

Articles and Sermons :: Finding Truth in a World of Distortion by Steve Gallagher

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It was a hot afternoon in July of 1981 and I was one of 150 trainees sitting in a classroom in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Academy. A seasoned detective was teaching us about the unreliability of witnesses' testimony when suddenly a man burst through the door, with another man following close on his heels, shooting at him. The first man collapsed in the front of the classroom while his assailant ran back out the door. The whole event was over before the stunned students knew how to respond. To our amazement, the unharmed "victim" stood up and left. The instructor then asked us to write down a description of the assailant on a sheet of paper.

After we had concluded our assignment, the "assailant" re-entered the room and we could see for ourselves how pathetic our powers of observation had actually been. Many of the students' portrayals were poles apart. Very few of the trainees had provided accurate details. It was a lesson I would never forget about how vastly different people's perceptions of life can be—even from those witnessing the same event, under identical conditions.

The fact is that truth can be very elusive at times. People are complex beings whose perspectives about life are shaped by many different factors. For example, in the story above, one female cadet had described the assailant as six feet, four inches tall, when actually he was only five feet, ten inches in height. Her fearful disposition had clearly colored her perception of the man.

God has admonished believers to adhere to the truth. Nowhere is this admonition more strongly urged than those living during the Last Days. Scripture repeatedly warns that this era of history will be a time of unprecedented deception.

The apostle Paul even implied that the only way to make it through these "perilous times" would be to have a love for truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:10) Simply holding some belief system would not suffice in a time of such overwhelming falsehood. One's only hope would be to maintain a passionate devotion to truth.

Consider for a moment the difference in your life and that of a typical First Century believer. There were only limited sources from which he could derive information that could shape his perspectives—perhaps one of the apostles, some practicing Gnostic, a Judaiser or maybe even a Pharisee. But even at that he would have to physically put himself in a position to listen to someone to be influenced.

How vastly different is our world today! We must find our way through a virtual labyrinth of influences aimed at us: advertisers, news media, television producers, websites, and so on. Even in the Christian realm we are targeted by a multitude of teachers promoting some particular form of Christianity. No wonder Jesus and Paul were so urgent in their warnings about falsehood during our time!

Getting hold of Truth in such a time as this is a little like finding one's way through a minefield. Any deviation from the Straight and Narrow can easily land a person in dangerous territory. In light of that, I would like to offer a few principles that have kept me in good stead over the years.

1. Thoroughly Familiarize Yourself with the Word of God. One would think that bank examiners would be trained to spot counterfeit dollars by studying them, but actually, they are taught to know legitimate dollar bills from top to bottom. Likewise, having a working knowledge of false teachings can be helpful, but the most effective way to discern fraud is by knowing the Bible inside out. Superficial reading of Scripture will tend to keep you at a shallow level of discernment. Study the Bible: do word studies, use Inductive study methods, pore over trustworthy commentaries. Remember Paul's admonition to love the truth!

2. Live In the Truth. It may sound ridiculous, but if you want to know the truth you have to be honest with yourself. Con artists, flatterers and false teachers all possess an inherent ability of telling people what they want to hear. The most alarming concern is not the deceivers themselves but our own tendency to believe what we want to believe. If you are in the habit of avoiding uncomfortable truth about yourself or of conveying an exaggerated (false) image of your spiritual life to others, you are not really living in the truth. And if you are not abiding in truth, you will have little protection from deception.

3. Limit Deceptive Influences. Paul called the Devil the "prince of the power of the air" because he is a master at creating

ing spiritual atmospheres that color people's perceptions of life. Satan knows that Christians can discern outright lies so he interweaves subtle deception throughout television programming, Internet stories, sporting articles and so on. The danger to Christians is in the subtlety of the lies being presented. Those who think they can spend hours lying in this foul bathtub and remain unaffected are only deceiving themselves. A good barometer as to your vulnerability is to ask yourself if you are spending more time in the Word of God than in the world's assorted mediums.

4. Regularly Seek the Lord. The only way believers will successfully navigate the treacherous waters of the end times is to maintain a solid connection with God. When Jesus said, "I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life," He wasn't simply providing nice fodder for Sunday morning sermons. We must maintain a viable, ongoing relationship with Him. How will you know the Truth if you don't know His voice? (John 18:37)

5. Keep a Humble Estimation of Your Perspectives. The level of confidence that people have in their awareness of truth is amazing considering how easily deceived they are. Someone once said, "If you think you can't be deceived, you're already half way there." We spend our days in a culture where deception is powerful and overwhelming—and it's only going to get worse. This is not the time to hold a cocky attitude about life. We live in fearful times and should have the humility to see our great need to distrust our own perceptions and to cling tightly to the Lord.

Beloved, you and I are witnessing the same events going on around us. I am convinced that we are in the beginning stages of the great falling away right now. The question is whether we have the power of observation to see these end time prophecies unfolding. Considering the "world of distortion" in which we live, perhaps an even greater question we should ask ourselves is if we really do have a "love of the truth so as to be saved."

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