

The Truth

A news report that appeared in the Miami Herald a number of years ago said that a former theology professor who declared that he does not believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead was ordained as one of the highest-ranking bishops in the Church of England. David Jenkins said that he believes that some of the central elements of the Christian creed—such as the virgin birth, and the resurrection of Jesus—are symbolic rather than literal truth. Furthermore, he said that even though he believed Jesus was both man and God, other people did not have to believe this to be good Christians.¹

This statement entirely contradicts what Jesus said,

John 8:24 ... “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins.”

Jesus left no such option for people either to believe or not believe. Unbelief carries adverse consequences.

Moreover, it is apparent that the bishop has one standard of truth, while Jesus has another. The article goes on to say. “One of the glories of the Church of England is that it has always allowed many different shades of opinion within it,” said the Archbishop of York, John Habgood. He had just ordained David Jenkins as Bishop of Durham.

Why would the Archbishop make such a remark? Does he mean by his remark that the “many different shades of meaning” are all equally true, or that the Church of England tolerates false and contradictory doctrines merely to maintain peace? There can be no doubt that the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the foundation doctrine of Christianity. Without the resurrection there is no Christianity.²

¹ *The Miami Herald*, July 8, 1984.

² 1 Corinthians 15:13-18.

The Apostle Paul said that belief in the resurrection is required to become a Christian.

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

The requirement that a person believe the truth is not popular in modern America, and in many other parts of the world. The idea that there could be an obligation that one believe certain historical facts in order to become a Christian gains little traction among modern churchmen. The reason is that, like the bishop in the Anglican Church, large numbers of people have come to believe that truth is relative. Many would argue that all thought is conditioned by social context—this is the canon of postmodernism. In America today the idea promoted as the most important is that one should hold to “values,” and these values include tolerance of diverse opinions and practices, while promoting diversity in the social context. These values are extolled so much in public comment that Americans have come to accept them as virtue, and opposition to them as vice—the latter to be censured or punished. Yet, neither tolerance nor diversity embraces the pursuit of the truth.

Americans have forgotten the reason for tolerance. The reason we are to be tolerant of different opinions is not because they are equally right—in the sense that they are all true—but because we are trying to minimize conflict. Tolerance has as its main benefit the forbearance of different views of a subject on which honest and honorable people differ in order to promote peace and harmony. Human society is pleasanter when we can go about our affairs without frequent confrontations about beliefs or practices. While it is true in a limited sense that forbearance makes the daily activities of life easier to bear, yet, there are limits even to such forbearance. There is a point in forbearance where one stops and insists that the truth be honored. For

example, if someone should insist that there was no Holocaust during World War II then that claim would meet with immediate contradiction, and there would likely be considerable evidence offered to prove the Holocaust did happen. Forbearance can take us just so far. While it differs between people regarding how far they are willing to go just to keep the peace, most have limits. This is so, even among the most tolerant of the multiculturalists. For example, what advocate of multiculturalism is there who is forbearing toward racism?

The answer is few, if any.

The real test of forbearance is not so much the limits of forbearance on a particular subject, but the subject itself. People differ on what to forbear, and in what context to practice the forbearance.

Subjects that include what a person believes to be fundamentally true are less likely to expect tolerance of contradiction.

Southern Baptists have for years been struggling among themselves to reconcile the policy differences between conservatives and liberals. The issues the Baptists face may be reduced to questions about truth. For example, an incident occurred in which the President of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, Hershael W. York, asked Georgetown College, a small Baptist college, to consider hiring for its religion department someone who would teach a literal interpretation of the Bible. The President of Georgetown College, William H. Crouch, Jr., objected on the grounds that the issue interfered with academic freedom. Yet, academic freedom is only a smokescreen clouding the underlying cause of the conflict. David W. Key, director of Baptist Studies at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, put it more clearly. He said, "The real underlying issue is that fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist form is incompatible with higher education. In fundamentalism, you

