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"Is The Bible Different From Any Other Book?"

Part II - "What Others Say About The Bible"

Leviticus 1:1; II Samuel 23:1-2; Ezra 1:1; Daniel 9:2; Matthew 5:18; Luke 24:35; II Peter 3:16; The Structure of the Bible; The Church Fathers; Manuscript evidence; Archeological discoveries. Cannon Formation.

"Good news! Good News! I got good news for you today.

The good news that came out this past week is that most people agree on at least one thing. That's amazing, isn't it? But What's the good news??

The most popular book in the United States is the Bible. When it comes to literary pursuits in the U.S., the Bible in a Harris poll of nearly 2,513 adults, they ranked the Bible number one.

The second choice was not as clear. "The Bible is number one among each of the different demographic groups," Harris said in a statement. The following demographics ranked these different books as their No. 2 favorite behind the Bible: men - J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings;" women - Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With the Wind;" 18-31-year-olds - J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series; 32-43-year-olds - Stephen King's "The Stand" and Dan Brown's "Angels and Demons."

Yes, it is good news that in the United States that the Bible is number ONE in literary pursuits.

But along with the good news there is also some bad news.

In a Gallup Poll taken in May of 2006, it was revealed that there is a long-standing decline in Americans who believe the Bible to be literally true.

- According to the survey, about 3 out of 10 Americans continue to profess belief in a literal Bible today, which accounts a 10 percent drop over the past three decades. More than 1,000 adults were asked to describe their view about the Bible with 28 percent responding that the Bible is the "actual Word of God and is to be taken literally."
- Poll results saw a 45 to 49 percent increase among those who said the Bible is the inspired Word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally.
- However, the survey also recorded a larger increase of Americans who said the Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man (13 to 19 percent).
- Gallup broke down the surveyed sample to subgroups and found that younger people are less likely to profess belief in the Bible, word for word.
- Results showed 23 percent of Americans aged between 18 and 29 years believe in the actual Word of God compared to 36 percent of the more elderly bunch aged 65 and older.
- The unlikelihood of believing in the Bible literally also paralleled with education.
- Only 10 percent of postgraduates said the Bible is the actual Word of God while 39 percent of people with a high school or less education had the same affirmation. Belief in the literal Bible was also highest among those living in the South and lowest in the West.
- The young and highly educated were highest with 58 percent in the belief that the Bible was inspired and that not everything is to be taken literally.

There is good news, the Bible is the number one literary book. But there is also bad news for only 28% in this country believe that that the Bible is the actual Word of God and should be taken literally.

That is why there is a desperate need for us to know today, "Why we believe what we believe?" For if we say that we believe that the Bible is the Word of God and should be taken literally, we need to know why we believe that. We need to know why we believe that the God of the Bible is different from other books available in our world today. We need to know why we believe that Jesus Christ is the true and only Savior in the world. We need to have answers for the evil and suffering in the world today. We need to know if a God of love would send people to hell. We need to know that a personal relationship with Christ is more than just a psychological experience.

To have answers to our questions, and here is where the rubber really meets the road, "Is there a dependable, reliable, trustworthy and objective truth, which is not based upon ourselves who are here on planet earth for a time and then gone, but based upon an eternal, loving, and personal God?"

The Bible declares that it is the Word from the eternal loving, and personal God who has come to us in Jesus Christ to provide us forgiveness of sin and eternal life through faith in Him. The Word of God in II Timothy 3:16 tell us that "all scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Thusly, as we saw last week, when we let God's word speak for itself, it convincingly states that it is from God and it is sufficient and efficient for faith and practice.

But what to others say about the Bible the Word of God? That's what we would like to pursue today. In answering that question, let's approach it this way.

I. Let's take a brief look at the Bible's Structure.

1. The Bible is an amazing book. If one takes time to look at the Bible, one will find that the Old Testament has 39 books, and the New Testament has 27 books, with a total of 66 books.

2. The Bible was written over a period of 1600 years with some 40 authors. It was written by a political leader in Moses, a military leader in Joshua, a shepherd who came a king in David, a king in Solomon, a prime minister in Daniel, a fisherman in Peter, a tax collector in Matthew, a physician in Luke, a scholar and rabbi, in Paul.

3. The Bible is written in three different languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. It was written on the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa.

