

## THERE'S NO FAKING FAKE NEWS!

Here's the irony: fake news is real. Very real! Oh, the phrase may be new, popularized during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election by Donald Trump, but the spreading of false news, whether by satire, willful misinformation, or the like, is as old as the hills. Literally, it dates back to the dawn of history, when Satan deceived Eve with a false account of what God had told Adam. The rest, as they say, is history. The fall of man ensured that every civilization and society has tampered with information for its own ends.

Some consider the mantra "fake news" ill-defined. They prefer the nuances of:

- *Mis-information*: False information spread without harmful intent.
- *Dis-information*: False information spread with harmful intent.
- *Mal-information*: "Genuine" information spread with the intent to cause harm.

### THE SPREAD OF FAKE NEWS

Philosophically, the pandemic of fake news has been coming for several centuries. It has resulted from the rejection of the once widespread belief that God has revealed truth, made it accessible, and pronounced that lies (whether outright, or by an assortment of deviations) are an offence against his holy omniscience.

Today's dismissal of truth began with the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The *Philosophes* argued that we come by truth through the power of human reason rather than by believing in what God has revealed. Thus, truth became subject to man's intellect, and, following the rise of Romanticism, to his emotions. This philosophical shift targeted the Bible, to which the heirs of the Enlightenment—e.g., Thomas Jefferson—took a pair of scissors, thereby altering the message of Christianity.

Then, in the twentieth century, Postmodernism superseded the modernism of the Enlightenment, claiming there is no such thing as truth. Each tribal grouping within society constructs its own "truth." Thus, we speak now of my truth or your truth rather than the truth.

Technologically, though, it was the advent of mass media which brought fake news into its own. Think of Goebbels' use of cinema for propaganda. "The Master of Lies" claimed that a lie repeated a thousand times becomes the truth. Yet, dictatorships are not alone in falsifying information. State-run media is separated only by degrees from today's politically partisan news.

The advent of social media has made the spread of mis-, dis-, and mal-information both global and instant. Anybody with a keyboard can create fake news. Before you know it, it goes viral. To counteract it we speak of fact-checking, but we don't know who to believe about what, and we don't know whether the fact-checkers are reliable. Trust is scarce. Truly, we have entered a quagmire. This is of Satan whom Jesus called "the father of lies" (John 8:44). No one is more sucked in than the person thinking Satan does not exist.



**CHRISTOPHER BLAIR**  
"Godfather of Fake News"  
For more: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/)

### THE EFFECTS OF FAKE NEWS

First, we are skeptical of anything we read. There is much that Satan doesn't mind us getting our hands on, but by breeding skepticism he perennially keeps us from believing what really matters, supremely the Bible. We haven't the time to, for every-day he has us fighting each other about things of import only for this life. The father of lies is also the father of distraction.

Second, there is the opposite problem. Since it is not possible to believe nothing, we are capable of believing anything. After all, life is too short to fact-check the facts and then to fact-check the fact-checkers, so we latch onto what we want to believe whether or not it holds up to investigation.

Yet, third, there is a silver lining to the cloud. The very despair into which Satan has led us renews in us a thirst for truth. We long for facts and meaning we can rely on: no smoke, no mirrors, just give it to us straight. If this is where you are at, do read on.

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SUNDAY WORSHIP TIMES



## RECOVERING THE TRUTH WHERE IT MATTERS MOST

Nowhere is truth more needed and yearned for than in the issues of life and death. After all, there is no replaying of either.

Since the philosophers have led us blindly, we need other guidance. Aristotle knew this: “Plato is dear to me, but dearer still is truth.” Science, a wonderful discipline but no God, has a hundred percent failure rate in vanquishing death. Journalists and media—too often the errand boys of falsities and as corrupt as those they critique—have, right- or left-leaning, earned the distrust in which they are held. So have professing Christians who, led by ministers and theologians distorting the good news of Jesus Christ, create their own fake news. As do cults and religions making less of Christ than God makes of him.

Generally speaking, fake news is immoral, stirs hatred, and threatens violence. Jesus reserved his greatest ire for those spreading it in matters of faith. Read, for example, Matthew’s Gospel chapter twenty-three, but wear gloves to do so!

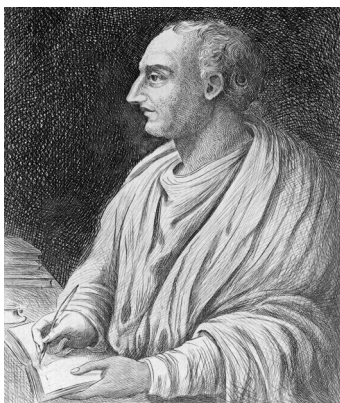
To counteract fake news is certainly to ponder sources and to better fact-check. But correctness in life means nothing in death unless we have come to know God. But, here’s the irony. To do so involves trusting the greatest claims known to man: the existence of God, the uniqueness of Jesus as the truth, and his promise as such to set us free (John 8:32).

