

Absolutes Or Not



**CAN YOU BE CERTAIN WHAT YOU KNOW IS TRUE?
IS TRUTH ALWAYS TRUE?**

ABSOLUTES OR NOT

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1 CAN WE REALLY KNOW THE TRUTH?

THIS LESSON WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

Objective 1. Discuss the philosophical, cultural, and religious differences between modernism and postmodernism.

Objective 2. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of modernism and postmodernism.

“Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on.” – Winston Churchill

A group of explorers discover a massive cave system. Eventually the explorers lose their way and settle down to live in the cave. Generations pass and each new one adjusts more skillfully to the environment. The thoughtful among them begin to scoff at the old myths regarding an “outside world.” Since no one has ever seen such things as “light” or “colors” the more sophisticated among the cave dwellers begin to call themselves “moderns” who reject such fairy tales. They mock the “premoderns” who still believe in these things.

As time passes some of the cave dwellers claim to have spotted shafts of light at certain remote spots in the cave. This light reveals that colors do actually exist. Perhaps there is really an outside world. Maybe the old myths contained some elements of truth. For lack of a better term, the cave dwellers who entertain these ideas call themselves “postmoderns.” One day a modern and a postmodern are working together in a remote part of the cave when outsiders spot and rescue them. Rescuers take them to a nearby house while teams are formed to find the others. Wishing to make the men comfortable, the rescuers take them to a large living room in the house belonging to the wealthiest of them. The modernist is the first one to discover the television. He meticulously takes the set apart and puts it back

together. He describes with great enthusiasm the principles behind such things as the cathode ray tube. Rather bored with the modernist's approach to the new device, the postmodernist sits in the comfortable chair across from the television. Finding the little hand-held device that has a button labeled "on," he turns on the TV and begins to enjoy the programming. The modernist takes copious notes as the postmodern channel surfs. Eventually the modernist announces his formula for determining which programs are best. The postmodern scoffs. There is no solid basis for saying which shows are better than others. "Better" is a subjective category. Whatever one likes best is best for him. Others will have their own preferences. Thus, many "best" shows will coexist simultaneously. As more of their friends are rescued from the cave and brought to the living room, they form rival clubs and assert their way of looking at the television phenomenon is superior to the others. Which club would you join?

"Television then, like literature, is a window on our world. Everything about it tells us something about ourselves and our culture"
(Sire 1990, 174).

Many sociologists say we have entered a new era called postmodernism. This era contrasts the "modern" one (covering the eighteenth century Enlightenment to the mid twentieth century) which saw science and logic as having concrete, absolute answers to all of our questions. Postmoderns say moderns have not thought deeply enough about the world we live in; nor have they taken feelings and experiences sufficiently into account in their view of this world. Stanley Grenz and John Franke (2001) summarize postmodernism as "the rejection of certain central features of the modern project, such as its quest for certain, objective, and universal knowledge, along with its dualism and its assumption of the goodness of knowledge. It is this critical agenda, rather than any proposed constructive paradigm to replace the modern vision that unites postmodern thinkers" (21–22).

Moderns have largely limited their knowledge to empirical findings. The only things they tend to accept as real are those things that have a purely natural or physical explanation. Postmoderns have dared to ask by what authority moderns make such absolute claims. If someone claims to have an experience "outside of the cave" who are the moderns to dismiss it out of hand? Just because the moderns are limited to the darkness and limitations of the cave does this mean with certainty that nothing else exists?

When moderns evaluate the world around us they also lack sufficient categories to discuss purely subjective elements. Their absolutist approach to the world demands that they speak of absolute truth and morals. Any communication is seen to have only one legitimate meaning. What is the foundation or basis for these absolutist beliefs? Postmoderns say that moderns have yet to offer a sufficient foundation for their belief system.

This is not just an abstract, philosophical debate engaged in by pipe-smoking professors with elbow patches on their corduroy sports coats. The changes in the halls of academia are tangibly paralleled in our everyday lives. Postmodernism is both an academic trend and a popular mood. To illustrate let us once again consider the ubiquitous nervous system of our culture—television programming. You turn on the TV and a couple on a talk show is discussing how they feel about their marital problems. The moderator eventually intervenes and tells both people what to do, although he gives no reason why they should do what he says other than that he believes it will “work” for them. You change the channel and on another show the audience is wiping away tears as the host talks about getting in touch with our spirits, but this host never says how we can know we have a spirit. Looking for something else, you change the channel again. On this one a guest psychic is telling people about their lives. The psychic just seems to “know” these things. No one on the show appears to care how. Finally, you decide on a sitcom. The characters are cheating, lying, and having casual sex outside of marriage. It is all supposed to be harmless and funny.

Our culture has changed. At one time people would have asked why they should do what the confident expert says. They would have asked what the other host meant by “getting in touch with your spirit” and they would have been more skeptical of the psychic’s claims. Fifty years ago the conduct of the sitcom characters would have been portrayed negatively and would have led to dire consequences in the episode. It seems like these days people are less rational and more subjective and the more subjective we become the more we tolerate behavior that once was frowned upon. We have grown weary of the limitations of “cave life.” Truth and morals are no longer seen as universal and absolute. People can have conflicting ideas but both are “true for them.” One poll conducted in 1991 found that 66% of Americans believe “there is no such thing as absolute truth.” 72% of those between the ages of 18 and 25 rejected all notions of absolutes (Barna 1991, 83–85).

Many people today are rebelling against the old limitations of modernism. The postmodern branch of architecture designs buildings with random, unpredictable appearance. Rather than teach traditional math skills, today's teacher may use an ethnically sensitive math curriculum that focuses on approaches to math found in various cultures. Generation Yers, now in their twenties, spend many hours on Myspace and YouTube, but do not seem to care much about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. We are forging new, more intuitive paths and many of the old concerns with rules, logic, and morals are largely passé.

Postmoderns are more concerned with stories than with ideas and logical argumentation. Propositions are too concrete and seem too absolute for postmoderns who prefer to speak about narratives. They find personal anecdotes more persuasive than research or evidence. Peters and Waterman (1982) advise contemporary businesses to recognize this phenomenon and appeal to customers through stories rather than information: "'Does it feel right?' counts for more than 'Does it add up?' or 'Can I prove it?' ... Simply said, we are more influenced by stories ... than by data ... people reason intuitively" (55). The mind is no longer an absolute tyrant. Postmoderns think and feel their way toward truth.

