

QUESTION 32:
“WHY CAN WE TRUST GOD’S WORD?”
(II TIMOTHY 3:14-17)

3.8.20

INTRODUCTION

What is “truth?” One definition is: “being in accord with fact or reality, or fidelity to an original or standard.” Another definition states that truth means “authenticity.”

It’s important to know what we mean by truth because, in this day and age, we are surrounded with assumptions and responses to what is — or isn’t — truth:

- 1) Our criminal justice system is built on the foundation of finding out the truth of a matter; in fact, witnesses called to trial are traditionally bound by oath to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”
- 2) Two countries frantically dealing with the coronavirus — China and Iran — have run into difficulties in coping with the outbreak because they have reportedly been telling their own officials to refrain from “speaking the truth” about what they are seeing in their people.
- 3) In the political arena, new words and phrases have entered our everyday vocabulary and consciousness, as we hear people try to clarify earlier comments by saying that they “misspoke” or we hear that somebody is “walking back” earlier claims concerning some situation. We’ve even had examples of people bucking criticism of their position by offering “alternative facts.”

Truth was a part of Jesus’ interrogation with Pilate; when Jesus told him: “[T]he reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth,” Pilate’s response was a very basic question: “What is truth?” — *John 18:37b-38a*.

We also live with multiple presentations of “truth” in the religious arena. This “COEXIST” t-shirt (also available as a very popular bumper sticker) represents just some of those so-called “truths”:

- 1) “C” (crescent moon) with star = Islam (but moon and star also represent Diana, the ancient Greek goddess of the moon).
- 2) “O” = peace symbol.
- 3) “E” with attached male and female symbols = equality between the sexes.
- 4) “X” (Star of David) = Judaism.
- 5) “I” (specifically the “dot” above the “I”) = pagan/Wiccan pentacle/ pentagram.
- 6) “S” (yin & yang) = Taoism.
- 7) “T” (cross) = Christianity.

with the assumption that all of these beliefs can coexist because they are, after all, just “variations on a theme” and all basically pursuing the same thing. Well, apart from fundamental biblical Christianity, all these others can coexist because they do have some things in common: They are all developed by man, they are all false systems, and they will all fail.

We also hear about post-modernism, which is an intellectual stance that rejects the possibility of reliable knowledge, and denies the existence of a universal, stable reality; in other words, there is no absolute truth, so-called truth is actually relative, that is, that what is true for me may not be true for you.

We also now have something called “post-truth,” which says a number of things:

- 1) Objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief; according to Matthew d’Ancona, writing in *The Guardian* in May 2017: Post-truth is “the growing primacy of emotional resonance over fact and evidence, the replacement of verification with social media algorithms that tell us what we want to hear. Truth is losing

its value as society's reserve currency, and legitimate skepticism is yielding place to pernicious relativism." The apostle Paul warned us about this in the spiritual sense; as he wrote to his friend Timothy (and simultaneously illustrated the absolute relevance of the Scriptures at ANY historical moment): *[T]he time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths — Paul, II Timothy 4:3-4.*

- 2) In the political context, post-truth is a culture in which debate is framed largely by appeals to emotion disconnected from details of policy, and by the repeated assertions of "talking points" to which factual rebuttals are ignored. When taken to its logical conclusion, you arrive at this, from George Orwell's classic book, *1984*, in which one of the main characters states: "[R]eality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind and nowhere else."

Now, as a body of believers, we have also claimed a truth — a collection of writings called the "Bible." Now while the Bible preaches and teaches many things — mainly concerning a God who loves, a creation that fell, a Son who rescued, and an eternal life that is offered — that is not the question we are being asked to consider. Today's question is more specific: WHY can we trust the Bible? What is our basis for believing that the Bible is indeed truth? To begin with, let's look again at the text that was read this morning:

TEXT

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 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 — Paul, II Timothy 3:14-17.

