

# Teaching Truth: A Biblical Paradigm

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Postmodernism has announced the demise of objective truth. While modernism was founded on the premise that truth is objective, achievable, and verifiable, postmodernism maintains that truth is either an inherently subjective social construction or that there is simply no such article as attainable truth (Erickson, 2001). Jean-François Lyotard (1984, translated) proposed, for example, that truth is but an expression of perspective of a given community. What individuals envision and accept as truth is thus dependent upon the community in which they participate. This relativity extends beyond one's perceptions of truth to its essence – a stance in which “there is no absolute truth” (Grenz, 1996, p. 8).

Michel Foucault (2001, 2002, translated), an avant-garde philosopher and sociologist whose contributions figure prominently in the postmodern shift, posits that the concept of truth itself is dangerous – that “truths” are merely the agendas of special interest groups with economic clout or political power, who use these ideas, packaged as advertising, propaganda, or mass media, to bully others into believing whatever the privileged find convenient. Finally, other postmodernists, such as Richard Rorty (1979, 1982, 1985), argue that we should give up the search for truth altogether and be content with interpretation.

Consequently, for postmodernists, truth has become elusive, a personal commodity at best. They prefer to think of “many truths,” a “diversity of truths,” or simply “truth for me.” Furthermore, postmodern principles seem to be hostile to any perspective which sustains the existence of objective truth or rests on the idea of universal truth.<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, the Christian worldview holds that God is trustworthy (1 Cor 1:9)<sup>2</sup>, and that His revelation of truth is objective and reliable (Jn 17:17; 2 Pt 1:19). God-centered truth is thus universal in scope – stable across time, place, and person (Mt 5:18; Heb 13:8; 2 Thes 2:12).

At a time when postmodernism was but beginning to evolve, Harry Blamires noted that “one of the crucial tasks in reconstituting the Christian mind will be to re-establish the status of objective truth as distinct from personal opinion” (1963, p. 40). This is especially crucial today within the academic enterprise, where, in many contemporary societies, youth and young adults have largely adopted a postmodern worldview (Paulien, 2004), and where the various academic disciplines have embraced a decentered, pluralistic perspective (Derrida, 1976). Even “uni-versities” – which once sought to establish a unified view of life and learning, have become “multi-versities” – supporting multiple agendas and interpretations, and each offering its own construction of truth. There is an urgent need to

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<sup>1</sup> While skepticism of universal Truth certainly predates postmodernism, the antagonism and “absolute” refutation of the universality of truth has reached a new level of intensity within the postmodern worldview.

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviations for the books of the Bible are in accordance with *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., 2003, sections 15.50-54.

re-establish the place of Biblical truth within the academic community, and to explore means through which this might be effectively accomplished.

In this paper, we will seek to highlight the significance of truth for the Christian worldview, analyze the inadequacy of representative secular criteria for truth, identify a Christian response to the truth search, explore various truth issues (such as the unity and universality of truth), examine the dilemma of error and the role of the Holy Spirit as guide and guardian of truth, and finally delineate a number of epistemological implications for Christian life and learning.

## The Significance of Truth

For the Christian, truth is vital. As believers, we are counseled to speak the truth (Eph 4:25), to make decisions based on truth (Zec 8:16), to live truth-focused lives (1 Pt 1:22), and to be sanctified through the truth (Jn 17:17). We are to “buy the truth and not sell it” (Prv 23:23)<sup>3</sup>, binding it about our necks and writing it upon our hearts (Prv 3:3). We are to worship “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24), “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tm 2:15). Ephesians 5:9 declares that truth is a fruit of the Spirit, while Philippians 4:8 suggests that for the Christian, truth is a leading priority – a point of departure for all other intellectual pursuits.

Truth, moreover, is a characteristic of all who enter God’s kingdom – “Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in” (Is 26:2). The apostle John identifies the returning King as “Faithful and True” (Rv 19:11), and describes the New Jerusalem as a sacred place where there is no violation of truth (Rv 22:15).

Students should understand that truth affects our lives. We act upon what we believe to be true, thus shaping the course of life. Truth also affects how we see ourselves. The belief of the divine creation of humankind, for example, joined with the doctrine of the Incarnation, provides a basis for human status and worth. At the end of the day, truth is what matters, judging what we experience and what we do (Ps 96:13; Is 42:3; Rom 2:2).

Tragically, however, humanity has lost the centrality of truth – it has “fallen in the street” (Is 59:14), trampled in the bustling thoroughfare. Particularly, we have lost the focus, universality, and unity of truth (Holmes, 1977).

As we have noted, people in the postmodern world have lost their *focus* on truth. They are not really all that concerned about truth; they live for present pleasure. The truth search is seen as tedious and frustrating, with but little possibility of a meaningful return. Truth, in essence, has become nonessential. Postmodern individuals have also lost the *universality* of truth. Relativism is in vogue – “It all depends.... Given the circumstances....” Absolute truth is viewed as non-existent. Finally, postmodern men and women have lost the *unity* of truth. Life has become fragmented; knowledge has been compartmentalized.

Scripture cries forth, “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see... if you can find a man... who seeks the truth, and I will pardon [the city]” (Jer 5:1). Sadly, though perhaps predictably, none was found (Hos 4:1).

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<sup>3</sup> All biblical passages quoted, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New King James Version, copyright 1979, 1980, 1982m Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers.

## Tell me the truth! – The Limits of Secular Criteria

The clatter of a mob shattered the morning calm. An accused man, noble and serene, stood before the Roman magistrate. It was the moment for judicial action. Pilate faltered. The verdict became a question – “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38).

Pilate’s query has echoed through the corridors of time. It has become increasingly relevant in a world of growing confusion, a world steeped in strife and stereotypes, a planet concerned with relevance and rubbish.

Students must wrestle with the question of what is truth. They must grapple with the criteria of truth – how we test the truthfulness of what we read and hear, how we determine what is true and what is not. They should perceive the limitations of the secular criteria of truth (see Figure 1).

From seamy alleys of the metropolis to cloistered towers of learning, one encounters a number of frequently offered criteria:

**1. Tradition.** *“It’s been that way for a very long time...”* We realize, of course, that a tradition must have a beginning. How did that first person know what was true? Ancient error does not become present truth through mere repetition.

**2. Popularity.** *“Well, everyone agrees...”* Is the majority always right? There was a time when “everyone” believed that the earth was the center of the universe. Another time, all but eight people believed that it could never rain (1 Pt 3:20). If we depend on opinion polls to assure us of truth, we run the risk of surrendering to the whims of the biggest crowd, or of the group making the loudest noise.

**3. Instinct.** *“Can’t you see? It’s obvious...”* Jefferson once declared that “all men are created equal” and called it self-evident. It was not all that evident, however, to King George back in England. There is an even more fundamental problem, however, with the “follow-your-heart” approach: The heart can be deceitful (Jer 17:9). If humans are inherently error-prone, can their instincts constitute an infallible guide to truth?

**4. Emotion.** *“I feel so very strongly that this is truth!”* What happens, however, when two people feel strongly about the same thing, but in opposite ways? With each side taking an assertive stance that explicitly excludes the other, it would seem that both could not be entirely correct. We should note that under this criterion, self is the ultimate judge of truth – which is the foundation of humanism and secularism (Blamires, 1963). Divine truth, however, may seem foolish to the “natural man” (1 Cor 2:13-16). It is also altogether too easy for emotion to degenerate into mere wish fulfillment: “This simply must be true because I like it.”

**5. Pragmatism.** *“But it works...”* Something may indeed work right, but is it necessarily right just because it works? Should we, for example, use deception in advertising in order to market a product? Does the fact that our marketing scheme worked make our misleading statements true? If one were to accept this criterion, truth could become merely a function of expediency.

