

How Could I Know the Bible Is True?

“Sanctify [set them apart] through thy truth; thy word is truth.” (John 17:17)

I was stunned when I received that phone call. At 28 years of age, I had become the youth pastor of a church in South Carolina. And I realized fairly quickly that we had a problem in our church. One of our men was carrying on an adulterous affair with a woman from another Gospel-preaching church in the area. In obedience to Scripture, our pastor led us to carry out the command of Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:15-17. After repeated appeals to the man to repent, we placed him under what is commonly called, “church discipline.” The other church carried through on a similar approach to the woman. Unfortunately, people in churches all over town were talking about this case constantly. And then I received a phone call from the woman. She asked to talk and I agreed to talk over the phone. She began by telling me that she was very upset with what people all over town were saying about her. I asked what they were saying about her. She said, “All these people are saying that I am committing adultery with this man.”

“Well, are you committing adultery with this man?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said, “but I wish that people would stop talking about it.”

I suggested, “If you want people to stop talking about it, why not end the affair?”

She said, “I can’t. I love this man.”

Now I would like to ask you: what would you say to such a woman? How would you use Scripture to appeal to her? This adulterous affair was destroying two families. We had met with both grieving spouses, and our hearts ached for the children. What would you say to that woman? In this message, I’ll tell you what happened. In today’s message, we want to try to answer this question for anyone who sincerely seeks the answer: How could I know the Bible is true?

What Is Truth?

In one of the most remarkable confrontations in human history, the politician’s question was this: what is truth? Though they were all looking forward to a holiday – the Feast of Passover – the Jewish leaders had angrily interrupted Pilate’s leisure. They demanded that the Roman ruler put Jesus to death. So Pilate reluctantly questioned Jesus Christ. Under examination, Jesus said, “. . . I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” To this, Pontius Pilate responded, “What is truth?” Pilate’s response was not that of a sincere inquirer; it was the question of a perturbed agnostic. He questioned the possibility of knowing the truth in any absolute sense.

Defined: Truth

If we are going to answer the question in the title of this message, then we have to define “true.” Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines “true” as “being in accordance with the actual state of affairs.”ⁱ This means “truth” conforms to facts or reality. In his *Basic Theology*, Charles Ryrie defined truth as meaning ‘agreement to that which is represented’ . . . and includes the ideas of veracity, faithfulness and consistency. Therefore, to say that God is true is to say that ‘He is consistent with Himself, that He is all that He should be, and that He has revealed Himself as He really is, and that He and His revelation are completely reliable.’ⁱⁱ

Truth Desired? Or Truth Denied?

Now I have no desire to “beg the question” (to assume the point or conclusion), so let’s point out the obvious. There is a wide disagreement about facts and reality, so there is a strong dissension about the “veracity, faithfulness and consistency.” Read any balanced website, such as realclearpolitics.com and watch conservative and liberal journalists interpret the same information. You can see the disagreement over the same “facts.”

But this is why the message is entitled, “How Could I Know the Bible Is True?” In other words, how could you find out? Jesus declared that He had come into the world to bear witness to the truth, and that those who were of the truth would listen to Him. But Pilate scornfully retorted, “What is truth?” So here is an important question that must be addressed. Will you investigate the reality of what Jesus proclaimed, or hold to the skepticism of Pilate? You are making a choice.

Consider the words of an avowed atheist who grew up in a Christian home. In his book, “The Antichrist,” Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, “Must I add that, in the whole New Testament, there appears but a *solitary* figure worthy of honour? . . . The noble scorn of a Roman [Pilate], before whom the word “truth” was shamelessly mishandled, enriched the New Testament with the only saying *that has any value*—and that is at once its criticism and its *destruction*: “What is truth?...”ⁱⁱⁱ Now bear in mind that Nietzsche had written, “*What follows, then?* That one had better put on gloves before reading the New Testament. The presence of so much filth makes it very advisable.”^{iv} Nietzsche urged you to honor Pilate, not Jesus. He denounced the Scripture as filth, unfit for faith. Nietzsche’s father and grandfathers were Lutheran pastors. He adored “. . .the ‘wisdom of this world,’ which an impudent wind-bag tries to dispose of “by the foolishness of preaching.”^v (His reference to “the foolishness of preaching” is found in the letter of the Apostle Paul to Corinth, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 21.) He equates “the wisdom of this world” with “science.”^{vi} Nietzsche insisted that “science makes men godlike.”^{vii} He wrote these words just before he experienced a complete mental breakdown.

So, you see, the world is not without its skeptics. The atheist Nietzsche, who declared that “God is dead”^{viii} declared that Jesus Christ “shamelessly mishandled” truth. But Jesus declared Himself to be “The way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). You are confronted with a choice. Which one will you trust as authoritative?

