

WHY I AM A CHRISTIAN - Part four - Teaching #'s 1218 & 1219

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WHY I BELIEVE THE BIBLE ALONE IS THE WORD OF GOD

Mark 7:1-13 - "Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, [2] they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. [3] (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, [4] and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) [5] And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" [6] And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; [7] in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' [8] You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men. [9] And he said to them, 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! [10] For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' [11] But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God)— [12] then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, [13] thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

John 17:8 - "For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me."

Suppose for a moment you were an alien from some distant planet. You've been sent to earth with the assignment of finding out if there are any genuinely inspired sacred writings here on earth. You've also been given the assignment of **sorting out** writings that **are** genuinely inspired from those which are merely **said** to be inspired, because all sorts of religions **claim** to have inspired books. So you have been given the assignment of sorting out writings that are truly **from** God from those that are merely revered and honored and **used** as sacred writings by groups of people.

How would you go about that task? There's a good question to scramble our foggy minds first thing Sunday morning! You could go to the religions of the world and **ask** if their book or books were inspired. But they would almost all say **"Yes!"** That's what **we** say. As Christians, we **say** we believe the Bible is the Word of God. We **believe** the Bible to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and absolutely dependable and true and trustworthy. But **how do we know this to be the case?** Let's face it - **everything** hinges on this issue. If the Bible **isn't** true, we have no special claim to divine truth, or truth at all, for that matter.

I **do** believe that the Bible is God's Word. I believe the **whole** Bible is God's Word. I believe that the very **words** of the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit. And I **do** believe that the Scriptures we received from God are free from error.

But beyond even this, I believe the Bible **alone** is God's Word. It is **uniquely** God's Word. That doesn't mean I believe that all other religious books and texts are wicked or have nothing good in them. But the Bible **alone** is **God's Word**. It is His final revelation of truth to mankind. Nothing can be taken **from** it, and nothing can be added **to** it.

Most of us would hold a similar view to what I've just spoken - at least I would hope so. The real question is this: **If this is my view of Scripture, how did I get it? Where is the proof for these very sweeping statements of confidence?**

I want to try to show you why **I** hold these convictions about the Scriptures.

And just in case I don't make my case as clearly as I would like, let me sum up the three basic steps I follow to arrive at the conclusions I've just stated. For me there are only **three steps**. They are not complicated. But, to my mind, their conclusion is simply irresistible:

- a) **The New Testament documents are historically reliable by any unbiased measuring stick and communicate accurate, factual accounts in what they record.**
- b) **These New Testament documents clearly teach that Jesus Christ is the long awaited Messiah, the second**

member of the Trinity, fully divine, God the Son.

- c) ***Jesus, being the fully divine Son of God, taught the Scriptures were God's Word, and furthermore, distinguished them from religious writings that were only human in their origin.***

That completes the logical process for me. We're going to work through those three steps in this teaching. But let me say right up front that you only need to establish these **three** facts. You don't need to establish **ten** or **twenty** arguments. If these **three** points of my argument are established, the Bible **is** the **only** Word of God for mankind.

- 1) **THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS ARE HISTORICALLY RELIABLE BY ANY UNBIASED MEASURING STICK AND COMMUNICATE ACCURATE, FACTUAL ACCOUNTS IN WHAT THEY RECORD**

How are we to **measure** the reliability of the New Testament? What are the standards used to measure such ancient documents? It's one thing for me to say I am "**blessed**" by what my New Testament says, or that I really "**feel inspired**" when I read the Sermon on the Mount.

But that's not the issue here. We're not studying how the New Testament makes us **feel** when we read it. We are talking about how we know what it says is **true**, even if no one ever **reads** it.

There are primarily three measuring sticks that are used to ascertain the reliability of ancient documents. These are not **religious** tests. And they are not reserved for **religious** documents. These are some of the primary tests used in historical research for the authenticity of **all** ancient manuscripts.