### TRUSTING GOD

Down the centuries multiple reasons have been given to believe in God: arguments from the causation of the universe, its evidence of design and beauty, the sense of morality each of us has (which in turn enables talk of immorality), the default practice of worship among those never taught of God, and the fact that atheism fails to stick and cannot gain universal approval. These arguments are not so much proofs of God’s existence as they are compelling testimonies to it.

All know of God’s existence because he has etched on our constitutions the knowledge of him and of his law (Romans 2:14-15). Thus, we know we are sinful. Additionally, God speaks to each of us, all day, all night, in all places, so that all hear him (Psalm 19:1-4). We not only hear him but see him. Creation tells us clearly of his character (Romans 1:19-20).

Many dismiss this as fake news, but how do we explain our innate sense of right and wrong, and the role of conscience in helping us distinguish between them, irrespective of whether we have ever read the Bible. And why do we suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness, just as the Bible says we do (Romans 1:18)? Fake news is, itself, an evidence of the trustworthiness of what God says of himself in the Holy Bible.



ROMAN HISTORIAN,  
TITUS LIVIUS,  
59 B.C. ~ 17 A.D.

*“Truth, they say, is but too often in difficulties, but it is never finally suppressed.”*

([www.britannica.com/biography/Livy](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Livy))

## TRUSTING THE TRUTH

Although God is just (upright) and holy (separate from sin), in love he has voluntarily found a way whereby he can bring us into relationship with him. That way is through Jesus, God’s Son.

Jesus described himself as “the truth” because he came from heaven to reveal the way to God (John 1:18). While God, being just, cannot but exact the penalty for breakage of his law, Jesus taught us that in his great love toward us his Father found a way to both punish sin and free sinners from condemnation. He is, writes the apostle Paul, both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

Now that is great news! It tells us that by resting on Christ for our pardon we escape God’s just condemnation! The very Jesus who, as the truth, told us this news, went on to purchase our pardon by suffering on the cross the sinner’s death penalty for sin. Now I ask you, how many peddlers of fake news do you know who would die for their stories?

### TRUSTING THE PROMISE

Before going to the cross, Jesus promised that those abiding in his word would know the truth and the truth would set them free. He thereby implied that by nature we are enslaved. We are bound, the Bible earnestly teaches us, by the guilt, pollution, and power of sin.

The religious are no exception. The apostle Paul, unsurpassed in religious zeal, came to see that no man can, by religion, free himself from sin. The good he would do he didn’t do, and the evil he would not do that he did. He concluded that he was wretched and that his religion was no help: “Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

By receiving as the Christ the Jesus whom he had despised, Paul discovered the truth not only about himself but about God and the grace he lavishes on sinners. Thus, he exclaimed: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:7-25). The truth lies not in our hapless endeavors to get to God but in the one God has sent to us!

Christ, the truth, grants freedom to those yearning for it. Yet, in today’s “truth” the freedom Christ offers is unnecessary and unwelcome. Against all the evidence, it is claimed we are not enslaved, and even if we are, we wouldn’t desire freedom from sin. Societies are, therefore, sinking into lawlessness, addictions, perversions, and despair. “But we’re free, don’t you know?!” But anarchy, whether personal or national, is never freedom.

All, however, is not lost. Christ remains the truth, who, wrote the apostle John from three years of observation, “will be with us forever” (2 John 2). Not so the opportunity to turn to him in repentance and faith. Now is all that is guaranteed us.

## WHERE THERE'S TRUTH, THERE ARE TESTIMONIES

It is our sin that we prefer to believe today's junk news than that which is well attested but outside the realm of our experience. If you find, though, that fake news has jaded your soul and has you living in bitterness and acrimony, why not rethink Christ? There's nothing so refreshing as embracing the truth!

### CONSIDER THOSE WHO SAW JESUS

The Bible is very interested in truth. Since DNA testing was not available in biblical times, truth was established by two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1). Yet, when it comes to the person and work of Christ we have an abundance of testimony.

Obviously, there were those who gladly testified about Jesus. In the hubris of our age we think such people were dumb or at least naïve, gullible, easily mistaken, or just plain fanatical. Rather, they were holy and committed to the truth (2 Peter 1:21), even to the detriment of their own reputations (1 Corinthians 15:9). Note, however, those you would not expect to vouch for Jesus.



**The Woman at the Well of Samaria (John 4:1-42).** Not only was she female and therefore deemed in the culture of the day a less than ideal witness, she was a Samaritan and thus was hated by the Jews. If Jesus were fake he would not call on this woman for support. He, though, had a more

selfless concern. Knowing of her seven husbands, he offered her eternal life, revealing his Messiahship to her upon evidence of her belief he could quench her parched soul. Not only did she accept Jesus as the Christ, she witnessed to him in the nearby town. Many Samaritans came out to meet Jesus, also believing in him as the Savior of the world. (Painting: [scripturehandmaidens.blogspot.com/2011/01/woman-of-samaria.html](http://scripturehandmaidens.blogspot.com/2011/01/woman-of-samaria.html)).

