

How Do Christians Come to a Knowledge of the Truth?

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Does Bible understanding come through revelation or through scholarship? Was the Church of God led into truth, or was it led into error? Are doctrinal changes manifestations of new truth—or a rejection of divine revelation? This article will answer these questions and show you how Christians come to a knowledge of the truth.

For over forty years, the Church of God accepted and believed what came through divine revelation. It believed doctrine was inspired by the Holy Spirit. That is no longer being taught. We read, in the *Good News* magazine, "Jesus explained to His disciples that the purpose of the Holy Spirit was to lead them into more and more truth. . . . This is a progressive, continuing process. Each generation of true Christians is led into new avenues of spiritual insight and understanding" (*Good News*, May 1976, "What Do You Mean—God Doesn't Change?").

Many Doctrinal Changes

Although smaller and seemingly insignificant changes began to occur even very early after the initial revelation, it was not until 1973 that more visible and significant doctrinal changes took place within the Church of God. "Minor" changes occurring before 1973 included the land sabbath, although this was not officially rewritten until later. Others included birthday celebrations and make-up. In 1974, major changes included Pentecost and divorce-and-remarriage. Many other official, as well as unofficial, changes followed in subsequent years.

Unbelievably, we are told, "It should be pointed out, by way of qualification, that the teaching of God in terms of His written revelation has remained static for nearly two thousand years. . . . What has changed is the Church's understanding of the meaning and application of those words! . . . These adjustments in teaching in no way change the truth of God" (*Good News*, May 1976, "What Do You Mean—God Doesn't Change?").

This statement is an oblique admission they believed the Church of God was in doctrinal error and that it was not led by the Holy Spirit! The doctrinal changes which began to be visible to the membership in 1973–1974 were not adjustments or progressive additions to truth. They were radical departures from what the Church of God once believed!

Basis for Doctrinal Changes

At a Senior Pastors' Meeting in January 1975 a member of the doctrinal committee stated that God's church did not have Greek and Hebrew scholars, therefore Mr. Armstrong "dug out what truths he could." But now we have scholars who are capable researchers, and they have found many of our doctrines to be in error.

So now, we are told, truth is ascertained through research and scholarship.

In agreement with this concept are these statements in *The Bulletin*: "Inspiration and revelation are not substitutes for knowledge, but companions to it. . . . Our basic understanding depends on scholarship. . . . The changes in both instances [divorce-and-remarriage and make-up] involved questions of scholarship to a considerable degree" (*The Bulletin*, October 21, 1975).

But is this true?

What Is Truth?

A principle once believed by God's people is that the Bible is the foundation of all knowledge. *The American College Dictionary* defines truth as conformity to fact or reality. There should be no contradiction, then, between Bible truth and secular truth. True knowledge must be factual, real, and in agreement with the Bible.

There are, of course, various areas of truth. There is scientific truth as well as historical truth. There is philosophical truth (all uninspired religions should be included here). And there is spiritual truth. Great vanity and pride are often attached to any or all of these fields of knowledge by those who have attained "superior enlightenment." But, in most secular areas of truth there is general disagreement with what is called Biblical truth. One or the other, or both, must be wrong. For, to be true, scientific, historical, and philosophical truth must agree with spiritual truth!

There are renowned scholars in all these fields, yet their "academic superiority" has not enabled them to harmonize secular knowledge with spiritual truth. In spite of mankind's scientific, historical, or philosophical achievements, the world is no closer to happiness and peace than it ever was. The truth of the matter is that man is incapable of achieving true spiritual enlightenment, either in knowledge or in practical application, apart from divine revelation!

What Is Spiritual Truth?

When Jesus stood before Pilate, He said, ". . . Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18:37). So Jesus knew there was truth—and He was specifically referring to spiritual truth!

Of Jesus, John wrote, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Of Himself, Jesus said, ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ." (John 14:6). Speaking to His disciples, Jesus said, ". . . ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Jesus asked the Father to "Sanctify them [the disciples] through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Jesus was that Logos, or Spokesman, who came from God the Father (John 1:1–2, 14; 3:34), to confirm God's message—His Truth. That Truth had been, for generations, recorded and preserved by the prophets and righteous men of the Old Testament (II Pet. 1:21). Now was the time to "fill it full"—*pleroo* in Greek (Matt. 5:17, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Arndt and Gingrich, p. 677). For Jesus came to ". . . magnify the law, and make it honourable" (Isa. 42:21). Thus, the New Testament writings were added to the Canon as permanently recorded truth.

But how does modern man view that truth?