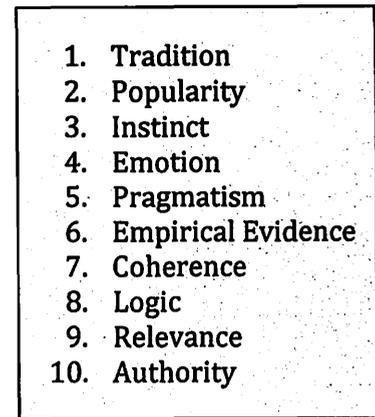
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1. Tradition
  2. Popularity
  3. Instinct
  4. Emotion
  5. Pragmatism
  6. Empirical Evidence
  7. Coherence
  8. Logic
  9. Relevance
  10. Authority

Figure 1: Secular criteria for truth

**6. Empirical Evidence.** *"It's supported by research and it's scientifically sound..."* Do we truly perceive what is out there, or could it be that we see "in a mirror, dimly" (1 Cor 13:12)? Could appearances, at times, be deceiving (1 Sm 16:7)? It is, in fact, possible for two individuals to look at the same data and to come away with different interpretations because of differences in worldview (Lk 16:31). We might also ask if all of the evidence is ever in. Might we know only "in part" (1 Cor 13:9), and this partial knowledge lead us to faulty conclusions? "Gathering all the evidence" is a frustrating quest, an endless groping in the dark.

**7. Coherence.** *"Everything is so consistent. It just comes together so beautifully..."* What if we were to start out with a false premise? Would our beautiful harmony make us dead wrong? Furthermore, is it possible to "force the evidence"? By persistent blows, could we eventually force a square peg thru a round hole? Consistency does not, in and of itself, establish the truth of a statement. It simply allows that the belief may be internally possible (Holmes, 1977).<sup>4</sup>

**8. Logic.** *"However, it sounds reasonable..."* Could logic become a systematic way of going wrong with confidence? In a syllogism, for example, the truthfulness of the conclusion depends upon the truth of its premises. The problem is that these axioms are often quite difficult to test. We assume that they are true; but we cannot use logic to demonstrate that they are so.<sup>5</sup> In essence, to logically prove that a statement is true, we must give another statement as a reason. Then to prove this second statement true, we must provide yet another reason. This process must go on indefinitely, become circular, or at some point come to a statement that we accept as one of our basic assumptions. The outcome? If our assumptions are in doubt, we cannot be certain about our conclusions. There is, of course, yet another side to the matter of logic. Just because one does not understand something, does not preclude it from being true.<sup>6</sup> For a number of reasons then, logic cannot be a "royal road" to truth.

**9. Relevance.** *"It's all so meaningful..."* If one takes this position, truth becomes quite relative. The pertinence of today may easily become the irrelevance of tomorrow. Furthermore, might error appear to be relevant? Let's suppose that a close relative suddenly became ill and passed away before you could see her once more. Someone who was present, however, has told you that in her last moments, your relative mentioned you

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<sup>4</sup> For example, while the statements "It is snowing," "Today is December 28," and "The temperature is 35 degrees Fahrenheit" do not inherently contradict each other (at least not in the northern hemisphere), this does not establish their truthfulness. It may, in fact, be raining on December 28, with the temperature considerably warmer.

<sup>5</sup> Imagine that the only black animals you have ever seen are dogs. You might assume that all black animals are dogs (major premise). One day, hiking through the woods, you spot a black animal – "Here is a black animal" (minor premise). Logical conclusion? "This is a dog." Actually, a bear! Or to change the analogy: Do you know why elephants have red eyes? So they can hide better in cherry trees. Have you ever seen an elephant in a cherry tree? No? See how well they hide?

<sup>6</sup> A corollary to this principle recognizes that there are statements that seem to inherently defy human logic. Some examples: (a) "Can God do anything? Could He make a rock that He couldn't pick up?" (b) "All generalizations are false." If it is true, then it is false; and how can something be true and false at the same time? (c) "When I am weak, then I am strong." [2 Cor 12:10] (d) "Having nothing, and yet possessing all things." [2 Cor 6:10] (e) "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." [Mk 8:35]

by name. Would that be meaningful? But, in reality, it is a complete fabrication, with the misguided intent to console you. Clark and Gaede (1987) point out that we must not accept or reject “truth” simply because we find it comforting or, alternatively, painful. Myth may also be reassuring or excruciating, but that does not establish its veracity.

**10. Authority.** *“He surely ought to know!”* Who is going to be the authority? How does that individual know, after all? Obviously, not from authority, because he or she *is* the authority! As we have seen, however, each of the other criteria has a fatal flaw. Can any person then be considered infallible?

At this point, we may feel like Thomas, “We don’t know anything for certain!” (ref. Jn 14:5-6). It is important, however, to keep things in perspective. Before anyone abruptly discards these ten measures, we should note that each is of value and can contribute towards a better understanding of truth. (How many of us, for example, have actually checked to see if the earth is a sphere?) The point is, however, that not one of these criteria can guarantee truth – and this is a key concept that students should understand.<sup>7</sup> The problem is that except for the narrow field of personal conduct, Christians have accepted, “for the purpose of mental activity, a frame of reference constructed by the secular mind and a set of criteria reflecting secular evaluations” (Blamires, 1963, p. 4). An authentic Christian response is needed.

### **The Truth Search – A Christian Response**

As is often the case with God, Christ had answered the truth question before it was asked. He had declared, “I am the ... truth” (Jn 14:6). On another occasion, Christ prayed to His father, “Thy word is truth” (Jn 17:17).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Scripture affirms that “the heavens declare the glory of God” and that there is “no speech nor language where their voice is not heard” (Ps 19:1, 3; see also Ps 85:11; Rom 1:20).

Here then is found the Christian response to Pilate’s question. The Word – whether written, illustrated, or incarnate – is Truth.

Consequently, for the Christian, truth exists as a divine revelation. It is authoritative, provided by One who has not only examined all the evidence, but formed the evidence (Jn 1:3; Col 1:15-16). Thus, the multitude who had gathered to listen observed that Jesus taught “as one having authority” (Mt 7:29) – the inherent authority of the Word, as contrasted with the limited truth criteria of the world.

In Christian education, students need to interact directly with the repositories of truth, revealed through Scripture, through the creation in all of its dimensions, and in the person of Jesus Christ. Christian educators, in turn, should communicate confidence in the trustworthiness of the divine revelation of truth – a “more sure word... which [we] do well to heed” (2 Pt 1:19).

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<sup>7</sup> Students should also be aware that at various junctures in history, differing truth criteria have been emphasized. In the pre-modern period, for example, truth was seen to reside in authorities, notably in the clergy and in Church councils. In early modernism, beginning with the Protestant reformation, truth was held inherent in Scripture, but was determined through reason and logic. In secular modernism, commencing with the Enlightenment, the key to truth was the scientific method, with its tenets of observation and experimentation. In postmodernism, truth is no longer found in authorities, Scripture, logic, or science, but in community, connections, emotion, and intuition.

<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Ps 119:142, 151 declare “Thy law is the truth” and “All thy commandments are truth.”

## Truth Issues

What does the Christian response to the truth search mean to the believer? What are the ramifications of this paradigm? In this section, we will explore a number of these issues – matters that should be candidly discussed with students (see Figure 2).

1. *For the Christian, truth is anchored in the supernatural.* Truth begins with God (Jas 1:17), not with man. The Creator is ultimately the Source of all truth (Jn 1:3, 17). Consequently, truth does not originate within nature, nor is it initiated by mankind. Human beings only discover<sup>9</sup> truth; they do not create it.

