

Truth versus ‘Truthiness’

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

Jesus wasn’t afraid to show His emotions. He wept when Lazarus died. He shed tears over Jerusalem. He raged against hypocrites and moneychangers defiling His Father’s house.

But Jesus based His life and teaching on something firmer than feeling: The truth as revealed by the Word of God. And He didn’t hesitate to make this absolute declaration of truth: **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).**

You will know the truth, Jesus also said, and it will make you free (John 8:32). But what is truth? Pontius Pilate’s famous question seems to have as many answers as there are people nowadays.

If you watch “Oprah” and follow bestseller lists, you’ve probably heard all about the uproar over “A Million Little Pieces.” That’s the title of a “memoir” by writer James Frey about his alleged criminal career and bizarre misadventures. With a push from superstar Oprah Winfrey — now the most powerful force in American book publishing — it has sold more than 3.5 million copies, and was second only to the latest “Harry Potter” book among 2005 bestsellers.

The trouble started when “Smoking Gun,” an investigative website, reported about a million little fabrications in “A Million Little Pieces.” The site exposed whole sections of the book as wildly exaggerated or outright fiction. At first Oprah defended Frey. Later, to her credit, she apologized to her millions of fans for presenting the book as factual — and lambasted Frey on her show.

“A Million Little Pieces” is far from the first autobiography to play fast and loose with facts. The whole episode would be a minor literary sideshow if not for the huge public visibility Oprah gives everything she touches.

But this incident also illustrates the sad state of “truth” in America. Everything is now open to acceptance or dispute. Almost everybody, it seems, feels qualified to declare what is true, regardless of the facts. ***If it feels right, if it’s declared loudly or entertainingly enough, then hey, it’s the truth -- even if it’s only my truth. Your truth is your business.***

“Feels” is a key word here. Oprah, despite taking the high road this time, has done as much as anyone to create the market for gut-wrenching “memoirs.” In Oprah culture, ***if it “feels” true, it must be true.***

Politicians, phony academics, purveyors of “reality television” and other masters of distortion contribute to the confusion. Much of TV news has morphed into entertainment.

Many news “consumers” access only websites or e-news services that tell them exactly what they want to hear. Several million young adults claim their primary news source is Comedy Central’s “The Daily Show,” a program that reports “phony news” for satirical purposes. It’s entertainment, but an amazing number of people believe it.

Washington Times columnist Suzanne Fields calls this phenomenon the triumph of **“truthiness”** — a word coined, appropriately, by mock pundit Stephen Colbert of “The Daily Show.” (The Intersection of Faith and Reason, Frank Pastore Show, KKLA 99.5FM)

“Truthiness” is what sincere people **“conclude with their hearts, not their heads,”** Fields explains. “Much that passes for fact in textbooks and in the media is really about truthiness, not truth.”

Basically, **“truthiness”** is emotional relativism. Among its most gullible victims are young people. Numerous studies show that many students, even at the college level, lack critical thinking skills, cannot identify the most basic events of recent history — much less past generations — and cannot distinguish between fact and fiction.

But **“truthiness”** often afflicts another target: the church. Yes, the Gospel of truth must be embraced by faith. But it’s built upon a rock-solid biblical foundation that has withstood the storms of ages. Too often, we undermine that foundation through neglect and mushy theology.

“Modern evangelicalism puts undue weight on experience,” Christian commentator Chuck Colson recently observed on a radio program. *“If somebody lacks a personal testimony — and the more dramatic the better — he is made to feel like a second-class believer. This heavy reliance on feelings carries over (to) discipleship and worship.... This is all to the good when it results in people making a personal commitment to Jesus. But it can be dangerous when that is all there is. Doctrine may be seen as abstract and inaccessible because it seems unrelated to personal experience.”* (The Intersection of Faith and Reason, Frank Pastore Show, KKLA 99.5FM)

Yet the church stands or falls on the great doctrines of the Bible. God’s supremacy and love. His righteousness and man’s utter lostness in sin. His exclusive offer of salvation by faith through Jesus Christ alone. His command to declare His glory and make disciples among all nations.

If some of those doctrines sound too stern, too “judgmental” to touchy-feely believers, what then?

As I travel around the world involved in world missions I can both see and believe that the American evangelical church **“seems to be losing its voice”** just as the opportunity to declare the Gospel worldwide is greater than ever.

At base, the issue is a failure of theological nerve — a devastating loss of biblical and doctrinal conviction. Put bluntly, many who claim to be Christians simply do not believe that anyone is actually lost.

This view, which is being quietly, often unconsciously adopted by more and more churchgoers, is anything but compassionate. These believers sleep soundly only “because their conscience is uncluttered by concern for the lost.”

If no one is lost, we have no business preaching the Gospel. If no one is lost, we have no business asking our best and brightest to leave their homes and sacrifice their comforts to be missionaries. If no one is lost, we have no right to ask someone to follow Christ who may lose his or her life as a result.

But people are lost. They do need a Savior. God loves them. And He tells us to declare His name and make disciples to the ends of the earth.

That’s not “truthiness.” That’s the truth. Is your life a reflection of “truthiness” or truth? As I engage our students more and more I am seeing a disturbing trend of “truthiness” and not truth.

Hmmm, something to think to about!