

Truth and Discernment

In recent years we have experienced a proliferation of conflicting news. Everyone seems to have a new theory, the inside scoop, or have just read a news article explaining what is “really going on.” This has had a significant impact on our people, even creating conflict within churches. How should we respond when faced with contradictory information, and how are we to determine what to believe? Perhaps more importantly, how can we as leaders sort through this barrage of information and guide our congregations in truth?

The goal of this writing is to address these questions. We have divided the content into four parts. This is to make it more readable as well as to assist church leaders who desire to share this content in church bulletins, newsletters, or periodicals.

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COMING SOON

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Part 1: What Is Truth?

“What is truth?” This profound question echoed down the stone hall as the man who asked it, ironically, seemed too impatient to wait for an answer. The Bible says that when Pilate “had said this, he went out” (Jn. 18:38). It was the right question, asked of the right Person. But, like many of us, Pilate failed to carefully pursue the answer.

Today, people are asking the same question. Faced with an abundance of conflicting information, people are not sure what to believe. One source proclaims that this is “the truth,” while another shows strong evidence that “truth” is over here. And in the midst of this perplexing and chaotic swirl, humanity is confused. What then is truth?

The God of Truth

Truth has many definitions in modern culture, but for our purposes we will define it as that which is in accordance with fact or reality. It is the way things actually are. Truth stands alone, unmoved by popular opinions, false narratives, or fake news. It is unchanged by arguments, personal feelings, or even rulers who deny it. Truth is immutable, a characteristic of Almighty God Himself. Notice these descriptive words used by Moses as he sang of an unchanging God: “He is the Rock, His work is perfect: For all his ways are justice: *A God of truth* and without injustice, Righteous and upright is he” (Deut. 32:4, emphasis added). Like a rock, God’s truth never moves. The characteristics of truth—its permanence, enduring nature, and transcendent immutability—are all descriptions of God Himself.

In the New Testament, the Apostle John describes Jesus as “full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). That is an amazing statement, yet Jesus took it one step further. “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6). That must have startled Jesus’ disciples. Jesus didn’t say that He always told the truth or that truthfulness is one of His characteristics. He said He is truth. Jesus is truth personified!

Just before Jesus left this world, He promised the coming of the Holy Spirit. Notice how Jesus describes this coming Comforter.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, *the Spirit of truth* who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.

However, when He, *the Spirit of truth*, has come, He will *guide you into all truth*.

(Jn. 15:26, 16:13)

Since God loves truth, promotes truth, embodies truth, and is Truth, it only follows that His people will be lovers of truth. To love Jesus is to love truth. To live in Jesus is to live in Truth, daily guided by the Spirit of Truth. We should be known in our local communities as lovers of truth. Our words, manner of life, and the way we operate our businesses should provide a public declaration—“This is a lover of truth!”

The Church—Truth Demonstrated

Jesus' church is also called to the serious responsibility of collectively demonstrating truth. In the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica, he stresses the importance of loving truth. Setting aside any potential prophetic meaning, notice how he contrasts followers of Satan (who love a lie) with followers of Jesus (who are lovers of truth):

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive *the love of the truth*, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who *did not believe the truth* but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

(2 Thes. 2:8–12)

Truth is a defining characteristic, a clear distinguishing line between two kingdoms. The one is known for loving, pursuing, and knowing truth. The other is identified by deceit, hypocrisy, and lies. The one passionately seeks and pursues truth—the other opposes it. Jesus' kingdom is Truth, and Satan's untruth.

Our society clearly aligns itself with Satan's kingdom as it increasingly calls evil good, insists that wrong is right, and peddles misinformation of every kind. Carelessness with truth is a defining characteristic of the kingdom of this world; if we pass on false narratives or deceitful theories, we are helping the father of lies. Believers should take this reality very seriously.

