

Systematic Theology
Are You Sure? The Certainty of Truth in a Postmodern World (Part 1)
Selected Scriptures
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Well, as you know, we completed last Sunday night, a four-year journey through what the Bible teaches about all of the great doctrines of the Bible. We began in November of 2003, and here we are. Is that right? 2003. That's hard to believe, isn't it? But, as we look ahead, I want to tell you a little bit about where we're heading. Starting, not next Sunday night but the following Sunday night, I hope to begin a series that will last, sort of intermittently because I have a couple of responsibilities I need to be away for, that will last for about 12 weeks. Tell your friends and family because what I hope to do in 12 weeks is give you **an** overview, a survey, of the entire Scripture. My goal is, in 12 weeks and I promise not to go longer, to give you a way to put your arms around the content of the Old Testament, the intertestamental period (that period between the testaments), as well as the New Testament - both its history, its message, and theology so that, if you will be here those nights, you will really have **a** grasp of the full range of what the Bible was given to us to communicate, and a little bit about its history. We hope - I hope to begin after that, a study of the Gospel of Mark on Sunday evening and look at the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and gaze on Him for many months to come.

Tonight, and next week however, I want to really finish our series on systematic theology, by looking at this basic question: Are You Sure: The Certainty of Truth in a Postmodern World?" We live, whether we're willing to admit it or not, in dark and unsettling times. Let me give you a glimpse into that.

In the May 23rd, 2005 issue of Newsweek magazine, George Will, who is the more conservative of Newsweek's columnists, wrote an article entitled, "The Oddness of Everything". Will concluded that article with these words. Listen carefully. "The greatest threat to civility and ultimately to civilization..." Now, immediately, your ears perk up and you think, "*Well, perhaps, he's going to say 'terrorism' or perhaps he's going to say 'economic crash' or some other catastrophe - war.*" But here's what he said: "The greatest threat to civilization is an excess of certitude. The world is much menaced right now by people who think that the world and their

duties in it are clear and simple. They are certain that they know what/who created the universe, and what this creator wants them to do, to make our little speck in the universe perfect.” Now, of course ultimately, he was, or immediately I should say, he was referring to the Islamic extremists over in the Middle East. But he goes on, in the next paragraph, to include all of us as well. And George Will is not alone. There is an increasing note of intolerance for the person who says, *“This is the truth.”*

We’ve just spent four years trying to discern what the Bible teaches about all the crucial doctrines of Scripture - the Bible, God, man, sin, salvation, the church, the future. We have studied in depth what the Scripture has revealed to us. And we have reduced the Bible to a series of propositions and call them, collectively, the truth of God. But, as we finished that study, we have to step back and ask a question that we’re being forced to ask today, and that is: is the entire process, through which we’ve gone, a legitimate exercise? Is it acceptable to call the fruit of our four-year study timeless, eternal, universal truth? Can we, in the end, really be sure of anything? The majority of people in America would argue *“Absolutely not!”*

David Wells, in *Tabletalk* magazine (the little magazine that R.C. Sproul’s ministry puts out), cited the results of two national surveys. In both surveys, Americans were asked a very simple question. Are there moral absolutes? Is there absolute truth that does not change, regardless of the circumstances? When you look at the general population, he made the point that only 22% of the American people thought there were moral absolutes. 64% were relativists - they embraced relativism - *“No, there are no absolutes”*. But it got much worse, if it could, when the questions - the same questions - were asked of teenagers. 83% of those teenagers surveyed, believed that truth is relative - *“There are no moral absolutes”*. 6% only, of America’s teenagers, believed that there is in fact absolute truth. Sadly, even some of those who believe there is absolute truth (in that 6%), would not believe that it could be fully and certainly known.

What I want you to see, tonight, is that we find ourselves in the middle of a paradigm shift. And we can either acknowledge it - and we can reach out to people who’ve embraced the false philosophy, we can be on our guard on behalf of our families, our children, and our churches - or we can stick our head in the sand and ignore it. But it’s not going away.

