

3. What Is Truth

This entire class is based on making truth claims about the world around us and things that have been revealed to us by its Creator. In fact, any class you take or article you read or video you watch is making some sort of truth claim. So, I think it's important for us to talk briefly about what truth is and how we can determine what is true and what is false.

What Is Truth?

When we start talking about truth, the first thing we should ask is "what is truth"? Pilate famously asked Jesus this question during his execution [Joh 18.38](#). Pilate was trying to be profound here, but it really isn't all that difficult of an answer when you think about it a little.

Because philosophers like to overly complicate things so they can have something to debate (myself included), there are multiple definitions of truth. I'm not going to bore you with the the debate so we're just going to go with what is known as the **correspondence theory of truth**. This definition says that *truth is when an idea, belief, or statement matches (or corresponds with) the way the world actually is (reality)* ^[1]

This theory is often referred to as the "common sense" theory of truth. In this view, reality determines what is true or false. So, a fact is true only if it matches reality. Here are some examples of true statements.

1. Los Angeles is a city in California.
2. Dave has a cat named Zuko
3. A square is a 2 dimensional object with four equal sides whose interior angles are 90 degrees

Right now, if you're saying to yourself, "duh Captain Obvious" then you understand why this is called the "common sense" view of truth.

An important idea to keep in mind is that truth is discovered, not invented. For example, the earth didn't transform from flat to round when we discovered it was round. It had always been round, it just took us a while to figure it out (despite what the internet says). Also, gravity has always been there holding us onto the planet. Gravity wasn't invented with Newton. He just did experiments in order to determine that there was an invisible natural force at play making apples fall on peoples' heads as they sat under trees.

Two Types Of Truth

Generally when we talk about truth, we say there are two types of truth - objective truth and subjective truth.

Objective Truth

An objective truth is something that is true for everyone whether they agree with it or not. It's true for me *and* for you. And for everyone else. These truths are subject independent. They don't rely on people thinking them to be true in order to be true.

Objective truth exists independently of anyone's knowledge of it. Back to our example of Newton and gravity. Gravity existed before Newton. It didn't just come into existence once Newton proposed his theory. And, despite people thinking he was a weirdo or not understanding his theory, they still benefited from gravity even though they didn't believe in it or understand it.

Objective truth is transcultural; if something is true, it is true for all people, in all places, at all times. $2+2=4$ for everyone, everywhere, at every time. It doesn't matter where you were born or when; 2 plus 2 has always been 4.

Truth is unchanging even though our beliefs about truth change. When we began to believe the earth was round instead of flat, the truth about the earth didn't change, only our belief about the earth changed. If everyone suddenly believed that the earth was flat, the earth wouldn't become flat.

Beliefs cannot change a fact, no matter how sincerely the belief is held. Truth doesn't care about sincerity. Someone can sincerely believe the world is flat, but that only makes that person sincerely mistaken.

Objective truth is not affected by the attitude or the personality of the one professing it. An arrogant person does not make the truth he professes false. If someone who is a real jerk and a generally nasty despicable person says "oh yeah, well Los Angeles is a city in California you greasy monkey-faced puss bubble" he has said a true thing. On the flip side, a humble, kind, and gentle person does not make the error he professes true. It doesn't matter how kind and loving and caring you are - or how sincerely you believe it; Dave is not 6' tall unless he's standing on a step ladder.

Subjective Truth

The second type of truth is subjective truth. This is something true based on the subject. If I say Cookies and Cream is the best ice cream flavor, that is something that is true for me (the subject). If I didn't hold the view that cookies and cream is the best ice cream, then it would not be true.

Or Dave is short. Short compared to what? To the average person, yes, I am short. In that ball pit at a toddler birthday party, however, I'm like King Kong. Also, if I didn't exist, then it would not be true that Dave is short. Because I (the subject) do not exist. If the subject does not exist, then a subjective truth statement is false.

How Is Truth Known?

