

What We Believe about The Bible

Psalm 19:7-14

March 26, 2017

Millions and millions of dollars are being spent every year in the search for extraterrestrial life. Huge satellite dishes are pointed toward outer space right now, listening for any kind of message. We are sending out all kinds of beacons and launching probes into space hoping that someone, or some thing out there, might possibly hear us. So far, nothing... except silence.

There is another voice in our universe however, and it reached planet earth a long time ago. This message to humankind is as loud and clear as it could possibly be. It was written down for us in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. And now, the entire message has been translated into over 600 known languages.¹ We've been so blessed to have the Bible in the English language for over 600 years now.² It's available in English but: How well do you really know your Bible? One of my concerns as a pastor is how often I run into people who have rejected God and the Bible's teachings because they've come to believe something about the Bible that isn't even true. They don't trust what it says but, in reality, they don't even know what's really in there!

CNN recently published an article, "Actually, that's not in the Bible."³ Let's look at a few together. Which of the following quotes do you think are actually in the Bible? (Answers are in the footnotes.)

1. "God works in mysterious ways."⁴
2. "God helps those who help themselves."⁵
3. "Pride goes before a fall."⁶
4. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son."⁷

The Bible is one of the most revered books in America, but it's also one of the most misquoted. Politicians, motivational speakers, and movie stars often quote passages that are supposedly in the Bible.⁸ Well, our desire is not to embarrass anyone or to show off how some of us might know more about the Bible than others. Our desire is that together, we'll think carefully about what REALLY IS in the Bible and why it should be believed, trusted, and obeyed.

Article 2 of our Church's Statement of Faith says this about The Bible: "We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises."

Do we believe everything that the Bible teaches?¹⁰ That's an important question, especially for Christ-followers. If we are going to base our entire lives on this one particular book, we had better be sure that it's worthy of our belief. There are at least 5 good reasons to believe everything that the Bible teaches:¹¹

1. **There is a stunning harmony** between all 66 books of the Bible; 39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament.¹² It was written in 3 different languages by some 40 different authors across the span of

¹ <https://www.wycliffe.org/about/why>

² Wycliffe's English translation was around 1382 AD

³ <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/19/living/bible-not-jesus/index.html>

⁴ "God works in mysterious ways" is not in the Bible. This saying may come from poet and hymn writer, William Cowper, who wrote the words to, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" in 1774 (#73 in our hymnal). But also see Isaiah 55:8-9 & John 13:7.

⁵ "It's actually attributed to Benjamin Franklin, one of the nation's founding fathers." As quoted by CNN website in online article "Actually, that's not in the Bible."

⁶ Actually, you were probably thinking of Proverbs 16:18 which says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

⁷ Actually... well, okay, Yes, this one's in the Bible; it's John 3:16.

⁸ From CNN article "Actually, that's not in the Bible."

⁹ "Few catch on because they don't want to - people prefer knowing biblical passages that reinforce their pre-existing beliefs." (From CNN article "Actually, that's not in the Bible.")

¹⁰ A great resource for understanding what the Bible teaches is the book, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, Zondervan, MI, 2003.

¹¹ Here's a 6th one: Our Lord and Savior, **Jesus Christ, held God's written Word in high esteem.** At the point in time when He was on the earth, only the OT had been written. But here's what Jesus says about it in Matthew 5:17-19, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly I tell you, 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. 19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus read the Bible. He quoted it. He lived His early life according to it. That's good enough for me.

¹² The Bible is a collection of 66 books attested to by Jesus and the early church. Just for the math geeks, there are 39 Old Testament books. If you multiply 3 x 9 it equals 27, which happens to be the number of New Testament books.

~1,600 years from a range of geographical locations. And yet, all 66 books unify into a beautiful, harmonious message about God's Messiah and His rescue plan for mankind.

2. The Bible has endured. The Bible has lasted through 3,500 years of resistance and persecution. Isaiah 40:8 tells us, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." And we should expect no less. Something that is genuinely from God and filled with His Truth should last forever.

3. The Bible is accurate. A careful study of archaeology and history reveals the reliability of the Bible's geography, culture, and teachings. These are not made up people and places. They are historical realities recorded accurately in the Bible. Perhaps some of you have heard that there's a new movie coming out about some of this. Check out this video teaser link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v16Alm20K0o> "The Case for Christ" by Lee Strobel is a book being made into a movie. It is one of many examples of how facts in the Bible that can be researched. Many have discovered that these facts are quite convincing. If you or someone you know is rather skeptical of the Bible, I'd urge you to dig in and do your own research. You may be surprised what you find.

4. The Bible is also prophetically accurate. Verses like Isaiah 53:5 which says that, "...He was pierced for our transgressions...", were predicted ~700 years in advance of the actual historical event.