Anecdotally, recently, I had a conversation myself with a couple of junior high students - a boy and a girl who don't attend our church but whom I met wandering on our campus after school. We had a good discussion, and it was a friendly one. I had an opportunity to share the gospel with them. But, as part of that discussion, I raised the issue of sin. Obviously, if you're going to share the gospel, ultimately you have to go to the issue of sin, even as Nathan was mentioning tonight. And the girl - when I mentioned sin, the girl asked me, "Well, who defines that? Who decides what that is?" And I said, "God does!" And then she asked this question, "What right does God have to make that decision?" I answered her; I explained - I answered her question. I explained that the Bible makes it clear that God created her. Therefore, He... and he sustains her. Therefore, He owns her. He has every right to tell her exactly what she ought to do and how she ought to live. This was her answer to that response: "Yeah, I understand what you're saying, but we can't really know if that's true. There is just no way to be sure what the truth is."

Now, where did she get those ideas? Was that accidental that she stumbled on that herself? Listen. Absolutely not! She didn't stumble on that herself. She is the product of our educational system. You need to be aware and alert to this. There has been a massive change in the mindset of the culture. Over the last 40 years, there has been a paradigm shift about truth. It happened, initially, outside the church - in the culture - but it continues its influence and it now begins to infect the church as well.

Now, this mindset has produced this perspective that believes we are alone in the universe and that the universe itself is empty of meaning. You can see it even at the popular level of entertainment. David Wells writes, very insightfully, "This mood was brilliantly captured in the 1990s television series *Seinfeld* which, by its own reckoning, was a show about nothing but which explored the comic consequences of living in a world that is empty of truth or meaning."

It influences and impacts our culture in a number of ways. But this disturbing mindset has more recently begun to make a huge impact inside the church. In an article that I first read in the November 2004 *Christianity Today*, I was introduced to the ministry of an Emerging Church pastor named Rob Bell and his wife Kristen. I had heard of them before but learned more about

them in this article. He pastors a huge community in Grand Rapids called Mars Hill - huge! The author of the article in *Christianity Today* writes this: “The Bells found themselves increasingly uncomfortable with church. ‘Life in the church had become so small’, Kristen says. ‘It had worked for me for a long time. Then it stopped working.’ The Bells started questioning their assumptions about the Bible itself - ‘discovering **the** Bible as a human product’, as Rob puts it, ‘rather than the product of divine fiat.’ He goes on to say, ‘The Bible is still in the center for us’, Rob says, ‘but it’s a different kind of center. We want to embrace mystery, rather than conquer it. I grew up thinking that we figured out the Bible’, Kristen says, ‘that we knew what it means. Now I had no idea what most of it means. And yet I feel like life is big again - like life used to be black and white, and now it’s in color.’”

Where did that come from? You need to understand that this is a reflection of what’s going on in the culture around us and it is infiltrating the church. This is where the battle is today. The question is no longer “What is truth?” but “Why are you even looking?” The dominant mindset of the age is either a blatant denial of absolute truth or the outright denial that we can ever be sure of what it is.

Now, you understand this, but in contrast to that mindset, the Bible both assumes and teaches that there is an objective, universal, eternal, propositional truth, and that we can know that truth with certainty. The statements I just made would have been almost universally held by the evangelical Christian church until about 40 years ago.

What I want to do tonight and next week is I want to analyze the season or the epic, the time in which we live, the mindset of our age, and how we got here and then what the Bible says about it. And if you’re sitting there thinking this is irrelevant, let me tell you, nothing could be more relevant. If you’re a student, you are faced with this philosophy every day you sit in school. If you are a parent, your children are being taught what I’m going to share with you over the next few minutes. And unless you understand it and understand how to combat it, you will lose your kids to falsehood and error, apart from the grace of God. You grandparents - your grandchildren are being taught the things that I’m about to share with you. This is happening today. And unless you understand it and can deal with it, all is lost. The church, itself, needs to defend itself

against error. Those who love the truth, have to hate error. So, it's very important for us to understand it.

Let's begin with a brief history of ideas - very important for you to see what's happened in the flow of human history. I want to trace, with a brief overview of the historical perspective on knowledge, and how we know what we know. How do we know what we know?