The process of discovering truth begins with a few laws of logic that are called first principles. We call these first principles because they are the foundation that everything else is built on. We call these laws "self-evident" because when you hear them you'll think to yourself "duh. That's obvious". Now, don't worry if these descriptions sound a little wordy or abstract or technical. I promise. In the end, "duh"

There are about 7 of these laws but I'm only going to go over two of the main ones. The first is known as the Law of Non-contradiction. Simply put, something can't be A and not A at the same time in the same sense. In other words, the opposite of true is false. And we use this law every day when we make decisions even though we don't know it's fancy name. For example, we know you can't be married and not married at the same time. You can't be pregnant and not pregnant at the same time. I can't be Dave and Not Dave at the same time.

Duh, right?

The second law I want to talk about is the Law of the Excluded Middle. This law says that either something is or it isn't. For example, either God exists or He does not. Either Jesus rose from the dead or he did not. There's no "kinda rose from the dead". There is no "God kinda exists".

It may seem hard to spot the difference in these two laws because it's very subtle. The law of non-contradiction tells us that no statement can be both true and false. The law of excluded middle tells us that true things must be one or the other.

Without these first principles we could not learn anything and discover what is true and what is not. Do these things seem like common sense? That's why they are called "self-evident". Even if we weren't able to give a precise definition of these principles we use them intuitively every day.

Reasoning

First principles can tell us *how* to discover truth but they cannot tell us *what* is true. For that we need to start using our faculties of reason.

This leads us to another question; how do we know things? How do we know the attributes of humans? How do I know that Steve and Susanna are humans? The simple answer is that we

determine what is true and what is false by observing the world around us and then drawing general conclusions. This is called reasoning.

Inductive Reasoning

There are different types of reasoning. The first is called inductive reasoning. We use inductive reasoning all the time and probably don't realize it. Inductive reasoning involves drawing conclusions based on our experiences of the world. For example, if someone said "my cat hatched from an egg". I've observed enough of the world - and enough cats - to know that cats are not born by hatching from eggs. They are born through the birthing process. And I can know this despite not seeing this particular cat being born.

Inductive reasoning doesn't give us absolute certainty. Inductive reasoning gives us reasonable conclusions. For example, if I say "the sun will come up tomorrow" I am making this statement based on the fact that the sun has appeared in the sky every day since the Earth was formed. And, until something happens to persuade me otherwise (say a report shows that a meteor is going to collide with the planet tonight and knock it off its axis) the most reasonable conclusion is that the sun will come up tomorrow.

Deductive Reasoning

A second type of reasoning is deductive reasoning. In deductive reasoning, you take observations and come to a conclusion. And that starts with forming arguments.

Arguments have a number of premises that leads to a conclusion. The argument is considered valid if the conclusion logically follows from the premises.

Here's an example of a basic argument.

1. Steve is a human
2. All humans are mortal
3. Therefore, Steve is mortal

The conclusion logically follows the premises. The first premise states that Steve is human. The second claims that all humans are mortal. So, *if* Steve is human and *if* humans are mortal, then Steve must be mortal. The bigger questions is how do we *know* that Steve is a human? Maybe Steve is a rock. And how do we *know* that all humans are mortal? This argument just asserts it and doesn't tell us how we know this.

Here's another example of an argument that makes this problem more apparent.

1. All humans have wings
2. Susanna is a human

3. Therefor Susanna has wings

This argument is also logically valid. The conclusion logically follows the premises; if all humans have wings, and if Susanna is a human, then it logically follows that Susanna has wings. But, we know this argument is false because we know the first premise is false. Without having to do any Googling we know that humans don't have wings. So, for the argument to be a good one, there has to be some sort of evidence or warrant for us to believe they are true rather than false. We can rely on observational evidence in the case of the first premise to know that it is false. We have certainly observed a lot of humans in our life times. Even if you've seen *one* human with wings you've likely seen some without them. Which would mean that not all humans have wings. And, therefore, we can't conclude that Susanna has wings based solely on this argument. We have to use other types of reasoning.

Abductive Reasoning

The final type of reasoning we will discuss is abductive reasoning. This type of reasoning is based on probability. We have a series of facts and are looking for the best explanation of the facts. We come up with all the possible explanations and start eliminating them until we reach a conclusion.

