be). Even if we believe our experience with something (including an actual experience with the supernatural) was real and, therefore, potentially experientially certain, this does not mean we should (or even can) expect those who did not share this experience to have the same level of belief as the one(s) who did or who think they did.

Even potentially certain beliefs resulting from a person’s actual conscious experience cannot be expected to similarly convince those 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. The non-experiential belief can only rightly be accepted to an extent appropriate to the non-experiential evidence and with any potentially contradictory evidence having been sufficiently provided and considered.

Based on the preceding, we can see how any “truth” in a religious sense is or should also be based on good reasons, preferably, the best! But reasons for believing something as true in a religious sense would have to be considered “good” only if they are at least like those reasons we accept as “good” (or the “best”) 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 to believe anything religious or spiritual based solely on reasons that are like the reasons we have for believing in something non-spiritual, but historically true. After all, historical “truths” not experienced or witnessed by anyone today are, similarly, often accepted by non-religious people, even acted upon strongly in many cases apart from any actual experiential evidence. In this light, consider the Bible as a source for good or even the best reasons.

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.” At a minimum this means reasons which are not contradicted by other equally “good” or even better reasons for *not* believing, or 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 associated with good reasons. To be decisive in any sense over any other belief what is accepted should not be contradicted by other equally good or better reasons. Otherwise, equal consideration should be given to the equally good belief, and preference should be given to the “better” belief, that is, the one with the best reasons, which would also mean there is not another equal or better belief, in terms of reasons. But why accept the Bible as a source for good reasons to believe in or teach anything historical or spiritual that is equally good or better than any other historical source or belief?

As mentioned at the outset of this discussion of “truth” and being “on the side of the truth,” I am writing in reference to the truths of the Bible, specifically those truths taught by Jesus and as recorded in the four most credible accounts of his life and ministry in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. When I say I believe they are “true,” I mean true in the same way I and many if not most others say other historical accounts and events are “true,” namely, there is evidence from physical remains and from other, datable records and events which support what is in the Bible, as well as in other historical records, though I and others like me believe the Bible has some of the best attested and important historical information than most other historical documents.

What I accept as having occurred in the past for such reasons provides me with a basis for ongoing comparative analysis of all beliefs, with the one that is “best” (if that is what

the objective, best available reasons reveal) accepted and acted upon. I believe they do, and I believe the best available evidence points to the biblical books as containing the best source of information about the ancient peoples of and around Israel, as well as their God and gods, as well as important figures such as Moses, David, Isaiah, and, of course, Jesus, all of whom have historical support (good reasons for belief) from outside of the Bible.

The evidence, I believe, points to the biblical books as some of if not the best source of information for the above figures and peoples, and many beliefs and practices related to those same figures and peoples. However, since I base my beliefs on the best available reasons, and since I did not personally experience what is recorded historically in the Bible or other ancient histories, I do not argue for my beliefs about the Bible or about non-biblical history with absolute certainty. This is true even if I believe I have had some spiritual experience validating part or all of what I believe based on my non-experiential best available reasons. Still, since I cannot relay the full weight of an experience others have not had, and since any genuine spiritual experience would not contradict what are otherwise the best available objective reasons, that is what I use to determine what I believe, what I do, and what I teach others.

With this in mind, again, my reasons for accepting the Bible as historically true are 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 what I can show are credible archaeological remains, recorded testimony and objective, observable facts together with credible science sufficient to establish belief in anything, but preferential, I will argue, to most if not all other historical beliefs, practices, as well as observations about the world and the universe, and about God and gods.

In addition to the previously stated good reasons, namely, the Bible's well-known archaeological evidence and the historical testimony, as well as what I consider its accurate observations about the world and the universe including their creation (namely, orderly as in Genesis 1, not by twenty-hour "days," nor *ex nihilo* but "out of" God [1 Corinthians 8:4-6]), the Bible also contains four detailed and lengthy accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. It is a collection of books which has survived an unusual history over several thousand years, with an extremely long and rich textual history in many languages, all despite fierce opposition from many nations, both to Jews and to Christian, throughout ancient history.