2. *Truth is eternal because it resides in God.* Psalm 117:2 state that God’s truth “endures forever” (see also Ps 100:5). What does this mean? Because truth is eternal, it existed before the mind of man,<sup>10</sup> and hence the mind can neither create nor destroy truth. We can only choose to accept it or to reject it (Rom 2:8), to abide in the truth<sup>11</sup> or to abandon truth to reside in error. As Christians, we must remember that nothing can be done “against the truth, but for the truth” (2 Cor 13:8). Human beings simply cannot obliterate truth. The world had its best chance at Calvary, and failed notably. Our role, then, as Christian educators is invitational, rather than confrontational. We do not have to “defend truth” from annihilation, but to extend the invitation to accept God’s eternal truth.

3. *Because God is the ultimate origin of truth and God does not change (Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17), truth is unchanging.* God’s truth then is absolute and universal in scope – it is true for all time, place, and person (Ps 100:5; Is 43:9). With the pervasiveness of relativism<sup>12</sup> in contemporary culture, teachers can be quite certain that nearly every student entering the classroom believes that truth is relative, in a state of perpetual flux – a matter of mere opinion, of social convention. While circumstances do

1. For the Christian, truth is anchored in the supernatural.
2. Truth is eternal because it resides in God.
3. Because God is the ultimate origin of truth and God does not change, truth is unchanging.
4. All truth possesses unity because it comes from the same Source.
5. Truth is infinite because God is infinite.
6. The Christian understanding of truth must be progressive.
7. Because God is the Source of all truth, all truth is ultimately God’s truth.

Figure 2: Truth issues in Christian perspective

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<sup>9</sup> Edwards (2007) notes that truth is not something we invent, but rather discover. “If we invent it, then it’s a lie.”

<sup>10</sup> As opposed to an *a posteriori* humanist view of truth, an *a priori* Christian position affirms that truth exists and that God is its author. It comes to us from outside of our human system, revealed through God’s acts and the concepts He shares. One might indeed argue that it is the acts of God (e.g., the creation, the Incarnation) which establish the facts of truth.

<sup>11</sup> This distinction is vital, for Jn 8:44 indicates that Lucifer did not abide in the truth, and therefore there is now “no truth in him.”

<sup>12</sup> Burwell (1987) and Clark & Gaede (1987) point out that relativism is based on a logical error: While cultural diversity is indeed evident, one cannot legitimately infer from the fact of diversity that there are or can be no universal values or beliefs – no more than a difference of opinion among different people as to what happened would mean that nothing happened. Diversity simply represents different judgments about truth and may tell us little about the existence and form of absolute truth.

change<sup>13</sup> and there is brokenness and fragmentation evident in many aspects of life, the Christian-Biblical worldview is able to provide a framework that offers stability and security. As educators, we must help students find foundations for their lives, enduring ideals which can provide a basis for living. We must help students understand that the solidity of truth contributes to a personal sense of identity, direction, and belonging.

4. *All truth possesses unity because it comes from the same Source.* Since God is one (Dt 6:4), truth is one, for God is truth (Dt 32:4; Ps 31:5). Truth therefore will always be in harmony with itself wherever and whenever it is found. It is consistent with itself in all of its manifestations.<sup>14</sup> Anything that contradicts truth is error or reveals a problem with finite human understanding. There are several implications within Christian education: (a) To know God is the key to seeing things as a meaningful whole (Holmes, 1977). (b) While there is always the danger of starting with a false premise or of forcing the evidence, the greater the scope of evidence and the better its fit, the more adequate its justification as truth. (c) As Christians, we must avoid creating false dichotomies within God's truth. These could include the severance of mercy and justice, the separation of student and subject, the disconnect of theory and practice, or the partition of faith and learning.

5. *Truth is infinite because God is infinite.* Our circle of knowledge is surrounded by the vast universe of our ignorance. The endless extent of God's truth lies as yet virtually undiscovered. Just as the perimeter of a circle (i.e., our contact with the unknown) increases as the area of that circle enlarges, so the more the Christian learns of God's truth, the more she realizes how much there is yet to know<sup>15</sup> – and the more humble she will be (see Figure 3). It's when the circle is small, and our contact with the unknown is reduced, that we are tempted to think that we "know everything." How presumptuous then it would be for us to declare, at any time, that we have now arrived, that we now possess all the truth. Christians, then, do not have "all the truth," but ultimately all they have will be truth (1 Cor 13:12).

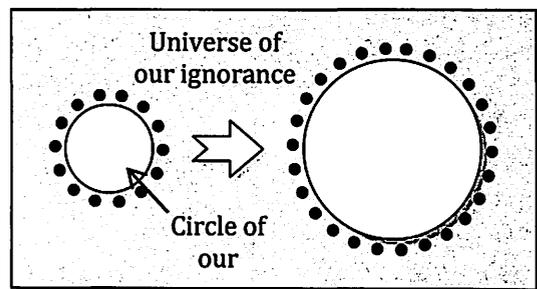


Figure 3: The case for humility

6. *The Christian understanding of truth must be progressive.* It is not enough to stand in the truth – we must *walk* in the path of truth (Ps 25:5; 26:3; 43:3; 86:11; 3 Jn 4). This concept of "walking" implies new horizons. It is a call to learning and to growth. To change

<sup>13</sup> Holmes (1977) notes that while some truths are, in fact, localized and dated in that they are about a particular place or time, they nevertheless remain unchangeable and universal in reference to that place and time.

<sup>14</sup> "All truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations" (White, 1958, p. 114). "In true science there can be nothing contrary to the teaching of the word of God, for both have the same Author. A correct understanding of both will always prove them to be in harmony. Truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is harmonious with itself in all its manifestations. But the mind not enlightened by God's Spirit will ever be in darkness in regard to His power. This is why human ideas in regard to science so often contradict the teaching of God's word" (White, 1948c, p. 258).

<sup>15</sup> Edwards (2007) suggests that there are only two kinds of minds that discover truth: those that know they know nothing and those that know they do not know everything. Similarly, Clark & Gaede (1987) propose that only by recognizing the limitations of our thought can we transcend them.

the metaphor, the term “rooted and grounded” (Eph 3:17) denotes that a plant is vibrant, receiving continual nourishment, growing in the truth (Eph 4:15; 2 Pt 3:18). While truth does not change, our relationship to truth must develop. We must recognize that our understandings of truth are but “works in progress” – that new dimensions of truth should progressively<sup>16</sup> open before us. As Christians, we must continually grow in our knowledge and understanding of the truth.

7. *Because God is the Source of all truth, all truth is ultimately God’s truth.* “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (Jas 1:17; see also Jn 1:17). This implies that Christian educators must see every discipline, every subject area, and every topic as an extension of God’s truth.<sup>17</sup> It also suggests that we must beware of exclusivity in the claim of truth. While Christians have truth, they do not, in the biblical worldview, have a monopoly on truth. Rather, because God makes His sun shine on the evil and on the good (Mt 5:45) and would have all come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2:4), non-believers also discover truth. What then is the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian? The non-Christian stumbles across tenets of truth in his journey through life, while the Christian recognizes the Source of that truth. In Christian education, we recognize that truth can be discovered and expounded by secular minds, and that these explanations can form viable components in the curriculum. At the same time, students must be brought into direct contact with the Source of truth, there discovering personal insights into God’s character and His plan.

In essence, truth begins with God, and not with man. It is revealed, and not constructed.<sup>18</sup> It is discovered, and not determined by a majority vote. It is authoritative, and not merely a matter of personal preference. It is feeling that must conform to truth, rather than truth to feelings. Ideas are not true solely because they are practical; rather, they will ultimately be of value because they are true. In the final analysis, the arbiter of truth is the steadfast Word of the infinite/personal God.

