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# To Know the Truth

by: *Ronald L. Dart*

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Would you say that we're living in the worst of times? If you look at the polls thrown at us every day, you would think that times are really bad. Michael Barone, writing in the May 29, 2006 edition of *U.S. News and World Report*, said this: "Things are better than you think. Yes, I know, most Americans are in a sour mood these days, convinced that the struggle in Iraq is an endless cycle of bloodshed, certain that our economy is in dismal shape, lamenting that the nation and the world are off on the wrong track. That's what the polls tell us. But if we look at some other numbers, we'll find that we are living not in the worst of times but in something much closer to the best." I thought that was fascinating—just stopped me cold.

## **Are We Living in the Best of Times?**

The best of times? He goes on to support his point, "In 2005, as in 2004, the world economy grew by about 5 percent, according to the International Monetary Fund, and the IMF projects similar growth for several years to come. This is faster growth than in all but a few peak years in the 1980s and 1990s, and it's in vivid contrast to the long periods of stagnation or contraction in history. The great engine of this growth is, of course, the United States, which produces more than one fifth of world's economic product and whose gross domestic product has been growing at around 4 percent to 4.8 percent in the last quarter." It's odd how dramatic these numbers are once they are plainly stated, and you actually look at what's going on in the world.

Economic growth has much to do with the future peace of the world. "Other engines [of this growth]," Barone said, "are China and India, each with about a sixth of the world's people and with economic growth of 10 and 8 percent, respectively. But other areas are growing, too: eastern Europe (5 percent), Russia (6 percent), East Asia (5 percent), Latin America (4 percent), even the Middle East (6 percent) and sub-Saharan Africa (5.5 percent)." The really surprising figure is how far behind Europe is. Eastern Europe is lagging behind at a level of 1 percent and western Europe at 2 percent. The lesson according to Michael Barone is, "Sclerotic (*an inability or reluctance to adapt or compromise- Merriam Webster*) welfare states produce mass unemployment and stifle initiative and innovation. In contrast, the Chinese and Indian growth rates show how freeing up an economy produces rapid growth, and the continued contrast between the United States and Europe makes the same point. Free-market economic growth is enabling millions of people to rise out of poverty every year, even more than the experts expect. As the IMF writes, 'The momentum and resilience of the global economy in 2005 continued to exceed expectations.'"

One thing that continues to surprise me is that we are able to achieve this growth without runaway inflation. Do you remember what it was like when Jimmy Carter was president? My wife was selling real estate in those days, and she recalls closing on one house with an interest rate of 19 percent on a thirty-year loan!

"It's worth noting, as the IMF does," Michael Barone continues, "that this growth is being achieved with minimal inflation. 'The present era of globalization and low inflation has an important precedent: 1880-1914, the era of the classical gold standard,' it says. That period ended with the outbreak of World War I, and there is no guarantee that the current low-inflation growth will continue. There are always downside risks in the economy. But we seem to be living by far in the best economic times in human history."

Then why is everyone so pessimistic about the economy of the world? Well, Michael Barone says maybe it's because of the conflicts around the world.

### **Are We living in Times of Record Strife?**

He goes on to address this issue, "But aren't we also living in times of record strife? Actually, no. Just the opposite. The Human Security Centre of the University of British Columbia has been keeping track of armed conflicts since World War II. It reports that the number of genocides and violent conflicts dropped rapidly after the end of the Cold War and that in 2005 the number of armed conflicts was down 40 percent from 1992. Wars have also become less deadly: The average number of people killed per conflict per year in 1950 was 38,000; in 2002 it was just 600." That is a huge difference. Michael Barone goes on to say, "The conflict in Iraq has not significantly changed that picture. American casualties are orders of magnitude lower than in the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, and precision weapons have enabled us to vastly reduce the civilian death toll."

### **A Letter to President Bush**

Barone quotes a letter to President Bush from the president of Iran, "'Liberalism and western-style democracy have not been able to help realize the ideals of humanity. Today those two concepts have failed.' That's obviously nonsense, of course. Free markets and democracy are chalking up one ringing achievement after another—as we can see from the surge in world economic growth and the reduction of armed conflict—while the Islamists can achieve their goals only through oppression and slaughter. Yes, they can inflict severe damage on us by asymmetric warfare, as they did on September 11, and we must continue to take determined action to prevent them from doing so again. Yes, a nuclear Iran is a severe threat. But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that, in most important respects, our civilization is performing splendidly." That optimism comes as something of a shock, doesn't it?

### **Are You Worried?**

Why are people so worried? Consider, for example, the huge flap over gas prices in this country. How many times have you heard the phrase "big oil," and about all the damage "big oil" is doing to the economy? Well, I just returned from a road trip and I didn't notice any difference in the

number of cars on the road. Everybody is still driving, spending a bit more, yes, but they can afford it. Have you considered that gas prices here are as low as any in the world, except places like Saudi Arabia where they're pumping it out of the ground? There is also the flap over prescription drug prices, and the expression "big pharmaceuticals." We have the best health care in the world, the best economy in the world, three cars in every garage, and we can afford the high price of fuel. Why are we so fretful? I'll tell you why, in two words. It's not "big oil" or "big pharmaceuticals." It's "big media."