Kingdoms which view truth lightly use swearing to inform others when they are being entirely honest. But Jesus wanted a kingdom where His citizens tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—all the time! Jesus instructed His disciples, “Do not swear at all... But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’” (Mt. 5:34–37). Paul told Timothy that he was writing “so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:14, 15). Do we understand the significance of these words? God's church is to be the “ground,” the underlying support for truth itself.¹ That is a tremendous calling!

There should be a clear picture of truth coming from our local church communities, giving our world an accurate description of reality.² Paul warned the church at Ephesus that they shouldn't be like “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Eph. 4:14). The church is to demonstrate stability, unmoved by false doctrines and unverified theories. We are to be a truth-believing, truth-loving, and truth-telling people. This was the original testimony of the early Church and

1 This is the only time this Greek word, *hedraïōma*, is used in the Bible. It speaks of support, a prop, or something underneath that is immovable and settled.

2 As Brett McCracken has written, “Shouldn't Christians, as followers of the man who called himself ‘the truth’ and said ‘the truth will set you free,’ be leading the charge to recover truth and model wisdom in a post-truth age?” (*The Wisdom Pyramid*. Wheaton, IL, Crossway, 2021, p. 22)

the historical position of the Anabaptists. A man's word was his bond, and people could depend on what he said. This is still God's desire for our local churches.

But what if a church becomes slack with truth, casual with research, and willing to pass on unverified information? Or worse, what if a church becomes known for believing the unbelievable and peddling false narratives?

Lost Credibility

Our churches seem fairly united on the basic doctrinal truths regarding Jesus Christ. We can articulate the New Testament message and share the important facts regarding Jesus' life, death, and glorious resurrection. We can even agree that it is important to share this truth with our unbelieving neighbors, and we talk about looking for opportunities to share "truth" with others.

But when we say a man is truthful, we are referring to more than doctrinal truth. We are also assuming he is serious about truth in his family life, with his neighbor, and with the facts about the product he is selling to a customer. Consequently, when he shares information about a current political issue, we assume he has done due diligence in verifying its veracity. His reputation depends on it, and we would no longer refer to him as an honest man if he was careless with truth, regardless of the subject.

So what happens when we lose credibility?

Let's assume a member of your congregation has a desire to share his faith in your community. He has grown up believing what he learned from his parents and what was taught in school, but he tends to believe sensational stories which come from people he trusts. He has never really enjoyed reading and has subconsciously assumed that occasionally skimming the headlines provides a fairly accurate perspective of our world.

One day he meets an agnostic on the job site. He wants to eventually share his faith, but in an effort to first build relationship, this member in your congregation begins by discussing current news events and his perspective on our world.

Church member: "Did you know that much of what the government is telling us really isn't true? A lot of this stuff is just made up. I have even heard that things like the Jewish holocaust never actually happened."

Agnostic (frowning): "But there are many pictures and videos of death camps. I saw them in school!"

Church member: "That's probably just part of the government's plan to mislead us. It's not hard to fabricate pictures and movies. You can't really believe any of the news anymore. There are huge things going on behind the scenes, and the government is constantly trying to deceive us!"

When your church member then attempts to share his faith, how much credibility would the Gospel message have? How can a message about Jesus be deemed credible if the messenger is seen as careless with truth in other parts of his life?

Our witness in the world is no stronger than our love for truth and connection to reality. When credibility is lost, individually or collectively, our ability to impact the kingdom of darkness and share the message of Jesus (Truth) is diminished. Why should honest seekers ask us for spiritual truth when we thoughtlessly pass on the unverified or untrue?

What Is Truth?

Recently many of our Anabaptist communities have experienced internal stress, partly because we can't agree on what is true. The result has been conflict within and a damaged Christian witness without.

Consider this parable:

Don and Ron are respected members in their local Anabaptist congregation. They both love the Lord, have godly families, and profess a deep love for truth. For years they sat on the same pew each Sunday, harmoniously enjoying their Christian lives together.

Then COVID hit.

