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The Foundation of Our Truths

By Jim Myers

How important is “truth” to you? I am sure that everyone would agree that “truth” is very important. However, I know that “truth” does not mean the same thing to everyone.

Dictionary.com defines “truth” as the following:

- (1) Conformity to fact or actuality.
- (2) A statement proven to be or accepted as true.
- (3) Fidelity to an original or standard.
- (4) Reality; actuality; often, that which is considered to be the supreme reality and to have the ultimate meaning and value of existence.

I think that most people usually think about the first definition when asked to define “truth” – “conformity to fact or actuality.” Just to make sure that we all have the “same bundles of associations” for the words found in these definitions, let’s also define “fact:”

- (1) Knowledge or information based on real occurrences.
- (2) Something demonstrated to exist or known to have existed; a real occurrence; an event.
- (3) The aspect of a case at law comprising events determined by evidence.

One definition of “truth” is “*knowledge or information that is based on real occurrences.*” This definition is reflected in the first part of the second definition given above – “*A statement proven to be true.*” This, however, isn’t the same thing as “*a statement accepted as true.*” Why would people accept something as true without having proof?

One answer is **belief** -- they “**believe**” it to be “truth.” This, of course, requires that we also define the word “belief:”

- (1) *The mental act, condition, or habit of placing trust or confidence in another.*
- (2) *Mental acceptance of and conviction in the truth, actuality, or validity of something.*
- (3) *Something believed or accepted as true, especially a particular tenet or a body of tenets accepted by a group of persons.*

When asked about what they believe to be “truth,” many people state “beliefs.” Facts are based on “real occurrences; something that can be demonstrated or is known exist or have existed.” A belief, on the other hand, is based on the “mental acceptance of and conviction of the validity of something.” In most cases, “something” is defined as “*a particular tenet or a body of tenets accepted by a group of persons.*”

I think that it is very important for us to clearly identify the basis of our “truths” – are they based on “beliefs,” “facts” or something else; i.e., opinions, emotions, lies, traditions, etc.? It is very common for people to use the terms “beliefs” and “facts” almost interchangeably in today’s world. However, if we are to move beyond much of the confusion and resulting conflict created by competing truth claims, we must determine their basis. Beliefs and facts are two very different things. Facts can be demonstrated or proven; beliefs cannot – they must either be accepted or rejected.

In our world it is not unusual to find ourselves standing in a battle between two competing sources of truth. The most ancient is religion, which presents “truth” based on “beliefs.” Religion’s most recent (by historical standards) contender is science, which repeatedly declares the source of its “truth” to be “facts.” This, however, is not always the case.

Barry J. Marshall and J. Robin Warren, two Australian researchers who discovered the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* and elucidated its role in gastritis and peptic ulcer disease, have been awarded this year's Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.

Warren, a pathologist from Perth, first observed small curved bacteria in the antrum in 1979. He saw the organisms in about 50% of patients from whom biopsies had been taken, and made what the Nobel Assembly said was a crucial observation--that signs of inflammation were always present in the gastric mucosa close to where the bacteria were seen.

"Don't ask me why nobody saw them before," Warren told *The Scientist*. "My feeling is that nobody thought they were there. Standard medical teaching at the time was that there were no bacteria in the gut."

"This was a paradigm-shifting discovery," said Adrian Lee, an *H. pylori* researcher and now Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education) at the University of New South Wales, Australia. "I gave a lecture just a week ago, using it as an example of the importance of always keeping an open mind if medical science is to progress. So often, one is taught dogma."

At the time of their discovery, it was widely believed that stress and lifestyle were the major causes of peptic ulcer disease. Warren and Marshall overturned that dogma, and it is now clear that *H. pylori*, a flagellated, gram negative, spiral organism,

causes more than 90% of duodenal ulcers and up to 80% of gastric ulcers.

Their findings, however, were met with skepticism by the clinical community and "it took a remarkable length of time for their discovery to become mainstream," said Lee. "They thought we were mad," said Warren. "It was against all the medical teaching, but we had the evidence. We just had to keep pushing it and pushing it."

In 1985, for example, Marshall underwent gastric biopsy to prove he didn't carry the bacterium, then deliberately infected himself to show that it caused acute gastric illness. In a paper published in the Medical Journal of Australia he described developing a mild illness over a course of 14 days. "This extraordinary act demonstrated outstanding dedication and commitment to his research," said Robert May, president of Britain's Royal Society.

However, "it wasn't until 1991...that it was really accepted by all gastroenterologists worldwide," noted Leif Percival Andersen, president of the European Helicobacter Study Group, from Copenhagen University Hospital, Denmark. Warren and Marshall's discovery paved the way for peptic ulcers to be cured by eradication of the bacterium with a combination of antibiotics and acid secretion inhibitors. As a result, "peptic ulcer disease is no longer a chronic, frequently disabling condition," the Nobel Assembly said.

How did Marshall overcome the existing beliefs of their peers? He proved that he didn't have an ulcer, gave himself one and then demonstrated the cure. Interestingly, it still took six years before his facts were widely accepted. For many years we have been saying – *"Our beliefs must be large enough to include all the facts; they must be open enough to be tested; and flexible enough to change when error is found."* Our spiritual health depends upon the integration of new factual information into our beliefs systems. Denial will only lead to delusion. **BHC**

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You are invited to become part of the Biblical Heritage journey. BHC works to gather quality information from many sources and distribute it to as many people as possible. *Discovering our spiritual heritage is an exciting journey.* Many people know nothing about the history of the organizations and beliefs that have played a very important role in the lives of generations of “believers.”

This spiritual journey begins with one book for many of us – our Bible. It has a history too. Who wrote its words? Who decided what our “word of God” would be? In what language was it written? How can we most accurately understand its words and messages? How accurate are our English translations? Is there a way that I can learn to work with the original languages -- without going back to college -- so I will be able to check the work of the translators?

Information that will help answer the above questions, as well as many others, has already been gathered and deposited on the BHC website and written about in our newsletters. It is available without charge to the public. Obviously, it cost money to do our work. The money comes from the tax-deductible contributions of those who understand the importance of, and urgent need for, quality information. Only by having access to factual information are we able to test the accuracy of what we believe to be either true or false.

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