The study of that, the study of knowledge, is called epistemology. It primarily answers two questions: "What is knowledge?" and "How do we know what we know?" or "What is the truth?" and "How do we come to know the truth?" I want to concentrate on that second question: "How is it that we know what we know?"

When you look at human history, there really have only been three eras or stages in the development of how it is we know what we know. The first one we will call premodern epistemology, the second is modern epistemology, and the third is postmodern epistemology. I want to look at each of those in turn. These mark stages through human history of how we have conceived of knowledge and how we know what we know. **Don't be** frightened by the word epistemology. It's nothing more, as I've said here, the study of knowledge - "How do we know what we know?" Let's look at these three stages or movement through human history.

The first I've called the premodern stage. Actually, this is used by a number of authors to describe this very issue. Premodern: basically, from creation through the times of the ancient Greek philosophers and until about 500 years ago, through the 1500s, there was nearly universal agreement that our knowledge depends on divine revelation. Now, there were philosophers that would say that God or the gods revealed themselves through nature, but they would agree that our knowledge is simply a small subset of what God knows, and that He has somehow revealed it to us. That's how we know what we know.

Now, that's where we stand. But for thousands of years, this was the prevailing view - that knowledge or truth was based on the authority of God's revelation and that revelation could come to us **either** in nature, or in the Bible. That's premodern epistemology. That's how people

from creation until the 1500s generally saw how we came to know what was true, what was right. It was through God, or gods if they were pagans, but through divine revelation.

Then we enter a period we'll call the modern period. Near the beginning of the 17th century, the tide turned. An increasing number of intellectuals rejected the idea of authority and revelation as the source of knowledge. We could even say, as some do, that modern epistemology began on a cold day in 1610. Listen to how one author describes the scene: "**It was cold and raw** that day in 1610, when a French mathematician named René Descartes pulled his cloak around him and climbed into the side compartment of a large stove. Descartes had been wrestling for weeks with questions of doubt and reason in his search for some certainty of a philosophical system. As he warmed himself in his stove, his imagination began glowing with the light of reason and he resolved to doubt everything that could possibly be doubted. Hours later, Descartes emerged having determined that there was only one thing he could not doubt, and that was the fact that he doubted. A good day's work! Descartes drew the conclusion, "I think, therefore, I am". And then he went out for a cognac. Descartes' now famous postulate led to the whole new promise for philosophic thought. Man, rather than God, became the fixed point around which everything else resolved. Human reason became the foundation upon which a structure of knowledge could be built. It was a mega shift.

For thousands of years, knowledge and truth had been revealed to man by God. But with Descartes, began a period known as the Enlightenment. It lasted from the early 1600s until the early 1970s. I want you to see that in terms of human history, with premodern epistemology and modern epistemology, we skirted to 1970.

Now, just to understand a little more about modern epistemology - how we know what we know - let me just give you a little feel for what the philosophers of this period said. Descartes said that we come to the truth, not through revelation, but through human reason. That's called rationalism. He said you start with a few self-evident foundational truths (that's called foundationalism), and then you build the rest of what you know on that foundation. Locke came along and he said, no, we acquire knowledge of what is true only through the senses and observation - that's empiricism - only what we see and can observe. Immanuel Kant followed up

these observations with his own. He combined reason and the senses rationalism and empiricism. But with his book “Critique of Pure Reason”, Kant made it fashionable to doubt that we can truly know reality as it is. Knowledge, he said, is really just a matter of interpretation. And that mindset (Kant’s mindset) prevailed until modernism died about 40 years ago.

So, modernity then, this modern epistemology, is the belief that truth exists but the only reliable way to know it is through the scientific method, that is, through the use of reason and the use of the senses - observing what happens in the world with the senses. But ultimately, reason lies at the source of how we know what we know, not revelation - my human reason.

That brings us to the postmodern mindset. It began with the writings of a man named Michel Foucault. And Michel Foucault embraced a fragmented view of reality. As one author summarizes it, “There is no single correct view of the world” - this is what he thought, “but countless views and they’re all right - they’re all correct in their own way.” He really began the mega shift, the earthquake, that became postmodernism.