4. It has the theme of Someone is coming, Someone has come, and Someone is coming again. There is a book that has been written entitled, "Christ The Theme Of The Bible," where the author shows how Christ is in every book of the Bible, in the Old Testament in shadow, and in the New Testament in substance.

Josh McDowell has stated that the Bible has been read by more people and published in more languages than any other book. There have been more copies produced of its entirety and more portions and selections than any other book in history. Some will argue that in a designated month or year more of a certain book was sold. However, over all, there is absolutely no book that reaches or even begins to compare to the circulation of the Scriptures." (Evidence That Demands A Verdict).

The Bible's Structure is phenomenal. It fits together like a puzzle. Each piece is necessary for the whole to give a complete picture of the revelation of the biblical God to us.

II. Let's see what the biblical writers said about the Bible.

1. In the Old Testament.

(1)Moses understood that God was speaking through him (Leviticus 1:1).

"The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting saying,"

(2)David understood that God was speaking through him (Ii Samuel 23:1-2).

"Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares, the man who was raised on high declares; the anointed of God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, the Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue."

(3)Ezra gave credence to Jeremiah's writing (Ezra 1:1).

"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of

Jeremiah,(when Jeremiah prophesied about 200 years earlier the return of Israel to their land after 70 years of captivity -Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10)), the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing." That proclamation was that the Jews in exile could return to their homeland. This occurred around 536 B.C.

(4) Daniel also recognized God's authority speaking through Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2).

"In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely seventy years (cf. Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10).

2. In the New Testament.

(1) Peter recognized that holy men of God were used to write the Old Testament Scriptures (II Peter 1:21). "For no prophecy (referring to Scripture) was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

(2) Paul recognized what was said was of God (I Thessalonians 2:13).

"For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God which also performs its work in you who believe"

(3) Peter acknowledged that Paul's writings were Scripture –graphi- on the same par as the writings of the Old Testament (II Peter 3:15-16).

"And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, but as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters speaking in them of these things, in which are some things are to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction."

But then, there is what Jesus Christ said about the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. Since Jesus Christ was the Son of God in human flesh, he would not nor could He lie. His words are always dependable, trustworthy, and accurate. Note what Christ said about the Scripture.

(4) Jesus Christ taught that the Bible is true and reliable.

- **Matthew. 5:18 - The Law shall be accomplished – Referring to the first five books of the Bible or the entire Old Testament.**
"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished."
- **John 10:35 – The Scripture can not be broken.**
- **Luke 24:44 - Whole Old Testament from God.**
"Now He said to them, These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalm must be fulfilled." Christ here is referring to the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible, the entire Old Testament giving credence to its validity.
- **Matthew. 23:35 - Again the whole Old Testament from God. (Abel in Genesis and Zechariah in II Chronicles; the last book in the Hebrew Bible.)**
Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees who are living very hypocritical and pious lives, "So that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." In one statement Christ says that the entire Old Testament is true.
- **John 14:26; 16:13 – Jesus Christ pre-authenticated the New Testament by foretelling that the Holy Spirit would come and bring to remembrance the teachings of Christ.**
"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you " (John 14:26).
"But when He, the Spirit of truth, come, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, he will speak, and He will disclose to you what is to come" (John 16:13).

Thusly Christ was telling before hand, that when the Holy Spirit would come, He would bring to remembrance the things that He spoke giving validity to the Gospels and other writings that would be written later.

III. Let's look at the manuscript authority.

1. John Ryland MSS (A.D., 117-38). This is the earliest known fragment of the New Testament. Written on both sides, it contains portions of 5 verses from the Gospel of John (18:31-33, 37-38). **It is the closest and most valuable link in the chain of transmission.** That's so important when considering the validity and trustworthiness of the New Testament.

Because of its early date and location (Egypt), some distance from its composition (Asia Minor) this fragment of the gospel of John tends to confirm the traditional date of the composition of the gospel about the end of the first century. The fragment belongs to the John Rylands Library at Manchester, England. Discovered in 1920 by Mr. C.H. Roberts among some papyri acquired by B.P. Grenfell.

2. Chester Beatty Papyri (A.D. 250) (P45,46,47)

This important collection resides in the Beatty Museum near Dublin. It consists of 3 codices and contains most of the New Testament.

