

Why We Believe the Bible

It is Inerrant

2 Peter 1:16-21

Mark Vroegop

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:16-21 (ESV)

Somewhere in junior high the "light bulb" went on for me when it came to studying the Bible. My youth pastor had distributed daily devotional worksheets, which were a half sheet of paper with three simple questions on them:

1. What did I read today?
2. What does it mean?
3. How does it apply to my life?

Those three questions served me very well throughout my teenage years, and my regular diet of Bible intake was to read whatever chapter in Proverbs corresponded to the date on the calendar. But what happened was that I discovered how relevant the Bible was to my life.

Now it didn't happen every single day. There were some days when my reading of the Bible was rather bland or less than dramatic. But there were so many other days where the connection between what I was reading and my life was amazing. It was like the Bible was walking with me and sometimes even anticipating what I was dealing with. In the Bible, I discovered instructions about what was really valuable, how to deal with temptations, the kind of friends I should pursue, how to think about my parents, the value of wisdom, and so many other things.

I discovered something I knew conceptually as a child, but I began to believe it and experience it at an entirely different level: the Bible was true. By that I mean not only that it was historically true, but that I came to understand and appreciate that the Bible could be trusted. When the Bible talked about a path that was different than what I saw in the world, what others were doing, or even what my own heart was telling me to do – I could trust the Bible. I came to believe the Bible even more because I believed that I could trust it.

Last Week: Do you believe the Bible is authoritative?

Last week we started a study called “Why We Believe the Bible,” and my hope for this series is to strengthen your belief in the Bible such that you love the Bible more, read the Bible more, memorize the Bible more, talk about the Bible more, and obey the Bible more. So did that happen for you last week? Did you think about the role of the Bible in your life?

I want to encourage you to do more than just listen to this sermon series. I hope that you’ll join a Small Group sometime in the month of August or September. Or perhaps you could start memorizing our weekly Fighter Verses. You could take a class that we are offering on Wednesday nights in September on how to study the Bible. You could start a discipleship group and use the One to One book that we have in our Resource Area. And for those of you who were not here last week, we are hosting a weekend event with John Piper on August 26-28 where he’ll be teaching us about the self-authenticating nature of the Bible and how to read it supernaturally.

One more thing: Next week we are going to take a break from the series so that I can talk with you about the issues related to Ethnicity, Authority, and the Gospel. I hope to help us have on-going and better conversations about this important, loaded, and timely topic.

Inspiration was our main focus last week, and I tried to help you understand that the Bible identifies itself as being “God-breathed” in 2 Timothy 3:16. Essentially, inspiration means that the Bible has God as its source or origin. The implication is that the Bible is authoritative. Underneath Christianity’s perspective on morality, ethics, eternal life, and the forgiveness of sin is the issue of authority of the Bible. Since the Bible is from God, to obey it is to obey God.

Therefore, one of the most important issues for you and me to wrestle with is the matter of where we believe that ultimate authority lies. Does authority lie within me? Do I determine what is right and wrong, what is true and not true? Or is there something outside of myself to which I’m accountable?

The doctrine of inspiration means that the foundation of life is rooted in the authority of Bible. And in troubled times, Christians need to be reminded about the authority of the Word.

Inerrancy: Do you believe the Bible is true?

Closely tied to the issue of inspiration and authority is the matter of inerrancy. For those of you not familiar with that term, inerrancy simply means that “the Bible always tells the truth and that it always tells the truth concerning everything it talks about.”¹ Another, more technical, definition is “the Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything which is contrary to fact.”² Inerrancy means that the Bible is without error, and it does not tell us things that are false. Inerrancy means that we can trust the Bible; we can believe that it is true.

Now for some of you the words “original manuscripts” strikes you as odd and maybe even concerning. Here’s what that means. We have excellent translations at our disposal which are based upon thousands of

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine – Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 42.

