

CAN YOU TRUST THE BIBLE?

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

Psalm 19:7-14; 2 Timothy 3:10-17

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In Confirmation studies and in this present sermon series, I have asked the question, “What do you believe?” I ask that question because I want you prepared for what you will face. Today I want to equip confirmands and believers and provoke non-believers to look at what you believe and why.

After confirmation I encountered some real challenges. When I left home to attend a public university, I encountered intelligent professors and students who publicly ridiculed Christianity and the Bible. I was told that the Bible was filled with contradictions and errors. Some of them would gleefully seize upon any variation in gospel narratives about Jesus’ life. For example, one gospel reports one angel at the empty tomb. Another tells of two. These skeptics would ask, “Which is it? One or two?” They would conclude, “Obviously, you can’t trust either account, nor honestly maintain that the Bible is God’s word.” I was on the firing line. Was the Bible full of contradictions and errors? Could its words be trusted? Did the Bible come from God?

Recently I received an email that contained all kinds of endorsements of the Bible. The nineteenth century abolitionist, Horace Greeley said:

It is impossible to enslave mentally or socially a Bible-reading people. The principles of the Bible are the groundwork of human freedom.

The 18th Century German philosopher Immanuel Kant declared:

The existence of the Bible is a book for the people. It's the greatest benefit the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it is a crime against humanity.

President Abraham Lincoln said:

I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man.

The acclaim for the Bible's teachings and stories, however, is not universal. Courageous Helen Keller didn't like it. She found it revolting and offensive. She wrote in her autobiography:

There is much in the Bible against which every instinct of my being rebels, so much that I regret the necessity which has compelled me to read it through from beginning to end. I do not think that the knowledge which I have gained of its history and sources compensates me for the unpleasant details it has forced upon my attention.

Much of the Bible offended Helen Keller's sensibilities. That was true also for the 18th Century philosopher Thomas Paine. He wrote:

Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and tortuous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon than the Word of God. It is a history of wickedness that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind.

Paine attacked not only the Bible's claim to be God's word, but also its historical, ideological and literary value. He saw it as an enemy of humanity, a purveyor of bigotry and intolerance. He taught that the Bible is something to be debunked and destroyed rather than believed and obeyed. When you and I walk out these doors today, we will encounter many people who feel that way. Some contemporary "liberation" movements feel that belief in the Bible is the major obstacle to their goals. Some of you sitting here may really struggle with trust

in the Bible. Is the Bible filled with contradictions and errors? Is the Bible accurate and true? Is it the word of a demon, musings of human beings or the word of our Creator to you and me?

Jesus, attested by an empty tomb and his resurrection as the Lord of heaven and earth, saw the Scriptures as wholly divine. He told people:

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (Matthew 5:18, NIV)

Jesus told his opponents, “***Scriptures cannot be broken***” (John 10:35). He told them that they suffer error because they “***neither know the Scriptures nor the power of God***” (Mark 12:24).

We cannot follow Jesus or embrace him unless we also embrace his vision of God and his vision of the Scriptures. Jesus saw the Hebrew Scriptures, his own statements and the words of his apostles as coming from God. I trust the Bible because of Jesus. How about you?

When I open the pages of the Bible, I read again and again, “Thus, says the Lord.” Scriptures claim authority and call for trust. To ignore the Bible is to ignore God. To obey the Bible’s directives is to obey God. That is its claim. The Apostle Paul wrote:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Even as God breathed into the nostrils of Adam and he became a living soul, God breathed into the thoughts and activities of many different persons and produced the Scriptures. All Scripture carries divine authority. Every page, every paragraph, every word of the Bible has the wisdom, compassion and mercy of God in its origin. It is given to *teach* or equip us for living, to *rebuke* or show us where we stray, to *correct* or offer steps that restore us, and to *train* or cultivate habits of thought and deeds that bless the world.

When you open the Bible, you face that claim. You either accept it, read it and evaluate your life by it, or you reject it. There is no in-between. It is either pernicious and deceiving lies, or it is God's word meant to bless you and the world.

Jesus saw it as God's word. It claims to be God's word, and it has the character of God's word. Specifically, there are three attributes that confirm its claims.

The Bible confronts us with a unique history. Standing alone in ancient literature, its worldview radically departs from the views held in its time and region. Its picture of God and outlook have no parallel and no explanation for their genesis. The most likely explanation is that God intervened in the history of humanity to reveal himself and that the Bible is a product of that intervention.

The Bible also has remarkable grounding in history. In ancient literature archeological support for its stories is unparalleled. Moreover, allegations of contradictions and errors often fizzle when given a deeper look. Skeptics often claim that the four gospels describing Jesus are copies of one another rather than independent witnesses. Yet when there are variations in perspective on a particular event, they claim error rather than admit an independent perspective. Such claims of error often amount to blowing smoke.

Even more compelling is the Bible's effect on people's lives. People that give its message serious weight find their lives transformed. David wrote:

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
(Psalm 19:7-8).

The testimony of David is repeated by millions of believers. God uses this gift, the Bible, to change us. It is a sword in his hand that exposes our pride, deception and so much destructiveness. Its promises fill us with hope. Its directives have put us in touch with God.

We've discovered love and life in its pages. Christ has used its words to direct us to his love, power and gifts. Read it. Believe it. Heed it. It is worthy of your trust. It is just one more gift from God to you! Embrace his gift.