



## Jesus & Pontius Pilate

[John 18:24-40]

### The Issue: *“What is truth?”*

Hasan Minhaj is a NextGen icon. His brand of stand-up comedy checks all the progressive boxes, mostly centering on xenophobia and racism he claims to have experienced as an Asian-Muslim growing up in America.

But, in a September 15, 2023 issue of *The New Yorker*, the comedian admitted that, in a 2022 Netflix special, many of his stories about racism were fabrications. In one bit, he joked about a prom date with a white girl whose parents were so uptight about his dark color, they refused to take the usual prom photos.



Even though it had been 20 years since the prom, his date that night became the victim of cyberbullying and death threats. Hasan Minhaj admitted that he made up the story about her and her parents' racism. When challenged, he defended his falsehoods as “emotional truth” that capture what he *feels* about America. *The New Yorker* article affirmed Minhaj's “emotional

truth” as valid for him. One can only wonder what the woman subjected to cyberviolence feels about his “emotional truth.”

### **Subjective & Situational Truth**

Truth is up for grabs in today’s postmodern culture. A Google article entitled, *Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings*, cites two national polls revealing that 65% of adult Americans believe truth is relative to circumstances. 83% of teens say truth depends on circumstances, and only 6% said that moral truth is absolute. Extensive research shows that increasingly truth is **subjective**: what is true is determined by feelings. And truth is **situational**: what is true is whatever we need it to be, depending on the circumstances.

### **Truth in the Arena**

Facts no longer matter for too many folks. Evidence takes second place to opinion. Yet, things haven’t changed much in 2,000 years. Take Pilate’s face-to-face conversation with Jesus. Jesus claimed he was the Messiah. Religious leaders said he was a false prophet. That became the “emotional truth” for the mob. Jesus was on trial that morning in Pilate’s court. But so was truth.

### **What is Truth? A Cynical Response**



“Then You are a king!” Pilate said. “You say that I am a king,” Jesus answered. “For this reason I was born and have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to me.” “What is truth?” Pilate said. And having said this, he went again to the Jews

and told them, “I find no basis for a charge against him.” [John 18:37&38]

“What is truth?” That’s the most important question anyone can ask. But Pilate wasn’t asking a question. He was giving a cynical response: “This isn’t my first rodeo. I’m an educated man. I’ve traveled the world. I’ve listened to philosophers and studied world religions.” Everyone has their idea about truth. So, who’s right? In the end, no one can know for sure. Pilate may have lived 2,000 years ago, but he thought like a postmodern person.

There's a **supreme irony** in his rhetorical question, "What is truth?" Truth was standing right in front of him in the person of Jesus. The night before he had said to his disciples in **John 14:6**, "I am the way, the TRUTH, and the life..." We can know the truth. Truth is a Person. Know him and you know truth. Listen to him and you hear truth. Watch him and you see truth in action.

**A sad fact:** Though Truth was standing in front of him, and speaking the plain truth to him, Pilate couldn't hear it. Neither can anyone who hasn't been made spiritually alive by the Holy Spirit. The Bible describes the condition of Pilate and everyone else. They are dead in their sins. Their hearts are like stone. They are blind and deaf to God's truth. St. Paul wrote in **Romans 1:18** that all sinners suppress the truth. That's why Jesus said in **John 3:16**, "You must be born again."

**The Good News.** When we have been born again, the promise of Jesus becomes true for his followers: "When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will lead you into all truth." **[John 16:13]** Pilate is wrong. We can know the truth. God's people possess it. It has been written down in Scripture so that we don't forget it, and preserved for thousands of years so we never lose it. Here's how you can know the truth:



### **First of all, God is truth.**

Theologian, Francis Schaeffer, said our Judeo-Christian Faith stands on two fundamental facts: **God is, and he is not silent.** God does not hide himself. In Exodus 3, at the burning bush, he revealed himself to Moses: "I Am WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" **[Exodus 3:14]** God has a name: "I AM that I AM." Dr. Schaeffer says the most basic form of "I AM" means, "I exist, I have always existed, and I will always exist." In his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer says I AM means that God exists in the ever-present now. Theologian R.C. Sproul says, "I AM That I AM" can be rendered, "I am who I say I am, not what you think me to be, want me to be, or need me to be."

