

The Hope We Find in the Authority of Scripture

CNN reported on a contest to rewrite the Ten Commandments. \$10,000 was offered for the best ideas. 2,800 submissions came in from 27 different countries. A team of 13 judges selected the “New” Top Ten. It should be noted that there isn’t a “Thou shalt not” among them. Are you ready for Man’s Ten Non-Commandments?

1. Be open-minded and willing to alter your beliefs. (Define “belief.”)
2. Strive to understand what is most likely to be true, not what you wish.
3. The scientific method is the most reliable way of understanding the natural world. (How does #2 apply to #3?)
4. Every person has the right to control of his/her body. (Define “person.”)
5. God is not necessary to be a good person or live a meaningful life. (Define “God.” Define “good”!)
6. Be mindful of the consequences of all your actions and take responsibility for them. (Wasn’t Hitler “mindful of his actions” and didn’t he take full responsibility for them? So then, Hitler must be a “good” person.)
7. Treat others as you would want them to treat you.
8. We have the responsibility to consider others, including future generations. (Isn’t that the same as #7?)
9. There is no one right way to live. (Doesn’t that cancel out all of these?)
10. Leave the world a better place than you found it. (Define “better.”)

Aren’t you grateful God didn’t leave it up to us to create rules to live by? Do you see why we need rules that actually have a “higher authority” as their author? Today, we need to examine why it is only in the authority of Scripture that we find hope. First, that’s because...

I. Scripture Has God as Its Source.

Of course, the first question a skeptic will ask is, “Well, how do you know it has God as its source?” We know, not because of a blind leap of faith, but because of the evidence. Let me share some of it with you. First, all the writers say that God was the source of what they wrote. None of the authors says that God was NOT the source. I realize that’s not the strongest evidence but it does speak of the internal consistency of the Bible.

A second piece of evidence is the textual reliability. In other words, have there been major changes in the text over the centuries? For example, the New Testament text has far superior reliability than say, the 37 plays of Shakespeare written in the seventeenth century. In every one of Shakespeare’s plays, there are *lacunae* (gaps) where we have no idea what originally was said. With the New Testament, we have more than 25,000 handwritten copies and no gaps. ⁱ

A third piece of evidence is the accuracy of historical characters and events as corroborated by outside sources. Before present-day methods of archaeology, some liberal scholars made wild accusations questioning whether places like Jericho even existed. Then, in the 1950’s archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon uncovered the city

just where the Bible said it should have been and the collapsed walls just as the Bible described. This type of evidence has caused Dr. Clark Pinnock to conclude:

An honest [person] cannot dismiss a source of this kind. Skepticism regarding the historical credentials of Christianity is based upon an irrational bias.ⁱⁱ

The apostle Peter states the fact plainly:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (II Peter 1:20-21)

The accuracy of all forms of evidence, proves this to be true. Knowing that God is the source of all Scripture gives us foundational hope. Secondly...

II. Knowing That Scripture Is Without Error, Gives Us Hope.

Valley's own first statement of faith reads:

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts...

Why does it say, "...without error in the original manuscripts..."? Well, this is simply to acknowledge that we are not claiming that every translation is without error or that every printing is without error. We're claiming only that the first manuscript written by the original author in Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic is without error.

This is a distinctly different view of Scripture from what you will find in some other so-called Christian churches that do not use the term "without error" or "infallible" when they speak of the Bible. Instead, they use terms like "it contains the Word of God" or the Bible is "inerrant on issues of faith and practice." This is, quite simply, doctrinal hedging. To be plain, when a church says that they believe the Bible "contains" the Word of God, they mean "it also contains things that are NOT the Word of God." Or if they use the phrase, it is "inerrant on issues of faith and practice," they mean that on all other issues, like history or science or psychology, it is NOT inerrant. In fact, they believe it is simply wrong!

The obvious problem is that this is a self-contradictory belief, because God regularly made statements through the prophets where, for example, in one sentence He claimed to have created the world (a scientific statement) and then also issues a faith command. Here's one example, in Jeremiah 33 it says:

This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it – the LORD is his name: "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." (Jer. 33:2-3)

Many who hold to the "inerrant on issues of faith" doctrine don't believe that God 'formed' the earth and "established" it, but that it evolved over billions of years. How can you separate a single sentence to be part truth and part myth? And if you can, how then can you trust any other sentence in the Bible to be true? You can't! It's either all true or all suspect. If it's all suspect, you have no reason for hope. Your anchor is not "firm and secure;" you are drifting, wishing, taking a flying leap in the dark and trying to believe that, by some miracle, you will land on solid ground.

Jesus argued for what is known today as the “verbal plenary” view of Scripture, which simply means that every word is inspired. In Matt. 5, Jesus said: **Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.** (Matt. 5:17-18)

Last time I checked, the heavens and the earth had not disappeared. Therefore, according to Jesus, not one comma in the original manuscripts should be set aside as not being true.

Now, what does this have to do with our living in hope? If you’re in a boat, why do you need an anchor? What’s the purpose of an anchor? An anchor allows you to hold your position in the water, because the one thing that’s true about being in a boat on the water is that you move easily. Either you’re moving because the water is moving, as on a river, or you’re moving because of the wind. And have you noticed that, even on what looks like a calm lake, the slightest breeze will move you? In fact, that’s one of my favorite things to do, to get out on the water and just drift with the breeze. Oh man, I wish I were doing that right now!

