

February 17, 2019 - 7 Big Q

Is the Bible Reliable?

There are some things in the Bible I don't like. I imagine the same is true for you. There are some things in the Bible we struggle with, aren't there?

So what do we do with those parts of the Bible? You've heard of "cafeteria Christians." Cafeteria Christians just pick and choose what they want, like the Bible is a giant cafeteria or pot-luck where you just pick and choose what you want and leave the rest behind. And if someone tries to put something you don't like on your plate, then what? We might sit and pout - "you can't make me eat that." Or we might turn it up a notch, cover our ears, make ourselves busy - "I don't have to listen to you."

But that doesn't sit well, does it? It doesn't sit well when people do that to us. And when we do that to God, (I pray it's still true) it doesn't sit well with our conscience. So what do we do? Sometimes the skeptic in us wonders and the arguer in us argues: "Interpretations. Different people have different interpretations. You interpret your way; I'll interpret my way." Sometimes the skeptic in us wonders and the arguer in us argues: "Times change. You have to keep up with the times." Sometimes the skeptic in us wonders and the arguer in us argues: "Special case. I'm a special case. My child is a special case; she's so good, he's so good; it must all be good."

Is the arguer in us right? Well, on the one hand, different people do have different interpretations (but that doesn't make them all right, does it?), times do change (for example, we're New Testament Christians, not Old Testament Jews, so there are parts of the Bible written for Old Testament Jews that don't apply to us today. And how do we know that? The Bible tells us so.), and each of us is special. But even though that's all true - that different people have different interpretations, that times change, that each of us is special ... even though that's true, does that mean I get to change the meaning of your words to fit what I want your words to mean? Think about that. Do I get to change the meaning of your words to fit what I want them to mean? Is that ok with you, that I change the meaning of your words? I doubt it. I know I'm not too keen on it when people change the meaning of my

words. So do we get to change the meaning of God's words? With the state of the world out there, with the state of the world in here, do we really think we're smarter than God?

The arguer has an argument for that. The arguer will argue: "This really isn't God's Word." Why? What's the proof? For many people it's this - "What the Bible says doesn't fit what I think God would say. What the Bible says doesn't fit what I want God to say. What the Bible says doesn't fit what I see or think about the world. It doesn't fit what I know about science, history, and archeology; therefore, the Bible must be wrong. Therefore, the Bible must not be from God.

Well, what do we know about science, history, and archeology? They're always changing. I'm not saying that as a knock on them. We want our understanding of science, history, and archeology to change. Better science can mean better medicine. But we need to watch out when we make science, history, and archeology judge over God's word. It wasn't so long ago when the world's most respected Bible experts said that Moses couldn't possibly have written the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). Why? People at the time of Moses didn't know how to write, so Moses couldn't have written, so the Bible must be wrong. That's what the world's foremost Bible experts were saying. So, how many of you have been to the Louvre? There we have a statue of an Egyptian scribe a thousand years before Moses. More and more, archaeology isn't proving the Bible wrong; more and more archeology is finding the Bible to be right. God hasn't left us in the dark with no Bible to trust.

But what about all the mistakes in the Bible? All the different Bible manuscripts? It's true; we don't have the original scrolls, the original books or letters. We have copies. Copies copied by hand for hundreds and thousands of years. What does that mean? Penmanship mistakes. Spelling mistakes - to, too, two; for, fore, four; Addison, Adisson, Adysyn. To, for, Addison - if someone heard the wrong word, spelled the wrong word, do you think you could figure it out? That's what most of the copyist mistakes are like.

Have you ever heard of the Wicked Bible? Back in 1631, the royal printers in London left the word “not” out of the 6th Commandment. Instead of “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” you can figure out what that Bible said. Does that mistake mean that we can’t know what the Bible should say? God hasn’t left us in the dark with no Bible to trust.

We don’t have to rely on one scribe. We have tens of thousands of parts and pieces of copies of the New Testament from hundreds and hundreds of years ago from all over the Mediterranean world. Put them together and what do we find out? No reason or proof for different Bible teachings. No reason for different denominations. God hasn’t left us in the dark with no Bible to trust.

What about the Old Testament? The Hebrew Bibles we have go back about 1000 years. A thousand years before that, most Jews at Jesus’ time used the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. But when the early Christian church was booming, the Jewish religious leaders didn’t want to be using the same Greek Bible as the Christians so they dug into their Hebrew Bibles again. And what about the Hebrew Bibles we have today? Ever hear of the Dead Sea scrolls? Great story from the late 1940s. The Judean wilderness, about a mile west of the Dead Sea. A shepherd boy throws a rock into a dark cave. He hears pottery breaking. When he checks it out, they find scrolls from before the time of Jesus. Some of the scrolls were books of the Old Testament. Isaiah was one of them. And what have we found out? It wasn’t “Look at all the differences!” No, it was “Look at all the samenesses!” God hasn’t left us in the dark with no Bible to trust.

But what about all the different translations? The internet arguer likes to say that this New English translation is based on that Old English translation which is based on this German translation which is based on that Latin translation ... and the translations can’t be trusted because who knows That might make for good internet; it makes for lousy truth. All the major translations today go back to the Greek and the Hebrew. God hasn’t left us in the dark with no Bible to trust.

Why? Because in here [Bible], God wants to show you his love. From

here, God wants you to trust his love. So God gives his Word, he preserves his Word, he keeps his Word. How do we know? He tells us! Does that sound like a logical fallacy, like begging the question? So be it. God says I can trust his Word.

In here, I find that I'm a sinner who has sinned against God. On the one hand, what a relief! I'm not the way I'm supposed to be. And on the other hand, what a scary thought! I'm not the way I'm supposed to be and God doesn't like it. The way I am with my sin would have me rejected by God and damned. But in here, God shows us his love - not a love we earn, but a love he gives us with Jesus. In here, God shows us his Son Jesus doing what no one else would have ever thought. Jesus, the Son of God, takes our place as sinner; on the cross he takes our place as damned. But that's not all. The Son of God gives us his place, a place right with God in heaven. Here we have the love of God - "I forgive you with Jesus." Here we have the power of God, the power of God to save us, the power of God to change our hearts to live a new and better life. Yes, here we have the Word of God that changes us to believe the unbelievable, to forgive the unforgivable, to love the unlovable, to live the unlivable, to live the impossible - to live a life right with God. So what do we say? "Lord, you have the words of everlasting life!" Amen.