



# ***Challenging Truth Claims***

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# ***'Creep and Drift' In The Evangelical Church***

***By***

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# Chapter One: Challenging Truth Claims

A 'truth claim' is basically what someone claims to be true. A variation of that definition is "a proposition or statement that a particular person or belief system holds to be true."

How many 'truth claims' do you hear in a day? How many 'truth claims' do you make in a day?

We probably hear dozens of truth claims every day, maybe more. We hear them from family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, fellow students, acquaintances and strangers. We hear them on television and radio and read them on social media. Many truth claims are really lies. That's one good reason to challenge them, especially if those lies are leading people to make decisions that will have a negative impact on their lives.

Most people don't have time to challenge every truth claim they hear, so I'm not suggesting that we do. We need to select which ones we want to challenge. The questions we'd like to answer in this article are **who, what, why and how**.

## Who

Everyone we know and meet is a potential "who." As we pointed out earlier, that can include family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, fellow students, acquaintances and even strangers. Every day that we wake up is a new opportunity to talk with people about truth. That sometimes means challenging truth claims when those people make them.

## What

We first need to be sure that what we're hearing or reading is a "truth claim." If someone says, "chocolate ice cream is a lot better than vanilla ice cream," are they presenting a truth claim or an opinion? It's an opinion rather than a truth claim

because the statement is a *subjective* personal preference rather than an *objective* claim that something is the absolute truth.

People often share their opinions in the same way they share truth claims. Many people don't even realize they're doing it. Since we're the hearer or reader, we need to determine **what** they're claiming. Everyone is entitled to their personal opinion, but people are not entitled to their 'personal truth.' No matter what you've heard, there's no such thing as personal truth. Something is true or it's not. That's what we learn from reality. We don't live in a fantasy world. We live in the real world.

**Opinion** – “a view or judgment formed about something, not necessarily based on fact or knowledge” (Oxford Languages) ... “a view, judgment, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

**Truth** – “that which is true or in accordance with fact or reality” (Oxford Languages) ... “the body of real things, events, and facts” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Some people have very good opinions because their opinions are based on facts/knowledge. Some people have very bad opinions because their opinions are not based on facts/knowledge. Some people's opinions are somewhat neutral because they're based on personal preference (e.g. liking chocolate ice cream better than vanilla ice cream).

We need to answer the "what" question before proceeding toward a challenge of what someone says or writes. If someone is simply sharing their personal preference for something that doesn't come with a big price tag (not so important that it needs to be challenged), then we don't need to consider a challenge.

Take a look at these two opinion examples and ask yourself the "what" question. Do either need to be challenged?

**Example One** — You're walking in your neighborhood with a friend. Your friend looks at one house and says, "I think the blue one-story house is very pretty, but that green two-story house is ugly."

**Example Two** — A friend tells you that in his or her opinion all Christians are stupid for believing that Jesus rose from the dead.

Would you challenge either? If so, why?

In example one, your neighbor is simply sharing a subjective perspective. Whether a person likes a blue house or a green house is personal preference. You might agree or disagree, but it's just an opinion. You might ask your neighbor why they like the blue house instead of the green house or let his or her comments pass. It really doesn't matter because it's subjective personal preference.

In example two, your friend disguises his or her truth claim inside a stated opinion. Many people do that with topics like religion and politics. I would challenge my friend's opinion because it is based on a truth claim that (1) Christians are stupid, and (2) Jesus didn't rise from the dead. I might challenge my friend's opinion/truth claim this way:

**Challenge** — The Bible agrees with you to a degree. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then Christians are stupid for believing it. The Apostle Paul, who wrote many of the letters in the New Testament, wrote "And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!" Paul went on to say that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, Christians should be pitied above all people. The problem with that thinking, though, is that Paul and more than 500 other people saw Jesus alive after the Romans killed Him and friends buried Him in a tomb. Another problem is that Jesus told His closest followers exactly how He was going to die and that He would rise from the dead on the third day. If what Paul and the 500+ people witnessed is true, then it would be stupid **not** to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

That's just one example of responding to a truth claim disguised as an opinion. Truth claims should be based on "truth," which are based on reality and facts. You can do the same thing with other types of truth claims that are disguised as opinions. In this case, as a Christian who has spent 50 years researching the life of Jesus Christ, I believe my truth



claims are based on solid evidence. I'm comfortable talking with people who disagree because of the evidence. Evidence is the reason we can have confidence as followers of Jesus Christ. We have to determine which truth claims and truth claims disguised as opinion should be challenged. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of them that should be challenged and defended.

## **Why**

Why would we want to challenge someone's truth claim? The truth claim would need to be something we believe is important enough to challenge. So many truth claims come at us through personal conversations, media reports and social media comments that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to address them all. We need to be discerning about which ones we challenge.

That goes to the “why” question. I need to have a good reason to challenge someone’s truth claim and disguised truth claim (disguised as opinion). Making that decision as a Christian, I think, should be a matter of prayer and study. I want God’s guidance in challenging truth claims. Some truth claims, like example two above, should be addressed as soon as we hear them “if” we’ve prepared ourselves to do that. If we’re not prepared, better to listen, ask some questions, pray about it and set a day and time with our friend to continue the discussion. We have some homework to do first.

