

# **BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #100:**

## **THE PRICE OF TRUTH**

**By John Temples**

Have you always told the truth? Probably none of us can say we have. As a youngster, I was taught to always tell the truth, but I did not always do it. And if I were honest and you had asked me on some occasion, “Why did you not tell the truth?” I might have responded, “Because I didn’t want to.” What I meant was, I was not willing to pay the price for telling the truth.

Proverbs 23:23 says, “Buy the truth and do not sell it.” This suggests two things: (1) truth is valuable; and (2) truth has a price which must be paid. For many people, the price of truth is too high. They would rather believe or tell a lie. (Interestingly, both truth and lies have prices or consequences attached; but with truth, the price generally must be paid up front, while the price of a lie you can “pay later.”)

One reason any of us lies, or does not accept the truth, is that the personal, intellectual, social, financial, or spiritual cost is too high. The rich young ruler asked Jesus what to do to have eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the law of Moses; he claimed he had done that. Jesus then told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor (Luke 18:22). He went away sorrowful--he wasn’t willing to pay that high a price for the truth as it related to his own situation.

On another occasion, Jesus was about to heal a man who had a withered hand. It was on the Sabbath day, and the Pharisees were watching Jesus closely, hoping to accuse Him of violating the Sabbath. Jesus asked the Pharisees a simple question: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil--to save life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4a). The Pharisees recognized that if they gave the obvious answer to this question--to do good--it would expose their hypocrisy. So “they kept silent” (verse 4b). They were not willing to pay the price of truth.

This helps explain why you can show some people the truth from the Bible but they will not accept it or obey it. They may even acknowledge that what you have taught is correct. But they are simply not willing to pay the price of a complete change in their lives.

## A CLASSIC CASE STUDY OF UNWILLINGNESS TO PAY THE PRICE OF TRUTH

In John 9 there is an account of one of Jesus's greatest miracles: He instantly gave sight to a man who was blind from birth. One of the many interesting aspects of this account is the reaction of the Pharisees, the Jewish fundamentalists who opposed Jesus.

The man was well known in the neighborhood; everybody knew he was born blind. And the fact of the healing was apparent to all. The Pharisees were faced with the truth--a genuine miracle--but they refused to accept it. Why? Because the price they would have to pay was too high. They would have to admit that Jesus was the Christ. They would lose credibility and power over the people. So the Pharisees went into "damage control mode." How they dealt with this incident is an interesting case study in the ways people suppress or deny truth and prefer to accept a lie. Here are four tactics the Pharisees used (and that people use today) to avoid accepting religious truth:

### FIRST TACTIC: ATTACK THE MESSENGER

The Pharisees first tried to discredit the One who performed the miracle. Speaking of Jesus, they said, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath" (John 9:16). What they meant was, Jesus did not observe their petty and sometimes ridiculous traditions regarding the Sabbath. (Notice that in the same text, they also tried to discredit Jesus by changing the subject--they suddenly brought Sabbath observance into the mix. Modern politicians have raised this technique--changing the subject--to a fine art.)

Attacking the messenger does not change the truth of the message, but people keep trying; and unfortunately, it often works. Paul had to deal with the same

problem in Corinth. His enemies in the church said of him, “His letters are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Corinthians 10:10). This shows that people will stoop to outright slander to avoid the force of the truth. Nathaniel also exhibited a typical prejudicial attitude upon hearing of Jesus: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46).

If we are really interested in finding the truth, we will measure and accept it on its own merits, rather than measuring it by the standard of the messenger.

## SECOND TACTIC: DENY THE OBVIOUS

“But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’” (John 9:18-19). Notice the utter stupidity of these remarks: “Is this your son?” What did they expect them to say? “Well, we’re not sure. He was born in our house, and he’s been hanging around for 20 or 30 years; but we just can’t be sure he’s our son.” And how about “who YOU SAY was born blind?” What would the parents say to that? “Well, there’s a good possibility--he keeps bumping into the furniture.”

The parents’ response also unfortunately shows a tinge of not wanting to pay the price of telling the complete truth: “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself” (John 9:20-21). The next verse tells us they gave an evasive answer because they feared being cast out of the synagogue. Denial or evasion, however, does not change the reality of truth!

## THIRD TACTIC: ENGAGE IN BLIND AND FAULTY REASONING

Most people deal with truth by reasoning rationally. To reason rationally is to draw only the conclusions that are warranted or demanded by the evidence. To reason irrationally is to draw conclusions that are not supported by the evidence or which do not agree with common sense and the rules of logic. A modern example of this

phenomenon is seen in the claim by evolutionists that life evolved from swamp slime by chance and random mutations. Many people will readily admit that a complex camera is the result of human genius and technology; but the human eye, which is even more complex, they say just happened by accident!

The Pharisees, those great doctors of the law, say to the blind man: “We know that God spoke to Moses; but as for this fellow, we do not know where he is from” (John 9:29). Amazing! Their reasoning is, Moses did miracles, so we know he was from God; this Man also does miracles, but cannot be from God!

The college graduates have spoken; now the uneducated blind man speaks: “The man answered and said to them, ‘Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where he is from, and yet he has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, he hears him...If this man were not from God, he could do nothing’” (John 9:30-33). The blind man reasoned correctly here: if this man does miracles, he must be from God. Nicodemus came to the same conclusion. Reasoning correctly, he said, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2).

#### FOURTH METHOD: JUST REFUSE TO LISTEN

Remember that obnoxious kid who would stick his fingers in his ears and start singing or shouting nonsense to drown out the words of others he did not want to hear? When the blind man said “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing,” that was too much for the Pharisees. Their response was, “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us? And they cast him out” (John 9:34). When they could find no legitimate way to refute the truth, they simply closed their ears. Putting the man out was their way of saying “End of discussion.”

Stephen experienced the same reaction to his sermon to a crowd of Jews. He carefully recited Jewish history, citing case after case from the Old Testament in which the Jews had rejected those sent by God; then he said, “You have received the law from God by the direction of angels and have not kept it” (Acts 7:53). The reaction was fierce and immediate. “Then they cried out with a loud voice,

**stopped their ears**, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him” (Acts 7:57-58a).

Grownups today have more subtle and sophisticated ways of shutting down Biblical discussions that are not going their way. One is to say, “That’s just your interpretation.” Once a preacher was discussing baptism with a lady, and he just handed her his Bible and asked her to read Mark 16:16: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” The woman read it, handed the Bible back, and said, “That’s just your interpretation.” It’s unfortunate but true that many people, when faced with obvious truth, will simply close their ears.

## CONCLUSION

The lesson is that powerful forces within each of us will do most anything to avoid admitting guilt or error. Hence, we will employ various tactics to avoid paying the price of accepting truth. We saw four of these tactics in the reaction of the Pharisees to a genuine miracle:

- Attack the messenger--try to discredit the source.
- Deny the obvious.
- Reason irrationally--use faulty logic.
- Close your ears and simply refuse to listen.

Solomon said, “Buy the truth and do not sell it.” This tells us that truth is valuable, and that it has a price tag. For some people, that price is too high to pay--they would rather accept a lie. But when eternity is in the balance, is there really any price too high for truth? --John Temples