

The Word of God 7-28-02

Is the Bible the Word of God? Critics have tried to discredit, debunk and slander the Bible, especially in the last century. Though many of their attacks have been answered through the sciences of archeology and logic, the attacks continue. Anything that would put some form of constraint or boundaries on what is acceptable will always be met with opposition from those wishing to live outside those confines. Yet, the Bible claims that the truth within its pages is liberating. Since the Bible has withstood direct attacks on its credibility, the new attacks are more subtle and cultural in nature. If culture can convince us that something contrary to Scripture is acceptable, then we will begin to disregard the claims of Sacred Writ. We say we believe but without conviction that says we must conform we compromise with any other idea we like in the hour of temptation. Is there no standard? Is there no objective truth to be found in life?

You could say that in the world of people who claim to be Christians there are really only two main groups. There is one group that believes the Bible is the Word of God, without error, God breathed. Then there are those who believe that the Bible is an inspired book but full of the flaws of its authors, and influenced by the culture of their time. A survey two years ago among pastors of six denominations showed that the conviction of those pastors 55 and up compared to those 35 and under that the Bible was the inerrant, infallible word of God had dropped by 50%. This particular church is in the first group of believers. We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God. God miraculously moved the writers to pen what God wanted to convey to man. Our statement of faith has as its first point this statement, "We believe the Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and the only supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct." Is the Bible supernatural revelation or just a very unique work of men with some inspiration from God thrown in here and there? Where you stand on this issue has everything to do with the extent to which you value the Bible and allow it to influence your life.

Let's look at the claims within the Bible. 2 Peter 1:20-21 (NIV)²⁰ *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

Peter claimed that the prophets (this would include the bulk of the authors of Scripture) spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. It wasn't just enlightened thinking but direction like a piece of paper blown by the wind. They weren't going where they intended or willed but where the Spirit moved them.

Prov 30:5 (NIV)⁵ *"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.*

Solomon declared that every word from God was entirely trustworthy, without a single error. His Father David wrote in Psalms 12:6, (NIV)⁶ *And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. Psalms 19:7-8 (NIV)⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes*

Commented [Q1]: Objective truth is truth that anyone can apply to any situation in any place at any time. You could say a "universal principle".

of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The writers of the Bible believed it was the Word of God that brought everything into being. They believed that God's Word was revealed to man through the prophets and seers. Today, in our culture unaided reason has replaced revelation. In the New Testament the Apostles wrote of what they heard and saw of Jesus and the work of the Spirit of God in the early church. They believed those writings were also God breathed. 2 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)

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.

Peter compared the writings of the Apostle Paul to the other Scriptures. They recognized the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

So we see the Bible does make a claim to be purely conveying the Word of God to man. Over and over again through the Old Testament we have the expression, "the word of God came to..." expressing that the source of the message was not within man. Quite a claim! But can it withstand scrutiny of honest testing?

The answer is that it has! Over the last 150 years man has attacked the Bible from every angle imaginable. So called, 'modern thinkers' have tried to make the Bible look like a collection of fables. Story after story has been attacked as fabrication. Abraham was written off as a fictional hero until the name of his father was found in the very city the Bible says he was from. David – the great king of Israel surely had to be a fantasy developed for the nation to have a hero. An ancient obelisk was discovered in the land of Israel's enemy that wrote of the House of David. Pilate – the Roman Governor that condemned Christ to crucifixion was thought to be a make-believe character. Surely the skeptics had found the proof of the Bible's fictional basis as Rome kept such accurate records. Recently a stone dedicating a coliseum to Pontius Pilate was discovered in Caesarea. One by one the attacks, that have no basis in fact but instead in the minds of those who do not wish to believe, are disproved by hard evidence. The more questions that are raised the more verification is discovered to show that the Bible is an accurate historical record.

