

Can We Really Believe the Bible Today?

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Man on Street Interview

Do we have any full-time missionaries here today? Could you raise your hand?

Actually, every Christ-follower is called to live on mission as a missionary. If a missionary is one who is sent to cross a culture, often learning a new language in order to share the gospel with those far from Christ, then each of us is a missionary.

It's difficult to share our faith with those who think the Bible is a fable, isn't it? Our society has certainly become more secular, and the spiritual landscape is becoming unrecognizable.

In a recent editorial (4/29/19) in USA Today, Oliver Thomas writes, "*Churches will continue hemorrhaging members until we face the truth. Being a faithful Christian does not mean accepting everything the Bible teaches.*" A couple paragraphs later, he makes fun of Christians who say, "*The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it.*"

BTW, Oliver Thomas is a retired Baptist minister.

In an interview with Nicholas Kristof published in the New York Times Easter weekend, Serene Jones, president of Union Theological Seminary, a seminary founded on the "infallible" Word of God, made these startling statements (the link is on Sermon Extras): "*I find the virgin birth a bizarre claim...*" Asked what happens when people die, Jones responded, "*I don't know! There may be something; there may be nothing. My faith is not tied to some divine promise about the afterlife...God is beyond our knowing...I don't worship an all-powerful, all-controlling omnipotent being.*"

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist seminary, offered this insight on "The Briefing" (the link is posted on Sermon Extras): "*Jones rejects the entire edifice of orthodox, biblical Christianity...This is not Christianity. This is a new religion, a new god, formed in an image intended not to offend modern secular sensibilities...indeed, she has denied everything that makes the gospel good*

news...What we see here is a hope to replace biblical Christianity with a new religion without anyone noticing.”

I fear the last verse in the Book of Judges sums up the shift in our society, as promulgated by secular and even spiritual leaders. Listen to Judges 21:25: ***“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”***

As we continue in our “Glad You Asked” series, our question this weekend is, *“Can we really believe the Bible today?”* Here’s the deal. If you believe the Bible is just made up by a bunch of people, you can sit in judgment of it. On the other hand, if the Bible comes from God, we must bow in submission to it.

Write this down: *What you believe about the Bible will determine your beliefs and your behavior.* If you don’t believe the Bible, you will make up your own beliefs and behave however you like! If you believe the Bible to be the inspired, inerrant, infallible and authoritative Word of God, then your beliefs and your behavior will reflect that.

We’re a church that stands on the Bible as the Word of God. Listen to the props the Apostle Paul gave to a church in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: ***“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”*** When we accept the Word as God’s Word, it goes to work in us.

Have you ever wondered why Bible-believing Christians declare God as the Creator, that all of us are sinners, that marriage is between one man and one woman, that Jesus is the only way to Heaven, that He was crucified, raised from the dead, ascended to Heaven and is coming again? How do we know Heaven and Hell are real, that demons and angels exist and life begins at conception? Because that’s what the Bible teaches.

Speaking of life matters, that’s why thousands of people gathered in Times Square last Saturday to proclaim the wonder of what God is doing in the womb as 4D ultrasounds were shown in the state that recently legalized abortion up until birth. Check out this full-page ad that appeared in the New York Times the next day. In bold letters at the top were these words: “SEE FOR YOURSELF.” At the bottom was a picture of a baby from a 4D ultrasound and this was the text: *“This was the*

image some didn't want you to see. Ten fingers. Ten toes. Chubby cheeks. Button nose. Moving. Wiggling. Kicking. Squirming. Unquestionably Alive!"

In other news this week, I'm glad Georgia just passed the fetal heartbeat bill. When Governor Brian Kemp signed the bill amidst threats of lost business in the state, he declared, *"Our job is to do what's right, not what is easy."* In contrast to this, on Monday night, Christine Quinn, who ran for mayor in New York, in an interview on CNN, made this statement: *"When a woman is pregnant, that is not a human being inside of her."*

As a practical way for us to do what's right we support Pregnancy Resources and this weekend we're launching the "Change for Life" project. Please pull off a bottle from the fences in the sanctuary and return it filled with change on Father's Day.