Using the ALPS system (Ask. Listen. Pray. Speak.) works well whether we have a good answer and challenge ready or if we need time to do some research. There’s nothing wrong with admitting we don’t have all the answers. People who think they have ALL the answers often have very few.

When I say the word “challenge,” I want to make sure you understand I don't mean it in a confrontational sense. The Apostle Paul wrote –

*Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. Colossians 4:5-6*

The Apostle Peter wrote –

*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 1 Peter 3:15-16*

We don't want to be argumentative or confrontational in spirit. As someone has said, the Gospel is offensive enough without our being offensive in the way we share it. The people who had the most impact on me when I was an atheist were those Christians whose speech was gracious and loving. I eventually came to understand that I was dead in trespasses and sins and desperately needed God's salvation through Christ, but that's not where my Christian friends began with me. Which leads us to the "how" question.

## **How**

How do we challenge a person's truth claim? I like to begin with a point of agreement, when possible. That's based on basic respect for people. God loves people and has called us to love people, even people who don't love us.

The "challenge" example earlier is one we can consider – "The Bible agrees with you to a degree." That's one way to begin with a point of agreement that also includes an entree to a forthcoming challenge (to a degree). Another way, when

appropriate, is to make a statement about how you agree with them on some point in their truth claim. I don't use that as a gimmick or trick and don't recommend you do either. If you love and respect people, you won't use gimmicks or tricks. You won't have to because your words will be seasoned with salt. They will naturally flow from your mind to your mouth as God's love is poured out through you to their ears. Plus, your challenge will include facts and knowledge based on reality. No need for tricks.

If you respectfully listen to people and ask them thoughtful questions to understand their claims better, they will often reciprocate by listening to your response. Your words may challenge their claims, but a challenge made with a loving, gracious spirit are often received well. Not always, but often.

A quick word about challenging someone's truth claim on social media. Pray about it. I've challenged people's truth claims online for more than 25 years and wonder sometimes what difference I've made. God knows. If you're friends with someone online, that may be different. You can develop a

trusting relationship that allows for helpful conversations and challenges. If the person you're communicating with is not a friend and you haven't had time to develop a respectful relationship with them, challenging truth claims usually doesn't go very far. They often move to people calling you names, which is not helpful. Just be sure you don't call them names back. Bad witness. Ask God to guide you to the people and truth claims He wants you to challenge online.

The "how" of challenging truth claims online is similar to in-person challenges. Listen. Ask. Pray. Speak. Be loving and gracious. Be humble in your responses. Stick to the facts that support your challenge and don't be pulled into arguments. Remember that our truth claims are not based on ideas of the flesh or this world.

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God,*

*bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. 2. Corinthians 10:3-5*

## Conclusion

I know this is a quick look at challenging truth claims, but hope it helps you in some way. Christians don't need to be afraid to challenge truth claims. We know Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He proved it through His perfect life, atoning death, burial, and miraculous resurrection. He proved it by ascending to Heaven to the right hand of the Father. The Spirit of God in us will guide us into all truth. We don't need to be afraid. We do need to be wise in the "who, what, why and how" of challenging truth claims.

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# Chapter Two: 'Creep and Drift' In The Evangelical Church

Something very bad is happening in evangelical churches. I call it “creep and drift.” If we don’t get control of this very soon, we soon won’t recognize the evangelical church.

Let’s start with **creep**.

## Creep

The Bible speaks of people who “creep into households and make captives” (2 Timothy 3:6). The Greek word translated “creep” is *endunontes*. It means “creep into, enter into” and carries the idea of “hiding” in something. The word translated “making captives” is *aichmalōtizontes* and means “ensnare, subdue, capture, make a prisoner.”

Jude warned Christians that “certain men have crept in unnoticed.” The Greek word translated “crept in” is *pareisedusan* and means “come in by stealth, enter secretly or under pretense, settle in alongside of.”

Jude said these *creepy* people were “ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4).

Jude went on to describe these *creepers* this way:

*These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. Jude 1:12-13*

The Apostle Paul warned the leaders of the Ephesian church that the day was coming when “savage wolves” would come in among them “not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). Paul told Titus that he left him in Crete for the express purpose of setting in order the things that are lacking and appointing elders in every city to “stop” the mouths of deceivers in the church “who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain” (Titus 1:11). Paul went on to say that Titus and the elders should “rebuke them sharply” (Titus 1:13) In today’s language that means telling the *creepers* to shut up and clean up. If they don’t? They face swift church discipline.

Jesus warned His followers to “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

The Apostle Peter warned that false teachers would “secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).

*Creepers* are creepy people in the church who creep in secretly, unnoticed, to take people captive so they follow only them. They destroy churches, church members and families.

The problem is that these creepy people don't look creepy on the outside. That's how they can secretly come in and do their dirty work. They go about their destructive business unnoticed. When they are finally noticed it's usually too late. Their *creepy* work is done. They've taken drawn away the disciples after themselves. They've taken people captive to do their will rather than God's will.

