

True or Trustworthy?

When I read a news story, or listen to a news story on radio or TV, I always ask myself, "Hmm... I wonder if that could be true."

Sometimes, what I'm questioning in my mind are the facts/details of the story. Sometimes however, what I'm questioning is the trustworthiness of the details and the way in which they are being presented. They may be factually true, but they may not be trustworthy.

Here's an example. A headline states, "*Israeli forces kill two Palestinian civilians*". Sadly, this is not an unusual headline for a 21st Century news story. But I can't tell you how many times I've seen/read news stories just like this, with factually true headlines, only to discover 5 paragraphs in (far enough in where no one's really reading any longer), "*The IDF strikes were retaliation for Palestinian forces having come out from one of their tunnels in order to abduct Israeli citizens. Palestinian forces later hid in a school where the civilians were killed*".

See what I mean? The headline was true; but not trustworthy.

"So what?", one might say. "*What we're really concerned about in Christendom is Spiritual Truth; God's Truth; Biblical Truth. We know the culture's going to lie. Let them say and do what they want.*"

Not so fast, not so fast... let's talk about this for a moment.

Yes, we know that the culture is corrupt. As a matter of fact, God has told us quite specifically through the pen of the Apostle Paul that it is not ours to judge this corrupt culture. Observe this exhortation from 1Cor 5:9-13...

"I wrote to you in my epistle not to associate with fornicators. Yet I certainly did not mean with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to leave this world! But now I have written to you not to associate with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous person, or an idolater, or abusive person, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God will judge. Therefore 'put away the evil person from yourselves.'"

The Church of Jesus Christ is not called to be the morality police in culture, judging them for their actions. Rather, God has called the church to be something else entirely; not judge of the world, but the light of the world.

"What's the difference?", one might ask. "*If I try to be light, and show up what's right and wrong, am I not judging?*" No, you are not. Let me repeat that again in case you didn't get it. No, you are not. I will explain...

Christendom has a habit of allowing itself to become conformed to its surrounding culture; any culture. That's the way it is; everywhere. The natural course of things is syncretism. **Syncretism**: noun; *the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties, as in philosophy or religion.*¹

¹ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/syncretism?s=t> retrived 03/21/2017

In Christendom, one can come to depend upon cultural attempts at “reconciliation or union” or the resolution of differing beliefs and practices in this fashion; the culture asking the church to compromise its standards to go along with the culture's standards. Why? Simply because the culture does not want to live according to the principles of God and His Scriptures; and, to the degree to which the church *does not* compromise its behavior and beliefs accordingly, the culture feels judged. That is not a controversial statement, it is a matter of course; a matter of historical and contemporary record and fact. Who reading this cannot attest to its accuracy?

But sadly, the church usually loses this battle. Rarely does the culture become more conformed to God's standards, but regularly does the church become more conformed to the culture's, ie., syncretized. It usually take about a generation. What is common in the church today, was considered compromise with the culture 30 years ago... give or take.

So how do we reconcile this in our minds? If we're not supposed to be judges, but we're not supposed to compromise our standards such that the culture feels judged... what to do?

Don't think for a minute that this cultural controversy comes as a surprise to God, and consequently it came as no surprise to Jesus. In fact, warning against it and in full anticipation of it, Jesus charged His followers to be *salt and light* in the culture in which they found themselves; indeed the culture in which we find ourselves. “*What do you mean by salt and light?*”, one wonders.

No doubt you've heard the expression, “The salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13) and the expression, “The light of the world” (Matt 5:14). Apparently, according to Jesus, these two “attributes” are to be the Christian's positions in the earth/world. But what do these thing mean? Let's begin by looking first at “the light” issue.

In the course of living life, we need light. Stated simply, this is why we consider blindness a handicap. Whether walking, driving, running, moving, working, staying home, whatever, we need to see. Everyone needs to see. Surely God knows this, no? But what does this mean in terms of the Christian's interaction with the culture? Allow me to explain it this way, as we see something else that Jesus said about light and darkness.

Do you know that famous “end-zone” scripture, John 3:16? I'm going to cite that Scripture here, but I'll cite the more complete passage, so that we'll get the thought. Here's verses 16-21...

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world so that He might condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness more than the light, because their works were evil. For everyone that does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God.

Men love darkness. So says the Christ.

But His followers are called to be the Light of the World. What do you suppose will be the experience in this world, of those followers, when the Light that they shed is encountered by those who love darkness? Here's what it will be...

