

Sermon Draft

Text: Ephesians 5:8–14

Sermon: “What is Truth?”

“What is truth?” This question was asked of Jesus by Pontius Pilate hours before our Lord’s crucifixion (John 18:38). Jesus told Pilate that he came to *“bear witness to the truth,”* saying that *“everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice”* (John 18:37). Pilate wasn’t interested. In a cynical, somewhat annoyed manner, he reveals what he thinks about the ability to discover truth in this life. He thinks it’s silly.

A similar attitude is alive and well in our time. Objective truth is on trial again. The secular opinion is that truth is manufactured in the heart of man. This leads to a diversity of perspectives on life, with no unifying foundation. How does a society function when truth is based on individual opinion? What is truth when truth can be different from person to person? When there can be more than one truth, how can there be unity?

In our text from Ephesians, Paul shows that Christian teaching upholds objective truth when he encourages his hearers regarding their manner of life.

He says they were once like Pilate, a people who were living in darkness, apart from faith in Christ. Now, however, they have heard the Word of God, they have been baptized into Christ, and so he calls them “light in the Lord.” In verses 8 and 9, he says, “*Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).*” Paul teaches that once an individual comes to faith in Christ, that person knows not only what is true but also what is right and good.

To walk as children of light means, first, that we should walk in a way consistent with all that is good. Second, it means we should walk in a way consistent with all that is right. And third, to walk as children of light means we should walk in a way consistent with all that is true.

First, we should walk in a way consistent with all that is good.

God alone is good. He is the source and originator of good, that is, of all moral excellence and purity. The Scriptures make this clear. In the beginning, when God created, he looked and “*saw that it was good*” (Genesis 1:12). Throughout the Old Testament, it was clear to the ancients that good comes from God as a gift and blessing.

In Psalm 73, we read that *“it is good to be near God”* (v 28). In the New Testament, Jesus makes God’s goodness abundantly clear when he asks, *“Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone”* (Mark 10:18).

Though God alone is good, Paul teaches the Ephesians that by Baptism and faith in Christ they have been brought out of spiritual blindness and now can see what “good” is! Before they knew Christ, the Ephesians did not know. Formerly they were lost, and their lives were lived in pursuit of carnal things.

The way of the Gentiles before Christ was not good. Then the prophets, apostles, and Christ himself brought to the world “Good News!” That news was of the only true God, who forgives and saves through the atoning sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. Because of Christ’s suffering and death for the sins of the world, Gentiles were able to go from unbelief to belief, from darkness to light, from bad to good.

Pilate, standing near and talking to Jesus, was a Gentile living in darkness who scoffed at the idea of Christian virtue. His decisions were not based in virtue but in expediency.

Look at the world around us today. Who is seeking what is morally excellent? Who is seeking what is objectively good? The basis for much decision-making in popular culture is subjective; that means, it comes from within the human heart. “Whatever seems good to me, I will do!” says modern man.

It seems silly to the unbeliever to seek what is good from outside of self. Paul teaches that walking as children of light is to seek the good that God has taught and shown.

And not only what is good, but also that which is right. We should walk in a way consistent with all that is right.

Just as God alone is good, it is also true that God alone is right. When Paul teaches the Ephesians to pursue that which is “right,” he is not teaching them to seek what is “correct” as much as he is teaching them to pursue justice and righteousness. When considering the rightness or righteousness of God, we immediately think of God as judge or arbiter.

In fact, the Scriptures reveal God this way in many cases. Psalm 7 states clearly, ***“God is a righteous judge”*** (v 11). Psalm 50 says, ***“The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge!”*** (v 6).

God who created the world sorrowed when his creation fell into sin. Nevertheless, God judged Adam and Eve according to their sin in the Garden of Eden, saying, ultimately, ***“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return”*** (Genesis 3:19).

As the world now lived in a state corrupted by sin, the Creator was entirely “right” to judge and sentence the sinner harshly.

However, this divine judge our heavenly Father was very quick to make declarations that were laced with grace and mercy for the sinner.

In fact, already with Adam and Eve, though they were judged according to their sins, God spoke words of mercy that related to the promise of a Savior. So, the Creator God shows amazing grace as the gift of his Son is announced, a Son who was given willingly for the sake of the lost sinner.