The Bible also contains a history of the creation of the earth and of mankind since then which extends back to the first humans, is consistent timewise with the development of languages according to story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), as well as with the development of metallurgy and cities of people. The Bible also teaches us how to live in ways that are pleasing to each other if followed (Mark 12:29-31). The Bible 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 most often accepted as good for human families, namely, for wives to honor husbands and for husbands to love wives (1 Peter 3:1–7), as well as 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 throughout the Bible. While none of these things prove that the Bible is God’s written Word, these are a part of the good reasons to believe what it teaches and that it represents the will of one who may be responsible for all the creation, especially when compared with other religious histories, laws, and beliefs about God and gods.

My reasons for believing the Bible as something religious or spiritual and 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 actions and laws. I believe in the existence of an intelligent Creator on the same basis of good reasons that I believe I can show are more credible than any reasons offered against 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 really are here. Based on 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 is purposeful, or intentional, then its cause is intelligent. If it is not purposeful, then its cause is accidental and unintelligent.

Things that I associate with purpose and which 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 our form and existence and to the form and existence of other already-existing things. In other words, our form and content (physiological make-up) and that of other living existences around us represent structures or forms that are similar or equivalent (if not superior) to other purposefully produced forms or structures, all of which appear to be intentionally created, based on their design and utility. This is certainly the case concerning all the things humans and animals have created.

Purposefully produced forms or structures perform intended functions or acts (computers process information, launch programs, etc.). Sometimes they perform unintended functions or acts (computers crash, cars break down, houses fall apart, etc.). Such unintended functions are still, in some sense, a necessary part or product of intended design and consequence of function. In this, too, our form and content like purposefully made things in that we have a functional and symmetrical (balanced) design, and designs are for a purpose, which for us involve certain “mistakes” which are a necessary consequence ability to make choices, often exploratory ones, which involve

learning in large through trial and error. But it is “error” only for the purpose of learning which is at work here, not intentional error due to a decision which ignores what is already known, that is, what does not require “error” to learn. We do not need to try and swallow fire to learn if it will harm us to do so. Fire’s form, content, and function, including the heat it gives off tell us what we do not need to learn by trying to eat it.

Still, not everyone learns or interprets evidence in the same way, and so not everyone concludes life and the material universe are the product of an intelligent Creator, or a “God.” Instead, many reject existence as I have described it, or they believe our and other existences around us can be explained apart from analogy with purposefully made (= intelligently designed) things we make. 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 *un*intelligent “material” and/or *un*intelligent forces.

In this view, *un*intelligent matter and/or forces somehow produce and evolve material and life over millions or even billions of years, or however long they say it could take for an accident to occur and to become something balanced and useful. This means everything that has been and that is here now resulted from *un*intelligent, randomness somehow interacting with *un*intelligent, eternal matter and/or force(s). Again, by comparison with how we intelligently cause symmetrical (balanced) and useful things to exist and to function and to evolve, *un*intelligence as a cause for symmetrically balanced and useful things to evolve with utility has no analogy. By comparison with reality, it is extremely bizarre even as a theory.

I have considered these and other alternative explanations to an intelligent cause for our existence (God). I simply do not believe any *un*intelligent cause can be shown to produce anything at all like us, like the earth, like the solar system, or like the universe. No known analogy exists to help explain how this could be the case. No science exists to show how everything (or even anything) could come from nothing, or from something eternal but formless and *un*intelligent, and still evolve into so many different types of balanced and useful items and life forms which are also able to reproduce in like kind (just like Genesis Chapter 1 teaches). Without intelligence, no amount of time and randomness can produce even one complex life form (and this is assuming already-existing material and forces) with perfect symmetry and with reproductive ability.

Science provides us with evidence for the development of a species within a species, and for changes that occur over time in relation to various organic factors (food, toxins, etc.) and environmental factors (sunlight, topography, required labor). Evolution of already-existing things due to such factors may result in changes to skin pigmentation height, muscularity, or pulmonary function. However, no amount of random moon, planetary, or other cosmic collision, volcanic eruption, earthquake, heat wave, ice ages (things all too often shown in association with media and written presentations of allegedly scientific evolution of life), or any other unintelligent interaction of things or among different

species has ever produced anything like the kinds of balanced utility in so many things and life forms in such a wide variety (again, or even one such thing / life form), either from non-life to life or from one species into another entirely different species capable of survivable balance and utility apart from intelligence.