### Receiving the Truth

How do we obtain God’s truth? Through reason? Through revelation? Through a combination of both? What is the role of faith, of inquiry, and of reflection? What is the place of experience? These matters are relevant in Christian

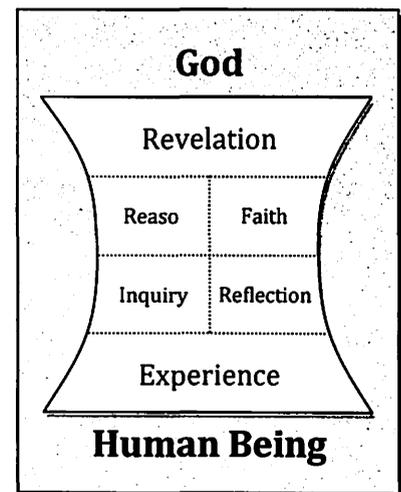


Figure 4: Receiving the truth

<sup>16</sup> Hodges (1987) discusses at some length the progressive nature of perception and revelation. He notes, for example, that we perceive God’s redemptive purposes more fully as the history of the world unfolds before us.

<sup>17</sup> This premise is more fully developed in Holmes’ work, *All truth is God’s truth* (1977). In a later work, Holmes (1985) proposes that all truth is either about God, about God’s creation, or about things that God knows but never Himself created – like the technological and artistic possibilities He left for us to bring to actuality.

<sup>18</sup> “Truth is regarded [by many] as a kind of pudding, or brew, which you concoct from human opinions.... But truth is more like a rock than a pudding – a rock which you lay bare by scraping away the soil. And the soil is largely compounded of human prejudice and passion” (Blamires, 1963, p. 113).

education, particularly given the position of God as the origin of all truth (see Figure 4).<sup>19</sup>

*Divine revelation.* God desires to continually reveal truth to man. Knowing would be unattainable, were it not for the self-initiated, self-revealing nature of God (1 Cor 2:12). Divine revelation is then the channel through which God communicates true facts and principles to human beings. This revelation of truth is foundational, and includes (a) God's creation<sup>20</sup> in each of its dimensions (Ps 33:4; Jas 1:18), (b) the Holy Scriptures (Ps 119:160; Jn 17:17), and (c) Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17; 14:6), "God with us" (Mt 1:23).<sup>21</sup>

These "words" of God (Ps 19:1; 119:105; Jn 1:14) provide an ascending order<sup>22</sup> of revelation (2 Pt 1:19), in which later revelations do not displace the earlier avenues, but rather complement each form with richer meaning. In the biblical worldview, for example, we recognize that the intrusion of sin has distorted our understanding of God's truth, both in nature and in human society – God's creation. Consequently, the Scriptures portray in detail the truth about the untruth, and are thus essential and fundamental to a correct understanding of truth as revealed in creation.<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately, truth is a Person. Christ is the fullest revelation of truth – "the express image" of the divine (Heb 1:3). "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). This revelation through Christ, anchored in Scripture (Lk 24:27; Jn 5:39) and expanded through a personal relationship with God (Jn 17:3), responds to the human condition in a way that surpasses any other presentation of truth.

Students must be brought into direct contact with divine revelation, exploring and examining God's truth revealed in nature and in human society. They must see the Holy

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<sup>19</sup> John Wesley's quadrilateral for truth included revelation, tradition, reason, and experience. This relationship should not be construed as equilateral, however. Wesley maintained that divine revelation was foundational and superseded all other elements (Outler, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Although sometimes denominated *natural truth*, as opposed to *revealed truth*, God's creation is also a purposeful revelation of His character and of His plan for the universe and for humanity.

<sup>21</sup> "Are we worshipping the true God as He is revealed in His Word, in Christ, in nature, or are we adoring some philosophical idol enshrined in His place? God is a God of truth" (White, 1948b, p. 173).

<sup>22</sup> "God has given man intellect in order that he may comprehend greater things than these beautiful objects in nature. He carries the human agent into a higher department of truth, leading the mind higher and still higher, and opening to him the divine mind" (White, 1982b, p. 201). "The Bible is not to be tested by men's ideas of science, but science is to be brought to the test of this unerring standard. When the Bible makes statements of facts in nature, science may be compared with the written Word, and a correct understanding of both will always prove them to be in harmony. One does not contradict the other. All truth, whether in nature or revelation, agrees" (White, 1988, p. 60).

<sup>23</sup> We must be careful not to create a Thomist synthesis of nature and special revelation. Even in Eden, special revelation was required in order to know who is God and how human beings are to relate to the world. Similarly, natural revelation was insufficient to understand the nature of man, of the Sabbath, or of the tree in the midst of the garden (Gn 1:26; 2:2-3, 16-17). How much more is special revelation needed now given the distortions brought about by sin. In essence, Scripture is *the* foundation for understanding the world around us. Without the guiding role of the spoken and written Word of God, nature leads to idolatry (Rom 1:22-23). E. G. White notes, "There are wonderful truths in nature. The earth, the sea, and the sky are full of truth.... But fallen man will not understand. Sin has obscured his vision, and he cannot of himself interpret nature without placing it above God. Correct lessons cannot impress the minds of those who reject the word of God" (1941, p. 107).

Scriptures as foundational in clarifying the contours of God's truth, and discern its relevance for their lives. Above all, they must be provided with opportunities to personally encounter Jesus Christ, and to experience with Him a vibrant, truth-affirming relationship.

*Reason.* While revelation, in each of its forms, is God's channel for truth, it does not replace human thought nor does it bypass reason. Divine revelation must be studied, accepted, and applied. Reasoning power is, therefore, a gift from God to understand truth.<sup>24</sup>

As Christians, we must be prepared to give a reasoned explanation of the beliefs that we hold (1 Pt 3:15). In the early church, the Christians in Berea were commended for not blindly accepting Paul's teaching, but rather they "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Throughout His ministry, Christ encouraged his listeners to engage in analytical thinking (Mt 16:13-15; 18:12; 21:28-32; 22:42-45; Lk 7:24-26; 13:2-4). Even the prophet Jeremiah was not always certain when he had received a revelation until he had checked it against the evidence (Jer 32:6-8). Divine revelation thus informs our reasoning, which must in turn understand the meaning of that message.

As Christian educators, we must communicate to students that reason is a God-given tool to interpret the significance of the messages we receive. Furthermore, we must clarify that the goal of reason is understanding, rather than proof. Reason is not omnipotent.<sup>25</sup> Rather, human reason can be trustworthy, but only within limits (Jb 11:7; Prv 30:18; Rom 11:33). This recognition keeps us from enthroning intellectual pride, and safeguards us from deifying reason (Ez 28:17; Rom 12:3).

*Faith.* Faith is also a gift from God (Eph 2:8). While neither a source nor channel of truth, faith is an openness to God's revelation of truth. In so doing, faith performs a key role in the acquisition of truth (Jas 1:5-6). Faith, however, goes beyond the mere discovery of truth. It is a sincere and whole-hearted commitment to live the truth (Jas 2:17).

Contrary to popular perception, faith and reason are not antagonists. Faith is not merely an emotion; rather, it incorporates both cognitive and volitional elements. Faith, for example, is linked to trust, and trust rests on evidence of trustworthiness (Ps 40:3; Heb 10:23). Such evidence is found in Scripture – "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Further confirmation of God's faithfulness is provided in the natural world (Mt 6:25-30) and through His involvement in our lives (Mt 16:8-10). Regardless of the source, this determination of credibility and dependability involves analysis and assessment, a careful examination of the evidence.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The fact that such a revelation is entrusted to fallible but rational human beings, is eloquent testimony to God's confidence in the rational powers He gave us and in our ability to make reasoned judgments (Holmes, 1977; Clark & Gaede, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> This was the beguiling allure of rationalism and the Enlightenment project.

