

Trust Only the Word of God!

Ravi Zacharias is a Christian apologist who speaks anywhere he is invited in the world about the truth of Christianity and the critical importance of absolute truth as a foundation for a good, just and enjoyable society. After speaking at a prestigious university in England, he was asked by a student about what he was afraid of when it comes to moral relativism, which is everybody just making up their own rules. The student asked, “Why are you so afraid of subjective moral reasoning? Do you think that we are all just going to start raping and pillaging? Because that’s not going to happen. So, what are you so afraid of?”

Dr. Zacharias uncovered the student’s own hypocrisy with seven words. He asked him, “Do you lock your door at night?”¹

Our church’s statement of faith, which is our statement of what we believe, loudly proclaims that our highest authority, when it comes to defining truth and describing our values, is the Word of God. It’s not me, it’s not dreams or visions or the vote of delegates to our denomination’s annual meeting. It’s the Word of God.

As Peter continues in his last recorded communication to Christian churches of the first century, he is stating the same axiom. Already in the first century, Christians were facing many of the same spiritual counterfeiters that we face today – false religions, deceiving Christian sects, ungodly spiritual teachers and false prophets. Peter recognizes them for what they are and argues for the principle, “*Make the Word of God your highest authority!*”

Now today, we’ll see how, through three sub-points, he supports that argument. The first is...

I. People Die, but the Word Lives On!

Peter announces that he knows he is nearing his own death. He writes:

I think it is right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. (2 Peter 1:13-14)

We don’t know exactly how Jesus made it clear to him that he was about to die, but I don’t think that’s the most important question here. The question is, “Why isn’t he freaking out with that knowledge?” He seems pretty calm for a man who knows he’s going to die soon, doesn’t he? He doesn’t seem to have any fear of death at all. In fact, at the end of the letter, as he writes about the age to come, meaning life after death or after Jesus returns, there is a longing in his voice.

How do you feel about dying? Hopefully, you’re not looking forward to it, but if it grips you with so much fear that you can’t sleep at night, then, I’d say you haven’t yet fully grasped or understood biblical truth regarding death. Peter’s not looking forward to dying, he’s looking forward to what comes AFTER dying.

Please note that he’s not doing anything to hasten his death. I’m sure he remembers well how Judas was condemned for doing that. (Acts 1:25) No, Peter is encouraging Christians who are suffering to use the promises from God’s Word regarding what comes AFTER death to enable them to live better, more satisfying, lives here in this world. Lives free of the fear of death. In fact, that’s Peter’s stated mission:

And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. (2 Peter 1:15)

And just what are 'these things' that he is making every effort for them to recall? It's the '...precious and very great promises' of God, which he mentioned back in verse 4. And since Jesus is now gone to heaven, so we can't go hear Him preach these promises, where will we find them? They are in the Word of God, which in Peter's day was still being gathered together, but in our day is completed.

So, what's Peter's point here? His point is that people, like himself, will die, but the Word of God lives on. In fact, the Word of God is eternal. It will outlast this world. Peter made this point in his first letter where he wrote:

...you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for

All flesh is like grass

and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,

and the flower falls,

But the word of the Lord remains forever. (1 Pet. 1:23-25, quoting Is. 40, 6, 8)

Do you hear what Peter is saying? The Word of God is imperishable, it remains forever. It's human thinking, human definitions of right and wrong, good and bad, even real and unreal that don't last. They wither and fade away.

We live in a world that is losing its grip on the basic concept of absolute truth. Because of that, it has let go of other important truths, like:

- A biblical definition of marriage
- A biblical definition of male and female
- A biblical definition of what is right and wrong (64% of Americans now say that it's okay to lie. So, I guess we shouldn't be surprised if our government officials lie.)
- A biblical definition of when life begins
- A biblical definition of race relations ("Oh, pastor! Don't go there!" Oh, yes, we must go there. We will in January and February.)

Friends, our culture has let go of biblical truth and this path will not lead to life. So, what can be done? We must listen to Peter! Peter says, "People die, only the Word of God lives on!" So, what does Peter say next? He says...

II. I Have Proof That Jesus Is the Truth!

So many cults or false religions are built upon the teaching of just one person. Mormons center on the experience and teaching of Joseph Smith, Jehovah's Witnesses on the teaching and interpretation of Charles Taze Russell, Islam on the teaching of Mohammad and so on. This is not true of the Bible. The Bible is written by 40-plus authors over a period of 1600 years. It was written on three continents in three different languages. Its subject matter includes hundreds of controversial subjects, yet, with all this diversity of authors and languages and over such a long period of time, there is lockstep continuity and harmony of the message. It is simply a miraculous book, unlike any other.

Josh McDowell tells of a time, back in the day when people sold things door to door, that a man came to his house selling a collection of the *Great Books of Western Civilization*. He said he laid out this chart and tried to wow Josh with all the authors and topics and breadth of wisdom. When he was done, Josh challenged him to pick just 10 authors, all from one walk of

life, one generation, one language and writing on just one controversial topic. Then he asked him, "Would those authors agree?"

The salesman laughed and said "No!" Josh asked, "What would you have?"

The salesman said, "A conglomeration."