Indeed, while science can rightly point to changes within a species and to the evolution of already-living things, this is entirely consistent with an intelligent cause by analogy to things we experience or make which change and development intended by an intelligent Creator. But that is all it can do. Science describes existing processes of change and development which are at the very least consistent with almost every scenario which we might by analogy make to purposefully (intelligently) produced things and life (reproduction) that we experience. Science does not provide any basis upon which we can credibly allege inorganic and organic matter and life in any form have their source in *unintelligence*. I believe it does just the opposite, particularly by analogy with what we do, what we experience, and what we observe.

Natural science, by definition, cannot explain anything as "supernatural." This is why when asked how matter can always exist or how life can come from something that is not already alive, most scientists cannot answer the question scientifically apart from theories which lack evidence of what is claimed. In other words, scientists cannot show how matter exists eternally or how it came about *unintelligently*, and the same is true for life. It can only try to tell us accurately how matter or life evolved *after* they are already here. This is because there is no evidence and there is nothing analogous to use in support of such claims.

While scientists often try to explain the *unintelligent* evolution of existing things by analogy with what they observe in the evolution of already-existing things, they can only answer the question concerning the origin of life and matter with something like, "We cannot explain such things, yet." But any possible explanation that might be discovered cannot be presented scientifically by analogy with any presently existing since it cannot account for the thing's origin, or how it came to be in the first place. This means that if the answer for a thing's origin is not "natural" or *unintelligent*, 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 so it is also beyond our confirmed experience, that is, outside of what we can observe or scientifically demonstrate. This means we also cannot use the supernatural as analogous to the natural world or use beliefs about the supernatural to explain the natural world. We can explain the natural world by analogy from within our world, again, from what is observable or scientifically demonstrable. If by extension we use what we observe or demonstrate scientifically to argue for an intelligent cause or God, we cannot use such evidence to claim we know for a certainty, even as scientists cannot defend with certainty their understanding of the 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 these questions.

While there is certainly not general agreement about these issues, I wanted to at least explain the basis for my accepting as “true” (that is, based on the best available evidence without contradicting evidence or evidence which supports a better conclusion) the existence of eternal, intelligent life, or “God,” before I speak about what it means to be “on the side of the truth” in a religious sense when it comes to biblical Christianity. Now, for those who believe like me in the existence of God and in the Bible as the preeminent collection of God’s 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, or able, to meet them (compare Matthew 9:36–38). As the apostles died off, existing problems continued to grow into outright heresy and eventually into wide-spread apostasy (Matthew 13:25; Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Thessalonians 2:23; 2 Peter 2:1). Similarly, 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).

The apostle Paul was able to find at least one young man named “Timothy” who was willing to deal with the problems and to meet the needs of others. So he wrote him at least two letters, letters which are now 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 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 what 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 by Satan (Job 1:9–12; 2:1–6). The 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 told to ‘continue considering whatever things are true’ (Philippians 4:8), for “no lie originates with the truth” (1 John 2:21). Indeed, being a Christian requires a person to believe “the truth came to be through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

Still, if even during the time of the apostles Christians 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 in what we observe, can demonstrate, or have good reasons to believe occurred in the past (archaeology, written records, astrological phenomena coinciding with reported events, etc.), how can we remain “a pillar and support of the truth” after we have found it religiously, for example, in the biblical books? The short answer is, by accepting and advocating for it in at least the same way or to the same extent as we do non-religious historical or modern truths.

Some may say religious truths are more consequentially than non-religious beliefs, and so the same standards for acceptance do not or should not apply. I do not believe this is true, since even our belief in things such as whether we will live or be injured or return safely while driving in a car regularly have the most serious of consequences, namely, loss of our life, and often the lives of others. If we are willing to risk our life driving in a car knowing that many people die or are injured every day while driving in a car, on what basis are we to consider the best available religious laws and practices *more* consequential? Unless we believe what we do now matters after we die in some non-natural (spiritual, supernatural) sense (as Christians and others do), then religious decisions often have the same consequence as non-religious decisions made every day.