For example, if I come downstairs in the morning and discover that someone ate my cookies and cream ice cream, I can go through a process of elimination to deduce who it was. The possible suspects include my wife, my daughter, my son, one of the cats, or some monster broke into my house, left everything else untouched and ate my ice cream.

First, I check the outside camera. Nobody came in the house. So and external party is ruled out. My wife hates cookies and cream. So, I know it wasn't her. Scratch her off my suspect list. My daughter is lactose intolerant and breaks out in a rash if she eats dairy products. I have a look at her - no rash. So, no ice cream. Scratch her off the list. Whenever my son goes downstairs at night, he turns on every single light in the house. And never turns them off. When I came downstairs it was pitch black. So that leaves....

I'm being silly here, but you get the idea. With abductive reasoning, we take a series of facts and eliminate possibilities until we get to the most reasonable conclusion.

My Truth Is False

In the beginning, we talked about objective truth vs subjective truth. We just finished showing how we can know if things are objectively true or not. And that's an important skill to have because we all want to get to the truth I hope.

I wanted to do all of that front end work to be able to talk about one of the predominant views of the day in our culture and that is a view known as relativism. Now, people don't go around pronouncing "I am a relativist!" But, many people say things like they are.

Relativism is the view that all truth is relative. Or equally valid. You've heard this viewpoint when you hear things like "there is no truth" or "true for you but not for me" or "my truth" or "you do you, I'm gonna do me".

Pilate expressed this idea when he asks Jesus in John 19:38 "what is truth?". Pilate wasn't asking Jesus for a lesson on truth; he was telling Jesus that truth is subjective. As in what was and what was true was up to him. IN the matters of the court he got to determine what was true and what was not.

The problem is that most of these statements are self-defeating. Or they don't live up to the claim that they make. If you look at them closer when they deny that something is objectively true (true for everybody) they are doing so by making an objective truth claim.

Let's start with the statement "there is no truth". Well, that person sure seems to think that it is true that there is no truth. Whenever someone makes a self-defeating statement ask them a question that uses the statement in it and see what happens. So if someone says "there is no truth" ask them "is that true?" and see what happens.

"All truth is relative".

"Is that relatively true? Or is that true for me too?"

"There are no absolutes"

"Are you absolutely sure?"

"It's true for you but not for me!"

"Is that statement true just for you, or is it true for everyone?"

"True for you but not for me" may be the mantra of our day, but it's not how the world really works. Try saying that to your bank teller, the police, or the IRS and see how far you get! "Oh, it may be true for you that my bank account is negative, but that's not true for me!"

Some people will make the distinction between hard facts in the material world - like how much a rock weighs - and moral claims - like it is wrong to kill Grandma for fun. We'll get into objective morality much later but it's easy to show that everyone thinks some things are wrong for everyone and not just if you feel like it. They sure think there is a list of things you ought not do to anyone - especially them! If you cut in front of someone in line "hey you can't do that!" or if you walk up to someone sitting at a table in Starbucks and take a big long sip of their iced quarenta mocha chai wheat grass coffee tea they're probably going to demand you pay for another one.

Do you want documented evidence that people believe that morality is objective? Just think of all the protesting that has gone on for the past decade or so. Whenever people protest what are they doing? They are trying to get your attention and convince you that something is objectively wrong and it needs to be fixed. The statement they are making is true for everyone and not just them. "You can't tell a woman what to do with her body". "We ought to be paid more". "The lives of (insert marginalized people group here) are important and they need rights". When people protest, they are making objective truth claims so that other people will vote and change some sort of law or policy.

Everyone believes morals are objectively true. Even when they say otherwise.

Do All Roads Lead To Heaven?

Another area we encounter relativism is in terms of worldviews. This is usually expressed as "all religions are the same" or "all roads lead to heaven". But this is easy to show it can't be true. Worldviews make claims about how the world works. And they make claims that often stand against one another. Remember our rules of logic. Something can't be both A and not A at the same time.

