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What is Truth?

John Allen Chalk

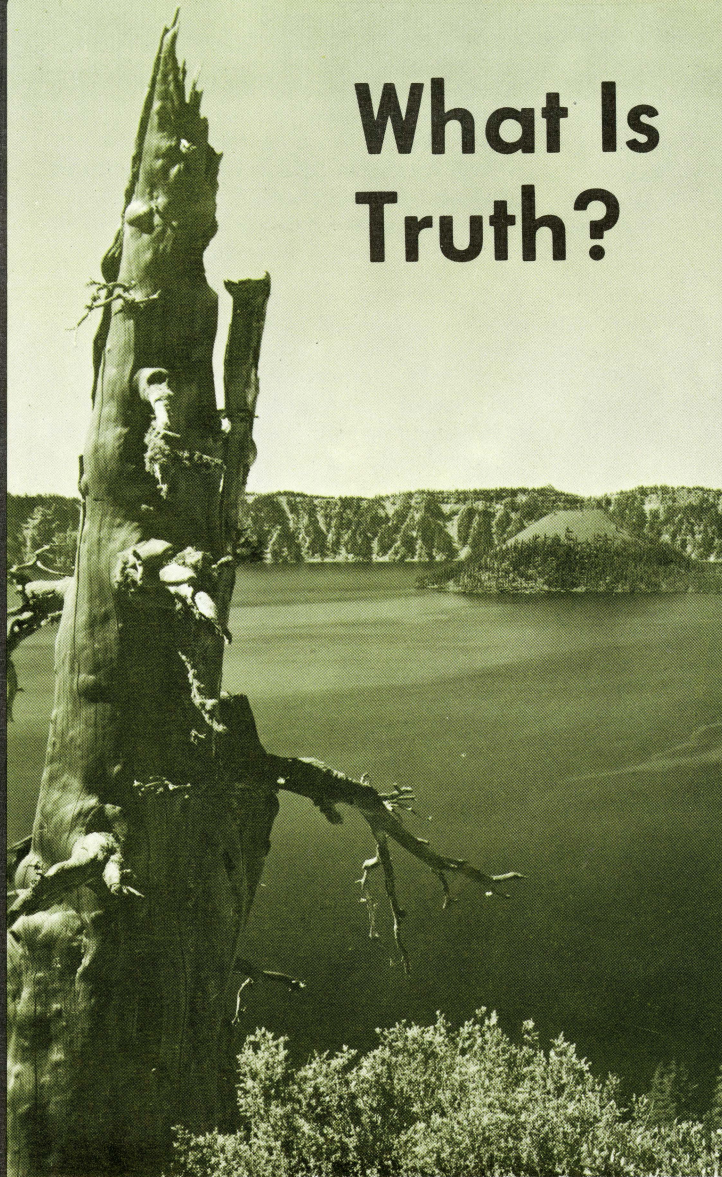
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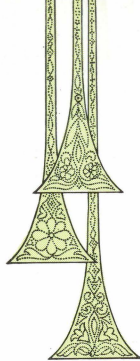
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What Is Truth?



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What Is Truth?

An insistent need for truth, coupled with a troubled awareness of truth's haunting absence creates confusion in almost all areas of human thought and endeavor today. Mass communications have linked every part of the world together with both voice and picture transmission. News and propaganda travel between any two farthest points on the globe in one-fourteenth of a second. Science has made everybody conscious of "facts" and "verifiable evidence" creating even in the non-scientific layman a curiosity about what is "real" and what isn't.

Our world of atomic and hydrogen bombs, our world of mass-communicated propaganda, our world of national and international tensions, our world of racial unrest, and our world of crime and violence *cries out for truth*.

There just is no substitute for truth in our age! A misinterpreted act or word could trigger a nuclear war. An error in espionage could suddenly sweep the entire world into missile warfare. In the United States alone, we see this need for truth as the dockets in our courts of law grow, ammed with attempts to get the truth in thousands of civil and criminal suits. Radio, television, and newspaper people endanger their lives for facts about the many unique situations occurring all over the world. (I heard one radio newsman say recently that in his last twelve years in broadcast-

ing he had experienced fifty-five extremely close brushes with death while covering a news story in some part of our exploding world.)

I'm always amused, and sometimes troubled, by the pompous way we moderns claim to accept only what can be proved in the laboratory and observed with the senses. "None of this 'faith' for me," many of us think and say! It's on this basis that many (quote) "enlightened" (unquote) men and women in our day arrogantly announce, "I do not believe in God." "One must have faith to accept God and why take anything in our scientific age on faith?" they blandly ask.