Some postmodern thinkers go so far as to say that all we really have are stories. For example, rather than speak of the proposition that all men should be equal in the eyes of the law, these postmoderns claim that all we can legitimately speak of are the stories or experiences that cause people to feel this way. They insist that these stories or narratives may provide meaning to our community and us but they do not teach universal truths. No person, church, or organization, they say, has "metanarratives." A metanarrative is an all encompassing view of truth and life such as Christianity or Communism that claims to have absolute truths that apply to all people of all cultures and times. The French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard said "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives" (1984, xxiv). In other words, truth is not above people and cultures; it is created by them, and different people create different truths. One culture's narrative which asserts polygamy as acceptable is just as valid as cultural narratives that see monogamy as the only valid option. Finding truth is like choosing a TV show to watch. There is no "right" one. We just pick whatever we like best.

The postmodern era is one in which we challenge long held assumptions, value our own experiences, respect the experiences of

others, and seek for trans-rational answers to questions about life's meaning and purpose. Modernism is a dry well in the search for such answers. The notion that we are just a chance assemblage of molecules makes us no more significant than a dirt clod. Our heart tells us there is more to the story.

"There is nothing outside the text; all is textual play with no connection with original truth" (Derrida 1985, 3).

The lack of overriding plots and the frequent display of situational ethics on Seinfeld have caused many commentators to consider it an example of postmodern television. (See Erickson 2002.)

The visual imagery of television has aided and abetted the rise of postmodern culture, at least at the popular level of experience ... True, false, good, bad, are the stuff of language and ideas, not visual images. In a video dependent society, moral decisions are emotive, not rational, not based on reasons or principles but on existential ecstasy or terror. (Brown 2001, 315, 319)

Sincerity does not change error. A man may mistakenly board a plane for New York thinking that he is going to Los Angeles, but that does not change his destination. – Robert Coleman

To argue for truth today is to stir an immediate debate, as if a heresy of devilish proportions has been invoked. The so-called death of God spelled the death of theology, but the morticians of the Absolute were not content to stab God-talk. Inevitably God's undertakers were marching to their own funeral, with all of knowledge being pronounced dead. (Zacharias 2000, 25)

The biblical claim is that there is a meta-narrative which is descriptive of all, and normative for all. God is the sovereign Creator, whose word spoke all into existence and who continues to work through history bringing the biblical metanarrative to its fulfillment (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28) ... In redemption, the metanarrative places the focus of history on the incarnation and the person and work of God the son. (Phillips 2001, 263)

To HELP YOU LEARN

Please answer the following questions in the space provided below or in your notebook.

1. Do you consider yourself to be postmodern?

2. Do you think you can really know the truth?

3. How can you be sure that what you believe is true?

4. If something is true for one person, is it true for others?

2 ARE WE SURE THAT WE CAN'T BE SURE?

THIS LESSON WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

Objective 1: Define the postmodern view of truth.

Objective 2: Discuss implications of the postmodern view of truth for religion and morals.

Objective 3: Indicate the impact of the postmodern view of truth on today's culture.

"If truth is relative, it's impossible to lie" (Veith 1998).

Philosophers such as Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty, who helped pave the way for the broader, cultural changes, challenged our most basic beliefs about reality. For centuries people have embraced what we call the correspondence theory of truth and the referential theory of language (also known as semantic externalism). Douglas Groothuis describes the correspondence theory of truth as the assumption that "a belief or statement is true only if it matches with, reflects, or corresponds to the reality to which it refers. For a statement to be true it must be factual. Facts determine the truth or falsity of a belief or statement" (Groothuis 2004, 65). Put succinctly, most people have believed that we can know what is real. We call a pencil real if it really exists. The referential theory of language says that words actually refer to this reality and that the speaker or writer's intent determines what a particular communication means. If an author writes about a rose bush, the correct way to understand him or her is to envision the plant all speakers of English refer to when using that term. It is not legitimate to envision a wheelbarrow in such a case. Postmodern theorists insist that there is no one, right meaning to what a person says or writes. Whereas modern readers debated the correct interpretation of a written work, postmodern

readers discuss their personal experience with the text and what that has meant to them.

The older ways of thinking about truth used to seem like common sense, but they are disputed by the new philosophers who claim that with no ultimate foundation for knowledge we cannot know anything with certainty. Many postmoderns, such as Jacques Derrida, also reject the confines of Western logic. The new linguistic theorists claim that a word or group of words can mean almost anything depending on who is listening to or reading them. The old, “modern” approach to understanding language would say you are mistaken if you believe this paragraph is about backyard barbecues. Taken to their logical extreme, some postmodern theories would say the paragraph is about backyard barbecues if that is what it means to you, regardless of this author’s intent. The words on the page do not refer to any reality outside of themselves. They “mean” whatever you feel when you read them. This is what Derrida meant in his famous saying that “there is nothing outside the text” (Derrida and Weber 1988, 148). Ironically, Derrida would have objected if a reader thought he was saying something like “the text means Jacques Derrida is a bad person” (1977, 162).¹ Postmodern thinking frustrates efforts to communicate if applied consistently.

“If words no longer communicate meaning, why do postmodernists continue to publish?” (Ludwigson 1995, 288).

Most of us do not follow this relativism to its logical conclusions. How would you order a hamburger and a soda if you gave the person taking your order the liberty to interpret your words any way he or she wished? Practicalities keep postmoderns from letting this fluid concept of truth and reality carry them to its extremes. Even the strictest postmodernists will argue why others should believe exactly what they believe. Still, having cut their rope to the anchor of absolutes and logic, postmoderns are free to believe whatever feels best to them and their community. They can choose any views they find pleasing without having to explain them if they do not want to.

