



## TIME OF GRACE®

### Whose Truth do I Trust? The Church's Truth?

#### Study Notes

#### Summary

If our hearts can deceive us and the world can mislead us, certainly the church is a good source of truth. Well . . . maybe. Since the hearts of church leaders can be deceived and many people can follow their teaching, God wants us to be people who cling to his Word, respectfully listening and diligently testing those who claim to speak the truth. John urged and the Bereans modeled this word-first search for truth.

- John 17:17: Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
- Church Truth? \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 1 John 3:19,20: <sup>19</sup>This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: <sup>20</sup>If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.
- Church Truth? \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - Acts 20:30: Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.
  - Acts 17:10,11: <sup>10</sup>As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. <sup>11</sup>Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

#### Points to Ponder

1. Do you bring a Bible to church? Consider starting this new habit, and make sure to take notes in the margins so you recall more of the Word as you continue to grow in your faith.
2. Evaluate: A Life Group without open Bibles is more of a social club than a sanctified community?

3. Scroll through the sermon series from the past few years at [timeofgrace.org](http://timeofgrace.org). Are there any topics that we appear to have avoided, perhaps out of a desire to stay comfortable? If so, email us your thoughts.
  
4. Some Christians believe we should be very cautious when asking for offerings in church. Others believe we should be unashamed, since joyful giving is a constant theme in the Bible. Where do you stand? Which Bible passages back up your opinion?
  
5. Do you know your next-door neighbors? If not, make time to introduce yourself and get to know them each by name. (Hint: Fresh-baked cookies are the best icebreakers.)

### **Homework for Next Week**

Read John 6

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Whose Truth Do You Trust? The Church's Truth?**  
John 17:17, 1 John 3:19-20, Acts 20:30, Acts 17:10-11  
February 18, 2024

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

For a couple weeks here, we have been talking about truth and we have been talking about trust. Because no matter where you come from and what your background, I'm sure you can agree that truth matters. That false news, being deceived, being lied to, all that stuff can mess with your life. But if you can find the truth, you know what to do. And to quote Jesus, if you can find the truth, it will set you free.

And so, we've kind of been methodically searching for truth over the past few weeks. We've been looking in here. We've been looking out there. We've been asking, should I trust my truth? Should I go with my gut? Should I do what I feel is best? Should I trust their truth? Should I listen to my friends? To our culture. To my parents. To my professors. And what we've kind of learned throughout these past few weeks is that the answer is, maybe or maybe not. And it's good to take advice from people and if our parents say this and our friends say that. But all of us too could think of whole groups that kind of strayed away from God's design. Lord knows that history has 1,000 examples of that. So, my truth, your truth, their truth, the answers have been maybe but maybe not.

And that's why every week we've been talking about this topic, we've come back to one verse. It's this really short thing that Jesus said. Some of you memorized these words from John 17. He was praying and He said to His father, "Father sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." If that's true and this book contains the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth who better in this room right now to trust than me.

Now if you'd ask God that question, should I trust the church? If you're taking notes in your program, here's what God might say to you to start the conversation. He would say, maybe. Write that down if you would. He'd say trust the church. Maybe. And here's why.

Let's imagine for a second, God forbid, that you're diagnosed with a very serious and deadly form of cancer and you knew that it was treatable. They had caught it in time but you needed the best path to cure this cancer. My question is, if that much was riding on it, your life or your death, whose truth would you trust? Would you trust yourself to cure it? I mean it's your body, you know your body best, right? Would you just reach out to your three closest friends? They had a biology class back in what, freshmen, sophomore year. Would they know what to do? No, I have a hunch. If really your life was on the line, you would turn as fast as you could to a specialist. Right?

You would find in your community, maybe your state, maybe across state lines to find the person with the most education and the most experience in that thing. Right? If there's someone who had spent like all of her college years and then all of med school, all of grad school studying how cancer works. And then after that not with just a patient or two but dozens if not hundreds for years if not decades. I bet you would default to all that education and all that experience because your life matters.