5. The Bible changes lives. The Bible has been a #1 best-selling book for years and years. New people keep reading it and discovering in it, the answers that they need for this life. And I am one of those people. Having the guidance and wisdom from God's Word has made all the difference in my own life. Not just as a pastor, but also as a husband, as a dad, and as a friend and member of this community.¹³

Perhaps you are saying to yourself: "Okay, Pastor Jerry, the Bible has made a difference in my life as well and I do believe what it teaches. BUT, I'm just not sure that we should believe ALL of it." Can we really trust ALL of the Bible's promises? Our Statement of Faith says that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God. This means the very source of the words in our Bible is God Himself. As 2 Timothy 3:16 states, "All Scripture is God-breathed..." Our Bible comes directly from God. This does not mean that the Bible is the result of "divine dictation" but it is most certainly of "divine inspiration."¹⁴ Therefore, it can be trusted as authoritative because "what the Bible says, God says."¹⁵

2 Peter 1:20-21 makes this clear, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Here is how the book *Evangelical Convictions* puts it: "God has worked by his Holy Spirit through...its human authors to produce the very words that God desired to be written, to reveal himself and his purposes to human beings."¹⁶

Our Statement of Faith also says that the Bible is without error in the original writings. This leads to the natural concern, "Then what about human errors and copyist mistakes; can we really trust our present-day Bibles?"¹⁷ Good question. God first entrusted the Jewish people with His words. We read about this in Romans 3:1-2, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew... Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God." And today, through the efforts of Jews and Gentiles alike, we have godly men and women who are striving toward giving us the most accurate Bible possible.

The honest truth is that we don't have the original manuscripts for the books of the Bible...any of them. The ravages of time did not allow for the preservation of the originals. What we do have is many very reliable, well-protected copies. Preserving our Bible has never been a reckless or sloppy effort. The copying has been done by people with a deep love and reverence for God. Accurately preserving God's Word was an act of worship for them. The printing press wasn't invented until the 1400s.¹⁸ But over those years there was a very committed group of godly people who carefully and meticulously copied the Scriptures down, one word at a time. In fact, today, thanks to their efforts, we have thousands of hand-copied manuscripts that are being studied through a careful science called "Textual Criticism."

¹³ See Psalm 119:9-11

¹⁴ See discussion on pp. 56-57 of *Evangelical Convictions*.

¹⁵ See discussion on p. 57 of *Evangelical Convictions*.

¹⁶ *Evangelical Convictions*, p. 56.

¹⁷ Two great discussions around this issue are laid out in the Rose Publishing booklets "Why Trust the Bible?" by Timothy Paul Jones in 2007 and "How We Got the Bible," 1998.

¹⁸ ~1440 by Johannes Gutenberg.

The skill of these copyists was put on display when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947. A bunch of manuscripts were discovered in a group of caves in the Judean desert because of a young Bedouin boy. This allowed us to check just how good these copyists really were so many years ago. In one example of a text from Isaiah 53, the only notable difference over 1,000 years of copying was one 3-letter word, which did not greatly affect the meaning.¹⁹ And here's the thing, every day efforts are continuing to study documents like the Dead Sea Scrolls to try to get us as close as possible to the original documents.²⁰

We can respond in a couple of ways to these efforts. We can point our fingers and say "aha! See, I told you we can't trust the Bible!" Or, we can respond by respecting the hard work and transparency of the scholars who've devoted their lives to getting us such an amazingly accurate copy of the Bible that helps us to know and enjoy the Lord. We owe a debt of gratitude to these servants of God. Just imagine your life without a copy of God's written Word to read every day...

Our Statement of Faith says the Bible comes "through the words of HUMAN authors." Realizing that God has spoken in the Bible through the words of human authors is significant. It means that we understand God's message through the lens of their human perspective. Therefore, we try to learn all that we can about the author's background, culture, language, and worldview. This is called the grammatical-historical method of interpreting the Bible. All this means, is that we are asking, **"what did the author intend, when he wrote these words to the first readers?"**

The Bible does not and can not mean whatever we want it to. It can only mean what God intended to convey through a particular human writer at a particular time in history. This is what keeps us grounded in true orthodoxy and protects us from wandering into false teachings and making the Bible say whatever we want it to say. In fact, we should be careful if we have a tendency to say "this is what this verse means to me." It would be better to say, "this is how this verse applies to me." In other words, it's fine to think about how the genuine principle in the text applies to our particular lives. But, to suggest that the principle in the text can change or adjust depending on who is reading it, is a bad way to go. Or, to say that a text should be interpreted to mean whatever you feel it means, would be wrong.

