

## **John 16-12-15**

There was a time when truth was simple. We were taught certain things at home, in school and at church that were pretty much consistent with each other and provided us with a degree of certainty about life. In our post-modern times, however, that has all changed. We are surrounded by a wide range of different ideas about who we are, our place in the world and what life is all about. This isn't a bad thing because it can open us up to a much fuller and richer life in a lot of ways. However, working out what is true or not, becomes a lot more complicated when a wide assortment of ideas and worldviews present us with conflicting messages.

One of the tools people use to work out what is truth for them is what they experience. When different voices give different messages about what is true, then people can rely on their personal experience to help them decide which can be trusted. For example, if an advertisement for a particular type of drink is telling me that one product tastes better, but another ad is telling me that their product has more flavour, then the best way to work out who is telling the truth is to try each of them. Our experience of those products will help us decide which is truth.

John talks a lot about truth in his gospel. If you're wrestling with questions about truth, it's worth reading John's gospel and listening for the times when John refers to truth or raises questions about truth. It tells us that people were

struggling with what was true in Jesus' day as well as our own. Throughout his gospel, John points to Jesus as embodying God's truth for us. Then, in John 16:12-15, Jesus promises to send the Spirit of truth who will guide his followers 'into all truth' (v13a NLT).

It's important to recognise that there are different kinds of truth, so we need to understand what sort of truth Jesus was talking about. For example, mathematical truths such as  $2+2=4$  are different from historical truths, such as Captain James Cook discovered Australia (which was what I was taught as a child, but which we know now isn't the whole truth). Philosophical, religious and spiritual truths are different again, so we can't just use 'truth' as a blanket term for every kind of truth.

When Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth will guide us into 'all truth', he was talking about the truth about God, our relationship with God, and how that relationship can shape the way in which we understand ourselves, others, our world and our place in it. One of the reasons why the Bible is such a large book is because this truth can be understood in a variety of ways and from a number of different perspectives. However, the basic truth of the Bible into which the Spirit of truth guides us is the good news of Jesus.

One way this truth can be expressed is what Paul writes in Romans 5:1 – 'since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us' (NLT). Through Paul's

words, the Spirit of truth guides us into the truth that we have been made right, or justified, by Jesus through faith in him. What this means is that everything that was wrong or broken about us has been put right through Jesus' death and resurrection for us. Because we are made right again through faith in Jesus, we now have peace with God. God is not angry, disappointed or unhappy with us. God isn't ignoring us or is apathetic towards us. Instead, because of what Jesus has done for us, we are in a new relationship with our Creator who accepts us, loves us, values us and cares for us as we are. As I said, the Bible communicates this truth in lots of different ways, but it is the good news of God's unconditional love and grace for us in Jesus which is the truth the Holy Spirit guides us into.

We need the Holy Spirit to guide us into this truth because faith in the gospel doesn't come naturally with us. There are people I know who have been part of the church their whole lives who still live with a deep sense of guilt or fear. We all need the Spirit of truth to be guiding us into the truth of God's grace and love so we can live free from guilt, fear, shame or regret, and find the joy, peace, love and hope that Jesus gives us through the Holy Spirit.

As the Spirit of truth guides us into the truth of the gospel, then he also begins to guide others into the truth of God's grace through us. Earlier I talked about how our experiences help to shape our understanding of truth. As the Holy Spirit guides us in the truth of the gospel, it shapes our relationships and faith communities so people can experience the reality of grace and Christ-like love in

us. Through our relationships with each other, the words we speak to and about each other, and a culture of grace in our churches, the Holy Spirit can guide people into the truth of God's grace by giving them the experience of grace. However good my messages, the church's worship or our programs may or may not be, if people don't experience the reality of the gospel in their relationship with us, then it won't be true for them. However, when people are experiencing grace in relationship and community with us, then the Spirit of truth can guide them into the truth of God's grace through us.

This becomes especially important in our ministry with the younger people of our congregation. What the Growing Young conversation essentially is about is how we can give others, especially our younger people, an experience of the truth of God's grace in their relationship with us and our congregation so the Spirit of truth can guide them into the truth of the gospel. In a world where our young people come into contact with so many different ideas which claim to be true, when they experience the truth of God's grace and love in relationship with us, then the Spirit of truth can guide them into the truth of the gospel and it will become true for them in a life-changing way.

Talking about truth is hard because there are any different kinds of truths and everyone thinks their version of the truth is the right one. I'm really thankful that Jesus promised to send his Spirit of truth to us to guide us into the truth of God's grace and love for us in Jesus. As the Holy Spirit guides us into the truth of

the gospel, the Spirit of truth will also grow and equip us so that he can guide other people, our young people especially, into the truth of the gospel.