

## How to Identify Truth: History & the Permanent Things; the Problem with Human Viewpoint & Religious Claims; the Bible: Direct, Infallible, & Inerrant Revelation

7. I was questioned recently by one of our Prep School students that inquired, “How do we know that what we are learning is right and true?”
8. The honest answer is “You don’t *know* because the search for truth requires placing personal trust in a source that claims ownership of the title.

NOTE: Children have a right to ask, “What is truth?” It’s their souls that are at stake. But we all make choices based on incoming data. For example, in commerce: people buy things because they believe the salesman’s pitch or the advertisement’s message. In politics: people vote for a candidate because they believe what he or she says in his or her speeches and commercials. In religion: people believe what they know about God, salvation, Christ, the Bible, and sin by what parents, preachers, and friends tell them.

9. So let’s suggest for a moment that the Bible, its Old and New Testaments, are not the source of truth. This requires that we begin our search anew.
10. In doing so we must examine all the resources of knowledge compiled by countless generations of mankind that have claimed the discovery of truth.
11. And when doing so we learn that their philosophies, and ideologies, and theologies are based on human observations, conclusions, and deductions.

NOTE: Over the course of human history it is possible to observe societies and cultures that have prospered and those that have not. What is discovered is what works and what doesn’t. The former is what Russell Kirk refers to as the “permanent things”:

Kirk, Russell. *The Sword of Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 167:

When Kirk rode into the lists of the literary tournament, at the beginning of the Fifties, the literary party of order stood in a forlorn minority; so it stands today. The literary party of disorder—an ill-sorted crew of nihilists, fanatic ideologues, and purveyors of violent sensation—were masters of the field; they are still, but now their hegemony is shaken somewhat.

The art of decadence and nihilism, the literature of meaningless violence and fraud, present us with the image of man unregenerate and triumphant in his depravity. This is the domain of the literary party of disorder.

In our time the disciplines of humane letters and of scholarship are disputed in a Debatable Land by the partisans of order and the partisans of disorder. In this clash, often the enemies of the permanent things gain the advantage. Yet their victory is Pyrrhic; for in undoing order, they undo themselves. Preferring to reign in hell rather than to serve in heaven, they make a Waste Land, and are condemned to dwell therein. In [Edmund] Burke’s words, “the law is broken, nature is disobeyed, and the rebellious are outlawed, cast forth, and exiled, from the world of reason, and order, and peace, and virtue, and fruitful penitence, into the antagonist world of madness, discord, vice, confusion, and unavailing sorrow.”

12. Debate could continue endlessly over the reliability of human-viewpoint answers to Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” But assuming for the moment that we can ignore any contributions on the subject by human beings then we are forced to consider the availability of divine inspiration.

13. This puts us in the arena of those “religions” that purport to have access to divinely inspired texts. These include Islam’s Qur’an, Hindu’s Vedas, and Mormon’s Doctrines and Covenants and Book of Mormon. There are also many more less known “holy books” claimed by a large number of less known religions. Analysis of these sources must wait for another time, but *none* of them can avoid the fact that their writings never assert direct revelation from God: there’s always some “middleman,” or “middle angel,” or “middle god,” or for Mormonism, a “middle thing” that provides them with the truth.
14. Only the Jewish and Christian Bible makes the claim to be “the Word of God” revealed to us directly by God the Holy Spirit. If this is true then it has to make sense, it must be organized, and it must be without error.
15. Why is this important? Because if God has decided to communicate with us then the knowledge He provides must be perfect. Why?
16. Because for God to *be* God He must be perfect. Why? Because the definition of “God,” held by any group that wishes to define Him, is “a supreme Being perfect in power, wisdom, and righteousness who is worshipped as creator and ruler of the universe.”
17. If God is God then he must be an omnipotent, omniscient, and righteous Being that creates and controls all things.
18. Since He is the creator and originator of all that is knowable then whatever information He decides to provide regarding Himself, His creation, His plan, and His purpose must not only be true, its revelation to us must be transmitted without error.
19. So if we may conclude that there is a God, He is organized, He has revealed Himself, and that revelation is true, then we must seek to discern what His message is and what it requires of us.
20. To do this we must examine the text of His message to us in order to discover its organization, its order, and its purpose.
21. In doing this we must accept as fact that its contents are without error. This is referred to by two terms: infallibility and inerrancy:
  - 1) The Bible may properly be called *infallible* and *inerrant*. These terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard truth.
  - 2) *Infallible* means that the Bible is not misleading so that it is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters.
  - 3) *Inerrant* means it must be free of all falsehood or mistakes and as such safeguards the truth. This means the Bible is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.
22. If God seeks to communicate to us He would logically do so in a straightforward manner. It is an awesome thought that God would choose to make Himself known to us. Since He has, it would not make sense that He would do so with codes, symbols, and hidden meanings.
23. Therefore, proper biblical analysis must follow the instructions of Isaiah:
 

**Isaiah 28:9a - To whom would He teach knowledge? And to whom shall He make to understand doctrine?**

**v. 10 - For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little.**
24. To accomplish this consistently throughout Scripture a standard must be followed which necessarily requires that interpretation of the Bible be approached according to its literal, or normal, sense.

25. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found *in the text*.
26. This method allows the development of doctrines drawn from the Bible itself. The primary source for help in interpretation is the Bible. It is its own best interpreter.
26. To allow the text to speak for itself it must be examined from the original languages by which they were initially revealed: Hebrew for the Old Testament and koine Greek for the New.
27. This is why I spend time on analyzing the Hebrew and Greek words since these are the languages of Scripture. In this way the text clearly expresses the ideas that God would have us know.
28. It is grammatical analysis combined with the view that what is revealed must be accepted as (1) literal, unless the text dictates otherwise, and (2) historical, that is, it must be interpreted in the time in which it was written.
29. There are two ways one can approach Scripture: (1) from the standpoint that it is to be interpreted literally, or (2) from the standpoint that its literal meaning is to be ignored in favor of hidden meanings apart from the obvious.
30. A review of the literal and allegorical approaches helps answer the question, "How do we know what we are learning is right and true?"