Atheists believe there is no God. Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindu, and Buddhists believe there is a supernatural force of some kind. If there isn't a supernatural force in charge of everything then the atheists are right and everybody else is wrong. But they both can't be right at the same time

Christians, Muslims, and Jews believe there is one God, other religions believe in many gods. Either there is only one God or there are many gods. If there is only one God, then the Jews, Muslims, and Christians are right and everyone else is wrong. If there are many gods, then the Jews, Muslims and Christians are wrong. In no way can they all be right.

Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Either he did or he didn't. If he did, the Christians are right and the Jews and Muslims are wrong. If he didn't then the Christians are wrong and the Jews and Muslims are right but they can't be right at the same time.

Now, this does nothing to show *which* worldview is right. For that, you need to examine the evidence for the claims they make. But, either they're all wrong or one of them is right. But, they differ so much that they can't all be right at the same time. This is simple logic.

Why Does Truth Matter?

So why am I making a big deal out of this? Isn't it mean or intolerant to point out that someone is wrong? But, truth matters. We use this every day. Certain things you have to get right because the consequences are so weighty. I'm a diabetic. I take two different types of insulin.

One makes my blood sugar fall really quickly and one maintains it over a long period of time. And, depending on the situation, I better pick the right vial. Too much of one and I end up unconscious in the ER. Not enough of the other, and I could end up with long term side effect. I better pick the right vial at the given time.

Just like medical decisions are weighty things, the things we talk about in this class are weighty things. The ramifications of your worldview have to do with eternity. The weighty concerns that we are talking about are weighty because they are forever

We should care about the truth because Christianity cares about the truth.

1Co 15,17-19 **17**And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. **18**Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **19**If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Paul spells out why the truth matters in his letter to the Corinthians. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then our debts haven't been paid and everything Christianity has taught for 2000 years is a lie. But, if Jesus *has* risen from the dead, then he has paid the debt

Christianity cares a lot about truth. And by truth I mean describing the world the way it really is.

Joh 8,31-32 **31**So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **32**and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Joh 14.6 **6**Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus doesn't say "I have some of the truth and I'm one way to get to God." No, he says I am THE way and THE truth. And NOBODY gets to God except through me. That's a pretty exclusive truth claim.

The word "truth" appears over 146 times in the Bible. Most of these verse in the New Testament talk about people who deny the truth or that the apostles gave them the truth. And, if you weren't doing what the apostles said, you were wrong. Not living in truth.

As part of our mission as Christ's Ambassadors, we are to spread the truth to others. Spreading the truth means countering false things with true things.

2Co 10,4-5 **4**For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments **5**and every lofty opinion raised against

the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Don't be put off by what may seem like harsh language. "Warfare" and "destroy". Paul isn't talking about waging war against people and destroying them. He's talking about attacking ideas. With the truth.

People Demand The Truth

People may say "true for you but not for me", but we demand the truth all the time. Like from loved ones. No one wants lies from a spouse or a child. In fact, we tell them it was wrong if they lie to us. We want our doctors to prescribe the right medicine and the right operations performed. We want our financial advisors and bankers to tell us the truth about companies they recommend that we invest in. And we get upset if they tricked us into investing in something that tanked but made them a ton of money. We want the courts to convict only the truly guilty. We want employers to tell us the truth and pay us fairly. We also expect to be told the truth when we pick up a reference book, read an article, or watch a news story; we want the truth from advertisers, teachers, and politicians; we assume road signs, medicine bottles, and food labels reveal the truth. In fact, we demand the truth for almost every facet of life that affects our money, relationships, safety, or health.


Even though people may claim that truth in morality doesn't matter, they don't really believe that when someone treats them immorally. But, success in life is often dependent on the moral choices a person makes. These include choices regarding sex, marriage, children, drugs, money, business dealings, and so on. Some choices bring prosperity, others result in ruin.

People think morality is subjective because it depends on the subject of the action or the circumstances. As if if I think its OK, then it's OK and you shouldn't worry about it. You want to see an easy way to demonstrate that objective morality exists? Put the phrase "for fun" at the end of an action. Like Is it ever OK to kill babies for fun? Or is it ever OK to hold someone down and have you way with them for fun? Or is it ever OK to shoot up a movie theater for fun? Hopefully you said no to all of those things. If not, we need to get you some help.

