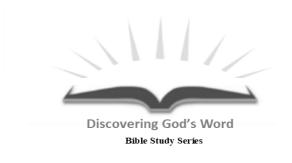
## Is There Really A Single Standard Of Truth?





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Learn from some evidence for the existence of a single standard of truth and consider what you should do with this knowledge

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

**Study Number:** DGW141

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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# Is There Really A Single Standard Of Truth?

Is there really a single standard of truth which all people are expected to accept and apply to their lives? This is a significant question in light of the fact that you will look to *something* in your life as being a standard for determining what is right and what is wrong. If there is more than one standard of truth for you to live by, then you should just find whatever standard of truth is most appealing to you. But, if there is only one single standard of truth, then you will need to conform your thinking and your actions to that standard.

There is a lot of confusion and conflict throughout this world about what is right and what is wrong. Nations are brought to the point of war because of disagreements about what is right and wrong. Political battles are waged over what the citizens of a country believe to be right and wrong. Family members often dispute over what is right and wrong. Individuals are often torn within themselves as to what is right or wrong in given situations.

Then, there are even disputes about what is right and wrong within religious communities. People of differing faiths and religious backgrounds often disagree about which religion is the right one. Even within "Christianity," there are tens of thousands of different religious organizations that all claim to be right – even though they all believe, teach, and practice different things.

All of this confusion and conflict can be traced back to a single problem. This is the question of how it is that we establish anything to be right or

wrong. You see, as long as people are looking to different standards to establish truth, there will never be agreement on what is right and wrong. Some people look to their own customs and traditions to determine what is right. Some people look to their own ideas or feelings. Some people rely on what they have been taught by their parents or educators. There are many different ways people gain ideas about what is right and wrong.

As you live your life on this earth and recognize that there are a vast number of standards being used to determine what is right and what is wrong, you will have to make some choices in your own life. You will have to decide for yourself which is the right standard for you to live your life by. You will want to know which is the right standard to use as you make all of your decisions in life.

But, some may question, "Does it even matter?" "Is there even a single standard that is worthy of determining what is right and wrong in every area of life?" "Why can't we all just live however each one feels is right or wrong within himself/herself?"

In this lesson, we want to investigate these questions. Not only is recognizing a single standard of truth important to achieving unity and peace with other people on this earth, but it is vitally important to your soul. In this lesson, we want to examine if there is a standard of truth that can be known by all – and if that standard is the only one that is appropriate to use in determining what is right and wrong. Then, we want to apply our conclusions.

## God Is Truth

In order to begin answering the questions that have been posed, we must begin with a search for truth. With so many different and conflicting things that are all claimed to be true, some people question whether absolute truth even exists. Or, is "truth" dependent on multiple factors that differ from person to person? As we investigate these matters, we should recognize that there really is a God who exists

who has given us His words in the pages of the Bible. For, we will soon discover that God is truth!

## The need for absolute truth

As I have already indicated, there is a need for absolute truth everywhere around you. Without it, there are wars, fights, disagreements, problems, and confusion everywhere. Without it, people are always doing whatever they believe is right. Without it, you can never really know for certain whether the things you are doing are right or wrong.

Think about the need for absolute truth in this way. The reality is that there are millions of people who operate vehicles on the roads every day, sometimes traveling in excess of 70 miles per hour. Now, most people recognize that a collision between these vehicles can be extremely dangerous — and even deadly. But, just imagine if there was no single standard of right and wrong for the roads that you drive on. What if every person could choose what he/she thought was the "right" speed to travel? What if every person could choose what he/she thought was the "right" thing to do whenever approaching an intersection? What if there were absolutely no traffic laws that would determine what was "right" or "wrong" when operating a motor vehicle?

Most would conclude that this would be a dangerous environment to operate a motor vehicle in. Now, if something so basic as operating a vehicle needs to have a single standard of "right" and "wrong," certainly we should recognize the need for there to be some authority greater than our lives that should tell us what is right and wrong in the decisions that we have to make! In fact, there is one who does have authority over every area of life.

