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Is Truth of Consequence?

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IS TRUTH OF CONSEQUENCE?

**There is a very shiny lining
to the last-day clouds amassing on
humanity's horizon.**

The clatter of a mob shattered the morning calm. An accused man, noble and serene, stood before the Roman magistrate. It was the moment for judicial action. Pilate faltered. The verdict became a question: “What is truth?” (John 18:38).¹

Pilate's query has echoed through the corridors of time. It has become increasingly relevant in a world of growing confusion, a world steeped in strife and stereotypes, a planet concerned with relevance and rub-bish. The questions reach us: How do we, as Christians, delineate truth? How do we identify and ascertain truth? How do we establish a biblical foundation for our en-

counter with truth?

These are particularly relevant in the postmodern world—a decen-tered, pluralistic society that has pro-posed the death of objective truth, preferring to think of “a diversity of truths” or simply “truth for me.” Michel Foucault, a philosopher and sociologist whose contributions fig-ure prominently in the postmodern shift, suggests that even the concept of truth itself is dangerous—that “truths” are merely the agendas of special-interest groups with eco-

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In essence, truth is vital, directly influencing our lives. We act upon what we believe to be true, thus shaping the way we live. Truth also affects how we see ourselves. The belief in the divine creation of humankind, for example, joined with the doctrine of the Incarnation, provides a basis for human status and worth. At the end of the day, truth is what matters, judging what we experience and what we do.

conomic clout or political power, who use these ideas, packaged as advertising, propaganda, or mass media, to bully others into believing whatever the privileged find convenient. Meanwhile, other postmodernists, such as Richard Rorty, argue that we should give up the search for truth altogether and be content with mere interpretation of data, without endeavoring to assess their truth value.

Clearly, given our contemporary context, the concept of truth merits special attention, particularly from a biblical perspective.

The Significance of Truth

Why is truth of consequence for the Christian? As believers, we are counseled to speak the truth, to make decisions based on truth, to live truth-focused lives, and to be sanctified through the truth (John 17:17; Eph. 4:25; 1 Peter 1:22). We are told to “buy the truth, and do not sell it” (Prov. 23:23), binding it about our necks and writing it upon our

hearts. We are to worship in the spirit of truth, “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Furthermore, Ephesians 5:9 declares that truth is a fruit of the Spirit, and Philippians 4:8 suggests that for the Christian, truth is the point of departure for all other intellectual pursuits.

Truth, moreover, is a characteristic of all who enter God’s kingdom: “Open the gates, That the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in” (Isa. 26:2). The apostle John identifies the returning King as “Faithful and True” and describes the New Jerusalem as a sacred place where there is no violation of truth (Rev. 19:11; 22:15).

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vides a basis for human status and worth. At the end of the day, truth is what matters, judging what we experience and what we do.

Tragically, however, humanity, particularly in the postmodern world, has lost the centrality of truth—it has “fallen in the street” (Isa. 59:14), trampled in the bustling thoroughfare. Scripture cries forth, “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; See . . . if you can find a man . . . who seeks the truth, and I will pardon [the city]” (Jer. 5:1). Sadly, though perhaps predictably, none was found.

God: The Essence of Truth

As is often the case with God, Christ answered the truth question before it was asked. He declared, “I am the . . . truth” (John 14:6). On another occasion, Christ prayed to His Father, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Furthermore, Scripture affirms that all God’s “work is done in truth” (Ps. 33:4).

Here then is the bold biblical delineation: *God is truth*. His nature, His very spirit, is truth. Consequently, truth is, at its core, a Being. Furthermore, if God is the essence, the embodiment of truth, it follows that all God says and all God does is truth. His words and His works are but revelations of His nature.

Here then is found the Christian response to Pilate’s question. The Word—whether spoken, written, il-

lustrated, enacted, or incarnate—is Truth.

Consequently, for the Christian, truth exists as a divine revelation. It is authoritative, provided by One who has not only examined all the evidence, but also formed the evidence. Thus, the multitude who had gathered on the hillside to listen observed that Jesus taught “as one having authority” (Matt. 7:29), the inherent authority of the Word.

In sum, the Christian worldview holds that God is trustworthy and that His revelation of truth is objective and reliable. Human beings must therefore interact directly with the divine repositories of truth, revealed through Scripture, through God’s creation in all of its dimensions, and in the person of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we are to communicate confidence in the trustworthiness of the divine revelation of truth—a “word confirmed, which [we] do well to heed” (2 Peter 1:19).