Why do we address the sanctity of life as often as we do? Here's why. Proverbs 31:28 calls us to speak for those who can't speak for themselves since Genesis 1:26 and Psalms 139 declare all life has dignity. Here at Edgewood, the Bible is the basis for our beliefs *and* our behavior. Next weekend we'll examine whether the Book of Genesis is trustworthy.

It's my prayer this series will equip and mobilize us to live on mission so we can take the message of the Bible to those who are trapped in the messes of life!

Here's where we're headed...

- **Proof:** *Why should we believe the Bible?*
- **Purpose:** *What does the Bible say about itself?*
- **Picture:** *How does Jesus view the Bible?*

Let's look first at some proofs for the Bible.

Proof: Why Should We Believe the Bible?

The first doctrine listed on Edgewood's belief statement is the Bible: *"We believe the Bible from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 as the verbally inspired and infallible Word of God."*

There are many reasons to believe the Bible. Here are 10 proofs.

- 1. Unparalleled popularity.** The Bible is the best-selling book of all time. More copies have been printed in more languages and read by more people than any other book in history.
- 2. Worldwide influence.** Entire cultures have been transformed from devil-worship, cannibalism and warfare. Our own country's history and heritage owes much to the Bible. I came across an amazing document dated October 4, 1982 in which Congress declared the Bible as the "Word of God." Here's part of the text: *"The President is authorized and requested to designate 1983 as a national 'Year of the Bible' in recognition of both the formative influence the Bible has been on our Nation, and our national need to study and apply the teaching of the Holy Scriptures."* Sadly, this has been all but erased from Congress and the culture today.
- 3. Manuscript evidence.** While we don't possess the original manuscripts of the Bible, the Jews were extremely careful when they made copies of the Old Testament. Scholars tell us there are over 5,300 complete manuscripts of the New Testament and another 8,000 partial manuscripts that go back within a century of the original writings. In comparison, there are only five manuscripts for anything Aristotle wrote and the first complete copy of Homer's *Odyssey* is dated 2,200 years after it was written.
- 4. Unique awe.** In answering the question, *"How does it appear that the Scriptures are the Word of God?"* the Westminster Shorter Catechism declares: *"...by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God."* A sense of awe is what first hit me when I picked up the Bible and started reading it for the first time as a sophomore in college.
- 5. Unity of message.** The Bible was written in three languages, on three continents, by 40 human authors over the span of 1500 years, using various literary styles and yet contains one overarching theme from Genesis to Revelation: *The glory of God displayed through creation, the fall of mankind, redemption through Christ and final consummation.*
- 6. Fulfilled prophecy.** This was another question that was submitted by the congregation. The fulfillment of literally hundreds of specific prophecies with pinpoint precision is powerful proof for the truthfulness of the Bible.

- 7. Archaeological confirmation.** The Bible is not a storybook, but is really a book of history. We could call it *His-story*. Christianity claims something extraordinary happened in the course of time. For many years people laughed at Christians because the Bible referred to places, people and events that had no basis in recorded history. But now thousands of discoveries have confirmed what we already knew to be true.

Just last month artifacts from one of King Josiah's court officials and his administrative headquarters were discovered. A year ago a ring bearing Pontius Pilate's name was found. The Dead Sea Scrolls, the most important archaeological find of the 20th Century, contain more than 1,400 original documents including the complete scroll of Isaiah and fragments from every other Old Testament book with the exception of Esther. The text of these scrolls hardly differs from the version we have today!

- 8. Scientifically accurate.** Where the Bible speaks about science, it is astonishingly accurate. For instance, the Bible says the earth is a sphere in Isaiah 40:22. This was not discovered until the 15th Century. Job 26:7 says the earth is suspended in space. Sir Isaac Newton discovered this in 1687. Genesis 15:5 says the stars are innumerable.
- 9. Power to change lives.** The Bible has the unique power to change lives because it is alive and active. Hebrews 4:12: ***“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”***
- 10. Bears witness of Christ.** The Bible tells us who we are, where we came from, why we are here and where we're going. All of it points to Jesus Christ. John 5:39 says, ***“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.”***

What you believe about the Bible will determine your beliefs and your behavior.

Purpose: What Does the Bible Say About Itself?

In order to understand the purpose of the Bible, it's important to define some key terms.