### **Big Media**

Big media is far more dangerous to our country than big oil, or big pharmaceuticals. Big media can take us to the place where our young men and women don't want to serve in the military anymore. And then, if forced into a draft, big media will moan and groan about the draft, and place the blame everywhere except where it belongs. Because the advantage of being big media is that you can decide who to blame, and you never have to blame yourself.

I had no idea how bad this had gotten, until the last presidential election which gave me a wake-up call. Big media thinks they have the right to decide who will be in Congress, who will be in the White House, and who will not. And if they make a mistake, and their candidate turns out to be a pettifogging (*one who quibbles over trivia*) demagogue who takes bribes and corrupts the legislative process, they can simply blame someone else. It absolutely staggers the mind to consider what CBS and Dan Rather tried to pull off in the 2004 elections. They so wanted John Kerry as president that they tried to palm off forged documents to support a story. I don't mean they knew the documents were forged. CBS went ahead with the documents because they told the story CBS wanted to tell. Do you remember when NBC faked an explosion in a pickup truck to show that the gas tanks weren't safe anymore? They put an explosive in it, made it blow up, and pretended that it was because of unsafe gas tanks. It really boils down to this: There is no one in big media that we can trust to tell us the truth.

### **What's True and What's Not?**

So how can we ever know, with the absolute flood of information coming our way these days, what's true and what's not? How can we know when we're being manipulated? How can we know when someone is trying to lead us down the garden path? I'll give you two words and an idea. The first word, a new one that you can baffle your friends with, is "epistemology." Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with knowledge, especially with regard to methods, validity, and scope of knowledge. It comes from the Greek word, *epistanai*, which means to put the mind upon, to comprehend, to be acquainted with, to know, to understand. The second word is "wisdom." A person is said to be wise when he has, or shows, a combination of experience, knowledge, and good judgment. The idea is your world view.

### **Epistemology and Wisdom**

"Epistemology" is a high-sounding word that merely stands for how we know things. When God made man, he sat back and looked at him and said, "That's good; that's very good." What he gave man was a mind that operates on certain principles of knowing things. We come with a

built-in epistemology. A built-in way of detecting the truth. And, if you will, a lie detector. We often say, for example, something has the "ring of truth" as opposed to the "clunk of something that isn't true."

Our entire legal system is based on the assumption that there is truth, and that man is capable of recognizing it and discerning it. It may be a person testifying on the witness stand, or the lawyers presenting evidence, that forms an impression in our minds of what is true and what is not. We know when a piece of evidence is relevant and when it is not. How do we tell when a person is lying and when he's telling the truth? We tell by his body language, his demeanor, his expressiveness. We can tell whether he looks nervous or not. We notice his eyes, his arms, his legs, how he moves.

Also, we are somehow able to recognize the presence of truth, and the absence of truth, in the structure of what we are being told. It's one of the reasons why most of us don't go chasing after conspiracy theories. Our built-in epistemology tells us, "No, that's not how the world works." "No, that can't happen." "No, that wouldn't happen that way." Truth has a shape and a form that we are quite capable of recognizing.

The second word was wisdom—that combination of experience, knowledge, and good judgment that allows us to make sense out of things. We look at something, evaluate it, and decide, "Yes, that will work," or "No, it won't."

### **Our World View**

All this goes together to form a world view, a way of looking at the world that enables us to make sense of all the information we get, and to know when we are being flim-flammed and when someone is telling the truth. I was in a doctor's office not long ago—he was one of these physicians that practices alternative medicine. I have nothing against alternative medicine, I use a lot of it myself. But this fellow turned out to be a regular flim-flam artist. I couldn't get out of his office quickly enough. My fraud detector was going off. We know these things, but sometimes we don't want to look at them. Our world view can become corrupted.

### **Love the Truth**

In another time and place, the great Apostle Paul spoke of this. He said, "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth." That's a concept to live by: To have the love of the truth. When that gets corrupted, it's over. Paul goes on to say, ". . .that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thes. 2:10-12.)

The truth is, sometimes we would rather live in unrighteousness than face up to the truth. Then slowly but surely our world view, or epistemology, becomes corrupted. What's your first line of defense against this? It's simple. It is to love the truth. To have a commitment to truth, no matter what it costs, no matter how painful, no matter how uncomfortable. Unfortunately, the spirit of Pontius Pilate still haunts our society with the words, "What is truth?" (John 18:38.)