In Part One of this series on “The People of God” I discussed seven things you will find among the Pharisees and the Sadducees and those like them in first-century Jewish religious and political society. I believe you will also find these “Seven Levens” 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 leads such people to pretend as if they love and serve God, only to love and serve themselves over God and even actively oppose the truth as they mislead others for their own selfish benefit. Yet, it was just such persons who were the closest organized representation of God’s people on earth 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, despite the various accouterments of religious devotion those people displayed or pointed to in support of their claims (Matthew 3:9; 23:5, 27–28; John 8:39). 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 some other things you can do to keep yourself always “on the side of the truth” (John 18:37).

On the Side of the Truth

As I 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 prejudgment, doing nothing according to a biased leaning.

Once you determine something is true based on the best available reasons, it is tempting never again to question your beliefs or continue to check your reasons for your beliefs against other beliefs or reasons we may learn or discover. When this happens, always remember that if your current belief in what is true results from the best available reasons, why would that same approach fail now?

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. This is because you are consistent in your reasoning without ‘prejudging’ something apart from the best available reasons, not following “a biased leaning,” as Paul wrote to Timothy.

While the best beliefs are those that are unlikely to be ongoingly replaced or contradicted by better reasons, you can only reach the “best beliefs” if you are truly committed to considering things with “soundness of mind” (Acts 26:25). This means our mind is receptive to the best reasons available for belief in anything, even if changes are required, especially if we are Christians committed to “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 lies to oppose “the God of truth” (Psalm 31:5).

For Satan to gain that which he desires (his own glory) he has to advance what God does not and oppose what God advances. This is what it means when Satan speaks from his own originality which, if we operate likewise, will only result in seeking our own glory in connection with what we advance or oppose, versus advancing God’s will and opposing what he rejects. Compare Jesus’ words in John 8:39 about what works those who opposed him would be doing if what they claimed (Abraham is their “father”) is true. As Jesus also taught, it is not so much about what we say as it is about what we do.—Luke 6:46–49.

Speaking and teaching in accordance with what we have received religiously from the Father, God, and from those clearly sent by him who in turn represent only his will, not their own (true prophets, Jesus, faithful spirits, faithful apostles), should keep us from seeking our own glory, and from being misled. Even if we do find that we spoke according to our own originality, we can retract or correct what we said. This is learning through error, what Christians and others who believe in God see as intelligence by design to facilitate personal evolution through choice, and as a consequence of being made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26).

However, if we find 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 if we maintain rather than correct it. Seeking our own glory can then result in deviation from the truth, unless our own disposition is always aligned with truth, as is God's. Christians believe the best choice is the choice God has already designed us to make both in terms of what we can see is conducive to healthy function and living, as well as what is clearly revealed in the best available biblical books, both of which should always agree and, therefore, validate each other, if true.

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 we have turned away from it entirely. But deviations from the truth, deviations of any number and kind from it, only leads us further and further away from the truth. Eventually, if we continue ignoring the truth, we will turn away from Good since Jesus is the "truth" who leads us to the Father (John 14:6). Consider the New Testament examples of Hymenaeus and Philetus. They started deviating from the truth about the resurrection and ended up 'advancing to more and more ungodliness' (2 Timothy 2:16). They did this by eventually believing apart from the best available reasons that "the resurrection," a Christian belief (1 Corinthians 15:20–23), "has already occurred."

This is why we should never "go beyond the things that are written," and leave "interpretations" of what is not clearly explained or plainly taught "to God" (Genesis 40:8; 1 Corinthians 4:6; compare Revelation 1:3). The result of 'deviating from the truth' about the Christian belief in the resurrection according to Jesus and the apostles was that "the faith of some" was 'subverted' (2 Timothy 2:16–18). Instead, Christians should simply present what Jesus taught (John 5:19–30) and what the apostles taught (Acts 24:15, 21; 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17; Revelation 20:1–6, 11–15). This is the only way to avoid 'deviating from the truth' in what the best available evidence shows the Messiah and those he first appointed taught. These are, in fact, the very teachings were carried on by the apostles and by the other earliest Christians.—John 15:14; Acts 1:1–2; 2:42; Romans 1:5; Galatians 1:12; Ephesians 2:19–20; 4:21.