Notice what Paul says about the Word:

- 1) It is able to make us wise for salvation — it tells us what we need to know to become pleasing to God.
- 2) It is useful for teaching — making us smarter in pleasing God.
- 3) It is useful for rebuking — literally meaning "to expose" error.
- 4) It is useful for correcting — literally, "restoration to an upright or right state."
- 5) It is useful for training — making us continually stronger in pleasing God.
- 6) The outcome — thoroughly/completely equipped for everything we need.

ANALYSIS

Wow! That's quite a claim — that a collection of writings written over roughly 1,500 years by some 40 authors reflects one perfect word from one perfect God, that will meet all our needs all the time. So the question is how can we know that all Scripture is "God-breathed;" how can we know, as Peter reported, that *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 — II Peter 1:21*, in other words, writings very literally inspired by God and superintended by God even as His Scriptures were being delivered through the vehicle of human hands? Let's do a little "time-traveling" to find out.

Old Testament:

It is generally thought that Moses is considered the author of the first five books of the Old Testament, and that they were composed some 15 centuries before Christ — the period of time when Israel was wandering in the wilderness.

Now for the books Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, those would have had the advantage of being events to which Moses himself would have been a direct eyewitness: the burning bush through which God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt, the ten plagues that convinced the Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave, the miracle of the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments, the wilderness wandering — all those things.

But what about Genesis, the first book of the Bible, which contains events which occurred long before the lifetime of Moses? The accounts of Genesis came from these sources:

Oral accounts — Middle Eastern peoples have an incredibly long history of oral tradition, to which I can personally attest (story of the telling of Iranian revolution — EVERY DETAIL HAS EQUAL WEIGHT TO THE STORY).

From oral accounts to written accounts — Writing has existed longer than is commonly thought. Recent archaeological discoveries tell us that Egyptians were writing detailed historical records using their hieroglyphic texts possibly as far back as 2600 BC — some 1100 years before Moses was writing. As histories began to contain facts and events that were considered important to the civilization, they would have been passed down both orally and, more permanently, in writing, with the idea of their needing to be preserved — much like what we do when somebody is telling us something important: “Just a second; I need to write that down.”

Archaeology has found parallel stories to the biblical accounts of Noah’s flood and the Tower of Babel — these dating back to at least 1600 BC. Many of these texts support the Genesis accounts that we read today. The points where they differ may reflect societies that were beginning to move away from a belief in the one, true God.

Once we get to the life stories of Abraham and the descendants that followed, we see people who understand that God was revealing Himself in very unique ways to what would become a very unique people — His chosen people, the Jews. As that awareness became more confirmed, there would have been a greater urgency to write these stories down.

Now, following the death of Joseph (at the end of Genesis), the Hebrews were made slaves of the Egyptians. Not knowing what the future held, it became even more important to make sure the stories of their national identity were preserved. It is thought that possibly the Levites began to preserve these stories. That raises interesting possibilities because Moses was a Levite. And, of course, he was educated from infancy in Pharaoh’s household, meaning that he had access to learning how to write and record events — and he would have had reliably preserved histories from which he could preserve God’s inerrant, infallible message.

But what about Genesis 1 and 2, events that occurred long before any human history or even witness? For those, it is very possible that God granted Moses visions of what occurred back at the beginning of time. He certainly granted such revelation to Isaiah and Ezekiel in the Old Testament, and John in the New Testament. But regardless of the specific details, God was superintending all of these writings, to make sure that His story and His ways were being accurately and completely recorded.

Over time, the only changes to the texts were made by priests to reflect changes in place names, vocabulary and political situations. However, these changes were made with a great deal of care and reflection to preserve the divine integrity and intention of the texts. Usually, however, the only time the ancient scrolls were even touched was to read them or to copy them word for word. This was an important skill in ancient times as there was no other means of duplication. They took exceptional care to copy the texts accurately.