<sup>26</sup> "There are many who believe, without a reason on which to base their faith, without sufficient evidence as to the truth of the matter.... They do not reason from cause to effect. Their faith has no genuine foundation" (White, 1977, pp. 535-536). "There is no excuse for doubt or skepticism. God has made ample provision to establish the faith of all men if they will decide from the weight of evidence" (White, 1948a, p. 583). "God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration" (White, 1974, p. 105). "God would have men believe, not because there is no possibility of doubt, but because there is abundant evidence upon which to base an intelligent faith" (White, 1886, p. 10).

Faith then takes the known, and responsibly extends belief toward the unknown. It thinks, not merely in terms of probabilities, but of possibilities. In that sense, faith bridges the gap between evidence and certainty – “For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him” (2 Tm 1:12).<sup>27</sup> Faith itself is the evidence (Heb 11:1).

Note that faith must have an object – it is confidence in something, trust in someone. You cannot, however, trust someone that you do not know (Ps 9:10). In order to trust an individual, you must get to know him or her personally; and in order to get to know someone, you must spend time together – talking together, doing things together. The basis then for understanding and accepting God’s truth is to spend time with God (Rom 10:17).

In essence, all must live by faith. The atheist, for example, cannot prove that God does not exist. His very laws of science do not allow him to prove the non-existence of anything. He chooses to believe that there is no God. The question is simply, “Where will you place your faith?” (see 1 Cor 2:5).

*Inquiry.* Faith cannot bypass difficult questions. Rather, faith is exploratory. It both informs and motivates inquiry. It is true that we see but dimly (1 Cor 13:12), but just because the glass may be imperfect doesn’t mean that we should not strive to discover all the truth that it is possible for us to learn.

Inquiry is a divine directive (Eccl 1:13; 2 Tm 2:15). “If you seek wisdom as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God” (Prv 2:4-5). Scripture, in fact, abounds with individuals of faith who exercised the spirit of inquiry (e.g., Jb 29:16; Ps 77:6; Acts 17:11; 1 Pt 1:10). The intent is to identify truth – to “hold fast what is good” (1 Thes 5:21).

In Christian education, students should be encouraged to question, to probe beneath the surface. They should understand that truth loses nothing by investigation. Rather, provided with a biblical frame of reference, both reason and faith are strengthened by the scrutiny of research and refined in the crucible of analysis.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, however, we must recognize that inquiry has its limitations (Jb 11:7), and that even a careful application of the scientific method is not a guarantee of truthful conclusions (Ps 64:6).

*Reflection.* Students should also be provided with opportunities for reflection. Although truth, in the Christian perspective, is not an internal construction nor is it relative, it is nonetheless personal. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps 34:8). God’s truth must be individually recognized, understood, and applied. “You desire truth in the inward

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<sup>27</sup> Through faith, founded on Scripture, the Christian can be confident that God was the creator of life on this earth, that we are in the midst of a great controversy between good and evil, that Jesus Christ was God incarnate – dying in our place, resurrected, and soon to return to grant us eternal life in His presence. The Christian can also experience the certainty of God’s love, the forgiveness of sin, and the assurance of salvation. See Ps 66:19; Prv 22:17-21; Jer 32:41; Dn 2:45; Mt 5:18; 18:3; 25:40; Mk 9:41; 10:15; 10:29-30; 11:23; Lk 1:1-4; Jn 3:3-5; 5:24-25; 6:7; 14:12; 16:23; Acts 2:36; 17:31; Rom 6:5; 1 Thes 1:5; 1 Ti 6:7; 2 Ti 3:14; Heb 10:22; 11:13.

<sup>28</sup> Clark and Gaede (1987) identify two extremes: “Comfortable Saints” and “Doubting Thomases.” Comfortable Saints focus on the premise “now we see” (1 Cor 13:12), conveniently neglecting the qualifier “in a mirror dimly.” These are advised to evaluate their beliefs more critically and to be open to the possibility that they may have embraced error. On the other hand, Thomases, immobilized by doubt, focus on the phrase “in a mirror dimly” to the exclusion of “now we see.” These must exercise faith, recognizing that there is reason enough to warrant belief in God, and that they are more justified in trusting the Christian worldview than any other.

parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom” (Ps 51:6). This internalization of truth requires time, however, for thought and for meditation.

Scripture encourages us to set aside space in our hectic lives for reflection (e.g., Jo 1:8; Ps 63:6; 77:6; 119:15, 27, 148; 145:5). “Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things” (Phil 4:8). In His own ministry, Christ valued quiet time for reflection (Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35), and urged His disciples to do likewise (Mk 6:31). Reflection, moreover, yields enduring effect. “So a book of remembrance was written before Him, for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name” (Mal 3:16).

*Experience.* Truth is not merely an abstract entity, a theoretical construct. Rather, truth must be personally experienced. It must be lived. The concept of “present truth” (2 Pt 1:12) suggests that truth must be made relevant to our circumstances.<sup>29</sup> It must influence our attitudes, our priorities, and our actions.

Truth then is not only descriptive, but prescriptive – providing both meaning and direction. There is a distinct difference, however, in knowing or believing the truth, and in desiring and doing the truth. The devils, for example, know and believe (Jas 2:19), but they do not love nor live the truth.

Christ’s followers, however, must have a love for the truth (2 Thes 2:10). We must be passionately concerned about truth. We must yearn for fuller understandings of truth. We must be convinced that God’s revelation of truth is but the portal to a more abundant life (Jn 10:10).<sup>30</sup> Then we can declare, “I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart” (Ps 40:8).

We must also apply God’s truth to our lives (Jn 17:19; 1 Jn 1:6; 2:4). Truth is more than words; it is action (Mt 25:34-36). Indeed, it is the personal acceptance and application of truth that makes the Christian different from the unbeliever. Living God’s truth serves to open new understandings of truth. “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God” (Jn 7:17). We know the truth as we live the truth. Perhaps the question is not so much, “How long have you been in the truth?” but rather, “Is the truth in you?” (ref. 1 Jn 1:8). Are you living the truth?<sup>31</sup>

Thus, while we recognize that God’s truth is not individually relative, it must become individually relevant. As Christian educators, we must help students discover that truth is deeply meaningful on a personal level. They must also come to see truth as relational, forming a living link with Christ and with the community of believers. In essence,

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<sup>29</sup> The concept of “present truth” may correlate with episodic truth – truth which is particularly applicable at this moment, given this particular set of circumstances (Mt 12:3-4 provides an example of episodic truth).

<sup>30</sup> To adopt this perspective, I must be convinced of two fundamental truths: (a) God knows everything [Ps 139:2-4]. (b) God cares about me [Jn 3:16]. If (a) is true but (b) is not, God might be an omniscient tyrant who delights in torturing me. If (b) is true but (a) is not, God could be benevolent, but bumbling – one who wishes me well, but is simply misinformed. If both are true, however, whatever God tells me to do or not to do is what I would choose if I could see everything as He does.

<sup>31</sup> Nearly half of the references to “truth” in Scripture place it in parallel with love, obedience, mercy, or righteousness. Truth, therefore, incorporates a moral, life-transforming dimension.

to “know the truth” is not merely a detached, cognitive process, but a personal experience with God, an encounter that radically transforms our life (Jn 8:32).