A Christian should never firmly promote dates, times, or even expectations of any kind when it comes to interpretations of biblical chronology and any prophecies related to end-time events. Doing so is a deviation from the truth of what is clearly taught in the Bible itself (Matthew 24:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6). Concerning these and other Bible teachings, many set aside what is clearly taught in the Bible and choose to 'deviate from

the truth.’ Because of the impact deviating from biblical beliefs can have on Christian faith and unity, let us consider two familiar examples of modern-day ‘deviations from the truth,’ and how we can avoid them and other deviations like them.

If the Bible teaches “to us, there is one God, the Father,” and it does (1 Corinthians 8:6), then that is what we should believe and teach if we are Christian. Christians do not change what the Bible plainly teaches here to, ‘there is to us one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,’ simply because Jesus is also addressed, ‘our God,’ while he is representing the Father, the “one God.” Since Jesus is not the Father but, rather, the Father is also his God (John 20:17), when he or any other angel or human such as Moses (Exodus 7:1) is addressed as or otherwise contextually called “God” it can and is only in a representational sense. Jesus and anyone else speaking as God or spoken to as God can only be God in “the Father” sense, since only the Father is the “one God.” This is confirming the Bible’s teaching about God with the Bible itself, not from outside of it as we find with later councils, creeds, and false apostles (compare Revelation 2:2).

We do not avoid calling Jesus “God” in texts like John 20:28, since Christians understand not only what precedes it (John 20:17) and follows it (John 20:31). We do not invent new meanings or ways to understand terms like “G-god” just so we can align the Bible with later non-biblical councils and creeds, like we find in Trinitarianism. Instead, we look at the overall teaching of each biblical document during the time it was written. Then we compare it with other, similar biblical books to reach a consistent understanding. This is why biblical Christians use both the immediate and the broader contexts of John’s writings to understand texts like John 20:28, not just verses 17 and 31 from the same chapter. 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.

As was already mentioned, we then compare the overall teaching of a biblical book with other, similar statements and teachings in other biblical books. For example, writing on the same subject of Jesus’ relationship to God the Father as we reviewed in John, the author of Hebrews teaches:

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 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.

Since there is “to us one God, the Father,” there is only “one God” Jesus can be unless he is acting out his own will, namely, “the Father.” Jesus is this God to us (and so also, ‘our God’) in that he “is the image of the invisible God” and “the reflection of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of his very being” (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). It is also 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). This is why even in Revelation 1:1 Jesus is first ‘given’ divine information (a “revelation”) from “God,” which he then gives to others.

In these ways, Jesus is God to us for he perfectly expresses the Father’s glory and will rather than his own will, which would make him a separate “God” from the Father. Instead, as Jesus openly taught, he only does the will of the “one God, the Father” (Luke 22:42; John 6:38; Revelation 1:1), whom he is not (Mark 13:32; Luke 9:26; John 1:18; 5:19–20, 26, 37; 6:46; 8:16). Jesus also expressly taught his will is existentially different from God’s will, even if they are the same in purpose. Otherwise, Jesus could not distinguish his will from God’s will, nor could he *deny* ‘seeking his own will,’ if his will and God’s will are (existentially) the same, not simply “one” in purpose.—Matthew 26:42; Luke 22:42; John 6:38; 17:21–22.

This absolute refusal by God’s exact image, God’s “firstborn” (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:6; compare Deuteronomy 21:17), to use his exact representation of 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 he could give 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 might choose to do so (Satan). But he did not. Instead, Jesus chose to submit himself completely to the will of the Father, his and our God (Matthew 27:46; John 20:17; Philippians 2:5–8). It is no real surprise, then, to find God in turn glorifying his Son who worships him in such a perfect way, a form of worship accomplished by rejecting one’s “own disposition” or desire (John 8:44; Philippians 2:9–11).