Don observed what was happening, and the truth seemed obvious. The Bible warns that in the last days self-centered men will be lovers of themselves and not want to submit. They will rebel against rulers and disdain governments. This disrespect for authority will impact even the church. As Don listened to his news sources, read the material that came into his home, and conversed with friends who saw things as he did, the situation was clear. Masks and attempts to restrict gatherings were simply an attempt by the government to contain a pandemic. This was a medical virus, not persecution! Further, aren't we supposed to obey our rulers unless their commands conflict with God's? Failure to submit to this would simply demonstrate to our children that they need not submit to rules they don't agree with either!

Ron watched what was happening as well, and the truth seemed just as clear to him. This was exactly what the Bible said would transpire in the last days. Things would grow worse and worse, governments would become more corrupt, and powerful men would compete to control the people. The powers of darkness would creep in, and very few people would be able to stand. As Ron listened to his news sources, read the material that came into his home, and conversed with friends who saw things as he did, the situation was clear. Masks and attempts to restrict gatherings were simply government overreach, and anyone who couldn't stand up to this wouldn't be able to stand when more severe persecution came either!

Two good Christian men who had grown up in the same community and worked and worshiped together for years were suddenly unable to communicate. Each had his own news sources, solid evidence, friends who agreed with his perspective, and even Bible

verses to back up his position. Neither was willing to back down or compromise on what he saw as Scriptural truth.

As many of us can attest, this isn't just a wild hypothetical story. We have seen firsthand the unrest that differing opinions can have on a local congregation. We also suspect there will be more difficult situations in the future, and Satan would love to divide our churches. He loves dissension and would like nothing better than to destroy our families, discourage our children, and mute our witness to the world. The church is called to be light to a darkening society. But how can we do this if we are unable to even agree on what the truth is, where to find it, and which sources are trustworthy?

Don and Ron are at an impasse. Neither trusts the other and both are sure they understand the "truth." If they were in our congregation, what would we as church leaders do? Are our churches prepared for a continuing flood of half-truths, misinformation, and false narratives? Are we capable of coming together and discerning which issues are even worth debating and defending? Some issues are obviously worth investigating. But in a world awash in "facts," how are we going to discern truth?

These are questions we should be asking and issues we will consider in the following parts of this article. Just like Pilate, who asked the right question yet walked away, it is easy to say that we want truth, yet never apply ourselves or teach our people how to properly discern. It is time for our Anabaptist church communities to apply themselves to the issue of truth and discernment. A church's ability to share truth will be no stronger than its love for truth.

Part 2: Why the Struggle?

People came to America for different reasons and with divergent ideals, religious beliefs, and perspectives. Consequently, there have always been issues threatening to sever the union. Whether federalism in the 1700s, slavery in the 1800s, or Vietnam in the 1900s, America has always seemed to have a controversy threatening to split it apart. But something about the current division is different, and much of the reason rests on how we receive our news.

There was a time when the front portion of a newspaper seemed primarily devoted to the facts, and the back page held the editor's opinion. Today, however, much of the information we receive seems to be slanted, and the reader must work hard to discover truth. And there is much more material to sort through. Throughout history, investigating, producing, and disseminating news was labor intensive. Consequently, there was much less of it. But in today's world, with the availability of inexpensive communication tools, anyone with an opinion can be a news publisher.

Inflation of Information

The western world is awash with information. The number of news sources is mind-boggling, and everywhere we turn someone is trying to shape our perspective. Fueling much of this is the internet which seems to empower and amplify the brash, the ugly, the weird, and the extreme. Outrage and shocking headlines attract the most attention, and false narratives proliferate. Social media and web-based platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Google, etc.) are funded by ads, and the more time a user spends on a site the more income is generated. Even newspapers' primary revenue stream is from advertising.

Of course, it didn't take marketers long to discover that the way to keep people on a site is to feed them a continual diet of news that agrees with their perspective. Complex computer algorithms have been created to discover each viewer's beliefs, causing the customized content to be a regurgitation of that person's viewpoint. These little echo chambers continually remind us how perceptive we really are, and we like that!