Tenets in the Christian Perspective

When one accepts that God is the very essence of truth, what does this suggest? What might be the ramifications of this perspective? There would seem to be, in fact, a number of implications (see Figure 1).

1. *For the Christian, truth is anchored in the supernatural.* Truth begins with God, not with human beings. The Creator is ultimately the Source of all truth. Consequently,

Figure 1.

1. For the Christian, truth is anchored in the supernatural.
2. Truth is eternal because it resides in God.
3. Because God is the ultimate origin of truth and God does not change, truth is unchanging.
4. All truth possesses unity because it comes from the same Source.
5. Truth is infinite because God is infinite.
6. The Christian understanding of truth must be progressive.
7. Because God is the Source of all truth, all truth is ultimately God's truth.

(2 Cor. 13:8). Human beings simply cannot obliterate truth. The world had its best chance at Calvary and failed miserably.

Our role, then, as Christians is invitational, rather than confrontational. We do not have to so much “defend truth” from annihilation, as to extend the invitation to accept God’s eternal truth.

3. *Because God is the ultimate origin of truth and God does not change, truth is unchanging.* God-centered truth is absolute and universal in scope—stable

truth does not originate within nature, nor is it initiated by humankind. Human beings only discover truth; they do not create it.

2. *Truth is eternal because it resides in God.* Psalm 117:2 states that God’s truth “endures forever.” What does this mean? Because truth is eternal, it existed before the mind of humankind, and hence the mind can neither create nor destroy truth. We can only choose to accept it or to reject it, to abide in the truth or to abandon truth to reside in error.

As Christians, we should remember that nothing can be done “against the truth, but for the truth”

across time, place, and person. In contemporary culture, relativism is pervasive, with many individuals maintaining that truth is in a state of perpetual flux—a matter of opinion or social convention. While circumstances do change, and brokenness and fragmentation are evident in many aspects of life, the Christian worldview is able to provide a framework that offers stability and security.

As Christians, we can help post-modern individuals find foundations for their lives, enduring ideals that can provide a basis for living. We can share with them an under-

standing that the solidity of truth contributes to a personal sense of identity, direction, and belonging.

4. *All truth possesses unity because it comes from the same Source.* Since God is one, truth is one, for God is truth. Truth, therefore, will always be in harmony with itself wherever and whenever it is found. Anything that contradicts truth is error or reveals a problem with finite human understanding.

There are, perhaps, several implications: (a) To know God is the key to seeing life as a meaningful whole. (b) Though there is always the danger of starting with a false premise or of forcing the evidence, the greater the scope of evidence and the better its fit, the more adequate its justification as truth. (c) We should avoid creating false dichotomies within

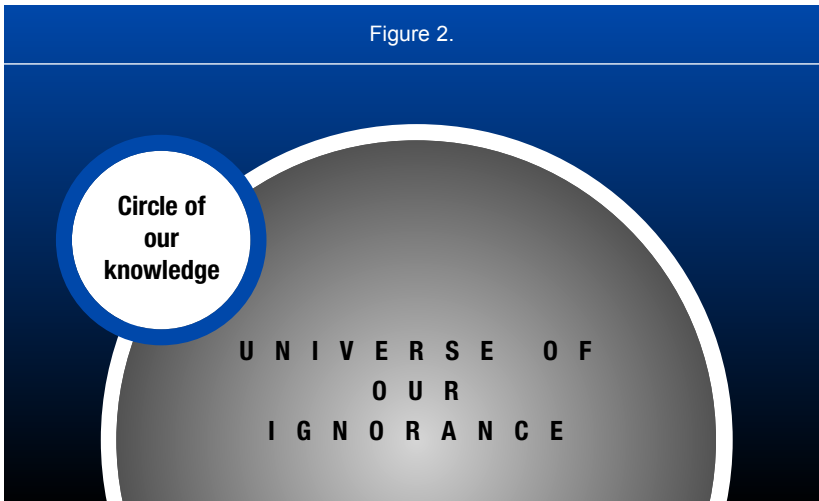
God's truth. These could include the severance of mercy and justice, the disconnecting of piety and action, or the partition of faith and learning.

5. *Truth is infinite because God is infinite.* Our circle of knowledge is surrounded by the vast universe of our ignorance. The endless extent of God's truth lies as yet virtually undiscovered.

