

II. The Authoritative Bible – You CAN trust the Bible!

OK so science may not have disproved the Bible, and may not even contradict it as the two speak to different aspects of our understanding but some argue we shouldn't take it literally – some things are wrong so just take the good bits don't follow it literally. Others say it's "culturally regressive" etc. So how can we trust the Bible both as truth and able to speak to our culture, and what does that mean for us personally?

Listen to this excellent talk from Timothy Keller, author of the source materials for this series. <http://tinyurl.com/gsg385f>



Be assured, you can trust it in 3 ways:

A Historically

B Culturally

C Personally

Luke 1:1-4 & 24:13-34

A You Can Trust the Bible Historically

Many people say these accounts were concocted by the "Political winners" the original Jesus, yes but who knows what he was like, those who came along added what they needed. Essentially that the Gospels are Legends written much later and so cannot be trusted as true and authoritative accounts. But there are several reasons why you can trust what the Bible says about Jesus, here's three:

1, The NT are written too early to be legends – Luke wrote "I have investigated and checked with eye-witnesses"

St Paul's letters were written 15-20 years after Jesus. In 1 Cor 15 Paul says that many people saw Jesus appear after his death, at one point 500 – and said "most of them are still alive and you can go talk to them". A public document that states such things must be able to stand the test it suggests.

In Phil 2 – Paul quotes a Hymn of praise to Jesus' divinity that is Jesus claim to be God, which was written during or shortly after his life. The Christians worshiped Jesus as God, witnessing his resurrection as it happened so we see they worshipped him as God from the beginning, not many years after following some re-writing of history.

The Da Vinci Code depicts Constantine as repressing all the truth about Jesus in favour of some more amazing myths – but the gospels were written far earlier than his time.

One Historian read the Da Vinci Code and said it wasn't Constantine's re-working of the Gospels that won Rome, the church had won the competition against Rome when it was still under persecution! Furthermore if you really wanted to be cynical you'd say that Constantine chose Christianity and backed it because it was ALREADY a winner and one he could use for his own advantage.

He might have got away with it had the Gospels had been written 200 years after Jesus, NOT right after when witnesses were still around.

2, The documents are too counterproductive in their content to be legends. If the documents only contain what the church want you to believe then why leave in such things as Jesus asking the Father for a “get out” in the Garden? Or Jesus on the cross saying “You’ve forsaken me”? OR that all the original resurrection witnesses were women when their testimony was not admissible as evidence?

AND the early leaders were apostles –who look like cowards, foolish even in the early days. Why would you include them – simply because that’s how it really was.

3, The documents are too detailed in their form.

Legends, ancient fiction etc had very little detail, not like modern fiction – novels which have a detailed narrative. Epics and myths do not start with “I checked with eyewitnesses”! CS Lewis says the gospels are nothing like the poems, myths, legends etc he knows and studied all his life. He continues: either they are reportage or some ancient writer or collection of writers suddenly and independently without any precursor in literature invented the whole technique of modern realistic narrative, and which wasn’t seen again for centuries.

So You CAN trust New Testament, but what about the Old Testament – can you trust it historically? Well what did Jesus say about the OT? He held it as not only trustworthy but true and authoritative.

B You Can Trust the Bible Culturally

Some argue that the Bible is primitive and regressive, we’re beyond that and so it means nothing to us today.

Here’s 3 ways to handle “Offensive Texts”:

1, please consider the possibility that it doesn’t teach what you think it teaches.

EG Genesis – spiritual heroes, yet look how they treat women!! Polygamy, Buy and Sell wives, patriarchal institutions etc.

In “The Art of Biblical Narrative” book it is described how there are 2 institutions in the book of Genesis which are universal in ancient culture: polygamy and primogeniture (oldest son). However when you read Genesis you’ll see polygamy wreaks havoc in every generation it is practised! Secondly in the lives of the heroes, every generation always favours the younger son: Abel not Cain, Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau. It’s as if Genesis is subverting those ancient patriarchal institutions rather than supporting and recommending them!

2, Consider the possibility that you are missing what the Bible teaches because of your own cultural “blindness”.

In Luke 24 the road to Emmaus disciples misunderstand the prophecies of the messiah because as Jews they were only thinking about the redemption of Israel (v 20 and 21) not of the whole world. They had their own cultural blindness – that why they couldn’t understand why Jesus did what he did.

For example: slavery. We might think the Bible condones it and that was wrong so who knows where else the Bible is wrong.