There were several who had influence. Derrida who said that even words are not... are unpredictable for communication - meanings are always changing, so you can’t really be sure of truth because words don’t really mean anything. They change and there’s no way to be certain of anything. In fact, he even raised doubts about the three foundations of logic that since Aristotle - since they’ve been from the beginning of the world, from God Himself and they can be proven from Scripture - and I won’t take time tonight to do that. But Aristotle recorded them some 2500 years before the Law of Identity: a thing is what it is, “A equals A”. The Law of Non-Contradiction: a proposition and its denial cannot both be true. A cannot be A and non-A at the same time and in the same relationship. And the Law of the Excluded Middle: a proposition must either be true or false. Those are the basic laws on which God built the universe, which He reveals His truth, but those were called into serious question.

Two other philosophers came along in this postmodern construction process - Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish. They both concluded that the meaning of a text... When you read a text, like the Bible or any other book, depends entirely upon your interpretation. There is no meaning in the

text; you give it meaning. Reminds you of the umpire who, when the ball came across the plate and he called it a strike, the players complained and he said, "Listen, it ain't nothing till I call it!" That's the mindset.

But the final plank in the demolition of modernism and the construction of **postmodernism** came from a man named Jean Francois Lyotard, I believe. My French is not very good. He was born, rather, in 1924. This man utterly rejected what he called metanarratives. Now, don't be scared of that word either. He simply said there are no unifying theories of universal meaning. Any overarching explanations of life here, i.e., a Christian worldview, are not the truth but rather simply grow out of religion, conventional philosophy, capitalism, gender - they're somebody's idea, they're not true. As one author said, "Scholars disagree among themselves as to what postmodernism involves, but they have reached a consensus on one point. This phenomenon marks the end of a single universal worldview."

Now, with all that said, what exactly is postmodernism? I think you'll understand this, okay? Stay with me. Postmodernism is nothing more than a label for the prevailing intellectual mood and perspective, currently present in western society - a perspective that began in the 1970s. And you can reduce postmodernism to two very simple beliefs. If you know these two things, you at least have your arms around the bulk of what postmodernism teaches: you can never be certain of the truth if truth exists at all, and there is no universal explanation or metanarrative of meaning. If I could boil it down to its simplest terms, at its heart, postmodernism is a rejection of certainty about anything. You can't know. How do we know what we know? The answer postmodernism gives is you can't. You can't know anything. That's the philosophy as it has grown up in the world around us.

This and these philosophers, whom I've cited tonight, are being taught in our colleges, in our high schools, in our junior high schools. And the teachers who were trained, even down to the elementary level, are inculcating these basic concepts into our children. And we see it all around us. Open your eyes and watch television, read the newspaper, look at magazines - you will see these ideas everywhere.

Now, what about the church? How have they come into the church? Well, they started by coming in academically - through a number of books, through the pens of scholars. The latest and most notable one is, in 2001, Stanley's grandson, John Frankie, wrote a book called "Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern World". In this book they argue that theology is in constant state of change and that no issue should ever be considered as finally settled. You can never be certain about your theology because it's in constant change. The major target of their book: the same thing that George Will targeted and that **secular postmodernism** targets - certitude. You can never be sure.

When you look at popularly how this has expressed itself in the church, it is primarily expressed itself through the Emerging Church movement. Three figures you need to especially be aware of who have written extensively. I mentioned Rob Bell earlier. There are other pastors in the movement, but Brian McLaren is sort of the grandfather of the movement. **His** most notable book, and one that's kind of a manifesto of this postmodernism in the Emergent Church is called "A Generous Orthodoxy". You get the idea, don't you? *Generous orthodoxy* - we can broaden the fence.

Rob Bell - "The Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith". Basically, he says, "Listen, the church has been painted by past generations, but it's like that velvet picture of Elvis, down in my basement. If I never repaint it, then I don't want it on my walls. It becomes outdated, antiquated. Instead, we need to repaint the church so that it doesn't become outdated and outmoded in its **mode** of operation. And this includes about everything."

Donald Miller's book "Blue Like Jazz" - which I don't recommend you read. It's tasteless, vulgar, and otherwise unedifying. But it is very popular in spreading this whole concept of postmodernism in the church.