The very foundations of truth have been, and are being, eroded in our educational institutions—from the lower grades of elementary school through the higher levels of university. Wisdom has lost much of its foundation. Is there anything you can do about it? If you have a Bible in your home, just turn to the first chapter of the Book of Proverbs and start reading, "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" (Proverbs 1:1-5.) Isn't that what we want? Here is what you can use to patch up your damaged world view. It's what you can do to rebuild a sound epistemology. God gave you one to begin with, but over time we screw it up. This is how you get it back.

### **Read Your Bible and Learn Right from Wrong**

You can read the Bible every day. You can inform your conscience about right and wrong. You can train yourself to recognize good judgment and equity.

In Proverbs chapter two Solomon said, "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hidden treasures" (Proverbs 2:1-4.) Did you notice the reference to commandments in that passage? The great foundation of our epistemology, our wisdom, is the Ten Commandments. The real reason why some want the Ten Commandments out of the courtrooms in our country is because the commandments are against lying, stealing, and adultery which create a hostile work environment for lawyers. They also provide a framework, a foundation, for our world view.

### **Biblical World View**

There's one chapter in the Bible that lays a foundation for a biblical world view that builds up an epistemology—wisdom that we can actually use to live a life. This chapter clears up so much that confuses Christian people, begins to heal our world view—or epistemology—and to restore the wisdom that we, as Christians, really ought to have. It's the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm. It is one man's meditation on the Law of God, and what he understood the Law of God to be about. It's easily the longest chapter in the Bible, laid out alphabetically in eight-verse stanzas to make it easier to memorize. What is easy to miss in this Psalm—vital to understanding it—are the synonyms for law found in it. It doesn't just say law, law, law. In the first stanza alone, there are seven synonyms for the law, and they repeat all the way through the Psalm. They are: law, testimony, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, and The Way. The next stanza adds one more, Thy Word.

### **The Law**

Christians for generations have been misled about the law. As did the Pharisees in the New Testament, some have tried to use in the law in an effort to control the behavior of others. It actually became, in some cases, an instrument of oppression. It was never intended to be

anything like this. The law was intended to inform, to educate, to train, to build a sound epistemology, to build sound wisdom in a man so that he can recognize what's right and what's wrong. How much is that worth to you? "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments" (Psalms 119:1-6.) An educated conscience, a trained conscience, never has to be ashamed.

Later, in verse nine he will say, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalms 119:9-11.)

While we think about sinning against God, we also think about sinning against our own lives. Because it is the Law of God that keeps us from putting a foot wrong. It keeps us from doing stupid things. It keeps us from hurting ourselves. "With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word" (Psalm 119:13-16.) The world consistently grabs the wrong end of this issue. This fellow is not under some heavy burden, some yoke of bondage to the law, some set of rules he has to live by, or else. He has found a treasure chest in the law. He knows the difference between right and wrong. He has found the cure for a sick epistemology. He has found a fountain of wisdom at which he can drink and be healed. It's worthy treasure to him.

### **Wonderful Things Out of God's Law**

Later in verse 17 he says, "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Notice: Not a burden, not an onus, not something he has to lay on his shoulder and drag around behind him. He's talking about wonderful things. "I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times." Why would a man feel that way? It's because the Law of God gives him an edge in life. The more he knows about the Law of God, the more successful he's going to be.

In verse 24 he says, "Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors." The purpose of the law is not to control. It is to reveal, to inform, and to counsel us as to right and wrong. Do you have any idea of the value of knowing right from wrong? I'm not talking about spiritual value only. Knowing right from wrong applies to everything, down to buying a used car. Even if you're going to do wrong, it's better to know it than not to know it. For the man who knows and does wrong can more easily retrace his path back where he ought to be.

Then, in verse 50, he says, "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law. I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself." This doesn't necessarily work in

the letter of the Law. Laws permitting slavery are an example of that. The meaning behind the law is what's important. It is the spirit of the law that gives a man comfort.

Still later he says, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments" (Psalms 119:73.) And this is the foundation of a strong epistemology. The ability to know truth when you see it, is to know that the hand of God has made you and formed you. We do hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men were created. If you don't start there, nothing else will

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*The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit [RLDEA.com](http://RLDEA.com) where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.*

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Do you think that times are really worse than ever?
2. If so, how would you compare times today against the Dark Ages?
3. Solomon stated that there is "nothing new under the sun", hasn't the world just always been full of strife and conflict with also a mixture of joyful times?
4. What do you think is the cause of the pessimism in, at least, first world countries? (Answer from a worldly perspective.)
5. Now, what is the cause of a lot of pessimism today from a Christian perspective?
6. Do you agree that most of society is being 'controlled' by the media?
7. How do you discern fact from fiction, truth from lies?
8. Has there ever been a time that you had to go against your world view because you knew that the truth contradicted it?
9. Do you believe you have a good "built-in epistemology"?
10. Do you agree that one method of making sure that we can discern the truth is to first get back regularly in the Bible?