

# 12

# COMPELLING

# TRUTHS

**Why Biblical Faith  
Is Completely Reasonable**

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# Introduction

Antony Flew shocked the world in 2004 when he announced that he had given up on atheism. His leanings toward Christianity had been rumored for several years, but he denied their validity. The announcement of his conversion to deism prompted a flurry of activity on the Internet. Christians heralded the conversion of the man who had been one of the twentieth century's most notorious atheists. Unbelievers decried his conversion as absurd, with many claiming or at least implying—as Richard Dawkins did in his book *The God Delusion*—that the aged Flew converted only because of senility or some other type of mental decline.

What was the cause for Flew's change of mind? For years he claimed that he, like the Greek philosopher Socrates, would have to follow the evidence wherever it led. For nearly his whole life, he believed that the evidence pointed to unbelief as the most logical and rational worldview to be had. Over the course of a couple of decades, Flew debated with some of the brightest minds Christianity had to offer. One such fellow was Thomas B. Warren, an intellectual titan and a member of the churches of Christ. Another

was New Testament scholar Gary Habermas, who defeated Flew in a debate on the resurrection of Christ held in 1985.

Flew's method is both an admirable one and an intellectually respectable one. In order to discover truth, we have to follow the evidence wherever it leads. This isn't always an easy task. Sometimes we have pet theories, or draw conclusions that we don't want to concede. We may be in competition with someone else, or we may just be uncomfortable with the results. When it comes to spiritual matters, it is often the latter that is the case.

It is a sad reality that many people do not want God to exist. Many deny God's existence because it provides them with a feeling of liberation. Aldous Huxley once commented that he did not want the world to have meaning because a lack of meaning provided liberation from morality. This freedom from being bound by morality, in turn, freed him from interference in his sexual proclivities. A quick look in the relationship advice columns of the morning paper will find many who would agree with him.

If we are to find real truth, we have to follow the evidence. We must be willing to distance ourselves from our cherished beliefs, because those beliefs may or may not be true. We have to look at the evidence and compare our beliefs to reality. Do they really reflect life as it is? Or do they simply exist because they represent what we want?

In this book we are going to look at a number of different areas in which the evidence points to a Creator of this universe, a God who has left His indelible mark on creation and described Himself in His autobiography. We will explore a number of areas, some scientific, some philosophical. But above all else, we must first have a burning passion to discover the truth.

The truth is out there and can be discovered by human beings. I hope you will join me in following the facts wherever they might lead.

# Truth 1

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## We Can Know the Truth

Pontius Pilate had a knack for irritating people. He was an unpopular fellow with both his superiors and his subordinates. One of his first acts as governor of Judea was to take money from the temple treasury to pay for the construction of an aqueduct, which did not sit well with his Jewish subjects. After repeatedly irritating Emperor Tiberius, he attempted to smooth things over by building a temple in the emperor's honor. It was little more than a Band-Aid™ on a gaping political wound. He stayed in constant trouble with the Roman emperor and would eventually be exiled to Gaul (modern day France), where he committed suicide.

Years before his tragic demise, Pilate had the opportunity of a lifetime. The very Son of God stood in front of him, having been up all night sitting through an illegal trial. He was marched before the Roman governor to answer the charges laid against Him by His fellow countrymen. During the conversation, Pilate looked Jesus in the eye and asked Him if the charges against Him were true. After receiving a response that eluded his understanding, Pilate responded by throwing his hands in the air and asking, “What is truth?”

(John 18:38). In a moment of exasperation, the troubled Roman governor spoke for the hundreds of millions who have asked the same question ever since then.

We live in an age where truth is like a wax nose, able to be shaped to suit the taste of the observer. Christianity has been hit especially hard by this recent turn of events. At one time, people assumed that truth could indeed be known. First it took the form of trust in an authority figure like a king or priest. Later it was faith in human reason, to which the philosophers after the Enlightenment appealed as a way to discover truth. Finally, humanity dispensed with any outside source of truth whatsoever, preferring instead to keep it an internal affair. Now we manufacture our own truth, custom-fit to order.