This one is God. Now, please recognize that there are two things that are necessary in order for someone to have authority in any area. These are power to control and right to control. For instance, I could claim to be the king over the entire world, but no one would listen to me – because I do not have the power to control the world or the right to control the world. But, God *does* have both power and right over every area of life on this earth! After all, He is the one who created it all by His great power and wisdom. Therefore, because He has authority over

everything (and He is the only one who has authority over everything), He is the only one who is qualified to determine what is truth and what is not! For instance, Jesus Christ (who is God, the Son) said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

## God knows everything

There is nothing that God cannot know. For instance, Romans 11:33-36 tells us the truth about God when it says, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?' 'Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

As man, there are many things that we do not know. We are often misled by people who claim to tell us something that is "true" (when it is actually false). We are often unsure about what is right and what is wrong. But, this is not so with God! Being limitless in His knowledge, God knows everything that is true and everything that is not true.

## There is no evil in God

As you consider why you should listen to God and how that you can trust Him to always be "right," you should also recognize that there is nothing that is evil in God. 1 John 1:5 says, "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." Habakkuk 1:13 says (concerning God), "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness...." The idea appears to be that God is so pure that He cannot look on evil or wickedness favorably.

The reason is because holiness is a main characteristic of God. In Revelation 4:8, God is declared to be "Holy, holy, holy." Thus, He possesses a perfect degree of holiness. To be "holy" is to be separated from everything that is wicked and entirely dedicated to right ways. Then, this is not just

an interesting fact to consider. Instead, this is vitally important for how you must live your life.

As you consider what is right and what is wrong, God says that His holiness is your standard for being "holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy." So, you are not holy (completely separated from evil) just because you think that what you are doing in your life is "right." Instead, you are only "right" if you are living according to the holy ways of God – who is perfectly holy!

### God cannot lie

Everything that God does or says is according to the way of absolute truth. Because God is separated from all of the ways of evil, every element of His Being is truth. The Bible also makes this apparent. Titus 1:2 says that God "cannot lie." And, Hebrews 6:18 says that it is "impossible for God to lie."

Not only does this contribute to the holiness of God, but it also contributes to His faithfulness. For instance, both 1 Corinthians 1:9 and 1 Corinthians 10:13 make the claim that "God is faithful." That is, because God is completely good and cannot lie, you can trust that whatever He says and does is always according to the way of truth and right. You never have to question whether God is going to lead you into a way that is wrong. For, the Bible teaches us that God can neither be tempted with evil or use evil to tempt others (see James 1:13).

So, everything that is wrong comes from some other source. Namely, there is one who is commonly called "the devil" and "Satan" who "does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). Thus, the Bible sets up a clear contrast. Everything that is right is of God and everything that is evil is of Satan.

## **God Has Revealed Truth**

As I have attempted to demonstrate that God is truth and the perfect standard of right and wrong, now we need to consider how it is that God has told us anything about what is right and wrong. Remember that one of the questions asked in Romans 11 was, "For who has known the mind of the Lord?" (verse 34). There is simply no person who could possibly know anything about what is in the mind of God without Him revealing it to us. Fortunately, God has revealed truth to mankind so that everyone can know it!

## God's word is perfect

In order to convey truth and the perfect standard of right and wrong, God has spoken! He has used words (as we will observe). Now, please recognize that the words of God are perfect. Since it is impossible for God to lie, it only stands to reason that anything He says must also be perfectly true.

Psalm 19:7-9 says, "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

Similarly, James 1:25 says, "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." So, the words "perfect," "right," "true," and "pure" are all applicable to the words spoken by our God. His words *never* accomplish anything that is imperfect, wrong, false, or wicked!

In being perfect, God's word is also complete. There is no truth that is lacking from what has been revealed that we need to know in order to please Him. For instance, Jude 1:3 says, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

Being "once for all delivered," there is no new revelation that will be given beyond what has already been revealed.