The darkness will always try to extinguish the light, "... lest his works be exposed". The light will always be hated; perhaps longed for, but always hated as the tension between the realization of God's Truth and human darkness is lived out. Truth will be revealed by the Light (if indeed "the light" is being what it is supposed to be!), and darkness will always combat it. Here are the words of Jesus, immediately preceding "you are the salt of the Earth". Matt 3:10-12...

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you whenever they revile you, and they persecute you, and they say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the Earth..."

So says the Christ.

But what about this "salt" issue? How are God's own to be the "Salt of the Earth"? There is something quite interesting in the original language of that Scripture. Let's see it together. It is found in Matthew's gospel, chapter 5, verse 13. Here it is in the old King James Version...

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

Here it is in the more modern English Standard Version (ESV)...

"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

What is interesting here is the phrase, "... have lost his savour..." or as it says in the ESV, "... has lost its taste...".

That entire phrase is one word in Greek, the language in which this was originally written. That word is *moraino*, or expressed phonetically, *moraino*. That word is a derivative of another word, the root word, *moros*, or expressed phonetically, *moros*. The translation of *moraino* is, "to become insipid; figuratively to make act as a simpleton – become fool, make foolish, lose savour".² The translation of *moros*, the root word is, "dull or stupid (as if shut up) heedless, (morally) blockhead, (apparently) absurd: -fool (-ish, -ishness)."³

Get it? To be the Salt of the Earth is to be un-dull, non-blockheaded, not foolish or stupid.

Here's the fuller quotation of the verses from Jesus, so that we can see his thinking; Matt 5: 13-16 EMTV.⁴

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes tasteless, with what shall it be salted? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and to be trampled underfoot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it shines on everything in the house.

² Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionary. Published 1890. Public Domain

³ Ibid

⁴ English Majority Text 2003-03 Paul Esposito

Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works, and they may glorify your Father who is in heaven”.

Now that we know from Jesus (John 3) that “... *men love darkness...*” and we know from Jesus (Matt 5) that the Christ follower is to shed *Christ's* light and not be stupid, foolish or blockheaded, let's get back to our original premise, shall we?

True or trustworthy?

Recently I was in a Sunday School class in a friend's church. My friend, the Pastor, was out sick and he had a young man subbing in the pulpit during service, and teaching the immediately following Sunday School class. I happen to have had the experience of studying in seminary with some of the same professors with whom this young guest speaker had studied when he attended that same school. In fact, during his last visit to this church, I asked him where he'd gotten some of his “thinking” and he told me that he'd gotten it from one particular professor, from whom I had suspected he'd gotten it! But on the particular Sunday to which I am now referring, the young man came in with “more of the same”, this time having to do with the US's immigration and refugee policies. Need I remind you that these are hot button issues in the culture and in the church?

During his “lesson”, the fellow articulated several things apparently designed to elicit certain reactions from the class; reactions sympathetic with his obvious position. I am glad that I was in attendance to observe this, else I might not have believed it. The young man's remarks were exactly in keeping with the point of this essay. His comments were true, but they were not trustworthy. Here's how that worked itself out in this “Sunday School class”.

The young man has been a missionary in a foreign, predominantly Muslim, West African nation for a decade or so. After having made reference to the church in the US speaking out against a recent Supreme Court ruling legalizing nationally, so-called same-sex marriage, the man proclaimed that the citizens of the nation where he was a missionary wouldn't care if the government passed a law allowing, say, polygamy. Why then would the church here take such a stand against a government ruling, potentially alienating those whom they could potentially reach with the Gospel, ie., same-sex couples?

Why would Christians care about whether or not the government allows polygamy or same sex marriage? After all, as we demonstrated above, the church is not to be the morality police in the culture. This is true! But it is not trustworthy, and here's why.

In point of fact, the nation where the young man had been working in the mission field is 94% Muslim, 5% Christian and 1% other.⁵ Interestingly, Islam allows men to have up to four wives. If the government there were to legalize polygamy, who would notice? But here in the US, when the church stood against the legalization of so-called same-sex marriage, the issue was not and is not one of marriage, nor of dictating morality to the culture. It is one of truth. The truth is that Christ taught what the Bible teaches, that marriage is the lifelong union between one man and one woman. That's what it is. That's its definition from earliest recorded history. In fact, until just last year, that's what it is in US law.⁶ It is not

⁵ US Central Intelligence Agency statistics 2008.