With the rope to the anchor cut the journey never ends. Those who think we cannot know truth see it as a journey rather than a destination,

1 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc., abc*, Glyph 2, (1977), 162.

believing we may pursue truth but never confidently find it since it is too elusive and mysterious. We must then let everyone have their own “truth” as long as they do not hurt anyone else or try to impose their views on others. People who proclaim dogma, especially those who proclaim religious dogma, are thought to be narrow-minded, as unfashionable to postmoderns as people wearing medieval clothes on a contemporary, city street. Stanford student Scott Scruggs was surprised to find this philosophical fashion entrenched as de facto policy by the campus administration:

Last year, a dean at Stanford University began to pressure evangelical Christian groups on campus to stop the practice of “proselytizing other students.” Ironically, what angered the dean was not the content of the message that was being shared, but the practice of sharing itself. He believes that in approaching someone with the Gospel, you are implying that the person’s beliefs are inferior to your own. Such an implication is unacceptable because it is self-righteous, biased, and intolerant. (Scruggs 2002, para. 3)

Religion is acceptable in postmodernism, just not the kind that says other religious beliefs are wrong. It is wrong to say others are wrong (never mind the contradiction). Rigid belief systems are not as nice and friendly as an eclectic spirituality which picks whatever suits a person’s appetite at the religious buffet. Transcendent, spiritual experiences from this buffet are now popular. Increasing numbers of postmoderns are practicing trans-rational religions such as Neo-paganism and shamanism. Many spiritual leaders such as Frithjof Schuon and Joseph Campbell have promoted the notion that mystical experience underlies and unites all religions while external differences merely express this unifying experience in various mythologies. Consequently, all forms of mysticism are fine to postmoderns as long as they are not associated with a literal interpretation of any religious text that claims to exercise authority over what everyone should believe and do.

Theologian John Hick expressed this pluralist concept by saying “God has many names” (1982, 40). The thought is that all religions worship the same God and they are just different roads to the same destination. Differences are considered incidental. Interfaith dialog or “conversation” has replaced evangelism or proselytizing since postmoderns consider it arrogant for anyone to believe or act as though his or her religion

is truer than any other. Since the mystical experience is the common essence that makes all religions equally valid to those who follow them, trappings such as incense and candles which elicit sacred feelings are highly sought after in postmodern religion which focuses on feeling rather than doctrine. Leaving out the systematic study and the calls to repentance, postmodern religion feels good. As Ravi Zacharias (2000) says, in the postmodern era “theology has been replaced by religion” (25).

With no overriding authority for belief there is no way to declare what is morally right or wrong. We can only say what seems right to us so we speak of values rather than morals. Moral relativism becomes the “absolute” guide to conduct. With no authoritative principles to guide us we judge the rightness of an action by how good people will feel as a result of it. “Tolerance” becomes the keyword in morality. The only things we seem to find intolerable are behaviors we think will physically or emotionally harm others. We also cannot tolerate those who suggest we be intolerant. Thus, tolerance is not an absolute, moral value. We tolerate whatever makes people happy and refuse to tolerate those things we believe deprive people of happiness.

Relativism is not humane. It is tolerant only as long as it feels like being tolerant. Once it feels otherwise, no moral law prevents it from becoming dictatorial. – Peter Kreeft

Not everyone in the postmodern era has completely surrendered to all aspects of postmodern thinking. Many people have carried old, “modern” baggage into the new era. Evangelical Christians and atheists offer conflicting, modern claims to absolute truth. Although strict modernism differs with orthodox Christianity’s belief in the supernatural, biblical Christianity does share modernism’s approach to truth as knowable and absolute. Popular, atheist author Richard Dawkins has written a scathing article about postmodernism as have many Christian leaders. These critics claim postmodernism’s theory of how we know truth and reality ultimately destroys knowledge and morals. Some critics go so far as to call postmodernism a form of willful psychosis.

However loud these voices may be though, they are in the minority. They are countercultural voices of protest. Additionally, the effects of postmodernism can be seen even within these two supposedly countercultural movements. For example, though atheists often claim to

have almost nothing in common with postmoderns, one of both groups' main objections to monotheistic religions is the same. They find the religious concepts of sin and judgment too unpleasant to bear. Though postmoderns object on subjective grounds and atheists upon objective ones, it seems the motivations of both have their roots in a dislike for rigid rules and divine retribution. Rejecting a religious claim because it seems too unpleasant is a postmodern trait even when used by "modern" atheists.

The new cultural environment has also affected many Christians. The poll referred to above found that the majority of those who considered themselves Christians did not believe in absolute truth. David Wells (1993), a professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, argues that Christians are progressively being less guided by doctrinal understanding and more led by their own feelings. A Newsweek poll appears to confirm what Wells says, revealing that though most professing Christians believe in a real heaven, thinking they will go there some day, most of them do not believe in a literal hell (Woodward 1989). Hell is not popular in a culture that determines truth by how good it makes us feel. While many theologians in the postmodern era are not postmodern in thought, those that are choose to interpret the Bible in a way that allows them to disbelieve teachings that historic Christianity has held to for many centuries.

For instance, Millard Erickson (2002) points out, etiquette upstages ethics in this cultural environment:

Probably the emotional factor has overwhelmed the rational [within the church]. This is etiquette, and what has happened is that etiquette has become more important than ethics today. In this sort of environment it is a serious breach of etiquette to accuse someone of having told an untruth. This would be the case even if the person in question has told an untruth. To accuse someone of committing an improper act is disapproved of more strongly than the actual committing of such an act. (63)

The new toleration means that even Christians consider correction to be mean, and being nice is thought to be better than being right.

Frustrated critics say postmodernism leaves us with no solid foundation for knowing anything with real certitude. Postmoderns concede this,

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calling their speculations on truth and reality “postfoundational,” meaning we cannot base any idea or principle on anything unquestionable. The floor has dropped out from beneath us. This is scary but it can also be fun. With nothing below us and no boundaries to confine us, nothing constrains us. We feel as free as the wind since there is no ultimate authority to tell us what is true or right. This era is reminiscent of a scene in the 1992 animated Disney film “Aladdin” in which Aladdin takes Princess Jasmine, the object of his affection, on a magic carpet ride and sings to her the following lyrics:

I can open your eyes
Take you wonder by wonder
Over, sideways and under
On a magic carpet ride
A whole new world
A new fantastic point of view
No one to tell us no
Or where to go
Or say we're only dreaming

There is no one to tell us what to think and no one to tell us we are wrong in this fantastic, postmodern point of view! Truth is a journey and the postmodern magic carpet is the most appealing product in the worldview market on which to travel. The other views look drab, slow, and limited by comparison. Why not ride since it seems so fun? But still, like a concerned parent, reason chimes in asking hard questions. Does this magic carpet have reliable guidance systems? Does it have good steering? Does it have any brakes? Is it safe to ride on? Will it get me where I want to go, or is it better to ask where I should go?

Religiously Correct Surgery

“What procedure do you guys feel good about performing today? The chart calls for an appendectomy but I’m open to whatever you think may best meet his felt psychological needs.”

In the Christian view, freedom is at bottom positive in nature; it is freedom for something -- freedom to obey the norms that structure human existence, freedom to do one's duty, freedom to bow before the imperious claims of God the Lord. . . . In the secular mind . . . freedom is generally viewed as freedom from something.