Now, please consider that whenever Jesus Christ was on earth and prayed to God (the Father), He said, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). Please consider two points from this verse. First, Jesus Christ recognized that God's word is absolute truth. Second, people can be sanctified by God's truth. Interestingly, "sanctify" means to make someone holy or set him/her apart from evil. Only God's word that contains complete truth is capable of making an individual holy as God is holy. Therefore, whenever an individual listens to what God has spoken, that individual is right (as God cannot be wrong).

## How God has communicated to mankind

But, how has God communicated to mankind so that he can learn what is in the mind of God? God has communicated with man in various ways throughout history. (1) Directly speaking to individuals – as He did with Adam, Noah, and the Patriarchs. (2) Through visions and dreams – as He did with Joseph, Peter, and others. (3) Jesus taught individuals directly when He lived on earth. (4) The apostles and prophets were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, who revealed God's message to them (Ephesians 3:3-5). However, God does not communicate with us in these sorts of direct ways today. He has indicated that He would no longer use these direct methods to reveal His word of truth to mankind. Yet, He *does* communicate with us today.

Today, God communicates with mankind through His written word (contained within the pages of the Bible). Hebrews 1:1-3 says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

The words that are written in the pages of the Bible are these words from God. Specifically, the words that are written in the pages of the New Testament represent the new law of Jesus Christ that every person on this earth lives under today. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

But, how did the words of God get into written form? Listen to what Jesus told His apostles about the Holy Spirit prior to ascending into Heaven. In John 14:25-26, Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." In John 15:26, Jesus said, "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

And, in John 16:12-15, Jesus said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."

The Holy Spirit, therefore, would come *after* Jesus ascended into Heaven and lead the apostles (and prophets) into all truth. He would both put them in remembrance of the things Jesus taught while He was on this earth and He would teach things they were not ready to receive whenever Jesus Christ was on this earth. But, please notice the authority that would be involved in this. Notice that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name, He comes from the Father, and would speak by the authority of Christ (not His own).

Now, the Holy Spirit was uniquely qualified to accomplish this work. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 says that "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have

entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God." Listen to verse 16: "For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ." Just as our spirits know what is in our minds and can reveal our minds to others, God's Spirit knows what is in God's mind and can reveal it to others. So, it is through the words revealed by God's Holy Spirit that we can know what is in the mind of Christ – who speaks with the authority given to Him by the Father!

Ephesians 3:3-5 will also prove to be helpful in understanding how it is we can know the mind of Christ. Paul wrote, "how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets." Similarly, 2 Peter 1:20-21 says that prophecy does not come by the will of man, "but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

So, just as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit has worked to reveal God's truth to mankind. He has done so by revealing this truth to the apostles and prophets. And, as these words have been recorded in written form within the pages of the Bible, we can know the mind of Christ. Thus, the Bible is a fully authoritative book that perfectly reveals the will of God to mankind.

## How to know whether something is right

Given what we have now discovered about the word of God that is contained in the pages of the Bible, we should consider that it is only when we live according to God's word of truth that we can determine something to be right. And, anything contrary to that word of truth is wrong (called "sin" in the Bible).

But, there are many people who make many different claims about what God's word actually teaches to be right and wrong. Therefore, it is important to recognize this principle: In order to

always be right in what you do, you must always have Bible authority. Colossians 3:17 simply states, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." God's word is compared to a pattern that we must hold fast in every area of our lives in order to be right and pleasing to God (2 Timothy 1:13). If we deviate at all from that pattern, we commit sin (see 1 John 3:4 and James 4:17). Remember, it is the Bible (and only the Bible) that perfectly tells us everything that God wants from our lives and perfectly leads us into right ways (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17)!

Since it is so vitally important to have Bible authority for all that we do in our lives, let's consider some basics about how to establish Bible authority. There are three ways through which we can establish Bible authority. Please note that these are the same three ways that we learn whether anything is true. So, I am just applying these principles to God's perfect standard of truth.

- (1) Through a direct command given in the Scriptures. For instance, baptism is commanded in Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Loving our enemies is commanded in Matthew 5:44: "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." So, we have Bible authority (established by direct commands) for both of these actions that we must do these things if we want to live in a way that pleases God!
- (2) Through an approved example given in the Scriptures. For instance, Acts 8:38-39 shows an approved example of baptism: "So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing." Acts 20:7 shows an approved example of Christians partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and

continued his message until midnight" (note that the "breaking of bread" refers to the Lord's Supper in this passage). So, we have Bible authority (established by approved examples) for both of these actions.