I would add that **God is self-existent.** He has no need for us to declare he exists. He existed eternally as the Great I AM before he created a single angel, or spangled the night skies with stars, or formed the first creatures on planet Earth out of dust. If all creation and its creatures shout in unison that God does not exist, he will still exist. If we try to redefine him, he will still exist as



he is, has always been, and will always be. His name is *I AM That I AM*—the same yesterday, today, and forever. **[Hebrews 13:8]**

**He does not keep who he is a secret.** As Schaeffer says, “He is there, and *he is not silent*. He reveals himself to Moses on Mt. Sinai. He reveals his name, and, in

doing so, says a lot about himself. He is a transparent, self-revealing God. But, he also wants Moses to reveal who he is to his chosen people. “Go tell them what I have told you to tell them about myself and what I plan to do for them...” **[Exodus 3:15-21]** So how does he reveal himself to us?

### 1) **God reveals himself *GENERALLY*.**

The Psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech...” **[Psalm 19:1&2]** The universe is a laser lightshow, broadcasting 24/7 that a Master Designer is behind this masterpiece of creation. We may not see this invisible God, but his fingerprints are all over that which is visible. St. Paul declared that God has also left a voicemail on the human heart. **[Romans 1:20]** In the deepest recesses of our soul, we know that there is Someone bigger than ourselves who made us for himself. So, God has revealed himself through his creation and in our hearts. But this revelation is incomplete. It tells us there is a Creator God, but not exactly who he is or about his will for us. That’s why theologians call it *General* Revelation. We need something more specific like what Moses got on Mt. Sinai.

2) **God reveals himself *SPECIFICALLY*.** Theologians call this special revelation. It is special because God chooses to open up about himself and his plan for the ages to those he has chosen to redeem. He wraps his glory in clouds of mystery, but he chooses to let some of us in on the mystery. St. Paul speaks of that as a “... mystery that was kept hidden for ages and generations, but now has been made known to the Lord’s people.” **[Colossians 1:26]** Do you realize how special we are? Because we are his most beloved family and friends, he reveals things about himself that he wouldn’t tell other folks. That’s what he did with Moses on the mountain that day. Only he shares so much more with us New Testament saints than

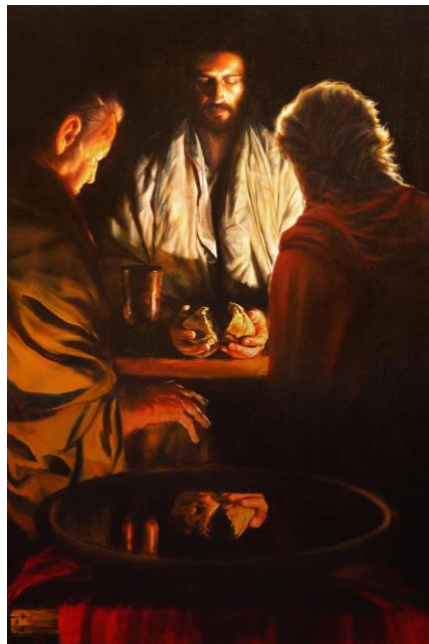


he did with the prophets and people of the Old Testament times. There are three ways he gets specific:

- **Before Christ, through the prophets.** **Hebrews 1:1** says, “In the past [or former times], God spoke to our ancestors through the *prophets* at many times and in various ways.” History is divided into two parts, intersected by God the Son coming to earth. The “past” or “former days” are those before Christ. We often say B.C. The “last days” or “latter days” are those between the First and Second Coming of Jesus. Before he came to earth, God spoke through prophets like Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. These prophets, filled with the Holy Spirit, had authority to say, “Thus says the Lord...” When their words were written down on scrolls, these became God’s infallible Word preserved for all time in the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

- **In the last days, he speaks only through Jesus Christ.**

**Hebrews 11:2** goes on to say, “But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” In Jesus Christ, God reveals himself most fully. Jesus is God in the flesh. St. John wrote, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” **[John 1:14]** There can be no more complete revelation of who God is than in Jesus. He is the final and most complete Word from God. Anything beyond what Jesus does or says is either redundant or false. That’s why, if we want to know the truth, we listen only to Jesus in these last days.