While thinking about this type of illogical reasoning the other day, I read the following statement, "*Faith precedes knowledge* and makes knowledge possible" (p. 58, David Elton Trueblood, *The Logic of Belief*). The author made a categorical statement affirming that this principle held true in every area of human thought. "How could he say such a thing?" you ask. The writer went on to establish that one first has to "believe" or have "faith" that there even is an external world at all! Second, he pointed out, one must also "believe", that is, accept by faith, that our conscious thoughts and mental images adequately and accurately reflect this physical, external world. And third, the author further suggested that one must believe that these mental images can be made public, that is, communicated to other minds outside our own. What actually happens is that without faith one is shut up within his own mind, with no certain knowledge of the outside world, having no understanding of others' thoughts, and no certainty that they understand him.

And it's precisely at the point of this necessary "faith" or "belief" that I want us to think about the question Pilate, the Roman governor of Palestine, asked of Jesus nineteen hundred years ago: "What is truth?" The question followed Jesus' explanation to the Roman official that He had come into the world to "bear witness unto the truth" (John 18:37). To which Pilate responded, "What is truth?" But to complete the picture, we ought to read the remainder of that same verse from John's *Gospel*. "And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, 'I find no crime in him'" (John 19:38).

How significant it is that at this dramatic point in Jesus' earthly life the question, "What is truth?" was raised.

Some say Pilate spoke emptily out of sheer scepticism. Others, with Lord Bacon, see Pilate in an ugly jest! "What is truth?" said jesting Pilate, and did not wait for an answer."

Possibly Pilate was strongly convinced of Jesus' innocence and his question about "truth" related only to the false charge of political treason. And it has also been suggested that Pilate's sincere quest for truth might have prompted the query. Others say it was an expression of his own personal despair of life's meaning. Then many suggest, on the other hand, that he was a practical, pragmatic ruler who believed in whatever accomplished his own selfish purposes. Whatever Pilate's motivation, he asked the primary question that still today compels our attention and determines the way we conduct our lives. "What is truth?"

I'd like to bluntly answer this question. And I want you to honestly consider the things we discuss in these remaining few minutes. God is truth! That's right! I answer the question, "What is truth?" with God. A basic consideration of God's identity and reality is His nature as complete, full truth — truth personified. To Moses, Jehovah God proclaimed, "Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). All that proceeds from Him and is shaped by Him partakes of God's nature as truth. "All the paths of Jehovah are lovingkindness and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies" (Psalm 25:10). God lives "in truth, in justice, and in righteousness" (Jeremiah 4:2). His truth provides benefits, when followed and respected, that men and nations can witness. "The nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory" (Jeremiah 4:2). Even the unbelieving king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, saw God's truth in the fulfillment of Daniel's prediction of the king's insanity and said, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the king of heaven; for all his works are truth, and his ways justice; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Daniel 4:37). God's people, therefore, as Zechariah the prophet wrote, know, obey, and live with God "in truth and in righteousness" (Zechariah 8:8). In a day of moral relativism and ethical compromise, when men are not sure of truth in any area but continue desperately searching for it, we answer Pilate's question, "What is truth?" with the living Jehovah God, whose truth and truthfulness has been repeatedly revealed and demonstrated in history.

God's truth is more than a characteristic of His divine nature. God communicated Himself, and therefore, His truth, to man in concrete, meaningful propositions. The widow of Zarephath could unashamedly speak of Elijah and God's truth in these words: "Now I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of Jehovah in thy mouth is truth" (I Kings 17:24). God's truth was not some mysterious word or idea reserved only for the initiated. Rather,

King David could sing, "For thy lovingkindness is great above the heavens; and thy truth reacheth unto the skies" (Psalm 108:4).

God's truth was communicated to His people Israel in orderly fashion: "And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thine ordinances. So shall I observe thy law continually for ever and ever" (Psalm 119:43, 44). He made His will known in the Old Testament revelation to Moses, the prophets, and the psalms so that we hear the Psalmist say: "Thou art nigh, O Jehovah; and all thy commandments are truth" (Psalm 119:151). God's Spirit, known throughout the Bible as the Holy Spirit and especially in the New Testament as "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; I John 5:7), guided the Biblical writers, both Old and New Testament authors, in recording God's truth communicated to them, and other inspired men, who demonstrated their divine authority to communicate God's truth. The Apostle Peter described this work in these words: "... knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:20, 21).