(3) Through a forced conclusion from the Scriptures. This is a conclusion that is *necessary* (not a guess or something that is speculated; but, one that is unmistakable). For instance, Acts 8:38-39 forces us to the conclusion that the man from Ethiopia was immersed in water and not sprinkled (or any other practice). For, the passage (as we have just read) tells us that both the one being baptized and the one doing the baptizing went down into the water for the baptism – and both came up out of the water. Acts 20:7 forces us to the conclusion that the Lord's Supper is to be taken on the first day of every week (and not just on a yearly, quarterly, or monthly basis – or any other practice). So, we have Bible authority (established by forced conclusions) for each of these practices.

In these 3 ways, Bible authority is established. Bible authority is not established in any other way. Bible authority is not established because I want the Bible to teach a particular thing. Bible authority is not established because I always thought the Bible taught a particular thing. Bible authority is not established because I have always done things a particular way. Instead, Bible authority is only established if there is a direct command, an approved example, or a forced conclusion.

## God's revealed word will judge us all

Here is why it is so vitally important to live according to the teachings of God's truth (as revealed in the pages of the Bible): God's word will judge you one day as to whether you have lived in a way that is pleasing to God or not. In John 12:48, Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." Similarly, Revelation 20:11-15 pictures that whenever the Day of Judgment comes, all people will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and be judged "according to their works, by the things which were written in the books." These are the books of God.

So, recognizing that you will be judged according to the standard of God's word of truth, please consider what is said in 2 Corinthians 5:10. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Everything about your life will be judged to be either good or bad by the perfect standard of God's word! Then, based on this judgment, you will either be rewarded with eternal life in Heaven or punished with eternal torment in Hell (see Matthew 25:31-46 and Romans 2:5-11).

## There Is No Truth Apart From God

We have seen that truth is of God. Therefore, since God cannot lie and is perfectly knowledgeable about everything, anything that man says or does that is not in perfect harmony with the truth God has revealed in the Bible *is not really the truth*!

## Truth is not in man

There are many people who attempt to justify their actions on the basis of having *subjective authority*. This is authority that man derives from within himself or from other men. This authority is not concrete. It is able to be changed upon the changing attitudes, opinions, moods, etc. of man.

But, is authority derived from within mankind acceptable to pleasing God? God says it is not! For instance, Isaiah 55:8-9 demonstrates that God's ways are much higher than man's ways. "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." Therefore, as we have already seen, mankind is not even able to know what pleases God or what does not please God unless God reveals it to mankind.

Jeremiah 10:23 says, "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." Without God's revelation of His will, we are incapable of living our

lives in a way that will please the God who possesses all authority. In fact, even when we try to act in ways that seem right to us, we often fail to please God. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." Therefore, "let God be true but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4).

## Examining some false standards of "truth"

There are many people who attempt to call things that are evil, "good." They try to call things that are involved with the wicked works of darkness, "light" (see Isaiah 5:20). They often justify themselves and their actions through a false standard of "truth." Consider the following standards that many people look to in order to establish right and wrong – and why all of these fail to accurately lead people in the ways of truth.

- (1) Some try to find authority through the opinions and "wisdom" of other men. Yet, we have already seen that God's ways are far above the ways of man (see Isaiah 55:8-9). In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:25 says that the "foolishness of God is wiser than men." God is not pleased any time we listen to man's opinions rather than listen to Him. This even includes situations in which the majority opinion of man goes against God's will (see Exodus 23:2 and Matthew 7:13-14) and when those we love and trust have opinions that go against God's will (see Matthew 10:34-39).
- (2) Some try to find authority through their feelings and their own consciences. They look to do whatever feels right to them, that they can do in "good conscience." Yet, Jeremiah 17:9 says that man's heart is "deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked." You see, mankind often fills his heart with things that are contrary to God's will. Therefore, things that God does not approve often *feels* right to man. Furthermore, Acts 23:1 and Acts 26:9-11 demonstrates that Saul had killed and persecuted Christians in "all good conscience." Still, his "good conscience" did not make his actions pleasing to God.
- (3) Some try to find authority through man's traditions. Some justify their actions by appealing to the "way things have always been done." Yet, Jesus revealed that some man-made traditions cause us to