– Henry Stob

[Postmodern philosopher Michel] Foucault invites us to a voyage in search of freedom with neither compass nor star to navigate. . . . Surely an illusory hope that “even without the truth we may still be made free.”

– John Hinkson and Greg Ganssle

TO HELP YOU LEARN

Please answer the following questions in the space provided below or in your notebook.

1. Are there things about which you are sure?

2. How are you sure of these things?

3. What makes something right or wrong?

4. What does it mean to be intellectually and morally free?

ARE WE SURE THAT WE CAN'T BE SURE?

3 IS IT RIGHT IF IT FEELS RIGHT?

THIS LESSON WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

Objective 1. Determine whether or not postmodernism is adequate as a guide to beliefs and choices.

Objective 2. Identify ideas upon which people base their beliefs and choices.

“Truth provides the structure for feelings. Feelings do not establish truth” (Carnell 1997, 89).

“If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair.”
– C. S. Lewis (quoted in Nicholi 2003, 45)

It is amazing how frequently things that are called disagreements prove, upon examination, to be simple dislike. ‘I don’t agree with you’ often means nothing more than ‘I don’t like what you say.’ . . . People either like things or they don’t like them and would rather avoid the real labor of thinking. They have had so little practice in it that they quite unable to distinguish between reason and personal preference.
– Elisabeth Elliot

Even on a magic carpet journey you need to know where you are going or you could crash. The freedom of flight still needs the constraints of guidance. On July 16, 1999, John F. Kennedy Jr. flew a plane carrying himself, his wife, and his sister-in-law into the water below, killing all

on board. The flight had run into conditions of poor visibility. Instead of relying on objective instruments for his guidance, Kennedy apparently trusted his own, subjective feelings which led him astray. As we journey toward truth, is there an objective system to guide us or are we left to nothing more than our feelings?

We may trust our own feelings but we must at least admit we know others whose feelings have led them astray. Solomon's wisdom in the biblical book of Proverbs seems like common sense: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12). Proverbs 21:2 says that everyone's ways seem right to them. Even the way of the fool is right in his own eyes (Proverbs 12:15). Proverbs 1:22 and 2:14 both say the fool delights in foolish ways. Foolishness can feel right to any of us.

All parents learn that their children's feelings will lead them to destruction if we do not direct them in wiser paths. Maturity means learning to make wise choices in spite of our feelings. We simply cannot eat everything we feel like eating, take off every day from work in which we feel like doing something else, or express our anger every time we would like to.

Feelings are not a consistently reliable guide to truth, morals, or practical living. In any argument both parties feel they have the truth. Both sides in any military conflict feel justified in their actions. Nevertheless, at least one side must be wrong in both the argument and the military conflict. A husband feels like having an affair while his wife feels he should not. Both cannot be right. A song from the 1970's said, "It can't be wrong when it feels so right," but surely life has taught us this is just sentiment. Perhaps the moderns did not give us a sufficient foundation for objective absolutes but both our minds and our hearts continue to seek for real truth we can both know and feel with certainty. The postmodern, magic carpet ride feels great, but it lacks a trustworthy guidance system.

Furthermore, on the magic carpet it is hard to discern the difference between an oasis and a mirage. What are the real answers to life's ultimate questions? How did the universe originate? Is there a God? Which religion is correct? What is the meaning or purpose of life? There is no way to tell if we are just playing make believe.

Most postmoderns have concluded that truth cannot be really known. Reading postmodern philosophers one sometimes gets the impression

they have given up on meaning as well. They use an abundance of ambiguous terms; newly invented jargon; unnecessary prefixes and suffixes; and unnecessarily complex sentences that their works often read like gibberish. Consider this quote from postmodernist Félix Guattari:

We can clearly see that there is no bi-univocal correspondence between linear signifying links or archi-writing, depending on the author, and this multireferential, multi-dimensional machinic catalysis. The symmetry of scale, the transversality, the pathic non-discursive character of their expansion: all these dimensions remove us from the logic of the excluded middle and reinforce us in our dismissal of the ontological binarism we criticised previously.²

This obscure style seems intentional since postmodern philosophers tend to criticize philosophical substance rather than contribute to it. Lyotard defended Guattari against those who “expect, especially when reading a work of philosophy to be gratified with a little sense” (1984, 71). Postmodern philosophy, music, art, and architecture have all evolved from existentialist, impressionist, abstract, and avant-garde movements that had their genesis in the modern era. Postmodern philosophers often find illustrations for their subjective views on truth and morals in the unstructured, unpredictable world of postmodern art. (See Anderson 1997.) Whereas philosophers have traditionally considered truth and ethics to be categorically different from aesthetics (appreciation of the arts), postmoderns tend to disregard distinctions between these categories.

“Consider postmodernism’s influence on art: it is an expression of complete autonomy, an insistent banality which is nothing more than an ‘absurd conglomeration of debris.’ No longer does art represent the external world” (Ludwigson 1995, 285).

In such a world the most we can hope for is to be “authentic to our personal narratives.” In other words the best option we can find is just being true to ourselves. But there are problems with this view. It advocates absolute relativism which is a self-contradiction. If truth and morals are not relative one must supply a basis for absolutes. If truth and morals are relative one has claimed this as an absolute and thus defeated his own argument. Furthermore there are authentic liars and many other people

² Richard Dawkins, “Postmodernism Disrobed.” April 1, 2007. <http://richarddawkins.net/article,824,Postmodernism-Disrobed>, Richard-Dawkins-Nature

most of us do not want acting like their authentic selves. Jeffrey Dahmer was being authentic to his personal narrative as was Ted Bundy, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Pol Pot (McDowell and Hostetler 1998). Our authentic selves want these people to change while their authentic selves do not want to. This principle cannot work consistently. “Authenticity” is not a reliable guide to truth or wisdom.

It seems that both modernism and postmodernism leave us with blanks to fill in. If life were only a true-false test, modernism would come through with its empiricism. If it were multiple choice postmodernism would give us all an “A” since all answers are equally correct. Both systems fail to fill in the blanks in the realities of life, however. What humankind needs is a worldview that works on objective and subjective levels. We need a way to fill in the blanks with concrete truth and morals.

Following is a postmodern poetry by Michael Giardina:³

The unable to deliver

a farmer, daughter
of an Italian canner
had passion for tracing
cataract scars.

Downtown Madrid--
a popular flamco
dancer
from Kentucky.

In any event,
she hung wiry necks
from my ceiling fans,
attached teeth to the
prefixes of my nightlight.

