

Nothing but the Truth
Rick Ezell

“They perish because they refused to love the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:10 NIV).

Picture a courtroom. Now envision a woman standing before judge and jury, placing one hand on the Bible and the other in the air, and making a pledge. For the next few minutes, with God as her helper, she will “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

She is a witness. Her job is not to expand upon nor dilute the truth. Her job is to tell the truth. Leave it to the attorneys to interpret, the jury to resolve, the judge to apply. The witness simply speaks the truth—the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

We are not very good at telling the truth. Diogenes would have a tough time in America today. The legendary Greek who sought for an honest man would be hard pressed to find many. One survey revealed that 30% of those consulted admitted that they would cheat on their taxes—to a point. The assumption is that a huge lie is more likely to be audited than a small one. That same survey reported that 64% agreed with the statement, “I will lie when it suits me, so long as it doesn’t cause any real damage.” Another survey indicated that about one out of three people admits to deceiving a best friend about something within the last year. And nearly half predict that if they scratched another car in the parking lot, they would drive away without leaving a note.”

We don’t like the truth. Our motto is *You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you squirm*. My dislike for the truth began at an early age when my mother came home from work and asked, “Did you clean your room, like I asked?” I realized then that honesty had its consequences. So I learned to cover things up.

“Did I clean my room? That all depends on how one interprets the word *clean*. I moved things around and I suppose compared to a room with a dirt floor mine is pretty clean. Everything is relative, anyway.”

We don’t like the truth because it reveals something about our character, our performance, and our relationships. So we cover it up. We justify. We rationalize.

While we may not like the truth, it is not fun; it is just what we need. Bill Gates writing in his book *Business @ the Speed of Thought*, says, “The willingness to hear hard truth is vital not only for CEOs of big corporations but also for anyone who loves the truth. Sometimes the truth sounds like bad news, but it is just what we need.”

We’ve replaced truth with tolerance as culture’s absolute. Tolerance has replaced truth as the cardinal virtue, the absolute, of our society. Most of us grew up with the definition of tolerance that means simply to recognize and respect the beliefs, practices, and so forth of others without necessarily agreeing or sympathizing with them. It is the attitude that everyone has a right to his or her own opinions.

Today, tolerance considers everyone's beliefs, values, lifestyle, and truth claims as being equally valid. So not only does everyone have an equal right to his beliefs, but also all beliefs are equal. The new tolerance goes beyond respecting a person's rights; it demands praise and endorsement of that person's beliefs, values, and lifestyle. James Montgomery Boice has observed, "Today there is a blatant hostility toward anyone who claims to know any ultimate truth, particularly truth rooted in religion."

We have cheapened truth. The very concept of truth is escaping vast numbers of souls in our society. People are apt to say "something may be true for you but not true for me" in the same way that one person likes chocolate ice cream while another prefers vanilla.

According to this view, truth is cheap—as easy and as fickle as an instant opinion. Subjectivity reigns supreme, free from the grip of reason and evidence. A recent poll indicates that 66% of Americans believe that "there is no such thing as absolute truth." For those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five the number rises to 72%. Far too many have reduced truth to personal preference—and thereby lost entirely.

Everyone may be entitled to his or her own opinion, but no one is entitled to his or her own truth. Truth can be received, ignored, or rejected, but it cannot be created by the likes of mere mortals.

We must pursue the truth. Alexander Solzhenitsyn was right when he observed, "Many of you have already found out, and others will find out in the course of their lives, that truth eludes us if we do not concentrate with total attention on its pursuit." Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us: "The greatest homage we can pay to truth is to use it."

Let's start today telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

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