



"We choose the thoughts we allow ourselves to think, the passions we allow ourselves to feel, and the actions we allow ourselves to perform. Each choice is made in the context of whatever value system we've selected to govern our lives."

—Benjamin Franklin

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Falling Leaves

Part of my responsibilities entails a great deal of reading of news and comment. Editorials from all parts of the political and religious spectrums cross my desktop every day. Indeed, editorializing has become a craze on the Internet. Many websites now run a blog, the observations and opinions of the webmaster or someone of note in the organization. So many of these exist that one could spend all his waking hours reading them.

The sheer volume of opinion available is overwhelming. Each newspaper, magazine, radio show, television news show, and scads of Internet portals have ideas and views to push. We cannot ignore them anymore, so how do we deal with them? How can we judge what they have to say?

It all comes down to foundations, roots. If we use the metaphor of a building, opinions are merely the exterior paint. If we compare them to the parts of a tree, they are at best the leaves that fall every autumn and are renewed in

spring. Certainly, exterior paint or leaves are necessary parts of their structures just as every person is entitled to and has opinions, but we have to ask, "What are they connected to?"

Opinions are often based on beliefs. In the building analogy, we might call them the exterior cladding of a structure—in a hollow-walled house, the plywood sheathing nailed to the studs. On a tree, beliefs would be the branches. Beliefs are far more substantial than opinions. Opinions are often clouded by emotion, party spirit, and base desires, whereas beliefs are firmer, longer-lasting tenets grounded in reality and conviction.

Beliefs themselves spring from a philosophy or way of life. This is represented by the studs of a house or the trunk of a tree in our metaphors. Most people think that one's philosophy or behavior is a product of beliefs, but it is really the other way around. Our beliefs usually conform to our behavior and concept of how we should live. We may never articulate our philosophy of life, but our behavior screams it for all [the world](#) to hear and see.

Our philosophy or way of life derives from our source of truth, the building's foundation or the tree's roots. Notice that it is "our source of truth" not "the truth." Though there is an ultimate source of the truth available, most people decide for themselves what they will consider to be true. For some—and many of us would consider ourselves among this group—the Bible is our source of truth. For others, it can be the Talmud, the Koran, the sayings of Confucius, the philosophy of Buddha, the writings of Karl Marx, or some other acclaimed ideology. A few have decided there is no absolute truth, and their way of life shows their absence of a foundation.

Now we have a way to judge the opinions we hear and read. It may not always be easy to find out a person's beliefs, philosophy or way of life, or source of truth, but a little digging will at least expose some indications. If nothing else, the person's words themselves will reveal how deep and true their foundations are. After just a few articles or opinion pieces, one can tell by his tone, sources, proofs, and conclusions where he stands, and from this extrapolations can be made.

For instance, if a commentator makes snide comments about religious people or mocks [God](#), we can be fairly certain that he is either an atheist or an agnostic or has had such poor experiences with religion in his past that he puts no stock in it. We can know from this that his roots are not in the Word of God, and it is likely that his opinions, beliefs, and way of life are flawed. We might want to take his conclusions with a grain of salt, especially if he is writing on moral issues.

[Jesus](#) says in [John 14:6](#), "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Earlier, in [John 8:31-32](#), He says, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Isaiah writes, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" ([Isaiah 8:20](#)). As Christians, we can see from these verses that, if the opinions we hear or read are not based on the timeless truths of God, they are like dead leaves falling from a tree or weathered paint chipping off a house: unsightly and worthless.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Truth \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Nothing is more important than the truth or the seeking after the truth. If we are going to be searching for truth, we should not be seeking it in the philosophies of men (a syncretic system of beliefs having its source in Babylon, a combination of human reason aided by demonic spirits and astrological prognostication - the weak and beggarly elements referred to by the apostle Paul in Galatians 4:9) but rather in the fullness of truth found in Christ with God's revelation as the final arbiter. There must be a continuous searching for more truth with the seeking of the kingdom of God as the highest priority to the end that we grow to full spiritual maturity.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Pillars Stand for Something!](#)

by John O. Reid

God has called us to be "faithful pillars" in His house. John Reid explains what a pillar is, what we need to be doing to become pillars and the reward of a "faithful pillar."

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