### **Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate (John 18:28-40).**

As a Roman, Pilate had no reason to affirm Jesus. Jesus' ministry was complicating his peacekeeping in Judea, placing him awkwardly between the local Jewish hierarchy and Caesar. Whereas the former wanted Pilate to execute Jesus (since it was unlawful for them to do so), the latter would not tolerate a king of the Jews other than a puppet whom Rome could control. Hence the charge of the Jewish Council that Jesus had undermined Caesar's authority



*Ecce Homo* by Antonio Ciseri

and claimed to be king (Luke 23:1-2).

Getting to the truth lay, then, at the heart of Jesus' trial before Pilate. If Jesus confessed to being king of the Jews he faced execution. Far from pleading for his life, Jesus calmly implied to Pilate that he was operating off a different notion of ruling than Pilate's. He declared that it was to witness to the truth of his kingship that he was born. Pilate retorted in Postmodernist fashion, "What is truth?" then returned with truth to the waiting Jews, "I find no guilt in him." While we do not presume Pilate owned Jesus as the truth, he recognized that in him was nothing inconsistent with the truth, and indicated thereby that we can doubt the truth but not destroy it.



**The Thief on the Cross (Luke 23:39-43).** The thief was also of the view that Jesus had done nothing wrong, but he used the truth he knew about Jesus to call on his name for mercy: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Evidently, criminals, too, recognize there is nothing fake about Jesus. (Painting: [www.bibleinfo.com/en/questions/thief-on-cross](http://www.bibleinfo.com/en/questions/thief-on-cross)).

### **The Roman Centurion (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47).**

Matthew tells us that the Roman Centurion standing guard at the cross, perceiving the darkness then the earthquake coinciding with Christ's crucifixion, exclaimed in awe, "Truly this was the Son of God!" Mark tells us that he, on witnessing Jesus' loud cry and death, uttered, "Truly this *man* [italics inserted] was the Son of God!" Luke tells us that Jesus had cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" and that when the centurion saw what had taken place, "he praised God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent!'" None of these sentiments are contradictory. More likely, in his amazement the Centurion uttered them all. He thus testified that Jesus was not only true to himself unto death, but that he himself is the truth who sets sinners free. (Image: [www.treadingwatertiljesuscomes.com/2017/04/05/soldier-at-the-cross/](http://www.treadingwatertiljesuscomes.com/2017/04/05/soldier-at-the-cross/)).



### CONSIDER THOSE WHO WROTE OF JESUS

You may be thinking, "It's all very well saying that the four Gospels give abundant witness to the fact that Jesus is the truth, but are such records true?" Well, consider the following:

- Early nonChristian writers (e.g., Jewish commander turned historian Flavius Josephus [born 37/38]; Roman senator and consul, Cornelius Tacitus [born 56 AD]; and Roman governor Pliny the Younger [61/62-111]) took for granted that Jesus existed.

*Continued overleaf...*



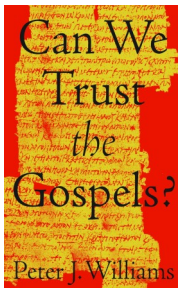
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- There are as many early sources available about Jesus as about the activities and conversations of his contemporary, Emperor Tiberius (reigned, A.D. 14–37).
- The oldest copies of the original manuscripts of the New Testament predate by hundreds of years those, for instance, of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Caesar's *Gallic War*, and Tacitus' *Histories and Annals*, but the timespan between the events of Jesus' life and the oldest copies of the manuscripts is under half the length of the other sources.

Let's be clear, while the question of the trustworthiness of the Gospels has a legitimate intellectual dimension to it, the question is not first and foremost intellectual. It is spiritual. We know in our consciences when we ask an academic question out of a sincere desire to know the facts (assuming thereby that truth can be known), but there are times in which our intellectual inquiry is disingenuous and illustrates how much we need Christ.

This all goes to say, that if you have genuine questions about the biblical records, you will find much useful information in Dr. Peter J. Williams' *Can We Trust the Gospels* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018). Ultimately, though, you will need to read the Gospels for yourself. As you do so, ask God to show you himself, yourself, and the freedom available to you through the truth. As Professor Donald Macleod urges you in *A Faith to Live By*:



Come into contact with [the Bible's] Christ, with its concepts, with its morality, with its knowledge of your own soul. Come into contact with these and you will find that the Bible attests itself as the Word of God. It bears the impress of the divine personality.

I am a Christian because of what the Christ of the Bible does to me, and I come at the Book through Him. I accept it as God's Word, because it has this incomparable excellence, Christ Himself. Even as a concept, He is unsurpassable. There is no way in which I would want Him improved or want Him altered. When I find Him, I find the Absolute, and I find the Ultimate. My spiritual quest is over.

May yours, too, soon be over.

*TIME* MAGAZINE  
DECEMBER 1974  
"HOW TRUE IS THE BIBLE?":

"After more than two centuries of facing the heaviest scientific guns that could be brought to bear, the Bible has survived—and is perhaps the better for the siege. Even on the critics' own terms —historical fact—the Scriptures seem more acceptable now than they did when the rationalism began the attack."

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