- a) ***The original documents were written by people who would have been in a position to know their subject, and were written early enough that there would be witnesses who could verify or deny the accuracy of their accounts.***

In this area the New Testament stacks up very well against any other documents from the ancient world. There is very good evidence for placing the authorship of the New Testament very shortly after the actual life and teaching of Jesus Christ. In other words, the **internal evidence** of the manuscripts of the New Testament argues clearly for an **early** writing. Let me just give you some (though certainly not all) of the evidence used:

One very important clue comes from the book of Acts. The book of Acts is important both for what it **includes** and what it **omits**. For example, it tells with fair detail the accounts of the death of **Stephen (7:54-60)**, and briefly mentions the death of the **Apostle James (12:1-2)**.

While very Godly, neither of these men are major players in the account of the early church Luke gives in the book of Acts. Most of the book actually centers around the ministries of the Apostle **Peter**, and even more so of the Apostle **Paul**. And yet the book says absolutely **nothing** about the end of either of these men's lives **which plain bare history says took place in the early 60 A.D. 's**.

Also, a great deal of the action of the book of Acts centers around the city of Jerusalem. Yet the book says absolutely **nothing** about the siege and collapse of this city **under the Romans in 70 A.D.**

Now surely the death of the two leading Apostles and the collapse of the central city of Jerusalem are events that simply dwarf many other events Luke **does** record. So here's the fifty dollar question: **Why does Luke not record any of these events?** I think you can probably guess the answer. He doesn't record them because **none of them had occurred as of the time of his writing.**

Consider the significance of this fact. Luke gave us his account of the early church **before** the leading apostles - the key players in the account - were even off the scene. They could **verify** what Luke had written. If Luke were lying or imagining anything, or simply mistaken on some point, there were people - **lots** of people - who would blow the whistle on him.

But the argument goes even further. Remember, almost all critics, even those hostile to the Christian faith, admit that Luke wrote his gospel **before** he wrote the book of Acts. And it is almost universally acknowledged, again, even by hostile critics, that Matthew and Mark were written **before** the gospel of

Luke.

And when you consider that Jesus was crucified around **33 A.D.** (some quibble about those dates by a few years either way), the gap between the **accounts** of those events and the **events themselves** narrows even further.

All of this has stunning significance for reinforcing our confidence in the trustworthiness of the Scriptures. The shorter the time span between the **event** and the **account**, the greater the probability of accuracy.

For example, if I told you that Alexander the Great died in Athens rather than Egypt not too many would jump to their feet to debate the point. Even if I didn't know what I was talking about, I'm still pretty safe in my statement because most of you, without googling it, don't know either.

But if I got up some Sunday morning that just happened to be **November 22nd** and said, "This morning we're all going to pause just for a minute and contemplate the anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Winnipeg," or if I said we were going to have a moments silence in honor of those who lost their lives in the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on this second day of November, most of you would immediately know I was historically out to lunch.

And the reason for your certainty would be obvious. Many of you **remember** when John Kennedy was assassinated. You were alive. You remember where you were when you heard the news. You watched the funeral on television. You saw Walter Cronkite cry as he announced Kennedy's death. And most of you remember that September 11th morning when we were all stunned by the attack of the terrorists.

But there's a **reason** I specifically mentioned the assassination of President J.F. Kennedy. The time gap between Kennedy's death and today is **longer** than the 30 or 35 years that transpired between the events of Jesus Christ and their first account in written form. And, as with the Kennedy illustration, an early date for authorship puts verification of the account into the hands of multitudes of people.

b) ***Historians set great value on the number of manuscript copies that are in existence and the time gap between the copies we have and the original author's document.***

i) Let me deal first with the **time gap** between the original document and the copy. Because most research in ancient documents is done from copies, the earlier the copy the better the chance of accuracy.

Imagine taking all the people in this sanctuary and placing them in a huge circle in the parking lot. Then, one person speaks a single sentence into the ear of the person on his immediate left, ***"Turtles, as one will discover in this giant metaphor called life, seek to find solace in watching stampedes."***

That's quite a sentence. Then the second person whispers that same sentence, in **exactly** the same words, to the person on **her** left, and so on, and so on, all the way around the whole circle - **one thousand people** - some young, some old, some bright, some...., well, you get the idea.

Now we conduct the very same experiment, using the very same sentence. The only difference is, instead of the whole church in a circle, we've cut the circle down to **three** people. The same sentence is passed around.