Fueling the feed,
she gestured
for Nordic fairies;
ears to stuff in bag.

Native Kentucky rests
and garlic pressurizes
in my gut, as wristbands
stick slick like
burnt moths

crashing into the sun.

3 Michael Giardina. “Experimentations in Abstract Postmodern Poetry.”
<http://creativestudios.com/abstractpoetry.html>

"It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies" (Chomsky 1967).

Sincerely believing something does not make it true, as anyone will testify who has ever picked a wrong bottle out of a medicine cabinet in the dark. . . . faith is no more valid than the object in which it is placed. It doesn't matter how sincere or how intense the faith. . . . Believing something doesn't make it true any more than failing to believe truth makes it false. Facts are facts, regardless of people's attitudes toward them. In religious matters, the basic question is always, "Are the facts true?"

(Little 2000, 147)

False teaching can make people very happy. Let us be quite clear about that. If you judge only in terms of experience and results you will find that every cult and heresy that the world or the church has ever known will be able to justify itself.

(Lloyd-Jones 1965, 185)

While most arguments throughout history have focused on rival claims to truth, postmodernism rejects the very notion of truth as fixed, universal, objective, or absolute. (Mohler, para. 7)

To the premodernist, truth was found in revelation. To the modernist, truth can be found in reason and science. To the postmodernist truth is not found (indeed it is not capable of being found), it is created. Absolute truth is a fable. It is possible for me to create my own truth, and for cultures and subcultures to create their truth, but it is not possible to find universal truth that is applicable to all people. Such truth does not exist and should not be sought. Those who claim to possess absolute truth only do so in order to assert power over others. (Gilley 2002, para. 10)

Contemporary Math Lesson

$2 + 2 =$ whatever (tolerant math)

whatever + whatever = 4 (pluralist math⁴)

whatever (postfoundational math⁵)

$2 + 2 = 4$ (“arrogant” math⁶)

Tolerance has become one of the most sacred values to the postmodern mind, and according to the new understanding of tolerance, any claim to possess unique truth is considered arrogant and intolerant . . . Those who claim to have the truth are regarded as arrogant. (Fernando 2000, 123)

TO HELP YOU LEARN

Please answer the following questions in the space provided below or in your notebook.

1. What do you think about postmodern art and literature?

2. What guides you in making important decisions?

3. Have you ever felt imperfect?

4 Religious pluralism is the view that all spiritual paths lead to the same destination.

5 In a completely postfoundational math system $2 + 2$ could equal 4, but $1 + 9$ could equal 7 with the same validity since there would be no undergirding certainties to guide the equations.

6 Those who make claims to speak absolute truth are often called arrogant within post-modern culture.

4 BY FAITH WE CAN KNOW

THIS LESSON WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

Objective 1. Indicate what faith believes.

Objective 2. State how one can know things by faith.

My friends we mistake a historical faith for a true faith, wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God . . . My dear friends, there must be a principle wrought in the heart by the Spirit of the living God.
(Whitefield 1771, para. 14–15)

We are not capable of producing the dynamic of faith, only of receiving it. In the same manner that homeowners don't produce electricity, but only consume it, we do not produce faith; we only utilize it. – Judson Cornwall

"Unbelief is natural to the sinning heart; saving faith is the gift of God"
(Tenney 1997, 123).

Postmodern art and sculpture illustrate the notion that people and their communities create their own truths, and they lack concern with accurate correspondence to external realities as they express themselves to others. Michael Giardina's poetry also typifies postmodernity. Scaring the female ferret out of Giardina's saltshaker expresses a "truth" he creates that cannot possibly be true for others. His poetry also illustrates the difference in worldview between hardcore postmodernists and conservative evangelicals. Those in the evangelical community of faith in Christ testify that we have discovered a way to know ahistorical,

cross-cultural, absolute truth that has objective, universal meaning and implications. This truth is revealed in the Bible which tells how we can know trans-rational, metaphysical realities with complete certainty. This way of knowing is something that neither modernism nor postmodernism offers. Hebrews 11:1–3 says the following:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Faith, by God's design, opens the way for discovery of spiritual truth and reality. This is a key principle. God invites us to seek Him and discover Him. Our faith, then, leads to deep assurance [Gk. *Hupostasis*] of things hoped for and the conviction (or evidence) [Gk. *Elegchos*] of things not seen. Both of the Greek words used in this sentence are strong in their meaning, indicating certainty. F. F. Bruce observes that "physical eyesight produces conviction or evidence of visible things; faith is the organ which enables people . . . to see the invisible order" (1964, 279). Consequently, people of Christian faith are able to perceive and understand things that cannot be verified within the cave of rationalistic empiricism.

Those who have never explored outside of the cave sometimes picture Christian faith as a form of make believe. Were this caricature true, faith would be a form of psychosis, but faith is not the product of human imagination. First, faith is a response to God's initiative so what it believes is determined by God's revelation of himself and His truth. Real faith does not create its own content. It is like a radio tuner. A tuner cannot produce the music, sports, and talk shows that we listen to; it can only receive the content that is determined and broadcast by a source outside of itself. Likewise, faith's content is determined by God and Christian faith is as reliable as the source of its content.

This tuner-like quality of faith can be seen throughout Scripture. Abraham did not believe he would have a son until God spoke (Genesis 15:1–6). Mary did not believe she would give birth to the savior until God revealed this to her through the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26–38). After this revelation Mary declared, "May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Likewise Paul believed he would be saved from shipwreck after God revealed this to him through an angel (Acts 27:21–26). Paul did not believe

the ship would be saved, however, since this had not been specifically revealed to him. Christians are not indulging in fictional daydreams, the magic of believing, or the power of positive thinking. They are responding affirmatively to a genuine, specific revelation from God.

Saving faith works the same way. It is simply faith which believes the message of salvation. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our need of a savior (John 16:18), teaches the truths of the Gospel to our understanding and our hearts (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10–13), witnesses to the gospel through signs and wonders (Acts 2:17–18; Romans 15:19; 1 Corinthians 2:4, 12:10), and confirms to us that we are children of God (Romans 8:16). Some of what the Bible reports and teaches cannot be verified empirically (for instance, we cannot make historical events such as creation or the birth of Jesus in Nazareth repeat themselves for our scientific observation), but faith's knowledge is just as certain as empirical knowledge because the experience involved is every bit as real. It is just an experience of things outside of the cave.