Consequences of "True For You But Not For Me"

If a society promotes relativism - that everyone gets to make up their own moral code - and if we teach students that there is no right and wrong, why are we surprised when a couple of students gun down their classmates or a teenage mother leaves her baby in a trash can? Why are we surprised when the acceptable age of the unborn to which abortions can be preformed keeps increasing?

Truth corresponds to reality. Not comporting ones self to reality can have serious consequences on ones' health and mental state. Take the case of anorexia. In this scenario, a person's perception of their body does not align with reality. In their mind, they are fat and overweight. So they go to extreme measures to lose weight and try to get skinnier and skinnier to the point where their organs start shutting down and they starve themselves to death. It's a mental disorder. What's going on in their mind does not comport with reality. This vision they have of themselves is not true. And, because they cannot see that "what's true for them" is just flat out wrong, they put their lives at risk. Now, I ask you, is the caring thing to do for that person to let them live "their truth"? No, of course not. We want to get them help to align what they think on the inside with the truth of the outside.

Or what about Body integrity identity disorder? This is a rare mental condition where people think they are amputees and they ask doctors to amputate one of their limbs. They feel so strongly that their leg or a hand or an arm is gone that they want a doctor to remove it for them so their outside can align with their truth on the inside. A while back, there was a [woman on the Dr. Phil show who had poured drain cleaner onto her eyes](#)  - making herself blind - because she wanted to live as a blind person.^[2] This is obviously a serious mental condition that needs help. And if one of our friends told us they wanted to have a perfectly good pair of eyes removed we would never just say "you be you boo". At least I hope not.

Here's another thought. If the atheists are right, and this physical world is all there is and we're basically just meat robots walking around living out our genetic programming then we might as well lie, cheat, and steal to get what we want because this life is all there is, and there are no consequences in eternity. We have a term for people who live this way. We call them sociopaths.

If a society does not comport itself to truth then that has consequences. That's why God cares so much about truth. And we should, too.

Why Do People “Shun” The Truth?

Some truths are plainly obvious. And yet, people will still deny them. You can make an air-tight case, full of evidence, and yet, people still will not accept that what you are saying is true. Why is that? Why do they "shun" the truth?

RaSHUNal Reasons

There are three reasons why people "shun" the truth. The first is for raSHUNal reasons. They are not convinced by the arguments or they have arguments that defeat the arguments presented to them. Maybe they don't have all of the evidence you have. Maybe there is a lack

of knowledge. And, maybe if we can share our knowledge with them, they will be convinced of something that is true.

EmoSHUNal Reasons

As much as we want to proclaim that man is a rational being, the truth is, he is also emotional. And, emotions often get in the way of rational thinking. For many people, Christianity comes with a lot of baggage. They may have had a bad experience at a former church. Or, they know Christians who don't act very "Christian-like". For them, becoming a Christian might be like going back to a restaurant you got food poisoning from one time. Even if the restaurant offers to let you inspect the back of the house where the meat is kept, watch the food being cooked, and examined their sanitation policies, chances are you still probably wouldn't go back. It literally left a bad taste in your mouth.

Spiritual abuse in the church is a real thing. People get manipulated all the time to give up their resources "for the church". People get manipulated into sexual favors or encounters. If that happened to someone, and they were able to get out of it, it would be really hard to trust another church. That would be a definite barrier.

One of God's parts is that of a Father. Imagine how difficult it must be for someone who comes from a household where they were abused by their father. You think that might be a barrier to developing a closer relationship to God?

On a side note, this is why *living out* the gospel is so important. Most people won't listen to a thing you have to say if you have bad character. The first encounter most people have with Christianity is with Christians. So, if they see people who call themselves Christians acting vulgar, obnoxious, dishonest, or mean-spirited why would they want to be any part of that?

VoliSHUNal Reasons


The third category of reasons people won't agree with a truth claim are for voliSHUNal reasons. They don't *want* a claim to be true. There are two different types of people in this group, but it basically boils down to the same objection; the cost is too high.