- **Jesus speaks only through his Apostles in the last days.** Jesus gathered his Apostles in the Upper Room for the Passover Supper. Crucifixion was coming in the morning. After Judas left to betray him, Jesus spoke to the eleven remaining Apostles. This was his deathbed speech; his instructions on how they were to carry on after he had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. His instructions were not for us, but for his chosen Apostles *alone*. We

need to understand the following verses if we are to grasp the full meaning of Hebrews 11:1&2:

In **John 14:24-26** he said, "...these words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you things and remind you of everything I have said to you." Jesus said that everything he has said to them came from his Father. Remember, Hebrews 1:2 says that in the last days, God would speak only through his Son. For three years, Jesus had given God's words to his Apostles. Yet, they were fallible humans who might forget what he said. Imagine, eleven men all trying to remember the same things years later. That wouldn't give us much confidence in the New Testament. But Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would **remind them** of everything he said. No wonder the gospels and epistles of the Apostles are so perfectly in sync when it comes to historical facts and doctrinal messaging.



In **John 16:12&13**, Jesus makes another promise to his Apostles: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears and he will tell you what is yet to come." In other words, Jesus hadn't yet told his

Apostles everything his Father had to say. Perhaps there wasn't enough time in his three years on earth with his Apostles, or maybe they weren't yet ready to grasp it. But he would reveal more to them, through the Holy Spirit, in the years after he ascended to heaven. So the Spirit will not only remind his Apostles of what Jesus had already said, but will **give them new revelation from God through his Son.**

- 3) God preserves his special revelation through the *Written Word*.** The word, scripture, comes from the Latin word *scriptus* which means writing. Our Old and New Testaments are God's words written down. That's why we call them the *Holy Scriptures*. God loved us too much to depend on the oral traditions of fallible and forgetful people to pass his word down to each generation. So his Holy Spirit not only spoke through the prophets before Christ, and the Apostles Jesus chose to deliver his Word in the last days, but also was there to make sure they wrote it down exactly as it had

been given. That's why St. Paul could write, "All Scripture is God-breathed..." [2 Timothy 3:16]

Not only that, but the Holy Spirit worked in history to **preserve** those Scriptures so that centuries later, the best of scholarship (from the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls to thousands of First Century New Testament fragments) proves beyond a doubt the Bible we have today matches the Scrolls and Scriptures possessed by Old Testament saints as well as first century Jesus followers.

- **How do we know which Old Testament books are trustworthy?**

Though there are many archeological and textual proofs (like the Dead Sea Scrolls) that the Old Testament Scriptures are God's Word, our ultimate proof is that God's people in the "former days" received them as such, and Jesus affirmed them by his own testimony. Again and again he said, "What do the Scriptures say?" When St. Paul wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed..." he was referring primarily to the Old Testament Scriptures. Most of the New Testament had not been written by the Apostles yet. When, in **1 Timothy 3:15**, he reminded young pastor Timothy that he had been "taught the holy Scriptures from childhood..." he was speaking of the Old Testament books of the Bible.