Rabi Maharaj, a Hindu who had been trained as a holy Yogi, experienced Christ as he knelt and prayed at a Christian meeting. He describes the new knowledge that came to him on that occasion:

Before I finished, I knew that Jesus wasn't just another one of several million gods. He was the God for whom I had hungered. He Himself was the Creator. Yet, He loved me enough to become a man and die for my sins. With that realization, tons of darkness seemed to lift and a brilliant light flooded my soul. (Death 1994)

I experienced this same supernatural certainty over 31 years ago when one night I read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5–7. When I read the part in which Jesus said “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7), these words came supernaturally alive in my heart and I KNEW that I could call on God and have an audience with Him. For the first time in my life I really, sincerely prayed, and it seemed that all of heaven descended upon me. Tears streamed down my face and I wondered why I had waited so long to find something so good. During that time of prayer I committed my life to God.

Countless others have experienced this same “out of the cave” knowledge. Saving faith is not guesswork or fantasy. Not only do real historical facts

exist that undergird Christian faith and make a reasonable response to God, but also saving faith presents the postmodern world with a kind of knowledge that supersedes both the naturally empirical and the naturally subjective. Speaking of the heavenly, saving wisdom, Paul writes,

No mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. (1 Corinthians 2:9–12)

Because of the active role of the Holy Spirit who is the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17, 15:26, and 16:13), we can declare on divine authority the message that you can “know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Norman Geisler and Paul Feinberg (1980) point out that divine knowledge as found in God’s Word (and, we might add, divinely given faith) is not subject to the weaknesses and flaws of merely human knowledge that moderns and postmoderns so frequently point out:

Among God’s attributes are omniscience, truth, perfect goodness, and omnipotence. Each of these attributes is crucial to the point we are making. Human knowledge is probable and fallible in part because our knowledge is partial. Sometimes we are wrong simply because we are ignorant of some relevant fact or facts. Such cannot be the case with God because God knows everything, both the actual and the possible (Ps. 139:1–6). Moreover, God’s knowledge is true. That is, it corresponds to reality (Exod. 34:6; Num 23:19; Deut. 32:4). Thus, neither ignorance nor error characterize[s] God’s knowledge. (130)

We can have genuine encounter and ongoing relationship with God, as the Bible repeatedly confirms.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (John 10:14).

“This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10).

“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6).

“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him” (Psalm 34:8).

The Bible also frequently describes this relationship as people experience it. Old Testament characters such as Abraham, Moses, and Noah conversed with God. David frequently described his relationship with God in the Psalms.

“Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:11).

“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground” (Psalm 143:10).

“But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds” (Psalm 73:28).

“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalm 16:11).

On two occasions (1 Samuel 10:5–12 and 19:23–24) even Saul was overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit who caused him to break forth into ecstatic prophecy. And in the New Testament, the entire book of Acts brims with a dynamic relationship between the believers and their Lord. The Holy Spirit speaks directly to Philip in Acts 8:29, Peter in Acts 10:19, and Paul in Acts 23:11. There are many other instances of spiritual gifts, divine guidance, miracles, angelic visitations, etc. in Acts, all indicative of a dynamic relationship.

Faith does not come from seeking faith; it comes as a by-product of seeking God. Specific doctrinal issues are then worked out over time since the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Word of God and illuminates it to us. Reading and studying the Bible becomes a genuine delight, as the Spirit teaches us through the Word. The written word then anchors our faith in an objective, factual revelation.

“There is also the possibility of certainty, . . . because God has spoken to us clearly and intelligibly” (DeYoung 2008, 40).

“The very affirmation that all truth is unknowable is itself presented as a truth affirmation. As a truth statement purporting that no truth statements can be made it undercuts itself” (Geisler 1976, 133–134).

The antithesis of “personal-revelation” and “propositional-revelation” can only result in an equally unscriptural contrast of personal faith with doctrinal belief. It is now often said that belief in Christ is something wholly different from truths or propositions. But to lose intelligible revelation spells inescapable loss of any supernatural authorized doctrinal assertions about God. (Henry 1979, 436)

TO HELP YOU LEARN

Please answer the following questions in the space provided below or in your notebook.

1. How would you define faith?

2. Do you desire to know God and His truth? _____

3. Is God capable of revealing absolute truth to people He has created?

4. How can one actually know God and His truth?

5 FAITH BELIEVES GOD'S WORD

THIS LESSON WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

Objective 1. Discuss the importance of the objectivity of the written Word.

Objective 2. State the relationship between the Spirit and the Word.

Objective 3. Identify the final authority for our beliefs and conduct.

All truth is indeed God's truth. But the truth that exists in undiluted and untainted form is discoverable in only one Book!

– David J. Hesselgrave

Faith never means gullibility. The man who believes everything is as far from God as the man who refuses to believe anything (Tozer 2006).

"It seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3–4).

Faith has intelligible content. Paul says that salvation involves coming to the "knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). There must then be some means to determine the correctness of one's faith if we are not to fall back into the pluralistic, mystical, subjectivism which characterizes postmodern religion. Jesus said in John 17:17 that God's Word is truth and the truth given by the Spirit of truth believes the written Word of God, the Bible. We thus have an authoritative standard by which we can examine or test everything

carefully (Isaiah 8:16, 20; 1 Thessalonians 5:21), and judge or evaluate prophecies and other spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 John 4:1). As the Bereans did when they first heard the Gospel preached (Acts 17:11) we test the spoken words against the written Word.

Were we left to mystical experiences alone to determine our beliefs we would inevitably fall prey to various kinds of false or imagined revelations. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive people with false revelations (2 Corinthians 11:14), and people often use their vivid imaginations as they falsely suppose they are having conversations with God. In Colossians 2:18 Paul warned against false teachers who would base their views on visions they had seen, inflated without cause by their fleshly minds. Without an objective written authority to guide us, the reliability of any claimed revelation is hard to evaluate. Thus, God has wisely given us His Word.

“So Moses wrote down this law . . .” (Deuteronomy 31:9).

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Joshua 1:8).

“Look in the scroll of the LORD and read” (Isaiah 34:16).

“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:15–17)

We can carefully examine the Bible's contents to understand what it does or does not say. Disagreements regarding doctrine or conduct can be adjudicated by the written Word's authority. The ever changing philosophical fashions of the world can be tested against this unchanging text. Feelings of worry or discouragement are overridden by the

objective, written Truth. With our Spirit-given faith rooted in God's book, faith is like a tree which reaches its branches to the heavens as we experience God but which also has its roots solidly planted in the tangible and objective Word of God, the Bible. Jesus said, "A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23).