Just as the perimeter of a circle (i.e., our contact with the unknown) increases as the area of that circle enlarges, so the more Christians learn of God's truth, the more they realize how much there is yet to know—and the more humble they will be (see Figure 2). It's when the circle is small and our contact with the unknown is reduced that we are tempted to think that we know everything.

How presumptuous, then, it

Figure 2.



In examining the biblical paradigm of truth, it seems evident that certain principles are foundational. Truth, in essence, begins with God and not with humankind. It is revealed and not constructed. It is discovered and not determined by a majority vote. It is authoritative and not merely a matter of personal preference. It is feeling that should conform to truth, rather than truth to feelings.

would be for us to declare, at any time, that we have now arrived, that we now possess all the truth. Christians do not have “all the truth,” but ultimately all they have will be truth.

6. *The Christian understanding of truth must be progressive.* It is not enough to stand in the truth—we are to *walk* in the path of truth (2 John 4). This concept of “walking” implies new horizons. It is a call to learning and to growth. Though truth does not change, our relationship to truth should develop. We recognize that our understandings of truth are but “works in progress”—that new dimensions of truth should continually open before us.

7. *Because God is the Source of all truth, all truth is ultimately God’s truth.* Scripture states that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). This suggests that human beings are to view each dimension of their lives—work, study, relationships,

recreation, etc.—as an extension of God’s truth.

It also reminds us that we should beware of exclusivity in the claim of truth. While Christians have truth, they do not, in the Christian worldview, have a monopoly on truth. Rather, because God makes His sun shine on the evil and on the good and would have all come to a knowledge of the truth, non-believers also discover truth.

What is the difference, then, between the Christian and the non-Christian? Non-Christians stumble across concepts of truth in their journey through life, while Christians recognize the Source of that truth.

Christian education, for example, recognizes that truth can be discovered and expounded by secular minds and that these explanations can form viable components in the curriculum. At the same time, students should be brought into direct contact with the Source of truth,

there discovering personal insights into God's character and His plan.

In examining the biblical paradigm of truth, it seems evident that certain principles are foundational. Truth, in essence, begins with God and not with humankind. It is revealed and not constructed. It is discovered and not determined by a majority vote. It is authoritative and not merely a matter of personal preference. It is feeling that should conform to truth, rather than truth to feelings. Ideas are not true solely because they are practical; rather, they will ultimately be of value because they are true. In the final analysis, divine truth influences each dimension of our lives as we recognize that all truth is indeed God's truth.

Receiving the Truth

A biblical perspective of truth, however, implies not only principles, but also process. How do we obtain God's truth? Through reason? Through revelation? Through a combination of these? What is the role of faith, of inquiry, and of reflection? What is the place of experience? These matters seem to be particularly relevant for the Christian (see Figure 3).

Divine revelation. God desires to reveal truth continually to humankind. Knowing would be unattainable, were it not for the self-initiated, self-revealing nature of God.

Paul notes that human knowledge is the result of truth "freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12). Divine revelation is the channel through which God communicates facts and principles to human beings. This revelation of truth is foundational and includes (a) God's creation (Ps. 19:1-3; 85:11; Rom. 1:20) in each of its dimensions, (b) the Holy Scriptures, and (c) Jesus Christ, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23).

These "words" of God provide an ascending order of revelation in which later revelations do not displace the earlier avenues, but rather



complement each form with richer meaning. In the Christian worldview, for example, we recognize that the intrusion of sin has distorted our understanding of the truth revealed through God's works, both in nature and in human society. Consequently, the Scriptures portray in detail the truth about the untruth.

Ultimately, however, truth is a person. Christ is the fullest revelation of truth: "the express image" (Heb. 1:3) of the divine. This revelation through Christ, anchored in Scripture and expanded through a personal relationship with God (Luke 24:27; John 5:39; 17:3), responds to the human condition in a way that surpasses any other presentation of truth.

Consequently, we, as human beings, must come into personal contact with divine revelation, exploring and examining God's truth revealed in nature and in human society. We should also see the Holy Scriptures as foundational in clarifying the contours of God's truth and discern its relevance for our lives. Above all, we are personally to encounter Jesus Christ and experience with Him a vibrant, truth-affirming relationship.

Reason. While revelation, in each of its forms, is God's channel for truth, it does not replace human thought, nor does it bypass reason. Divine revelation is to be studied, accepted, and applied. Reasoning

power is, therefore, a gift from God to help us understand truth. The fact that such a revelation is entrusted to fallible but rational human beings is eloquent testimony to God's confidence in the rational powers He gave us and in our ability to make reasoned judgments.

