

Education & Science

"Proof? Positive!" Series, May 18 & 19, 2024 | John 8:12-32

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Christianity has made the world a better place.

Of course, some people disagree with me.

Mark Noll, ironically a Christian scholar, wrote, "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind."

He was restating what many people think—that Christian faith, particularly evangelical Christian faith, is incompatible with a robust intellectual life.

To be blunt, many people think that we are ignorant and that we like it that way.¹

Christians get lampooned because of Galileo.

Galileo was a Renaissance man: a philosopher, mathematician, physicist, and astronomer.

He carefully observed the movement of objects—small ones and planets alike.

Galileo made observations that supported the theory that the earth revolved around the sun.

The old way of thinking was that everything revolved around the earth.

That view was supported by the Church because it implied that humanity was the center of the universe, a universe created by God.

Galileo ended up on trial for his beliefs. Twice. He was forced to recant his ideas and placed under house arrest for the rest of his life.²

Galileo's treatment centuries ago is frequently cited as proof that Christians are ignorant, that we are anti-science, that we ignore reason, and that we are anti-education.

Christians get ridiculed every time we do not agree with a particular scientific idea.

Science is a process of discovery based on observations, hypotheses, testing, and refining.

Science is also a body of knowledge based on those observations, experiments, and analysis.

Sometimes people stop describing and start believing. Then those who disagree or just don't see are ridiculed and ostracized. That's when science stops being science and becomes a faith.

Let's call that faith "scientism." Christians are not anti-science. Christians are anti-scientism.

Christianity is FOR science and education because Christianity is FOR truth!

Yes, Christians have made mistakes in history.

But Christians have been for inquiry, study, and training in history, and we are for inquiry, study, and training today. Why? Because we are for Jesus, who is Truth.

¹ Rodney Stark, *America's Blessing*, p. 147.

² https://www.worldhistory.org/Galileo_Galilei/

Jesus is Truth.

Jesus is the light of the world who reveals truth. (John 8:12)

In **John 8:12** we read:

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. He was likely in or near the Temple.

He was speaking to a crowd of pilgrims in Jerusalem. The crowd included teachers of the Law who had begun to turn against Jesus, so the crowd was skeptical of Jesus.

Jesus told them that he was the light of the world.

He said that anyone not following him was instead walking in darkness.

The darkness that Jesus described represented being away from God and against God; being caught in sin, caught in evil, and caught in the clutches of death itself.

Jesus also meant that they were in the darkness of ignorance. Of course, they thought they knew all about God. But Jesus was saying that there was so much more that they did not know.

Jesus was offering to show them. He was offering them truth.

That truth would bring them in out of the darkness. It would bring them away from sin, away from rebellion against God, away from evil, away from death. Truth would lead to life.

Jesus is the light of the world who reveals (he gives, brings, offers, shows us) truth.

Jesus reveals truth that is corroborated. (John 8:13-20)

The crowd, particularly the Pharisees, were skeptical. How could Jesus make such claims?

In **John 8:13** we read their objections:

So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true."

The Old Testament Law required that important testimony be given by more than one person.

In **John 8:18** Jesus said:

"I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me."

Jesus said that his Father in Heaven testified along with him. He corroborated Jesus' testimony.

Jesus reveals the most important truth from the most important source. (John 8:21-30)

The crowds were judging Jesus based on their standards. Jesus said that they were thinking in worldly terms. Of course, on their own, Jesus implied, that was the best they could do.

Jesus offered a higher, more important, more significant kind of truth from an entirely higher standard.

In **John 8:23** we read:

He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world."

Jesus told the crowds that he had come from his Father and spoke on behalf of his Father.

Jesus had truth from a higher, more important source, and it was a higher, more important truth. The religious leaders were asking questions about Law. The crowds were asking questions about leadership, politics, and the future.

Jesus was talking about sin and separation from God, about heaven and earth, about life and death, and about eternity. In **John 8:24** Jesus said:

"I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

Jesus reveals the most important truth from the most important source.

Jesus reveals truth in relationship. (John 8:31-32)

John 8:31-32 says:

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Jesus said that there are kinds of truth that we will get only when we believe in him.

Jesus called those who believe in him to follow him, to stick with him, to soak up what he is saying, and to obey him. That's how we will really know the truth. It's in relationship.

And when we know the truth of Jesus, we get true freedom. We are freed from sin, we are freed from evil and darkness and wrong questions; we are free to belong to God instead, and we are free to enjoy life for eternity.

God reveals truth.

God reveals truth through creation.

God made creation to glorify him. It points to him, draws attention to him, and tells about him.

Psalms 19:1-2 says:

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.

Paul adds in **Romans 1:19-20** that God reveals truth through creation in such a way that we have everything we need to know him and are without excuse if we miss him:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

This is the doctrine of general revelation. It's good. But there's more.

God reveals truth through Jesus.

Jesus is the clearest picture we get of God.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

God revealing himself to us through Jesus goes further than his revelation through creation. He shows us more of himself, more clearly, and more compellingly.

As Jesus himself said in John 8, he is truth itself, truth in the flesh.

God reveals truth through the Bible.

The Bible is a special revelation from God. It is true and reveals truth.

It tells us everything we need to know about God for salvation and living. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** says:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

It conveys truth and can work in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Hebrews 4:12** says:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Alister McGrath had a life-changing encounter with truth.

Alister McGrath was not raised in a particular religion. He became an atheist by the time he was a teenager. Science became his lens for understanding the world, a faith of its own.

He studied molecular biophysics at Oxford. It was then that he felt a lack of peace about the limits of science to answer life's biggest questions.

He also began to realize that many intelligent people actually held faith in Christ.

McGrath reached a turning point during a ferry journey home one Christmas. He felt a deep dissatisfaction with atheism and found himself ready to explore the possibility of Christianity.

