

Where Are The Boundary Stones Part 4

We are wrapping up this series on where are the boundary stones to begin talking about the actually boundary stones, the core beliefs of the Christian faith. Let me just quickly review: We are living in a changing time in the life of the church and of the Christian faith. Definitions of family and marriage, definitions of sin and morality are changing. Many of the changes are happening in part as a result of our rejection of belief in objective truth or absolute moral laws. We don't know what the bible says and we ignore the historic teachings of the church. Although a majority of Americans would probably say they are Christian or at least believe in God, they would also likely say that truth is relative or subjective rather than objective.

Subjective truth says, "This is truth for me. This is right and this is wrong for me. I believe in God and I'm pretty sure he'll back me up on this because I am a deeply spiritual person. I mean, I have my truth and my core values and I feel like I'm a good person."

Objective truth is truth that is independent of what we think or feel about it. The truth is in the object, not in our mind. It is real, factual. Subjective truth is based upon or dependent upon me, what I think or what I feel. Let me give you an example. President Kennedy was shot and killed in 1963. That is objective truth. That is a fact, independent of what we think or feel about it. Some people insist organized crime had him killed, or Castro. That is subjective truth. Objective truth is that $2+2=4$, even if we think and feel like it should equal 5.

Objective truth is demanding and intolerant in one sense. There is just the one answer to $2+2$. You can accuse me of imposing my truth on you, but it is still the truth. The law of mathematics declares it to be so. It is a universal truth. But our culture questions the existence of universal truth and absolute truth.

Think how contradictory it is to argue "there is no universal truth and that is a universal truth." "There are no absolute truths and that's absolutely true." Peter Kreeft wrote, "All forms of skepticism of objective truth refute themselves. 'There is no truth' – is that true? 'Truth is not objective' – is *that* truth objective? 'Truth is not universal' – except *that* truth? 'No one can know truth' – except you, I suppose? 'Truth is uncertain' – is *that* uncertain? 'All generalizations are false' – including *that* one? 'You can't be dogmatic!' – you say that very dogmatically. 'Don't impose your truth on me!' – but you just imposed *your* "truth" on me! 'There are no absolutes' – absolutely? 'Truth is only opinion' – so that's only *your* opinion, then." We have to decide, yes there is objective truth. Yes God's truth is absolutely true and

that truth is the basis for moral laws and moral absolutes. That truth is the basis for the boundary stones that are to guide our life. “But how do we know that the bible and the gospel are true? Isn’t it arrogant to believe that Jesus is the only way to God? Isn’t Christianity just one of many ways to get to God and to know him?”

Well, there is that analogy that all roads lead up the mountain to God; that one way is as good as the next. The problem with that is the faulty assumption that the roads go up and not down, that man can on his own successfully build a road or a religion or a path that will lead to God and to heaven. Peter Kreeft again, **“Christianity is not a system of man’s search for God but a story of God’s search for man....there is no human way up the mountain, only a divine way down.”....Peter Kreeft** Christianity is about our Heavenly Father reaching down, coming down to us to rescue and save us.

“But isn’t it arrogant to believe that Jesus is the only way to God?” No, because we didn’t say it, Jesus did. He said **“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6** If that’s not true then Jesus was a madman and a lunatic, but if it’s the truth, then he is not one way among many, he is the One and only way.

I believe, in spite of all of the teaching that all truth is relative or subjective, I believe when you get right down to it, people young and old, want to find something that is true, something that is absolute. People are searching for something to which they can anchor their life. They are looking for certainty and truth in a rapidly changing and uncertain world and that truth can be found in an ancient book and an ancient faith and in a church that is constantly renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

So what happened? How did the church lose sight of the truth? How did the boundary stones get moved? We stopped believing in objective, absolute and universal, truth. We stopped teaching the core beliefs and truth of the Christian faith and when we did, we had nothing upon which to base our decisions, our choices, our values, our sense of right and wrong except upon our own opinions and our own conscience. Remember we said most people decide what’s right or wrong, what they should do or not do, based on 1) social fads and peer pressure (everybody’s doing it); 2) our feelings (it can’t be wrong if it feels so right); and 3) our desire for the easiest and least troublesome life.