Josh then spent an hour-and-a-half showing him in the Bible, the diversity of authors, time periods, countries, languages and the hundreds of topics, and yet how there was an incredibly focused and singular message. Two days later, the salesman committed his life to Christ.²

This is what Peter is doing for his churches and for us! He's showing us the evidence, the proof, that Jesus was speaking the truth. Let's look at it together. First, he says:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18)

Okay, what's he talking about? He's talking about when he witnessed Jesus' transfiguration. The "we" he keeps mentioning are James and John and himself. Why is he bringing this up? Because false teachers and false prophets were trying to persuade the members of Peter's churches to leave Christianity and join them in their New and Improved Christianity that was 'deeper' than Peter's version because they had new revelations from God. So, Peter counters that by saying, "Listen, we saw the whole thing, James and John and myself. We saw Jesus glowing like a Roman candle and Elijah and Moses were with Him! And we heard the voice of God!! It wasn't a dream or a vision, it was reality! What could possibly be deeper than that?"

That's his first proof. But he's got more. Next he says:

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention... (2 Peter 1:19a)

Peter is pointing his readers, including us, to the fact that there were three hundred and thirty specific prophecies in the Old Testament that Jesus fulfilled precisely. Prophecies like: Where He would be born, when He would be born, to whom He would be born (a virgin of the tribe of Judah, line of Jesse, house of David), that the king (Herod) would try to kill Him, that He would flee to Egypt, that He would grow up in Nazareth, not Bethlehem; that He'd be preceded by a messenger (like Elijah), that he would do miracles, that He would teach with parables, that He would be rejected by His own, that He would be praised by little children, that His friend would betray Him for 30 pieces of silver and that He would be abandoned by His disciples. And these don't include the Crucifixion and Resurrection!!!

Do you see what Peter is saying??? He's saying, "Look at the proof!! Jesus couldn't have manipulated these things to make them true! How do you manipulate when and where you are born? No, '*...we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed...*'" This is proof #2 that God's Word, not dreams or visions or mythical stories, should be our highest authority.

And he has one more. Proof #3:

...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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. (2 Peter 1:20, 21)

First, let me say a word about Bible translations. There are multiple translations of the original texts of Scripture into English. I think we all know that. These verses are not guaranteeing that bible TRANSLATIONS are without error, but that the original manuscripts are without error. So, once in a while a Bible translation might have a mistake in it. It's rare, but it could happen. That has nothing to do with the truthfulness or inerrancy of God's Word.

Also, different translations are preferred by different Christians. That's fine. In fact, that can be very good because the different translations, if used together, can give a fuller understanding of a passage for those who don't read the original Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic. In fact, some of you have noticed that here in worship, we've switched our Scripture reading and the Bibles in this sanctuary from the NIV to the ESV translation. Why did we do that? Well, it's really just a matter of taste. I prefer the ESV. If you want to know why, I've written a brief explanatory paper that you can pick up at the Welcome Desk. I haven't thrown away my NIV; in fact, I use it a lot. It's just that, for preaching, I prefer the ESV. And some of you didn't even notice we switched!!

So, if translation ISN'T what Peter is talking about, then what IS he talking about? He's talking about the reliability of Scripture in the original manuscripts. He's clearly stating that these weren't the concoction of a human mind. "*But men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*" What does this mean and why is it important?

First, it means that all the men who wrote the books of the Bible were the instruments of God to reveal His truth to humankind. God didn't override their personalities. We can recognize each of their writing styles. But the content, the fact-checking, the 'meat' of the writing is from God. The term '*carried along*' is the Greek word *pheromenoi*, which is a sailing term and describes how a ship is 'carried along' by the wind. So, the 40-some writers of the books of the Bible are like 40 ships on the sea, all different, all unique. But none of them are going anywhere without the wind of the Spirit of God.

And why is this important? This is important because it means that Daniel Brown, the author of *The Da Vinci Code*, is simply wrong when he implies that it was the various church councils that "created" the Bible as we know it today. No, the councils had one task, which was to determine which books, which letters, were the ones that were Scripture from the instant that they were written because the author had been "*carried along by the Holy Spirit.*" We see that very fact here at the end of Peter's second letter when he writes about all of Paul's letters. Peter says:

...as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15b-16)

Do you hear that? Peter clearly identifies all of Paul's letters as Scripture.

So, you can put your full trust in the Bible as the Word of God, not because the church councils were so wise in what they did, but because it was God Himself who produced each writing under the supervision of the Holy Spirit. If God was so involved in each book's writing, don't you think He also '*carried along by the Holy Spirit*' the delegates at the church councils when they decided which books were Scripture from the instant they were written? I certainly do. Finally, we need to see what will be...

III. The Impact on Our Lives If We Live in the Word of God.

Verse 19 says:

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts... (2 Peter 1:19)

Here Peter is making a strong suggestion that, if we ‘*pay attention*’ to God’s Word, we’ll have light to see in the darkness. This is true and other Scriptures say the same thing. Ps. 119:105, for example, says, “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,*” which is what Peter’s saying!

But Jesus makes a much stronger point. In John 8:31-32, He says:

... “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Did you know that this famous statement about the truth setting you free was welded to the idea of living in the Word of God? The Greek word translated *abide* here is *meinate*, which literally means ‘to live and move and dwell’ in something or with someone.

Do you see now how critical it is to be in God’s Word daily? Do you see the power that is available to you? Do you understand that your path to freedom from whatever it is that is enslaving you is in this book?

Your identity is found... in His Word.

The absolute, unchanging Truth is found... in His Word.

Your freedom can be found... in His Word.

These are the three universal questions that every human being asks:

1. Who am I?
2. What is Truth?
3. How can I be free?

And where are the answers found to all three questions? According to Jesus, they’re found ONLY in the Word of God! How badly do you want to find answers to those questions? You WILL find them, if you start “*living*” in His Word this week.

Let’s pray...

¹ From a video of this exchange on the website clashdaily.com

² Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Arrowhead Springs: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1977), pp. 19-20