Now, you say it can't be as bad as what they're talking about secularly. It can. Let's look at the tragic consequences of these ideas as they've infiltrated the church. In 1948, Richard Weaver wrote a book **entitled**, "Ideas Have Consequences". What Weaver was saying is that ideas don't

usually stay ideas. If they're adopted, those ideas can radically transform an entire culture and, tragically, that is exactly what has happened with postmodernism inside the church.

Here are the tragic consequences. Number one: truth is not absolute. Truth, instead, is a trajectory and the Bible merely **maps out** points on that trajectory. Let me give you an illustration of this. Eccentric British theologian, N.T. Wright, who's very popular in America, says that we should think of the Bible like a play - like a play of Shakespeare in which we have four acts, but the fifth act is missing. And so, our job is to interpret the first four acts and together, corporately as the church, to write the fifth act the way it should end. So, we get to right the end of the story. The Bible merely points us in the right direction, but we get to write the end." This, of course, means that I am free to decide what God was ultimately aiming at.

Let me give you an illustration of how this works. Brins and Frankie can say, "Well, take the role of women, for example. The Bible talks a lot about the role of women, but you need to see those things (and this was explained to us very well, I thought, in our conference last year) but you need to see those things as points on a trajectory. In the Old Testament, women weren't treated so well. That's the low end. God was still helping people see how they ought to be treated. In the New Testament they're treated a little better, but they're still forbidden certain activities like teaching men, and preaching in the church, exercising leadership over men in the church." So, that's just another point on the trajectory, but now we have the opportunity to sort of draw a line and connect the dots and see where God was headed. Where God was headed is that they would have full opportunity to do all of those things. And so, we can make that story. We write the fifth act. And we decide what God really intended by connecting the dots. It's okay for women to be pastors. So, truth is not absolute; it's merely a trajectory.

Secondly, the Bible is not about propositional truth. McLaren writes, "None of us want to throw out the Bible. But what we want to do is become more savvy and more aware of our interpretive grids that we bring to the Bible. One good way to think about the Bible for me", he says, "is to think of the Bible as a scrapbook or as memorabilia - the essential documents that tell us the story of people who believed in one true, living, just, holy, loving, merciful God. The Bible (here it is) sets a trajectory; it helps me aim for a continuing trajectory so that we can live in our

day in ways that are pleasing to God and are good for God's dreams for the world." So, the Bible doesn't give us truth; it just tells us a story.

Thirdly, another consequence of how this has infiltrated the church is that no one can claim their interpretation of any truth is certain. Again, McLaren says, "Are there truths related to the faith that we can know, that we can be certain about?" You say, "Well, sure there's salvation. We can be certain about that." No, that's not what McLaren says. He says, "Well, first of all, when we think about the word 'faith' and the word 'certainty', we've got a whole lot of problems there. What do you mean by certainty? What do you mean by 'that woman'? If I could substitute the word 'confidence'", he says, "I'd say, yes, I think there are things that we can be confident about. Certainty can be dangerous. It's a passion to say we might be wrong, and we are always going to stay humble enough to admit that."

So, being certain of an interpretation is proud. Sin becomes subjective. Take homosexuality, for example. I won't read you all the quotes I have but McLaren refuses to say that it's sin. When he's asked that question, he says in one interview, "The thing that breaks my heart is that there's no way I can answer it without hurting someone on either side." And he never answers it. Another time he said, "The issues are not as simple as many people make them sound." Really?

Number five: there is no body of necessary doctrine that must be believed. In a recent book McLaren entitled "The Last Word and the Word After That" he asks his readers to re assess the historical interpretation of hell. He asks them to **reassess** the interpretation of the reason Christ died. He says, "If we think of Christ dying to satisfy the wrath of God, that's equivalent to divine child abuse." "And hell - ", he says, "the traditional view of hell makes God look like a torturer. We have to deemphasize this image of God as a torturer." No body of necessary doctrine that must be believed because you can't know what you know. You can't know that it's true. You see the consequences are serious.

But you need to know that there are churches in our area that embrace these very principles I've put on the PowerPoint tonight. This is not something living off somewhere in an academic world. This is here and now. And that's why I feel it's so important to address it.

