

Session 1

October 15, 2023

DOES IT REALLY MATTER WHICH “TRUTH” I BELIEVE?

John 3:19-21; 8:31-36

In John 14:6, Jesus will declare that He is Himself the truth; that is, He *embodies* truth. But we’re not there yet! Here, earlier in the book, Jesus *aligns* Himself with the truth. Two principles are evident from these two passages.

Truth and light (John 3:19-21). John 3 records a monumental meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees. There is spiritual sparring between the two men. The drama is filled with theological truth, earnest questions, sly answers, and even some good-natured sarcasm as well (see v. 4). Jesus chides Nicodemus for his lack of understanding (v. 10), but Nicodemus’ life is changed, and in the end, he will shine like a new penny! (See John 19:39). In the meantime, the spiritual sparring continues. Jesus pointed out in verse 18 that those who don’t believe in Christ are already standing in condemnation. *Darkness versus light* is a very prominent motif in John and is used to draw harsh distinctions (see 1 John 1:5-10). Notice the description of the lost man here in verses 19-20. First, there is *knowledge*. Lost people understand that God exists and has revealed Himself to them (see Rom 1:19ff). Second, there is *avoidance*. Lost people love sin more than they love God. That’s part of the sin nature. Third, there is *fear*. Their deeds are evil—and they know it—so they avoid God like a thief avoids a cop. Verse 21 contrasts the believer with the lost person. Those who submit themselves to God, also submit to His truth. They are drawn to His light like a moth to a flame (see John 6:44). But they do so not out of arrogance or pride, but humility! As the truth of His light exposes our flaws, we demonstrate that any goodness we have has been accomplished by God working in us. For reflection: *The believer’s life is a changed life. Think about how your life changed when you came to Christ. Is there clear evidence that God is still at work in you?*

Truth and liberty (John 8:31-36). By John 8, Jesus is in conflict with the Jews. In many ways, they represent “the church crowd” of the day, as they are zealous to maintain the very traditions that Jesus came to shake up! The first part of John 8 deals with the woman caught in adultery. That was a trap meant to catch Jesus disobeying the law. The remainder of the chapter records the escalating arguments the religious leaders had against Jesus. By John 11, they are ready to kill Him; but for now, they simply want to trap Him. Verse 30 says that through Jesus’ answers to their questions, “many believed in Him.” The Lord’s tone with them changed immediately. They were new believers, so they needed discipleship. In verses 31 and 32, Jesus stated two important lessons. First, He told them the *requirement* of discipleship. They must “continue in His word.” They had taken that first step of faith; but the proof of discipleship means more than *accepting* Christ; it means *abiding* in Christ (see John 15:1-8); His teaching, His truth, His word. Second, He told them the *results* of discipleship: it will make them free. Their assertion that being Jews was enough to keep them free (v. 33) was misguided at best...and a flat out lie at worst! The promise to Abraham was one of blessings and prosperity and perpetuity. But Israel’s history is littered with captivities! (Anybody remember Egypt?! How about Babylon?!) Jesus’ reply, however, was more compassionate than condemning: “Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.” Their position as children of Abraham may have given them some security. But as slaves to sin, their position was much more tenuous. Slaves would come and go at their master’s whim.

They had no claim to family rights or privileges. But sons are family! They have family ties, the family name, and the family inheritance. Jesus had already established Himself as the Son of God earlier in this chapter. He is certainly referring to Himself in verse 36. As a full Son of God the Father, He has the authority to set slaves free. And when He does so, their freedom (from sin) is certain and complete. They are “free indeed!” For reflection: *The close context here is that the truth sets us free from sin’s enslavement. But we often quote this verse in other ways. What are some other legitimate ways that truth can set us free?*