Through the mixture of narrative and propositional writing we see that the correspondence theory of truth and the referential theory of language are clearly presupposed in the Bible. When the Bible says Jesus was crucified on a Cross and rose from the dead for our salvation, it is giving us information we are to relate to the real world. Scripture cannot be confined to the philosophical boundaries of either naturalistic modernism (which would rule out the resurrection by its anti-supernaturalist presuppositions) or subjectivist postmodernism (which refuses to see any definitive "Thus says the Lord" in the Bible's pages).

Though God used the personalities and experiences of the authors, He inspired them to write the words they did. Understanding God's Word then is an exercise in understanding the intent of the inspired authors. Determining what the words meant in the author's time and community helps us to draw out the meaning of the text rather than read our thoughts into it. The Holy Spirit does make the meaning of the Word come alive in our hearts and impress upon us the implications for our own lives, but the Word gains entry to the heart through the gateway of the mind. We read this holy revelation with our minds fully involved as we try to connect with the originally intended meaning and then meditate upon this meaning with heart and mind as we seek its relevance for our lives. Just as the Holy Spirit did not bypass the mind of the authors of Scripture as He inspired them, He does not bypass the mind of readers as He illuminates the Word to them.

We consequently find that God's message to the postmodern world is the same message He has communicated to every era. He created the world and we are His creatures. Humans are not therefore the measure of all things; our Creator is. God is holy. In His perfection He is eternally intolerant of sin but has provided us a way of salvation in His Son.

We do not look inward for answers to life's ultimate questions; we look up to the one who formed us in our mother's womb. We are not left to our own devices. God has not asked us to figure things out on our

own or trust any other person's word for these answers. Through God's Word we can know the unalterable truth that brings life and sets us free. Changes in cultures do not change the content of God's revelation. Since God's revelation comes from heaven, it is not subject to change by anything earthly such as organizations or philosophical fads. Believing and obeying "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1:3) means essentially the same thing for people in the twenty-first century as it did for people in the first century. The incidental differences in technological and cultural surroundings between first century people and us do not affect the heart of what it means to believe, love, forgive, and repent. Modern readers seek to apply the ancient meanings to new surroundings. Scripture is thus the sole authority for the doctrines and practices of all those who acknowledge its divine origin. We do not judge the Bible by men's opinions; we judge men's opinions by God's Word.

"The culture is to be constantly judged by the Bible, rather than the Bible being bent to conform to the surrounding culture"

(Schaeffer 1985, 105).

"We shall not adjust our Bible to the age; but before we have done with it, by God's grace, we shall adjust the age to the Bible"

(Spurgeon 2008, 254).

It is not arrogant for us to claim to know absolute, ahistorical truth from above; it is in fact the very opposite. In recognizing the absolute authority of God and His Word over our lives we are humbling ourselves before a higher source of knowledge. Both the modern insistence that absolutely rules out God's involvement in creation and the postmodern assertion that truth ultimately comes as we create it represent proud rebellion against God. It is humbling, on the other hand, for humans to admit that the world is in darkness apart from God's revelation, but this lowly posture is one that finds the light God shines in the darkness.

“There are perhaps no graces that have more counterfeits than love and humility” (Edwards 1746, 146).

“Opinions are relative to cultures, but truth isn’t” (Kreeft 1990, 34).

Sin is of a deceitful nature, because, so far as it prevails, so far it gains the inclination and will, and that sways and biases the judgment. . . . So far as any sin sways the inclination or will, so far that sin seems pleasing and good to the man; and that which is pleasing, the mind is prejudiced to think is right. (Edwards 1987)

True worshippers will also worship God ‘in truth.’ Many people today have the idea that it’s not necessary to worship in truth as long as we worship sincerely. Remember—it is possible to be sincere—and sincerely wrong. – Ed Young

Some Things the Bible Says About Truth

We can know the truth (John 8:32).

God wants all people to know the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

We should believe the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:12–13).

We should speak the truth to one another (Zechariah 8:16).

Christ is the truth (John 14:6).

God’s Word is truth (John 17:17).

We should handle accurately the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

The Holy Spirit reveals truth to us (John 16:13).

The truth will remain forever (2 John 2).

God delights in truth (Proverbs 16:13).

God delights in those who speak the truth (Proverbs 12:22).

We should write truth on the tablets of our hearts (Proverbs 3:3).

We should cherish truth in our innermost beings (Psalm 51:6).

We should rejoice in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6).

We should let our minds dwell on truth (Philippians 4:8).

We should worship God in truth (John 4:24).

We should walk before God in truth with all of our hearts and souls
(1 Kings 2:4).

FAITH BELIEVES GOD'S WORD

We should serve God in truth (Psalm 145:18).

Correct belief is essential to salvation (John 3:18, John 20:23, Galatians 1:8, 2 Timothy 1:13–14, Titus 1:9, 2 John 9–10)

In the midst of the ever changing tides and currents of worldly trends the church, in its morals and doctrines, stands out as an unmovable expression of God's eternal kingdom. "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 1:9).

Scripture can rule us only so far as it is understood, and it is only understood so far as it is properly interpreted. A misinterpreted Bible is a misunderstood Bible, which will lead us out of God's way rather than in it. (Packer 1996, 104)

To turn the back on all doctrinal clarity is not only a sin; it is a sin against charity, for Christian charity itself demands the preservation for posterity of the faith, in all its illuminating richness which past generations have handed on to us. To evade doctrinal clarity in the name of charity is thus an intolerable self-contradiction.

– Harry Blamires

Below is "a parable, in the form of a question in a music test, as it might be asked at different points in history. It was given to me by a music teacher a few years ago.

1930 Define rhythm

1960 The movement of music in time, including tempo and meter, is called _____.

1990 The movement of music in time, including tempo and meter, is called:

- a. melody
- b. harmony
- c. rhythm
- d. interval

2000 The movement of music in time, commonly called Rhythm, makes you feel:

ABSOLUTES OR NOT

- a. I don't understand the question
- b. I think this is an unfair question
- c. I don't know what the word Rhythm means
- d. It doesn't matter how I feel as long as it is my own authentic feeling

If you selected the year 2000 question and chose answer (d), you may be a postmodernist!" (Erickson 1998, 14)

TO HELP YOU LEARN

Please answer the following questions in the space provided below or in your notebook.