Liberal Concept of Truth

Modern educators do not believe or teach that truth is permanent. Modern education, saturated with the liberal ideology, has accepted the liberal concept of truth. Truth, to a liberal, is that knowledge which can be discovered by reason and science. Truth is the present consensus of scientific opinion and that which is accepted and believed by the democratic majority. There is no permanent truth apart from those areas science has discovered to be unalterable. Therefore, divine revelation—or that which is permanent truth revealed by God in the Bible—is looked upon as myth. Liberals believe anyone foolish enough to accept the Bible to be God's inspired word and who attempts to live accordingly suffers from some form of mental weakness.

The Bible Rejected

Thus, the Bible is rejected as a source of authority in setting moral standards or in defining right from wrong. Situational ethics is the method for judging conduct and all principles are subject to that which is presently accepted and practiced by society.

Accordingly, the Bible is not the inspired Word of God. It is of no value except those portions which contain historical information or are of inspirational value. No wonder God

says through the prophet Isaiah, "Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil is accounted mad [margin]: and the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment" (Isa. 59:15).

How Truth Is Ascertained

There are those fields of knowledge in which truth can be discovered by science and reason. No one should refute authenticated scientific knowledge or scientific achievements. While some of these achievements have questionable value as far as the good of mankind is concerned, they nevertheless illustrate man's capacity to observe and collect facts, then to put this information together into the form of a specific belief.

Philosophical reasonings are not always wrong, though some are absurd. (For example, Zeno's paradox "proves" change and motion impossible. At a given moment, an arrow must be either where it is or where it is not. But it cannot be where it is not. And if it is where it is, then it must be motionless.) Some conclusions and observations have been valuable. When philosophy confines itself to the mundane sphere of natural philosophy, the mental exercise can be stimulating. The author who said, "Men reason and men reason well," should have confined his praises to those philosophers who have limited their attention to that which can be discovered by science and reason. But men have not limited their speculations to that which they can discover. They have reasoned and formulated conclusions in those areas which they are incapable of discovering. They have delved into that which can only be known through divine revelation. And having rejected divine revelation, they have reached horrendous conclusions (Rom. 1:19–32).

Man must realize his philosophical limitations and confine his reasoning capability to that which is tangible, observable, and real. When he delves into moral philosophy (which is revealed by God) or metaphysical philosophy (which is guesswork), he is completely beyond his proficiency.

Spiritual truth can come only through divine revelation! There is no other way! It cannot be discovered by science and reason. True, correct spiritual conclusions can be drawn relative to creation and established physical laws (Rom. 1:20), but these should serve to make man seek God and impel him to correlate his life within the framework of the spiritual laws set in motion by that God (Psa. 19:7–11). But the moment man begins to think he has the capability to decide *what* spiritual laws he will accept and *what* is best for him to obey, he goes off into frightful aberrations (Rom. 1).

Truth, Not Error, Revealed

Jesus said those who truly worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). That truth was revealed to mankind (Deut. 29:29) and has been here on this earth for many generations (Psa. 100:5). The God who revealed that truth is a God of truth (Deut. 32:4, Psa. 31:5). He does not reveal error! The only legitimate basis for spiritual truth is divine revelation (John 14:26, I Cor. 2:9–14). But whether or not it is accepted by mankind has no bearing on its validity! The world for centuries did not believe the earth revolved around the sun. Galileo was forced, under the threat of persecution, to publicly denounce his astronomical discoveries regarding such, but that did not make the facts any less true. And modern education's rejection of divine revelation as permanent truth does not make it otherwise!

Can Truth Be Changed?

Conclusions have been changed or altered in scientific and historical fields when scholars have discovered error, albeit sometimes reluctantly. Followers of Aristotle, who said heavy stones fall faster than light ones, bitterly opposed facts proving all stones fall at the same rate of speed. Faulty conclusions have been corrected when the evidence has shown a necessity. In these areas, there was a legitimate need to change what was thought to be truth. What was called truth, what was believed truth, was proven otherwise. This, of course, is due to human imperfection. Man is subject to error and to erroneous conclusions. He has at times been careless in his research. In many cases, what was called truth is no longer regarded as truth. Thus, the development of the liberal concept that there is no permanent truth.

Sound scientific observations and conclusions do not change. But to take the concept that secular truth is subject to change and apply it to spiritual truth is one of the great errors of the twentieth century! Any religious organization which believes "progressive insight" legitimately alters divine truth might as well be honest and admit it did not have the truth in the first place!