I want us, in the few minutes we have remaining, to look at the **biblical** argument for truth. What does the Bible say about the issue of truth? Can these people be right? Listen, the Bible both assumes and teaches that there is objective, universal, eternal, propositional truth.

What exactly is truth? How do you define it? Theologians define truth as the self-expression of God. Or to put it simply, when we speak of truth, we are really identifying two great realities. One, that God has an eternally consistent unchanging nature and two, that God's communications with us always perfectly correspond to that unchanging nature and to reality, as He knows it to be true. Now, look at those definitions. Those are the foundation - bedrock of our faith. God doesn't change. He is eternally consistent. He is true to Himself and to reality.

And secondly, God, when He talks, to us always talks to us plainly and straightly as a reflection of who He is and in accordance with reality as He knows it to be. That means that God's communication to us is objective. Objective. In other words, there is truth that is not determined in my own mind. It's not subjectively determined. The truth stands outside of us. In fact, according to Jesus, it has been revealed to us in a book - what Luther called "the external Word". This is a theme throughout the Scripture.

Listen. In 2 Samuel 7:28 David prays, "Now, O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant." Where do you find the equivocation of postmodernism in that? *Your words are truth.* Psalm 25:4-5: "Make me know Your ways, O Lord; / Teach me Your paths. / Lead me in Your truth and teach me, / For You are the God of my salvation; / For You I wait all the day." Psalm 31:5: "Into Your hand I **commit** my spirit; / You have ransomed me, O Lord, God of truth." *Your very nature is truth.* Psalm 119:160: "The sum of Your word is truth, / And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting." By the way, notice that this is a claim for the truthfulness of what the entire Scripture teaches. Isaiah 65:16: "Because he who is blessed in the earth / Will be blessed by the God of truth." John 17:17: our Lord prays on that night of, before His death, in the great high priestly prayer - "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word [Jesus said] is truth." Acts 26:25: "But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.'"

And, of course, in Romans 1:18-21, we discover that the fundamental problem is not the absence of truth about God. You remember Romans 1? Turn there for a moment. Romans 1:18: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth...” They hold it down. It’s not that there’s no truth, or that it can’t be known. They hide it. They bury it. They hold it down “because [Paul writes, verse 19] that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” You know what Paul is saying? The problem is not with truth. Don’t blame God that you can’t know what the truth is. If you don’t know the truth, it’s because in your sinfulness, along with all of us apart from grace, you have suppressed the truth. You’ve buried it.

2 Corinthians 4:2, Paul says, “but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” Paul says our ministry of the Word is nothing more than opening up or manifesting - revealing the truth to you. That’s my ministry.

2 Corinthians 7:14: “For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth [Paul says]”. 2 Timothy 2:15 (I read it this morning): “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling [notice how he refers to the Bible - as] the word of truth.” The word that sets forth truth. Listen. There is truth. It is objective truth. It is outside of you, and it is outside of me. And it will stand whether you live or die. Whether you embrace it or not, it is true.

Secondly, the Bible teaches that truth is universal. It is not localized and relative to each situation. It’s not true for you but not for me. It’s true to every person, in every circumstance, in every culture, in every place in the universe. It is universal. Our Lord, in Matthew 28 with the Great Commission, told His disciples, “*I want you to go make disciples of all the nations. Go*

around the world.” This was the great charter of evangelism. He says, “I want you to make disciples, I want you to baptize them, and I want you to teach them to observe everything I commanded you.” He said, “Listen, my truth isn’t just for these backward Jewish people here in Israel and the first century, but we need to expand that a bit for the bright Greeks over there in Athens.” He says, “No, My truth is true and it’s what I want you to teach wherever you go. It’s universal - not restricted by place or by time.” Acts 1:8, right before His ascension, He says, “You’re going to receive power. I want you to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria. And I want you to take this message to the remotest part of the earth.” And they’ve done that, haven’t they, with the Scriptures? The apostles have taken their message everywhere in the inhabited world.