As the Messiah was promised to the world, yes, already to Adam and Eve, the declaration of righteousness was modified. Now, the sinner did not have to appear before the angry judge according to his own works or merits. Rather, the sinner was given an advocate to stand next to him even in his place as substitute, taking the death we deserved upon himself. That advocate was the Son of God, the Savior, Christ Jesus.

In Isaiah, we read of this judge making a declaration: ***“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool”*** (Isaiah 1:18). Paul makes a parallel statement in Romans when he writes, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”*** (Romans 3:23–24). It is this “good” and “right” God who has brought the Gentiles from darkness to light, and in so doing has called them, us to that which is right.

Understanding what is “right” in light of the Lord, we are now given an ethical standard by which to live. When Paul tells us in verse 10, ***“Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord,”*** we should realize this is something we can do! Knowing this God and his nature, attitude, and disposition toward them, we can know and learn day by day what is pleasing to him, and knowing what is pleasing to him will help in exposing (v 11) the opposite, that which does not please him.

The knowledge of that which is good and right goes a long way in helping them live out their Christian calling. But Paul speaks of one more virtue in verse 9 that will help still more, a virtue that Pilate thought was so far from anyone, but a virtue that is close to us in Jesus Christ our Lord: that which is true. We should walk in a way consistent with all that is true.

It’s an ironic moment in time when Pontius Pilate, a man born of Adam, looks into the eyes of the God who created him and asks, ***“What is truth?”*** Jesus, of course, is Truth Incarnate.

The Bible again speaks of our God as a God of truth. Appealing yet again to the Psalms, we read in Psalm 43, “***Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me***” (v 3). In Psalm 51, “***Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart***” (v 6). And in Psalm 119, “***The sum of your word is truth***” (v 160).

John the apostle writes of truth as a theme in his Gospel. Beginning already in chapter 1, he says, “***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth***” (v 14). Just a few verses later, he writes again, “***For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ***” (v 17). While these texts are clear, nothing is more clear than what Jesus says in John 14: “***I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me***” (John 14:6).

The Scriptures make it clear. God alone is the source of all truth. And if the world is to know truth, then it must know Jesus Christ, the truth of God incarnate.

Paul says that walking as children of light must also include walking in the truth, that is, in the facts and realities of life. How does one walk in truth, or live in reality or understand the facts of life? Jesus answers this question again in John 8, saying, ***“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*** (vs 31–32).

Jesus clearly teaches that the Word of God is truth, fact, and real, even as he prays in the High Priestly Prayer, ***“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth”*** (John 17:17). The Word of God is one of the means through which the Holy Spirit works to bring people from darkness to light.

It is God’s Word which the Gentiles received through the preaching of Paul that led them away from that which was unfruitful, dark, and shameful. God’s Word exposed the dark ways of the unbelieving Gentiles so that they could see and live in the light of the truth.

What a struggle we have in our day with debates over what is true and real! Truth has been so obscured that we get angry and frustrated even thinking about the ways:

A boy calls himself a girl. A girl calls herself a cat. An unborn child is called a “product of conception.” Standing up for your beliefs is called bigotry. And on and on. It has become increasingly clear that the Christian faith and worldview are under assault by that which is false and dark. The world today is living in a very similar manner to that of these Gentiles before they were brought into the light of Christ.

But Paul’s words in our text are for us Christians. He is not barking at the Gentiles; he is exhorting God’s chosen, his elect in Christ. He is calling and reminding and teaching us, teaching you and me to live out our rightful calling and walk in the light of the Lord that he clearly made known to us and continues to make clear to us in Holy Scripture.

The calling of which Paul spoke to the Ephesians was not based in the mind of man but in the mind and will of God, who created, redeemed, and sanctifies. He exhorts the Ephesians to consider their walk and to be wise in their day, knowing that the days are evil and that Satan will ever continue to attack those who confess Jesus as Lord.

Though virtue remains on trial today in our world and our society and Pilate's question continues to ring from generation to generation, we have received a word from the only reliable source of wisdom and knowledge in life. The triune God, who is himself good and right and true, has given us his Son even to death on the cross so that we might have these virtues illuminated before our eyes. Not only that, but the Son of God has brought us into his marvelous light by Baptism into his name, that we might not only know virtue but also live virtuous lives. May we, like the Ephesians, boldly cling to the Word of Christ and pursue that which is good and right and true in our day, to the glory of God and in service to our neighbor.

Amen