Here's the question. In which circle do you think there is the greatest opportunity to have the sentence return to the original speaker, unaltered by the passing of time and retelling?

The answer is obvious. The fewer people in the circle, the greater the chance of accuracy. This is how it works with ancient manuscripts. The fewer the years between the original and the copies (just like the fewer the people in the circle) the greater the chance of accuracy.

In terms of ancient manuscripts, a gap of 500 years is considered very good. For example, many

of you will study the writings of Plato in university or college. Many will study the writings of Aristotle. And no one seriously challenges the authenticity of these writings. Yet, between the original documents and the earliest copies (because copies are all we have to work from - there simply are **no** original documents), there is a gap of at least **1400 years!**

This is not at all uncommon with ancient manuscripts. But we have almost the entire New Testament in copies dating little more than **120 years** after the original autographs. This is like working with a circle of three rather than a circle of a thousand in transcribing truth.

- ii) Next, let me quickly deal with the **number of manuscript copies** we have to work with when dealing with the New Testament. Here too, the New Testament stacks up far better than almost any other ancient document.

Most ancient works are considered very well represented historically if they have up to **ten** manuscript copies. You will read and study very few classical works with more than ten manuscript copies in existence.

Now consider the New Testament. Here is an uncontested fact. In terms of manuscript evidence, the New Testament is the **single best attested ancient historic work on planet earth**. I don't mean best attested by **Christians** or even **religious people**. I mean the best attested document by simple evidence. Period. There are, thus far, over **five thousand** partial and complete ancient New Testament manuscripts in existence today.

Simply put, there is no ancient historical work with more **early**, more **complete**, and more **numerous** textual evidence going for it than the New Testament you bring to church with you on Sunday morning.

No wonder **John A.T. Robinson**, himself a rather liberal critic of much of what we would hold dear in our evangelical faith, nonetheless still admits: ***"The wealth of manuscripts, and above all the narrow time interval between the original writing and the earliest copies make the New Testament by far the best attested text of any ancient writing in the entire world."***

Can you imagine Christians **not** taking time each day to carefully study such a wonderful, blessed resource?

- c) ***Historians set great value on the verification of historical works when they receive supporting evidence from outside documents and archeological evidence.***

In other words, the confidence we have in any ancient document goes up proportionately as it is corroborated by **other** evidence. We don't have the time to go into this in today's teaching other than to say the following:

With regard to **outside ancient documents** verifying the New Testament, the evidence is overwhelmingly on the side of New Testament reliability. We have corroborating testimony from many historical works of the ancient world. People like Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Bishop Polycarp write from ten to twenty years after the writing of the New Testament and record many of the same persons and details the New Testament authors record.

Archeological evidence continues to mount on the side of the New Testament's reliability. Places like the **poools at Siloam and Bethesda** (regarded at one time as never having existed) have been discovered. The foundation of **Herod's Temple**, the location of **Pilate's Praetorium** are important discoveries. Writings have been discovered in Latin, bearing the inscription "Titulus Venetus," illuminating details of **Augustus' census** (Remember? **"There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed"**).

Here's the reason I've taken all this time (perhaps too much time?) Going over things you don't normally hear from the pulpit during a Sunday morning sermon. I'm putting together the **three steps** in my

argument for *why I believe the Bible alone is the Word of God.*

The first step takes the most time, but is in many ways the most important. The first step is this: ***The New Testament documents are historically reliable by any measuring stick and communicate accurate, factual accounts in what they record.*** This is the foundation upon which the other two points rest:

2) **THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS CLEARLY TEACH THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE LONG AWAITED MESSIAH, THE SECOND MEMBER OF THE TRINITY, FULLY DIVINE, GOD THE SON.**

I hope you're still with me. Once the accuracy of the New Testament is established certain facts come flooding through its pages that have to be reckoned with. Here's the most important fact: ***The New Testament will allow only one interpretation of Jesus' Person: He was the second person of the Trinity, God the Son:***

