
"The Trustworthiness of Scripture"
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)
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January 8, 2017

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¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

This year 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the great movement in history called the Reformation that occurred over in Europe. We owe so much to the Reformers and the movement they began because they rediscovered an important principal that had gotten lost and that is the principal of Sola Scriptura—Scripture alone. Sola Scriptura means that the Bible is sufficient as our supreme authority in all spiritual matters. What does that mean practically? That means that if I have a question regarding—who God is, who I am, what the world is all about, what is the greatest problem of the world, what is sin, what did God do to save us, who is Jesus Christ, how can I have purpose in life and similar questions—the information and answers to these questions will be found in no other place than in the Bible that you and I have before us. It is completely sufficient for these matters. So if you have questions about calculus or about the combustion engine or photosynthesis, it will not be in the Bible. There are some references to science and technology in the Bible, but not much because that is not the purpose of the Bible. The Bible was given to us by God to answer the questions I just mentioned.

Why is Sola Scriptura such an important principle? What does it matter to us modern people? If you are young person under ten years old most likely you believe what you believe because grownups told you to believe it. Mom and dad told you, a teacher told you and a pastor told you. But as you get older, into your teenage years around 15, 16, 17 years old, the faith in Jesus that you had when you were younger starts to get challenged. You begin questioning several things:

1. Is it true?
2. Does it work?
3. Why should do I care?

What I want to do in today's sermon is to help all of us have a greater trust in the Bible. Now I cannot possibly cover all the topics but I will try to touch upon the major ones. I'm going to try and answer those three questions.

Let's look at the first one—Is it true? When we try to prove a point in a discussion or debate we can't always go back to square one. We always start with assumptions. I am assuming that there is a thing called language, and words, and sentences. And those words have certain meanings that we both agree on. I am assuming we are rational, logical creatures. If we were to prove all the assumptions every single time we had a debate, we'd never get to the point we were trying to talk about in the first place.

Also, part of what teachers and pastors assume is that you are at a certain level of understanding, a grade 3 or grade level of understanding and we'd be bad teachers if we taught grade 8 like they were in grade 1 and grade 5 like they were in grade 12. Does that make sense?

So, there are assumptions that we make when we teach the Bible to you—things like:

- The Bible doesn't merely contain the words of God, it is, in fact, the word of God.
- The Bible is relevant for us today.
- The Bible is without error.
- The Bible is a historically reliable document.
- Only the Bible possesses the ability to change a person's life.
- It's only by hearing/reading/encountering the Bible that a person can come to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Those are some of the assumptions. Let's go back to one of these assumptions today—the assumption that the Bible is true.

How can we establish that the Bible is true? Now that's a very big question. Let me try to address it from a few angles and see if we can't make some progress.

First, it is historically true. How do you determine if something is historically true? You cannot go back in time and replay the events. We're also filled with skepticism because we know that all history is biased. Yes, it is impossible to write history from a purely objective standpoint. Why? Because a person cannot know all the facts and in order to write purely objectively, they'd have to know all the facts. As well, yes it is true that everyone has a bias, but does the bias make the events untrue? The writers of the gospels, of course they had a bias. Their bias was that Christianity is true and every other worldview and religion on the planet is false. That's a bias, but is it true? So bias doesn't mean something didn't happen.

There has been tons and tons of support for the historical truthfulness of the events of the Bible from at least two external sources.

First, from non-Biblical writings. One of the most well-known examples is that of Josephus who was a Jewish historian in the first century. In his writings he mentions Jesus as a living, breathing human being who existed and he refers to the movement that Jesus began called Christianity.

Second, there's archaeology. This means that there has been discovered physical artifacts such as an inscription, a coin, a place, a temple, or even a writing that corroborates what's found in the biblical text. Here's an example. Several years ago for the first time ever an inscription from the biblical people, the Arameans, was found that contained the words "House of David", that was dated to the 800s BC. It was an inscription that recorded the Aramean military victory over Israel. Many scholars up to that point were skeptical whether or not David was an historical figure, but this inscription shows that it could be referring to a battle that's recorded in 1 Kings 15:16-22. And there are so many other archaeological discoveries that support the events found in the Bible.