When we start basing our morality and the church’s doctrine and teaching upon our own opinions, our own sense of truth, even on our own conscience, the boundary stones get moved

and we find ourselves in trouble. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.” 1 Corinthians 4:4** God told the prophet Jeremiah that the heart was deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it? (Jer. 17:9). You can't always trust your heart.

Paul says my conscience isn't bothering me, but that doesn't mean I'm innocent. God is our judge and he is the one that placed the boundary stones where he did, for our good, for our protection. If he says I'm wrong, I'm wrong. If he says it's sin, it's sin. If he says he is the way, he is the way. We can't choose “all the above” when Jesus says the answer is “a.”

Remember the illustration from last Sunday? God is the one who put up the signs warning us of the minefield. He is trying to protect us, to care for us. We have to believe and trust him and his word and not our conscience, our feelings, our wishes, or anything else.

Chuck Colson wrote, **“When the not-so-still or small voice of the self becomes the highest authority, religious belief undergoes a change so dramatic that it no longer involves commitment to any authority beyond one's self. The church is no longer regarded as a repository of truth, nor as a source of moral authority, but merely as a place to go for spiritual strokes.” ...Chuck Colson**

I'm afraid that is happening in much of the church world. It's just the place to go to feel better about ourselves. “Tell me I'm okay. I want to feel better about myself.” We've compromised the truth and allowed the boundary stones to be moved. We aren't sure of what it is we believe and since we are uncertain about absolutes and truth we are hesitant to proclaim Jesus and our faith as the only way. The apostle Paul told Timothy **“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” 1 Timothy 4:16.** The world is lost and looking for truth. We must hold fast to the truth and preach and teach and proclaim it. If we don't, the church just becomes another self-help center, a support group. Any group is as good as the next.

I shared this recently on Wednesday night. Michael Horton in his book, *We Believe* commented about the religious pluralism of our day, the idea that one faith is as good as the next. He argued that the days of the martyrs of the early church were also days of religious pluralism. There was a whole Roman pantheon of gods, just pick one. He writes, “Had Christians claimed that Jesus was a way, or perhaps the best way, no one would have bothered with them. Had they suggested Christianity as the empire's ally in creating patriotism, morality, and civic virtue, they

would have been welcomed and Jesus would surely have been added to the pantheon of Rome's faithful divine patrons. But their claim – the one that got them in trouble – was that Christ was the only saving revelation of God. They maintained that he alone held the key to history, to the understanding of self and society, sin and salvation and that his historical resurrection will be followed by a historical return in judgment against all who refuse him.”

“In A.D. 177 Athenagoras reported, “Whenever the Christians proclaim that there is only one God and he is only known in Christ, a law is put in force against us.” Rome concluded that their dogmatic claims to exclusive, public, final truth surely made them enemies of public peace and order. The Roman historian and official, Tacitus, surmised that Nero rightly persecuted the Christians ‘for their hatred of the human race.’” (Sounds like Houston.)

Christians were marched into the arena where they died as martyrs for their faith. Houston wrote, **“When everything is on the line, one has to determine whether one’s convictions are worth dying for. Threats aside, this community of martyrs was created in the nursery of the apostolic church, where the believers gathered daily to listen to the apostles’ teaching, to receive communion, and to worship God in prayer and song... People knew what they believed and why they believed it. And there they stood.” ... Michael Houston**

Remember that at the heart of this whole series has been this question about deciding who or what speaks with authority as to truth and correct belief and action for us as Christians? We said it is the Scripture, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the collective wisdom and tradition of the church. **We have to know what we believe!** If we don't know what we believe, as G.K. Chesterton said, it's not that we will believe in nothing, rather we will believe in everything and anything. That kind of watered down faith and belief leaves us confused and wandering into the minefields. It matters what we believe. That's why next Sunday we are starting a series entitled We Believe. We are going to examine the central creed and beliefs of our faith. But let me take just a moment to wrap this all up by talking about what it means for us to believe.