One author wrote, “The theme of truth is a foundational idea in [the Gospel of] John. For Jesus and for John truth is not merely some intellectual concept of correct facticity. It also involves life-oriented integrity. Jesus’ mission was to integrate truth into life. That is the reason the text here defines people who are of truth as those who hear the voice of Jesus.”^{ix} The author highlighted the life-changing nature of God’s truth. This is what Jesus prayed: “Set them apart through Thy Truth; Thy Word is Truth.”

Recently, Vice-President Mike Pence’s daughter, Charlotte, testified about the very choice we are describing. Brought up by her Christian parents, she turned toward atheistic writers when she went to Oxford in 2015. “While at Oxford, Pence admits that she ‘turned away from God’ and had ‘not wanted anything to do with religion.’”^x Describing her conversion experience, she said, ““During this time abroad, that was really a time in my life when I was given the liberty and the freedom and the space to have doubts, to have questions, to wonder ... if this is something that I believe and to what extent. The biggest realization I had was that Christianity was real and I couldn’t be halfway in. I couldn’t have one foot out the door all the time.”^{xi} Like her, you are making a choice.

How could you know the Bible is true? The Bible offers you many avenues by which to prove its claims to truth. It’s important that you read it for yourself. In today’s message, we will look at two: the conversion of

Saul, the persecutor (who became Paul, the Apostle) and the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies. Let's turn over to Acts chapter 26.

The Remarkable Conversion of Saul, the Persecutor (Acts 26)

King Agrippa (Marcus Julius Agrippa, the great grandson of Herod the Great) and Festus examined Paul at Caesarea (Maritima) about the year 59 or 60. Paul acknowledged that Agrippa was an expert in all the Jewish customs and questions about the Jewish people (Acts 26:3). So Paul made the central point in his message **"And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:"** (v. 6).

To show the transforming power of that promise, Paul described his lifestyle as a persecutor of Christians (vs. 9-11) putting them to death. But his conversion experience on the road to Damascus changed everything (vs. 12-18). He began to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ (vs. 19-22): **"That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles"** (v. 23). How could you know if the Bible is true? Study the conversion of Saul, the persecutor, who became Paul, the Apostle. It was a complete reversal, forsaking all his background, education and social standing. The persecutor of Christians began to preach Christ. Paul's conversion is a well-known, historical fact. As he said to King Agrippa, **"For the king knows of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner"** (v. 26).

During Paul's message, Festus blurted out that Paul was out of his mind – that all his learning had made him crazy (Acts 26:24-25). But Paul countered, **"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."** Let that phrase sink in: "the words of truth." It was the words of God's truth that had changed Paul's heart. Even as an Old Testament scholar (who probably had memorized all of it), Paul would write to the Roman church that he would not have understood lust unless the Law had said, "Do not covet" (Romans 7:7). So how would you use the words of truth with the adulterous woman on the phone?

Using Romans 13, I explained that the 10 Commandments were the illumination of the laws of love. So I asked her to pretend that I were her defense attorney to answer questions from the Lord. She agreed.

I asked, "Do you love God?" She said, "Yes."

"Do you have any other gods before God?"

She said, "No."

"So," I asked, "you do what He says, and not what you wish to do?"

She said, "Wait, maybe I do have gods other than God."

I asked, "Do you take God's name in vain?"

She said, "Well, I curse every once in a while."

"But there's more to this. Don't you claim to be a Christian?" I asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

“And aren’t you taking the name of Christ and dragging it through the mud all over this community by continuing this affair?” I asked.

She said, “Well, when you put it that way, I guess I do take God’s name in vain.”

I pointed out, “By your answers, you have just shown that you do not love God. “What do your parents think about all this?” I asked.

She said, “Oh, they are horrified!”

I asked, “Then are you honoring your father and mother?”

“No,” she affirmed.

“Then, you have just shown that you do not really love your parents.” Next I said, “Ok, let’s talk about this man.”

She said, “You can use all the tricks you want to, but I know that I love this man.”

“Ok,” I said, “if you love this man would you kill him?”

“No” she said firmly.

“If you love this man would you steal from him?” I asked.

“No” she responded with equal firmness.

“If you love this man would you tell lies about him?”

“No,” she agreed.

“If you love this man would you covet what he has and wish you could take it from him?”

“No,” she said.

“Ma’am, I only have one other question for you. If you love this man, would you commit adultery with him?”

She grew silent. For two long minutes, she said nothing, and I frankly thought she had hung up. Finally, she said, “I guess I really don’t love this man.”

I said, “Ma’am, I agree, and what you just experienced is God’s illumination of the laws of love.”

Two weeks later, we received the news that the adulterous affair had broken up. A couple of months later, we received the repentant man back into our fellowship, and that woman was restored to her husband and her congregation. This is just one illustration of the life-changing nature of the words of truth. Study the stories of conversions in the Bible and through Biblical preaching. You will see how you can know that the Bible is true.

