

Does the Bible Contain Errors?

Selected Texts

John 17:13-19

“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Introduction

Last week, we established that the Bible is truly God’s word in light of the testimonies about Jesus and the claims of Jesus. We saw that Jesus not only affirmed the Old Testament as God’s word but that He also authorized the New Testament as God’s word. This morning, we move from the nature of the Bible as God’s word to a consideration of the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Bible as God’s word. As we have already read from John 17:13-19 and will see in more depth in a few moments, the Bible claims that God’s word is true and trustworthy. As such, the Bible presents itself as being free from errors. Yet, some remain unconvinced by the Bible’s claim about its own nature. Those that deny what the Bible teaches about itself often point to supposed errors in the Bible that would undermine the claim to its full truthfulness and trustworthiness.

My hope this morning, then, is to present what the Bible teaches about its own nature as the true and trustworthy Word of God while framing how Christians can begin to think through responding to the claims of skeptics who deny that the Bible is true and trustworthy and assert that the Bible contains errors. As with last week, I want to begin by acknowledging that answering questions is not the same thing as evangelism. Furthermore, having satisfying answers to hard questions does not regenerate lost souls. Only the Spirit of God brings forth eternal life. Thus, whenever we are working to provide answers to objections against certain Christian beliefs, we must also be committed to praying and asking God to show up and move in the lives of those with whom we are interacting. Winning souls, not a debate is the aim of Christian evangelism. So, as we proceed, keep in mind that we are learning and growing in order to do good to others, to show them Jesus, to comfort the hurting, to correct the wayward, to promote their joy in God.

Finally, as much as I would love to spend hours leading us to understanding and address some of the objections and problems that people raise about the truthfulness of the Bible, we simply do not have time this morning to address every issue. My hope, then, is to provide you with a framework for thinking about the objections and point you in the direction of finding the answers that you are searching for as you or others wrestle with the nature of the Bible. To that end, I want to invite you to take advantage of two opportunities that are available to all of you, member and guest alike.

The first is this: On March 21st and 28th, I am going to be teaching a Sunday afternoon seminar, entitled, “Delighting in God’s Word: An Introduction to the Principles of Biblical Interpretation.” In that seminar, I will introduce the fundamental principles of biblical interpretation. Of the many things that will be taught in the seminar, participants will learn how to make observations from the biblical text, how to research the historical and literary contexts of a passage of Scripture, why it is important to approach Scripture with humility, what role the community of faith plays in our understanding of the Bible, why we need the Holy Spirit, and how to enrich our devotional times through deeper study. This is a hands-on seminar that balances instruction with exercises and discussion.

Registration for the seminar is required. The seminar will cost \$10 to cover the cost of materials, but if cannot afford to pay, do not let that deter you. Let us know if you need help covering the cost. Childcare will be limited based on the number of volunteers available. We will let you know no later than Wednesday, March 17 if we have spots for your children. In order to pull off this seminar, we will need volunteers to provide childcare for this seminar. We are hoping that you will get your small group or a group of friends to volunteer with you. You can come to the seminar, in-person one week and then volunteer the other, or volunteer for both. The seminar will be recorded and released for you and your small group or friends to watch later. Depending upon how this first seminar goes in terms of volunteers, we hope to offer more seminars later in the year.

Now, here is the second opportunity that I want to provide you with to help you grow in your understanding of God’s word and address any questions that you may have about the Bible. I have carved out a few hours each week to dedicate to nothing but helping you understand God’s word more deeply on a one-to-one basis. That means that if you have questions after about a sermon or about a particular question in the Bible, you can schedule a call with me online where we can visit and go into more depth. It’s kind of like a “tele-doc” appointment but for your soul. Obviously, I am available to visit with you in-person in my office and visit with you at more length when needed, but I also want to be available to you when you are wrestling with questions about the Christian faith. So, if you are interested in setting up a time to have that type of conversation, you can visit <https://calendly.com/caseyhough/15min> and schedule a time in one of the available slots, providing details about your questions or other reasons for the call. I will then call you back at the contact information that you provided at the appointed time that you picked.