3. Bodmer Papyri (A.D. 175-225) (P66,72,75)

The most important discovery of the New Testament papyri since the Chester Beatty manuscripts. Contains portions from John, Jude, I & II Peter, and Luke.

4. Codex Vaticanus (A.D. 325-50) (B)

This includes the Old Testament in the Septuagint (Greek Translation) and the New Testament in Greek. It is written in small unicals (capital letters) on fine vellum. It is kept in the Vatican Library, Vatican City, Italy. Known to scholars in 1475, but not allowed to be studied until 1889-90.

5. Codex Sinaiticus (A.D. 340) (Aleph)

Most important witness to the Text. Obtained in 1859 by Count Tischendorf visiting the monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai. It contains over half of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament.

These are just a few of the major papyri and uncial manuscripts. However overall there are about 5000 Greek manuscripts plus 8000 of the Latin Vulgate, giving 15,000 copies of manuscripts of portions of the New Testament. **And only the New Testament has such a short interval of time between the actual writing of the book itself and the earliest extant manuscripts.**

Other works of antiquity are much fewer in manuscript and much farther apart in years between original and extant manuscript.

- **Take Caesar's Gallic Wars (58-50 B.C.)** About 3 extant manuscripts. The oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's Day.
- **History of Thucydides (460-400 B.C.)** is known to us from 8 manuscripts belonging to about A.D. 900. The same is true of **Herodotus. (488-428 B.C.)** No one would doubt the authenticity of these Greek historians. The manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments give credence to the Bible's validity.

IV. The Church Fathers' Witness must be considered.

During the last half of the first century, there was in progress the selecting, sorting (Luke 1:1-4; I Thess. 2:13), reading (I Thess. 5:27), circulating (Col. 4:16), collecting (II Peter 3:15-16), and quoting (I Tim. 5:8) of the Scripture.

1. Ignatius - Bishop of Antioch - Martyred (A.D. 116) Knew of the Epistles of Paul, the Gospels of Matthew and John appear to have been his favorites. He also knew the apostles and was a disciple of Polycarp.

2. Polycarp - Bishop of Smyrna (A.D. 69-155) Uses much of the New Testament. Had all the epistles of Paul. He was a disciple of the Apostle John.

3. Justin The Martyr (A.D. 100-165 – An apologist) A Greek born in Samaria. He used Matthew., Luke and John. He knew Acts, I Peter, Romans, I Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, II Thessalonians, Hebrews, the Revelation, which he attributed to the Apostle John.

4. Irenaeus - Bishop of Lyons (A.D. 140-203) Saw Polycarp at Symrna when but a boy. He held as far as we know, that all the books that we have in the New Testament were authoritative and from God. From the close of 2nd century, the books are as we have them now.

By A.D. 397, at the Council of Carthage, at which Augustine used his influence, all 27 books of our New Testament were accepted as being from God.

V. Archaeological discoveries provide validity for the Bible.

Archaeological discoveries have advanced much information concerning Biblical time.

1. Ras Shamara literature discovered in 1904, and the Ras Shamra Tablets discovered in 1929 - dating about 1400 B.D. at the North Syrian Coast. Some have said that Moses couldn't have written the first five books of the Bible because there was no alphabetic writing in Moses' day. These archaeological discoveries have found alphabetic writing at least 100-200 years before Moses.

2. The Code of Hammurabi - dated about 1700 B.C. was discovered at Susa in 1901. This shows similarities to the laws of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The differences between the Code of Hammurabi and the Law are in regard to ideology. The laws of Moses were for 1400 B.C. not 500 B.C.

3. The Nuzi Tablets were discovered at Nuzi on the Tigris River in Modern day Iraq in 1925. These tablets serve to confirm the historicity of many of the customs and usages practiced by Abraham occurred around 2000-1700 B.C. (cf. Gen. 31:30)

4. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947 dating from 150-100 B.C., contain the 66 chapters of Isaiah and are identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% variation only due to slips of the pen and in spacing. No difference in doctrine.