Americans who lean Republican will begin seeing an abundance of right-leaning articles on their news feed, and those who lean left find a profusion of articles proving that Democrats are correct. Confirmation bias³ is a universal human tendency, and the electronic world has quickly learned how to profit from this human weakness. This exploitation not only creates profits for these media companies, it also increases the deep ideological divide among Americans. In the past, people had different opinions but were largely working off the same information. Today, the "news" a person is consuming may be completely different than his or her neighbor's, yet each assumes their "news" is accurate and balanced. With neighbors (and church members) receiving information from opposing perspectives, conflict and misunderstanding are inevitable.

The wise man wrote, "Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget..." for good reason (Pro. 4:5). Wisdom is much more difficult to obtain than information. The assumption today seems to

3 Confirmation bias is the tendency in people to favor information that confirms their existing beliefs.

be that humanity's greatest need is more information. But more information, of necessity, calls for increased discernment to properly use it, and the average American is already consuming far more "facts" than he or she can properly sort or validate. News feeds, websites, blogs, and articles have forced America to become a nation of prolific information skimmers. We read a few news articles or listen to a podcast and subtly believe we are an expert on the topic. We know what the "real problem" is, who the next president should be, or what the "real" cure is to a dreaded disease.

Where Are We?

One might assume that Anabaptist followers of Jesus, committed to truth and focused on a different kingdom, would be free of the divisions that plague our nation. Yet we are seeing this political partisanship creep into our churches. If you care about the unborn, insist on biological gender, or encourage traditional family values, you are associated with Republicans. If you are concerned about minorities, the poor, the treatment of immigrants, or even attempt to be a good steward of creation, you are labeled a Democrat. Yet all of these were Biblical values long before the current political polarization. So why do we see church members like Don and Ron dividing along political lines? How can a group of Christ-following people fall out because they are seemingly unable to agree on what truth even is? The answer may be that some of our greatest strengths as Anabaptist people come with corresponding weaknesses.

Seven Strengths that Can Become Weaknesses

1. We love simplicity and common sense.

We love practicality, level-headed pragmatism, and simple lifestyles without outward adornment. These are unquestionably Biblical values. The Apostle Paul commended the church at Corinth for operating out of "simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom," and we believe this is still God's will for us today (2 Cor. 1:12). We love common sense and eschew impractical head knowledge. But mishandling a strength creates a weakness, and simplicity is no exception.

It can be easy for us to assume that every problem has a commonsense solution, and world dilemmas are actually not very complex. This suspicion that uncomplicated answers exist makes us vulnerable to misinformation, and we tend to fall for simplistic answers to multifaceted dilemmas. Perhaps there is a spike in oil prices, or a sudden increase in the cost of lumber. Someone comes along and says, "I just heard this whole thing is the result of price gouging. A few men at the top have cornered the market, and they are driving the price up, taking advantage of the common man!"

This comment may or may not be true. But our love for simple solutions makes us susceptible to these easy-to-understand explanations, regardless of the fact that supply and demand is rarely that simple. It is actually very difficult to get large numbers of suppliers to agree to these kinds of schemes. But the simplicity of the proposed solution appeals to something deep within us.

There is also something intoxicating about knowing and sharing the inside scoop on hidden information. So we pass it on. And the simple, yet often erroneous, explanation continues.

2. We have a strong belief in Biblical separation from the world.

When the Bible calls us to “come out from among them, and be separate,” we believe it means what it says (2 Cor. 6:17). Paul told the church at Rome, “Do not be conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2), and we understand these words to still be applicable today. But misunderstanding this vital principle creates a weakness. For many years, we have operated as a counterculture movement within a larger society. We have even been given special exemptions by our government and, over time, we can begin to see ourselves as unique, better than, or somehow different than general society. But being born into an Anabaptist community does not exempt us from selfishness, greed, and other universal human tendencies.

When assessing world problems, we can too quickly lay the blame on others—other people, organizations, or even some wealthy man with a hidden agenda. Blaming the world’s woes on some social movement or a particular political party may be tempting, but it may simply be a way of bypassing the reality of universal sinful tendencies. All of us are partly responsible for the woes of this broken world, and by quickly assigning blame, we may be overlooking our own complicity.

In contrast, consider godly men in the past who willingly embraced their own humanity and culpability for sin. Leaders like Nehemiah, who verbally confessed his own weakness and connection to a sinful people (Ne. 1:5–7). Or men like Daniel: when addressing the sin of Israel, he didn’t come to God saying, “They have sinned.” He began his prayer of repentance by embracing his own humanity with the memorable words, “we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.” (Dan. 9:5). Isaiah didn’t say “They are like sheep.” He said, “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way” (Isa. 53:6).

It is tempting to blame America’s woes on some powerful group or political party. That is much easier than admitting that the problems in our world are actually the result of humanity’s selfishness and sin. While Christians are to be separate from the world, we need to be careful about separating ourselves too far from the humanness of humanity. All of us, as selfish humans, have contributed to the brokenness of our world.

3. We are suspicious about an overemphasis on head knowledge.

Whether considering books or higher education, we believe that “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Cor. 8:1). We have watched many institutes of higher learning, even those that originally promoted godliness, transform into organizations departing from, even denying, Biblical truth. Over the years much of our caution has been vindicated and our suspicions confirmed.

Yet once again there is a corresponding weakness. It is possible to forget there is still value in careful study and accrued knowledge and experience.

It is easy for us to believe, after skimming a few articles, that we have a better grasp on a topic than we actually do. But does the person who skims an article or listens to a sales pitch about a medical issue have a better understanding than the scientist who has spent years studying a specific disease? Who is displaying the most humility: the one who has studied little, yet claims to understand both the malady and the cure, or the doctor who has researched for years yet admits he or she still has much to learn?

A disregard for accumulated knowledge and the advice of experts makes us easy prey for scams and hucksters. It is the height of arrogance to suppose that many medical researchers who have studied for years know less than I do after a few Google searches. Yet it has become common to hear plain people proclaim with certainty that a particular natural substance cures some disease that the medical community is still attempting to effectively treat. Educated researchers can be wrong and greedy pharmaceutical companies may promote drugs that are less than the best. But if we, as the uneducated, are going to disagree with the educated, we should at least express our opinions with great humility.

Although we must read with caution and discernment, it is through reading sources which challenge and stretch our perspective that we discover how little we really know and how much there is to learn. Avoiding information that challenges our viewpoint can encourage arrogance.

We are often incapable of recognizing our own incompetence. Our basic understanding of a topic can blind us to our ignorance. This inability to self-assess accurately has become known as the Dunning-Kruger effect, and all of us are susceptible. I may have listened to a surgeon talk about heart surgery, read a couple articles on the subject, and subconsciously conclude I have a fairly good grasp on the topic. But the reality is that the little bit I do know blinds me to the massive amount of knowledge I lack and to my need to learn from true experts in this field. My slight knowledge deludes me, and my ignorance feels like expertise!

The answer is to either study diligently at increasing my knowledge of the subject or humbly listen to those who have. It has been said that “As our circle of knowledge expands, so does the circumference of darkness surrounding it.” In other words, increasing knowledge of a given subject correspondingly increases our realization of our ignorance. This is why people who have made a particular subject their life study are sometimes more inclined to admit they have much to learn than those with brief exposure who speak boldly with greater confidence.⁴ Arrogance and pride are not found only among the educated, and if we are going to properly discern truth in our time, humility is essential.

4. We are a trusting people.

Most of us have grown up in settings where truth was expected and confidence in each other the norm. This is a huge blessing. The Apostle Paul told the church at Thessalonica that he had confidence that they would “do the things we command you” (2 Thes. 3:4). He trusted them, and trust is essential in our church communities. But the parallel weakness is that we are more susceptible to deception. When a product, service, or cure comes along that sounds amazing

4 As Albert Einstein famously said, “The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don’t know.”

and fits the need at hand, we tend to believe the claim, especially if it is delivered by someone we trust.

If Aunt Mandy tells us that a certain herb cures a disease, or Uncle Joe says that a particular political party has pulled a shenanigan, we know that must be true. After all, Uncle Joe and Aunt Mandy have proven themselves to be honest for years. We know we can trust them! This fact is so powerful that we rarely investigate information we hear from trustworthy sources, especially if it agrees with our preconceived opinion. But where did Uncle Joe and Aunt Mandy get their information? Of course they accurately conveyed what they heard. But how do we know their original source was correct?

Instead of investigating we pass the information on, and others trust its veracity due to our proven trustworthiness. In this way, misinformation (and disinformation)⁵ continues to spread. How often do we stop and investigate claims we receive from people we trust? Answering this will reveal much about our commitment to integrity and love for truth. Sometimes our desire to share the latest sensational information is stronger than our love for truth itself.

5. We love order and despise chaos.

Like our Creator, we love bringing order out of chaos, and when events are unexplainable, we naturally search for logical explanations. This desire to make logical sense (order) out of the illogical (disorder) makes us susceptible to false explanations. We see patterns, or accept explanations, where none exist. This is a tendency sometimes referred to as patternicity. Our minds, created with a propensity to seek meaning, quickly “connect the dots” and try to ascribe meaning to events. Sometimes we even develop false explanations.

An example would be the waves of the ocean. Many of us have heard that waves tend to come in groups of seven, with the seventh wave being the largest. This theory has been disproved repeatedly, yet it continues to attract. Occasionally the seventh wave is the largest, giving strength to the myth. But in reality this theory is passed on because we like predictability and explanations for random events.

We know that God does, at times, place significance in numbers and sequence. So this knowledge, coupled with this tendency to find patterns, makes us vulnerable. Someone may claim to have found a secret code in the Old Testament that can help you accumulate wealth, a sequence of events that points to a particular date when the end of the world will come, or a series of dates that seem to validate some conspiracy theory. The simplicity of a pattern that confounds the wise of this world appeals to something deep within us.

6. We believe that the forces of evil have power.

The Bible teaches us that evil exists in our world, a spiritual battle is taking place, and behind the scenes Satan is at work. But many false narratives being promoted go too far, giving the father of lies unjustified recognition, relying on his unlikely ability to unite self-centered men and

5 Misinformation refers to information which may not be intentionally false. Disinformation is information purposefully designed to deceive or mislead.

women to sacrifice for a cause which brings them little in return. Narratives of this nature should be viewed with skepticism since they contradict what Scripture teaches and what we observe about unregenerate human behavior.

For example, we sometimes hear that medical researchers actually know how to cure cancer, but they just aren't telling us. Or that oil companies have a motor which operates on perpetual motion but are keeping it a secret. Or take the "Flat Earth" theory: according to this belief, the earth is not a round globe but flat. All the educational curricula, photographs from space, and first-hand accounts of those who have traveled to space have been manufactured to fool mankind.

Yet consider the concerted worldwide effort necessary to hoodwink humanity if this and other conspiracies of this sort were true. Imagine the millions of people who would need to link arms, sacrificially set aside personal agendas, ignore opportunity for personal fortunes, and secretly work together harmoniously, all with the goal of bamboozling the larger populace. Are self-centered men capable of disregarding the potential for personal gain they could receive from exposing these scams? Does Satan have enough power to cause millions to selflessly unite for a false purpose? This is a level of harmony that the church has struggled to accomplish, even with the power of the Holy Spirit!

Evil men do deceive. Governments and marketers have always used deception to accomplish their purposes, and we can't immediately dismiss every seemingly wild narrative. But we should be wary of narratives which depend on large numbers of people sacrificially working together. This does not line up with what we know to be true about self-centered unregenerate humanity.

7. We want to be active workers.

We believe we are to be active in our world, fighting against the forces of darkness and exposing the tactics of the enemy (2 Cor. 2:11). God is at work, and we are to be laboring together with Him (1 Cor. 3:9)! Actively engaging is one of our strengths. But Christians can get so caught up in the work and easily forget Jesus' proclamation that His Kingdom and battle strategy are going to be different, completely opposite to the kingdoms of this world (Jn. 18:36).