In Acts 26, Paul pointed to another important truth claim. You can test these out for yourself to answer the question about the Bible’s truthfulness. Paul asked King Agrippa: “**Do you believe the prophets?**” Paul knew the answer with such certainty that he said, “**I know you believe the prophets**” (v. 27). The apostle had referred to the prophets in verse 22 and the fulfillment of those prophecies in Jesus Christ in verse 23.

The Remarkable Fulfillment of Biblical Prophecies

Knowing that people were hard-hearted, God gave them truth they could test. Here is the way the Lord expressed it in Isaiah 48:3b-5, **“I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I showed *it* thee:”**

These verses answer the question, “How could I know the Bible is true?” Here is the answer: God’s fulfilled prophecies. (See also Isaiah 44:6-8.) If you really want to study this out, look at the way that God has fulfilled His promises: Biblical prophecies. This is the way you could know that the Bible is true.

In 1944, the mathematician and astronomer, Dr. Peter Stoner^{xii} wrote, “Science Speaks.” In his books, he recommended a number of calculations about Biblical prophecies. With his students, he devised a method analyzing the variables and limitations of several Messianic prophecies.

For each prophecy, they tried to make a conservative estimate of the chances of one man fulfilling the prophecy. For instance, using Micah 5:2-4, they studied the chances of one man born in Bethlehem being the prophesied Messiah. To get the calculation right, they had to study the average population of the world (from Micah’s time to the present), and the average population of males born in Bethlehem.

Dr. Stoner’s grandson, Don Stoner, carried the work forward. The text of the book is available online.^{xiii}

In the book, they analyzed the following Messianic prophecies: Micah 5:2-4, Daniel 9:25, Malachi 3:1, Zechariah 9:9, Zechariah 13:6-7, Psalm 22:16, Zechariah 11:12-13, Isaiah 53:7, Psalm 22:18, and Isaiah 53:9.

In the book, you can read their calculations for yourself. The mathematical chances of one man fulfilling all these prophecies is less than 1 in 1,000,000. And these were very conservative estimates. But these are only 10 of the estimated three hundred prophecies about Christ’s first coming. What would be the mathematical chances of one man fulfilling all these prophecies? Astronomical! But that is exactly what God predicted and fulfilled so that you could see His truthfulness. So Paul challenged Agrippa with those prophecies. And this is how you could know that the Bible is true.

Those prophecies told us that God would send His Son into this world to be born in Bethlehem. They told us that He would live a perfect, righteous life. They told us that He would be “wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; And the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5-6). My friend, Jesus Christ died for your sins. He is “the way, the truth, and the life.” And He wants you to know for yourself that the Bible is true. Read it for yourself. Ask the Lord to open your eyes. Let Him show you that it really is true.

ⁱ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/true>

ⁱⁱ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God, and Angels*, vol. 1 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 253. Citing Charles Ryrie "Basic Theology" p.44.

ⁱⁱⁱ F. W. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, (translated by H.L. Mencken, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924 p. 134-135 accessed at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19322/19322-h/19322-h.htm> (To see the influence of Nietzsche on the German Nazis and Italian Fascists, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influence_and_reception_of_Friedrich_Nietzsche . Many of Nietzsche's works were published by his sister after Nietzsche's death. She was a strong supporter of Adolf Hitler. See Brad Smithfield, Friedrich Nietzsche went mad after allegedly seeing a horse being whipped in the Italian city of Turin, *Vintage News*, February 5, 2017 accessed at <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2017/02/05/friedrich-nietzsche-went-mad-after-allegedly-seeing-a-horse-being-whipped-in-the-italian-city-of-turin/> This articles discusses the disagreements about what led to Nietzsche's mental illness and catatonic state.

^{iv} Nietzsche. p. 133

^v *Ibid.* p. 138 He stated that science was the original sin in defiance of "Thou shalt not know" (his misrepresentation of God's commands) (p.138)

^{vi} *Ibid.* p. 136

^{vii} *Ibid.*

^{viii} Friedrich Nietzsche, "God Is Dead" See http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/Death_of_God

^{ix} Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 243.

^x Samuel Smith, Charlotte Pence discusses her battle with atheism and how she solidified faith in Christ, *The Christian Post*, October 18, 2018 accessed at <https://www.christianpost.com/books/charlotte-pence-discusses-her-battle-with-atheism-and-how-she-solidified-faith-in-christ.html>

^{xi} *Ibid.*

^{xii} Dr. Stoner was Chairman of the Departments of Mathematics and Astronomy at Pasadena City College until 1953; Chairman of the science division, Westmont College, 1953-57

^{xiii} Dr. Peter Stoner, "Science Speaks" <http://sciencespeaks.dstoner.net/> See the calculations on pages 58-61