As Christians, we are to be prepared to give a reasoned explanation of the beliefs that we hold (1 Peter 3:15). In the early church, the Christians in Berea were commended for not blindly accepting Paul's teaching, but rather they "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Throughout His ministry, Christ encouraged His listeners to engage in analytical thinking (Matt. 16:13-15; 18:12; 21:28-32; 22:42-45; Luke 7:24-26; 13:2-4). Even the prophet Jeremiah was not always certain when he had received a revelation until he had checked it against the evidence (32:6-8). Divine revelation thus informs our reason, which in turn evaluates the authenticity and the meaning of that message.

In short, reason is a God-given tool to assess the validity of the messages we receive and to interpret their significance. In so doing, the goal of reason is understanding, rather than proof. Reason is not omnipotent—the beguiling allure of rationalism and the Enlightenment project. Rather, human reason can be trustworthy, but only within lim-

Reason is not omnipotent—the beguiling allure of rationalism and the Enlightenment project. Rather, human reason can be trustworthy, but only within limits (Job 11:7; Prov. 30:18; Rom. 11:33). This recognition keeps us from enthroning intellectual pride and safeguards us from deifying reason.

its (Job 11:7; Prov. 30:18; Rom. 11:33). This recognition keeps us from enthroning intellectual pride and safeguards us from deifying reason.

Faith. Faith is also a gift from God (Eph. 2:8). Though neither a source nor channel of truth, faith is an openness to God's revelation of truth. In so doing, faith performs a key role in the acquisition of truth (James 1:5, 6). Faith, however, goes beyond the mere discovery of truth. It is also a sincere and wholehearted commitment to live the truth (Rom. 2:7, 8; James 2:17).

Contrary to popular perception, faith and reason are not antagonists. Faith is not merely an emotion; rather, it incorporates both cognitive and volitional elements. Faith, for example, is linked to trust, and trust rests on evidence of trustworthiness (Ps. 40:3). Such evidence is clearly found in Scripture—"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Further confirmation of God's faithfulness is pro-

vided in the natural world and through His involvement in our lives (Matt. 6:25-30; 16:8-10).

Regardless of the source, however, this determination of credibility and dependability involves a careful examination of the evidence.

Faith thus takes the known and responsibly extends belief toward the unknown. It thinks not merely in terms of probabilities, but of possibilities. In that sense, faith bridges the gap between evidence and certainty: "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him" (2 Tim. 1:12).

Note, however, that faith requires an object. It is confidence in something, trust in someone. But you cannot trust someone you do not know. In order to trust an individual, you must get to know him or her personally; and in order to get to know someone, you need to spend time together—talking together, doing things together. The basis then for understanding and accepting

Christians should be encouraged to question, to probe beneath the surface. They should understand that truth loses nothing by investigation. Rather, both reason and faith are strengthened by the scrutiny of research and refined in the crucible of analysis. At the same time, however, we should recognize that inquiry has its limitations and that even a careful application of scholarship or of scientific methodology is not a guarantee of truthful conclusions.

God's truth is to spend time with God.

In essence, all must live by faith. Atheists, for example, cannot prove that God does not exist. Their very laws of science do not allow them to prove the non-existence of anything. They choose to believe that there is no God. The question is simply, "Where will you place your faith?"

Inquiry. Faith cannot bypass difficult questions. Rather, faith is exploratory. It both informs and motivates inquiry. It is true that we see dimly (1 Cor. 13:12), but just because the glass may be imperfect doesn't mean that we should not strive to discover all the truth that it is possible for us to learn.

Inquiry is a divine directive. "If you seek her [wisdom] as silver, and search for her as *for* hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:4, 5). Scrip-

ture, in fact, abounds with individuals of faith who exercised the spirit of inquiry (Job 29:16. Ps. 77:6, Acts 17:11, 1 Peter 1:10). The intent is to identify truth—to "hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

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Reflection. In order to understand truth, we must seek out opportunities for reflection. Although truth, in the Christian perspective, is neither an internal construction nor rela-

tive, it is nonetheless personal. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). God’s truth is to be individually recognized, understood, and applied. “You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom” (Ps. 51:6). This internalization of truth requires time, however, for thought and for meditation.

