

# WHAT IS TRUTH?

## What is truth?

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 8th September 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

**Reading:** 2 Timothy 4:1-5

### Introduction

What is truth? That's the question that Pontius Pilate asked Jesus. And it's a question many of us, and those around us, may be prompted to ask today. For perhaps like no other time, it is harder and harder to tell the truth from the lies. It is harder to know what is fact, and what is fiction. And so this morning I want to offer you, as Christians, a Biblical perspective, and indeed some certainty on what the truth is.

And there are five things we're going to consider:

- Not everything is true
- We need to find the truth
- We need to study the truth
- We need to validate the truth
- We need to preach the truth

First, we need to acknowledge that not everything we hear, read, or watch, is true. Far from it. And that means that we need to find the truth in the middle of this chaos. But, it will do us little good to find the truth, and do nothing with it — rather, we need to study it, we need to understand it, we need to live our lives in light of that truth.

But, especially given we live in a world where lies abound, we need to be sure that once we've found the truth, we don't make the mistake of confusing it with the lies.

Then, in conclusion this morning, we'll consider that if we have the truth in our hands, in a world that is struggling to find it, that we *must* share the truth with those who, like us, so very much need it.

## Not everything is true

So, let us start with something that is foundational, even obvious, yet bizarrely ignored by some today, and that is not everything is true. Indeed, the truth is exclusive. If Matt likes coffee, it can't also be true that he hates it. If all the lights in this building are on, they can't also all be off at the same time. And *more* significantly, if Jesus is the Son of God, it can't also be true that He is not. Likewise, He either rose from the dead, or He did not.

This exclusive nature of truth means you can't have your own truth, as many claim today, saying "my truth is this". Either something is true, or it is not. Sure you can have your own perspective on something, and you can choose to believe or not believe something, but there certainly are such things as absolutes, as uncomfortable as that is for those who are absolutely sure there are not.

And Jesus wasn't shy in making absolute statements, for we read:

### John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

He didn't say *a* way, *a* truth, and *a* life. But *the* way. *The* truth. And *the* life. Indeed, He was making an absolute statement to Thomas that there was no possible way to God except through Him. And since that is the case, it means no-one can have their relationship with God restored by following Mohamed, or Bhudha, or by worshipping wooden idols, or by being a spiritualist. It means you can't earn your way to to God by doing good works. Rather, the *only* way to God is through Jesus Christ. It is an exclusionary statement. And as such, Jesus warned that we must be careful that no-one deceives us into thinking we're following Him, when actually we're following a false-Christ, a false Messiah. We read in chapter 13 of Mark's gospel:

**Mark 13:5-6**

And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many.

Then just a few verses later He said:

**Mark 13:21-23**

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

So we need to be vigilant. We need to be careful who and what we believe. And we shouldn't be surprised to find an abundance of lies presented to us. Not only about who Jesus is, but about *all* things. In Paul's first letter to Timothy he warned:

**1 Timothy 4:1-3**

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

And we see these things and much more beside taught and pushed at us. Sometimes by those who want nothing to do with Christ, and sometimes by those who claim they do. There's almost no part of scripture that you won't find people trying to tamper with and twist, to suit their own ends, and to excuse their own sin. Whether redefining what a man or woman is, or what marriage is, or whom we should marry. Or whether God really meant that we shouldn't do this or that.

This isn't a new problem, of course, for even in the early church there were those who wanted to distort what Jesus had taught, and what His apostles had taught, trying to put people back under the law, saying that our good works were what earned us a place in heaven. And Paul gave this direct warning in the book of Galatians, writing:

**Galatians 1:6-9**

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

There were also those who claimed Jesus had already returned, that those alive had somehow missed the rapture and second coming of Christ. And that those who had died as Christians were consigned to the grave forever. Not only that, but it seems some people had sent letters pretending to be Paul saying these things. So in his second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica Paul wrote:

### **2 Thessalonians 2:1-2**

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

So, false gospels, twisting of scripture, even imposters of those who we would trust are nothing new. And I can only stress how careful we must be in our day and age. It's been well said, that a lie can make it half way around the block while the truth is putting on it's shoes. And today (with the advent of electronic communication, messaging, and social media) false news, lies, deceit, rumours and more can travel oh so fast. I've noted before how people have been literally set on fire and killed in some countries because of rumours that spread on WhatsApp — before anyone checked out whether those rumours were true.