Our culture has a fascination with ancient wisdom, that is, unless that ancient wisdom comes from the most verifiable and reliable source of all – the Bible. Why is that? If it comes from some questionable source of which we have no proof as to its authenticity it is a bestseller and becomes a new cult. I'll tell you what I believe from the very words of philosophers who have shaped modern thinking. Man would like to be free from the restraints placed upon him by the word of God. Since man is evil, as the Bible declares, he seeks justification for doing as his lustful heart desires. If there is an absolute source of truth and boundaries set down by our Maker, then man must conform or live with a guilty conscience and in fear of the righteous judgements of God. That is why the Bible has been under such an intense

attack. You can't name any other piece of ancient literature with even a shred of evidence as to its authenticity that has undergone one one-hundredth of the scrutiny that the Bible has endured.

There is no other book with even half the accuracy rate of prophecy. There is no other book compiled by men of every standing in society over such a vast period of history that speaks with one voice to the condition of man and the nature of God. There is no other book or teaching so tested in the lives of millions over millennia. What other words have inspired so many to die for love – not the suicidal fanaticism of cults but pure love for God and for those who don't know Him? This book has been tested!

I've tested it. When I thought God had failed me I found that my understanding was too limited, and I had not searched out His heart or given the situation time to see what God would do. Yes, it takes faith, but we base that faith on mountains upon mountains of solid evidence, promises kept, fulfilled prophecy, archeology, lives changed, joyful martyrs, and the transformation of our own desires. We also have the testimonies of the Apostles' witness of Jesus' life.

Now I want you to think about something. I believe if you are honest, you will come to the same conclusion that I have. What is the most translated and widely distributed book in the world? The Bible! Does it not make perfect sense to you that if God loves the world, like the Bible says He does, that He would see that His word got to as many as possible in their own language? The alternative is, God does not love man. Oh well then, forget about a relationship with Him. But if He loves man, then He will see that they get that message in their own language. Have you kept up on the Jesus film project? They are translating that film into an incredible number of languages and showing it in the most rugged and rural places on earth with amazing results. Why? Because the love of the God declared in the Bible wants every living soul to know how much He loves them. I'm not willing to accept the alternative, a god who doesn't really care or want a relationship. He'd be an experimenter, and we'd be the experiment. No! The God of Scripture knows the end from the beginning and He cares enough about man to die in man's place so that man can have a relationship with Him.

This heart of God is declared through His word again and again. Deut 12:28 (NIV)²⁸
Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the LORD your God.

You see, God has given us instruction and boundaries for our good. If we do what society says today, individually deciding what is good for us, then there is no standard, everything is supposedly good. That makes no logical sense. The pedophile can say that is what is good for him. The arsonist can say that is what is good for him. This illogical diatribe of being non-judgmental or tolerant is lunacy. Everyone draws a line somewhere. Were the 9/11 terrorist just doing what they believed is right and so we should tolerate them? That is ridiculous!

The question is why do you draw the lines where you do? If you say the Bible is full of errors you place it under your discretion to pick and choose what you will accept and so you remain the god of your life. If you believe it is the Word of God without error, you are obliged to take time to read the Word of your Creator and give Him your attention. You are obligated to let Him transform your life in the guidelines of the right and wrongs declared by Him. You have an objective truth to live by that is a righteous standard by which to judge all your actions. You place yourself under its instruction and direction. It does not change according to your feelings or temptations. It is based on the unchanging character of a perfect God who loves you.

If you draw the line way over here on the liberal side to justify your sin and then claim the Bible is not a valid source of truth because you want to be free from its constraints, will a just God wink at your sin? There is a major push today in our culture to redefine our boundaries ignoring the word of God as antiquated. Arizona did away with its so-called antiquated laws. Then because of a few religious extremists, who act contrary to Scripture in hateful acts, everyone who believes the Bible is lumped into the same group. Even a very limited knowledge of the teachings of Jesus shows those hate crimes are contrary to Christianity. That truth is ignored, and those of us who believe the Bible is God's Holy Word are labeled as hateful bigoted fanatics. The same thing happened in the days of Rome. Christians were called cannibals because of symbolism in communion. Our enemy is not the people that label us falsely but the spirit that drives them. This is the same spirit that presents the lie that there is liberty and fulfillment outside of God. The question that I fear the answer to is this, "Does this generation really want the truth?" The truth is genuine liberty is not being self-centered but God-centered. Are we willing to hear that?