have all the truths. In education, you're searching for truths."³

To any humanist "fundamentalism" is a pejorative. To claim to know the truth is to academicians like Key something akin to secular blasphemy. But when Key says that "fundamentalism ... is incompatible with higher education," he might be stating the truth, however not for the reason he believes. The weakness in the academic position is that constant pursuit of the truth never arrives at the truth. Pursuit of the truth is not an end in itself. Key, and others of the same belief system have the obligation to state their methods for determining the truth, and their progress thus far. If they have spent a lifetime pursuing the truth, but have not found it, then it follows that their methods are faulty. It appears what the academicians like Key are doing is equivocating, and deluding themselves by calling it academic freedom.

A day comes when a person must face the facts, and choose to embrace the truth or forever be in denial.

Ezekiel and the Priests of Baal.

In the book of 1 Kings, the Bible tells the story of how the prophet Elijah confronted the sons of Israel and the worshippers of Baal at Mount Carmel. He asked them the timeless question. It is a question that comes to everyone, not only the bishops of the Church of England, but to every man and woman within whom lives the spirit to inquire after the truth about God. The Bible tells us,

1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long *will* you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."

The people of our own time answer that question in ways that are similar to the people of that far off day.

³ *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, "Future of Baptist colleges 'fragile' as conflicts continue," Finder, A., Friday, July 28, 2006, B7.

1 Kings 18:21 But the people did not answer him a word.

Whatever their reasons might have been for not answering the prophet, their silence is eloquent. It tells us that they had neither the courage, nor the conviction to oppose the priests of Baal.

Yes, the worshippers of Baal had the support of King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. And, yes, it is true that the King commanded the army, which Jezebel would readily use in defense of the religion she practiced. It is seldom different. Even today, the truth many times finds itself competing with persons or institutions that hold formidable power—together with falsehood. On that ancient day the people of Israel had to choose between an inanimate stone and the God of Heaven. Who had the truth? Was it the worshippers of Baal, or was it Ezekiel?

The test came at the suggestion of Ezekiel.

1 Kings 18:23 “Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire *under it*; and I will prepare the other ox, and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire *under it*. 24 “Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people answered and said, “That is a good idea.”

Here was an infallible test to determine the truth. The story tells us that the priests of Baal,

1 Kings 18:26 ...took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, “O Baal, answer us.” But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. 27 And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.” 28 So they cried with a loud voice and

cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. 29 And it came about when midday was past, that they raved until the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.

By this time it became evident to even the most prejudiced observer that Baal was a rock, not a god, and the priests of Baal were deluded by falsehood. To enforce the truth of this in the minds and hearts of the Israelites, Elijah had them "...come near." It is as if he said, "I want you to see this, and seeing, believe."

1 Kings 18:30 So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. 31 And Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." 32 So with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a trench around the altar, large enough to hold two measures of seed. 33 Then he arranged the wood and cut the ox in pieces and laid *it* on the wood. And he said, "Fill four pitchers with water and pour *it* on the burnt offering and on the wood." 34 And he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. 35 And the water flowed around the altar, and he also filled the trench with water. 36 Then it came about at the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. 37 "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and *that* Thou hast turned their heart back again." 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it,

they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.”

Sometimes it takes a demonstration to help people see the truth. This is not frequently done, and in modern times almost never. Most of the time people are allowed to go their own way, and are expected to dig out the facts for themselves. Few do. Nevertheless, the truth is there whether a person believes it or not, as in the case of the ancient Israelites who did not believe until they saw with their own eyes.