How do we know that we have the right 39 books that we now regard as the Old Testament? We know that the Ten Commandments had been preserved in the Ark of the Covenant. In Deuteronomy, as Moses is giving his final instructions to the nation, we find these words: *After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord: “Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God. There it will remain as a witness against you” — Deuteronomy 31:24-26.* This puts Moses’ writings on a par with the Ten Commandments, which had been given directly from the mouth of God Himself.

But before that, Moses had commanded: *“Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you” — Moses, Deuteronomy 4:1-2.* It is a great picture of the authority of God’s word: If added to, it is diluted; if subtracted from, it is diminished. It is because it is the divine word of God that it has the authority to demand obedience. And it is the priests receiving this charge who are to maintain God’s written revelations, that they be kept safe in their divine integrity.

As the revelations and words of God’s anointed spokesmen continued in the centuries following Moses (whether actually written by them or recorded by close associates), they too would have been collected and safeguarded. At some point in time, all of these records were stored in the temple at Jerusalem. We know this because, according to II Kings 22: *Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary (to the king), “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord” — II Kings 22:8a.* Historically we are pretty sure that this was still the location of the Scriptures well into the first century AD, because the Jewish historian Josephus was given them by the Romans in 70 AD when they destroyed Jerusalem — and the Temple.

Another question: When did the Jews who were so carefully collecting the sacred writings believe that God’s revelation had ended? According to Josephus, the Jews believed that the succession of the prophets — who they believed were the true spokesmen of God — ended with the messages of Haggai and Malachi. This would have taken place approximately 400 BC. Therefore, any books written after that date would have been seen as historically valuable but not to be regarded as Scripture. The books as completed by the ministry of Malachi were recognized as Holy Scripture by both the Pharisees and Sadducees — the two most important religious bodies in Israel at that time.

Jesus Himself provided additional confirmation of the “God-breathed” inspiration of the Scriptures. He quoted from all three Jewish divisions of the Old Testament — the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The disciples that followed Him likewise viewed the Old Testament Scriptures as divinely inspired.

What about the books of the Apocrypha? This is a collection of writings that date from about 200 BC to early into the first century AD. They include such books as Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, I and II Maccabees, Tobit, Judith and Baruch. These and others of these books look at the intertestamental period — in other words, that period of history from about 400 BC until the life of Christ. They are a valuable look at religious and national life during this period of time. However, they were never considered Scripture by the vast majority of Judaism, nor did the church itself ever hold these books to be on a level with the original Hebrew Scriptures. How do we know this? Well, Jesus NEVER quoted from any of the books of the Apocrypha, nor did any of His disciples in any of their writings. Nowhere in the entire NT is any book of the Apocrypha cited. If you look at that precedent, it would be highly improbable that the early church, staking their very identity with Christ and the apostles, would have gone outside His example and considered these

books to be Scripture. By the time of the Reformation, these books were being set apart in their own section between the Old and New Testaments, and introduced with the explanation that, while included in the Scriptures, these books had never been considered to be equal with Scripture. Eventually, to make a clarifying statement and to separate themselves from the doctrinal viewpoints of the Catholic Church, the Apocrypha was dropped as a part of the Bible. Protestant Bibles today exclude these books.

New Testament:

The 27 books of the New Testament were originally written over an approximately 50-year span (45-95 AD). There are some great reasons why we can rest in the reliability of the teachings of these books being the authoritative word of God:

- 1) Jesus Himself. The first words of the gospel of John literally equate Jesus with God's Word: ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. . . . The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth — John 1:1-2, 14.*** TRANSLATION: The words of Jesus — God the Son — were equivalent in value and authority with God the Father. Jesus Himself underscored His authority as being God's word in the flesh during the Sermon on the Mount; five (5) times over the course of that message, He used some variation of this phrase: "You have heard it said . . . BUT I SAY." He was not denying God's Word; He was rather expanding the understanding of what God's Word truly meant. He was not continuing the tiresome Pharisaic tradition of repeating the words of their teachers (who were in fact repeating the words of their teachers) but creating a new word — the foundation for a new covenant. It was one of His clearest demonstrations of precisely who Jesus of Nazareth truly was.
- 2) Second, Jesus Himself personally selected and trained disciples. For a little over three years, they both listened to His words and watched His actions. His teaching methods included parables, repetition and visual aids. He taught them how to spread His message and commissioned them to continue His work after He was gone. Once He had been resurrected and ascended back to heaven, the disciples did virtually nothing else except spread His word. Their teachings remained fresh in their lives as they continued both teaching and defending their faith.
- 3) Third, the human capacity to memorize has mostly been lost on us because of the options of putting knowledge in books or on computers. None of this was available to the ancients so they had to count on their memories to be accurate to the recounting of Christ's words and works. Remember also that, by the time He left them, the disciples had become convinced beyond doubt that Jesus was in the fact the Son of God. They had great incentive to remember what He taught them.
- 4) Fourth, it is likely that, even before the New Testament scriptures began to be formally written down in the 40s AD, Christ's followers would have written down important pieces of His teachings to help refresh their memory.

In addition to all this, the Holy Spirit would have helped the disciples to remember. Jesus Himself said so to the disciples during the Last Supper: ***"[T]he Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you"*** — ***Jesus Christ, John 14:26.*** They were never going to be having to rely on their own efforts. But it was also the Holy Spirit that would be affirming that these writings were, in fact, from God. In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he quotes from Luke's gospel (Luke 10:7). And Peter's second letter affirms the writings of Paul as Scripture (II Peter 3:15-16).

As one more point, the NT writings stress the importance of eyewitnesses and hard facts. Here are a couple of examples:

[W]e did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain — II Peter 1:16-18.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ — I John 1:1-3.

Unlike the Old Testament sources, which were largely collected together and often found in one place, the New Testament canon traced a very different path from the creation of the individual works into the collection we know now. Part of the issue was the widespread locations of many of the early churches. As they were so distant from one another, it was often the case that a church might have access to only a few of what would become the New Testament books. It was often a very extended period of time before these new scriptures would have been reviewed by a great many of these new churches. However, the one redeeming feature of the earliest churches was that they were founded by the apostles or their associates as the church spread over the landscape. These would have also been the first churches to receive the written records (following the usual teaching by oral tradition). They were undoubtedly helpful in helping newer churches determine the true God-inspired viability of these Scriptures.

Thus, over time, as heresies tried to establish themselves in the church, there began to emerge a body of books that became recognized as a “new” testament of God’s work and words to the world. All these works had in common an identity as having come from genuine apostolic origins as well as an undeniable compatibility with the traditions of the Old Testament — something easily seen as we consider the NT authors:

Matthew	a disciple of Christ
Mark	from Peter, a disciple of Christ
Luke (Luke, Acts)	from Paul, an apostle of Christ, plus eyewitnesses
John (John, 1-3 John, Rev.)	a disciple of Christ
Paul (Romans-Philemon)	an apostle of Christ
Hebrews	an apostle of Christ known to the original audience
James	an apostle, brother of Christ, witness of his resurrection, leader of the Jerusalem church
Peter (1-2 Peter)	a disciple of Christ
Jude	an apostle, brother of Christ

Remember these verses, occurring immediately after the Lord’s return to heaven? ***Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where [all the remaining disciples] were staying. . . . They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers*** — Acts 1:12-14. It is very probable that James and Jude were some of the “brothers” that Luke was referring to. And Paul also tells in I Corinthians 15 that, following

Christ's resurrection, ***He appeared to Cephas (Peter), and then to the Twelve. 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. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also — Paul, I Corinthians 15:5-8a.***

Many of the books we view as a valid part of the New Testament quickly became viewed as divinely inspired. Clement of Rome quoted from Christ's Sermon on the Mount (AD 96) and treated it as Scripture. By 110 AD, Ignacio of Antioch, a disciple of the apostle John, maintained that the gospel materials were Scripture. By 180 AD, scholars believe that an early church apologist named Irenaeus used possibly as many as 22 of the 27 books of the New Testament we have today. By the year 200 AD, it is the considered opinion of many that the essential collection of books we know today as the New Testament had become established and viewed in that context. By the fourth century AD, a church historian named Eusebius of Caesarea would name all 27 books that are commonly accepted as NT canon today.