[http://c795631.r31.cf2.rackcdn.com/ten_top_biblical_archaeology_discoveries.pdf]

Here's a standard method or procedure a Christian might go through to determine whether or not the Bible was true and reliable:

1. What kind of textual evidence, document evidence is there to prove the Bible we have today is not corrupted and is the original. First there is not a single existing copy of any of the original documents. We only have copies. But through the science of textual criticism from a catalogue of over 24,000 documents, textual experts say that over 99% of the Greek Bible we have is the original text.
2. Then they would go to the gospels. Are the gospels historically reliable documents? They would answer yes.
3. Do the people who wrote the gospels and what was written in them show us that Jesus was indeed the Son of God? We would conclude yes.
4. If Jesus is God, we believe that he is trustworthy and cannot lie. How did Jesus view the Old Testament Scriptures? Did he view them as reliable, as historical, as authoritative, as factual? And the answer to all these questions is yes.

A couple great books would be "More than a Carpenter" or "Case for Christ"

So that is how Jesus viewed the Old Testament, as the very Word of God. What then should our view toward the Old Testament be?

As well, when we get to the New Testament times, the early Christians began to view and receive the words of Jesus and the writings of the Apostles as Holy Scripture. The words of Jesus would be obvious. Paul refers to the words of Jesus as Scripture in 1 Corinthians 7 when he speaks about divorce. Here's what Paul says:

¹⁰ To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹ But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. **(1 Cor 7:10–11 NIV11-GK)**

And now here are the actual words Jesus said in Luke:

"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." **(Luke 16:18 NIV11-GK)**

Here's another fascinating example. In 2 Peter the Apostle Peter is writing to the church and references Paul's writings as being on par with the other Scriptures.

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. **(2 Pet 3:14–16 NIV11-GK)**

So, within the Bible and in the early phases of the growth of Christianity you see the coming together of a new collection of words, books, and letters that are perceived by the early church, and not only the church, but by the apostles, as having the authority of the Old Testament.

Let's look at some other evidences. The Bible is very unique in that it is more like a collection of volumes in one book. 66 books or letters within one book that we call the Holy Bible. Now these 66 books were written over the course of not one person's lifetime, but across a period of 1500 years. In addition the Bible was not written by one author, but by around 40 authors from Moses to David to the Prophets to the New Testament writers like John. Now consider this. Written across a 1500 year time period by around 40 different authors and yet containing one central cohesive message. Most of the other religions were written by one author and since they were written by one author, they were written only over one life time. Book of Mormon is like that. The Quran is like that. If you're the only author, you can make your religion say whatever you want to say.

Now consider the difficulty of the coming together of the Bible. If you were one of the authors you had to know so intricately the ins and outs of all that the previous authors wrote. You'd have to understand their true meaning at the time. And you'd also have to understand if they were pointing forward to anything and if they were, you'd have to know that you were writing in such a time that was the fulfillment of what they were writing. But how was it that this one central message was kept over all these 1500 years without confusion or variation, unless, it was authored ultimately by God himself, through these human agents?

There's also the undeniable proof of fulfilled prophecy. There are prophecies about individuals and nations, but what's most enlightening are the dozens and dozens of prophecies regarding the Messiah Jesus. How do we account for all the exact details that were predicted in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? That's another evidence.

Now, here's one other thing that might be helpful. When Paul is writing the letter to the 1 Corinthians around the late 50s AD, so this just 25 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, listen to what he says:

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. **(1 Cor 15:3–8 NIV11-GK)**

He mentions what almost seems like in passing, the phrase, "most of whom are still living", meaning that what he's saying about Jesus is not his invention, it's a historical fact, that can be verified by 500 eyewitnesses. In a court of law all you need is one witness. In Bible times you needed at least two. But here Paul says, there were over 500 witnesses who with their own two eyes saw the resurrected Christ.

Do those facts matter? For some, not at all. You didn't need to hear a single one of them. And even hearing them doesn't make you think any higher of the Bible because you already had the highest view toward the Bible. It doesn't mean you're a blind, ignorant, anti-intellectual. Not at all. Christians believe that knowing all that archaeological and textual and historical evidence doesn't make you a Christian and it doesn't make you believe that the Bible is the word of God. Only God the Holy Spirit can enable us to accept the Bible as God's word. That's the only way. So you were already convinced because the Spirit of God enlightened you.