But eventually, you want to stop drifting, especially if a storm is coming up and you need to get to shore. Or if you’re on a river and you’re heading for the falls! So, what do you do if you need to stop and stop quickly? You throw in the anchor. If it’s a good anchor, it digs into the bottom and stops your drift. Then you can take your time to start up the motor and go where you need to go.

Our summer verses, Heb. 6: 19, 20, say that our hope is our life anchor. It might be relaxing to let your life drift for a while, but eventually every life must stop drifting and head for shore, either because a storm is coming or you’re heading for the falls! Is anyone here in that situation today? You need to stop drifting because you can see that you’re heading for trouble. Well, throw the anchor! Oh, but wait. There’s one thing I forgot to mention. You’ve got to be sure the anchor rope is tied to your boat.

Have you ever made that mistake? I did that once when I was a kid boating with my Dad. He said, “Throw the anchor over!” So, I threw it. But wait, we’re still drifting. My Dad said, “Did you tie the rope off first?” Oops!

Is God’s anchor of hope tied to your boat? What exactly is God’s anchor of hope? He explains it to us in the verses right before our summer verses in Heb. 6. Beginning in verse 16, it says:

Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. (Heb. 6:16-17)

What’s an oath? Webster says it’s *...the form of words in which... a statement or promise is made*. Because God wanted to make His unchanging purpose clear to you, He gave you His Word!

God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope

offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. (Heb. 6:18-19a)

Nothing in this book is false! It doesn't matter what the topic is! Science, math, history, relationships, faith – it's all 100% true because God is the source and God did not lie and God cannot lie! Anyone who says that the teaching of the Bible regarding history or science is in error is calling God a liar. But based on the evidence we can know for certain that it is not error. It is true and it is a personal oath from God to us that all His promises will be fulfilled. So, tie the end of the rope of God's Word to your boat. Stop drifting! This anchor will hold! It will save you!

Lastly, because the source is God, because it's without error, we can know...

III. Scripture is Also Eternally Useful.

Have you experienced how practical the Bible is? Multiple practical life discoveries have come about by people studying God's Word. Matthew Maury, for example, discovered the ocean currents from Psalm 8. I'm serious. He was a naval officer and oceanographer all his life and while he was recovering from an accident in 1839, he had his daughter read the Bible to him. At one point she read Psalm 8, which celebrates God as the Creator by saying:

**When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
What is man that you are mindful of him... (Ps. 8:3, 4a)**

But then in verse 8 there is this phrase:

...and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. (Ps. 8:8)

Most of us would just pass over that phrase, but not Maury. He stopped his daughter and had her read it again. "Paths of the seas, paths of the seas." He said, "If God's Word says there are 'paths of the seas,' then there must be paths in the seas!" So, he began to study old ship's logs and set adrift drift bottles to see where they went. In 1855 Maury wrote the first textbook on modern oceanography, which is decidedly Christian! In it he displayed his charts of sea currents, especially along our eastern seaboard and between America and Europe. His discovery transformed marine navigation. This practical discovery came from God's practical and scientifically accurate Word.

What charts are you using to steer your ship these days? I have to tell you how my heart has been aching this week as I've come to the conclusion that our "Ship of State" is way, way off course. I watched some of the videotaped interviews with high-ranking officials of Planned Parenthood. Have you see any of these? Don't do it unless you have a very strong stomach! The ones I saw recorded physicians of Planned Parenthood callously talking about the sale of infant body parts for research. In one video, they went into the lab to show what could be "harvested" from just one abortion. My mind flashed back to the films of the mountains of corpses in the Nazi death camps. I thought, "We've become Nazis! How is this possible?"

But as I prepared this sermon, it became painfully clear how it is possible: we've abandoned God's Word as our authority. If it were still the navigation chart that once guided our nation, we would've heard God say through Jeremiah:

The people of Israel and Judah have provoked me by all the evil they have done... They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom

to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind, that they should do such a detestable thing... (Jer. 32:32, 35)

What's the way out? We need to do what Daniel did. Daniel did not share in the atrocities of his people, but he prayed as one of them. Remember? He prayed: **...O Lord, the great and awesome God... we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets... O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay... (Dan. 9:4-6, 19)**

I believe we're at a very, very serious crossroads. Don't go numb. Don't surrender to the pressure and be absorbed into the crowd. First, immerse yourself in God's Word. Jesus gave us promises if we would do this. He said:

...If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ...the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. (John 14:23, 26-27a)

In the midst of mind-numbing chaos and wickedness, we can make a difference AND we can have peace! He promised.

Then secondly, we need to pray like Daniel. Cry out to God! There's nothing wrong with the Marches for Life or the protests at abortion clinics or the appeals for legislative change, but they simply have not stopped this great evil. I believe that God will bring this to an end now in one of two ways: revival or judgment. We need to cry out to God.

And no matter which way God chooses to act, He has promised to give us something besides peace. He said: (John 14:16-17)

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.

This is our hour on the world stage. What will we offer as a solution to a drifting society? Will we offer hope or despair?

...we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. (Heb. 6:18b, 19a)

Cry out to God. He'll enable you to live in hope this week. Let's pray...

ⁱ Josh McDowell, *A Ready Defense* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), p. 24

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 55