The first group of volitional objectors are the ones who can often be heard saying "I just want to live my life the way I want to live my life". They think that becoming a Christian means a life having all the fun sucked out of it. All they see about Christianity is a bunch of unthinking rule followers and they want no part in that, thank you very much. Or, they've developed a lifestyle counter to what Christianity teaches and they don't want to give that up.

These people aren't on a truth quest; they're on a happiness quest. If something causes them discomfort, it's not good. If something makes them happy, it's good. The gospel starts off with

“you’ve messed up, and you need help”. Not a very attractive opening statement to someone who thinks they have it all handled on their own. Most people don't want to be held accountable to anyone but themselves. They want to feel like they are in charge of their own lives. So, they resist.

Frankly, this is where most objectors fall. I know I did. Before I accepted that Christianity was true, I had a serious problem with people telling me what to do or how I should live my life. I thought I knew what being a good person looked like and I didn't need anyone to tell me how to do that. I was an independent thinker, after all.

If you want to see an example of a volitional objection, watch Frank Turek in his Q&As when he asks some people [if Christianity were proven to be true, would you become a Christian](#)  and they flat out say no. This is not a logical objection, this is a willful objection. They don't want Christianity to be true.

For the second group in this category, there is too great of a social or familial price to pay if they were to agree with you. Not only would they have to admit to *themselves* they were wrong, but they would also risk alienating their peer group and/or their family. That's a BIG deal. We've seen all too well recently the kind of vitriol that gets unleashed against people on opposing sides on places like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Simply changing your mind on a topic means that you would now be subject to all of that.

Or what about when the church gets attached to certain polarizing political figures? And people have seen the political mudslinging going back and forth. And they think "if I come out as a Christian people are going to associate me with that guy"? Or, even worse, they think now I have to VOTE for that guy?

Being very public about your positions can also get you fired or blacklisted in certain industries. People have a lot at stake when they come out on a topic these days. Losing relationships is one thing. But, if you have a family to provide for, and you know there is a possibility of hostility in the workplace or even termination, you might think twice before coming out on a particular side of something. Or announcing that you are now a different party or a member of a different belief system.

This gets taken to a whole different level in countries where religious freedom is not a right protected by laws. In places like Egypt, if you are not a Muslim, there are many opportunities that are closed to you. In many Muslim nations, it is against the law to convert someone from Islam to another belief system. So, if you are a Christian in some Muslim countries, and you try to convince your Muslim friend that Christianity is true, you could end up in jail. Or worse. In some areas, Muslims who become Christians are executed. So, a Muslim has to weigh the cost of losing their livelihood, their possessions, their family, and even their own lives in some cases against admitting that Christianity is true. That's a pretty weighty decision to have to make.

Christianity Is True



Truth matters because we should live our lives in line with what is true. Above all else - above our social status, above our career advancement, above our desire to be liked - Christians should love truth. Now, I'm not suggesting we are putting truth over God. Because all true things are God's things. But, we MUST care about the truth very deeply if we want to be transformed and want OTHERS to be transformed.

Christianity doesn't hide the truth. Now, CHRISTIANS might not tell the truth. And, some CHURCHES might not give people the whole truth. But, that's not by God's design. The same information available to the clergy is available to the congregants in God's Words to us.

That's also a sign of a cult - when the leaders keep "teachings" from the congregation or when they primarily teach from personal visions or dreams they have received that none of the members have access to. Watch out for those types.

I'm not a Christian because it makes me feel good or because it makes my life easier. Quite the contrary actually. I'm a Christian because it's true. In fact, that's the only reason anyone should be a Christian – because it's true. Not because it makes them a better person or forms better societies – although those are wonderful side effects. And not because my parents were or because I got a burning in the besom when I prayed about it. If you want to consider yourself a Christian you should be a Christian because it's true. Christianity is the best explanation for why things are the way they are.



1. Brake, Aaron. "What Is Truth?" *Stand To Reason*, 6 Feb. 2018, <https://www.str.org/w/what-is-truth-1> .

2. "The Woman Who Put Drain Cleaner in Her Eyes to Fulfill Her Dream of Being Blind", *Dr. Phil*, season 14, episode 39, 2015 