We need to ground our study of God's Word in a consistent, common sense approach. The meaning of a text does not change over time and should not be overruled by human whims or by our changing culture. "Our interpretation must wrestle with the way words are used in the literary context in which they are found."²¹ Now, if any of this sounds sketchy to you, it shouldn't. We all do this in conversations all the time. For example, if I text you that something is "cool," how do you know whether I mean that it is cold, like I better wear a light jacket because the weather is kind of "cool," or whether it is appealing to me, like that's a "cool" jacket, where can I buy one like that? Things can also be "sweet" or something can be "tight" or even "groovy," but what we mean by that particular word is always determined by the contextual clues around it. The Bible works this way as well. It can't mean just anything or everything. Sometimes it just takes a little work to figure out what the author was trying to communicate to the original audience.²²

Well, I hope that this discussion so far has given you a better idea of why the Bible can be believed and trusted. Now just one thing remains: Will we fully commit ourselves to obeying the Bible? One of my favorite verses on obeying the Bible is Philippians 3:16, "Only let us live up to what we have already attained." We don't need to be anxious about the things in the Bible that confuse us or make no sense to us. We just need to focus on what God has made clear to us. Don't let it bother you too much if there are a few things that you don't understand about the Bible. In fact, we're better off to do the opposite. Here is a wise insight from Mark Twain: "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand." Our more important focus should be to obey the parts of the Bible that we

¹⁹ Josh McDowell, *New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pp. 78-79, Thomas Nelson, 1999, pp. 78-79.

²⁰ We are also continuing to find more manuscripts.

²¹ *Evangelical Convictions*, p. 54.

²² We also need to be careful that we understand what the Bible is actually promising. (2 Timothy 3:12 is an interesting promise.) Consider Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it." (NKJV) Is the Bible promising here that if parents do a good job training up their child that as they get older they're guaranteed to never disobey? No, I don't think so. But this doesn't mean we can't trust the Bible. What it means is that we have to understand the author's intention here.

The proverbs are a genre or style of writing that were intended to impart wisdom and general truths about life, not absolute promises to take to the bank. So, generally speaking, children who have parents who train them when they are young will find that they will stay on that path; not all of the time, but much of the time. But the Bible also teaches us in the new testament that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So, each of us is a sinner who can go astray even if we were brought up by the best of parents. (See the essay on the top of p. 1063 of the *NIV2011 Study Bible* and also the introduction to the book of Proverbs on pp. 1025-1026 entitled, "The Nature of Proverbs.")

do understand. To do the hard work of depending on the HS to help us live out what is already clear to us. That should keep us plenty busy; and God will be pleased. Over time, we'll mature and we'll learn how to apply even more of the Bible to our lives as we gain greater understanding.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Obeying God's Word means not only being taught and trained by it but also being rebuked and corrected by it. We sit under its authority because it is the ULTIMATE authority. Therefore, the Bible supersedes the authority of the Statement of Faith itself. And of any church tradition or historical creed. It overrides scientific theories, human reason and conscience, and contemporary prophetic utterances.

The Bible is our one, true and best authority. Consider the words of Jeremiah 23:25-29, "'I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' 26 How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? 27 They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship. 28 Let the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the LORD. 29 "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"²³

The point is that straw doesn't nourish and neither do false teachings, only grain can feed and nourish.²⁴ We need God's genuine Word to feed our souls. And, we need to respect its powerful authority to burn like fire in our lives and break like a hammer. The ultimate authority of Scripture is why we read our Bibles daily and it's why when you come to church on Sunday, you ought to keep your own personal Bible open. I know that we project the text up on the screen, but it is still commendable for each one of us to have our own Bible with us and opened up, checking to see if the sermon is in line with God's Word.²⁵

Being a Christ-follower means submitting oneself to the Bible as our ultimate and final authority for life and conduct. Here is a short paragraph from our Free Church's history: "The Evangelical Free Church began as a reform movement in the state churches of Scandinavia, spawned by a renewed focus on the Bible. Through a network of small Bible studies called the "Readers Revival," these believers developed a strong conviction about the centrality and authority of the Scriptures. "Where stands it written?" became the watchword for all faith and practice. We stand strongly in that tradition."²⁶

The necessary response to all that we've talked about this morning is to obey God's Word. Everything we believe and do SHOULD be judged in light of the Scripture's ultimate authority. Wouldn't we all like it if God looked on us with favor? There's a verse that tells us what God likes to see in our lives: Isaiah 66:2 says, "These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word."²⁷

May the Lord bless us and keep us as we walk in reverent obedience to His Word.

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on March 26, 2017 by Pastor Jerry Johnson.

²³ See also Deuteronomy 13:1-4, 1 Corinthians 14:37-40 and Galatians 1:8.

²⁴ See *NIV2011 Study Bible*, Zondervan, MI, footnote on p. 1266.

²⁵ See the Bereans in Acts 17:11.

²⁶ *Evangelical Convictions*, p. 67.

²⁷ Consider how this contrasts with Matthew 7:24-27 and James 1:22-25.