

*“What is truth?”* – John 18:38 (fragment)

Francis Bacon calls him “jesting Pilate” who “would not stay for an answer.” In John’s Gospel “What is truth?” ends the encounter between the Roman Governor and the Christ who has just asserted he is “witness to the truth.”

Is Pilate jesting or simply making an observation? In that place and with his powers “truth” was his to determine. Likely he would also have been familiar with the prevailing sophistic philosophies of his era, “truth” lay not in the merits or facts, but in the best arguments, the best presentation.

Or perhaps Pilate observed something darker; by asking “What is truth?” his ironic response to Jesus is that “truth” does not exist.

The philosophers of our present day warn and sometimes celebrate that we are in a time of “Post Truth.” The most careful language proves innately slippery, to the point that attempting basic regulation, for example, requires the writing of many books. Counterfactual information frequently prevails. Our preferences were studied by psychology, first to sell us things, then to sell us ideas, then “to manufacture consent.” What is “true” is replaced with what is found to be not illegal. The definitions have changed. Is “truth” even necessary? Is deceit the primary human interaction?

I suspect that one lesson of the pandemic crisis is that to live in a “Post Truth” world is particularly dangerous. Some of those we should and need to rely on have, through repeated small and large deceits, lost all credibility.

In such a time examining what we as Christians believe may help. We profess that there is “Truth” (Christ identifies himself as the truth in [John 14:6](#)) and also a need for “truth” (speaking what is right). In the Old Testament (e.g., [Psalm 45:4](#), [Proverbs 12:17-19](#), [Isaiah 59:14](#)) the idea of truth is linked to good character and a sense of justice. Truth is also associated with the revealed ways of the Lord.

In the New Testament John’s Gospel repeatedly asserts truth as the good news and as aspects of Jesus ([John 14:6](#)), the Spirit ([John 15:26](#)), and the word of God ([John 17:17](#)).

It is in the pastoral letters of the New Testament that we find repeated urgings that a Christian is to value, guard and stay with truth. This is not only a warning against turning away to the arguments of false teachers (e.g., [2 Timothy 4:4](#), [2 Peter 2:2](#)) but there is also a celebration of living and relating in truth (e.g., [1 Timothy 2:4](#), [1 John 3:18](#)).

Consider doing a Bible word search on “truth”. I think you will find the concept repeated and essential. In these days when our world dangerously redefines the idea of truth, we may do well to ground ourselves in this essential, the revealed Truth (which is the Gospel) and also the truth that seeks justice and says trustworthy things.