1. Do you think you have humbled yourself before God?

2. Have you sincerely sought Him in prayer?

3. Have you looked in the Bible for answers to life's ultimate questions?

4. Does the Bible say we can really know the truth?

5. Is the truth the Bible speaks of absolute and unchanging?

6. What are the ways the Bible says we can know the truth?

6 LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

THIS LESSON WILL FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

Objective 1. Indicate the spiritual and moral condition of this world.

Objective 2. Show how faith creates light in the darkness.

Man lives in the dark and even his nuclear flashlight cannot pierce it. We not only live in the dark, we get used to it. There is a slow, subtle, sinister brainwashing process going on and by it we are gradually being desensitized to evil. Little by little, sin is made to appear less sinful until the light within us becomes darkness—and how great is that darkness! (Havner 1964)

The following Scriptures speak to the importance of light in this world's darkness.

“You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:5).

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16)

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13–14).

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. (John 3:19–21)

The Bible tells us that Jesus is the light of the world (John 1:5–9, 3:19–21, 8:12, 9:5, 12:46). Those who reject the light remain in spiritual darkness, as they cannot see the truth and are inclined toward works of moral darkness. Read the following excerpt of Paul’s encounter with the Lord:

“I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’”

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.” (Acts 26:15–20)

Christ is the only exit out of this dark cave. There are many paths in the darkness, but the only one that leads to the light of Christ is the unchanging Gospel message which proclaims Him as the only savior for all times and peoples (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Belief and repentance are necessary steps to receiving this light.

He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. (Acts 16:30–32)

“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).

This light reveals the truth to the enlightened. Biblical faith believes the specific, doctrinal teachings found in the Bible, disbelieving all contrary dogma. Genuine faith is like a light socket in a lamp that fits only one, unique, gospel bulb. Paul writes, “Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Paul writes, “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place” (Ephesians 6:14). The inward flooding of God’s light makes believers children of light (1 Thessalonians 5:5). They can walk in the light (1 John 1:7) since they are no longer slaves to the works of darkness (Ephesians 5:8). When one believes the gospel by faith, he or she receives life-changing grace (Ephesians 2:8) which works by love (Galatians 5:6). The believer then becomes a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17) who loves God and other people. Real faith receives the real God who changes people (James 2:17–26).

Those who have been enlightened are then privileged to shine as lights in the darkness that others may also see the truth and walk in the light. This shining involves both the believing and living aspects of faith. Believers show the world Christ in them by the new way they live (Matthew 5:16, 2 Corinthians 6:14) and they declare the enlightening message which leads to salvation for all who believe (Luke 8:16, Acts 26:23, Romans 10:13–17). Followers of Christ take on a leadership role in this world, daring to be different, to go out in front and point the path to those who are still in darkness even if those in darkness sometimes resent the implication that they are lacking something in their lives. The light must not be hidden since there is no other (Matthew 5:14–15).

Many years ago, while vacationing in the mountains, my wife and I found ourselves on a rough path in the woods with no flashlight and not enough time to get back to the road before nightfall. A pair of helpful young men joined us on the path, going before us with their flashlights. They were not ashamed of the fact that they had light which we did not, nor were they timid in showing us the way. Thankfully, they did not extinguish their lights in a misguided effort to avoid embarrassing us or

to identify with our condition. Those who are lost in the darkness need guides who are unashamed of their light (Mark 8:38, Romans 1:16).

A Christian is a guide rather than a follower of others—including postmodern people—who does not conform to unbiblical thinking or conduct. When one repents and follows Christ, he or she is no longer premodern, modern, or postmodern. Believers become aliens and strangers in this world who belong to a higher kingdom. The believer who receives salvation functions as a luminary to the surrounding culture. The light (message) remains the same regardless of the surroundings even though the shape of the lamp (methodologies) may be altered to better fit the setting.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14).

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

The attitude we are here investigating is seen in its most insidious form when it attempts to cloud men's reasoning by a fog of so-called 'charity.' The idea is cultivated in some quarters that any individual's declared attachment to a specific doctrine is an affront to all those who happen not to accept the doctrine. In the name of charity and tolerance we are discouraged from openly proclaiming any clearly formulable beliefs at all ... The idea that Christian charity consists in not expressing opinions with which other men may disagree is tenderly cherished in some quarters, but it is fatal to a rational faith. (Blamires 1956, 57)

TO HELP YOU LEARN

Please answer the following questions in the space provided below or in your notebook.

1. Do you believe God can communicate understandable, objective truth in the Bible?

2. Is it possible that some people are right and others are wrong?

3. Have you found absolute truth and certainty?

4. Would you be ashamed to be different from the majority if the majority were wrong?

5. If you had truth that others' lives depended on, would you spare any effort to tell them?

CONCLUSION

The answer to our original question is a resounding “yes!” We really can know absolute, life-changing truth. This truth is in Christ and the Bible. All of us must at some time seek Him for ourselves. No one can do this for us and we must not let a sense of unworthiness stop us from this seeking because we are all unworthy. Christ died for sinners, those who are His enemies (Romans 5:6–8). His death on the Cross makes it possible for any of us to seek and know Him. Once He lives in us He changes us so that we can live according to the absolutes of His kingdom. We can escape from the cave and experience a whole new world—not the fantasy, foundationless world of Aladdin—but the brilliant world of God’s wonderful truth and life.

After my saving encounter with God I was surprised to find that there were whole buildings full of people who had repented and come to know Him through Christ just as I had. Becoming part of a local body of believers (a church) was vital to my continuing spiritual life and growth. There is a body of believers waiting for you to join with them in worshipping and serving God. I highly recommend an Assemblies of God church if there is one in your area. Those of us who have given our lives to Christ have found the journey of following Him to be exciting and challenging. Join us as we follow Him together and seek to live out His kingdom community in this postmodern world.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you sought God with a sincere heart?
2. Do you know Him and believe His message of salvation?
3. Have you sought out a church to attend?
4. Have you been reading the Bible?
5. Have you shared the gospel truth with others?

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ABSOLUTES OR NOT

RESPONSE PAGE

YOUR NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

Thank you so much for studying these lessons on postmodernism. If you have enjoyed studying this subject, please tell us about the blessings you have received on the following lines.

We would also like to know how you feel about some of the postmodern ideas you may have. Has the Lord spoken to you about any of these areas since your reading of these lessons? How do you feel He is trying to turn you to Him and experience His blessings? Have you come to believe in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior through these lessons?

NAMES & ADDRESSES OF YOUR FRIENDS

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Grade level or Profession

Full name

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