⁶ D.O.M.A. An Act to define and protect the institution of marriage. Enacted 104th Congress, September 21, 1996.

something or anything else. Marriage is what it is; it is not whatever we decide it is going to be in this particular generation or circumstance. So the matter here is not one of judging or ostracizing people, but one of shining the light of God's Truth on a situation which seeks that which men love... according to Jesus... darkness.

Nevertheless the "true" statement that the speaker uttered cast doubt in people's minds as to whether or not the church should keep its collective mouth shut. He spoke the truth, but it was not trustworthy.

In the same vein of "who the church should embrace", comments came about another culturally sensitive and controversial issue here in the States, immigration and refugee admission to the USA.

Immediately after asserting that the US should be embracing refugees, shouldn't be afraid of the US taking in refugees (most especially Islamic refugees), and that the church should be on the forefront of openly advocating the taking in of refugees, the speaker shared the true statistic that 49.6 percent of all refugees worldwide are Christians. All in that class were shocked to hear that statistic and no doubt immediately began to question certain policies, and perhaps their own positions. But that stat has nothing to do with the percentage of Christians among the USA's refugee intake of the last 4 years. One person in class actually noted a statement from the US Dept. of State and its position of the last 4 years, which is that Christians will not be taken in as refugees so as not to present the US as favoring one religious group over another in its refugee policy. The reasons given for this position are that current state department regulations have to do with *whom* is doing the persecuting. Says the State Dept., if the persecution is done by any group other than the internationally recognized government of a nation, then refugee status is not conferred despite the reason for the persecution. In other words, if one is persecuted for one's religion, refugee status is only conferred upon such a one if the persecution is coming from the internationally recognized government of that nation. Should persecution come from say, Islamic State, or Hesbolah, or the Aryan Nation or any such non-government group, the US Dept. of State's refugee definitions do not allow refugee status to be conferred upon such a one.

This fact was articulated to the young man quite specifically in the class, but his response was that "there are numerous definitions of refugee in the US's refugee policy". True, but not trustworthy. As a matter of fact, the US State Dept has specifically and singularly held the policy against refugee Christians for the last four years, stating that the persecution is not from the government, but from some other entity. Even upon having been informed of this trustworthy truth, the young man held to the less than trustworthy truth that "there are numerous definitions of refugee in the US's refugee policy". In point of fact, the 49.6% figure regarding worldwide refugees, makes the point that the most persecuted and hated refugee population worldwide is the Christian refugee population; which population the US Dept. of State has refused to assist for the last 4 years.

Perhaps in order to make the people in the room think that the US is not doing enough for refugees and immigrants, the fellow asked, "How many immigrants do you think the US takes in annually?". One informed fellow in the class had the correct answer (and it's far more than any other nation). The followup question had to do with how much in resources the US enjoys, and what the US's immigrant intake *should* be in light of the amount of resources that the nation enjoys. There is a rather obvious assumption and premise in that comparison, which has everything to do with opinion and has nothing to do with the facts of the matter. But the question was posed not for the purposes of proclaiming facts or truth, but swaying opinion. In a room of "Truth seekers" in Sunday School, assembled together for the

purposes of learning and better loving the Truth, this type of manipulation with “truths” is not trustworthy.

There were now fireworks going off all over the room! For some reason other than the proclamation of the Gospel and Biblical Truth, the speaker was articulating “truths” with an agenda other than trustworthiness. As to what that agenda might have been, one can only speculate (as I have, but will save that for a future essay), but the stark difference between truth and trustworthiness was on display for all to see and hear; hence the fireworks.

I felt very badly for the absent pastor, home trying to recuperate, while his sheep were being manipulated in their thinking, in the name of truth. But I don't think they were buying.

While you may not initially make the connection, this situation puts me in mind of the definition of Biblical Inerrancy that can be found in my personal doctrinal statement (which is available on this website), which definition I have actually borrowed from (and whom I credit) renowned theologian Millard Erickson. Erickson says,

“The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms.”⁷

Here Erickson, without using the word, refers to trustworthiness. The Bible is truthful in what it affirms. Truthfulness has much more to do with the heart than it has to do with the facts. The Light of the World, the Salt of the Earth – we – are to be concerned with scrupulous truthfulness. Only this is trustworthy.

We who claim to be trafficking in the Truth, we would do well to remember this.

Pastor

⁷ Erickson, Millard J.(2007), *Systematic Theology*, 2nd Ed, Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Books (p.253)