So, make plans to attend the seminar on delighting in God’s word in March, invites some friends and neighbors, and take a look at the possibility to have schedule a one-on-one call with me to discuss God’s word in more depth.

Now, back to our question: Does the Bible contain errors? We begin with our first point, which considers how the Bible, the Scriptures answer this question...

Exposition

I. The Bible's Answer

The Bible unequivocally testifies to its own truthfulness and trustworthiness. Consider just a few of the passages of Scripture that speak to the nature of God and His Word:

Numbers 23:19 - God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Psalms 12:6 - And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.

Psalms 119:89, 96 – Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens... To all perfection I see a limit, but your commands are boundless.

Proverbs 30:5 - Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

2 Samuel 7:28 - Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your covenant is trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant.

Matthew 24:35 - Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Titus 1:1-3 - Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—² in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,³ and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.

Hebrews 6:18 - 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 set before us may be greatly encouraged.

If the Bible is God's Word, as we established last week, then what is true of God's Word must also be true of the Bible, which is the written word of God.

If I were going to summarize the Bible's answer to our question, it would look like this: **1)** The Bible is God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16), **2)** The Holy Spirit worked in and through the human authors in such a way that as they wrote their own words, they were also writing the very word of God (2 Peter 1:21). **3)** The Bible teaches us that God is incapable of lying or deceiving, only ever speaking truth (Number 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), **4)** The Bible also teaches that God is all-knowing. Therefore, he knows all and cannot be mistaken about anything (Job 36:4; Psalm 33:13-15; 139:1-4; 147:4-5; Hebrews 4:13), **5)** If something is true, then it is without error, **6)** Therefore, because Scripture is the very word of God, and because God only speaks truth and is never mistaken about anything, and because a document that is completely true is necessarily without error, then the entirety of the Bible as God's very word must also be considered free of error, true and trustworthy.

Again, the Bible unequivocally testifies to its own truthfulness and trustworthiness. But what about the problems that people mention about the Bible...

II. The Skeptic's Problems

Now, for sake of clarity, I am not suggesting that everyone who asks these questions is an unbelieving skeptic. I'm simply noting that many of these objections are raised by skeptics. Many believers wrestle with these supposed problems as well, and that's ok. Part of my role as a pastor is to help you work through these supposed problems so that you have greater confidence to seek to know God through His word with faith.

The Skeptic's problems tend to fall into one of nine categories:

- **Theological Problems** – These problems tend to deal with theological issues that we struggle to reconcile with our finite understanding of reality. So, for instance, we might struggle to under the doctrine of the Trinity, or the doctrine of the sovereign God and the responsibility of man, or the doctrine of person of Christ. Fundamentally, these supposed problems are rooted in our finite ability to fully grasp the glory of our infinite God. There are mysteries related to the nature of God and His work that we may never fully know simply because God is unlike us in so many ways. Our response should be worship and wonder (Romans 11:33-36). We are able to know God truly, but that do not mean that we are able to know God exhaustively.
- **Ethical Problems** – These problems tend to arise from our sinful problem with God's authority. In other words, we have a problem with His Lordship over His creation. It's not that we do not understand God's view of sexuality, it's just that we don't like it, or we think it is wrong because it does not conform to our culture. This is not really an issue of understanding hard things in the Bible, it's a matter of accepting hard things out of submission to God.
- **Factual Problems** – These problems tend to come from a misunderstanding of the type of language that Scripture is using in its particular context. We need to be sure that we make a distinction between precision from the fields of math and science and truth in ordinary language. Both can be true depending upon the expectations of those involved in the conversation. So, for instance, it is not false for me to say that I am 37 years old, even though, that is not scientifically precise. The same goes when describing the distance that I live from the church. I can say, "I live 2 miles from the church," and if I'm a little under or over, it is still a true statement because the expectation in that conversation is for ordinary language to be spoken, not language that belongs in the realm of scientific or mathematic precision.
 - An example of this can be seen in the parable of the "Mustard Seed" in Matthew 13:31-21. Some have accused Jesus of speaking falsely because in the world of botany, the mustard is not, in fact, the smallest seed. However, Jesus was not making a scientific statement about universals. He was making a comparison.