Scripture encourages us to set aside space in our hectic lives for reflection (Ps. 63:6; 77:6; 119:15, 27, 148; 145:5). Philippians 4:8 reminds us: “Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” In His own ministry, Christ valued quiet time for reflection and urged His disciples to do likewise.

Experience. Truth is not merely an abstract entity, a theoretical construct. Rather, truth is to be personally experienced. It must be lived. The concept of “present truth” (2 Peter 1:12) suggests that truth is to be made relevant to our circumstances. It should influence our attitudes, our priorities, and our actions.

Truth is not only descriptive, but also prescriptive—providing both meaning and direction. There is a distinct difference between knowing

or believing the truth, and desiring and doing the truth. The devils, for example, know and believe (James 2:19), but they do not love or live the truth.

Christ’s followers, however, must have a love for the truth (2 Thess. 2:10). We should be passionately concerned about truth. We are to yearn for fuller understandings of truth. We are to be convinced that God’s revelation of truth is but the portal to a more abundant life (John 10:10). Then we can declare, “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8).

We are also to apply God’s truth to our lives. Truth is more than words; it is action (Matt. 25:34-36; John 17:19; 1 John 1:6; 2:4). Indeed, it is the personal acceptance and application of truth that makes the Christian different from the unbeliever. Living God’s truth serves to open new understandings of truth. “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God” (John 7:17). We know the truth as we live the truth. Perhaps the question is not so much, “How long have you been in the truth?” but rather, “Is the truth in you?” Are you living the truth?²

Thus, while we recognize that God’s truth is not individually relative, it is to become individually *relevant*. As Christians, we should help

others discover that truth is deeply meaningful on a personal level. They should come to see truth as relational, forming a living link with Christ and with the community of believers. In essence, to “know the truth” is not merely a detached, cognitive process, but a personal experience with God, an encounter that radically transforms our life.

The Problem of Error

As we have seen, God, the Source of truth, communicates truth of His own initiative to human beings (Dan. 2:47; Rev. 1:1). Nevertheless, while God desires all “to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7), He does not lock in human thought or free will. Men and women must still interpret and apply truth to the contexts of their lives. In this process, it is indeed possible to arrive at false conclusions, to exchange God’s truth for a lie.

This problem of error raises important issues. How is it that men and women can receive facts and principles from God and then come to false conclusions? Why does error haunt our quest for truth? What is the remedy for this distressing state?

First, we should recognize that the problem seems to reside in our finitude, our fallenness, and in Satan’s intentional distortion of God’s truth (see Figure 4).

Our Finitude. “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and

knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out” (Rom. 11:33). “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9). While God and His truth are infinite, we, as created beings, are finite, with inherent limitations in our perceptions and understanding.

The reality of human finiteness would seem to lead to certain implications:

1. A fixation on empirical certainty does not seem to be suitable for human beings, due to our sensory limitations, the inherent complexity of the world around us, and the impracticality of always suspending judgment until all the facts are in. Apart from God, we would

Figure 4.

Causes

- Our finitude
- Our fallenness
- Satan’s distortion

Remedies

- Humility
- Crosschecks
- The Holy Spirit

As Christians, we are to work in concert to unmask the diabolic misrepresentation of God's truth, helping others to see God as He truly is and to understand the contours of God's plan for their lives. We are to highlight the consequence of truth—that it is relevant to our lives, influencing our beliefs, values, decisions, and actions.

find ourselves forever searching yet “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7).

2. Though God’s truth is absolute and objective, our perspective on truth is constrained, our knowing is context bound. Our perceptions and understanding depend on our point of view and our focus, as well as on our prior knowledge, experience, and expectations. When Peter received the vision of the unclean animals, for example, he did not at first understand its meaning. Only upon arrival at Cornelius’ house did Peter discern God’s truth. Context would consequently seem to be a key factor in receiving and sharing truth.

Our Fallenness. Though some error is the result of human finiteness, sin and unbelief are also implicated. “Just as in the problem of evil we identify both moral causes and natural causes, and thereby distinguish moral evils like crime and war from natural evils like earthquakes and cancers, so in the problem of error we must distinguish the moral

causes of error from its natural causes.”²³

In the beginning of this world’s history, Eve was not satisfied with her finiteness—she wanted to know like God. This rejection of her status as a created being led to moral rebellion and ultimately to believing a lie. In a similar manner, our acceptance of a secular, humanist worldview warps our perception of God’s truth and results in false conclusions about God and about our role as His creation. In essence, our fallenness leads us to distort and misuse truth in self-serving ways. Our minds are easily blinded by “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). In this condition, we see only the here and now, and leave God and eternity out of our reckoning.

