

Am I Honest?

By Gary Henry

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Generally, we wish to get correct answers to the questions we ask. The more important the questions are, the more we would like to feel we're on track in getting the right answers to them. It would seem obvious that correct answers are nowhere more critical than with respect to the general question of religion. And when we are confronted with the religious claims of Jesus of Nazareth -- not only that a right relationship to the Creator should be our ultimate concern, but that such a relationship is possible only through Jesus Himself -- we have a specific set of questions that we ought to want to have answered with nothing less than the full truth.

But getting the right answers to the questions of religion in general, and of the gospel of Jesus Christ in particular, is not a "mechanical" process. We can't assume the truth is going to yield itself up automatically to anyone who pushes the right logical buttons, regardless of what his character or his intentions might be. To the contrary, this happens to be a subject in which getting the right answers depends largely on whether we are a certain kind of person and whether we are asking for a certain kind of reason.

To put it more bluntly: whether we are able to get at the truth about Jesus Christ and His church depends on what we intend to do with the truth. Before we can be in a position to ask questions about the thing called Christianity, there is a more fundamental question we are required to ask about ourselves -- and that is whether we are really honest inquirers who intend to do what is right about the truth, whatever it may turn out to be. Jesus went a good deal farther than merely saying we must be "intellectually honest" folks who are willing to weigh the evidence "objectively." While the Bible certainly does talk about "loving" the truth, Jesus explained exactly what that means -- and how essential it is -- when He said, *"If anyone wants to do His [God's] will he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority"* (**Jn. 7:17**). What that says is simply that if I don't have the integrity and honesty to do what I know I ought to about the right answers I say I'm looking for, then I may not even recognize those right answers when I come across them.

There is really no more sobering text in the New Testament than **2 Thess.2:9-12**, which asserts that God will actually lead those away from the truth who are not honestly looking to obey it: *"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."* The armchair religionist is bound to get tangled up, on even the fundamentals of his subject. No matter how diligent and scholarly his pursuits, his investigations will be skewed by the fact that he is merely looking for curiosities to think about. But the fellow who waits only for a reasonable assurance that the truth is really the truth before he is ready to render obedience to it, that is the individual who is going to get the information he is seeking.

It is of utmost importance, then, that we be honest about the truth. The trouble is we are often not willing to be honest about whether we are honest. As a person claiming to want the truth about the questions of religion, how can I know whether I am honest or not? And if I'm not willing to search for, accept, and act on the truth about myself, would I do any better about other truths?

One good place to begin testing our own honesty is asking what we are doing about the religious truth we already possess. The person deserves no additional light that is wasting what he presently has, and if we are studiously avoiding dealing with obligations that have been in plain view for quite some time, there is little point in debating the finer points of the law.

But there are some other tests that may help us focus on our honesty. Am I, for example, capable of being persuaded, or is my mind basically made up already? Am I a person who decides questions on the basis of evidence, or am I guided by prejudices and preconceptions? Do I tend to believe that the truth is whatever I want it to be? How hard am I willing to dig for truth? How careful am I in approaching weighty issues? Am I fair? On the question of God, do I harbor any reservations about how far I'd be willing to go in accepting the implications and consequences of the truth? Questions like these ought to tell us some significant things about the level of honesty at which we approach the issues of life.

Jesus taught on one occasion that His word germinates in the "*honest and good heart*" (**Lk. 8:15**). Deciding to have just that sort of heart has got to be the beginning point for any serious quest for truth. It is, as Jesus said elsewhere, the truth that will make us "*free*" (**Jn. 8:32**) -- but the truth is a maiden who will not be wooed by just anybody. Anything less on our part than a bona fide commitment to be faithful to truth -- whatever that may entail, at whatever cost -- and truth will disguise herself from us. If we are serious about getting at the right answers to all the issues that pertain to life's deepest meaning, we can ill afford to have anything other than the attitude of the Psalmist: "*Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me*" (**Ps. 25:4-5**). It's that kind of honesty that gives us a chance to make progress. Without it, we are as lost intellectually as we are spiritually.