But even closer to home, each one of us has the ability to share, post and publish lies and deceit if we are not careful. We *must* be on our guard. We can't just repost things because we like them! Or because we think it *sounds* good. We need to be diligent to know the source of that info, and whether indeed it *is* good! We need to know who that person is that we're retweeting. We need to be sure that what they are saying matches up with what the Bible says. Us saying, "Oh, I heard it on the Internet" is not good enough. Reposting something because it had lots of like already is a terrible way to discern truth. We should take note of what Moses warned the children of Israel in Exodus 23:

### **Exodus 23:1-2**

"You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.

Let me put it another way. It takes mere moments to create a web site. In fact, there are several people in our small church that could create a decent looking web site in half hour. Give us half a day and we could have it looking more professional than some sites people trust, with dozens of articles written by AI. Think I'm joking? I'm not. Just this week, to test the reality of this, I asked an AI tool to "write a Christian devotional about sin". Within 10 seconds it had quoted a scripture, written a 500 word devotional, and included a prayer to pray at the end. 10 seconds. Without any check of scripture whatsoever.

This is only going to get more advanced in the coming years. 2 years ago I tested a tool for my paid work that takes a script and turns it into a video of someone talking. I could tell it wasn't a real person, but it wasn't bad. And it's no longer hard to imagine AI generated Bible studies, given by virtual pastors. Or worse, *pretending* to be pastors or Bible teachers that you know. All with zero check of scripture, and zero accountability. Sadly, I also think there is no doubt that some real life pastors and teachers will resort to using AI to write their sermons — as despicable as that is. You and I need to know the truth. And we need to be able to discern between it and the lies.

And I should be clear to note, if anyone stands in this pulpit attempts to preach a sermon written by AI, they should be removed from it. No pastor or teacher should be in the business of collecting a random bunch of thoughts from other people or AI, but rather they should study the word of God diligently under the influence and guiding hand of the Holy Spirit.

And, so again, let us all take note, that not everything we hear, read, or watch, is true.

## We need to find the truth

So then, we need to find the truth in the midst of the lies. But what is truth? As I said at the start, that's the question that Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, which we read in chapter 18 of John's gospel:

### John 18:37-38

Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

It seems Pilate never did get to the bottom of this question, and it's even recorded that he took his own life in the years after this. Which is tragic, as only a chapter before Jesus had answered this very question in front of His disciples, speaking to God the Father, saying:

### John 17:17

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

And simply put, that is the answer we need to note today. That *this* book, the Bible, is THE truth. It's *the* foundation on which we can and must build our lives. In the midst of a world that is ever changing, and ever scrambling to find something worth living for, this book is unchanging, it is relevant, it is a lamp to our feet, and light to our path. It gives us everything we need to know which way is up. It gives us everything we need to know what and who to trust.

And we read in 2 Timothy of course:

## 2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So, do you want to be complete? Do you want to be thoroughly equipped for how you should live in this life? This wondrous book is where you will find all you need for that purpose. It is a book like no other, as we read in Hebrews:

## Hebrews 4:12-13

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

And indeed it will dig deep into us as we dig into it. It will expose our sin, and it will even make us uncomfortable. But that is what we need, for our transformation, our sanctification, and our preparation. Our *transformation*, that the very way we think may be renewed, that we might be changed from how we were. Our *sanctification*, that we might be set apart for Christ, made into what we should be. And our *preparation*, that we might be made ready for Christ as a bride prepares herself for her husband ahead of their marriage.

So where do we find the truth? Well, again, the Bible itself claims to be the truth. Jesus said that it was the truth. And you and I only need to seek out the truth, not the falsehoods. We only need to study the original, not the counterfeit. Just like we don't need to study every counterfeit bank note to know what a genuine one looks like. And we'll find that this book we have in our hands, is the truth. We can test that, we prove that. We can see the evidence of that in our lives, and the lives of others. That truth might be uncomfortable at times. But that doesn't change the validity of it.

