



## *The Truth Crisis*

How would you complete the following sentence?

“The idea that such a thing as absolute moral truth exists and can be learned by people is...

- a. ...an outdated belief of the past which itself is not true and only causes problems for society.
- b. ...the undeniable reality whose belief is important for the survival of Christianity and civilized society as a whole.

If you answered “a” to the statement above, congratulations! You stand with the vast majority of Americans, nearly 80% according to a survey conducted in 2001 by Barna Research Group of Ventura, CA. According to Barna, nearly 70% of those who belong to the groups most likely to believe in absolute truth, non-mainline Protestant Christians and so-called “born again” Christians, still reject the concept. Most of our fellow citizens seem to have made peace with living in unending uncertainty that anything is true.

If, on the other hand, you believe Jesus when he tells us, “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); “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6); “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 19:37); then you know that the Christian Church is facing a big problem. Undoubtedly Jesus was referring especially to the truth about grace and forgiveness through him, but all genuine standards of morality also come from him, and those who reject the moral truth Jesus taught don’t long hold onto the truth about Jesus as Savior.

This is not a new phenomenon. The first sin came as a result of questioning God’s absolute truth. “Did God really say...?” (Genesis 3:1). What concerns us are the deep inroads it has made into the Christian churches of our time. While flipping through the channels I recently caught part of an interview of Christian apologist Josh McDowell by Pat Robertson. Armed with statistics similar to those above, McDowell was painting a bleak prospect for the future of the Christian faith. The problem seems to be even greater among the youth. McDowell claimed that there was very little difference between Christian teens and their secular counterparts in rejecting the concept of absolute truth. According to Barna, among those under the age of 36, acceptance of absolute truth drops to just 13%.



It would seem that parts of otherwise conservative Christianity have added fuel to the fire by choosing to be selectively relativistic. Non-denominational and independent Bible churches may insist on some things as absolute truth, but in order to appeal to the widest audience possible they downplay the importance of historical differences of belief between Christians. In such an environment it should not surprise us that the core of non-negotiable truths grows smaller and smaller, and the value of believing absolute truth exists comes into question.

One of the most compelling arguments against believing that absolute truth exists is the history of cruelty and even bloodshed by those who thought they possessed it. Religious wars of various sorts, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and now the rise of fundamentalist Islamic terrorism are all attributed to belief in absolute truth.

The question is: does the problem of violence in the name of truth stem from the concept of truth itself, or is it rather a symptom of the corruption of mankind that always finds ways to twist and pervert good things for evil ends? Does the truth have to make men mean?

The absolute, non-negotiable truth that Jesus taught always centered in love. Keeping the commandments of Christianity has never been mere rule keeping. The commandments of the Bible teach us to behave in a way that serves and loves my neighbor. Caring about God and caring for others is at the heart of the absolute moral truth of our faith. This is not a sentimental niceness or socially acceptable politeness that rules out all rebuke and confrontation. But because it keeps the focus on helping my neighbor, it counteracts the heartless self-righteousness and sometimes violent condemnation that have marked so many moralists throughout the centuries.

The absolute, non-negotiable truth that Jesus taught also sets the standard of goodness far above what even the most selfless and devout people can attain. It is meant to be taken straight without any water added. When it is, it does a wonderful job of humbling even the proudest hearts. Those who are kept aware of their own sinful shortcomings are less likely to lash out at fellow strugglers in an unloving way.

Only those who know God's absolute moral truth in this way can appreciate the truth that sets us free: in Jesus life and death both my self-indulgent immorality and my self-righteous cruelty find full and free forgiveness. That God is love, that the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin, and that this good news is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe takes on life and meaning in my heart when that heart is overcome, not by doubt, but by certainty that all of this is true. Certainly there are things that we cannot know for certain, things God has not chosen to reveal, but where he has spoken we can be sure that there is no truth so small that it is unimportant, so insignificant that we can overlook or ignore it. Don't be ashamed to stand up for the truth Jesus has given us. The health and future of our faith depend on it.

In Christ, Pastor Vieths