In Romans 1:13 and 6:13-16 - I won’t take you there because of time. There, Paul says, *“Listen, the message I preach is good for Jews and it’s good for Gentiles. It’s good for Jews and it’s good for Greeks. There’s nobody excluded. Everybody is included. What I’m telling you”, Paul says, “is for everyone.”* The truth of the gospel is universal in its application.

But it isn’t just true of the gospel. It’s true of other things as well. The law of God is universal according to Romans 2:12-16. Some people have the law written. Other people have it written - the substance of it written in their hearts. But every man universally understands the truth of the law of God. God has made sure of it. Romans 3 says, not only Jews, but also Greeks are under sin. There is none righteous, not even one. The doctrine of sin governs everyone. It’s universal. God’s truth is universal.

Thirdly, it is eternal. It is eternal. It doesn’t change. It cannot change. Psalm 119:89 says, *“Forever, O Lord, / Your word is settled in heaven.”* It was true in eternity past. It was true when it was written. It is just as true today. And a billion years from now, it will still be true. The truth is not a trajectory, a moving target, it is forever settled in heaven. Psalm 119:152: *“Of old I have known from Your testimonies / That You have founded them forever.”* The last part of Psalm 119:160 says, *“...every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.”* Our Lord, in Matthew 24:35 said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away [we’ve studied this over the last few*

weeks], but My words will not pass away.” They’re eternal. 1 Peter 1:25: “‘But the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this is the word which was preached to you.” It’s eternal.

It’s propositional. The truth is not a narrative. It’s not a story. It’s contained in propositions. You see, postmodernism hates truth propositions. What is a proposition? It’s simply an idea framed as a logical statement that affirms or denies something and it is expressed in such a way that it must be either true or false. That’s a proposition. Constantly, the Scripture writers give us propositions. The exact phrase is something like this: we know that [you fill in the blank]. That’s a proposition. They’re affirming truth propositions. They are making propositions.

For example, Romans 3:19: “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God.” Romans 7:14: “For we know that the Law is spiritual...” Romans 8:28: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good...” 1 Corinthians 8:4: “...we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.” 2 Corinthians 5:1: “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house [our body] is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

This is the message of the New Testament. And here’s the key point: we can know this objective, universal, eternal, propositional truth with certainty. Luke 1. Luke begins his gospel by saying, “...it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.” Sound like uncertainty there?

Ephesians 5:5: “For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 1 Timothy 4:3: “men [speaking of false teachers] who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.” You can know the truth. You can be certain of the truth.

You find it again in 1 Peter 1: “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold... but with precious blood [of Christ].” 1 John 2:3: “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.” By the way, I love this verse because it combines propositional knowledge - “we know that” - with personal knowledge - “we have come to know Him” - with experiential knowledge - “if we keep His commandments”. 1 John 3:2: “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” 1 John 5:13: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

What I want you to see is that there is truth, that has been revealed by God. It is objective truth. It is universal truth. It is eternal truth. And it has been revealed to us in propositions, where we can know with certainty that they are true.

How do we respond to the spirit of our age? In closing, turn to Romans 12. Romans 12. I read it this morning. Look at it again in this context. Romans 12:2: “*Don’t be conformed to the mindset of your age. Don’t let the mindset of your age push you into its mold but rather “be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that is, with the truth of God revealed in Scripture.* That’s how we’re to respond.

It was in the early 1900s that **G.K.** Chesterton wrote a famous passage about the retreat from truth in his day. And it’s just as true now, as it was then. He wrote these words: “What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition and settled upon the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth. This has been exactly reversed. We are on the road to producing a race of men too minimally modest to believe in the multiplication table.”

God has spoken. Are you sure? The Bible says we can be. Next week we’ll look at the testimony more specifically of our Lord.

Let's pray together.

Father thank You for Your gracious gift to us of the truth. Father, help us to defend it. Help us to teach it, to love it, to proclaim it, to teach our children. And help us to hate error. Father, I pray that You would help us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds with the truth, so that we're not conformed to the mindset of our age. Father, give us wisdom to guard our own hearts, hearts of those we love, from this insidious error that has even snuck into the church itself. Your Word, our God, is truth. Help us to love it, to defend it, and to live it. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen!