

# PART FOUR

## THEOLOGICALLY IGNORANT

The postmodern generation does not have a theological position so much as it lacks a theological position. It has not rejected Christianity, because it is generally unaware of the Christian faith.

Modernists could not separate their opinion, system, or ideology from “truth,” therefore the postmodernist has concluded there is no truth. Modernity was an age of ideological “isms” and scientific hubris. Eastern thought has always operated from a different system of logic while the West confused a logical system with the truth.

Postmodernists are usually characterized as not believing in ultimate truth when in fact, they are searching for the ultimate truth. For Christians, this search opens unparalleled opportunities for presenting the gospel. The challenge for Christians, however, lies in their own capacity to distinguish between their theological system and the ultimate truth of the gospel. This chapter will argue that all theology is wrong, though some is more wrong than others. Theology is meditation about God, though during the modern age the church has made theology a science.

Modern liberal and evangelical theology became respectable by intellectualizing the spiritual domain out of theology. The spiritual was left to Pentecostals and Catholics who had the common decency to “do it” according to a tradition that could be rationalized in the modern world as aesthetic. People with a postmodern orientation have no difficulty with the supernatural in the Bible; but unlike most contemporary Christians, they also have no difficulty with the supernatural occurring today.

A plethora of explanations and speculations about the spirit world are

available today. The church has an opportunity to interpret this reality to a pagan world in a way it has not had since Patrick landed on the shores of Ireland fifteen hundred years ago. People are now prepared to accept spiritual reality. The question remains whether or not the church will be prepared to talk about such things.

No country, culture, society, or civilization has ever lasted. God has judged them all and found them lacking. The prophets of Israel described this process in detail, yet God's people continue to cling to the romantic notion that their country or culture or society or civilization is just what God had in mind. At the Ascension the disciples were still asking if the kingdom was about to be restored to Israel, but Israel's time was past. The book of Revelation describes the final judgment of nations and cultures and individual hearts. The success of the gospel does not depend upon the continuation of modernity any more than the success of God depended on the continuation of Israel. In each age and place, however, God opens a door through which the gospel can pass. It keeps the church from growing lazy. And it reminds us that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### FEELING GOOD WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME: TRUTH AND VALUES

In the movie *Return of the Jedi*, Luke Skywalker complains that his teacher, Obi Wan Kenobi, lied to him. Obi Wan had said that Luke's father had been killed by Darth Vader, when actually Darth Vader *was* Luke's father. This was a dramatic moment in that movie. To this accusation of lying, Obi Wan Kenobi replied that when the father was seduced by the dark side of the Force, then he ceased to be himself. Obi Wan argued that it was true that Darth Vader killed Atticus Skywalker—at least, “from a certain point of view.”

The postmodern generation does not believe in the truth as an absolute thing. Everything is relative; it all depends upon one's point of view. Something may seem true from one certain point of view and false from another certain point of view, but nothing is “true” or “false” in and of itself. The modern world had made dramatic claims about what is true and what is false. Especially was this so in the realm of science. Truth came to be regarded the same as the scientific method. Real truth consisted in what a person could verify through experimentation, observation, and duplication.

As the modern age rolled along and we moved out of an age of kings and monarchies to an age of other kinds of political systems, political movements started making these equally dramatic claims about what constitutes truth. We saw Communism making dramatic claims about the truth, and fascism making equally dramatic and contradictory claims about the truth. From time to time even democracy has made dramatic claims about what is



truth! Philosophically, the truth meant the philosophical system that a person uses.

Now, philosophers are not just people who live in ivory towers somewhere, and say obtuse and convoluted things. Everybody is a philosopher, because philosophy is simply a matter of how people think, and we all think. Everybody has a philosophy, and they express it in simple terms. “Seeing is believing” represents an entire philosophical system. This philosophy of knowledge is called *empiricism*. People with this philosophy of knowledge do not believe what they cannot experience firsthand. Doubting Thomas followed that kind of philosophy: “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it” (John 20:25b).

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” represents another approach to philosophy called *pragmatism*. This approach does not waste time worrying about what we can know. This approach is only concerned with what works. In this concern with what works, people do not really care about value and morals and ethics; it’s just a matter of “does it work?” If it works, it is good. If it does not work, it is bad. Oftentimes even Christians have gotten into this business of understanding truth in which we have relied on a philosophical approach. Christians have tended to see the truth as the theological system they have accepted or the philosophical system behind their theological system. It might be neoorthodoxy; it might be Calvinism; it might be Arminianism; it might be dispensationalism. These are all philosophical systems for interpreting Scripture, and people have a tendency to regard their system as the truth. Because we use a philosophical system for interpreting Scripture, we tend to confuse our way of thinking with God’s revelation.

The confusion of philosophy and revelation happens because we tend to confuse logic with the truth. In the West we have come to equate Western logic with what is really true. But all over the world there are many different kinds of logic. Logic is only a matter of how we make sense of the world. It operates like language. Everybody has a language, but not everybody speaks English. Everybody has a system of logic, but not necessarily our system. For this reason, in the modern world truth came to mean nothing more than individual preference.

## MODERNITY’S TAKE ON TRUTH

The dramatic advance of science accelerated steadily from Newton to Einstein and then exponentially during the twentieth century. Alongside this advance the philosophy of *naturalism* developed until it exercised a major influence on the modern world. According to naturalism, all phenomena

may be explained according to natural forces. Stated more extremely, nothing exists that may not be explained by natural forces or processes. When Napoleon asked Laplace where God fit into his theories, Laplace replied, “I have no need of that hypothesis.” Naturalism has no place for God, but naturalism also has no place for absolute truth or absolute values.

Newton assumed the existence of God, even though his view did not fit classical Christianity. He adopted a view of God that kept God at arm’s length from nature. God set everything in motion, including all the “laws” Newton set about to discover, then he withdrew from creation. In addition to the physical laws God established, Newton and most scientists and philosophers of his age believed that God had also established moral laws. This view of God, which swept through the scientific, theological, and intellectual communities of the West during the eighteenth century, is known as *deism*. Deism provided a philosophical basis for separating God from nature and morality. Truth, in turn, became an aspect of science in terms of nature and of philosophy in terms of morality.

This fragmentation of knowledge into specialized disciplines led to the tendency to think of truth in terms of the discipline itself. As we saw in chapter 3, fragmentation results in a loss of the whole. While the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, concentration on the parts results in the loss of that which is greater. The focus on the individual parts in science resulted in the loss of the need for understanding the relationship of the parts to each other. The separation of the questions of the scientific method from the questions of the philosophical method meant that each realm of knowledge could thrive without having to consider broader issues that relate to the whole.

Philosophers like Descartes, Pascal, and Newton had to consider both the physical and nonphysical realms. The development of deism, however, allowed for the great divide of the disciplines. In the nineteenth century this divide became permanent when the natural philosophers adopted the new term *science* to describe their discipline. Descartes had helped this process along in the 1600s by making popular the idea of a mind/body dualism. It took two hundred years to work itself out, but by the 1800s this dualism had separated those who studied the mind and spirit (philosophers) from those who studied the body and matter (scientists).

Without the need to consider ultimate spiritual matters, Charles Darwin was free to suggest a theory of evolution that could be explained entirely by natural processes. In fact, without the option of considering ultimate matter beyond the physical, a scientist has no choice but to attempt to explain all phenomena exclusively by natural processes. This trend in science took a dramatic step further away from the consideration of ultimate matters when Sigmund Freud applied the implications of natural selection to the study of



the mind. The mind had belonged to philosophy, but Freud made it an object of science. Freud provided a theory based on naturalism to account for all of the high and lofty ideas of humanity, as well as for all of the low and curish ideas.

If the presence of humanity can be explained in terms of survival of the fittest, then the values of individuals can be explained in terms of survival mechanisms. One of the aims of psychology has been to free people from the bondage of absolute ideas like God or truth, which are seen as only wish projections. Likewise, Social Darwinism applied the implications of Darwin's theory to society as a whole. Growing into the discipline of sociology, this field accounts for group behavior in terms of survival and the exercise of power without recourse to any value or absolute that lies outside the group. Values are created that advance the survival of the group. The truth is nothing more than what the group values.

While the hard sciences (physics, biology, chemistry) and the soft sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology) moved more and more in the direction of giving physical or natural explanations for what were spiritual matters, philosophy moved increasingly away from the physical world and even spiritual considerations. With Immanuel Kant in the early nineteenth century, the distant God of deism disappeared as an impersonal force remained. Kant was concerned with the moral question of what one "ought" to do, but "oughtness" as a force seemed rather weak. Hegel's dialectic provided a way of thinking of the force at work that drives history toward its conclusion. Marx built his great system on Hegel's dialectic and placed materialism at its center. Philosophy became increasingly stressed to account for truth or moral absolutes in a mechanistic, naturalistic universe.

The *existentialist* philosophers following Søren Kierkegaard focused their attention on the individual's quest for authentic existence in a world where people easily become lost in the crowd. The dilemmas of meaninglessness, lack of identity, and mortality provide the context in which authentic existence may emerge. An atheistic form of existentialism became popular after World War II in France following two dreadful wars and the collapse of the French overseas empire. Since nothing seemed to matter, existentialism provided thoughtful, despairing people with a way to make sense of their individual existence in a world that seemed futile. Existentialism in a Christian context developed in Germany during the rise of nazism. Rudolf Bultmann accepted the basic views of naturalism and concluded that there is no life except the one we live between the cradle and the grave. What matters is that we live a faithful life while we are here.

By the 1930s the great philosophical tradition of the West had collapsed into the individualism of existentialism and the irrelevancy of *linguistic*

*analysis.* Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that language works like a game. Every group or *family of life* in society has its own way of using language and has its own meaning for the words it uses. Football players have one way of using language, carpenters another, and Sunday school teachers yet another. The meanings of words is determined by their usage, not by any objective reality behind the word. The word *God* has meaning to the Sunday school teacher, but it has no objective meaning. This trend in philosophy reduces all ideas such as truth, beauty, goodness, and God to mere social constructs. They have no independent existence from the group that uses them.

In the realm of Christian theology the fragmentation also took place, which called the idea of truth into question. Theologians of both a liberal and conservative stripe attempted to adapt the methodology of science with its expectation of absolute certainty. Higher criticism, comparative religion, and the quest for the historical Jesus represent areas in which theology attempted to treat religion in a naturalistic way. Dispensationalism and the laws of revival school attempted to discover the key to the interpretation of the Bible and the laws by which revivals operate. Both approaches tend to drain the transcendence from religion and make it something over which people have gained power to control and explain. Under the influence of Darwinian evolution, classical nineteenth century liberal Protestant theology embraced a view of the progressive perfection of society.

Karl Barth proposed an alternative to the old liberalism when the carnage of World War I suggested that people and society were not getting better and better. Barth wanted to recover the affirmations of the historic orthodox faith, but he also felt the need to affirm a naturalistic world. *Neoorthodoxy* became yet another way of expressing Descartes' mind/body dichotomy. The physical world can give us no ultimate knowledge of God. Barth rejected *natural theology* as a valid enterprise. On the other hand, he rejected the idea that the Bible represented specific revelation from God. The Bible contained a record of revelatory experiences with God that people had long ago. Barth believed that the revelation of Christ represented the ultimate revelation of God to people.

Neoorthodoxy became extremely influential in American Protestant Christianity. The de-emphasis of the Bible as revelation, however, led to the common expression of such phrases as "it became truth for me." A subjective dimension entered mainstream Christianity that gave the Bible a relativistic character. Christ may be the ultimate revelation of God, but what we know of Christ comes as statements in the Bible. These statements are not objective truth but represent the faith of the person or community that experienced Christ.

In the United States, neoorthodoxy presented an attractive alternative to



fundamentalism for people who wanted to hold to traditional affirmations of faith without the dogmatic turn. Developed in German-speaking Europe after World War I as a counter measure to liberal theology, neoorthodoxy flourished in the United States after World War II as a counter measure to fundamentalism. In a strange way, neoorthodoxy prepared the way for the postmodern attitude toward truth and ultimate matters. For decades, the mainline pulpits proclaimed that the Bible was a collection of stories of faith but was not revelation from God. Only personal encounter with God is revelatory, and such an encounter is inexpressible. Therefore, the Bible should not be regarded as truth but as testimony by people who had spiritual experiences.

In the 1960s as people became increasingly aware of other religious traditions through the experimentation of the counterculture, the Bible became just one of many holy books in the world. It made no difference that neoorthodoxy claimed Christ as the ultimate revelation. It had no basis for the claim since its holy book was just a collection of spiritual experiences. The Bible and Christianity had no basis for making truth claims compared to other religions in the neoorthodox scheme. As a result, mainline American Christianity was unprepared to deal with the changing theological landscape. Neoorthodoxy provided answers to questions Europeans were asking in 1918, but it verified the postmodern conjecture that all values and truth claims were personal matters.

## THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

This approach to truth during the modern era gives us a clue to begin to understand what is going on with the postmodern generation. They looked at the modern world system and decided, "Well, that's just a bunch of hooey; there must not be any truth, if everybody is saying 'this is true, and that's true, and something else is true.' They all contradict, and it's just people arguing among themselves." So they have rejected the idea of absolute truth. Notice, they have not rejected Christianity, or God, because they have never known either one. They have never heard what the New Testament means by truth.

Every person has values. Every society has values. Values represent little more than what is important. Ebenezer Scrooge had values. One of these was revived by the postmodern generation during the beginning of the stock market boom in the 1980s as "greed is good." The Vandals smashed, burned, and destroyed the fruit of a thousand years of classical culture because the buildings and art of ancient Rome were not important to them. The name of that ancient tribe has been given to anyone who senselessly destroys something of value to someone else.



In this regard, the postmodern generation is regarded by many as a tribe of vandals at the gates of Western civilization on the verge of a great destructive rampage. To the extent that they do not value the great tradition of Western thought, they have the potential to be vandals. Oddly, the modern age produced far more acts of cultural vandalism than the postmodern generation will likely commit. The postmodern generation is largely ignorant of the great tradition of Western thought. They would not have encountered it at home, at school, or through the popular media. They never went to church, so they would be ignorant of biblical teaching. But they do have a deeply rooted value in the American tradition, though they are the first generation to embrace it so completely without other competing values.

Thomas Jefferson had the best of intentions, and on the whole, he did a commendable job of expressing the grievances of the colonies and declaring an alternative vision for what a society could be. Had his colleagues in the Continental Congress not pressured him to finish the memorial to the king, had the committee not pestered him with so many helpful suggestions, and had Philadelphia not been so insufferably hot that summer, Jefferson might have realized what he had said in time to correct it. He probably only included the last phrase in order to balance the first two ideas. None can argue with the fact that it sounds more stirring from a propaganda point of view to have the last phrase included: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

With everything else that was going on that summer of 1776, Jefferson probably did not have time to reflect on what that last phrase meant. Doubtless, he had never intended to lay the philosophical foundation for the disintegration of that little nation he hoped to help start. Nonetheless, he created a time bomb. For most of this nation's history, the people of the United States had to devote all of their energy to the preservation of life and liberty without much time left over for even contemplating how to go about pursuing happiness. With my generation, however, we finally found the time.

We always had the privileged few who devoted all of their energy to pursuing happiness. Mr. Jefferson did his share; but for most of us, securing life and liberty required our total attention. We did not work for fulfillment and meaning; we worked to have food and shelter. As late as the 1960s and the Civil Rights movement, liberty remained a crucial issue that left little time to ponder how one would even go about pursuing happiness. With my generation, however, the pursuit of happiness emerged as a mass movement that replaced earlier concerns for the preservation of life and liberty.

It all began innocuously enough. The warning signs appeared in the late-1950s for anyone willing to see them. Who could miss the hula hoop! In a matter of months, every child in the country had a hula hoop. I remember

hearing the parents of my friends talk about hula hoops. Of course the things were silly, but during the Depression they had to do without. The Depression generation wanted their children to have the things that they could not have had as children. And if a hula hoop would make them happy, what harm was there in buying one? Hula hoops were fun for a week or so before they got boring, but they did not make us happy. Since happiness did not lie in hula hoops, we began pursuing it elsewhere; and we have not stopped.

Everyone came up with his or her own list of what would make for happiness. As we grew older the lists changed. Beer, dope, sex, cars, and clothes were fun; but they did not make us happy. They just made us want more beer, more dope, more sex, more cars, and more clothes. Then we tried to modify the list when we decided only a certain variety of things would make us happy. We wanted the right friends, the right clothes, the right job, the right house in the right neighborhood, and the right sex partner. We learned that we could discard people as easily as hula hoops if they did not make us happy. We succeeded in turning all of creation inside out with each of us individually at its center judging the value of everything else in terms of its happiness value to us.

Pursuing happiness takes a lot of energy and does not leave much time for less fulfilling activity like caring for the homeless, finding a solution to the environmental crisis, tutoring inner-city children, neighborhood development, providing emotional support for fragmenting families, visiting the elderly, or simply spending time with one's own family. Pursuing happiness requires the total commitment of one's life energies. Pursuing happiness requires a dedication to a relentless, all-consuming quest that takes us from jobbing to cocaine to high fiber to TA to TM to channeling to mutual funds. Others become a means to our end, and happiness gets lost somewhere as the failed quest settles for isolated moments of pleasure. As Kris Kristofferson wrote and sang to us of Bobbie McGee:

Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose. . . .  
 Feelin' good was good enough for me.

A year after the Persian Gulf War, the experience of the Kurds and their struggle for life and liberty serves to remind us that the pursuit of happiness is a pretty shabby goal.

Of course the irony of this tragic little episode in the collapse of civilization is that my generation will never know happiness until it learns that happiness cannot be pursued. Happiness is not an ornament that may be acquired; nor is it an accident of one's circumstances, captive to the ebb and flow of fortune. Happiness is a gift. It cannot be squeezed from life. It is the



by-product, the fringe benefit, of living for others rather than for ourselves. Without that, we lose the life and liberty Mr. Jefferson and his friends were really concerned to protect. Maybe after conspicuously consuming our way through the self-indulgent 1980s and 1990s, and finding nothing that satisfies, people will begin to look for something else.

Of the baby boom generation, those born between 1946 and 1963, 75 percent had a significant church experience growing up—at least two years in church as children or teenagers. Baby busters, those born between 1963 and 1977, flip-flopped the statistic. Only 25 percent had any church experience growing up.<sup>1</sup>

Consider the generation that began in 1977, that is now entering their twenties. We have them in our colleges and our high schools. They know nothing about the Bible, Christianity, or Jesus. When my little girl was two years old she knew about Moses in the bulrushes, David and Goliath, Noah and the ark, Jonah and the whale, Daniel and the lions' den. Notice how the Bible stories all come in pairs. She has known all the stories of the Bible from earliest childhood. Most young people in the United States today do not know who Jesus is. So they have not rejected the absolute truth of the gospel, because they have never heard it. They have rejected what the modern world meant by the truth, which is just a fashionable way of thinking until a new fad comes along. Oddly enough, what the postmodern person is really looking for, what postmoderns really want, is the stability, the rock, the anchor, the foundation, of the truth that they can stake their lives on; because they recognize the sham of the modern worldview that has been passed off as the truth.

What opportunity do Christians have for reaching this postmodern generation? How do we deal with this generation that is intent on sweeping away the past? Will we insist that they adopt the thought patterns of the philosophical system of the modern era, or will we tell them about Jesus? Jesus told his disciples "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). We can either introduce people to the Savior and exalt him; or we can tell them about a theological system, and we can confuse our faith with our cultural preferences.

I'm suggesting the old cliché, that we get "back to the Bible." Unfortunately, this phrase usually means to return to an old theological system. Amazingly, both conservatives and liberals can drift away from the Bible as we get wrapped up in our systems. Virtually all of Protestantism came about as a product of the modern age. Most of the Protestant groups produced a great theologian, but Baptists never did. Southern Baptists in particular have violated the rules of Western theology by affirming ideas that do not fit consistently with how theologians in the West do theology. For

instance, they affirm both “Once saved, always saved,” and “Whosoever will may come.” Now the first, “Once saved, always saved,” is Calvinism. The second, “Whosoever will may come,” is Arminianism. The Presbyterians, who are Calvinists, and the Methodists, who are Arminian, have told the Baptists throughout the modern era, “You can’t believe both those ideas because they are not logically consistent.” And Baptists have replied, “We can believe it, because the Bible says it.” It may not be logical, but it is truth. The unlettered Baptist saw something higher than a system.

All theology is wrong. Some theology is more wrong than other theology, but all theology is human reflection about God. It is a human attempt to understand and talk about God. The Bible, on the other hand, is revelation from God. Which is more trustworthy? Theology will pass away. All the theologies of the past have passed away sooner or later; then we recycle them, dress them up, and start them over again. They may be helpful, but theology is not truth. God’s word is truth.

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

This issue of the relativizing of truth and values bothered me more than any other aspect of postmodernity. Every other aspect of postmodernity seemed to offer some door through which the gospel could pass. Since postmodernity deals with the rejection of modernity and modernity dealt with the rejection of Christianity, postmodernity cleared the field of so many modern presuppositions that stood against Christianity. The rejection of absolute truth and absolute values, on the other hand, seemed to offer no open door. Instead, it seemed to be a closed door that was heavily barred. In fact, none of the other possible doors seemed to matter if this one was closed.

The existence of absolutes has been a foundational concept of Western civilization since the time of Plato and Aristotle. Christian theology since the time of Augustine has depended upon an understanding of these universals. Catholics and Protestants have both utilized this kind of framework. When the deists were hard at work developing their moral law apart from the presence of God, they looked to these universals. The universals served people well. They gave people a basis for developing ideologies that had no need for God.

I wanted desperately to defend the universals because they form such an important part of my tradition. Unfortunately, they play no part at all in biblical revelation. They are a pagan idea. The universals stand alongside God or the gods. The universals provide a basis for judging God; and thus, they stand over God. The ancient Greek philosophers asked questions about



“truth.” They wanted to understand “the good.” For them, these terms represented philosophical concepts. They were organizing principles that do not necessarily exist perfectly in the physical world. Things in the physical world may either reflect the universals or contain a certain degree of the universal, but the universal itself exists in another realm. The physical world may either point to the universal or be only a shadow of the universal; therefore, the universals remain a matter of speculation that no one can quite know.

The Bible certainly speaks of truth, goodness, beauty, and a number of other matters that we generally think of as pertaining to these universals. To these universals, we could also add such concepts as the value of human life and other moral absolutes. In the Bible, however, these matters are not self-existent truths or realities. They depend upon something else for their existence. They depend upon God.

If anything exists independently of God, then the God of the Bible is not the kind of God that exists. Twenty-five years ago when I first went to seminary, it was popular among *avant garde* ethicists to speak of the moral standards to which even God is subject. That line of thought bothered me then because it meant that something stood over God as judge. It meant that God submitted to some higher authority outside himself. The idea of universals, no matter how helpful they may be to erecting the moral society of Plato or the deists, involves *dualism*. It means that God has a rival authority. This view has had a tremendous influence on Western conceptualization of values. For the deists, it meant we could follow the rival authority and dispense with the necessity for God. The modern world could produce very moral atheists who followed the standards of the universals. The universals, in turn, became the standard for evaluating a person's right to immortality. Once again, God need not play any part in the journey from this world to the next.

The teachings in the Bible about goodness, righteousness, truth, and other matters considered by Christians as absolute are actually personal views. In this case, however, they represent the personal views of God. These concepts have no life of their own apart from God, just as my opinions have no life of their own apart from me. Of course, as the opinions of God, they have had quite a life! The opinions of God about his creation should have a higher standing than the opinions of a crew of bystanders like the human race. Yet, as creatures made in the image of God, we have the ability and the privilege of forming opinions of our own which differ from those of God.

The literal meaning of the Greek word translated *repentance* in the New Testament has the notion of changing one's mind. Many theologians and Bible students do not think this idea is strong enough. The concept of

penance grew up to give us something extra to do because changing our minds does not seem significant enough. I might facetiously observe that of the theologians I have known, I cannot recall any that had much experience at changing their minds; so I am not sure that they realize how very difficult it is. To repent involves exchanging our view for God's view; trading our values for God's values.

The discussion so far has focused on what might be called positive absolutes, but the same would hold for negative absolutes as well. Evil as a self-existent, independent thing does not really exist. Evil represents the complete disregard for the values of God. Whether thoughts or actions, evil represents a personal rejection of God or what is important to God. Evil describes the totality of thoughts or actions that result from such a complete disregard for God.

Not all religious views would hold to this understanding of evil. In the dualistic religion of ancient Persia, Good and Evil represent eternal self-existing and equal forces. In the yin and the yang of the Tao of China, opposites represent two sides of the same reality. Good and Evil are two aspects of one universal. No such dualism appears in the Bible. Evil poses no challenge to God in the Bible. It is not his equal. It is not a rival. It only exists as a by-product of the attitude of personal beings to God. This does not so much mean that the postmodern generation is right as it means that the modern age was wrong. Some things are right and some things are wrong, but not because of universals. Something is universally wrong because of God's judgment of it.

