

Christian Basics

CHAPTER ONE

The Truth will Set You Free

HERE IS WHY THIS CHAPTER IS IMPORTANT

■ We must understand what belief means ■

1. **IF** the God of the Bible is real, **THEN**, this God should be the source of truth.
2. **IF** the God of the Bible is real, **THEN**, we should be able to know and understand at least some of his truth. The premise being that, since we are made in God's image, we should be able to find much of God's truth that resonates within us. The way God thinks and sees the world should be available to our understanding. God's truth should be reasonable. His truth should make logical sense to us.
3. **IF** the God of the Bible is real, **THEN**, we should be able to place our faith in his truth.

Everyone has reasons for believing certain things. We don't have to know everything, but at least we can have good grounds for belief. The eight chapters that follow this chapter were written to add strength and confidence toward faith in God. Our faith can be based on good evidence.

This chapter will help give you confidence your faith and belief is well placed.

“The truth will set you free.” How many times have we heard this phrase before? We've heard it from revolutionaries, politicians, religious cult leaders and even impassioned movie stars. How can we argue with something that sounds so good, so right and so true?

However, there is a problem with how the phrase is used. The problem lies behind what kind of truth is being offered. Sometimes the most dangerous kind of truth is a half-truth. Can truth be so plastic and flexible that it can be twisted to conform to anybody's version of reality? Anybody can stand up and proclaim that the truth (their truth) will set us free. How can we trust them? Perhaps it might be a good idea to take a look at the context out of which this popular quote came. After all, would it be wise to trust a version of truth if the very quote used to wedge its way into our trust is taken out of context?

THE QUOTE IN CONTEXT

People who wish to sway others to their way of thinking often use “The truth will set you free” as leverage. What most people do not know is that this quote actually comes from the Bible. More specifically, it came from the lips of Jesus Christ. To use this saying in a manner other than how Jesus himself originally intended can lead to trouble. Here is the quote in fuller context.

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:31-32(NIV)

Please notice there is a very SMALL qualifier at the beginning of this phrase that has some very LARGE ramifications. The qualifier happens to be the little word “if.” It might be convenient to overlook this little qualifier. However, it might not be safe to pursue the results promised while leaving out the very reason the word was put there. “If” is followed by the word “then.” Without the *IF* there can be no promised *THEN*.

Some people like to say that the things they are telling us (their truth) will set us free. They may not be telling the whole truth. Jesus said that knowing the truth would depend on holding to HIS teaching. Only then can a person meet the qualification put forth in the words of Jesus. The freedom to which Jesus was referring is a freedom that must be held in check by the very qualification given by Jesus himself. If we ignore the very first word given to us by Jesus Christ, (that pesky little word “if”), we may not find a positive outcome in our pursuit of truth. Furthermore, the freedom promised might not be so good either. We will come back to the importance of the context of this quote later. Let’s briefly explore the definition of truth itself.

WHO DEFINES TRUTH?

How is truth defined? A simple answer is this: truth is that which is real. Truth is reality. A magician is skilled at twisting our perceptions so that we do not see that which is really true – it only appears to be true. This deception is all part of the fun. Yet, there are times when deception is not fun. To be deceived by truth that is later found out to be error can be disturbing. Examples of this can run the gamut from a wrong medical diagnosis to a false guarantee on a wristwatch. I am sure we have all realized that we can be fooled – and fooled often.

Who determines what is real? The question of authority has a lot to do with determining reality. Who are we to believe if sometimes we cannot even trust our own perceptions? If a wild-looking man in tattered clothing with drool chasing down his chin were to leap at us with his claims of truth we probably would not believe him. If a sophisticated gentleman in a white lab coat came out with his claims of truth, backed by a Harvard medical degree, we might tend to lean toward his view of reality. Authority matters in the quest for truth. Authority can add weight that can tip the scales toward the recognition of what is true.

APATHY ALERT

“Don’t bother me with all this. I just want to be left alone.” The problem with this kind of thinking is that sooner or later the truth has a way of sneaking up and biting us. Many people have discovered that their lives could have been vastly different had they only known certain things sooner. May God grant you faith as you take the time to read each of the following chapters in *Christian Basics*. The pages that follow are designed to lay a strong foundation for a vibrant and growing faith. This is an ALERT to challenge you to give your utmost CARE in your study of this material.

Before Jesus was crucified, Pilate was questioning him. He was troubled by Jesus' comments. A perplexed Pilate had only this sad retort: "What is truth" (John 18:38)? Pilate was face-to-face with "truth incarnate." He had Jesus Christ standing right in front of him. Pilate asked his question out of frustration and didn't wait for Jesus to answer. Unfortunately, he chose to turn his back on what would have been a rare opportunity for a direct answer from a most authoritative source. We may not find ourselves staring into the face of truth like Pilate, but we should not turn away from the search to find the truth. Read and study these chapters slowly and carefully. Your effort will be rewarded.