Spiritual Truth Is Unchanging

Spiritual truth—that which comes through divine revelation—cannot be changed (II John 1:2, Psa. 146:6; 100:5). God does not change (Mal. 3:6, Heb. 13:8), and His Truth does not change. (Write for our articles, *Doctrinal Changes—How They Affect You*, and *What Does the Bible Teach about Change?*)

But what do we mean by change?

Jesus came to ". . . magnify the law, and make it honourable" (Isa. 42:21). He came to "fill it full," to show its complete spiritual application in relationship to God and man (Matt. 5–7). His magnification of God's law did not water down, abrogate, or lessen it. The adjustments Jesus made placed a greater spiritual requirement upon man than ever before. The Sermon on the Mount did not repudiate God's law. It expanded and magnified it!

When doctrinal-committee members of the Worldwide Church of God say, ". . . These adjustments in teaching in no way change the truth of God" (*Good News*, May 1976, "What Do You Mean—God Doesn't Change?"), they are clouding the fact that they have repudiated church doctrine! And what has been officially changed is only the tip of the iceberg. Church members have been led to believe the church really has not changed that much, but many older members know it is not the same church into which they were baptized!

How Does God Reveal Truth?

Romans, chapter 1, tells us God reveals Himself by creation (Rom. 1:20), but this is only one aspect. God has given man His inspired Word in the form of the Old and New Testaments. But access to that inspired record does not necessarily convey spiritual truth to any individual. There must be inspiration from God, directly and indirectly to the individual, before he can understand spiritual truth!

The Bible tells us God's recorded word came to us through holy men inspired by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21). It was originally written in Hebrew and Greek (with some portions in Chaldee and Aramaic). The educated scribes, lawyers, and doctors of law were not capable of understanding what it meant (John 3:9, Matt. 15:14). Even Christ's own disciples could not understand the recorded word. It took the divine intervention of Christ in order for them to comprehend! (Luke 24:45). It is by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Christians become capable of understanding spiritual truth (John 16:13). Those called, who truly seek to do God's will, will have no difficulty understanding spiritual truth and the true doctrine (John 7:16–17). God then provided a commissioned ministry, led of that same spirit, to teach the Truth of God to those called (1 Cor. 1:21, Rom. 10:14).

Divine revelation, then, is threefold. First, inspiration by the Holy Spirit to holy men who faithfully recorded God's word, second, inspiration by the Holy Spirit to the individual in order to open the mind to that revelation, and third, the appointment of faithful ministers to proclaim and expound that truth. It is by the Holy Spirit that God reveals spiritual truth (I Cor. 2:9–14). Truth does not come through scholarship and human reasoning (II Cor. 10:5). Scholarship, and especially study (II Tim. 2:15), have their place—but they are not the basis for spiritual truth. The basis for spiritual truth is divine revelation through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit! The fact is, many brilliant theologians and scholars are in utter darkness as to the true meaning of God's word (Matt. 11:25, I Cor. 1:23–29).

To Whom Is Truth Revealed?

It is God's desire that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4). But this is not the time God is trying to save the world (II Cor. 6:2, I Tim. 2:5–6). It was only to the prophets and holy men of old that God made His Truth known. Later, Christ and the apostles were chosen to convey the New Covenant Truth (Heb. 1:2, Eph. 3:5). This was the foundation for the New Testament church (Eph. 2:20) which was the instrument used of God to convert many (Acts 2:39–41, 47; 4:4; 5:14). But each individual was called by God through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44) and given spiritual understanding (I Cor. 2:14). It is humanly impossible to come to proper understanding of spiritual truth apart from God's Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:9–10). Worldly understanding about the Bible and the subsequent attempt to formulate spiritual truth apart from the guidance of God's Holy Spirit is utter futility (Col. 2:8, I Cor. 3:18–19).

God's Spirit does not inspire or lead into error (John 16:13). God's Spirit is called the Spirit of truth (John 14:16–17, 26). Therefore, any departure from revealed truth cannot be by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And any individual called of God, led to truth through God's Holy Spirit, will not commence his Christian life in error.

Foundational truth must be understood at the time a work begins. How else could anyone be converted? The truth was initially revealed to Israel (Heb. 4:2). From that time Israel was obliged to live by that revelation. Further, Christ brought the Truth to the twelve apostles who, with Himself, formed the commencement of the New Testament church (John 7:16; 8:28, I John 1:1–5; 2:24–27). Next, Paul was called for a special mission. He was taught foundational truth before Christ commissioned him (Gal. 1:11–12, 16–17, I Cor. 15:3; 11:2).