Indeed, acceptance of truth has no bearing on the validity of truth. I might not like hearing that eating a kilo of chocolate a day is bad for my health, I could even disagree with that statement, but it wouldn't change the fact of the matter.

## We need to study the truth

Now, if we have found the truth... indeed, *since* we have found the truth, what are we going to do with it? It would be a disaster if we simply put it on a shelf and let it gather dust, right? But isn't that what we all too easily do with our Bibles? We need to study the Bible, the Word of God.

As we heard last week, that is why we are here, that is why we gather, that we might study God's Word and apply it to our lives. Without it we don't know who we're worshipping, why we're worshipping, who we're praying to, or how we should pray. Without it we don't know why we need saving, how we can be saved, or what we should do once we are saved. The Bible is the foundation for all we believe and do as Christians. It's irreplaceable. So we must not ignore it.

But our corporate time of study on Sunday mornings and evenings, cannot be the only time we study it. We need to read it, we need to soak in it. We need to make it part of our daily lives. The Bible is our daily bread, not cake for special occasions. And just as Sunday School is not a replacement for parents teaching their children, neither is a time of Bible study like this a replacement for reading your Bible at home, nor is it a replacement for studying your Bible at home.

We need it so much, that we should orient our lives around it. I can't stress enough the value in meeting with other believers to study, to discuss, to apply God's Word. That's why we have home groups, men's Bible studies and Ladies Bible studies. They shouldn't be for the select few who brave the weather, or have nothing better to do. They are great opportunities to discuss, learn, understand and apply the great truth of this book. That's why Hebrews says:

#### **Hebrews 10:23-25**

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Yet further still, we should be excited about the things of the Lord. We should be excited at learning more about His Word. We should take full advantage of Christian books, conferences, blogs, vlogs and even some Christian movies. We should immerse ourselves in the things of Christ. And I tell you, no-one I have ever met that has done that has ever regretted it. Can you name anything else of which you're that confident no-one would regret?

## **We need to validate the truth**

Now, if we have found the truth, and we are eager to study the truth, we must once again return to the reality that there are many who want to distort the truth. To twist it. To spin it to their own ends and purposes. And so we must take great care not to get caught up in that. For sadly, it is possible to be deceived. Indeed, there are too many Christians who are gullible enough to believe anyone who says they have a message from God, or claim that the Bible says this or that. It is for this very reason that wicked ministries spring up to fleece the flock, rather than feed them. Ones that sell miracle wallets, or promise healing, or teach the prosperity gospel (which isn't good news at all).

It's also why there are ministers and ministries that teach that God didn't create the world, that Jesus isn't coming back, that God has finished with Israel, that homosexual marriages are permissible, that Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, that He wasn't really born of a virgin.

And this possibility of deception was a great concern of the apostle Paul. He expressed his concern to the Colossians, that some might deceive them with persuasive words. He told the Thessalonians "Let no one deceive you by any means". And furthermore that they should "Test all things". And he wasn't alone in his concern.

Peter, in his second letter, warned of those who he described as "untaught and unstable people" who twisted scripture to their own destruction, and would try and teach others such fallacies. John said in *his* first letter "These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you." and "Little children, let no one deceive you...". And Jude gave a stark warning in his letter, saying "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." Deception is a problem that the Bible warns about time and again.

So what do we do? Well, **we need to validate the truth**. We need to compare what we read, what we hear, what we watch, to the Bible. Knowing that if it doesn't match up, then we are to reject that teaching. It's not rude to check that what your pastor says is actually in the Bible. It is to be encouraged, for we famously read of the Bereans in Acts chapter 17, of whom Luke writes:

#### **Acts 17:11**

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

If these people were prepared to check out what the apostle Paul said against the Bible, then surely we should be prepared to check out what we hear — and not swallow the latest wind of doctrine whole, accepting it simply because it is popular, or makes us or others happy.