5. Ebla Tablets – In 1975, the archives of the Kingdom of Ebla was found. The Kingdom of Ebla was about 300 miles southwest of Haran and Abram would have passed through it on his journey to Canaan. The Ebla Kingdom was unknown to history until it was discovered in 1968 by Archaeologists and Professor Paolo Matthiae of the University of Rome. In 1975, 17,000 clay written tablets were found, and another 1600 the following year. Science has dated this find at 2250 BC, which is in the same time frame as Abram's life. Critics of the Bible often argue that Scripture was written later in history. However, the Ebla tablets and other finds date back far beyond the lifetime of Moses. In fact, archaeologists have discovered whole libraries that date back centuries before Moses.

The Ebla tablets refer to a creation story and a flood story. Also mentioned are names and places, which coincide with biblical ones: Esau, Abraham, Israel, Sinai, even Jerusalem. But the real bombshell is the mention of the two "sin cities", Sodom and Gomorrah. Before the discovery of these tablets, no historical reference to these cities had been known except in the Bible. Therefore, they were considered to be just mythical places. However, many books will have to be rewritten, for these findings do indeed confirm many geographical names of that day.

6. Masada Discovery – More recently in 1996, "at Masada, the desert mountain top fortress of King Herod, archaeologists cleared an ancient garbage dump. In the debris they found pieces of a discarded ancient storage jar. Written in ink on the jar's shoulder was the Latin phrase 'Herod King of the Jews.' This is the first ancient inscription ever discovered with both the name and title of the infamous Jewish king who killed the babies in Bethlehem" (Biblical Reliability in Archeology, Christian Answers. Net).

VI. The collecting of the different Bible books (The forming of the canon). The question arose as to which books that were written actually belonged in the Bible.

The canon, which means a rule or measuring rod, was a word used to apply to the Bible. In relationship to the Bible it refers to the collection of books that passed a test of authenticity and authority. It also means those books are the rule or authority for life. How was this collection made?

Books were canonical even before any tests were put to them. That means that the books were authoritative from God when they were written, before any church or council accepted them. The church or its council recognized and verified certain books as the Word of God, and in time those books that were recognized were collected together and we have today what we call the Bible.

What were the tests of canonicity?

1. **The authority of the writer was tested. In relation to the Old Testament, this meant the authority of the law giver or the prophet.** In relation to the New Testament, the book had to be written or backed by an apostle for it to be recognized as authoritative. It had to have apostolic signature or apostolic authorization. Peter, for instance backed Mark, and Paul backed Luke.
2. **The books themselves had to give some internal evidences of their unique character, as inspired or authoritative.** The content should be different from an ordinary book in communicating the revelation of God.
3. **The verdict of the churches regarding the books was very important.** There was surprising unanimity among the early churches as to which books belonged in the inspired number.

Of course, the formation of the canon, the actual recognition of the 66 books we have in the Bible, took time. Some feel that the Old Testament canon was collected and recognized by Ezra in the fifth century B.C. References by Josephus, the historian indicate the extent of the Old Testament canon as the 39 books we have in our Bible today.

As just mentioned, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (A.D. 140-203), held to all 27 books of the New Testament that we have today as being authoritative and from God.

The first church council to list all 27 books of the New Testament was the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397.

Of course, as we mentioned. in considering how writers looked at the Bible, Ezra and Daniel recognized Jeremiah. Peter recognized Paul's writings as being from God, and of course Jesus Christ gave recognition to the entire Old Testament being authoritative, and said that what would be written about Him later would be authoritative.

The bottom line in all of this is, that the books of the Bible were authoritative when written. The formation of the canon of the Bible only gave credence to what had already been written.

How does this all apply to our lives today?

VII. Application of the Bible to our lives.

Why do I take the time this morning to give a message like this? To remind of us of how accurate and dependable the Bible really is.

Remember what we said at the beginning of our message. The Harris poll said that the Bible is number one in our country in literary consideration.

At the same time, only about 28% of those interviewed believe that the Bible is the actual Word of God.

With a disparity like that, we need to know "Is the Bible really different from any other book that is written today?"

Yes, we really need to know "Why we believe what we believe?" And that's why we are doing this series.

So, if we believe that the Bible is the Word of God today, the Word of God that lives and abides forever, that is contemporary for our lives in this 21st century, it ought to have a direct affect on our lives.

