



This example includes an excerpt from Chapter 2, followed by a selection from the end-of-chapter REFLECTIONS.

CHAPTER 2

Absolute Truths – Why They Are Important

Before we explore what Jesus can't do for you, we must understand and agree on what constitutes an absolute truth is and how an absolute truth differs from a relative truth. We will explore the appearances of absolute and relative truths in both our secular and religious lives so that we can better understand the advantages and dangers of what we choose to believe as truth.

Absolute Truth

The claims of what Jesus can't do for you detailed in this book come not from my personal beliefs, but rest on absolute truths. What is an absolute truth? An absolute truth is something that holds true and is always valid ***regardless of the circumstances or how we may feel about it.*** For example, it is an absolute truth that our bodies are mortal and someday we will all die. Our death is an absolute truth, regardless of the circumstances or how we feel about it. Whether my "circumstances" regarding death of my mortal body are, "Men in my family have lived well into their 90's", "My family has a history of diabetes related health complications", or "I only eat organic foods and I exercise 4 times a week", these circumstances are irrelevant when faced with the absolute truth that one day my body will die. This absolute truth, which is not influenced by circumstance, is also not challenged ***by how I may feel about it.*** Regardless of whether I am accepting of my death or fearful and in denial about my death, my ultimate death is an absolute truth.

A biblical example of an absolute truth is that Jesus Christ died on the cross. The four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all testify to the validity of this absolute truth that Christ was crucified and died on the cross, and this absolute truth is valid regardless of circumstances or how one feels about it.

For skeptics who argue that the foundation of my claim that the absolute truth of Jesus' crucifixion is rooted in *only* the Bible, consider the non-biblical evidence of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Let's begin our inquiry with a passage that historian Edwin Yamauchi calls "probably the most important reference to Jesus outside the New Testament." Reporting on Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in A.D. 64, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote¹:

"Nero fastened the guilt ... on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of ... Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome...."

Perhaps the most remarkable reference to Jesus outside the Bible can be found in the writings of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian. On two occasions, in his *Jewish Antiquities*, he mentions Jesus. The second, less revealing, reference describes the condemnation of one "James" by the Jewish Sanhedrin. This James, says Josephus, was "the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ." F.F. Bruce points out how this agrees with Paul's description of James in Galatians 1:19 as "the Lord's brother". In Josephus' writing called the "Testimonium Flavianum", the relevant portion declares: "About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he ... wrought surprising feats.... He was the Christ. When Pilate ...**condemned him to be crucified**, those who had . . . come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared ... restored to life.... And the tribe of Christians ... has ... not disappeared"². Those portions are widely regarded as later Christian additions, although many scholars accept that the passage contains an authentic reference to Jesus and His crucifixion.

Relative Truth

In contrast to an absolute truth, a relative truth is a truth or belief that can ***change based on an individual's feelings*** or understanding of the relative truth or belief. An example of a relative truth is the claim that "All puppies are cute."

This is a relative truth because “cuteness” is a matter of opinion. You may believe that all puppies are cute, which is your relative truth, while I may believe that not all puppies are cute, which is my relative truth.

Many of our beliefs, especially Christian beliefs, are founded in absolute scriptural truths, such as Jesus Christ died on the cross. However, it is also possible that we hold onto beliefs that are not rooted in absolute truths, but rather, people root their beliefs in relative truths. Since the Holy Word of God is founded in absolute truths, it is important to understand the difference between absolute truths and beliefs, especially when our beliefs are not in alignment with absolute truths.

An example of an absolute truth and a relative truth or belief **not** being aligned with one another can be seen in that absolute truth that virtually all birds possess the physical and physiological attributes that make flight possible for them. The fact that most birds can fly is rooted in this absolute truth pertaining to their physiology and the physical laws required for flight. However, some birds, such as the penguin, do not have all the physiological and physical attributes required for flight, and are constrained to be flightless by the absolute truth that they do not possess all the characteristics for flight. If a penguin held firmly to the belief that it could indeed fly, we see *the belief* of the penguin *is not in alignment with the absolute truth* of the penguin. In addition, if I studied many of the physical attributes that birds employ for flight and I truly believed that if I applied many of these absolute truths to my belief that I could fly, then I might believe that I could fly. Any one of the absolute truths required for birds to have the ability to fly cannot be ignored for the desire of a belief.

An example of a religious belief, or relative truth, which is not in alignment with an absolute truth is the belief that one may enter the kingdom of heaven without the acceptance of Jesus Christ. To many Christians, the belief that there are other ways to go to heaven outside of accepting Christ may sound absurd. In responding to the Apostle Thomas’ question “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how can we know the way?” (John 14:5), Jesus responded, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). This statement by Jesus is a scriptural absolute truth. Jesus does not say, “I am ONE of the ways”, He says, “I am THE way”, and that “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”.

The belief that there are several ways to come unto the Father is a relative truth that is not in alignment with the absolute truth spoken by Christ in John

14:6. Many Christians, however, adhere to beliefs and relative truths based upon their opinions, circumstances, desires, or feelings. For example, some Christians believe that since God is loving, they feel that He would provide multiple ways to get to heaven. The Bible tells us that God is love in 1 John 4:16, “¹⁶ And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him”. And if God is love, He could not possibly let all non-Christian people go to hell, that would be awful to comprehend and that thought makes us feel uncomfortable. As a result, many believers adhere to a relative truth, or the belief, that in His love and compassion, He will provide multiple ways for people to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

REFLECTIONS

Chapter 2 – Absolute Truths: Why They Are Important

Opening Prompt: If truth changes depending on the person, culture, or situation, can it still be called truth? Why or why not?

Aim: Distinguish absolute from relative truth; submit beliefs to Scripture.

Scripture to Read Aloud: John 14:6; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; John 17:17; Isaiah 5:20.

Discussion Questions:

1. Where are you most tempted to turn absolutes into relatives (e.g., exclusivity of Christ, sexual ethics, forgiveness)? Why?