- a) He called Himself the Son of God (many times, in all four Gospels). And remember, being a Jew, Jesus was a strict ***monotheist***. So He clearly ***wasn't*** claiming to be ***a*** God, or ***another*** God. He was not some Hindu Avatar. He was claiming to be eternally God Almighty.
- b) He challenged His critics with His absolute sinlessness - **John 8:46** - "**Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?**"
- c) He forgave the sins of others - **Mark 2:5-11** - "**And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.'** [6] Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, [7] "**Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?**" [8] And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "**Why do you question these things in your hearts? [9] Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? [10] But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins**"—he said to the paralytic— [11] "**I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.**"

The scribes were right in their indignation at one point. It's true that no one but ***God*** can forgive sins. I can forgive you for sins you commit against ***me***. But only God can forgive you for sins you commit against ***others***. And that's exactly what Jesus did for this man.

- d) He performed miracles, and even raised the dead. Then He rose from the dead Himself.
- e) He accepted the title "**My Lord and my God**" and accepted worship from others - **John 20:28** - "**Thomas answered him [Jesus], 'My Lord and my God!'**"
- f) He uttered the sacred divine name, "**I AM**" as His own name - **John 8:56-59** - "**Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.**" [57] So the Jews said to him, "**You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?**" [58] Jesus said to them, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.**" [59] So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."

They weren't gathering stones just because Jesus ticked them off. They were gathering stones because they felt the need to stone Jesus because of His blasphemy in attributing deity to Himself.

- g) He claimed He alone could give eternal life - **John 5:39-40** - "**You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, [40] yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.**"
- h) He knew people's thoughts and future events, not occasionally, but perfectly - **Luke 24:1-7** - "**But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. [2] And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, [3] but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. [4] While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. [5] And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? [6] He is not here, but has risen.**"

Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, [7] that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

- i) He claimed authority to fulfill and change Mosaic Law - **Matthew 19:3-9** - "And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" [4] He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." [7] They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" [8] He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. [9] And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."
- j) He said He would personally come and judge the whole world - **Matthew 25:31-33** - "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. [32] Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left."
- k) He said people would be eternally judged by how they treated Him - **Matthew 25:31-40** - "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. [32] Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. [34] Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' [40] And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"

Here's my point: It is simply intellectually dishonest to treat the New Testament as though it merely presented Jesus as a good moral teacher. That is plain nonsense. The people who crucified Jesus for blasphemy were at least **closer** to the teaching of the Christian truth than those who simply admire Him as a great moral teacher and prophet.

All of this brings us to the third and final point in the argument - ***"Why I believe the Bible alone is the Word of God:***

- 3) **JESUS, BEING THE FULLY DIVINE SON OF GOD, TAUGHT THAT THE SCRIPTURES WERE GOD'S WORD, AND FURTHERMORE, DISTINGUISHED THEM FROM RELIGIOUS WRITINGS THAT WERE ONLY HUMAN IN THEIR ORIGIN.**

If Jesus is God, then His assessment of the Bible is absolutely infallible. And Jesus clearly calls the Scriptures ***"...the word of God..."*** (Mark 7:13). This is where both of our opening texts are striking when they are thought through:

- a) ***In John 17:8 Jesus said the very words He spoke (not just the concepts or thoughts, but the very words He spoke came from God Himself - "For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.***

- b) ***In Mark 7:1-13, not only does Jesus call the Scriptures God's word, He separates them from the religious words and traditions of man - Mark 7:8 and 13 - "You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.... 7:13....thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."***

Remember, if Jesus is God, His words **must** be given due weight. And Jesus said two very important things in these verses:

- i) He said the Scriptures were **"God's words."** That's obvious enough. But there's something even more important:
- ii) Jesus said (remember, **God Himself** says) that all other religious traditions and sayings are only the **words of men**. And He chides these religious leaders for ever putting them on the same level with the Scriptures.

So the answer (the **only** answer) to the person who says, **"What makes you Christians think your religion is better than anyone else's?"** is this: **"I'm not saying I'm a better person than you. I'm not saying everything you believe is worthless. But if you're asking me, as a Christian, 'Who says my religion is true, and only my religion is to be received as revelation from God,' the answer is God Himself says so. And I have to accept His verdict."**

What a wonderful foundation of truth upon which to establish your life!