- “Often the misrepresentation assumes that Scripture is making a universal statement when in fact it addresses only a narrow context... It is absurd to imagine that Jesus, in the parable of Matthew 13:13-21, was giving his hearers the conclusion of an exhaustive botanical taxonomy, and it is irresponsible to demand that we read the text in such a way.” (John Frame, DWG, 188)
- **Consistency Problems** – The problems tend to deal with things like the order of events in a story, which assumes that the ancient writers were always speaking chronologically. However, many times the authors were not concerned with chronology as much as they were concerned with arranging material topically in order to serve the particular purpose they have in mind with their audience.
- **Attribution/Quotation Problems** – These problems tend to come from the fact that ancient authors like to paraphrase instead of providing quotes verbatim. They were primarily giving summaries.
- **Historical Problems** – These are problems that are often related to archeological “discoveries,” which themselves have to be interpreted.
- **Literary Problems** – These problems are related to the fact that people often make mistakes interpreting the Bible because they have failed to understand the different types of literature that Scripture employs to convey its message. We call this genre problem, as in parables, proverbs, etc... We are intuitively aware of this in our own culture (“love letter” vs. “legal document”), but we tend at times to be unaware of it in other cultures.
- **Scientific Problems** – Probably the problems most noted by skeptics relate to the relationship between science and the Bible. I would describe the problem as rooted in the difference between Phenomenological Language (Ordinary Language – “sunrises/sunsets”) vs. Scientific/Precise Language (Technical Language). Scripture “is not intended to be as a textbook of science, nor is it intended primarily to answer the types of questions we describe as scientific.” This is not to say that Scripture does not touch on these topics at points, but rather to highlight the intention of Scripture is not primarily scientific in modern terms
 - In dealing with “Bible-science problems” we ought to follow the principles of:
 - Considering alternative interpretations of the texts we investigate.
 - Considering alternative scientific possibilities.
 - Reflect on our own willingness to think God’s thought after him, rather than demanding that he conform to some standard of our own.
- **Background Problems** – Finally, these problems tend to be related to the study of the background of the biblical text and deal with issues related to date of composition, authorship, and the historical setting in which the work was written, and the audience to whom it was sent.

How should Christians respond to these supposed problems?

III. The Christian's Response

As Christians, the manner of our response to the problems raised about the Bible should be marked by **humility, hope, and patience**. When I think about these areas, no other passage of Scripture, at least in my mind, captures the manner of the Christian's response better than 2 Timothy 2:22-26.

2 Timothy 2:22-26 - ²² Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. ²³ Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

While this passage was originally read by Timothy, I believe it also applies to any Christian who would venture to be a "servant of Christ." Our interaction with others should not be "quarrelsome," at least as much as it depends upon us. This means that much of what we see on social media in the "name of Jesus" would not be approved by Jesus. We ought to be "kind to everyone," even those that we deeply disagree with on important issues. Kindness, not quarrelsomeness should characterize Christ's servants. Furthermore, while pastors certainly need to be able to teach, I believe all Christians ought to aspire to teach others without being resentful. In fact, according to **Hebrews 5:12-14**, as Christians grow in maturity, that ought to be teaching others. Listen to what **Hebrews 5:12-14** says, "¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." Thus, we ought to be pressing on in Christian maturity, able to teach others as we grow in our understanding of God's Word.

Now, you may be thinking, "You know, preacher, I just don't think that it is for me. I enjoy the milk. I don't want to move on to the solid food. The milk is easy. The solid food take effort. I don't want to work hard. Just give me the easy stuff. Don't make me think hard." To this, I want to respond two ways. First, if you are a new believer or you have never been discipled, then I understand this response, I'm not really talking about you. If you have just recently began your walk with Christ, then you are still a spiritual infant and that's ok. You will grow in time, and Copperfield Church is a church that wants you to be able to grow here. This is a church for people of varying degrees of Christian maturity. Don't hear me saying that you are not welcomed. We are going to help you grow. We are going to equip in obedience to Ephesians 4:11-16 for the work of ministry. You do not have to have it all figured out at this point. Come with us and we will do you good! With that said, if after being a Christian for years, you have not grown, and you are still living off of "spiritual milk" instead of "solid food," there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