Isaiah wrote concerning the idols to which the people of his generation worshipped,

Isaiah 46:1 Bel has bowed down, Nebo stoops over; Their images are *consigned* to the beasts and the cattle. The things that you carry are burdensome, A load for the weary *beast*. 2 They stooped over, they have bowed down together; They could not rescue the burden, But have themselves gone into captivity. 3 “Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, You who have been borne by Me from birth, And have been carried from the womb; 4 Even to your old age, I shall be the same, And even to your graying years I shall bear *you!* I have done *it*, and I shall carry *you*; And I shall bear *you*, and I shall deliver *you*. 5 “To whom would you liken Me, And make Me equal and compare Me, That we should be alike? 6 “Those who lavish gold from the purse And weigh silver on the scale Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it *into* a god; They bow down, indeed they worship it. 7 “They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it; They set it in its place and it stands *there*. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; It cannot deliver him from his distress. 8 *Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. 9 “Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My

purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; 11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned *it, surely* I will do it. 12 "Listen to Me, you stubborn-minded, Who are far from righteousness. 13 "I bring near My righteousness, it is not far off; And My salvation will not delay. And I will grant salvation in Zion, *And* My glory for Israel.

Isaiah wrote the truth in his own day that shouts down to us through the centuries: "I am God, and there is no other." And "Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass." You can believe that.

Ignore what the nay Sayers and doubters of our own age say, for they are the "priests of Baal" praying to stones. There is truth. And the truth is near because God has brought it near.

Separating the truth from the lie

Yet the truth competes with the lie, and each person must learn to differentiate the two. Jesus once used these pointed words to the Jews,

John 8:43 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It* is because you cannot hear My word. 44 "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. 45 "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God."

- The devil does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.
- Whenever the devil speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*.

- The devil is a liar, and the father of lies.

In the New Testament the words that are translated “truth” carry the meanings of dependability, truthfulness, and uprightness of character. In these NT instances the Hebrew sense predominates; the Hebrew sense accords with the Old Testament idea in which one regards more highly the basis of truth in a reliable person than that of the mere facts of the case.⁴ For example, in an exchange with the Apostle Thomas,

Jesus said,

John 14:6 ... “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

- He **is** the truth.

In the New Testament truth is also used in the absolute sense of that which is real and complete as opposed to what is false and wanting.⁵ Examples of the second use of the word truth may be seen in the Gospel of Mark and Paul’s letter to the Ephesians,

Mark 5:25 And a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, 26 and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse, 27 after hearing about Jesus, came up in the crowd behind *Him*, and touched His cloak. 28 For she thought, “If I just touch His garments, I shall get well.” 29 And immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. 30 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power *proceeding* from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched My garments?” 31 And His disciples said to Him, “You see the multitude pressing in on You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’” 32 And He looked around to see the woman who had

⁴ *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

⁵ *Ibid.*

done this. 33 But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.”

- She told Him the whole truth. She confessed the facts.

And as Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one *of you*, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

- Speak truth.

As in these examples, we think, therefore, of the truth in the absolute sense of that which is real and complete as opposed to what is false and wanting.⁶

Jesus before Pilate.

On that Day of Preparation on which the Jewish authorities brought Jesus to trial before the Roman Governor, Pilate,

John 18:33 Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” 34 Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” 35 Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?” 36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” 37 Pilate therefore said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born,

⁶ *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” 38 Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”

Pilate had the Truth standing before him and was not able to see it. There are numerous reasons why this might happen. But as it was in Pilate’s case so it is in the circumstances that face modern man, the reasons are largely self-imposed. Pilate was a Roman soldier who had risen to the rank of prefect, or military governor. As such it is likely that he had a Roman worldview.⁷

A person’s worldview can work either for or against them in their recognition of the truth. If the worldview is secular then its holder will not recognize spiritual truth even if it stands before him.⁸ Alas, such is the case with higher education, in general, in the US today.