So, if you're making notes, the first point here is that we are to test all things. We are to be careful **what** we listen to. We are to know our Bibles well enough that we can spot heresy a mile off. And when I say we are to know our Bibles, we're to know what the Bible actually says — not what we *think* it says — for sometimes we pick things up from children's books or Christian culture that are not accurate, such as Joseph's coat being torn (which it wasn't), or David picking up 4 other stones in case he missed Goliath (when in fact they were for Goliath's four brothers), or we think Daniel was a young boy in the Lion's den (when he was actually an old man), or we think that there were three kings that visited Jesus (when there were many Magi), and that they visited Him in the manger in Bethlehem (when they actually visited Him in a house in Nazareth up to 2 years later).



We are to be wary of those that water down what the Bible says too, rejecting those who say Noah's flood was only local, that the Red Sea crossing was in fact just through a few inches of water, or that Jesus merely fainted and didn't die. Again, we are to test all things. The Bible is the measure to which we compare everything we hear. And those things that don't measure up, we reject.

Now, second (and note this too), because of the prevalence of such heresy, we must be oh so careful of **who** we listen to. Technology can be used for much good, and indeed there is so much solid, faithful, and helpful Bible teaching that we can listen to using our phones or computers. But there are also many many false teachers in churches, with podcasts, with YouTube channels, and with blogs. And there are even published authors who write absolute nonsense and seek to deceive (and profit from) those who buy their so called Christian books. And this should be no surprise to us, for Paul warned the Corinthians, writing:

### **2 Corinthians 11:12-15**

But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

So how do we know who to listen to?

Well, the first test (as we've already seen) has to be to **measure what they say against the Bible**. And we can and should pray for discernment, that the Lord would keep us from such deception.

Second, it's prudent to **speak to other seasoned believers**, especially those who care for your spiritual state such as your pastor and elders, for there are many false teachers who we would immediately warn you against — from Joel Osteen, to Kenneth Copeland, to Joyce Meyer, to TD Jakes and more. And many faithful teachers that we would point you in the direction of, such as Chuck Smith, Joe Focht, Dave Hunt, Ray Comfort, J Vernon McGee and more.

Third, you should **look for fruit**. If you find those that follow a particular pastor have become obsessive fans or followers, then be cautious. If you see a trail of bankruptcy or scandal following a teacher around, avoid them! And if even if you find some good in what is taught, note the kind of fruit that is being produced in the lives of those that listen — for some Bible teachers teach *some* good things, but when you look at the fruit you find they are followed around by people that you would not want in your church. Unloving, unkind, vindictive, self-righteous, arrogant, full of pride.

Fourth, and this is important. **Listen to those whose lives you can see up close.** Sure you can listen to an online pastor you've never met. You can listen to an international Bible teacher who has a million followers. But if you know nothing of their life, proceed carefully. Look at what Paul said to Timothy in his second letter to him:

### **2 Timothy 3:10-15**

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, **manner of life**, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. **But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.** But you must **continue in the things which you have learned** and been assured of, **knowing from whom you have learned them**, and that from childhood **you have known the Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Paul was saying that there would be imposters who come along, pretending to be someone when they were not, but Timothy had seen Paul's life up close. He'd seen his manner of life, his conduct, his faith and patience. He'd seen how the Lord had worked in his life. And that meant he knew the genuineness of what Paul was saying. In a similar way, those of you that have been part of this church for a while, know how I have lived, how I have conducted myself. You've seen me hold out for a Christian wife, you've seen how I've not thrown my toys out the pram when Sian and I went through two miscarriages. You've seen how I've handled being made redundant.

I'm not trying to hold myself up on a pedestal, but I am trying to explain that it is wise, it is prudent to listen to those whose doctrine matches the Bible AND whose lives match their doctrine. Those who practice what they preach. That's why it's so important you have elders in this church whose lives you can see lived before you, and lived well. Bob, Pete, and Matt are elders not merely because they can teach doctrine, but because they live it. And they live it before us all. And your google search for a random pastor or podcast, won't result in you hearing the Word taught by someone who you KNOW to be living it. And that does matter. Especially in a world where posts, sermons, vlogs and blogs will increasingly be at the risk of AI and more. Being at church in person is going to become ever more important. And it's already critically important.