Anyone see where I'm going with this? Alright, so if your eternal life matters, if the connection you have with God and your spiritual situation is not just for these 70 or 80 years but it's for eternity, who should you trust? Yourself? Who knows your soul better than you? Your best friends? You know they're pretty spiritual. They went to church growing up. Some of them have prayed passionately for years. Or is it possible that you should trust a specialist. Someone that didn't just take a class or go to Christmas and Easter services back in the day; but spent years upon years upon years upon years studying this one thing. And then ministering to not one or two but dozens if not hundreds if not thousands.

And I realize I'm making some of you uncomfortable. But guess who in this room is near the top of that list. Pastor Michael. Yeah, he's older than I am. But the pastors, right? I'm really not boasting when I say this but after high school Pastor Michael and I spent four years in college studying the Bible. We had a very narrowly focused education. We honestly fear like if we weren't pastors what marketable skills do we have? Because it was Bible, Bible, Bible, Bible. We took semester after semester of Greek so we could read the New Testament in its original language. And then semester after semester, year after year learning Hebrew reading it backwards so we could read the Old Testament in its original language. And after those four years were done guess what we did? More school. Four more years of grad school. More Greek. More Hebrew. More Bible. More Bible. After that was done, I continued six more years to get an advanced degree. Guess what it was in? Bible. And every single day of my 14-year career there has been one book that has sat on my desk and it has never been put on a shelf. It has never collected dust because it gets opened every single day, almost every single hour. And that book is, it's the Bible. And for the past 25 years when I go home from my job, I don't play soccer every day. I don't even talk to my wife and kids every day but guess who I do talk to every day? The God who wrote this book.

So, if you're willing to believe that Jesus was correct. Your word Father, is truth. Then maybe, maybe, maybe, as controversial as this seems of all the people in this room you should trust me. Now for some of you that's super awkward. And I'm going to talk about that in just a second. But actually, as I look out at some of the faces here today, some of you know that that is not a scary thing. That is a beautiful thing. If you've ever had a church experience where there was a pastor who knew you well and knew Jesus well, and brought the two together, you're not terrified by that truth. I know some of you have had wretched church experiences. Some of you have had just boring church experiences. But a few of you here today have had a connection with a pastor just like that.

In fact, I just think of the past few months of what's happened here in our church. I'll leave the names and the details out of it. But she comes into my office, and she feels this great anxiety. You know what I did when she told me about her great anxiety? My brain instantly thought of at least three passages in the Bible that use the word anxiety. Could you name at least three? Psalm 94, Philippians 4:6, 1 Peter 5. "When anxiety was great within me, your unfailing love was my support. Your consolation brought me joy," Psalm 94. 1 Peter 5 he said, "Cast all your anxiety on God," not some of it all of it, "because God he cares for you." In fact, I just remember from my education the Greek word for cast off all your anxieties only used twice in the whole New Testament. The other time on Palm Sunday when the disciples cast their cloaks off onto a donkey. Get all of it off of you. And I didn't even have to think about that because my education put it within me. Not because I'm better than you. Not because I'm smarter than you. If you had all these years like I had, you will be able to do that too.

And a couple days later she showed up in my office. Struggling with the same sin that she did last week and last year. And some of you get this. After sin, after sin, after sin, after I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry and nothing changes she's starting to wonder am I really saved. Christians are supposed to be repentant. They're supposed to believe. So, if I keep going back to the same thing am I really sorry to God or am I just saying that and mouthing those words.

She said pastor what do I do? And my brain instantly said Galatians 5:17, Romans 7, Romans 8:1. And I easily explain to her that no you're absolutely saved. The problem is you have something within you the apostle Paul called the sinful nature, and it constantly is opposed to the spirit. But look at this in Romans 7. The apostle Paul did that. He wrote Romans 25 years after becoming a Christian. Twenty-five years in, the guy who writes half the New Testament says, why do I keep doing this? And that is the blessing. I'm not doing this Jesus thing by myself. The Bible is a big book. It's a beautiful book but it's complicated. It's hard to know where all those things are.