Paul says: "Slaves obey your masters". Yet when dealing with Onesimus in Philemon – Paul talks to the servant as if it's "indentured servitude" not 17,18,19th century first world slavery. He goes on to appeal to Philemon to accept Onesimus back into his household, but as a brother in the Lord rather than a slave. In Paul's estimation, Onesimus was far more "useful" (v. 11) now that he was a Christian. Paul even promised to pay whatever debt Onesimus might owe Philemon.

Contrast 1st Century and New World "slaves"

In the 1st century Greco-Roman world:

- a) Slaves were not distinguished by race, speech or clothing.
- b) They were more educated than their owners in many cases and held high management positions.
- c) financially they made the same wages as free labourers. Were able to buy selves out, very few were slaves for life and usually manumitted by late 20s early 30s at latest.

Contrast that with New World slavery:

Slavery is race based, for life, involved kidnapping (condemned in 1 Tim 1:9-11 & Deut). Paul always discouraged slavery but in the 17,18,19th century Christians campaigned for abolition.

So – the Bible did not condone slavery as we know it. But didn't Southern US people (and Europeans) use those scriptures to subjugate slaves – YES but they read them through their cultural blinders and this resulted in illegitimate perversion of scripture.

3, Consider you may be offended by texts because of an unexamined supposition of the superiority of your cultural moment.

Most of us read something and see the problem it causes to our culture, but even in other places today these things are accepted. Meanwhile those things we accept, other cultures today do not.

EG in the west – a Biblical approach to sex is a problem, while forgiveness seems wonderful. In the middle east, what it says about sex is OK, maybe not strict enough! Forgiveness however is crazy! That's the difference between an individualistic guilt culture (West) and a shame and honour culture (East).

Why get rid of the Bible because it offends my sensibilities and culture? Is our culture superior to all others? If the Bible is the revelation of God and hence not the product of or written to appease one culture wouldn't it contradict each different culture at some point and have to offend each somehow? Yes, so isn't that very cultural challenge a reason to say it IS God's word rather than the opposite?

What about your great grand kids, grand kids or even kids – would they find some of your beliefs embarrassing? And what of those of our predecessors - would we find so? Are we so upright, true and constant?

So don't let your range of beliefs sit in judgement of the Bible and miss out on all that a relationship with Jesus can give you just because it offends something that 50 years from now might be a laughing stock

C You can and should trust the Bible personally

It's often thought or said out loud that believing in the Bible literally is a cold, legalistic kind of faith. Well it can be, but a completely authoritative Bible is a pre-requisite for a warm relationship with God, not the enemy of it.

In Luke 24 v 32 The Emmaus disciples look back on all that was said and reflected: "Were not our hearts burning within us when he opened the scriptures to us." "Hearts burning" is to express an uncontrollable desire for someone, they had a whole life changing personal encounter with the Lord. When the scriptures were properly expounded to them, when they were properly explained Jesus leapt right out to them.

In vv 20 and 21 we see their sadness: "but we had hoped.... but we thought." Jesus turns to them and says "How foolish you are and slow to believe all the prophets had spoken you, you misunderstood the scripture, Christ had to suffer then enter his glory".

The in v 27 "and beginning with Moses he explained"... everything in the Bible is about ME!! About Jesus, who he is, what he has done, not about you and what you must do, not about following rules.

There are only 2 ways to read the Bible: as if it's all about you and what YOU must do **OR** about Jesus and what he has done **FOR** you.

Moses – is that about you being faithful and a good leader etc **OR** about the salvation God gives through faith in the blood of a woolly lamb. No – Jesus **IS** the lamb of God for all people and all time.

When the text becomes about Jesus then it gets personal, an encounter with a real person and we sense His presence and he touches our lives.

Moses smiting the rock with his staff, the rod of justice – that's Jesus being smitten by the rod of God's justice so we can have water in this desert. Jesus is the tabernacle in the desert and the temple in the city, the sacrifice, the altar, the light, the bread, the prophet, the priest and the king.

Don't you want to know him?

Inside each of us has in our heart a longing for purpose, infinite love, significance and security that nothing in this world can possibly satisfy. Not until you find him though seeing some particular text is about him and he touches your heart.

Yes it's all about Jesus **AND** also all authoritative. Why – because we don't just have to know it's all about Jesus but have to submit to it too. Relationship is built on conflict and working it through. How does God speak to you and contradict you unless you have a fully authoritative Bible. If not you have a god only of your own making, picking and choosing the things you think he ought to say.

An authoritative and trustworthy Bible is a precondition to a relationship with God. The one with the greatest relationship with God was Jesus and scripture just poured out of him – he bled scripture.