Unfortunately, the lives of millions of people and tens of thousands of evangelical churches have already been destroyed by these *creepers*. They crept in unnoticed and took people captive right under the noses of church leaders who should have known what was happening.

Which begs the question, with all the warnings we have in the Bible about creepy false teachers, why don't church leaders catch them in the act and put a stop to their dirty deeds?

Here's Paul's context for what church leaders should be doing:

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood ... Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Acts 20:28, 31*

That leads us to what may be an even bigger problem than *creep*.

## **Drift**

I call it "shepherd's drift." Let's put the blame where it belongs, on church elders. Jesus warned His apostles about savage wolves getting into the church. Paul warned church elders and his traveling ministry team (e.g. Timothy, Titus) about these creepy people. Jude warned church leaders, Peter warned church leaders, and John warned church leaders. Shepherds

have had sufficient warnings. The question is why aren't shepherds heeding those warnings? Why are evangelical churches falling away left and right? Why are evangelical denominations falling away? Why are pastors and elders who know better changing their sermons to match what people **want** to hear instead of what they **need** to hear? The answer is "drift."

We are currently publishing a series on this blog titled "EXvangelical – What's That?" Here's what we noted about church leader drift in a recent part.

*Interestingly, this process of religious or faith deconstruction often starts within the church. Popular pastors, church leaders, academicians, conference speakers, authors, movie actors, song writers, and musicians begin to drift away from the truth of Gods Word. Their drift should be noticed long before it ever gets out of hand, but it hasn't been in thousands of cases. A Christian who is in the Word, reading, studying and believing the Bible to be true, and communicating with God through*

*prayer regularly should be able to spot the drift long before other Christians notice. God has given us all the information we need to recognize spiritual drift (and heresy), plus we have the Holy Spirit of God living inside of us to guide us into all truth. That should give Christians time to protect themselves, their family and church. However, all too often people don't listen to warnings coming from knowledgeable and discerning Christian brothers and sisters.*

The author of Hebrews used the word “drift” in this way:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? Hebrews 2:1-4

The Greek word translated “we drift away” is *pararuōmen*. It means “to flow by, slip away, drift away from duty.” It has the picture of drifting past a destination point because of being pushed along by the current.

That is an excellent picture of what has happened, is happening and will continue to happen in evangelical churches. The very shepherds who are appointed/ordained to lead/guard/protect the church are drifting past their destination point because they are being pushed along by the current of modern (postmodern) culture and those who have crept in unawares to take church members captive to become their disciples. So many of today’s evangelical shepherds have drifted away from their duty to feed and protect God’s flock.

Church leaders are allowing what God has given them to “slip away” from them because they have drifted away from their duty. Do we need to be reminded of what James wrote?



*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. James 3:1*

Those who teach, who lead, the Lord's people will receive a stricter judgment. That fact should make many men think twice before entering the pastoral ministry. Do you really want to face that kind of judgment before God? That fact should also make current pastors and elders think twice before allowing themselves to drift away from their duty.

I'm reminded of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

*Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 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. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. 2 Corinthians 5:9-11*

Whether you are a church member or church leader, you will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

In the context of participating in the great work of building the Church, Paul wrote this:

*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 1 Corinthians 3:11-13*

## **Godly Advice**

Church leaders by the thousands have drifted away from their duty of feeding and guarding church members. While leaders have drifted, false teachers have crept into churches secretly and unnoticed. Those creepy people do their ungodly work while pastors and elders just drift along thinking they're doing a great job for God.

The result is that tens of thousands of churches that once stood for the true Gospel of Jesus Christ have either closed down or are now standing for a false gospel or no gospel at all. The same is true for so many denominations that once stood for the Truth, but have fallen victim to the enemy.

So, what advice might we share that could make a difference? I realize that advice given doesn't necessarily mean advice taken. However, I think sharing some advice at this point could be helpful.

Elijah thought he was all alone in his ministry, but God told the prophet that He had “reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). Jesus reminded His disciples that He would never leave them nor forsake them, but would give them the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. Jesus also said that He was building His Church.

We can take comfort in knowing that we are not alone. It may seem that way in the ministry at times, but there are thousands of other pastors and elders who love God and are committed to preaching the true Gospel no matter the cost. We need to find each other for mutual instruction and comfort during the troubles of our time.

I had the privilege of serving in several churches through the years and have seen firsthand how the enemy attacks from within. If we are close to God through His Word and prayer, we will see the attacks early and be able to serve as an early-warning system in our churches. I will tell you that knowing an attack is underway and alerting other leaders to the attack

does not guarantee the attack won't continue or even be successful. What we can do is what we can do. God will hold us accountable for doing what we could do in each situation.

Here's a section of Paul's last letter to Timothy that God showed me early in my ministry. Whenever a godly person who is close to their earthly death gives you advice, listen. I've used this advice many times when searching for the best way to deal with an enemy attack inside a church. I pray it will be helpful to you as well.

*Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith*

*of some. Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:14-26*

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