- **How do we know the New Testament books are trustworthy?**

There were so many writings floating around during the time of the Early Church. Some are called *pseudepigrapha*, a fancy long word which is a combination of Latin words that mean, "writings that are false." Archeologists and other scholars have found about 120 that were written between 300 BC and 300 AD. Many claimed to be written by Old Testament prophets and New Testament Apostles. So, how did Church councils decide what to put in the New Testament? Realizing that Jesus said that the Word God had given to him for the last days would only be delivered by his Apostles, the Church came up with three tests:

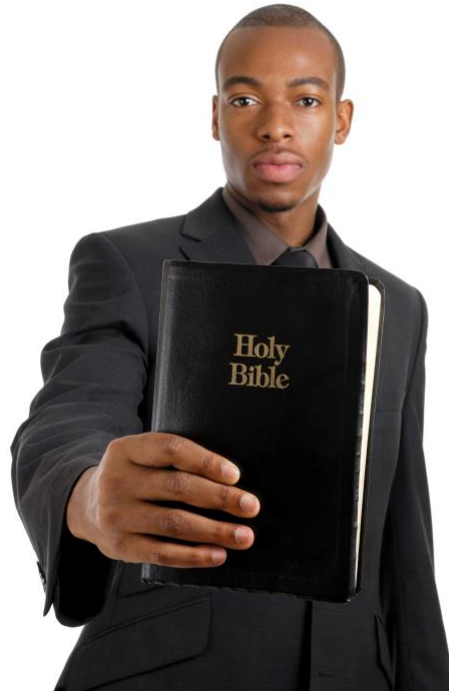
1) They had to be **written by Apostles, or under the direct authority of Apostles**. For instance, Mark wrote under Peter's authority, and Luke wrote his gospel and the book of Acts under St. Paul's authority. We aren't sure about the book of Hebrews, but it is written in the style of St. Paul. James is written most likely by the half-brother of Jesus who labored among the Apostles. The rest of the New Testament had clear apostolic authorship.

2) They had to be **apostolic in doctrine**. In other words, they couldn't contradict the writings of other Apostles. "God is not the author of confusion." [1 Corinthians 14:33]

3) They had to be **received as authoritative by the Apostolic Church** [the First Century Church].

- **What about Paul who wrote much of the New Testament?**

Have you ever wondered why Paul spent so much time defending his calling as an “Apostle of Jesus Christ”? The answer is simple. He said some hard things people didn’t want to accept as the commands of Jesus. So it was easy for them to remind everyone that Paul was not in the Upper Room with the other Apostles. Sure, he “claimed” to have met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He further claimed he had spent three years in the Arabian Desert with the Resurrected Jesus. **[Galatians 1:1-18]** He further claimed that Jesus had appointed him to be an Apostle. It was easy for cynical people to say, “How do we know? Maybe Paul is lying or delusional. We can’t be sure he is writing with Apostolic authority. So we can ignore what he writes.”



That becomes a problem when we realize Paul wrote one-third of the New Testament books. But, in his Second Letter, St. Peter sets the record straight. He writes for himself and the rest of the Apostles, in **2 Peter 1:16-21**, that they didn’t make up fables when they told what they saw and heard from Jesus. Nor did they depend on their memories. Rather, when they sat down to write their gospels and epistles, they wrote like the prophets of old, as they were “carried along by the Holy Spirit.” What Jesus had promised came true. In these last days, he spoke for the Father, through the Holy Spirit, to his Apostles. But what about Paul? St. Peter gives a resounding and unambiguous answer in **2 Peter 3:15&16**. He wrote, “Our brother Paul wrote many things that are hard to understand, and ignorant people distort, as they do the rest of Scripture.” He says two significant things: 1) St. Paul is a brother in the company of Apostles like Peter; 2) as such, what he

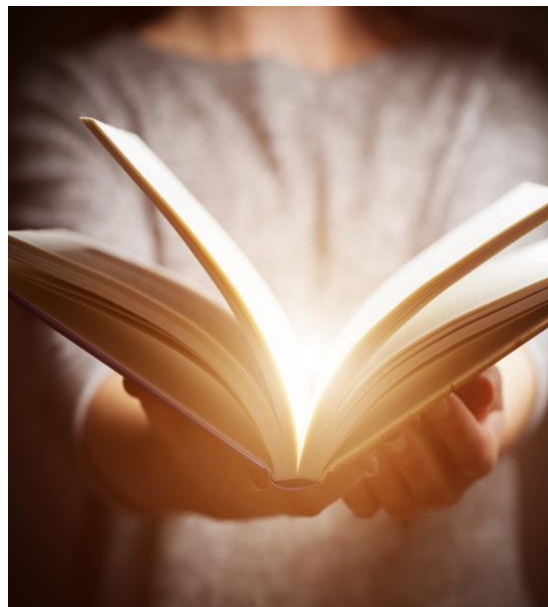


wrote is Scripture that is on the same level as that written by the Old Testament Prophets and New Testament Apostles.

