

“Seek Out the Truth”

1 Corinthians. 1:18-31

A few weeks ago, when it snowed and we had only a few hearty souls that were able to make it to church, for Bible class, I opened the floor for any questions. I don't remember how we got on the topic, but I spoke about the intentional deceit that the world imposes on your ears, the intentional lies that have been told to you – and you have believed these lies, because they have been often repeated; they have gone unchallenged; they sound plausible; and many who are said to be wise have said that these stories are true. And the more often stories are said to be true, the more people believe them.

One of the repeated lies I mentioned was concerning Christopher Columbus. Like you, I grew up hearing that most all people in the Christian world in the days of Christopher Columbus believed that the world was flat and he set out to prove that the world was not flat. This story was put forth as empirical truth – unchallenged in any conversation. To this day, children are still told that people, until 500 years ago, thought the world was flat. How could this untruth be so widely believed?

In 1828, American writer Washington Irving (author of Rip Van Winkle and the Legend of Sleepy Hollow) published a book entitled

The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus. It was a mixture of fact and fiction, and it was intentionally unfriendly to the Christian Church. Its theme was the victory of a lone believer in a round Earth (Christopher Columbus) over a united front of Bible-quoting, superstitious, ignorant people connected to the Church who were convinced that the Earth was flat.

In fact, the well-known and well-documented argument that actually took place was **not** concerning a flat earth versus a round earth. The argument was about the distance between Europe and Japan. The debate had nothing to do with the shape of the Earth. And, by the way, the “ignorant representatives of the church” were correct in their assumption of the distance of the circumference of the earth. Christopher Columbus was wrong, and he would have run out of supplies if the Americas had not appeared where he expected to find Japan or India. Washington Irving’s false story was told and retold as if it were an historical account. And our unbelieving world wanted this to be the truth.

In 1834, an anti-Christian writer, named Letronne, falsely claimed that most of the Church Fathers, including St. Augustine, St. Ambrose and Basil the Great, held to a flat Earth – even though pretty much every educated person in the Western world since the days of Aristotle (4th Century BC) has known that the world was round.

The great irony is that those who claim to be so wise in the ways of the world, they are the ones who are speaking foolishness. And the

even greater fools are the ones who believe them. Letronne's work has been repeatedly cited and quoted as a 'reputable' authority for almost 200 years. The fact is that, not only did the church not promote the flat Earth, it is clear from such passages as Isaiah 40:22 that the Bible implies the Earth is round. Look it up. Seek out the truth.

In the late nineteenth century, the writings of John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White were responsible for promoting the myth that the church taught a flat Earth. Both of these men had Christian backgrounds, but rejected Christ early in life. Draper's work, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874), was a best seller. Meanwhile White (who founded Cornell University as the first explicitly secular university in the United States), published the two-volume "scholarly" work *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, in 1896. Both men incorrectly portrayed a continuing battle through the Christian era between the defenders of ignorance (the Christians) and the enlightened defenders of reason (the scientists).

We talked about some of these things in Bible class a few weeks ago. I also told them about Charles Lyell – who is given credit for creating the most influential theories in the field of geology today. His theory was that geology is the record of long, slow, uniform change over millions of years. He did not have evidence to support his theory. He didn't even claim he had evidence. He had, what was referred to as, "privileged reasoning." It was said that because people who

believe in the Bible are not scientific, then the scientists who do not hold to the Bible must be more scientific than they are. Therefore, he didn't need evidence.

This week, wanting to get additional information about him, I did more research. I am not going to repeat the story about Charles Lyell that I told during Bible class, because, after digging deeper, I found that the part of the story of him creating his theories because he was a Scottish separatist and wanted to discredit God and therefore the King of England who sat on the throne by divine right – I discovered that this part of the story was just as made up as his theory of long periods of time. And this made me mad, because I have repeated that part of the story on more than a few occasions.

Someone, trying to discredit evolutionary science (and you don't need to make stuff up in order to do that), had made up this part of the story. It sounded plausible, but it was not true. Even though Charles Lyell's "geology" is a totally made-up story that he "poofed" out of his mind and for which there is no evidence anywhere on earth. The geologic layers that he designated (and that your children are forced to learn in science class to this day) don't exist in reality. There is no place on earth where you can find all of them. And in many places, the "older" ones are on top of the "younger" ones (figure that one out). However, even though every attempt should be made to discredit this type of pseudo-science anti-Christian nonsense, there is no justification for telling false stories.

We do not need false stories to promote God's work among His people. Keep in mind that Satan is the father of lies. Jesus is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

Knowing the truth about liars like Washington Irving and the false history told by Letronne, and Draper, and White, and the bad science of Charles Lyell – knowing the truth is for your confidence. It is not for you to go out and convince your atheist friends about God. Those who have rejected Christ; those who have rejected the foolishness of the cross; those who are perishing; those who are dying in their sin; they will not change their mind because of clever arguments or debates. They will not come to faith because you filled them with worldly wisdom. Only the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel can change their heart.

We preach Christ crucified. It is foolishness to those who think they are wise in the ways of the world. It is considered weakness. It is considered “unscientific.” I fear for our young people – especially those who are subjected to the lies and persecution regularly found on college campuses in particular. Pretty much every public “institution for higher learning” is boot camp for paganism these days.

Pray for this generation. Speak the truth in love and patience and gentleness. And remember Jesus words, “Blessed are you with others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.” Amen.