² Ibid.

manuscripts or copies of portions of the Bible which have been collected or preserved since the original writing of the Bible. While we do not have the original manuscripts, we do have an excellent collection of manuscripts. Now there were times, when in the process or transmission of making a copy, that a textual or copying error occurred. Wayne Grudem helps us understand how we reconcile this with inerrancy:

“For over 99 percent of the words of the Bible we know what the original manuscript said. Even for many of the verses where there are textual variants (that is, different words in different ancient copies of the same verse), the correct decision is often quite clear (there may be a copying error, for example) and there are really very few places where the textual variant is both difficult to evaluate and significant in determining the meaning. In the small percentage of cases where there is significant uncertainty about what the original said, the general sense of the sentence is usually quite clear.”³

And, I would add, no major doctrinal truth is negatively affected. Therefore, we can have confidence that we have an authoritative and trustworthy Bible – not just in the original but even in what we have now.⁴

In fact, we should be very grateful because never in human history have there been more accurate and widely available translations than what we have today. What’s more, the missions’ effort to translate the Bible into every language on the planet has never been closer to completion.

Back to the meaning of inerrancy. Inerrancy means that the Scriptures do not come from man or from human interpretation as we will see in 2 Peter 3. Rather, God’s Word comes from God Himself. And since God is holy, it means that He cannot lie and that He always speaks the truth. Therefore, if God is truthful, then His word must also be truthful. And if it is true, then it also is trustworthy.

The clearest and most helpful statement about the trustworthiness of the Bible came from the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy⁵ in 1978. I would commend it to you as something which would be good for you to read. Over two hundred evangelical leaders signed this document because they believed that this issue was very important to the trajectory of the church. Here is what they said in the preface of that statement:

The authority of the Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God’s written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.⁶

One of the reasons why this is important is because of how interwoven the matters of authority and trustworthiness are when it comes to why we believe the Bible. A Bible that is not trustworthy is not authoritative. But a Bible that is trustworthy has sweeping implications. Again, from the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy:

³ Grudem, 44.

⁴ If you want to examine this issue more completely, read *Why Trust the Bible?* by Greg Gilbert. It is a short and helpful book defending the trustworthiness of the Scriptures.

⁵ http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf

⁶ Grudem, 474.

*Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.*⁷

Do you see how authority, inspiration, and inerrancy are all linked? This issue is not merely a theological perspective. There are very personal dynamics in play here. Kevin DeYoung, in his book *Taking God at his Word*, says the following:

*"Inerrancy means that the word of God always stands over us and we never stand over the word. When we reject inerrancy we put ourselves in judgment over God's word. We claim the right to determine which parts of God's revelation can be trusted and which cannot. . . . How are we to believe in a God who can do the unimaginable and forgive our trespasses, conquer our sins, and give us hope in a dark world if we cannot believe that this God created the world out of nothing, gave the virgin a child, and raised his Son on the third day?"*⁸

I believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, and I believe that the Bible is absolutely true. I believe that God has spoken through the Word of God, and I believe that if God is true, then His Word must also be true. And if the Word is true, then I can believe what it says about the world, me, the cross, the future, and anything else the Bible talks about.

On a very practical level, it means that in everyday life, the truthfulness of the Bible is constantly in play. A few examples:

When the Bible says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5), will you choose humility when it seems like humble people lose, are taken advantage of, and are treated unfairly? Is the Bible true or not?

When the Bible says, "Flee sexual immorality . . . your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:18), will you look around and be okay feeling weird or out of step or being laughed at by your friends because you are committed to purity and sexual activity only in marriage? Is the Bible true or not?

When the Bible says that "God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8), will you choose to give even though it means that your bank account has less in it than it did yesterday? Is the Bible true or not?

When the Bible says, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good . . ." (Rom. 8:28), will you look at the hard circumstances of your life and say "Somehow this will work out for the good purposes of your will, God"? Or will you be angry? Is the Bible true or not?

When the Bible says that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8), will you believe that to be true in the final moments of your life on earth? Is the Bible true or not?

⁷ Grudem, 475.

⁸ Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word – Why the Bible is Knowable, Necessary and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 38,40.

The truthfulness of the Bible is not merely a theoretical or theological issue. It is incredibly personal and practical. And yet you might think something like this: “Well, I believe that it’s true, but I’d really believe if I could hear God say it personally or if I saw it with my own eyes.” That is why 2 Peter 1 is so important.

