

interpretation of a reader or community.³²⁻³³ (For a biblical assessment of the emerging church, see Endnotes 5, 10, 20, 35. For an overview on the Bible's reliability and its divinely revealed truth, see Endnote 26.)

THE ULTIMATE TRUTH WAR



The kingdom of darkness battles intensely against the kingdom of light for people's souls. Satan (as grand conspirator) employs two age-old strategies: attacking the validity of the Word of God and discrediting the gospel. Starting in the garden, he tempted Eve with "Did God really say?"³⁴ (See Gen. 3:1; 2 Tim. 2:15; Rev. 12:9.)

Challenges to "Christian" Postmodernism

[a] **CP distorts God's revealed truth.** CP wages a "truth war"³⁵ by advancing a philosophy contrary to Christ (Col. 2:8). It redefines core Christian doctrines such as sin, salvation, atonement, and the gospel.³⁶ It embraces religious pluralism (all roads lead to God) in opposition to the good news: that the sinless Son of God sacrificially shed His blood on the cross to reconcile us to holy God (Rom. 5:9-11; 2 Thes. 1:8-10).

[b] **CP interferes with eternal salvation.** Avoiding dualistic thinking, some emergent leaders say "eternal life" does not mean "life after death," and "unsaved" people do not get "saved" or converted.³⁷ Yet the Bible clearly identifies all people as believers or unbelievers, sheep or goats, wheat or weeds.³⁸ (See Matt. 25:31-46; 13:36-43; John 3:3; 1 Cor. 14:22; Mal. 3:18.) CP's subjective definitions confuse biblical truth and endanger eternal souls.

THE GREATEST LOVE KNOWN



"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Jesus' promise is the most loving and important message ever delivered. His followers are to tell the world.

5 THE MISSING PIECE

[a] **The missing piece in the truth puzzle.** Man's reasoning is insufficient; God's revelation is needed.³⁹ Creator-God has given us a heavenly vantage point from which to know reality as it truly is. He has revealed objective truth: (1) through the written Word (the Bible, authored and illuminated by the Holy Spirit) and (2) through the Incarnate Word (the Son of God, who took on human form to communicate with us and be in relationship with us). Hence, such supernatural communications, directly from our Creator to us, are accessible to us irrespective of our culture, biases, language, upbringing, or community.

A HEAVENLY VANTAGE POINT



Truth is not arbitrary; it flows from God's nature. His existence and character are solid, unchangeable, and absolute.⁴⁰

[b] **The missing piece in our broken world.** Today's culture is disillusioned by the lack of solutions to fix our world. Pursuits of freedom, peace, acceptance, and love remain unfulfilled. Such is the human predicament; we live in a fallen world requiring a Savior. Jesus Christ is the Missing Piece who can redeem us and fill the void in our hearts for authentic love (John 3:16; 7:37-38). We are priceless souls, created in the image of God to personally know Him...now and forever.

Relativism in all forms is shaky and subjective, whereas biblical Christianity is solid and certain. You can choose to anchor your hope on the shifting sands of "interpretive truth" or on the firm ground of objective truth—revealed to us through Scripture and Jesus.

*"On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand."⁴¹*



A PRAYER FOR SALVATION

"Father God, thank You for revealing Your love and truth to us. Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross for my sins and rising from the dead to give me eternal life. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. Lord, I trust You and want to have a relationship with You forever. In Jesus' name, amen."

A PRAYER TO DISCERN BIBLICAL TRUTH

"Lord, I acknowledge You as the Source of all truth. Please help me to discern between biblical truth and unbiblical interpretations that arise from worldly philosophy. May Your Holy Spirit illuminate Your Word to me. In Jesus' name, amen."