Thus God's truth for us was permanently recorded in the Bible. Here, then, we gain the wisdom of God: "Thy commandments make me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me" (Psalm 119:98). God's revelation also provides us with the necessary understanding of truth: "I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation" (Psalm 119:99). The Bible, as God's truth for man, gives us the unique insight into life so necessary for meaningful and righteous living: "I understand more than the aged, because I have kept thy precepts" (Psalm 119:100). And in the Bible, God provides distinct and never-changing moral principles to govern us: "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might observe thy word" (Psalm 110:101).

God is truth! And God communicated His truth to men down through the ages. The New Testament *Epistle to the Hebrews* opens with this summary of God's revelation to men: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:1-4). Thus, what the writer here

states is, that Jesus Christ is today the personification or embodiment of God's fully communicated truth to mankind.

He came into the world as the fullest and the final communication of God and His truth to mankind. Christ is described significantly as "the word" in the *Gospel of John*, chapter one. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Christ's eternal existence as God, the Son, His continual intercommunion with God, the Father, and His divinity are described in the first verse of *John* 1. As "the Word" of God, in these three unique senses, Christ revealed God's way for you and me. The fact that now God's way for us is fully revealed is what Peter says in these words from his first epistle: "... seeing that his (God's) divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue; whereby he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust" (II Peter 1:3, 4).

Christ came as the fullest and the final communication of God's life and truth for mankind. "And the Word (Christ) became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He thus appeared among men and lived a life for all to examine, I repeat, *for all to examine*, because: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). He came as God to speak God's truth to each one of us!

God's indestructible truth (Psalm 117:2) is now fully communicated in the Jesus Christ who "is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). The Apostle Paul rightly recognizes that "we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (II Corinthians 13:8). Our falsehood, rebellion, and spiritual blindness do not detract from the truth. But our obedience, our honesty, our receptivity to the truth compliments and fulfills its very purpose.

Jesus prayed to His Father, "Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). He validated His claim to have brought God's truth to men by His life and works, especially His miracles. He even challenged those who followed Him and observed His ministry to accept the truth He taught or explain the miracles (John 5:32-38). There was no adequate explanation except that He

was "the Word" of God who revealed God's truth. In other words, Jesus came to "bear witness," as He said to Pilate, to God's truth for us (John 18:38). Paul, using another description, calls Jesus the "minister" of "the truth of God" (Romans 15:8). To the Ephesians, the same apostle stated the whole matter as clearly as possible when he said, "truth is in Jesus" (Ephesians 4:21).

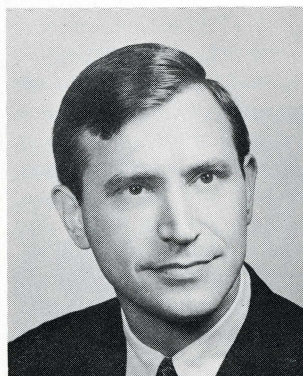
To Pilate's question, "What is truth?", we answer "God is truth." God's way for your life is truth. God's Word, recorded for us by inspired writers, is truth. The Christ of the scriptures is truth (John 5:39, 40). All of which means, very simply stated, that truth, God's truth for our souls, for our spiritual and moral direction, is knowable today in His living word (Hebrews 4:12).

Why "exchange the truth of God for a lie" as many have done and are doing (Romans 1:25)? Make no mistake about it, God desires, and so suggests by the emphatic revelation of Himself to us, that He wants "all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:4).

Since God's truth is knowable in Christ, in the Bible, we either respond in obedience, thus cleansing our souls by that response (I Peter 1:22); in love of the truth that causes us to accept its constant guidance (II Thessalonians 2:10); in belief of God's truth which prompts our obedience (II Thessalonians 2:12; I Timothy 4:3); and thus are "established" in the truth (II Peter 1:12) for a meaningful life now and forever in God's service; *or* we respond in rejection of the truth by accepting foolish arguments (I Timothy 6:5); by our immorality and pride that we refuse to repudiate (II Timothy 2:7, 8); in our willful desire for unrighteousness (Romans 1:18); and, above all, through our failure to acknowledge and accept Jesus Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life" of God (John 1:14).

Christ calls for our surrender and obedience (Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 3:20). He requires our complete turn from sin (Luke 13:3). Christ promises to take our names to God, the Father, as we confess our faith in Him to men (Matthew 10:32, 33). He commands that we be baptized in culmination of our obedient surrender to God and in full acceptance of God's truth for us (Mark 16:16).

Yes, God has an answer to Pilate's question, and to yours as well. Will you accept His truth for your life today?



John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.