- **When is Scripture completely written?** This is a critical question for those of us who want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth that only God can reveal with absolute certainty and credibility. The Old Testament was closed by the time Jesus came to earth. Jesus affirmed the credibility of the Old Testament books as God's spoken word written down for posterity. [Matthew 5:17&18] But, what about the New Testament? The answer is simple: when the last of the twelve Apostles (that includes St. Paul) died, there could be no more Scripture. God was finished with his special revelation. That's why Jude 3&4, one of the last written books of the Bible, can say, "Contend for the Faith once and for all delivered." That means that Mohammed is not a prophet whose writings are God's truth. That means Buddha, Mohammed, the Vishnu, Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, or L. Ron Hubbard, or any other religious guru, televangelist, or self-proclaimed prophet or so-called apostle, is selling a false bill of goods when they claim to be speaking God's words. The Scriptures are closed. Everything we need to know for faith and practice is already written down.

**Secondly, if God is truth, what is our confidence that the Bible is his Word written down?**

One of the greatest summations of biblical doctrine is the Westminster Confession of Faith. In chapter 1.5, the Confession gives several reasons for the credibility of our Bible: the efficacy of its doctrines, the consent of its parts, the sum of its whole, the majesty of its style, etc. But, after giving many sound reasons we should take confidence, it says, "Nevertheless, our full assurance rests in the Holy Spirit as it speaks in and through the Word to our hearts." The same Holy Spirit who spoke through the Prophets and the Apostle, and then carried them along as they wrote down the Words of God, and preserved those Scriptures, is the same Holy Spirit who works through them to convince your heart and mind that they are true.



No one can convince you that the Bible is God's Word. Nor will your

best arguments convince someone else. Even Jesus couldn't argue Pilate into believing he was the Truth. We can only speak the truth, and then let the Holy Spirit do his effective work in their hearts. Spiritually dead people must be born again by God's Spirit. So share, and then pray desperate prayers for God to work on your heart and theirs too.



### **Thirdly, what should be our response to the Word of God?**

The Westminster Confession of Faith gives a first-rate answer in chapter 1.10: our final rule on all matters of Faith and practice is found in the Scriptures alone. The Confession begins by saying "The councils of men do sometimes err."

Humans are prone to error. *Our* truth is not always *true* truth. The writers of the Confession were admitting in the first chapter of their work that we should not even take their theological views as certain truth. Even they were prone to error. The only certain truth is found in the Bible. It is the only basis of belief for a follower of Jesus. It is the only sure guide for the practice of our Faith. It is the final arbiter of all disputes between believers. It is the only measure we have to test what is true or false.

The Protestant Reformers changed the world when they said *Sola Scriptura*—ONLY THE SCRIPTURES. Fully devoted followers of Jesus must stand on this alone: God is truth; he has given us that truth in Jesus who affirmed the Prophets of old and commissioned the Apostles for the last days to deliver that truth. He carried them along by His Holy Spirit to write down that truth exactly as it came from God the Father through Jesus the Son. The Bible alone contains that certain truth. It has been preserved through the ages to come to us as it was originally written. All of it allows us to say with full confidence, "The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it. Now I will live out with passion what it says."

## DR. BOB'S QUESTIONS TO PONDER



1. Do you believe that God has written in his Word an answer to every question and issue we face in our day of expanding knowledge? If not, in what areas is the Bible silent?
2. Are there Prophets or Apostles today? How should we respond to those who claim to be so?
3. Can anything be added to Scripture to enhance our faith or practice?
4. What does *Sola Scriptura* mean to you?
5. How can you use the teachings from this FaceTime with Jesus to lead people to Jesus himself?

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