

SAVING TRUTH

Finding Meaning
& Clarity in a
Post-Truth World

Executive Summary

ABDU MURRAY

SAVING TRUTH

Executive
Summary

Finding Meaning
& Clarity in a
Post-Truth World

ABDU MURRAY

 ZONDERVAN®



Book at a Glance

Admit it. You were supposed to read this for staff meeting. Or a discussion group. Or because you're hosting an on-campus conversation about culture and the Christian faith, or a conversation about the differences between postmodern and post-truth societies.

And now you're panicking. How can you sound intelligent? Simple: get caught up with the summary below. (If you want to look intelligent, try wearing a pair of glasses.)

The skinny

In the past decade of our current post-truth mindset we have found ourselves adrift in a cultural river of questions without answers rooted in objective truth. This post-truth mindset infects all of us, as politicians and voters, pastors and philosophers, soccer moms and baseball dads, even as scientists. It also infects our spiritual lives and influences how we seek clarity in answers to life's biggest questions. And we need to know who can provide us with clarity. In *Saving Truth*, Abdu Murray explains how the message of Jesus can answer our deepest questions and how the actions of Jesus can bring truth and clarity to a culture that needs it so desperately. In fact, it was the “inconvenient” truth of the message of Jesus and the logical credibility of the Bible that prompted Murray’s conversion from Islam to Christianity years ago.

The Blossoming of the Culture of Confusion

Post-truth was the word of the year for 2016, and yet this mindset blossomed a Culture of Confusion long before our present decade. When we look at our world today and see all of the questions being asked amid a post-truth culture not truly committed to sound answers, it's hard to imagine a time more confusing. We are in desperate need of clarity to rightly answer the questions of our day. What does it mean to be human? What is human freedom? Do our rights have limits? Is there transcendent meaning and purpose to our human existence? We need clarity to be informed individuals, honest scientists, and fair politicians. More than questions, we need answers. And we need the unmovable to guide us if we are to find answers we can all live with.

Confusion and the Church: Seductions of a Post-Truth Mindset

There is a perception in society today of Christians as “enemies of progress and freedom.” For some Christians, this perception means battle lines have been drawn. On one hand, Christians respond by compromising the clarity of Scripture for the sake of acceptance and to avoid conflict. And on the other hand, Christians have indulged in the cultural practice of vilifying those with whom we disagree. We start believing and spreading false stories about people we see as the enemy. We are seduced into making “them” look bad while making “us” look as sympathetic as possible. This is the insidious Culture of Confusion: it creates an “us versus them” paradigm for all of us, Christian and non-Christian. When we are eager to believe the worst about others, we bring out the worse in ourselves. In doing so, we repel the very people who could benefit from what Jesus has to offer. This is not the way we navigate the search for meaning and clarity as Christians in a post-truth world. If the church’s caving to the post-truth mindset has contributed to the larger cultural problem, then perhaps our rediscovered commitment to the truth can lead us back to the solution.

Confusion's Consequences — Getting Freedom Wrong

The consequence of living in a Culture of Confusion is that we get freedom wrong and this creates problems. What is at the root of this post-truth mindset that fuels the Culture of Confusion? We have mistaken autonomy for freedom. Autonomy is the reason preferences and opinions are elevated over facts and truth. Anything that challenges our preferences, even if a challenge is laced with facts, is deemed “offensive” and “oppressive.” When autonomy robs us of our reason, our accountability, and our value for individuals, we become desperate for deliverance from the chaos. Freedom, on the other hand, operates at its best within the confines of truth. Confusing freedom with autonomy has enslaved our rational minds and our moral senses. And soon it may enslave us altogether. These are the cultural and moral consequences of jettisoning truth as our guide. But we have the opportunity here to search once again for the source of true freedom.

Clarity about Freedom

History's most influential person expressly binds freedom to the limits of truth. Jesus repudiates the post-truth Culture of Confusion's mindset that refuses to tether freedom to truth. Yet he does so without shaking his fist. He gently tells us that truth is freedom's foundation and the wall that protects freedom from the invasion of chaotic autonomy. Freedom to pursue the truth comes only when we recognize that there is an objective truth out there for us to freely pursue. According to Jesus, truth and freedom are always linked. Any attempt to separate them diminishes our ability to enjoy either. Explore the cyclical nature of truth and freedom that occurs when objective truths to be discovered lead to the actual freedom to discover them. Discover just how applicable Jesus's words are to our current cultural confusion and our desperate need to clarify the nature of freedom.

