

God's Truth = Justice

Seventy years ago, Cambridge University passed a momentous resolution. Much later than London and Oxford, they decided to admit women as full members of the University. Prior to this, women had been allowed to sit exams, but were not eligible for the award of degrees.

Injustice

There was one famous woman for whom this was most unjust. In 1890 Philippa Fawcett gained the highest marks in the mathematics exam finals, but it was the man with the next highest marks who got the coveted title of 'senior wrangler.' Philippa did not even get a degree.

Her family was familiar with causes for women as her mother had been a suffragist. Attitudes were very different then. In the Victorian era there were strong beliefs that women had inferior brains and could not cope with academic subjects. Philippa was what mathematicians would call a 'counter example' – something that broke the supposed rule and so showed it to be false.

Absolute Truth

In mathematics, your working and reasoning are either right or wrong. If you cannot solve an equation you cannot get any credit by merely 'describing' or 'discussing' it; either you can solve it correctly or you cannot. In maths, there is most definitely 'truth'; opinion matters little.

It is not fashionable nowadays to talk about absolute truth, and dog-

matism is unpopular. In 2016 the Oxford Dictionaries 'Word of the Year' was 'post-truth', referring to situations in which emotion and personal belief are more influential in shaping opinion than objective facts.

Doubts about truth are not new, however. Some 2000 years ago, at the trial of Jesus, Pontius Pilate asked (probably cynically) "What is truth?" This was in response to Jesus' emphatic statement:

You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice (John 18:37).

The Bible repeatedly claims that there is absolute truth in religious beliefs. Jesus also said:

If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31-32).

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

$$\frac{\partial \mathbf{v}}{\partial t} + (\mathbf{v} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{v} = -\nabla p + \nu \Delta \mathbf{v} + \mathbf{f}(\mathbf{x}, t)$$
$$\frac{\partial v_i}{\partial t} + \sum_{j=1}^3 v_j \frac{\partial v_i}{\partial x_j} = -\frac{\partial p}{\partial x_i} + \nu \sum_{j=1}^3 \frac{\partial^2 v_i}{\partial x_j^2} + f_i(\mathbf{x}, t).$$
$$\frac{\partial v_i}{\partial t} + \sum_{j=1}^3 v_j \frac{\partial v_i}{\partial x_j} = -\frac{\partial p}{\partial x_i} + \nu \sum_{j=1}^3 \frac{\partial^2 v_i}{\partial x_j^2} + f_i(\mathbf{x}, t).$$

These are strong statements about truth and faith. The context shows that Jesus was referring to freedom from the destructive curse of death. The word 'if' shows that we can get it wrong, and the terms 'no one' and 'except' leave no room for manoeuvre. So according to Jesus, belief in both his words and his actions is the only way we can be saved.

In the first century, the apostles were convinced that the inspired message of the Gospel, as given by God, could not be altered by anyone.

Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

The Bible text has an original meaning which is not subject to private interpretation. Consequently, the messages preached by the prophets and apostles are not a matter of personal opinion or choice (see 2 Peter 1:20, 2:1–2). This means that departing from Bible truth can put us back on the road to destruction.

Real Justice

God's offer of life is conditional on our faithful response, but it is not unfairly discriminatory. The offer has always been equally open to men and women, irrespective of status. There is no suggestion in the Bible that women cannot comprehend the word of God. Men and women have exactly the same opportunity and responsibility.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,



there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26–28).

The important thing is to be 'in Christ', which is achieved by belief, followed by baptism, then a changed life of dedication to the ways of God.

Being the 'senior wrangler' was a prestigious achievement. But it pales into insignificance compared with the hope of eternal life. The divine gift is offered to all men and women.

Philippa was disadvantaged in what is now considered an unfair system. Many centuries before, Jesus Christ died a humiliating and excruciating death, an unfair punishment for crimes he never committed. But he did so to give us hope of everlasting life.

For many years, women were denied university degrees, and even nowadays, for many people this type of education is not an option. In contrast, the Gospel message does not require academic achievement (1 Corinthians 1:20–28). It is for anyone, and offers far more than any university. Let us therefore do as the apostle Paul urged and:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

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