He thought about the Incarnation, how God took on human form and came to be with us. He thought about God's suffering; God who suffers with us understands us and is accessible to us.

He began studying Christian theology more seriously, looking for evidence for Christianity, particularly for the resurrection. He became convinced of the truthfulness of Christianity.³

Truth brought McGrath to Christ, and he has since become a defender of Christian truth.

Christians value and share truth.

Christians disciple other Christians.

From the very beginning, disciples of Jesus learned the teachings and ways of Jesus and passed them on to others. That is the essence of the Great Commission. Jesus said in **Matthew 28:19-20**:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. ..."

New believers were taught the faith before and after baptism through a process of question and answer. The *Didache*, one of the earliest writings we have from after the New Testament was written, was a manual describing how to train disciples.⁴

Christians saved knowledge.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF1vMrkdov0>

⁴ Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*, pp. 170-172.

When learning collapsed in the West after the end of antiquity with the fall of the Roman Empire, manuscripts of ancient philosophy, science, and mathematics were kept in monasteries, where they were copied and studied.

In the West, most of the education during the Middle Ages happened through monasteries. Were it not for the monasteries in the West, this knowledge could have been lost to us.⁵

Christians started schools.

The movement toward universities came from Christianity. The university system itself takes its earliest cues from the learning happening in monasteries and in the institutions they founded.

Here in the United States, every college founded before the Revolutionary War, with the exception of one, was started by Christians.⁶

Christians even developed and championed public education. From the Reformation forward, it was a hallmark of Christian faith to want educated citizens who could read, so that they could read the Bible and receive the Good News about Jesus.

Sunday School eventually sprang up because a Christian noticed that poor children, working during the early years of the Industrial Revolution, did not know how to read.⁷

Christians studied science.

The method of inquiry and research that we today associate with science started with theologians studying with logic and rigor the text of the Bible and the writings of other theologians.”

That research methodology was turned on the natural world during the high Middle Ages.

To understand God, Christians wanted to understand the world he created.

The more they understood the world God created, the more glory it brought to the Creator.

Christians started and supported the modern sciences, we have always been involved in them, and we have never stopped learning!⁸

Christians still study and learn.

We study history, particularly the history of religion.

We are MORE likely (not less) to enjoy and patronize the arts.

We are LESS likely to get duped by crazy theories.

On the whole, active Christians read almost 50% more than non-Christians.⁹

Disciples of Jesus champion truth and education.

Let's focus again on what a disciple is:

⁵ Schmidt, pp. 172-174.

⁶ Schmidt, pp. 180-190.

⁷ Schmidt, 176-190.

⁸ Schmidt, 189-190.

⁹ Stark, pp. 148-162.

A disciple is someone who has decided to follow Jesus, is being changed by Jesus, and is multiplying disciples of Jesus.

As this definition points out, being a disciple of Jesus changes our heads, hearts, and hands.

Decide to Follow: Know that truth exists and is available in Jesus.

This is a two-fold decision we need to make.

We as Christians reject the notion that truth is entirely subjective and, therefore, not available.

Truth may be difficult at times to see; our own perspective may make truth difficult to find.

However, as Christians, we confess that truth exists. We know that. We agree with that.

Furthermore, we believe that this truth is available to us in Jesus.

Be Changed: Value truth.

This is actually tougher for us as disciples and more urgent.

To be a disciple is to value truth in a culture that calls truth relative and plays loosely with it.

We, as disciples, value truth. We value the truth we get in the Bible. We value the truth we get in Jesus.

We value even the truth God has placed in creation.

To be a disciple who values truth means that we reject falsehood in all its forms. Falsehood takes many forms right now. Because our culture calls truth relative and plays loosely with it, we find falsehood masquerading as truth all around us.

Of course, there are obvious examples. Some people make claims that are obviously false. They are out of keeping with the Bible and with what God has told us.

But falsehood comes in much subtler forms. Throughout the media, particularly on social media, there are attempts to deceive us. There are false headlines designed to get our attention, so that we will see an advertisement. There are false headlines placed in front of us by people seeking to confuse and divide us politically.

To be a disciple who values truth means that we don't play loosely with truth ourselves.

It also means that we don't spread stories that are undocumented and potentially false.

It also means to some degree that we avoid some of the places where false information dominates. We need to think carefully about the media we consume.

To value truth is to reject falsehood in all its forms.

Multiply: Keep learning, teaching, and making disciples for a lifetime.

We particularly keep learning about the Bible, about Jesus, and about the Christian faith.

We also keep teaching for a lifetime. It comes naturally to us to teach each other what we need to know about the faith. It comes naturally to us to make sure that children have the opportunity to learn everything they need for faith and for living. It comes naturally to us to make sure that everyone has the ability to experience God's Word.

We also keep making disciples for a lifetime. We keep sharing life and what we know with others, who keep sharing life and what they know with others.

Come out of the darkness into the light.

Truth can be thought of as something cold and hard, but it's not.
Truth is warm. To lack truth is to be in the dark where it is indeed cold.
Truth is radiant; it's life-giving. **John 1:4** says:

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

That verse is talking about Jesus, and it is saying that not only is he light, but that light is life. Truth is radiant and life-giving.

Truth is relational; we find it in Jesus. **John 1:5** says that the light is shining in the darkness that we human beings find ourselves in apart from Christ:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The darkness grasps at the truth; it seeks to comprehend the truth, but it can't.

The darkness grasps at the truth; it tries to overcome truth with falsehood, but it can't.

The light of Jesus is shining in THE darkness; it's shining in OUR darkness, inviting us to come in out of the dark, to come into a truth-giving, life-giving relationship with God through Jesus.

Won't you say "yes" today to Jesus, the light of the world and truth itself?