This is something God could never do, or it he would be following someone else’s will, exactly like Jesus does. The one whose will is followed is the one who is God, who is himself neither instructed nor counseled by anyone (Romans 11:33–36; compare Isaiah 40:13–14; 46:8–10). 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). Eating blood as food that is subsequently digested by the body does not allow the eaten blood to remain blood and to be used as blood by the body, which is the purpose for which God created it, not for food.

However, it is a ‘deviation from the truth’ to claim that such texts also teach 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’s body. Using blood as blood is not the same thing as eating blood as food. Therefore, biblical texts against the use of blood as food cannot be used to prove using blood as blood is also wrong according to those same texts, texts which at most prohibit eating or drinking blood in their context.

It is not a question of whether God may be “triune in nature,” of whether Jehovah may disapprove of temporarily removing blood for the purpose of reusing it as blood. The issue here is, as we have discussed, what do we have the best reasons to believe? What does the Bible *clearly* teach about a subject, if anything? In terms of God, it teaches “to us one God, the Father,” and on blood the Bible says it is wrong to ‘eat blood,’ as a food. If we ‘deviate’ from these or from other similarly clear teachings in the Bible by adding to them either meanings about “God” or about uses of blood which are not taught in the biblical books, 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 reproving 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, where people are being ‘turned away’ or “turn themselves away from the truth,” then serious correction is needed before more damage is done to people’s faith in God and in Jesus. The apostle Peter found himself in just such company and was himself “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 Peter with severity’ so he and those with him might “be healthy in the

faith” (Galatians 2:11). If truth is what we want, then look to it as our guide, versus simply accepting what others teach apart from the best available reasons (compare Isaiah 29:13). We must be consistent with how we determine what to believe, what we accept as true for the best reasons. Then we must not let anything keep us from following it except for other, better reasons!

Still, even here we must be careful of our “own desire” (James 1:14), which is nowhere, really, used as a basis for determining what is true. Again, only the best available reasons for what is right, which are often at war with our desires (compare Romans 7:15–8:2). 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’ to be Christian we should 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” among Christians (1 Timothy 5:21). If we remain “on the side of the truth” (John 18:37), it is less likely we will ‘speak of our own originality.’ It is also less likely we will ‘turn away’ from God.—Hebrews 12:25.

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 you “are not in darkness,” as all Christians “are all sons of light and sons of day” according to the New Testament (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 things considered earlier, because it keeps our minds on God and Jesus and prayer 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, but then before anything meaningful occurs they lose

sight of the truth, and fall away from faith, which is essential to receive what you ask for in prayer (Hebrews 11:6; compare Matthew 17:20). Prayer, a form of worship, must also be “with ... truth” (John 4:24). Therefore, we should work hard at ‘putting away falsehood’ and in 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 himself (John 14:6). The “truth” in terms of our spiritual beliefs, as with all our beliefs, is that which has the best quality of reasons for believing it in the first place, provided our basis for belief in anything is, in fact, good (hopefully, the best available) reasons.

Now that we have a good understanding of how to find truth, and about how we can stay “on the side of the truth,” we should be able to find the people of God somewhere in the world, even if it is as Jesus said it would be, “two or three” (Matthew 18:20). Based on what we have reviewed from the Bible about Christians, it should also be clear they will be those who really are “practicing the truth” (1 John 1:6), not simply telling people we are the truth or that we have it when it is constantly changing, unlike Jesus, the real “truth” (Hebrews 13:8).

Next, in Part Three in this series on “The People of God,” I invite you to take just such a look with me, to see who we might find, if anyone, as the people of God today.

Greg Stafford

[04/19/2008 Update: The formatting of some of the paragraphs were revised without any other changes to the content or to the meaning of the original.]

[07/10/2026 Update: Several paragraphs were re-formatted to create more smaller paragraphs from several longer ones. Connecting sentences were also revised for these new paragraphs, as well as revisions to several sentences which were either too long or not as clear as they should be. Otherwise, the article overall remains unchanged as to the main points, captions, texts cited and discussed, and even the original formatting.]