

173 “What is truth?”

It's John's turn to challenge me today, and I do appreciate having such wonderful friends who, I don't doubt, are praying for me, especially if you're concerned that I might be leading us all into error. Please don't stop challenging me!

John wonders how the Holy Spirit could inspire the OT writers to write something that was intrinsically not true. So my email one-liner (he's just off on holiday/retreat for a week) was to ask what **kind** of truth did he think God was wanting us to know, absorb, love, live out?

His answer was: “How can you have a ‘kind’ of truth?” Good question, and suddenly another article is initiated... Off the top of my head, could there be things like scientific truth, legal truth, logical truth, religious truth, relational truth, truth of character, personal truth? Indeed, could Truth be a person?!

My other thought was: can you have degrees of truth, or is everything either true or false? Can something be more/less true? e.g. “Is that a true likeness?” or “That's true to some extent.”

Christians can tend to be too dualistic – we think of things as simply true or false, right or wrong – and as a result we can sometimes tie ourselves in logical knots, e.g. are we predestined/chosen or do we have the freedom to choose? Maybe that's something for another day: can two logical opposites both be true?

I've been greatly helped by Derek Flood's *Healing the Gospel*,^[50–54,57] he's a film-maker, and he made the point that we can come out from watching a good film, having been powerfully affected, changed even. How can that be true if it was a made-up story? Flood's claim is that God's concern is mainly to give us each a change of heart – well, probably a series of changes – so why shouldn't God use a “made-up story” to effect change?

Indeed, the section of Scripture that has most powerfully affected me this past few years is Jesus' parable of the prodigal father, a “made-up story” that has profoundly affected my view of God.

OK, I know that's a different issue from saying that some bits of the Old Testament are actually in error (I'll come back to this, don't worry), but it's important to acknowledge that there are different ways of conveying truth.

The words of the Bible (in the original languages, anyway) don't change, but our (translation and) interpretation most certainly does, e.g. most Christians (but not all!) now believe that the universe was **not** created about 6000 years ago, but is a lot older. Science has made us realise that we've been over-literal in our interpretation of the Genesis creation accounts. I don't have a problem with humankind's increasing knowledge (all of which ultimately comes from God) forcing me to rethink my interpretation of Scripture.

Finally, an important part of biblical interpretation is deciding what is the **purpose** of a given section of Scripture, so maybe you could think about: “What is the primary purpose of the Old Testament?”