What many people do not realize is that Truth 2.0 isn't rational. It isn't logical. In short, it's a deficiency in sound thinking. On the surface, it sounds magnanimous to have individual truth. That way no one ever has to fight or argue. We simply say, "You've got your truth, I've got my truth," and suddenly everyone can agree to disagree because no one has the right to tell anyone else that he is wrong. But if we are going to look at reality and try to understand reality as it is, there are judgments that have to be made. Some people are right, and some people are wrong. It boils down to the question, "What is truth?"

In discussing the very important matter of Christianity and the reasons why it should be taken seriously, we have to begin with an understanding of worldviews.

### *It's All Relative*

I once had a friend with whom I attended a Christian high school. I caught up with him years after we graduated. He invited me over to his house and told me that he had embraced Buddhism. He carefully explained that while attending a Christian college, he took a Bible class in which the last question on the final exam asked him to explain why another religion was wrong. He told me that it was at that point he realized that Christianity was exclusivistic and

intolerant. He searched for what he thought was a better way to look at the realm of belief and finally settled on Buddhism. With enthusiasm he explained that religion is like a mountain. Different faiths are like different paths to the top where God can be found. Some paths may have a gentle grade, while others are much steeper. Some paths might be like taking a stroll; others require an arduous climb. But every path that leads to the top of the mountain has access to God. He told me with increasing excitement that each person takes a unique path to God. And even though two people might take the same route, their footsteps will be different along the way. Each individual's faith is uniquely satisfying for that person. And we accept every path because we're all trying to get to the same place. Speechless, I looked at him in sadness, desperately searching in vain for something I could say that would counteract his thoroughly relativistic worldview.

Everyone has a worldview. A worldview is how a person views the world, the glasses through which they see and interpret reality. Some people are religious, and interpret the information of the world around them in light of the existence of their god, God, or gods. Others are not religious; so much of what they see around them is interpreted in a naturalistic manner. There are many different kinds of worldviews out there, including tolerant religious pluralists, paranoid conspiracy theorists, and everything in between.

In our current postmodern age, truth has become much more flexible than at any other time in the past. In the pre-modern age, people generally believed they could trust the authorities and the experts. This changed in the mid-1800's, ushering in the modern period, where the average person was thought to have sufficient powers of reason to rely on his own ability to discover truth. Reason (with a capital "R") became the most important principle, and as long as a person's thinking sought out and operated according to the universal principle of Reason, then proper belief would be the natural result. Science gained a great deal of authority as scientists became the final arbiters of truth. Also during this time, emphasis

on empirical evidence obtained by the five senses assumed vital importance. A belief developed that only through science could a person find truth. In the postmodern age, roughly the mid-twentieth century onward, no authority is trusted, whether a human figure or a universal principle. There is no authority, except the authority each individual creates.

Postmodernism makes absolute truth an elusive commodity. Truth has essentially become nothing more than personal opinion in masquerade. It is subjective truth, shaped by the individual. There is little appeal to evidence, universal standards, or objective data. This kind of thinking is what Francis Schaeffer described as having one's feet planted firmly in mid-air. Without any foundation or guiding principles, how does one truly know anything?

History is full of one-liners, famous quotes that are still used today though they may have been first uttered centuries or even millennia ago. Philosophy has its fair share of pithy statements, such as the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's famous declaration "God is dead." Socrates said, "Question everything." The ancient philosopher Parmenides said, "Whatever is, is." (And he's famous for it. Go figure.)

One such statement that concerns us here is a classic from Rene Descartes: "I think, therefore I am." Descartes was a French mathematician and philosopher who wanted to discover a way to truly know truth. He concocted a brilliantly simple plan: doubt everything until you get down to the most fundamental truth that cannot be doubted, then use this point as your starting place. As he whittled away reality with his philosophical knife, he finally arrived at something he could not dismiss: his ability to think. Most people would just pass over this idea as something that is common sense. But to Descartes it was a powerful idea. His ability to reason was the one thing that could not be doubted because doubt verified his ability to think. The fact that he could think about thinking meant that his ability to think, and therefore his existence, was an undeniable truth.

### *That's Just Your Interpretation*

We live in a postmodern culture. Postmodernism is a viewpoint that there is no such thing as absolute truth when it comes to ideas; there are only interpretations. Ultimately, what you and I think is nothing more than an opinion and the individualistic way we see the world around us. The relativist claims that universal truth in the realm of ideas does not exist. There are only subjective opinions and interpretations. But Descartes was on to something when he found the very thing he could not deny. There is incontrovertible truth to be had, as long as we're willing to put forth the mental effort to find it.

America is a melting pot. We have a wide range of cultures represented in American society today all coming together to form one nation. In the consciousness of our country there is almost an implicit understanding of diversity, which is expressed by the motto *e pluribus unum* ("out of many, one"). Along with this diversity in ethnicity and culture is a diversity in worldviews. In the postmodern society in which we live, some believe that all viewpoints should be not only tolerated but celebrated. Why judge someone else? Why not allow all people to have their own truths?

When worldviews come into conflict, one means of escape or evasion is the catch phrase, "That's just your interpretation." Even when the case for truth is carefully laid down, some will dismiss it as being nothing more than one person's perspective. Was Nietzsche correct when he said, "There are no facts, only interpretations"?

The phrase, "That's just your interpretation," is something of a catch-22 because the person using it considers his own viewpoint to be much more than just an interpretation. The speaker usually believes his own opinion conforms to fact or reality while another's does not. In essence, he is stating that everyone's opinion is relative except for his own. Rarely does anyone offer what he firmly believes as nothing more than one possibility among many. The best way to confront this kind of evasion would be to ask very simple

questions: Where do you think I am misinterpreting the facts? What are your reasons for disagreeing with my interpretation? In your opinion, what is the correct interpretation?

Much of our culture is based more on feeling than on thinking. We don't ever want people to feel badly about themselves. When high school students flunk, we give them a graduation certificate so they won't feel bad for having failed to get a diploma. We make policies of evaluation easier so that fewer students will fail their coursework. We promote students to the next grade level even though they haven't earned the grades to get there. The message our culture is sending is shockingly clear: we will tolerate failure at thinking, but we don't want to feel badly for it.

When we read what Scripture has to say, we immediately discover that faith is not concerned merely with feeling. It is also concerned with truth. We separate knowledge from belief. Knowledge is knowing actual facts that correctly conform to fact or reality, while belief is often synonymous with feeling. If I believe something is true, I am stating a matter of opinion. If I know something is true, then there is certainty and confidence.

### *Evidence*

Some sections of Christianity today have divorced themselves from thinking and examining the evidence. Faith, for some, is a matter of feeling without any need to engage the mind. Some of the most potent criticisms of Christianity stem from the mistaken belief that Christians do not think about anything or evaluate any evidence, but merely rely on "blind faith."

Modern culture believes that empirical knowledge—the kind derived from one's senses—is the only true knowledge. Science has staked a claim on this variety of knowledge, in part because that is the nature of the discipline. Scientists must be able to observe and reproduce the events observed. That is the very nature of the scientific method. While this is fine for the sciences, it cannot be applied across the board to all kinds of knowledge. If a person always

insisted on empirical knowledge for everything, he would never trust a newspaper, historian, or nightly news anchor. In short, he could never trust anything outside his own experience.

Trusting other evidence is much of the problem behind science's supposed refutation of religion. While secular science insists on empirical knowledge, those very scientists do not limit themselves to that kind of knowledge. They themselves rely on published reports, experiments, and other forms of data. They trust in the ability of other scientists to formulate theories and conduct proper experiments. In short, scientists have a kind of faith in other scientists.

Logic is the basic foundation for human thinking. It helps us determine what is meaningful and what is meaningless. It is a potent force on the battlefield of ideas. In some cases, we can be our own worst enemies by using self-refuting arguments. Examples are "We cannot know for certain that anything exists" (you would have to exist to make this statement), "we cannot know truth" (which is a truth claim), or "all truth is relative" (which is an absolute truth claim). Some critics are fond of starting from a naturalistic viewpoint that accepts only scientific evidence as a test of truth. In other words, "Only things that are scientifically verifiable can be true." It probably does not occur to those making this statement that they are asserting the statement as a truth, but one cannot perform a scientific test on a statement or assertion of fact. It is a self-defeating argument.