We live by what we believe. Everyone believes in something. Even if you say you don't believe in anything, then you believe in the premise of non-belief and that effects the choices you make in your life. If you believe in God it effects the choices you make and the way you deal with life, with tragedy, with challenges, with death. You will live differently than the

person who doesn't believe in God. You approach life and death differently. Remember the apostle Paul said at the death of a believer "we sorrow, but not as those who have no hope;" and "if we had hope in this life only we would be of all men most miserable." Paul believed and because of that it effected everything about his life.

Hebrews 11 says "**And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**" **Hebrews 11:6.** This is where we start. We believe that God is, that he exists. But most people believe in God. By that they mean they believe *that* He exists or at least there is Someone out there, a Creator or Designer of some kind. But that isn't enough. The bible says "**You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.**" **James 2:19** The demons believe in God, in the sense that they believe *that* he exists, but there is more for us when it comes to believing in God.

The idea is that when I believe in God, I also need to believe *upon* him. If my belief is that someone is trustworthy or that something is true, I need to believe *upon* them to the extent I am willing to *rely* upon them. I will put my hope, confidence and trust in them. It's not just giving intellectual or mental assent, but I am actually relying upon them. You see, I not only believe in God, that he exists and is the Creator of the universe. I believe that he reached down to me through love and mercy, that he sent His Son to die on the cross in my place so that through faith, through trusting in Him, I could receive salvation and the forgiveness of my sins. Because of that salvation, I believe when I die I am going to heaven to be with my Lord. I have staked everything, everything upon Him. I live in full and complete reliance upon the saving grace of God. My faith, what I believe, effects every area of my life. We live by what we believe.

I believe airplanes fly. I don't know how, I don't understand all the aerodynamics and science, but I believe that airplanes fly. But simply believing that a plane can fly is not the same as boarding a plane and believing, i.e. relying upon that plane to take me to my destination. I am believing in, trusting in that plane to fly me where I need to go. **Believing is reliance upon.**

Believing that God exists is not the same as relying upon him for salvation, believing upon him totally and trusting in him and his mercy and grace alone for forgiveness and salvation. You see, **Christians don't simply believe, we believe in and upon Someone.** We talk about

having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We are relying upon Him, leaning upon him, believing in him.

To truly believe in God is more than mental assent, more than relying upon him for salvation, to believe means to surrender to him. **Believing means commitment.** I remember a missionary telling us about a first convert and disciple who said to him, “I believe in Jesus now. I am willing to tell the whole village that I believe in him. Even if I am rejected by the others, I believe. I would be willing to give up everything for him.” That is believing. That is committing yourself to God. That’s what it means to believe, it is trusting Jesus, not only to save you, but to be the Lord of your life. It is the kind of belief those martyrs had as they walked into the arena in Rome. It is believing regardless of the cost, regardless of the sacrifice. It is full and complete surrender and commitment to Jesus.

Believing means obedience. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1, **“Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” Romans 1:5-6**

To truly believe in God is to live in obedience to his word and his will. Obedience is the proof, the fruit of believing. James said, **“...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” James 2:17** Like those believers in Rome, we have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. If we believe in him, if we rely upon him, if we put our trust in Him as Savior and Lord, then we must commit our lives to him and obey him. After all, we believe he is the way, the truth and the life.

Are you ready to do more than just say you believe in God? Are you ready to truly believe in Him, giving yourself to him, surrendering your life to him, committing yourself to him? The decision is yours, but you have to take that step of faith. It is not a leap into the dark, it is a step into the light!

It’s time to do more than just believe that God exists. Meet him through faith in Christ and have a personal relationship with him. You believe that God can forgive sins. Are you ready and willing to let him forgive your sins? You believe that God is trustworthy and reliable. Are you ready to trust in him yourself? To rely upon him for your salvation and to be the Lord of your life?

If you're ready, take that next step. The bible says **"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** 1 John 1:8-9

And in Romans 10 the bible speaks of this word of faith we are proclaiming: **"...that if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'" Romans 10:9-11**

If you've been looking for boundary markers, for truth to anchor your life to, you've found it right here. It's time for you to take the next step. It's time for you to truly believe. Discover the truth of all that I've been talking about for yourself. Call upon him in faith and believe and watch what happens.