1. **Revelation.** God has revealed Himself through *general revelation* by putting His existence on display outwardly through creation and inwardly in our conscience. Romans 1:20 says: ***“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”*** God has also made Himself known through the *special revelation* of the Scriptures and through His Son. One pastor writes, *“In an age of moral and spiritual anarchy, we believe there is a God who has spoken to the human race.”*

2. **Inspiration.** Inspiration has to do with the recording of God’s special revelation. 2 Timothy 3:16: ***“All Scripture is breathed out by God...”*** Here’s a helpful definition: *“God’s superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original manuscripts.”* When we read the Bible, we are hearing the very words of God.

3. **Plenary.** This means every word and every letter, every jot and tittle – ***“All Scripture is breathed out by God...”*** The Bible says what God says. Everything we need to know about Him is in the Bible. Over 5,000 times in the Old Testament, we come across this phrase, ***“Thus says the Lord.”***

 BTW, “jot and tittle” come from Matthew 5:18 in the KJV: ***“For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”*** A jot is the tenth letter in the Hebrew alphabet and the smallest. It was written above the line and looks like an apostrophe and is similar to *iota*, meaning “a very small amount.” A tittle is even smaller than a jot. It’s a simple letter extension, a pen stroke that differentiates one Hebrew letter from another.

4. **Inerrant.** The Scriptures are without error in their original manuscripts. 2 Peter 1:21: ***“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.”***

5. **Infallible.** The Bible is also incapable of error and thus absolutely trustworthy. Proverbs 30:5: ***“Every word of God proves true.”***

6. **Illumination.** The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to understand and apply the Scriptures as seen in Psalm 119:18: ***“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.”*** If revelation is the *disclosure* of truth, illumination is the *discovery* of truth.

7. **Interpretation.** Another word for interpretation is *hermeneutics*. The key is not to read our subjective thoughts into the text, but to discover God’s objective truth *from* the text. The Bible has one interpretation but many applications. I love what is said about some serious Bible students in Acts 17:11. One of our Sunday Growth Groups takes its name from the Bereans: ***“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”*** It’s important to consider the context, understand the genre, allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, define key words, and take the plain meaning as we seek to discover more about the glory of God.

8. **Authoritative.** Simply put, the Bible is binding on us. Since God has spoken in His Word, we must submit to His ways. Psalm 119:89 says, ***“Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.”*** In Deuteronomy 32:47, Moses told the people they were to obey God’s Word and teach it to their children: ***“For it is no empty word for you, but your very life...”***

When challenged by hostile church officials almost a hundred years before the Reformation, John Huss repeatedly answered his opponents with this statement, *“Show me from Scripture and I will repent and recant!”*

The Bible alone became the foundational battle cry of the Reformation. The question is the same in our day, isn’t it? What is the final authority for the Christian? When asked to explain why the Reformation spread throughout Europe, Luther simply said, *“The Word did it all.”*

9. **Sufficient.** The Bible alone is all we need to equip us for a life of faith and service. Psalm 19:7: ***“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”***

2 Timothy 3:16: ***“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”***

The word “*profitable*” means beneficial. Notice the four ways the Bible is beneficial in our lives:

- **Teaching** provides content so we know what *is right*.
- **Reproof** brings conviction so we know what *is not right*.
- Then, we’re **corrected** so we know how to *get right*.
- And **training** changes our character so we can *stay right*.

2 Timothy 3:17 tells us when we allow the Word to do its work, we will be equipped and outfitted for effective ministry: “***That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.***” There’s nothing more needed. The word “*equipped*” has the idea of being fully furnished.

I like what Elizabeth Elliot once said: “*The Word of God I think of as a straight edge, which shows up our own crookedness. We can’t really tell how crooked our thinking is until we line it up with the straight edge of Scripture.*”

10. **Complete.** Revelation 22:18-19 gives a strong warning about deleting or adding anything to the Bible: “***I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.***”

In order to illustrate why it is so important to understand the purpose of the Bible, let’s go back to the editorial by Oliver Thomas since he’s calling the church to change its view on homosexuality. Listen carefully to the following two sentences because he is making a claim to new revelation that trumps what the Bible says: “*The church is killing itself. A great revelation has occurred that is bringing joy and happiness to millions, but is being met with resistance and retrenchment from many of my colleagues inside the church.*” Did you catch the language? He’s telling us a ‘great revelation’ has now come and we better take heed of it.