The Word: “More Fully Confirmed”

In the time we have left, I want to unpack 2 Peter 1:16-21 because it addresses the issue of the trustworthiness of the Word in contrast to seeing something with your own eyes. This text essentially tells us that the “prophetic word” is more fully confirmed (ESV) or is something completely reliable (NIV).

Now you need to know that Peter said these words because he, like Paul in 2 Timothy, was anticipating his death. So if you want to understand what Peter is saying in verses 16-21, you have to look back to how the book began. This, by the way, is one of the many helpful ways that you can study the Bible: read the earlier chapters or the surrounding verses to understand the context. One of the principles for studying the Bible is that context determines meaning.

This book is Peter’s encouragement for the followers of Jesus to continue in their godliness even as they face persecution and for them to grow even more (see 1:3-11). Peter’s aim in verse 12 is to remind them of these spiritual qualities even though they already know them and are established in the truth. In other words, Peter wants to remind them about some things that they probably already knew, but as he considers his death, he wants the truths in this book to help them persevere. Verse 15 is rather moving: *“And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things”* (2 Peter 1:15).

So what does Peter tell them about the Word of God? Notice these three characteristics and how they relate to the issue of trustworthiness of the Bible:

1. It is historical

Verse 16 starts with the word “for” which indicates that what follows is linked to the previous verses. Peter is going to provide some reasons why they can be established in the truth, and the first one that he gives is his own eyewitness testimony – that the events surrounding the gospel are true. They really happened.

Peter wants his readers to know that the things he has told them are not “cleverly devised myths.” Roman and Greek culture were filled with mythological stories about the gods which attempted to explain the world in which they lived. You may remember from middle school having to learn the myths related to Zeus, Poseidon, Aphrodite, and Dionysus. Peter is saying that the message about Jesus’ power and His coming are not just another creative story to make sense of the world. The record of Christianity is based, not on a myth, but on the facts of history.

That is why Peter says, “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” Peter is saying – “I was there! It really happened. I saw these events with my own eyes.” And in verses 17-18 he specifically describes the transfiguration, the moment when Peter, James, and John were able to see the glory of Jesus, meet Elijah and Moses, and hear the affirmation of God the Father over Jesus.

¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 2 Peter 1:17-18 (ESV)

Unlike in the Roman and Greek myths, Peter wants his readers and us to know that he was there. He heard and saw all of this, and he wasn't the only one. He is not telling them stories, making things up in order to scare them about the future, or devising some mythological explanation of the world. Jesus was really transfigured. Peter really heard the affirmation of the Father. Peter saw the glory of Jesus in all of His majesty. The biblical record is true.

Peter tells them this because he wants them to not only be confident in what happened in the past but to also know that the entire gospel message is true and that this same Jesus will return again. Therefore, he calls the followers of Jesus to be godly because King Jesus is coming back. 2 Peter 3 uses the future return of Jesus as a primary motivation to persevere in godliness. In other words, since this is all true, be godly.

Do you see the connection to inerrancy and the trustworthiness of the Bible? If the biblical record is not factual or truthful, then why would you waste your time in pursuing godly living? If Jesus is not really returning, and if the Bible does not tell us the truth, then why not just live like everyone else in the world? The biblical message is trustworthy because it is historical. It is not a myth. It reflects events that really took place. The Bible is true. The Bible is historical.

2. It is written

Verse 19 makes a very important statement regarding the trustworthiness of the written word. Peter turns his attention and his argument from his personal experience and his own eyewitness testimony to what he calls "the prophetic word."

¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts . . . (2 Peter 1:19)

By prophetic word, Peter means what was previously written about Jesus and, by implication, all of Scripture. He uses the word, or something similar to it, in verse 19 ("prophetic word"), verse 20, ("prophecy of Scripture") and verse 21 ("prophecy"). Now this word does not just mean things that are predicted by the Bible. The phrase "prophetic word," combined with "prophecy of Scripture," point us to the written word.