[FYI: The earliest complete scriptures we have are two complete copies from the middle of the fourth century AD — 335-350 AD to be precise.]

APPLICATION

So, why is it important that the Bible is true? Well, if you analyze human beings, there seem to be four (4) questions that dominate their thinking:

- 1) Why am I here (what is the purpose of my life)?
- 2) What is there to look forward to (what is the outcome of my life)?
- 3) How can I know lasting happiness (what is the joy of my life)?
- 4) Am I loved (what is the significance of my life)?

The Bible answers all of those questions — answers that we are called to communicate to all those around us:

- 1) Why am I here? I am here because God wants me here — I was created for God's purpose, I was designed for God's purpose, I was given mission for God's purpose:
 - a) ***[Y]ou, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand — Isaiah 64:8.***
 - b) ***[W]e are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do — Paul, Ephesians 2:10.***
- 2) What is there to look forward to? Is this life all there is? You're born, you live, you die? What else is there? Well, how about an eternity in the presence of God in heaven — living, learning, laughing and loving with no end in sight in the company of Jesus Himself:
 - a) ***My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am — Jesus Christ, John 14:2-3.***
 - b) ***Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" — Revelation 21:1-5a.***

- 3) How can I know lasting happiness? Answer: Know God through His Son Jesus Christ, and you will enter a life of incredible happiness:
- a) *I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure . . . You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand — David, Psalm 16:7-9, 11.*
 - b) *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” — Jesus Christ, John 10:10b.*
- 4) Am I loved? Are you loved? Beyond a shadow of a doubt, you are loved — completely, unconditionally, eternally.
- a) *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” — God speaking, Jeremiah 31:3b.*
 - b) *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him” — Jesus Christ, John 3:16-17.* And Paul reminds us in Romans that nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever separate us from that love that is found in our wonderful Lord.

That is the message we are called to pour into the world in which God has brought us: that YES, you have a purpose — but that purpose can only be found in God through Jesus Christ; YES, there is an entire eternity to look forward, but that eternity can only be found in God through Jesus Christ; and most emphatically, you are loved, and never shown more clearly than when, on behalf of relationship with God, His Son Jesus Christ came to this world to take all our sins upon His perfect self, sacrificing His life for us, so that we could substitute our lives with His; as Paul declared with such assurance: *But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners (while we were God’s enemies — Paul, Romans 5:10a), Christ died for us — Paul, Romans 5:8.* And the apostle John echoed that incredible declaration, telling his readers: *This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins — I John 4:9-10.*

All those things we can trust because the God of the Bible declared it. He kept His word alive over the centuries so that we would always have access to knowing His truth, His commands, His desires, His plans, and His incredible love for us. And we are a part of that story. We often talk about how God’s wonderful prophecies came true — as a proof of the truth of His words. Well, how about the wonders that God has shown in my life, in your life, that just as much declares the truth of His words. That’s why God has shown all of those things to us — not just so we can quote somebody a verse, but that we can simultaneously show somebody a life that declares, “I know God’s words are true because I’ve seen their truth happen in me. Let me tell you what I’ve seen; let me tell you what I’ve experienced.” God’s truth is why we praise. God’s truth is why we evangelize. God’s truth is why we obey. God’s truth is why we pray. God’s truth is why we are forgiven. Better words were never written than these from the apostle John: *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know — I John 5:13.* We “know” God. That’s why we are who we are, and why we do what we do. God said it; that settles it. Praise God for His truth. What an amazing God we serve. Let’s pray!