Another example is a bit more personal. A while ago I was praying with a few ministry leaders and I heard someone pray these words, “*God give us some new revelation...*” Actually, we have all the revelation we need! That means the *Koran* and the *Book of Mormon* are not on the same level as Scripture.

I want to address another question that came in related to this topic:

Q: *What's the Apocrypha? Why is it in Catholic Bibles but not included in our Bibles?*

Roman Catholic Bibles have several more books in the Old Testament than Protestant Bibles. These 12 books, written primarily in the time between the testaments, are referred to as the Apocrypha, which means, "hidden." There are also additions to Esther and Daniel.

Here are a few helpful points to keep in mind:

- The nation of Israel treated the Apocrypha with respect, but never as true books of the Hebrew Bible.
- While the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament hundreds of times, it never quotes from any of the Apocryphal books.
- There are many proven errors and contradictions in the Apocrypha.
- The Roman Catholic Church didn't officially add these books until the Council of Trent in the mid 1500's, primarily in response to the Protestant Reformation.
- Some Roman Catholic doctrine like praying for the dead, petitioning "saints" in Heaven for their prayers, worshipping angels, and the giving of alms to atone for sins comes from these books.

We declare Scripture alone (or as the Reformers would say, *Sola Scriptura*) is our highest and final authority, not extra books, tradition, our politically correct culture, our feelings, our political party, the church, the Pope or the Supreme Court. Only the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the basis of our faith.

If you think things are bad in our culture today, you better buckle up because it will get worse and become more and more difficult for Christians to believe the Bible and say, "*Here I stand. I can do no other.*" That doesn't mean we clobber sinners but it most certainly means we don't cave on the Scriptures. John 1:14 reminds us Jesus was filled with grace and truth. A Christian response is always filled with truth about sin *and* grace toward sinners.

Let's determine to live out what we know to be true – regardless of the cost, no matter the pain, without regard for the consequences.

What you believe about the Bible will determine your beliefs and your behavior.

Actually, the Bible can stand on it's own. When Charles Spurgeon was asked to defend the Bible, he replied, *"The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself."*

We've looked at 10 proofs for the Bible and 10 purposes of the Bible. Now let's consider the picture Jesus paints from one passage.

Picture: How does Jesus view the Bible?

Turn to Luke 4. Jesus is back in his hometown of Nazareth, and true to form we read in verse 16: ***"And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day..."*** Let me make the obvious point synagogue attendance was part of His regular weekly schedule. Because this was His habit, He didn't join a travelling sports team, He didn't get up in the morning and wonder if He should go, or allow anything else to get in the way of going, or not go if He was tired, or stay home because He didn't like something in the service. It was His custom to go, no matter what. I love seeing how so many of you have made a commitment to gather with God's people each week. May your tribe increase!

BTW, Pastor Kyle and the students sure did a great job helping us see what a big deal it is to gather with God's people.

This passage gives us four ways to become more emboldened about the Bible.

1. Read the Word. Jesus was the guest reader and preacher that day so He stood up to read. Let's do that now as a sign of respect and reverence for God's Word as I read verses 17-19: ***"And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'"***

Jesus was very familiar with Scripture. Notice He was able to "find the place" for the reading. Later in this passage Jesus retells two stories from the Old Testament

as part of His sermon. Jesus assumes believers will know the Bible and be reading it regularly. On several occasions, He said things like, ***“Have you not read?”***

How are you doing at reading the Bible? Lifeway just released a study in response to the question, *“How much of the Bible have you personally read?”* More than half have read little or none of it and only 20% have read the Bible at least once. We publish a Bible reading plan each month to help encourage regular reading.

Another question came in related to the Bible that I’ll answer briefly:

Q: *What version is the best?*

There are three main categories of Bibles available today:

- **Formal Equivalence** (word-for-word). Examples include the *New American Standard*, the *King James Version*, the *New King James Version* and the *English Standard Version*.
- **Dynamic Equivalence** (thought for thought). This would include the *NIV* (1984 version) and the *New Living Translation*.
- **Paraphrases**. Two popular paraphrases are *The Living Bible* and *The Message*.

I have used various versions over the years and most recently have been enjoying the *ESV* for its accuracy and readability.