We see this understanding of truth and values in the earliest passages of the Bible in terms of God's valuation of creation. As God saw the results of his creative activity, he called each aspect of it "good." This does not mean that he appealed to the universal category of good to describe his work. It means that what God does provides the criteria for determining "the good." Goodness is defined in the Bible in relationship to God, not to a universal idea. Jesus mentioned this understanding of goodness when he was approached by a young leader who wanted to know how to be included in the Kingdom of God. Both Matthew and Mark record the encounter. They focus on different aspects of the exchange, but they both intersect at this point about goodness as it relates to God.

Matthew focuses on the issue of *doing* good: "Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?' 'Why do you ask me about what is good?' Jesus replied. 'There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments'" (Matt. 19:16-17).

Mark focuses on the issue of *being* good: "As Jesus started on his way, a



man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone’ ” (Mark 10:17-18).

God and God alone is the standard for understanding goodness. The Good, which so perplexed the Greek philosophers is not a universal concept, a principle, or a force, as little children learn to pray “God is good. . . .” The postmodern generation has come to the point that it rejects the notion of universal principles, but they have not yet come to the realization that goodness, truth, and other values that have absolute authority derive that authority from their unique status as the judgments of God. At this point they are satisfied to say that everything is relative. Their sense of absolutes went the way of Newton’s universe with its absolute science and absolute moral laws. In Einstein’s universe, as we observed in chapter 6, everything is relative. Or is it? In terms of human observations of phenomena, everything is relative. Everyone has his or her own perspective that affects how one sees things. To say that everything is relative, however, is to say that things are relative to a standard. In the case of the physical universe, things are relative to the constant speed of light.

In terms of human experience, we all have the tendency to view qualities of truth, goodness, beauty, evil, and other intangibles from a rather limited perspective that centers around us. We bias our own values to suit ourselves. In this sense, the postmodern person rightly says that all values are relative. It is simply another way of saying that “the heart is deceitful above all things” (Jer. 17:9). Put another way by precocious little Anna in the tale of the little London orphan during World War II, people have a point of view, but Mister God only has points to view.<sup>2</sup>

The postmodern generation is not interested in grand philosophical explanations. They are up close and personal. They have rejected ideologies and absolutes, yet they still have to deal with truth and lies, beauty and ugliness every day of their lives. In many ways C. S. Lewis had an easier time of it than the postmodern generation. His thought crystallized on these issues during the period 1939 to 1945. During these years he wrote *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, *The Problem of Pain*, *The Screwtape Letters*, the collection that would become *Mere Christianity*, *Perelandra*, *The Abolition of Man*, *That Hideous Strength*, and *The Great Divorce*. This great body of work represents his most important work as a Christian apologist. Of course, Lewis had the advantage of Hitler in helping him recognize truth, goodness, and evil. It is much easier to recognize what is meant by evil and wickedness when one is on the receiving end. It is much easier to recognize beauty in the midst of ugliness. Truth, goodness, and beauty exist where the grace of God abounds. Where the grace of God does not abound, we find deceit, evil,

and ugliness. It is much easier to deal with this issue when things stand in such stark contrast as black and white. The postmodern generation lives in a gray world. Black and white have been so mixed together that people cannot tell the difference until they are the victims of something they do not like. They only know deceit when they have been deceived. Then they only know truth in terms of its absence.

In this dreary situation, the Christian faith offers good news. Truth is not a concept. Truth is a person. Goodness is not a principle. Goodness is a person. In the midst of all the relativistic chaos of life in which people do not know what to do when the crises of life arise, Jesus Christ comes as a personal guide.

The purpose of this chapter has not been to explain how to convince postmodern people that universal absolutes exist. When we begin our philosophical arguments, their faces take on a blank stare and their eyes glaze over. Two thousand five hundred years of philosophical tradition is collapsing around us, but this has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the only reliable basis for truth. Postmodern people have not rejected Christ because they have never known him. Once they know him, they will begin to learn the true meaning of the values of God from the one who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).