But if there is someone in your life who can pastor you, who can shepherd you, who in one conversation can get you to the truth that will set you free. What a gift that is. I love how Jesus' close friend John puts this in 1 John 3:19-20. He says, "This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in God's presence: If our hearts condemn us," here's my favorite part, "we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."

Now before I move to part two, it is so exciting to me to think that some of you are like this close to finding the answers to questions you have had for years. So, forgive me for this. Sometimes when I'm out at a bar or I go to a wedding and it's late and people have a little bit too much to drink and they find out that I'm a pastor, do you know what they do? They put a sloppy drunk arm around me and they ask me questions about God. Right? Now there's no embarrassment now that the guard is down. I've learned that people who have no connection to the church have tons of questions about life, about death, about Jesus, about forgiveness. And they're right there.

Listen you don't have to get drunk to ask me a question. Some of you have wondered about forgiveness. You've wondered about depression. You've wondered about suicide. You've wondered if the Bible can be trusted. You've wondered about who Jesus is and you've been asking your friends. You've been Googling it. But what you don't know is that you can just ask me. You could send an email. You could text. You could write it on your communication card. Pastor Michael and I have a lot education that we don't get to use. Nothing would make us happier than doing our best to open a Bible and answer your questions that some of you are so, so close.

And today could be the day. I guarantee you I've heard the question. I guarantee you I've thought about the question. And I can almost guarantee that I can find an answer to that question. Trust me. I'm a pastor. So, ask God the big question. Should I trust the church? He would say maybe. And you know what else he would say? If you're taking notes write this down one more time. He would say, maybe not.

You know this so I'll keep my word short; from the headlines that you've read, from the experiences that you've had, that the church doesn't always stick with the whole truth. People lie and pastors are people and therefore pastors can lie. In fact, the Bible is ridiculously honest about this. Remember when Moses was getting the ten commandments and down at the bottom of Mount Sinai people were literally building a false God, a golden calf. Do you know who's leading the way and building that idol? The high priest. The leader of the church. About 1,500 years later Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God is standing in flesh and blood, he's on trial. And a governor named Pontius Pilate says I find no charges that stick to this man. I'm going to let him go. And you know who leads the chants of crucify him? The church. And when the New Testament was being written by church leaders, do you want to know what even they admitted?

Let me show you just one passage from Acts 20, the apostle Paul warned some pastors. He said, "Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." Be careful he said. From your own number. From within the church. People will rise up -- they won't totally reject the truth, they'll just twist it, they'll distort it.

And here's why he says to draw away disciples after them. Sometimes, the church, to get popular, to get comfortable, to get rich, to get what it wants takes this book and ignores about half of it. And so, Paul said to those people and he would say it to you today, be careful. You can't always trust the church.

Back in 2017, I had an opportunity to work with a media ministry called Time of Grace. Some of you have heard of it. It's on TV. It's on the internet. Printed materials, booklets. I was excited and I said, "yes". But what I didn't know at the time when I said yes was how much Time of Grace knew about you. When I joined the team and I got to the first quarterly board meeting I got a packet that was probably 50-75 pages long. Every single video, every single email, we knew did people like it or did they hate it? I mean imagine it for just a second. If we all started a church and we wanted to

convince the community that we love this book and that Jesus was the truth. But we actually didn't want to read and teach all of it, just parts of it, to get as many people as possible. What would we say and what would we skip?

There's probably a bunch of answers to that question, isn't there? I can think of two options. I can't figure out just yet which one would be more popular. You can tell me after church. I think I could grow this church much more than it is today if I said all the good things the Bible has to say to you. If I would tell you that you're not an accident but that God made you. Which is true. He formed you in your mother's womb. You're fearfully and wonderfully made. You are unique by God's design. You're not like your brother, your sister, your mother, your father, your next door neighbor because God crafted you in a certain way. He didn't just make you. He loves you. He loves the whole world. He knows you. You're not just one out of seven point whatever billion human beings on the planet. Not just a number. Not just a name. He knows you. He adores you. Your name is engraved on the palm of his hand. That's true.