Note these ideas that attach to the truth:

- Objective truth is first a Person: Jesus as deity revealed the source of truth as in Himself. All truth has its basis in Him and is derived from Him. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life...” John 14:6.
- There is objective truth that exists apart from opinion or belief. Baal was not a god.
- Aristotle said, “The truth is saying what is, is, and what isn’t, isn’t.” This is called the common sense definition of truth.
- The objective truth is not an attitude. Truth is not **how** we know, but **what** we know. Sincerity does not mean truth. A bishop can sincerely believe that all opinions are valid, but that is not the truth.
- Truth does **not** mean, “...**known by all**” or “**believed by all**.” Even if everyone believes a lie, it is still a lie. Truth is not determined by an opinion poll.

⁷ worldview. Ger. *weltanschauung*: a conception of the course of events in [the world] and of the purpose of the world as a whole forming a philosophical view or apprehension of the universe.

⁸ John 1:10; John 14:17; Romans 8:5-7; 1 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 4:5,6.

- Truth does **not** mean, “**publicly proved.**” An objective truth can be privately known—i.e., a treasure known only by the one who hid it. Also it could be known without being proved.
- Objective truth is independent of the knower and his consciousness. For example, “I itch,” is a subjective truth, but the statement that, “Jesus rose from the dead,” is a reference to an objective truth.

Logic teaches that the truth can be established by testimony. For example, George Campbell, D. D., principal of the Marshall College, Aberdeen, Scotland, in correspondence between himself and David Hume, wrote a reply to Hume’s philosophically worded argument that it was inherently impossible to produce proof sufficient to offset what he declared to be the conclusive presumption against a miracle.

Campbell replied, “In a number of concurrent testimonies, where there has been no previous concert there is a probability distinct from that which may be termed the sum of the probabilities resulting from the testimony of the witnesses; a probability which would remain even though the witnesses were of such character as to merit no faith at all. This probability arises from the concurrence itself. That such a concurrence should spring from chance is as one to infinity; that is, in other words, morally impossible. If, therefore, concert be excluded, there remains no cause but the reality of the fact.”⁹

The “reality of the fact” is the same as establishing the truth concerning a fact, where a fact is an event, or a thing that has been done in the history of the world.

The Bible teaches that witnesses may establish truth. The Law of Moses says,

Deut. 17:6 “On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. (See also, Mt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1.)

⁹ Linton, I. H., *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, p. 55.

The Law of Moses told the ancient Israelites that concurrent testimony by reliable witnesses is sufficient to convict. Jesus, Himself, used the same criterion to establish the truth. Further, it is worthwhile to remember that the truthfulness of the events in the life of Christ is established by the concurrence of the testimonies of the Apostles as recorded and transmitted to us by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Truth as experience

But mere knowledge of objective truth, or the truthfulness of an event is not all there is to the idea of truth. Jesus spoke of truth as an experience. John, in his gospel, writes in the eighth chapter that,

John 8:31 Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

A disciple is a learner, a follower, a believer. The word used in John’s gospel carries the idea of thought accompanied by endeavor. The intent of discipleship is to become like the Teacher. And Jesus connects the idea of discipleship with abiding in His word; that is, of remaining, or continuing within the reach of His teaching. His word, when it has its intended effect, results in a changed character in the disciple to the end that the disciple becomes more Christlike, and it results in behavior that emulates Christ. The proof of discipleship is in the follower who abides in His word.

The second thing Jesus attached to abiding in His word was that the disciple would “...know the truth.” This means that the disciple would come to know, recognize or perceive the truth as a result of abiding in His word.

The present state of the world is that it constantly experiences the Lie, and because of that it cannot see the truth.

Paul in his defense before Agrippa and Festus told these rulers about his experience with the risen Christ, and he

summarized to them by outlining the facts of the gospel. But then as Paul testified in his own defense,

Acts 26:24 ... Festus *said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! *Your* great learning is driving you mad.” 25 But Paul *said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. 26 “For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.

Paul had not known the truth before his experience on the road to Damascus; afterward he did. Afterward, he not only knew it, but he experienced the effects of it. Therefore, one can know the truth both intellectually, and by experience. The word of God, as contained in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, is the truth.

Study it.