Fifth, and finally, I encourage you to **listen to not only those who you know, but those who know you, who care for you** in the way Hebrews 13 describes:

### **Hebrews 13:17**

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

This is a picture of what the local church should be like, where the pastor and elders with him watch out for your souls. That's the care that should be behind the preaching you hear, and the teaching you receive. And I can tell you, I care a great deal about you all — not because I'm special, but because God has laid you on my heart. And know that you are prayed for by myself and the elders. Know that we are sad when we see anyone here treading water in their faith, or compromising in their walk with God. Not because we want to find fault, but because we want to find you in Christ.

So, throughout your *whole* life, make yourself an active part of a church family where the pastor and elders match what you we read in 1st Peter chapter 5, which says:

### **1 Peter 5:1-3**

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

## **We need to preach the truth**

Now, knowing that not all things are true, but that you have found the truth, have studied it, have tested what you hear against it, there is one more thing that you are to do with it. And that is to preach it. And no, I'm not saying you should each stand up in a pulpit and preach. But you are to convey what you know to whom God has called you to speak to. To those He has placed before you. Noting what Paul wrote to Timothy, saying:

### **2 Timothy 2:24-26**

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

That phrase able, or apt to teach, isn't exclusively for those who speak from a pulpit or stage. It is not for some Christians, but all Christians to do. Whether talking to a member of your church family, pointing them to the Lord and to His Word. Or a member of your own family as a husband, wife or parent. Indeed, husbands, you are to lead your wives in the things of the Lord. You are to lead your family, that you may say as Joshua did "as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

And parents — Mum AND Dad — you are to teach your children the things of the Lord, noting what we read in Deuteronomy:

### **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This is so very important. For as one person noted, *while you wait to teach your children truth, the world will not wait to teach them lies.*

Are you a Sunday School teacher, a Livewires leader, or a Youth Club leader? Then teach the Word of God to those entrusted to your care. Or do you attend men's or women's conferences, or other Christian conferences? Then be ready to share God's Word with others you meet in your conversations there! And let each one of us be ready to share the good news of what Jesus has done with *anyone* we meet, just as we are instructed to in 1 Peter chapter 3:

### **1 Peter 3:15-16**

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

We *all* need to preach, to teach, to tell others about what the Bible says. And we need to do so faithfully, even when it's hard, for as Charles Spurgeon noted, *"If you really long to save men's souls, you must tell them a great deal of disagreeable truth."*

## **Conclusion**

As I come to a close this morning, let me go back to that question of Pilate's — "what is truth?". If you're a Christian you *know* what the truth is. And you should hold fast to this most valuable book so very dearly. You must test all things against it, and live all things within it. You must be discerning in who you choose to listen teach it. And you must be ready to share what's in it with anyone you meet. You must not compromise, or tolerate false teaching — for in this world you'll find permission, acceptance and even encouragement for every sin. You'll find every scripture twisted by someone for their own ends. But in a world with a propensity to trust what is read online with out any verification, media that can skew the truth, agendas from many factions, and now Artificial Intelligence, you need to know what the Bible really says. Your kids need to know what it says. And we all need to help each other learn, understand and apply what it says to our lives. We need Christian fellowship.

Let me close with a warning Charles Spurgeon made to his generation, that is equally pertinent to ours. He said:

*We have come to a turning point in the road. If we turn to the right mayhap our children and our children's children will go that way; but if we turn to the left, generations yet unborn will curse our names for having been unfaithful to God and to His Word.*

**Charles Spurgeon**

May we be found faithful. May we be found in the truth.


## Application questions

As you sit in quiet in a moment, as you have coffee after the service, or dinner as you get home, ask yourself these questions:

- Is reading the Bible a priority in your life?
- How diligent are you to check out what you hear against the Bible?
- How faithful are you in sharing what the Bible says with others?

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