### The Problem of Error

God, the Source of truth, communicates truth of His own initiative to human beings (Dn 2:47; Rv 1:1). While God desires all “to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4), He does not lock in human thought or free will (Jo 24:15). Men and women must still interpret and apply truth to the contexts of their lives.<sup>32</sup> In this process, it is indeed possible to arrive at false conclusions, to exchange God’s truth for a lie (Rom 1:25).

This problem of error raises important issues in Christian education. How is it that men and women can receive true facts and principles from God, and then come to false conclusions? Why does error haunt our quest for truth? What is the remedy for this distressing state of affairs? First, we must recognize that the problem seems to lie in our finitude, our fallenness, and in Satan’s intentional distortion of God’s truth (see Figure 5).

*Cause: Our finitude.* “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33). “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Is 55:9). While God and His truth are infinite, we, as created beings are finite (Ps 8:5), with inherent limitations in our perceptions and understanding.<sup>33</sup>

The reality of human finiteness leads to certain implications, particularly in terms of teaching and learning. (a) A fixation on empirical certainty is not suitable for human beings, due to our sensory limitations, the inherent complexity of the world around us, and the impracticality of always suspending judgment until all the facts are in. Depending entirely on our own resources, we find ourselves forever searching, and yet “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tm 3:7). Perhaps hence, the ubiquity of the statement, “You never know...” (b) While God’s truth is absolute and objective, our perspective on truth is constrained, our knowing is context bound. Our perceptions and understanding depend on our point of view and our focus, as well as on our prior knowledge, experience<sup>34</sup>, and expectations. When Peter received the vision of the unclean animals, for example, he did not at first understand its meaning (Acts 10:9-17). Only upon arrival at Cornelius’ house,

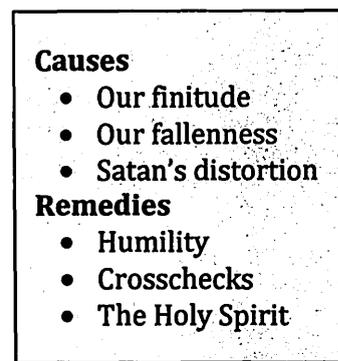


Figure 5: Dealing with error

<sup>32</sup> Note that the difficulty resides with humanity, rather than with God. “As God allows man to sin without causing his sin and being to blame, so God allows man to err without causing his error and being to blame for that” (Holmes, 1977, p. 54). Holmes further suggests that God permits us to err in order that we might understand both our finiteness and our need for growth.

<sup>33</sup> Scripture does not offset all our finiteness, nor was it intended to do so, for it is not an exhaustive revelation on all things, but rather a sufficient revelation of what is essential for faith and practice.

<sup>34</sup> Hodges (1987) notes that our perceptions are constrained by prior experience. On one hand, lack of prior experience may make the pickup of available information difficult or impossible. On the other, prior experience may set up expectations that cause us to “see” what is not there.

did Peter discern God’s truth (Acts 10:34-35). Context is consequently a key factor in receiving and sharing truth.<sup>35</sup>

*Cause: Our fallenness.* While some error is the result of human finiteness, sin and unbelief are also implicated.<sup>36</sup> In the beginning of our world’s history, Eve was not satisfied with her finiteness – she wanted to know like God (Gn 3:5). This rejection of her status as a created being lead to moral rebellion, and ultimately to believing a lie (verses 4, 6). In a similar manner, our acceptance of a secular, humanist worldview warps

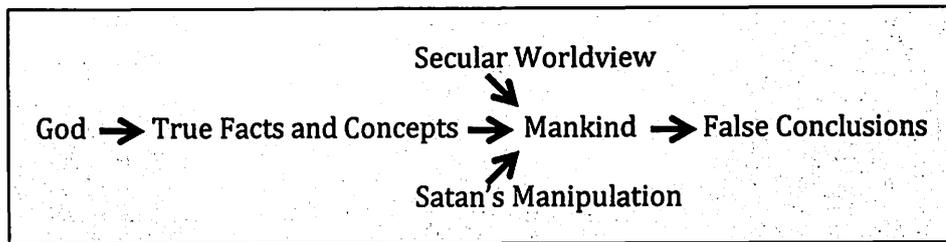


Figure 6: Falling into error

our perception of God’s truth and results in false conclusions about God and about our role as His creation. In essence, our fallenness leads us to distort and misuse truth in self-serving ways (2 Pt 2:2; 3:16). Our minds are blinded by “the god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4). We see only the here and now, and leave God and eternity out of our reckoning.

*Cause: Satan’s distortion.* There is, however, a more subtle scheme. When Paul was evangelizing in Philippi, a certain slave girl, “who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling,” followed after Paul and his companions, calling out, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:16-17). After she continued doing this for many days, Paul rebuked the evil spirit in the name of Jesus Christ, and commanded it to come out of her (verse 18). Why would Paul do that? After all, what the girl was proclaiming was true! Simply, the people of Philippi knew the girl and her trade of divination and sorcery. As the girl seemed to know Paul and was providing free publicity, the onlookers would conclude that both were from the same league. In essence, Satan had mutated God’s immortal truth into an immoral lie.

Depicting the cosmic conflict between good and evil, John describes a great red dragon, who is “the Devil and Satan” (Rv 12:9), that employed its tail to ensnare “a third part of the stars of heaven” (verse 4). Isaiah 9:15 suggests that this tool was Satan’s tale of lies – his misrepresentation of God’s character and His plan for the universe, which he has adeptly marketed to the human race (Gn 3:1-5; Rv 12:9; 18:23; 19:20; 20:8).

As Christian educators, we must work concertedly to unmask the diabolic deception of God’s truth – to help students see God as He truly is and to understand the contours of God’s plan for their lives. We must help students grasp the importance of biblical truth – that it is relevant to our lives, influencing our beliefs, values, decisions, and actions.

<sup>35</sup> Paulien (2004), in fact, proposes that the gospel is not understood unless it comes to people in context.

<sup>36</sup> “Just as in the problem of evil we identify both moral causes and natural causes, and thereby distinguish moral evils like crime and war from natural evils like earthquakes and cancers, so in the problem of error we must distinguish the moral causes of error from its natural causes” (Holmes, 1977, pp. 52-53).

Thus while God imparts truth to men and women, our finiteness, fallenness, and Satan’s manipulation of God’s truth can lead us to false understandings (see Figure 6).<sup>37</sup>

Faith, reason, inquiry, reflection, and experience are all necessary, but insufficient. The problem, of course, is that we then tend to impute the truth of the data to the

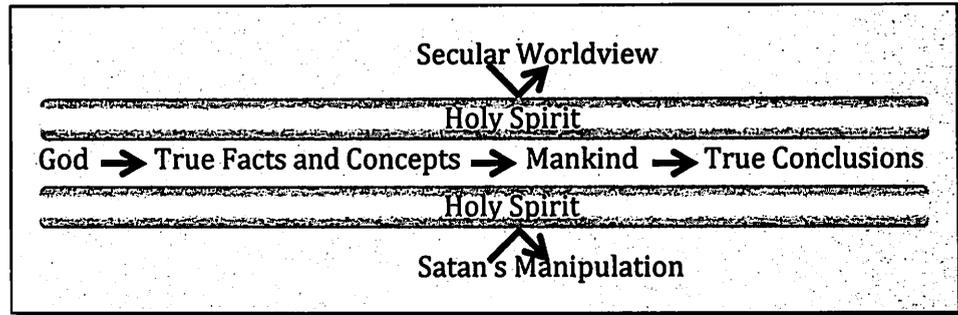


Figure 7: The Holy Spirit as guide and guardian of truth

truthfulness of our conclusions, and frequently we are not even aware of our error. Is the situation hopeless? The answer to the problem of error appears to reside in humility, in crosschecks, and in the role of the Holy Spirit.