The people chosen of God received this revelation (I Thess. 2:13). They had no doubts! Today people who have lost faith challengingly say, "At what point in time did we have the truth?" Amazing! No one had doubts at the time of conversion. Why? Because each was doing the will of God from the heart (John 7:17; 8:47). The truth is obvious. That foundational knowledge necessary for salvation was given at the beginning of the work! Is it not strange that divine revelation was questioned only because of defects and inadequacies later found in human leaders?

Finally, no one questions additional revelation. But this additional revelation *cannot* repudiate the initial foundational truth. It only adds to the original fund of knowledge. As Peter said (II Pet. 3:18), ". . . grow in grace [add thereto], and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." All added knowledge must be Scriptural (Ph'p. 3:15). It cannot be revealed truth and at the same time be contrary to the written Word. How different from what has happened in our time!

There are areas in which a newly begotten Christian needs to grow, but it does not take forty years to arrive at foundational knowledge necessary for salvation!

Either we were led by the Holy Spirit into the correct doctrine when we were first called, or we have never been converted! If we did not know the truth until 1973 and 1974 and after, we have never been in the true Church of God, and we have never known the truth!

Or, what is now called truth, under the guise of doctrinal change, is a departure from God's revealed truth—and God's people have gone off into despicable error. It is one or the other!

Can We Be Sure?

How can we be sure God's Church had the true doctrine in the past?

First of all, Jesus said the true faith would be found on the earth when He returns (Luke 18:8), albeit rare (implied).

Next, He promised His true disciples would be actively engaged in His work at the time of His return (Matt. 10:23; 24:44–46).

Furthermore, Jesus said He would not forsake His church, and that included up to "the consummation of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

Then, Jesus prayed for those who were to follow chronologically the time period of the apostles, illustrating the continuity of truth (John 17:18–20).

In addition, prophecies clearly show there would be true believers joined together in the common cause during a time of great trial near the close of this age (Dan. 12:3, 10, Mal. 3:16–18).

And finally, there was to be an apostasy just prior to Christ's return (II Thess. 2:1–3). Note here, the Greek *apostasia* has been mistranslated "falling away" in verse 3. This cannot mean a "falling away" from a church. Apostasy can mean only an abandonment of the Truth!

So, the Bible makes it clear God's Truth would be here on the earth in the latter days and there would be those who obeyed it, as well as large numbers who would repudiate it. One cannot repudiate what one never knew.

Fruits of God's Truth

No converted member of God's Church, who attended services for any length of time prior to 1972, can deny his Christian experience. He cannot forget the transformation which took place in his own life, as well as in the lives of others. He cannot forget the excitement of learning God's Truth; the joy, the love, the dedication observed. He cannot forget the wonderful fellowship, the bond of unity, the love for one another. This was not happenstance or accidental. He had God's Truth, and he knew it. He saw the tremendous blessings of growth, the changed lives, the miraculous healings, the personal blessings received. He knew God existed. He knew God's Word was inspired and he knew he understood the Truth. The fruit which was produced in his own life, and in the lives of others, provided abundant proof of God's true way of life (Matt. 7:20, John 7:17). He understood that way of life and followed it.

But something happened.

Personal Responsibility

God's people forgot their personal responsibility to Him. They allowed their loyalty to God, by His call to repentance and conversion, to be transferred to a work, to a physical organization, and to fallible men who were prophesied to depart from revealed truth (II Thess. 2:3).

It is God who calls us to a knowledge of His Truth (John 6:44). While the church was the instrument used to preach that Truth, the church itself rejected and turned from it. For, the doctrine which is taught and believed today by the Worldwide Church of God is not the doctrine into which we were baptized, (for those baptized well before 1974). Will you, like the Jews in Jesus' day, seek approval from men more than honor from God? (John 5:43–44). Will you place loyalty to a religious organization before loyalty to God?

God is going to hold each of us accountable for carelessly assuming that whatever is done by a physical organization has God's approval! How can one profess to believe God's Truth, then repudiate it with the flimsy arguments offered by a doctrinal committee? If you want to know the truth concerning these doctrinal changes, and if you are a man or woman of conviction and courage, then write for our articles, *The Doctrine of Divorce and Remarriage—How and Why It Was Changed!*, *The Truth about Marriage and Divorce, Why a Monday Pentecost?* and *The Doctrine of Pentecost—How and Why It Was Changed!*

May God give you the strength and courage to always put His Truth above doctrines of men (Mark 7:9), and to act now—before it is too late.