

WHAT IS TRUE

“A thing is not necessarily true because badly uttered, nor false because spoken magnificently.”

- Saint Augustine

Sometimes we hear the statement: “It’s all about **perception**”. This statement suggest that what we hear, read or see has more to do with the delivery than the content – or is more about the presentation than the source or party of origin. Some time ago, the word “**spin**” came to be applied to political dialogue or rhetoric (and related information) to insinuate a bias or attempted slant on the story. One popular news analyst describes his program as “the no-spin zone” - to suggest that the content is objective.

In light of Saint Augustine’s quote, consider that most of what you hear and all of what you see must be addressed with a degree of skepticism. Perhaps taking on the mantra of Missouri, the “show-me” approach demands more than simply “the talk”, but emphasizes “the walk” or action. Politicians are notorious for doing a lot of “the talk” and not necessarily “the walk”. Still others – where conduct and ethics are possibly more important – are scrutinized, criticized and even ostracized for their known or “perceived” failures in living-up to expectation or expressed intentions.

Of course, the truth is not always easy to determine. Many have thought something to be true (or not) – only to be corrected or revised in their thinking at some later time. In our own society, political and popular views about race, religion and other social issues have changed with time; for example, the social acceptance of slavery in the early American culture versus contemporary views. Thus, what is true is not always easy to determine...and to understand...and may change with time.



Even with the illusive identification or understanding of truth, most people desire to know it; or basically, most people do not like being made a fool or being used as a patsy in a scam, a ruse, or some other trickery. It’s one thing to be the brunt of a joke, but an entirely different matter to be made the *scapegoat* – or to be falsely accused of some wrongdoing or crime.

We can think of such cases – such infractions of injustices of truth – where someone or some body was falsely or wrongly accused; or where the truth is not presented...or false information prevails. Whether the accusation comes in the form of words (“the talk”) or by actions (“the walk”), the matter of truth is still essential to our natural desires or preferences when we are the one being accused or wronged.

Another saying that has to do with perception is **repetition**: “if you hear something enough times, it becomes truth”. For the ages (and according to history), men thought the world was flat...and not round. Enough emphasis on this theory – to include repetition – made it so...or fact. Again, in contemporary society we now know the truth; and see this theory as farfetched – even ridiculous! On many matters however, we still accept repetition as the indicator of truth. If said enough, something that we might be dubious about – even oppose – can become rather acceptable over time; it’s just a matter of time and repetition.

History and technology enable us to study the past in more depth – and presumably with more knowledge and truth. We can learn of congregations of peoples – even industrialized countries – where information became a means of **power and control**. One nation might be led into war on the premise that it must act to defend itself from hostility; when in actuality, it is the country itself – or its ruling party – that is being hostile. Anyone who acts on the premise of protection or preservation is a most-able combatant – even if duped into battle!

In this age of information, “information is power”. I’ve heard it said that we live in an age of unprecedented information but disproportional knowledge; which is to consider that tetra-levels of information do not suggest equal capacity or condition to learn or increase knowledge. Maybe it has something to do with the **credibility** or **credence** of the information; or maybe it is just the accepted value or worth of the data.

Information or data may not be acceptable or applicable; but it may also lack **integrity** or **veracity** because it has not been verified or validated through analysis and thorough evaluation.

Obviously, some information may not require such rigor; it may not be of such



import worthy of the "analysis and evaluation". So much information simply passes by without this attention; while there is that small percentage that must be carefully treated and attended. In the small percentage is something that is deemed worthy of such careful consideration before acceptance and application.

The question may not initially be the veracity of the information; but instead, the means or method by which it will be tested for truth or accuracy. How is information or data tested, verified or validated in the first place? There is probably a *fine-line* between these two words; but for potential clarity, a court or similar agency would verify a claim by an oath or sworn statement (as being true or false); whereas they might validate a testimony through reason or supporting evidence. In the former, they trust that the testimony is truth by virtue or **integrity** of the claimant – or person making the claim; and in the later, they attempt to reason or rationalize the testimony or statement as realistic or factual.



It seems complicated; that is, in dealing with information and determining whether it is true or not. With the possibility of err – which could be to reject information that is true or to accept information that is not true – the uncertainty alone can leave someone confused and even bewildered when it comes to confirming truth. Couple this uncertainty with the intended use of the information or data, and the effort becomes even more arduous and daunted with **risks** and its **consequences**. What if the information is found to be true and the consequence is that innocent persons are found guilty; worst yet, what if the data is rejected and the incurred risks result in the loss of life? Again, the import of the information should determine how it is treated and attended before acceptance and application.

When Saint Augustine made this quote or formed these words of wisdom, was he thinking about all the possibilities that truth can be easily abused? Perhaps he was aware that truth is not easily maintained and, left to devices and nature of man, could be easily be perverted for power or some other purpose. Maybe he had seen or witnessed how truth was presented to undermine the hearts of many – who accepted it based on the presupposition that the source was reliable or trustworthy...when indeed they were not.

Long before Saint Augustine, Jesus instructed his disciples to be “as shrewd as snakes, but as innocent as doves.” From the translation, *The Message*, the following account from the Gospel of Matthew:

“Stay alert. This is hazardous work I’m assigning you. You’re going to be like sheep running through a wolf pack, so don’t call attention to yourselves. Be as cunning as a snake, inoffensive as a dove...”

“Don’t be naïve. Some people will impugn your motives, others will smear your reputation—just because you believe in me. Don’t be upset when they haul you before the civil authorities...”

In this instruction, Jesus was preparing them to understand that the devices and nature of man is marked by such abuse and perversions truth. There is the paradox that, while most may want to know the truth when they are being falsely accused or wronged, they may not be nearly as interested in the truth if they are only the other side or do not have a stake in the case. When he said “Don’t be naïve”, he was warning them not to accept information or data so casually – because it could easily be false or falsified in some way. Just because they are to understand the nature of man is no excuse to act or live in the same way; but instead, to live with and for the truth – or for Jesus who is the bearer of truth. Being “inoffensive as a dove” is to represent the character of Christ – while still knowing the nature of man.

We cannot always know the truth – as every situation and circumstance that arises does not enable or allow our full control in the ability or opportunity to verify, validate or otherwise test; but we must realize and accept the Christ is truth and – as with the initial disciples – enables others to identify the truth through endowed wisdom, reason, or insight.

What is true? We will (or can) know what is true and what is true will set us free.