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

A famous atheist was quoted as saying, "Science is what we know. Philosophy is what we don't know." I would ask him if it was his philosophy that has told him what he knows. He seems to have a lot of confidence in his own philosophy in determining truth. He has it on good authority that what he says happens to be true and is reflective of reality. Where does he get his authority to determine truth and reality? He has the authority within himself. He trusts in himself. That is fine so long as his trust is well placed and actually is an accurate picture of what is real and true.

The question of authority is of vital importance when we begin to sort out what is true and what is false. The atheist rests on his own authority. Will he allow his authority to be tested by reality? If his idea that there is no God is true it should be reflected in reality. It should make sense logically. How did the universe come into being? There are only three choices: the universe is eternal, the universe somehow created itself, or the universe is created. Are any of these options logical? Is there any evidence that the universe has eternal qualities? It seems that many scientists claim that the universe has had a beginning. Also, there is evidence that things are winding down in some measurable degree. If the universe is winding down, then it must have had a beginning. Is there any evidence that the universe would have the ability to create itself? How can something that does not exist, and therefore, needs to be created, create itself? We are left with the third option: the universe is the result of an act of creation.

If our own science ("what we know") informs our philosophy ("what we don't know"), the question can honestly be asked if either an eternal universe or a self-created universe makes sense. Upon what authority will we base our answer? How can we really know?

What if there is an authority outside of ourselves that could lead us to a viable conclusion? I would like to offer the possibility of a source from which we may find a trustworthy assessment of what is real. That source is God. The God of the Bible is the uncreated, eternal source of all things. God is Creator. If God is God, then there can be no more trustworthy source for discerning reality. The first premise I would like to offer is that God exists as Creator of all things.

Premise # 1 – God is Creator of all things.

If God is the Creator of all things, then he must know a few things that we don't know. Could it be that God has revealed some of these things (truth - reality) to us? The second premise I would like to offer is that God has indeed revealed truth to us. His truth may be found in the Bible. Some people may not know much about the Bible or may not have much confidence that they will find truth and reality in the Bible. I would ask them to consider strongly that the Bible is God's revelation to us. God caused the Bible to be written, collected and preserved so that we might know HIS reality and HIS truth. I would suggest that people start by leaving the door open for the possibility that God has indeed left us with a trustworthy written account of truth.

Premise # 2 – The Bible is God's word to us.

Let's start with two concepts that there is a God who created all things and that he has given us his word: the Bible. With these two foundational propositions in place we can know what is real and true. We can move forward in confidence that it is possible to find a good, trustworthy guide for life.

THE QUESTION OF FAITH

What is faith? A Sunday school teacher asked her young students to give her a definition of faith. One eager student stood up and proclaimed, "Faith is believing in something even when you know it is not true." Many people have the mistaken idea that faith is not supposed to make sense. Granted, sometimes we may not have a full understanding of certain things, but the biblical definition of faith demands that it be grounded in truth.

We are given a definition of faith in the book of Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

"Being sure" tells us that there is reality and substance – a reason – for faith. We may not have the completed answer yet, but we have good reason to place our faith that the full answer will arrive one day. There may still be the tension of some unanswered questions or partial details, but we wait patiently – in faith.

Abraham is given as a reliable and trustworthy example of someone who had faith. Abraham received a promise from God. Based on that promise Abraham obeyed and followed God's instructions. Was Abraham's faith based on nothing? No. His faith was based on the promise of God. Abraham's faith was not without reason. He had good reason for believing. He had the promise of God. The first part of the definition of faith – "being sure of what we hope for" – was a lived-out by Abraham. If he had claimed that a space alien, or Santa Claus, or the man in the moon had given him the promise, then his faith would have little reason or substance. As we read the account of Abraham, from Genesis, chapters 12 to 22, we find that he was visited seven times by God and given powerful promises. Abraham's faith was not without reason.

The second part of the definition of faith states that "...faith is being certain of what we do not see." The term "certain" means that there is proof (evidence) for belief. How do we prove that something invisible exists? Courtrooms do it all the time. Facts are proven through evidence of an event that was unseen by any of the members of the jury. The jury makes decisions based on that evidence. There is certainty. The evidence brings faith down to earth. What is OUR evidence? Our evidence is God's word, the Bible.

Hebrews, chapter eleven, has been called "the faith chapter." It is no surprise that it begins with this strong definition of faith: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." There is not a wishy-washy word in this definition. The definition itself is steeped in meaning and reason.

Faith is the act of trusting, and then, acting on that trust. We will not do too well, however, if we do not know God's word. God's word is telling us that faith is a good thing and that we are to be commended for our faith. God is alive and he rewards faith. A few verses later we read in Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

"Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Belief in the existence of God is an essential part of our faith. Another essential part of our faith is the attitude we carry into our search for the truth. Jesus said that the truth will set us free. He made that statement as he was confronted with a group of people who had a contrary attitude toward him. Attitude – an attitude of faith – is crucial for receiving the freedom that Jesus promised.

Premise # 3 – Come to God and his word with faith

Our atheist friend presented a false dichotomy between faith and reason. He said that reason is science – what we know, and that faith is what we don't know. What we MUST know is that this is a non-biblical definition of faith. Faith and reason are not to be separated. It was God himself who called to his wayward people, "Come now, let us REASON together" (Isaiah 1:18). Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment in the law. He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your MIND" (Matthew 22:37). Faith and reason go together. What God has joined together, let not man separate.