Sam, a member in an Anabaptist congregation, enjoys listening to his favorite political talk show host, Frank Truth, on the way to work each morning. Frank Truth is a no nonsense, say-it-like-it-is radio host who regularly laments the eviction of God from schools and the culture. He fearlessly reminds his listeners that returning to God is the only way to stop our moral decline, and frequently requests prayer for important events transpiring in government. He even sends out emails, calling for Christian watchfulness during these critical times. Last week it was an important bill in Congress, and this week the Supreme Court is considering weighing in on abortion.

Sam wouldn't necessarily agree with all of Frank Truth's theology but likes the fact that Frank is on God's side of these important issues! Frank also gets things done! Millions listen to his program, and when Frank encourages people to vote a certain way, boycott some godless organization, or apply pressure on a politician, things happen! Sam likes that!

But Sam is unaware that something within HIMSELF is slowly shifting. Spending far more time listening to Frank Truth than to fellow believers, Sam's perspective has changed. At one time Sam saw the church as powerful, and God's primary means of bringing change to our world. But now when he thinks of needed change, his mind goes to court rulings and getting a particular political party into power this fall. There have also been moments (although he would never mention it) when he wonders about the wisdom of not voting. Where at one time Sam dreamed of ways to build the kingdom of God, his mind now gravitates to ways to bring transformation through government.

Sam has been slowly drawn in and ensnared. Frank Truth may be right about some of what he opposes, but he is wrong about the methods he proposes. Jesus said His kingdom is not of this world, and Sam has slowly lost this perspective. He has assumed he could maintain a kingdom focus while drinking at the well of political activism. But he is wrong. We eventually become what we consume.

As followers of Jesus, we desperately want to see light overcome the darkness in our world, and it is exciting to see the many ways God is working in our day. But it is also a time of great deception. Satan would love to subtly persuade us that we need to utilize Satan's tactics (violence and coercion) to achieve God's goals (redemption and love).

The Seriousness of the Situation

It is essential that the church, and especially its leaders, recognize the urgency and significance of the challenge. We must realize the result of naivete and of failing to carefully evaluate the information we consume. We are in danger, not only of losing our focus, but of also losing our reputation as pillars of truth. *Christianity Today* published an article entitled "Fleecing the Faithful—Again,"⁶ sharing the startling reality that the American Christian community is losing more money to fraudulent schemes than they are sending to overseas missions. The article specifically mentioned Anabaptist losses, referencing \$33 million lost in Ohio by 2,600 investors, most of them Amish. This article was published back in 2011, but unfortunately the problem of naivete doesn't seem to have lessened. Sadly, Christians in our day have become easy targets, famous for gullibility, and viewed as poor thinkers. But what are we to do?

Completely severing ourselves from all news isn't the solution. Followers of Jesus (Truth) will want to have some sense of what is going on in our world. Ignorance and a lack of curiosity should not be the trademark of God's people. Yet, how can we know what is true? How can we help each other become people of Biblical discernment?

In the next part, we will look at the importance of developing a strong personal foundation, essential for navigating a confusing time.

6 Walker, Ken. "Fleecing the Faithful—Again: Former YWAM Leader Defrauds Many." *Christianity Today*, vol. 55, no. 6, June 2011, p. 54ff.

This paper was prepared by ViewPoint: Anabaptists working together on current issues.

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ViewPoint builds on the Anabaptist value of community wisdom. A team comprised primarily of older, ordained men forms the core executive group. Subcommittees are then formed to address particular issues, drawing in people experienced in the subject.

ViewPoint was formed in response to repeated calls for help in addressing issues facing conservative Anabaptist leaders. A number of church leaders asked Faith Builders (Guys Mills) to facilitate the effort. The ViewPoint executive committee includes Steven Brubaker (PA), Merle Burkholder (ON), John Coblentz (PA), Matt Landis (PA), Gary Miller (ID), and David Yoder (KS).

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