

Faithful to Truth in an Age of Tolerance

Lesson 4: Defending the Truth, Part 1:

How Do We Know What Is True?

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In Lesson 3, “Contending for the Truth,” we saw that being faithful to truth is not merely believing truth for ourselves. It is *standing* for truth, which the apostle Paul compares to laying siege to a city (2 Cor 4:3–5). Furthermore, this battle is not won in the flesh, but through the power of God. Yet as we have opportunity to stand for truth, we will find ourselves in *contradiction* with those who oppose the truth, and we must be ready to “give an answer” for the “reason” of our hope (1 Pet 3:15). This series of lessons is designed to prepare you for that moment.

1. The meaning of “truth.”

- a. Truth is an *observation* that we make about what is *real*.
- b. An observation about what is real can be expressed in declarative statements, called *propositions*, which are able to be judged as *true* or *false*.

EXAMPLES:

2. How we know if our propositions are true: *Do they correspond to reality?*

“A belief or statement is true only if it matches with, reflects or corresponds to the reality it refers to” (D. Groothuis).

The “correspondence” theory of truth is based on several observations:

- a. Truth *depends* upon *facts*. Or we could put it this way: *facts* are what *make* something true.
- b. This means that *truth* exists *outside of ourselves*. We cannot *make* something true, we can only *discern from the facts* what is true and what is not true.
- c. We must judge whether or not our propositions (truth claims) correspond to reality by *critical thinking*.

- (1) The term “critical thinking” refers to a *process* of *testing* propositions (truth claims) by *questioning* whether or not they correspond to the available evidence.

Sample Questions:

- (a) Is this claim the most plausible conclusion based on the evidence?
- (b) Does this claim take all of the evidence into account?
- (c) Is this claim being fair with the evidence?
- (d) If this claim is true, then what should also be true?
- (e) Is this claim consistent with other claims that I already know to be true?

(f) Why would this person making this claim want me to believe it?

(g) Is there any ulterior reason I want to believe the claim?

(2) Believers are encouraged to practice critical thinking in the New Testament.

(a) 1 Pet 3:15–16

“answer” = *apologia*, from where we derive the English word “apologetics”

(b) Acts 22:1; 24:10; 25:16; 26:2; 1 Cor 9:3

The word *apologia* is used to describe Paul’s *defense* or *answer for* his beliefs

(c) 2 Cor 10:5

“imagination” = *logismos*; a reasoned argument against something

(d) Examples: Jesus (Matt 22); Paul (Romans 1–8)

3. Competing views to the “correspondence” theory of truth

a. Postmodernism

(1) There is no truth, only stories told by cultures to explain their world.

(2) The most powerful people get to make up the stories that tell us what to believe.

b. Relativism: Something is true if it corresponds to what I already believe.

c. Pragmatism: Something is true if it is ultimately beneficial.

If these are the prevailing philosophies of our time, then it is no wonder that we are living in an age of tolerance.

4. How do we know that the Bible is true?

a. Answer from Faith: Because we believe the claims that the Bible makes about itself (2 Tim 3:16–17; Heb 4:12; 2 Pet 1:19–21)

b. Answer from Reason: Because the *propositions* (truth claims) of the Bible correspond to reality.