What's more, he says that this prophetic word is more fully confirmed. The NASB renders this as "made more sure" and the NIV as "something completely reliable." Do you see what he is saying here? After everything that Peter had told them regarding his personal experience, he simply says that his eyewitness testimony only confirmed what was already true – the prophetic word, the Word of God. Peter's personal experience wasn't more reliable than the scriptures themselves; his experience served to confirm the trustworthiness of the Scriptures.

This is really important because it determines how you view the Bible. There are some of you who might be tempted to think, “If I saw it with my own eyes, it would be much easier to believe.” Others might be tempted to say, “I really can’t believe without seeing it for myself.”

And as Peter considers his death, he wants to provide a long-lasting assurance to God’s people about the incredible trustworthiness of the Scriptures. One commentator says it this way as if he were speaking for Peter:

Listen to me – I was an eyewitness to the saving acts of God in history. And I know that after Christ’s death and resurrection God will have no need to ever again perform these things in the presence of another generation. But remember, this in no way means that your faith is inferior to mine (1:1). We have both been given the prophetic promises of God. We can all read the words written down long ago. They are a more sure light than anything I ever saw and heard. Beloved, my seeing these things is important. Witnesses are essential. But God does not need to appear in the flesh every forty or fifty years to enlighten us and confirm his love to us. Seeing isn’t essential for believing – reading God’s word is.⁹

Believers need to hold on to the Scriptures all the way to the end of the ages (“the morning star rises in your hearts”) and during days that are increasingly difficult (“a lamp shining in a dark place”). They don’t need another appearance of Jesus in order to help them persevere. They can trust the inerrant and trustworthy Word of God. The same is true for you.

But there is one more characteristic about the inerrant Word.

3. It is supernatural

Peter is presenting one final argument. He is concerned that some people would hear what he is saying about the Bible and be skeptical because it is a book that was written by people. God didn’t drop a book out of the sky. Human beings physically wrote the Bible, so how can we know that it is trustworthy? There are three arguments.

First, according to verse 20, there are no private interpretations that create prophetic Scripture. The teachings of the Bible may have been written by human beings, but humans are not the source.

Second, in verse 21 there is a reiteration of what is said in verse 20 with a focus on why interpretations do not create Scripture: because prophecy does not come from human will.

Third and finally, we get the source of the Scriptures themselves and the reason why they are trustworthy: “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (v 21). To be carried along means that like a ship is driven by the wind or a ferry carries cars, something greater than the individual is at work.

And so it is with the Scriptures. Human beings were writing words on a page, but what they wrote was the inspired and inerrant word. Since it is God’s word, it is true and trustworthy. The Bible has a supernatural aspect to it because it was the Holy Spirit who was behind this inerrant book.

⁹ David Helm, *1-2 Peter and Jude – Sharing in Christ’s Sufferings*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 216.

Personal Implications

So what does all of this mean for our lives today? Why is this issue of inerrancy important?

First, it means that the basis of church ministry, what we do on Sundays, and how you order your life is under the authority of Word. You can trust the Bible. You can base your life on the Bible. You can hope in what the Bible says for eternal life, even today.

Second, the inerrancy of the Bible means that you need to study the Bible. The hope for your life and for our church is in what the Bible actually says. Not in what we think it says or what we hope it says, but in what it actually says. Therefore, you should work hard to understand and know how to study the Bible.

Third, when you read the Bible you are hearing the voice of God. As wonderful or as helpful as you might think it would be to hear God speaking to you audibly or with some supernatural, cosmic intervention, you are able to hear the voice of God through the Scriptures.

So love the Bible more, read the Bible more, memorize the Bible more, and study the Bible more in order to hear the voice of God in the Scriptures. This is the Word of God! Thanks be to God.

There is no more authoritative declaration than we find in the Word of God, no firmer ground to stand on, no "more final" argument that can be spoken after the Scripture has spoken... You do not need another special revelation from God outside the Bible. You can listen to the voice of God every day. Christ still speaks, because the Spirit has already spoken. If you want to hear from God, go to the book that records only what he has said. Immerse yourself in the word of God. You will not find anything more sure.¹⁰

We believe the Bible because the Bible is true.

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¹⁰ DeYoung, 41-42.