Satan’s Distortion. There is, however, a more subtle scheme. When Paul was evangelizing in Philippi, a slave girl, “who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling” (Acts 16:16), followed after Paul and his companions, calling out, “These

We should understand the relationship of truth and freedom. We do not so much need freedom in order to discover truth, as we are to reside in truth in order to experience freedom. Truth, in fact, offers the only freedom. “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation” (vs. 17). After she continued doing this for many days, Paul rebuked the evil spirit in the name of Jesus Christ and commanded it to come out of her.

Why would Paul do this? After all, what the girl was proclaiming was true! Simply, the people of Philippi knew the girl and her trade of divination and sorcery. As the girl seemed to know Paul and was providing free publicity, the onlookers would conclude that both were from the same league. In essence, Satan had mutated God’s immortal truth into an immoral lie.

Depicting the cosmic conflict between good and evil, John describes a great red dragon, the devil, that employed its tail to ensnare “a third of the stars of heaven” (Rev. 12:4). Isaiah 9:15 suggests that this tool was Satan’s tale of lies—his misrepresentation of God’s character and His plan for the universe, which he has adeptly marketed to the human race.

As Christians, we are to work in concert to unmask the diabolic mis-

representation of God’s truth, helping others to see God as He truly is and to understand the contours of God’s plan for their lives. We are to highlight the consequence of truth—that it is relevant to our lives, influencing our beliefs, values, decisions, and actions.

Here, then, is the essence of the problem: While God imparts truth to men and women, our finiteness, our fallenness, and Satan’s manipulation of God’s truth can lead us to false understandings (see Figure 5). Faith, reason, inquiry, reflection, and experience are all necessary, but insufficient. The problem, of course, is that we then tend to impute the truth of the data to the truthfulness of our conclusions, and frequently we are not even aware of our error.

Remedies

Is the situation hopeless? The answer to the problem of error appears to reside in humility, in cross-checks, and, most significantly, in the role of the Holy Spirit.

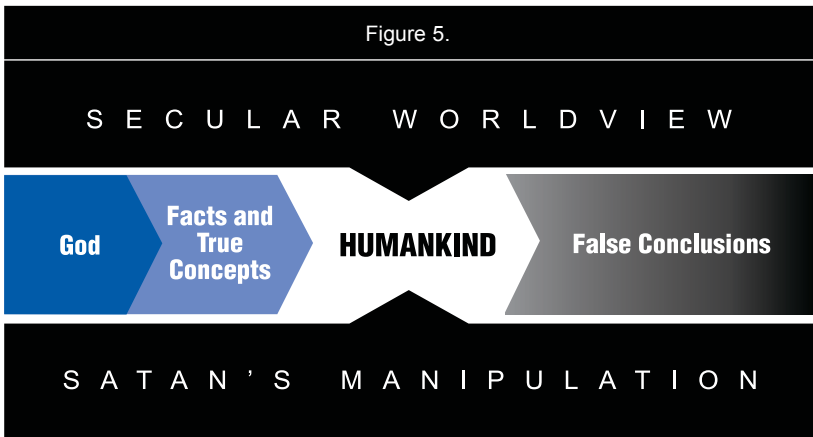
Humility. Given our finite and fallen condition, we are admonished

“not to think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think” (Rom. 12:3). We are also reminded that “the humble He [God] guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way” (Ps. 25:9). Consequently, we should express our understandings of God’s truth without dogmatism and with care. Scripture seems to resonate with this tentative nature of knowledge: “We see in a mirror, dimly,” and “know only in part” (1 Cor. 13:12, NRSV). Not even the greatest scientist or the most erudite theologian can claim to have arrived at a full understanding of truth or to have a definitive grasp on knowledge. Humility is warranted. Each of us has but a subset of the larger picture, with ample room for learning and growth.

Cross-checks. “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is

safety” (Prov. 11:14). Linked to humility and to the contextual nature of understanding is the recognition that we each have much to discover and to understand and that cross-checks with fellow searchers serve to broaden our limited perspectives. This shared nature of truth implies that we can all learn from one another, regardless of belief or background, provided that we, as Christians, can connect that knowledge back to its Source and apply it to our lives through the “truth-filter” of His Word.