But, for others, knowing all this stuff does help because you might be wired a bit differently. You can't just accept something, especially something as important as this, without adequate reasons and proofs. And that's not a bad thing at all. In fact we see in one of the writers of the Bible, Luke, who wrote the gospel named after him and the history of the early church called Acts for people with that disposition. Listen to how he addresses the opening of his biography:

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1–4 NIV11-GK)

He was writing like a careful investigator, a researcher, checking multiple sources, especially because he himself might not have been an eyewitness to these things.

So, the first question was, “is the Bible true?”

The second question is “does it work?” We must never go to this question without first asking the first question. I guess we should ask the question, work for what? That brings us to the purpose of the Bible. What is the purpose of the Bible and does it work for that purpose? Does it carry out its intended purpose?

What then is the purpose of the Bible? The purpose of the Bible is the purpose of God. What is God’s purpose for us? That all people might glorify him and enjoy him. That is the ultimate purpose of all humanity. That we might glorify our maker and enjoy his presence. How? What is preventing us from glorifying and enjoying God? The answer is sin. What then are we to do with the problem of sin? Nothing. But God has done something. He gave us his Son Jesus to suffer the penalty for our sins. This is the most important thing. There is nothing more important in your life, in anyone’s life, than to be made right with God.

The Bible is the only way by which we can come to know how we can be made right with God. Only by hearing the Bible can faith be given to us, to believe in God. Only the Scriptures can make us wise unto salvation. That’s why we encourage those of us who are not yet Christian to read the Bible, humbly praying that God would reveal himself to you and we still encourage you to do that.

In the months leading up to me becoming a Christian, during my first year of university, God placed in me an insatiable appetite to read the Scriptures. I know it was God who did that, because there is no way I would have done that on my own. I hated the Bible. I hated reading the Bible. But all of a sudden, I couldn’t stop reading it. And so not only was I reading it, but it actually began making sense, I began to accept it as God’s word, it began to speak to my heart at the deepest level, about my sin, and God’s love.

I’ve seen that similar scenario play out in so many of you as well. Many of you who have gone through seasons where you have an insatiable hunger for the Bible, know it is a work of God. You know it wasn’t because you made a new year’s resolution. It was God, by his grace, giving you a season of seeing the Scriptures in HD. That’s why it is so important to pray and plead and beg and claim the promises that our father makes to his children. Especially, we need to pray Psalm 119:18. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. That’s how we have to pray for our children. That’s how we need to pray for our Christian friends and our non-Christian friends and our Sunday school children.

Let me say it like this. There is no other way. We can look at our healthcare system and say, hey it’s not perfect, but it’s all we got. We say that about many things. But the Bible is perfect, it is without error, it is the word of God, it is the only way one can know God. So does it work? Yes it does.

Finally, do I care?

Can I speak to young people for a second, and older people you can listen in. I think it’ll be beneficial for you too. You may have said at one time or another things like, I don’t want to go to church. I’ve heard all the stories. It’s so boring. I don’t want to read my Bible. I know that when I was a young person, I used to say those things all the time.

Do you know why you are probably saying those things? Do you know why you have that kind of attitude? More than anything it is a spiritual problem. It is a spiritual problem because knowing God through the Bible is a spiritual exercise. So there might be a bunch of reasons, but the greatest reason might be because you are not a Christian.

You may have not yet repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus as your savior and Lord. Because when Jesus comes into our lives, he changes our hearts and we begin to love what he loves and do what he does. What does Jesus love? He loves God, he loves people, he loves the church, he loves worshiping God, he loves the word of God, he loves obeying God, he loves doing whatever he can to make God the most happy. So even as a young person, we need to start asking this question. Have I trusted in Jesus as my savior? Do I see in myself loving what Jesus loves.

Children your parents bring you out to church and sign you up for Awana and send you to retreats, and they encourage you to read the Bible at home, because they want you to sit under the word of God, hoping and praying, that the word of God will make your heart come alive and you will repent of your sins and trust in Jesus. Whether you are young or old you should care about the Bible because the Bible is the difference between heaven and hell, between living forever with God or being separated from God forever. It is the only means by which we can know God, glorify God, and enjoy him forever.

Let's pray.