Clarity about Human Dignity

The Golden Rule, depicted in a stone mosaic at the United Nations headquarters in New York, is easily one of the most quoted and recognized idioms in human history: “Do unto Others What You Would Have Them Do unto You.” Yet we often forget who first uttered those words in that particular way: Jesus of Nazareth. Other religions have their own version of this rule, and though there are subtle differences between Jesus’ wording and the wordings in other traditions, it’s important to see that all versions express the common belief that we should demonstrate the value and dignity of other humans by our actions. But our common understanding of human dignity has fractured with the rise of autonomy, as we oppose, even hate, anyone who doesn’t agree with our views. Uncertainty and confusion take over in our post-truth Culture of Confusion and cause us to doubt what it means to be human and what it looks like to live out the Golden Rule. We need clarity about human dignity if we are to bridge the gap between the way the world is and the way we want it to be. And we must continue to ask what it means to be human because we cannot afford not to.

Clarity about Sexuality, Gender, and Identity

In our post-truth Culture of Confusion, many of us are asking, how can we hold to an uncompromising view of biblical sexuality yet show others that God cares for them beyond measure? The topics of sexuality and gender identity are by far heavily clouded in confusion and emotion in our culture. Often, anger and misunderstanding keep real conversations regarding these issues from happening. Our fellow humans wrestling with these topics are looking for understanding. Understanding doesn't require agreement. It simply requires the kind of empathy that can bridge the gulf between us. We must try to understand each other and why our differences exist as the necessary first step towards clarity. We must understand how the confusion surrounding these issues has kept us at odds and prevented us from truly understanding each other. And we must provide clarity about what the gospel says, why it says what it does, and how its message can guide us through our struggles to find God-given identity.

Clarity about Science and Faith

Some people in our post-truth culture believe that religious people are gullibly clinging to wishful thinking despite having evidence to the contrary. They think God and Religion are delusions, and only the insane suffer from such delusions. Their answer to these Christian delusions is science. We often credit science with the world's wonderful achievements and blame religion for all of society's ills. These are false narratives of opposition created by the confusing intersection of faith and science in our post-truth culture. This is critical for us to understand if we are to clear up the confusion that surrounds the interaction of science and the Christian faith. The Christian faith and scientific findings are, however, actually harmonious, and more alike than some might wish to acknowledge. Science actually confirms the truths in Scripture. And together, science and faith together give us a clearer picture of the simplicity and complexity of the world around us.

Clarity about Religious Pluralism

There is a well-meaning sentiment and popular view on religion in today's Culture of Confusion called religious pluralism— the idea that each of our unique individual experiences of God shows us that we're all on the right path. However, religious pluralists, in their efforts to be religiously inclusive, fail to acknowledge that all views are exclusive at some level. This the heart of our culture's confusion about religious pluralism. Once a very clear idea, pluralism meant that all religious and nonreligious worldviews were welcome in the marketplace of ideas. Pluralism allowed us to explore different claims about life's most important questions, like purpose, meaning, and destiny. Today, pluralism confusingly uses "tolerance" to shield certain religions from scrutiny and assail other religions for believing that they're actually true. Recovering clarity about pluralism is critical if we are to truly understand and respect each other.

The Son through Fog: Clarity's Hope

Hope is the feeling or desire that things will work out for the best. We hope for things to work out because we are uncertain that they will. And we lose hope when we place a higher value on the confusion of autonomy over the clarity of freedom. Confusion gives way to controversies that rise and flourish in our post-truth culture where autonomy is the ultimate goal. And when our individual autonomies collide—we turn against each other. We give lip service to respecting all religions, only to turn against a particular religion if it doesn't line up with our irreligious autonomy. Our individual autonomies give us the wobbling existence of confusion, instead of the sure footing of clarity. This mindset of confusion creates deep cultural fissures in the public sphere—and even more so in the private. And these fissures leave us longing for hope and a sense of coherence from life's confusion and complexities. And this sense of coherence can only be marshalled under one clarity—that we are made in God's image.