TRUE-WAY TRACTS®

P. O. Box 1258

San Juan Capistrano, CA (USA) 92693

www.truewaytracts.com

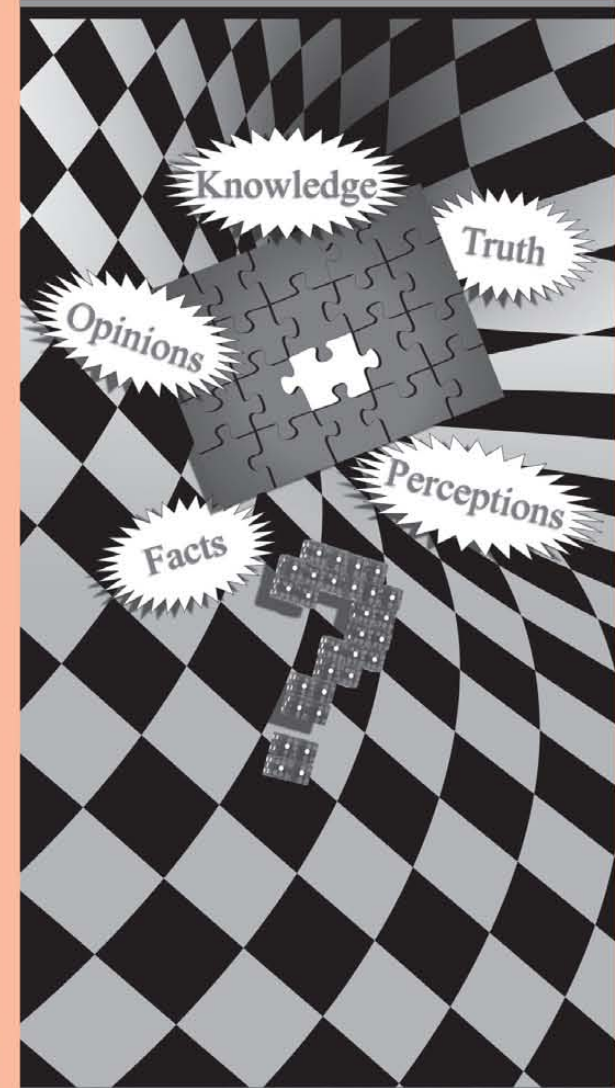


JOHN 14:6

REFERENCES: ¹Paul Copan, *True for You, But Not for Me* (Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 11. ²Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Crossway Books, 2004), 33, 111. ³Josh McDowell, *In Search of Certainty* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 6. ⁴D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Zondervan, 2005), 105. ⁵R. Scott Smith, *Truth* updates (handwritten notes postmarked 4-15-08). ⁶Ibid (handwritten notes postmarked 6-12-08). ⁷Norman Geisler, Speaker, Emergent Church Conference, 3/8/08, Murietta, CA. ⁸Copan, *TFY*, 25. ⁹R. Scott Smith, "Where is the Emerging Church Heading?" essay read at ETS in 11/07. ¹⁰Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent* (Moody Publishers, 2008), 84. ¹¹Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Thomas Nelson Pub., 1999), 625. ¹²Smith, *Truth* updates (handwritten notes 6-12-08). ¹³Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *The New Tolerance* (Tyndale House Publishers, 1998), 19, 110. ¹⁴Paul Copan, *That's Just Your Interpretation* (Baker Books, 2001), 34. ¹⁵McDowell, *TNT*, 59. ¹⁶Ibid, 63. ¹⁷Ibid, 73. ¹⁸Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism* (Baker Books, 1998), 13. ¹⁹Copan, *TFY*, 47. ²⁰R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian* (Crossway Books, 2005), 165. ²¹Beckwith, 31, 65-66. ²²Smith, *Truth*, 164. ²³Copan, *TFY*, 47. ²⁴Ibid, 46. ²⁵Ibid. ²⁶M. J. Tyner, apologetics brief "Is the Bible the Infallible Word of God?" (True-Way Tracts, 2012), available online at www.truewaytracts.com. ²⁷Smith, *Truth*, 64. ²⁸Scot McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church," *Christianity Today*, 2/07, 34-39. ²⁹Carson, 12. ³⁰Ibid, 162. ³¹Smith, *Truth*, 154. ³²Carson, 143. ³³McDowell, *TNT*, 155-157. ³⁴Ibid, 71. ³⁵John MacArthur, *The Truth War* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), 23, 171. ³⁶DeYoung, 84, 194-204, 247-253. ³⁷Ibid, 186. ³⁸Ibid, 200. ³⁹Dennis McCallum, *The Death of Truth* (Bethany House, 1996), 252. ⁴⁰McDowell, *ISOC*, 13. ⁴¹Words: Edward Mote, *Hymns of Praise*, 1836. Music: *Solid Rock*, William B. Bradbury, 1863. ⁴²TWT unabridged apologetics brief "Is Truth Relative or Objective?" True-Way Tracts, 2016.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States.

IS TRUTH RELATIVE OR OBJECTIVE?



by m.j. tyner, m.a.
christian apologetics

biblical christianity

Understanding Truth in Today's Culture

INTRODUCTION

We live in an increasingly relativistic age. Relativism claims that what we might think is knowledge (a firm grasp of truth and reality) is only an opinion. A fact, value, or outlook on life can be “true for you” but “not true for me.”¹ But is truth relative or objective? Is truth dependent or independent of people’s perceptions? This issue is monumental in scope. For if biblical Christianity is the worldview that covers all of life and reality (“total truth”),² then relativism bars people from personally knowing the Creator-God and His transforming truth.

Our current crisis of truth arose out of a philosophical shift that took place a few decades ago. Postmodernism presented a subjective view of truth. (See chart, “Three Worldviews.”) Below is a brief analysis of four avenues of relativism, followed by a Christian response.

