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# LIFE

## Guest columnist: Christians allow themselves to be led by the truth

By Tom Gilson

May 21, 2005

In a world of religious and ideological divisions, there's hardly any phrase that invokes more ire than "I know the truth."

It may be tolerated in mathematics and science, though even scientists are wary of it, knowing how often the "truths" of one age are later corrected or replaced.

In morality and religion, though, it's downright offensive. Relativism reigns, and though we don't mind if others have opinions, if someone says, "My beliefs are the truth," many people find it offensive.

Thus, we who are evangelical Christians find ourselves in a socially awkward position. We are odd, anachronistic. We claim to know the truth. We believe this truth is unique and applies to all people for all time. We believe that the truth is so tied together with Jesus Christ that he could claim, "I am the truth." We know we are bucking cultural currents when we say this. Regardless of how it may seem, we don't do it because we're trying to pick a fight, though I'm afraid that's how it's been interpreted.

To say, "I know the truth," may appear to be claiming superiority, but in fact, the opposite is the case. Christians believe that the truth is not something we create or build for ourselves, it is a reality to be discovered, that holds sway whether we like it or not. Christians do not own the truth; we submit to it. Our position before truth is humility.

C.S. Lewis, possibly the most articulate spokesperson for Christianity in the 20th century, illustrates this well. A firm atheist, he was at Oxford when he decided to study the evidence regarding God. It led him in a direction he did not choose: "You must picture me alone in [my] room... night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet... That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me... I gave in and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."

Yes, sadly, there are arrogant Christians, individuals who act holier-than-thou, who delight in pointing out others' errors and flaws. Jesus encountered religious people like

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that, and stood against them. They in turn made themselves his mortal enemies. A religion that lords itself over others, even if it calls itself Christianity, is actually opposed to Jesus Christ.

It's not quite accurate for any Christian to say "we hold the truth." The truth holds us. It constrains us. Thus we find ourselves in that socially difficult position I mentioned earlier. How simple it would be to ride with the flow of the age, to relax and let go of issues such as abortion, gay marriages, sexual "freedom" and so on. We cannot. If we bow before the truth, we must be led by it, even if it leads us into unpopular territory.

"But you must have an open mind!" comes the objection. Another sparkling writer of the 20th century, G.K. Chesterton, answered this way: "The point of having an open mind, like having an open mouth, is to close it on something solid."

I have studied for hours (and still do) viewpoints contrary to Christianity. I continue to find that God's word is solid and nourishing, and ultimately makes more sense than the alternatives. The truth holds me.

I wish it held me more. Any Christian would be deceitful to pretend he or she practices it fully, even as far as he or she understands it; and it would be just as bad to say we understand it all. Even the simple commands, to love God fully and to love our neighbor as ourselves, have a depth beyond reaching.

There are many aspects of the faith that are clear, for instance, the basics: that Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh and supported his claim by his life, death, and resurrection. There are other aspects that remain mysterious or difficult.

Our age has come up with new questions (genetic engineering, genocide, end-of-life decisions, and global environmental issues, for example) that require us to work out anew how God's word applies. This, too, is reason for humility.

I'm reminded again of Chesterton at this point, though: "what we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert - himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt - the Divine Reason." He's encouraging believers to be confident of the truth we know.

I'm afraid I've painted a dark picture here, that we've been forced into a corner we do not enjoy and do not wish to stand in. That's not the case, of course. C.S. Lewis also wrote of Joy (he always capitalized it) that led him toward Christ and flowed out of his relationship with God.

The truth in Christ is not a cold, abstract principle, but a person of infinite love and grace. The Bible tells us to "speak the truth in love," and clearly implies that it should generally be accompanied with a smile.

Those who deny there is such a thing as truth may find it hard to see that smile. We're offering it. It's not a smile that says, "Whatever you do, whatever you believe, is fine," for that would be a denial of the truth - Jesus Christ - who is also love. It's a smile instead that says, "Come see and be held by the truth that holds us, that we have come to love."

Tom Gilson is the U.S. Planning Director for Campus Crusade for Christ, and can be reached through his Web log at [thinkingchristian.net](http://thinkingchristian.net).

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