When infants do not grow as they are expected, physicians use the term, “failure to thrive” to describe their status. Failure to thrive tends to be a sign of undernutrition. The infants are not getting what they need in order to grow as they ought. In a similar way, this can be true for us spiritually. There is a time when it is appropriate for us to feed on spiritual milk, but eventually, we must grow up and move on to more substantive food. Yet, for some reason, some in the professing church have built their entire model of ministry around keeping people on spiritual milk, not encouraging people to press on in spiritual maturity to the solid food of God’s Word. And as a result, churches around our country are filled with professing Christians who have been living on milk instead of solid food and they are spiritual malnourished, unable to understand or teach others the truth of God’s Word.

To use a rather graphic but accurate illustration, let me ask you this question: If you saw a twenty-year old man being breastfed by his mother, would that concern you? Of course, it would concern you! It would disturb you! We laugh because the mere image is deeply troubling and uncomfortable! Yet, because we have normalized spiritual immaturity, we do not find it disturbing that people who have been Christians for decades are still content to live off of spiritual milk instead of growing up and feasting on the solid food of God’s Word! Brothers and sisters, God is calling us to press on to maturity that we might be able to teach others, gently instructing opponents of the gospel, with hope and patience, praying that God would grant them repentance.

And as we teach and respond to the objections that are raised against the Bible, here is what should characterize our message: **Wisdom, Reason, and Insight**. In regard to wisdom, we see in **Colossians 3:16**, which states, “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” Again, this is instruction given to the entire church. They are to teach and admonish one another with all wisdom at it relates to the message of Christ.

As Christians live in this manner toward one another and in the world, God’s Word anticipates that people will be provoked to ask us about our hope in Christ. We see this in **1 Peter 3:15-16**, where we are told, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” Thus, Peter expects us to be able to field questions from others regarding our faith and be able to provide reasons for our faith. The Christian faith is not some unreasonable hope. It is grounded in historical events. It is rooted in eyewitness testimonies. And it resonates with the hunger that humanity has for the answers about existence and significance, as demonstrated in Paul’s interaction with the philosophers of his day in Athens in Acts 17. The Christian faith is durable. It is able to withstand the greatest attacks. For centuries, philosophers have claimed that Christianity was dead, yet Christianity continues to live while philosophers who sought to write its obituary continue to die. As the old hymn puts it, “God’s truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever!”

For Christians to continue to engage in the advancement of the truth of God's Word, finally, we must be committed to growing in insight regarding God's Word. I ground this admonish in Jesus' words in **Luke 10:27**, where we are told to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" As we answer the objections raised against the Bible as God's true Word, we must do so at those engaged not only with our emotions, but also our mind. To be sure, the point of Jesus' command is to stress the need for people to love God with the entirety of our being. I simply want to highlight that part of our being is our minds. We should not be afraid of rigorous thinking for the sake of the glory of God and the good of others. We should use the mind that God gave us to wage a spiritual war, as Paul describes in **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**, where he writes, "³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

God has called us to this! He has called us to answer the objections and demonstrate the reasons for our faith in Christ and our subsequent trust in the Bible as God's Word, which is without error!

Conclusion

So, we return to our question: Does the Bible contain errors?

The Bible, as God's Word, claims that it is true and trustworthy.

If God is perfect, unable to lie or deceive, then the Bible, which is His Word, by virtue of its divine origin, must necessarily be perfect, free of lies and deceit.

While skeptics raise questions and challenge the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Bible, all supposed problems have a reasonable and plausible explanation.

The vast majority of proposed problems are due to either misplaced expectations, wrong assumptions, or insufficient contextual information on the part of the modern reader.

If God's Word was not true and trustworthy, we would be hopeless in life and death. For, we could not trust any of His promises if His Word was not true. But His Word is true!