*Remedy: Humility.* Given our finite and fallen condition, we are admonished “not to think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think” (Rom 12:3). We are also reminded that “the humble [God] guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way” (Ps 25:9; additionally, Prv 11:2; Is 57:15; Jas 4:10). Consequently, we must express our understandings of God’s truth without dogmatism and with care. Scripture seems to resonate with this tentative nature of knowledge – “we see through a glass darkly” and “we know only in part” (1 Cor 13:12). Not even the greatest scientist or the most erudite theologian can thus claim to have arrived at a full understanding of truth or to have a definitive grasp on knowledge. Humility is warranted. Each of us has but a subset of the larger picture, with ample room for learning and growth.

*Remedy: Crosschecks.* “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prv 11:14). Linked to humility and to the contextual nature of understanding is the recognition that we each have much to discover and to understand, and that crosschecks with fellow searchers serve to broaden our limited perspectives. This shared nature of truth implies that we can all learn from each other, regardless of belief or background, provided that we, as Christians, can connect that knowledge back to its Source, and apply it to our lives through the “truth-filter” of His Word.

These concepts of crosspollination and inter-member checking, however, have special application within the community of believers (1 Tm 3:15). In apostolic times, significant differences of opinion arose as to which requirements should devolve upon Gentile Christians. In response to this crisis, the apostles convened a Council in Jerusalem, discussed the various points of view, and then issued a statement of doctrine, which was communicated to the believers (Acts 15). This episode illustrates the value of multiple perspectives in detecting truth, and of the community of faith in determining truth. It also

<sup>37</sup> “God has illuminated human intellects, and poured a flood of light on the world through discoveries in art and science. But those who view these from a merely human standpoint will most assuredly come to wrong conclusions” (White, 1982b, p. 156).

reminds us that even leaders and scholars – like the apostles Peter and Paul – need to submit their (tentative) conclusions to careful evaluation and critique.

At the same time, while recognizing the positive role of crosschecks, we must be aware of the risk of “group think” and of a “herd mentality,” and recognize that even consensus is not a guarantee of true interpretations.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, something more is required.

*Remedy: The Holy Spirit.* According to Christ’s words, the Holy Spirit performs a crucial role in a correct understanding of truth: “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (Jn 16:13; see also Jn 15:26; Acts 15:28; 1 Cor 2:10; 1 Jn 5:6). It seems that God has given His Spirit as a shield to insulate us from the warped interpretations of a secular worldview, to deflect Satan’s manipulative attacks on truth, and to enable us to surmount the inherent limitations of our finitude and fallenness. This function of the Holy Spirit as guide and guardian of truth is vital in helping us to arrive at correct understandings of truth – true conclusions about God, His character, and His plan for our lives (see Figure 7).

There are also implications for the educational process: (a) The Holy Spirit enables teachers and students to receive the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:14-16; Phil 2:5) – seeing life and learning as God sees it. (b) We should not engage in intellectual activities independently of God. Regardless of the subject or topic studied, we rely on God’s Spirit to help us perceive truth and interpret information correctly. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor 2:12). (c) Teachers and administrators should formulate means through which the presence and influence of the Spirit may be enhanced in a Christian school, identifying learning attitudes and activities that help students to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### **Some Academic Ramifications**

The infinite, eternal pattern of God’s truth lies at the heart of Christian education. Consequently, students must be confronted with truth in the teaching/learning process. Christian educators must affirm that God is trustworthy, and that His revelation of biblical truth is reliable. Through the rubric of our lives, we are to model that God’s Word is relevant and far-reaching in its application. Given the limitations of our finite and fallen condition, we must also be open and frank with students as to the fallibility of human interpretations of truth, emphasizing the triangulating role of Scripture, the community of believers, and the Holy Spirit. We must also recognize that there is always a point which precedes reason, where one makes an assumption, a declaration of faith.

Within the educational process, a number of factors can help students to effectively detect, value, and assimilate truth:

- a) Teachers should evidence a thirst for knowledge, a zest for learning. They should exemplify in their own lives a spirit of inquiry – exploring and growing in the truth.

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<sup>38</sup> As Blamires notes, “If schoolboy X has got the right answer to a sum, and his eleven companions have got various wrong answers, then X would be a fool to compromise by accepting a figure averaged out from the twelve exercise books” (1963, p. 113).

- b) Teachers should prompt students to be hesitant of pre-packaged solutions, blanket judgments, and reductionist generalizations. They should warn students not to blindly believe authorities – whether textbooks, websites, experts, or even religious leaders – but to question, to probe deeply, and to seek the broader perspective.<sup>39</sup> Together they should dig beneath platitudes and pat answers, carefully examining underlying premises and logical consequences.
- c) Educators should provide students with opportunity to learn from others. Especially, they should help students respect those who have different perspectives from their own, listening without prejudice to alternate points of view and assessing ideas through the filter of the Word.
- d) While teachers must address error and discuss the “truth about the untruth,” this should be a minor theme. Just as detectors of counterfeit money spend most of their time studying genuine bills, so educators must focus primarily on truth, rather than merely exposing error.
- e) Because truth must influence life, education should prepare students for responsible action.<sup>40</sup> Teachers and students together should bring their understanding of God’s truth to bear on controversial social issues. Truth should make a difference in the world.
- f) Educators should prepare students to effectively share the truth (Jn 5:33; 18:37). It is clear that before they can speak the truth (Eph 4:15), they must know the truth for themselves. It is also evident that if students are to be witnesses for God, the educational process must help them develop abilities to communicate truth in clear and convincing ways.

Throughout the educational enterprise, there are a number of key areas which the Christian view of truth will distinctively shape. These include integrating faith and learning, evidencing authenticity, engaging in research, dealing with paradoxes, and addressing the matter of academic freedom.

*1. The integration of faith and learning.* The Christian-Biblical worldview holds the wholeness of truth. This implies that we see all of life and learning in relation to God. It suggests that education must beware of overspecialization and knowledge fragmentation, and forge both interdisciplinary and life connections. Most crucially, however, this perspective asserts that we must not create a spiritual/secular dichotomy.<sup>41</sup> Rather, teachers and students should see each subject and topic as within the pattern of God’s truth (Beck, 1991; Gaebelein, 1968).

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<sup>39</sup> “While the children and youth gain a knowledge of facts from teachers and textbooks, let them learn to draw lessons and discern truth for themselves” (White, 1982a, p. 35).

<sup>40</sup> Hodges (1987) maintains that truth is not so much something one has as something one does. Indeed, the problem is not so much knowing truth, as it is acting on the truth that we do have.

<sup>41</sup> We should also avoid creating a false dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural – where, as our understanding of the natural grows, the supernatural shrinks. The Christian view is that the natural is a part of the encompassing and infinite supernatural – where an understanding of the natural helps us to more fully, albeit infinitesimally, understand the supernatural. In essence, nature is not autonomous. God both transcends creation and yet is immanent within it (Clark & Gaede, 1987).

2. *The authenticity of the educator.* While the Christian worldview maintains that universal truth does indeed exist, it also recognizes the human constraint of partial knowledge and the potential for flawed interpretation. Consequently, no one can claim infallibility or a full understanding of any topic – not even a teacher.

As educators, we must model learning, authenticity, and humility. This includes recognizing the limits of one's knowledge, being honest about one's weaknesses, and expressing the tentativeness of one's conclusions.<sup>42</sup> It also implies passing provisional judgment, evidencing openness to correction, and demonstrating a passion for continued growth. Instead of trying to hide behind technical jargon in a pretense of knowing, one may simply state, "I don't know, but let's discover" – properly modest, but yet duly confident.