And not just that. He loved you so much that he sent his son to forgive you. To save you. To rescue you from all the drama, all the pain, all the anxiety, all the mental illness, all the grief, all the loneliness. This life is short compared to the eternal life he has for those who trust in Jesus. And that is absolutely true. He's working everything for your good. He takes all the drama, the bad stuff you wish you could skip, and he flips it. And he uses it to bless his people. I can say all of that and all of it would be true. And if I ended the sermon there, I think I could grow this church.

If I never confronted you or challenged you. If I skipped those pages where Jesus said you have to deny yourself because your heart is evil. You need to repent every single day. You need to give up what you want and start praying things like, Father your will be done. And your kingdom come. I think if I skip that people would like it. Or I actually think this might be a little bit more popular. I think if I didn't talk so much about you, I think if I just got really angry and went off on them, I can attract the most popular podcast in America. And for years and years and years I kind of noticed that some of the most listened to voices are the angriest ones. Often times they're very spiritual, very religious and it's about those people ruining this country.

And there's always a story, right? Some Hollywood celebrity, some college campus, some professor, the latest show or the latest whatever. And it's those people -- I'm like Jesus if we can start flipping tables, we can threaten them with damnation, we can talk about this is the end times. Hold on, we're the good people, they're the bad people, I think. I think people would like that. Maybe. Maybe not. Amen.

No that's actually not the end of the sermon. We're kind of stuck in the same situation, aren't we? Like should I follow my heart? Should I listen to my friends? Should I listen to Pastor Mike? It makes you wonder God what do you want us to do? You want us to follow a truth, where do we turn? Everything is debatable. Nothing is guaranteed. What exactly should we do?

Well, if you care about the answer to that question, I want to share a very short story. One of my favorites from the New Testament. It's about a group of people who figured out what to do. Here is what happened in Acts 17. It says, "As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas [two early Christian missionaries] away to Berea." That's a city in Greece. "On arriving there they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica," now hear this, "for they received the message with great eagerness and they examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." They literally fact-checked one of the most famous Christians in history. And what did the Bible say about those people? They were noble. They weren't disrespectful. They weren't disobedient. They weren't mean. They had noble character because they examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Friends, I can offer you no short-cuts today. The truth matters more than a cure for cancer, but it will take work to get there. And its work that we will have to do together. Open a Bible, examine it, study it every day and you'll know if the guy who stands in front with all of his education is telling you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. No matter how long you've been here. No matter how old you are. The truth will set you free.

So, can you trust the church? Maybe. Maybe not. But study this book and you will know. And best of all you'll get to know God. Let's pray for his help.

Heavenly Father, you know my heart. Sure, it's easy for pastors to turn on a microphone and say they're preaching the truth but that doesn't always happen. And so God, if there's anything about me that needs to be corrected, correct it. If there's some tradition that's been passed on in my denomination that is not Biblical, it's one sided, it's out of context, rebuke me.

Heavenly Father if there's something I'm emphasizing that you don't, something I'm moving too quickly past that you do, Heavenly Father readjust me. What happens here week after week is infinitely important. That's why he commanded in Hebrews 10 that none of us should give up meeting together but we should spur each other on, encourage each other and best of all remind each other of Jesus.

This is complicated God. It's just easier to assume the church is always right and it's easier just to bail on the church altogether. We long to walk that narrow middle road to do life together under loving, truthful authority. So God, help us. At the end of the day all of us want Jesus. We want His unfailing love. We want His forgiveness. We don't want part of Him we want all of Him. When He confronts us, when He comforts us, we want all of Him. So Heavenly Father help us.

I thank you Father for all the spiritual leaders in our past. Some of them have preached to half empty churches because they love the truth. Some of them saw people turn around and walk out the doors because they loved you. And some of us showed up the following Sunday at a place that was holy and good and pure because there were courageous leaders.



So, I'm asking you now Father, raise up leaders just like that. So that more and more, and more and more churches will be filled with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We pray all this in the name of Jesus who called himself the way, the truth, and the life. And all God's people said, amen.