This concept of inter-member checking may have special application within the community of believers. In apostolic times, for example, differences of opinion arose as to which requirements should devolve upon Gentile Christians. In response to the crisis, as recorded in Acts 15, the apostles convened a



council in Jerusalem, discussed the various points of view, searched the Scriptures together, and then issued a statement of doctrine that was communicated to the believers. This episode illustrates the value of multiple perspectives in detecting truth and of the community of faith in determining truth. It also reminds us that even leaders and scholars—like the apostles Peter and Paul—need to submit their tentative conclusions to careful evaluation and critique.

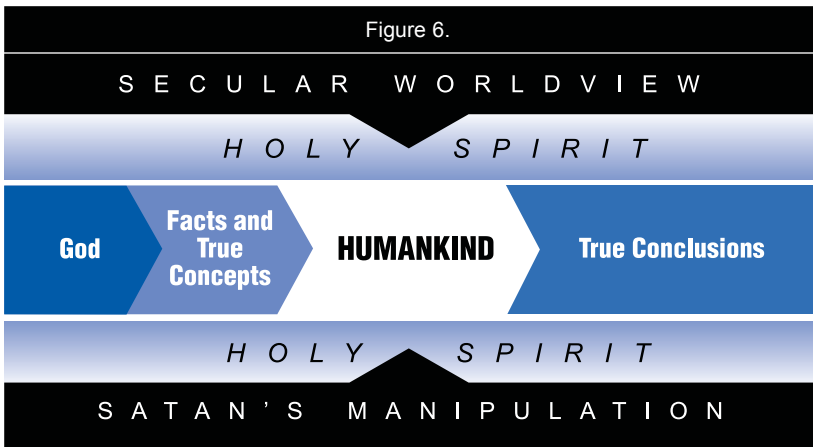
At the same time, while recognizing the positive role of crosschecks, we should be aware of the risk of “group think” and of a “herd mentality,” recognizing that even consensus is not a guarantee of true interpretations. Clearly, something more is required.

The Holy Spirit. According to Christ’s words, the Holy Spirit performs a crucial role in a correct un-

derstanding of truth: “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). It seems that God has given His Spirit as a shield to insulate us from the warped interpretations of a secular worldview, to deflect Satan’s manipulative attacks on truth, and to enable us in our finitude and fall-
enness. This function of the Holy Spirit as guide and guardian of truth is vital in helping us to arrive at correct understandings of truth—true conclusions about God, His character, and His plan for our lives (see Figure 6).

There could be a number of implications.

1. The Holy Spirit enables us to receive the “mind of the Lord” (1 Cor. 2:16), seeing life as God sees it.
2. We should not engage in intellectual activities independently of God. Regardless of the topic studied,



we rely on God's Spirit to help us perceive truth and interpret information correctly. "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12).

3. As Christians, we need to formulate means through which the presence and influence of the Spirit may be enhanced in the church, in our homes, and in our lives, identifying attitudes and activities that help us be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Though our finitude, our fallenness, and Satan's intentional distortion of God's truth can indeed lead us to false conclusions regarding God, His character, and His plan for our lives, God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, has provided effective remedies. These include humility, cross-checks with fellow believers, and, most crucially, the role of the Holy Spirit as guide and guardian of truth. These elements enable us to arrive at correct, although still limited, understandings of God's truth.

The infinite, eternal pattern of God's truth lies at the heart of the Christian worldview. As Christians, we are to affirm that God is trustworthy and that His revelation of biblical truth is reliable. Through the rubric of our lives, we are to model that God's Word is relevant and far-

reaching in its application. Given the limitations of our finite and fallen condition, we should also be open and frank to the fallibility of human interpretations of truth, emphasizing the triangulating role of Scripture, the community of believers, and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we should understand the relationship of truth and freedom. We do not so much need freedom in order to discover truth, as we are to reside in truth in order to experience freedom. Truth, in fact, offers the only freedom. "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Above the tumult of the mob, the eternal Judge stands serenely. It is the moment for the judicial action. He speaks and the verdict resounds throughout the universe. Truth has triumphed! Divine truth has set us free! Throughout eternity, God's children will live and flourish in the universe of Truth. □

REFERENCES

¹ All biblical passages in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are quoted from the New King James Version.

² Nearly half of the references to "truth" in Scripture place it in parallel with love, obedience, mercy, or righteousness. Truth, therefore, incorporates a moral, life-transforming dimension.

³ Arthur Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977), pp. 52, 53.