Premise # 1 – God is Creator of all things

Premise # 2 – The Bible is God's word to us

Premise # 3 – We come to God and his word with faith

Jesus was the one who said, "The truth will set you free." The truth must be HIS truth. There can be no greater authority for learning the truth that Jesus referred to than the Bible itself. The Bible IS the teaching of Jesus. The Bible must be our foundation for truth. It possesses authority that can be trusted to lead us into the Truth that will set us free. Beware of other sources.

TIME OUT

Write out these two verses from Hebrews eleven on a piece of paper you can carry with you.

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1)

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6)

Memorize them. Carry them with you and pull them out from time to time and meditate upon them. This is what you are to do the next time you encounter doubt or discouragement:

Declare Chapter Eleven!! – Hebrews chapter eleven.

Your faith will increase as you learn to trust in God's word.

CHALLENGE

Truth is not always “NEW!” or “IMPROVED!” Have you ever noticed how popular TV documentaries about the Bible seem to gravitate toward the sensational and the controversial? Why not present the tested and plain facts that, over time, have been proven to be trustworthy? The “new” and the sensational attract more attention. Perhaps TV programmers depend on keeping viewers mesmerized so they will be less tempted to change the channel. The search for truth becomes secondary to ratings and income from commercials.

We are challenged to readjust our thinking to realize that the search for truth will not always be as sensational as the latest controversy or the newest scintillating scandal. Truth is bedrock. Truth is old, and, as a result, it will not always be “new.” Therefore, we must be willing to exercise discipline and maturity as we work through the facts and weigh them with careful attention. This is not to say that truth is not exciting. It can be the most exciting and life-changing thing in a person's life.

The next eight chapters are dedicated to the development of a clear presentation of the major tenets of the Christian faith. The objective of this book is to help many people grow ever closer to the one who said, “I am the truth” (John 14:6).

A PRAYER FOR YOU

May Jesus give those who take up the challenge of going through these chapters the same experience that the disciples had as they walked with him on the road to Emmaus. “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us” (Luke 24:32)? They had no idea a Bible study could be so exciting. May God open up the Scriptures to you in a new way just as he did to those disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Review

1. What are the three premises for approaching your study of the Bible?
2. How can you explain a worldview which allows for the possibility of a supernatural God?
3. How would you explain to someone the importance of NOT separating faith from reason?
4. Recite Hebrews 11:1 and Hebrews 11:6 from memory
5. Read and reread the quote from Jesus from John 8:31-32. How would you explain to someone the truth that Jesus had in mind?

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

1. *Does it show a lack of faith to want faith to be reasonable?*

Genesis 1:26 says that we are created in the image of God. That image may be spoiled by sin, but we still have the ability to reason and think.

If reason has no bearing on faith, God would not draw his people to himself with such words as: “Come let us reason together” (Isaiah 55:1).

In fact, if faith lacked reason and logic, then why would God even choose to use words at all? Why would God call people to account for his words? Perhaps faith could be just someone’s intuition or a feeling. It shouldn’t take a very close reading of the Bible to see that God uses language and logic (reason) in his dealings with his people.

The language of God (the Bible) gives us many tangible reasons for faith. Our task is to understand God’s ways as they are worked out in human history. We may not always understand his ways fully at first, but we work toward an understanding. We will discover that both our faith and our reason will grow stronger.

2. *Do I have to enroll in Bible College in order to understand the Bible?*

No. The Bible was written for all to understand. You do not need a Bible school. The early believers did not have a Bible college. Scripture is meant for all and to be understood by all. That being said, Bible College and other advanced studies are helpful in enabling people to work with increasing effectiveness with others in a wide variety of ways.

People are tempted to stay away from reading and studying the Bible due to the false idea that they must have a biblical degree. They may give all the responsibility to the pastor or the experts and then sit back and withdraw from studying God's word. Every believer is to study God's word. Some people choose to go deeper in order to increase their effectiveness and to answer the call on their lives.

The Bible was written, compiled and preserved so that all might come to the knowledge of the truth.

3. *I often struggle with lack of faith. What can I do to strengthen my faith?*

The illustration has often been given that a believer's life can be seen as a table with four legs: The Bible – Prayer/worship – Fellowship – Service. If any of these "legs" are weak or missing, then there will be unbalance. The first place to consider would be an appraisal of any of these for areas to see if there might be something missing.

Are you engaged in disciplined Bible study? Do you take to heart God's word by meditation and memorization? Are you involved in prayer and worship? Is prayer and worship a vital part of your life? Do you attend a healthy, biblically-based church? Are you involved in the lives of others for mutual encouragement in the faith? Are you involved in some kind of service, no matter how small it may seem?

The four areas listed are by no means meant to be some kind of mechanical and dry method to produce faith, but they are a good place to start. God is alive and will help you as you seek him.

More questions?

Go to **christianlifetools.org** with your questions. Your questions will be answered ASAP.