God has provided one means of forgiveness and it is His only begotten Son. Justification in your mind will not nullify the debt of sin. I call it debt because we owe God, our Creator, the right to rule and direct our lives. Our insistence on setting our own standards does not change the fact that we owe all to Him. Genuine liberty is found in entering into God's purpose for our lives. The truth will set you free. Whom the Son sets free is free indeed! The Bible often refers to rebellion against God as slavery – whereas the world calls it freedom. Name any vice. That vice is an escape from surrendering to God. It is destructive and it is a lie. It enslaves instead of liberates. Liberty is walking in the destiny that your Creator intends for you!

Mariko and I love each other deeply. I wasn't always so head over heels for her as I am now. Because I allowed my flesh to imagine someone different could meet my needs better, I focussed on what I thought was wrong with my wife. I looked for things not to like. I complained to myself and sometimes, I'm ashamed to say, to others. But once I realized how much she loved me, I made a commitment to trying to love her in return, because that is what my LORD desired and the Word of God instructs me to do. I turned my focus. Then I began to see all the things there are to not like about me. Those petty things I focussed on in her were not nearly as

bad as the disgusting things in me. The more I focussed on what I loved about her the more beautiful she became to me, and the more I wanted to change for her.

I tell you that because the situation parallels, to some extent, our relationship with the Word. Jesus is the Word made flesh, (John 1:14) and we meet Him in the pages of the Bible. Are you looking at your Bible with a critical eye thinking something else can bring you greater satisfaction? Then you will not see the wonder that He is. It takes a change of attitude toward the Word to be willing to look at where the problem really lies.

You see, one reason we refuse to value God's Word is that we don't want to look at ourselves. The Word is a mirror that illuminates the darkest corners of our inner self. (James 1:23-25) We don't want to have to face and deal with that. But once we turn our focus on the beauty of the Word and God's love for us, the Word only gets more wonderful, more meaningful. It always was, we just had our mind and heart set on looking somewhere else. Will you see the great declaration of God's love for you in His Word and turn your focus upon its beauty? Folks complain about boring lineage – you know, reading the 'begatitudes', but that is such a small portion of the Word and it's there for a purpose. Some complain about not understanding. Get a version that is easier to read. Get in a Bible study. There is no excuse for not being in the Word of God.

If you have come to the same conclusion, that this Book is the heart of God to man, then what are you going to do about it? Will you commit this morning to living in the Word of God daily? Will you do as it instructs and meditate upon it so that you can be prosperous and have real success in life? You've heard me say it before but it bears saying again, you act on what you believe. If you believe this is a love letter from God to you then you will be in it. If you believe the Eternal God, your Savior, declares His desires for you in this book, then you will be reading it to seek His direction. I'm talking about making a commitment, a change in focus that calls you to action.

Here is our problem. We make a mental ascent to accepting something but then we don't find ourselves acting on it. Why is that? What keeps us from saying, "Yes" to this message but not changing our day to day life? Commitment and discipline! It takes a willingness to say "yes" to the direction of the Spirit of God living in you and a determination that you will act. What are you going to do about it? Am I preaching to the choir and you all have daily communion with God in His word? Decide today what your priorities will be. Decide what kind of Godly habit you are going to start today and go home and talk to your mate or friend about it. How can you be accountable? What can you do to make sure you follow through? How can you check yourself to see that you are walking in step with the Holy Spirit in this matter instead of going your own way?

I have made a study of the lives of the great men of God in history. One thread I see in common is the commitment to daily be in the Word of God and prayer. They came to a place some of you are at this morning, and they said "YES" to the Holy Spirit. Then they followed through with discipline and consistency, in step with the

Commented [Q2]: 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14 (NIV)

Commented [Q3]: 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror
24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.
25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.
James 1:23-25 (NIV)

Holy Spirit. Feed yourself spiritually and you will grow. Feed on what the world offers and you will spiritually shrink. We are spiritually what we eat spiritually. Decide today to begin a life daily in the Word of God.