There is an added dimension, however. Pedagogy is not simply the transmission of knowledge from expert to novice. It can also be conversational, forming a network of dialogue, a democratic process in which each party shares experiences and insights. Across a variety of disciplines, the teacher's role can be seen less in terms of a "sage on stage," and more that of a "guide by the side." Consequently, we must increasingly think of teachers and students learning together, and the building of a participative learning community as a key component of the search for truth.

3. *Engaging in research.* Research is a focused and systematic search for truth. In our world, truth has become overgrown, like a lost coin in the grass. Although covered with weeds, it is still a coin, and still of value. Our duty is to be the metal detectors of the world, to find coins of truth and lift them out from the rubbish of Satan's lies.

As we have noted, research is a divine directive (e.g., Prv 2:4-5; Eccl 1:13; 1 Thes 5:21; 2 Tm 2:15).<sup>43</sup> The results and conclusions of a study, however, are only as valuable as their truthfulness. Consequently, we seek in research to establish reliability and validity as indexes of truthfulness. Although we thus endeavor to safeguard the truth-value of our conclusions, we recognize that we can never arrive at certainty based merely on empirical data or statistical process.<sup>44</sup> Rather, we must speak in terms of evidence – indications that bear "witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37; 3 Jn 1:12).

We also recognize that data must be carefully interpreted. The problem is that we never begin with a completely open, unbiased mind. We invariably bring suppositions, attitudes, and inclinations – determined by our experiences, our culture, and our worldview. In reporting research, we should acknowledge those biases of which we are aware, initiate member-checking, and invite external audit. We must remember that the discovery of error, even our own, is a genuine advance for one who is concerned with truth (Burwell, 1987).

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<sup>42</sup> Even when we speak of the infallible truth of Scripture, we cannot claim infallibility for any of our own understandings or interpretations of Scripture.

<sup>43</sup> "Instead of confining their study to that which men have said or written, let students be directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research in nature and revelation" (White, 1903, p. 17).

<sup>44</sup> We can never declare, "Research has proved...." Rather, we must state our conclusions under conditions of estimation and approximation, in terms of probability, possibility, and plausibility. As Holmes (1977) cautions, we must hedge what we say with a degree of tentativeness appropriate to the evidence in the case, and we must recognize that alternative possibilities exist. Our best empirical descriptions are, in essence, but "progress reports" and not, strictly speaking, "conclusions" – in the sense that nothing further can be said.

4. *Dealing with paradoxes.* At times truths can seem to be contradictory. Whereas Greek-based logic saw the opposite of a truth to be false, Judaic thought is able to view truth as the tension between contrasting ideas (Paulien, 2004). There seems to be biblical precedent for this tolerance of opposites. These paradoxes include Christ's humanity and divinity (Col 2:9; 1 Tm 2:5), the relationship of faith and works (Eph 2:8; Phil 2:12), as well as God's mercy and justice, man's free will and God's sovereignty, and God's love and human suffering, among others.<sup>45</sup>

While we cannot overlook apparent contradictions, we must recognize that our perception is often limited by perspective. To illustrate, one might use the analogy of a mountain range (ref. Clark & Gaede, 1987). Although each view of the mountains may be entirely correct, each is still only partially true in reference to the whole. The fact that one differs from another does not necessarily mean that either is false, only that each is incomplete.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, these differences of perception do not mean that absolute truth does not exist nor that truth is relative, but rather that truth must be discovered and understood by finite human beings. Only God is in a position to know truth in its entirety.

5. *The matter of academic freedom.* The rights and responsibilities of academic freedom continue to be a matter of intense debate (e.g., AAUP, 2007; Wood, 2007). At stake are the issues of freedom of expression, indoctrination, propaganda, and the aperture for differing perspectives within an institution, discipline, or society.

Academic freedom includes the freedom of speech, the freedom of research, and the freedom to teach.<sup>47</sup> These liberties are essential to the search, discovery, and assessment of truth. Each, however, must be conducted within a biblical worldview and frame of ethics, respecting the right of the student to learn within a focused and supportive context, and of the institution to maintain its distinctive philosophy and to fulfill its mission. An educator, for example, must avoid introducing irrelevant political opinions, presenting but a pet

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<sup>45</sup> For example: "There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; And one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches" (Prv 13:7). "Whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all." (Mk 10:44). Compare also Lk 22:36-38 with Mt 26:52.

<sup>46</sup> In science, a set of assumptions is referred to as a model. Most models, however, involve conflicting evidence (e.g., the wave and particle nature of light). We do not discard a model, however, simply because it contains some apparent inconsistencies. Rather, we recognize that no one model will be able to explain everything, and seek to compare various models to understand which one (or combination) provides the "best fit" with the evidence.

<sup>47</sup> These liberties are further discussed in a document voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee (1987), which reads in part: (1) Freedom of Speech. "While the right to private opinion is a part of the human heritage as creatures of God, in accepting employment at a Seventh-day Adventist college or university the teacher recognizes certain limits to expression of personal views. As a member of a learned profession, he must recognize that the public will judge his profession by his utterances. Therefore, he will be accurate, respectful of the opinions of others, and will exercise appropriate restraint. He will make it clear when he does not speak for the institution. In expressing private views he will have in mind their effect on the reputation and goals of the institution." (2) Freedom of Research. "The Christian scholar will undertake research within the context of his faith and from the perspective of Christian ethics. He is free to do responsible research with proper respect for public safety and decency." (3) Freedom to Teach. "As a specialist within a particular discipline, [the teacher] is entitled to freedom in the classroom to discuss his subject honestly. However, he will not introduce into his teaching controversial matter unrelated to his subject. Academic freedom is freedom to pursue knowledge and truth in the area of the individual's specialty. It does not give license to express controversial opinions on subjects outside that specialty nor does it protect the individual from being held accountable for his teaching."

perspective on controversial issues, or demeaning students who disagree with his or her stance.<sup>48</sup> Above all, the Christian educator must evidence integrity, fairness, humility, restraint, and respect.

Finally, we must truly understand the relationship of truth and freedom. We do not so much need freedom in order to discover truth, as we must reside in truth in order to experience freedom. Truth, in fact, offers the only freedom.<sup>49</sup> “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:32).

## Epilogue

Above the tumult of the mob, the eternal Judge stands serenely. It is the moment for the judicial action. He speaks and the verdict resounds throughout the universe. Truth has triumphed! Divine truth has set us free! Throughout eternity, God’s children will live and flourish in the infinite universe of God’s Truth.

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<sup>48</sup> The landmark 1915 “Statement of Principles” states: “The liberty of the scholar within the university to set forth his conclusions, be they what they may, is conditional by their being conclusions gained by a scholar’s method and held in a scholar’s spirit; that is to say, they must be the fruits of competent and patient and sincere inquiry, and they should be set forth with dignity, courtesy, and temperateness of language. The university teacher, in giving instruction upon controversial matters, while he is under no obligation to hide his own opinion under a mountain of equivocal verbiage, should, if he is fit for his position, be a person of fair and judicial mind; he should, in dealing with such subjects, set forth justly, without suppression or innuendo, the divergent opinions of other investigators; he should cause his students to become familiar with the best published expressions of the great historic types of doctrine upon the questions at issue; and he should, above all, remember that his business is not to provide his students with ready-made conclusions, but to train them to think for themselves, and to provide them access to those materials which they need if they are to think intelligently”(quoted in Wood, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> As Edwards (2007) points out: Only when we know the truth about an airplane are we free to pilot it. Only when we know the truth of the science of medicine are we free to practice it. Only the person who knows the truth of engineering is free to build a bridge that will stand.

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**HOW COLLEGE IMPACTS  
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