1. **The word of God points us to the Savior, Jesus Christ, for forgiveness and eternal life. It shows me my need of the Savior, that I have sinned against Him, and I need to ask His forgiveness and ask Him into my life (Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-13).**
2. **The Word of God gives our lives God's eternal direction (Colossians 3:16-17).**

Colossian 3:16 is a fantastic verse about the word of God. "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, sing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

What are these verses telling us? Each of the words in this verse are vitally important.

- (1) **The word of Christ** – that which is the written Word of God, what we are reading right now.

- (2) **Richly** – that is the word of God brings spiritual enrichment to our lives, which no other book can do. It provides us a new and eternal cutting edge in this world which is not sure what life is all about.
- (3) **Dwell** – Let the word of God be a part of your life. Some have translated it, "Let the word of God be at home in your life." It's well to note that the word, dwell, is a command in the present tense, meaning the Word of God should be at home in our lives daily. It should be an ongoing experience with the Lord.

The Word of God should feel comfortable in our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. It's like putting on an old shoe. Ah, it feels so good to wear. It should be the same for the Word of God as we pick it up and read it. Wow. This is God speaking to me. What does He have for me today?

- (4) **Wisdom** – This means that the Bible not only gives us knowledge about God and what He is doing in His world **and what he is doing for the believer in Jesus Christ, but the word of God gives us direction on how to live.** Why do we not lie, cheat, steal, gossip, be critical, or be jealous? Why do we keep our selves from immorality? The Bible tells us not to do those things. In the power of the Holy Spirit we seek to obey the Lord. When we have a bad attitude, whatever, we confess that to the Lord and continue to live in fellowship with Him.
- (5) **Teaching** – That is the Bible gives us objective eternal content that is trustworthy and reliable, and is powerful to change our lives as we obey what it is telling us to do.
- (6) **Admonishing** – means to bring to mind, really to put some sense in my head as to how to think, act, and treat others. It may bring conviction in my life, it will also give direction.
- (7) **"With psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." The Word of God produces a life of praise and thankfulness to God.** The word of God changes my focus off of myself and turns my attention to God as the source of all I have and how grateful I should be to Him for all that He gives me. He supplies all my needs. The word of God provides a new tune in my life and a new thanks.
- (8) **"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** The word of God provides us an eternal purpose in serving the Lord. Whatever the task, in the power of the Holy Spirit, I can do all to the glory of God that is give evidence that He lives in my life.

The word of God points us to our need to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior. The word of God gives us eternal direction for our lives.

3. The word of God provides us an eternal hope in the midst of life's many challenges, even in death.

- David of old in Psalm 119:74 penned, **"May those who fear you see me and be glad, because I hope in Your word."**
Psalm 119:81 – May soul languishes for Your salvation, I hope in Your word.
Psalm 130:5, "I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope."
- **Romans 5:1-5** tells us that in our tribulations and trials, God is there to bring us hope. Hope, Paul concludes, does not disappoint.
- **I Thessalonians 4:13-18** was penned to the believers that have had loved ones die in the Lord. They didn't need to sorrow as those who had no hope, for those who know the Lord as personal Savior will be with their loved ones gone on before them, either at death, or when the Lord returns.

Believers in Christ have a living hope, the anticipation that God is going to something good in His time and way for all who trust in Him as personal Savior.

It's the unchanging eternal word that gives us the reassurance of His presence and care in the midst of our challenges and even in death. For He is the believer's eternal rock (Psalm 62) and eternal home whether in this life or the next (Psalm 90:1-2).

I visited a friend of mine who has cancer that is very serious. We were able to talk about some things, but our attention came back to the Lord. We talked about God's healing and God's will. Before I left, I took out my New Testament and read that great Psalm 62 – the LORD is my Rock and Salvation. The Rock Psalm, as one lady use to call it when I called on her. Then I read from Psalm 90 which says that the LORD as been our dwelling place in all generations . . . from everlasting to everlasting He is God. Yes, the Lord is our eternal home whether in this life or the next. No greater hope than that.

God's Word speaks to our spirits, our personalities to give us salvation through faith in Christ, direction for our lives, hope, yes comfort and strength for our lives. God's Word is life changing.

Is this book we read and hold to be the Word of God true, reliable and accurate?

You can depend on it. It has proven itself through the ages.

I trust it has proven itself in your life as you let the Word of God be at home in your daily experience.

God's word lives and abides forever. Praise His Name!!