violate the authority of God. In Matthew 15:1-14, Jesus said that some Jewish leaders had "made the commandment of God of no effect" by their traditions. And, He condemned them, saying that their hearts were far away from God and worshiped God in vain by teaching the doctrines of men.

- (4) Some try to find authority through doctrines of man. Many hold to man-made doctrines in addition to some of God's doctrines. Yet, the apostle Paul warned that those who preached any other gospel besides what God has revealed would be doomed to destruction (see Galatians 1:6-12). Therefore, as the apostle John warned, we must only abide in the doctrine of Christ and must refuse to accept any other doctrine (see 2 John 1:9-11).
- (5) Certainly there are many subjective standards mankind appeals to in order to justify and authorize their actions. However, every one of these subjective standards of authority fails to lead us in a way that will please God! Therefore, if we discover that anything we do is only by the authority of men, we must get away from it!

## Living With The Reality Of Absolute Truth

Because there really is a God who knows all and cannot lie, He is the one who possesses complete truth. We have seen that He has revealed truth to us through His word – and His word has been recorded in the pages of the Bible. We have also seen that each one of us will be judged based on that absolute standard of truth some day. So, please consider how you should respond to the reality of a single standard of truth.

## Study it

You should want to know everything that you can possibly know about the truth that God has revealed. Psalm 86:11 should be your prayer to God: "Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name." Since God has revealed His word of truth in the pages of the Bible, you should want to spend an appropriate

amount of time learning God's standard of truth every day of your life (see Acts 17:11). For, if you do not study His truth, you will not possibly be able to believe only what is true and live according to that truth.

## Rightly interpret it

It takes effort to learn the truth. And, God wants you to put forth that effort both in studying and rightly interpreting His message of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." You must be careful not to misinterpret or misapply what God's word teaches. For, it is possible to read the Bible and twist God's words into saying something that is false and will lead to your spiritual destruction (see 2 Peter 3:15-16).

## Obey it

Remember that God's word is the complete truth. So, whenever you study His word of truth, you must be willing to believe and do whatever it says. For instance, James 1:25 says, "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." Even if you do not like what God's word teaches, the fact that it is absolute truth means that you must yield your own ideas and desires to God's. If you do not, you will commit sin.

## Teach it

As you recognize the importance of learning and obeying God's standard of truth, you will also want to help others learn and obey it. In fact, God has chosen for His message of truth to be spread to others through preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18). 2 Timothy 2:2 says that it is the responsibility of those who have learned and obeyed the truth to teach it to others.

## Conclusion

Yes, there really is a single standard of truth! Since God is full of truth, it is only reasonable that His word contains nothing but truth. And, since His word will be the standard by which all people will have their lives judged one Day, it is the single standard of truth. Yet, will you choose to allow it to be the standard by which you determine whether everything in your life is right or wrong? And, will you choose to obey it in all things during your life?

## **Study Questions**

What is at the source of all the confusion and conflicts about right and wrong? How can these problems be remedied?

### 1. God Is Truth

What is the need for absolute truth?

How much does God know?

How pure is God?

Is it possible for God to lie?

## 2. God Has Revealed Truth

What does it mean for God's word to be "perfect"?

How has God communicated to mankind?

How do you establish Bible authority in order to know if something is right?
Why is it essential that you live according to God's standard of truth?
3. There Is No Truth Apart From God
Is truth derived from within man? Why or why not?
List some false standards of truth and explain why they are <i>false</i> standards.
4. Living With The Reality Of Absolute Truth
Why should you study the Bible?
Why should you rightly interpret the Bible?
Why should you obey the instructions in the Bible?
Why should you teach the truths in the Bible to others?