- Postmodernism
- The New Tolerance
- Moral Relativism
- “Postmodern” Christianity
- The Missing Piece



1 POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism (PM) is edging out modernism as the prevailing mode of thought influencing our culture, casting a shadow over logical reasoning and the scientific method.³ It asserts that all truth is based on perspective.⁴ Objective truth is nonexistent or unknowable; we cannot arrive at it through science, logic, or rationality. Today’s PM philosophers conclude: “Our only access to reality requires interpretation, which is done from the standpoint of one’s community, culture, and language. So there are a number of interpretations of reality.”⁵ Even to have

an experience requires interpretation.⁶

Two Challenges to Postmodernism

[a] PM’s basic assertion constitutes a logical fallacy. The core idea in PM is that we cannot know any truth or reality directly (as it is in itself); our only access requires interpretation. Ironically, that statement is itself a truth claim. (*We “know it is true” that we “cannot know” truth directly.*)⁷ Since this claim is presented as universally true and rational, PM is inconsistent with itself (the “self-excepting fallacy”).⁸

[b] PM renders us ineligible to receive supernatural revelation from God. By maintaining that our very access to reality requires interpretation, PM makes it impossible to understand what God would intend to reveal to us. However, surely an all-powerful God could “cut through our interpretive grids, to reveal truth to us directly.”⁹ A Creator-God would not be limited from communicating objective truth to His creations through meaningful, understandable words.¹⁰

DO FACTS EXIST?

A person could not function long if he acted as though truth were based only on his (or his community’s) perspective. For example, he could get hit by a bus that “to him” was not moving; or he could drink poison that “to him” was lemonade.¹¹ Facts are facts even if people do not believe them (including moral and religious facts¹²).

2 THE NEW TOLERANCE

Relativism’s top virtue is the New Tolerance (NT). Traditionally tolerance meant allowing for beliefs or behaviors you consider false or disagreeable. However, this NT (a dominant theme taught in our schools for at least a generation) has come to mean accepting all values, practices, and truth claims as equal.¹³ While well intended, this mind-set leads to religious pluralism (no religion is exclusively true), multiculturalism (no truth

transcends culture), and moral relativism (no moral values are universal). Grounded in postmodern thinking, the NT accepts any contradictory moral/religious beliefs.

Two Challenges to the New Tolerance

[a] The NT devalues the meaning of truth. If there is no truth that is “more true” than any other truth, why does truth matter? Why take seriously one of many interpretations?¹⁴ People’s increasing loss of convictions creates a complacent generation, unable and unwilling to defend truth.¹⁵ And if no truth transcends culture, then advocating human rights becomes absurd. There would be no basis for protesting violations such as widow burning and infanticide.¹⁶

[b] The NT is inconsistent and intolerant. Even though proponents of the NT accept all moral/religious views as true and equal, they reject one view. Relativists are intolerant toward those who believe in objective morality. And they use conformance tactics such as criticizing logical thinking or name-calling and labeling.¹⁷ Relativists rarely take their own view to its logical conclusion.¹⁸

A MORAL DIFFERENCE

“Are we really willing to concede that there is ultimately no significant moral difference between Hitler and Mother Teresa?”¹⁹

—Dr. Paul Copan, Philosophy Professor/Author

3 MORAL RELATIVISM

Moral Relativism (MR) claims that moral values are humanly made. There are no universally valid morals that are true for all people at all times.²⁰ The underlying motivation for MR is freedom from all behavioral standards. Individuals can base their moral choices on feelings, beliefs, or the situation at hand. Without a firm moral foundation, however, there could be no safe, orderly society. Another flaw of MR is that it cannot account for (a) moral reformers, such as Martin Luther King Jr., who fought for civil rights, or (b) for moral progress in a culture, such as abolishing atrocities like child sacrifices.²¹

Two Challenges to Moral Relativism

[a] MR cannot explain the moral compass across cultures. Some moral wrongs are cross-cultural, such as murder, rape, and torturing babies.²² These acts are not merely cultural behaviors. Rather, they point to a universal moral code. Victims of offenses such as sex slavery, torture, slave labor, or child abuse intuitively know that justice is being violated.²³

[b] MR is illogical and unlivable. If there were no distinction between virtue and vice, how could a moral relativist be trusted?²⁴ He could lie or steal and then justify it. And how could he protest if he were arrested or tortured for no reason? How could anyone condemn terrorism or gang violence? MR leads to the breakdown of relationships and society. Practically, MR is unworkable.²⁵

THREE WORLDVIEWS

Premodernism, Modernism, Postmodernism

Shifting Views of Epistemology

Epistemology is the philosophical study of the source and knowledge of truth. Each worldview had/has its own problems and extremes; each challenged the preceding era. (For more information, see Endnotes 5, 13, 20, and 42.)

4 “CHRISTIAN” POSTMODERNISM

Tying PM to Christianity leads to heresies. Proponents of Christian Postmodernism (CP) and the “emergents” are viewing the Christian faith through the lens of PM.²⁷ Emerging churches are a diverse network of “communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures.”²⁸ Yet in their attempt to reach the emerging generation,²⁹ many of them (including supposedly conservative churches) are altering both their message and their ministry style. Many accept religious pluralism, redefine core Christian doctrines, and undermine the genuine gospel.

CP denies we can know if Christianity is objectively true. Even the Jesus who actually exists becomes unknowable, for we are limited to our own “construction” of the Savior.³⁰⁻³¹ Biblical doctrines come from the