2. Feed From the Word. After presenting the Word of God, Jesus then preached the Word. It’s important to both read and feed from the Bible. We need interpretation and application if we hope to experience transformation. In His reading, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2. This was a well-known passage everyone believed referred to the mission of the Messiah. Jesus came...

- **To proclaim good news to the poor.**
- **To proclaim liberty to the captives.**
- **To proclaim recovering of sight for the blind.**
- **To set at liberty those who are oppressed.**

Notice what Jesus did in verses 20-21: ***“And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were***

fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"

We must *read* the Word, we must *feed* off the Word, and thirdly, we must *heed* the Word.

3. Heed the Word. Mark Twain, not exactly a die-hard Christian, wrote these words: *"Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me the most are those I do understand."* Showing again how well Jesus knew the Bible, He recounted two examples from the Old Testament to make the point that though His listeners were God's chosen people, they weren't any better than anyone else. Until they recognized they were poor, enslaved, blind and broken, they couldn't be saved. They understood His point and they didn't like it.

The people initially were very excited to hear a message from Jesus. They found comfort in His Words, but as He continued preaching, their comfort turned to conviction, and when that happened, they wanted to get rid of Him.

Their initial amazement turned into intense animosity. They got the message. God will save an outcast Gentile widow and a Syrian leper who admit their spiritual destitution before He'll save the arrogant Israelites. Notice their reaction in verses 28: ***"When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath."*** The word ***"wrath"*** means they were *"breathing hard with indignation."*

Not wanting to hear anymore, verse 29 tells us, ***"And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff."*** As soon as Jesus exposed them for what they were, they rose up to destroy Him.

We do this sometimes don't we? When we don't want to hear the truth, we just turn it off, or stop reading our Bibles, or stop coming to church, or stay away from our Christian friends. We think if we can just get rid of the messenger, then the message won't bother us so much. I love verse 30: ***"But passing through their midst, he went away."*** This shows the amazing power of the written Word and the awesome power of the Living Word of God.

Listen to these words of Jesus in John 8:37: ***"I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you."*** Do

you have room for the Word? Are you reading, feeding, and heeding? If you ever hear yourself say, “*I know what the Bible says, but...*” you should correct yourself immediately, “*I know what the Bible says, **therefore** I will...*”

4. Need the Word. There’s one final point about the picture Jesus is painting. Those crowded into the synagogue that Sabbath were really saying that they didn’t need the Word of God. And because they had no need they didn’t want to read, feed, or heed.

Here are two action steps.

- **Guard against “familiarity fatigue.”** Its way too easy not to take the Bible seriously when you’ve been swimming in it many years. Read it again as if for the first time. Admit you need it. Keep it fresh by not only reading, but also feeding from it and heeding what you read.
- **Repent and receive Jesus before it’s too late.** If you reject Him today you may not get another opportunity. Commentators believe this was the last time Jesus was in Nazareth. Jesus is speaking gracious words now but the next time He comes it will be in judgment. In fact, Jesus left off the second part of Isaiah 61:2: “***To proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God...***” Find His favor now or face the fire of His wrath later.

What you believe about the Bible will determine your beliefs and your behavior.

Many years ago a church was going through a controversy and no one could agree on anything. At a business meeting the various factions were arguing about the minutes of the last meeting. After the pastor stood to read a passage of Scripture, an older man rose to his feet and said, “*Mr. Chairman, I move that the Bible stand accepted as read!*”

All in favor of accepting the Bible as read?

Let’s stand now and declare our acceptance of the Scriptures. The USA Today article made fun of the phrase, “*The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it!*” After posting this on Facebook Friday, Gloria Keeslar, a biblically astute Edgewood member, offered this insight: “*Actually, I don’t even have to believe it*

for it to still be BOTH settled and true...I do believe it but it was settled a very long time ago before I came to believe.” Spot on, sister!

In light of that, let’s change the phrase up a bit: *“The Bible says it. That settles it. I believe it.”*

Let’s end by declaring this truth three times in a row, getting louder each time.

“The Bible says it. That settles it. I believe it!”

“The Bible says it. That settles it. I believe it!”

“The Bible says it. That settles it. I believe it!”

We’ve *gathered*. Hopefully we’ve *grown* and we’ve *given*. Now let’s *go* and live as missionaries on mission!