Many critics like to claim that Christians avoid evidence at all costs. In truth, the Bible actually appeals to empirical evidence. Take the miracles, for example. These were tangible, visible signs that accompanied the messages of prophets and apostles. Not only that, but the apostles Peter (2 Peter 1:16), John (1 John 1:1, 2), and Paul (1 Corinthians 15:5-8) all stake their claims on eyewitness evidence for the risen Christ. Christian apologists have followed in the apostles' footsteps. Believers from every field of science have investigated facts that have led them to conclude that God exists.

### *Is Religion the Product of Experience?*

When it comes to religion, some critics state that a person's beliefs are simply the product of his background or upbringing. Modern atheists have used that argument in attacking Christianity, stating that if a person was born in a religious context, he would naturally adopt that religion. Likewise, in a scientifically enlightened world where religion does not exist, no one would ever abandon reason to adopt religious superstition.

While it is true that one's personal experience shapes his worldview, the critic is really missing the point. He is beginning with the assumption that his own worldview is the correct one. He is also assuming that being raised in a religious context is wrong unless it agrees with his. The religious pluralist will argue against exclusive religions, while the atheist will argue against all religions. The important thing to remember is that just because a person adopts the dominant religion in his or her context does not have any bearing on the truth of that religion.

If a person grew up in Nazi Germany, chances are they would have been part of the Hitler Youth. The same goes for anyone growing up in the Soviet Union, who would likely have been a part of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League. But that has no bearing on which government is truer. As philosopher Paul Copan puts it, "Just because a diversity of political opinions has existed in the history of the world doesn't obstruct us from evaluating one political system as superior to its rivals."<sup>1</sup> The same goes for religion. A person growing up in a Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or Buddhist culture and adopting the dominant religion says nothing about how true that religion is. No one can hide behind ignorance, because God has left an indelible signature upon His creation (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20).

Religious belief as a product of experience makes for a poor argument, although it is one frequently used by critics. Popular Christian apologist Amy Orr-Ewing says, "No other intellectual discipline

would accept such a superficial approach to truth. Why accept it here, when it comes to a fundamental belief system?”<sup>ii</sup>

### ***So What?***

It is *en vogue* to claim that objective truth is dead. In his book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom writes, “there is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative...The students, of course, cannot defend their opinion. It is something with which they have been indoctrinated.”<sup>iii</sup> Critics, especially those from a more radical postmodern bend, will claim that there is no such thing as objective truth or knowledge. But look carefully at that statement. The very statement “there is no such thing as objective truth” is stated as an objective truth. It refutes itself. Unlike beauty, truth is not in the eye of the beholder. The careful observer will quickly be able to see through the blue smoke and mirrors of pseudo-philosophical language that Christianity’s critics employ. It often takes only a short while before the contradictions become exposed. All a person usually needs is some good critical thinking skills.

In the end, we cannot escape truth. We cannot deny it, and we would contradict ourselves if we did. “There is no such thing as truth” is, after all, a truth claim. Even radical skeptics who think that all truth is subjective will disagree with those who do not share their opinion, and disagreement implies that someone is not holding beliefs that are objectively true. Truth is assumed by every worldview, even those that deny it exists. Unfortunately, such people are either unable or unwilling to see the contradictions their denial creates.

There is a world of evidence around us. According to the laws of logic and rational thinking, there is only one true way to interpret it. That is, there is one reality and any description of it is either true or false. There is no other alternative.

Jesus told others that He is the only way to God (John 14:6). To a culture consumed with tolerance, this seems like an incredibly arrogant statement. Our society is conditioned to think of truth as something that exists purely because we believe in it. If Jesus' statement actually conforms to reality—that there is a God and the death of Jesus Christ is the only way to enjoy eternal blessedness with Him—then not only is Jesus' statement true; it is a moral imperative. If Jesus' statement correctly represents the facts, then every human being must accept it as true or face the direst of consequences.

The more we try to escape the truth, the more we end up affirming it. As we continue our walk through evidence that has compelled the greatest skeptics to become believers in the Bible and the God who inspired its authors, I urge you to keep an open mind. Don't take everything I say at face value. Be skeptical if you will. Christians have no fear of the facts, and I am confident that once you investigate them you will become more and more aware of the one responsible for the creation of this wide wonderful universe. But before we get to the one who started it all, we have to go back to the beginning.