

So What About: Part 3- The Problem of the Bible

I. ME

- A. Welcome/Online
- B. Exploring the questions/problems people have with Xianity
- C. **So what about...** cards- How this can be a conversation
- D. Important conversation exploring the questions and problems people have with Xianity-
 - 1. Email last week... "I'm a little skeptical when it comes to God and Christianity but I've figured out that Christianity is the religion that makes the most sense. I still have a lot of doubts but I am trying to learn more because if this is the truth than it is important."
- E. Willing to follow where the evidence leads...
- F. Often when people are exploring Xianity, whether they used to believe, grew up believing and are asking their own questions, or simply are looking to see if what they believe actually hold weight... they will ask questions about the Bible.
- G. **The Bible can be a huge obstacle for a lot of people**
 - 1. Many see the Bible as outdated, irrelevant, and mythological.
 - 2. So obviously a belief system based on this book is pointless at best and sad/evil at worst.
 - 3. If the bible has holes or isn't true than Xianity isn't true
 - a. *Of course Xianity predates what we the bible as we know it by about 200 years.*
 - 4. Completely understandable
 - 5. "Why would a book written at least 2000 years ago in ancient Palestine have anything worthwhile for me today?"

- H. I believe, however, that this thinking is based on some huge misunderstandings.
 - 1. Especially not understanding what the Bible actually is.
- I. Let's face these head on... and follow where the evidence leads... and **BE COOL**
 - 1. Not going to be able to cover everything.
 - 2. But let's discuss some key issues concerning it's credibility
- J. If the Bible can be shown to be trustworthy and reliable would you give it a chance by reading some of it? Let's see.

II. WE

- A. First the basics
 - 1. The bible is not technically a BOOK
 - 2. No one sat down and said., "today I'm going to write the Bible"
 - 3. It's a collection of ancient documents in two parts
 - 4. The first part is a collection of documents recording the history of the ancient nation of Israel.
 - 5. The second part contains the eye-witness accounts of Jesus' life and letters explaining what it means to be a Jesus-follower. How to actually live it out.
 - 6. Makes more sense to call them... the biblical writings than The Bible... I'll use both interchangeable bc its just cultural to call them THE BIBLE.

B. Common Bible Problems- Tackle 3 main ones tonight...

1. You can't trust the Bible b/c it was written hundreds of years after the events it says it records and it's been changed so much over the years, to suit those in power, that we have no idea what it originally said.
 - a. Basically its history makes it unreliable.
2. You can't trust the Bible as a moral guide... look at the evil it condones
3. Christians pick and choose what they follow in the bible.
4. Let's consider these problems one at a time.

C. B/c the true story of the Bible can change your life.

1. **But you have to understand what it is first.**

III. GOD

A. Problem #1- The Bible's history makes it unreliable.

1. "It was written hundreds of years after the original events"
2. "And since then it's been changed so much (mostly by men in the powerful positions in the church in order to keep power) that it isn't even close to what it originally was meant to say."
3. Very popular opinion
4. **Karen Armstrong's** book A History of God- **"We know very little about Jesus. The first full-length account of his life was St. Mark's gospel, which was not written until about the year 70 AD, some 40 years after his death. By that time, historical facts had been overlaid with mythical elements which expressed the meaning Jesus had acquired for his followers... rather than a reliable straightforward portrayal."**
5. Like TELEPHONE
6. This problem just isn't true.

B. After looking at the historical and literary evidence, most scholars (both secular and xian) agree that the New Testament writings are the best-attested documents in antiquity.

Why do they say that?

To decide whether an ancient document can be trusted scholars look at a number of factors... one is the number of manuscripts.

- a. The more manuscripts there are the more it can be compared and contrasted for contradictions/mistakes/changes

Another piece of evidence is how close to the original writing the existing manuscripts are... the closer to the original the less chance of changing.

So how many copies and how old are the copies.

If we compare the NT manuscripts to other accepted writings of antiquity we find that they are the most trustworthy set of documents in the entire ancient world.

Comparisons

a. Thucydides (460-365 BC)

- 1) Wrote about Greco-Roman culture... most historians trust what he wrote was accurate.

2) 8 Copies. Earliest 1,300 years after the events recorded.

b. Aristotle's Poetics

- 1) 5 Copies. Earliest 1,400 years after original

c. Biographies of Alexander the Great- 2 – 400 yrs after he died.

d. New Testament- 25,000 copies- some are only 15-20 yrs after events.

Example... **1 Cor 15:1-8**

- a. Earliest writing about Jesus rising from the dead.
- b. Written between 53-57 AD
- c. Predates the Four Gospels
- d. All credible scholars agree that there was a historical Jesus
- e. And that he was executed by the Romans around 30-32 AD.

V. 1- Past Tense

Told them about the resurrection when he first met them in 52 AD

That means Paul is writing about Jesus rising from the dead, not 100's of years later, but only 20 yrs later.

Creed- preexisting. Well-known statement of belief.

V. 3 What I RECEIVED. From whom? **V. 5-7.**

In Galatians Paul tells us that about 3 years after he became a Xian he went to Jerusalem to meet the guys who had lived with Jesus and that he grilled them on the details.

- a. Most date Paul's conversion in 36 AD.
- b. Conversation would be in 39... **6-8 yrs after.**
- c. Not 100's, Not 50, Not 10. No later than 8 years. – Too early for myths to come up.
- d. Paul- "Hey James, did your brother really rise from the dead?"
- e. James- "Yep"
- f. Paul- "Nice!"

Belief in the resurrection was documented while eyewitnesses were still talking about what had happened.

Why were the Gospels written later?

- a. Ancients trusted eyewitness testimony over written accounts... they finally wrote it down when the eye-witnesses were dying out.

Sir Frederic G. Kenyon (former director of British Museum)

- a. **"In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscript so short as that in the New Testament"**

C. Problem #2- The Bible condones evil

1. Can only look at one example... "The bible teaches that slavery is ok!"
 2. Truth- Slaveholders in the early US used the Bible to say it was good for them to own slaves.
 3. Example- **Colossians 3:22**
- D. First- When we hear slave we think our own country's horrible/horrendous history.
1. Where slave owners literally owned their slaves and could treat them as harshly as they wanted.
 2. Historians tell us, however, this is not what 1st-century Roman slavery was like at all.
 3. It wasn't based on race and they weren't owned the same way.
 4. 85-90% of the inhabitants of Rome and Italy were slaves or of slave origin.
 5. They enjoyed great popularity in Rome... they were trusted household servants, teachers, librarians, accountants, and estate managers.
 6. B/c it was a form of employment, slaves could work their way out in 10-15 years.
 7. What Paul is saying is not that it is good to own another human or that slavery is a good thing... he's simply telling people who find themselves in this situation to work hard and respect their superiors. And he told masters/employers to treat their slaves/employees with dignity b/c there was no difference between them in God's eyes.
 8. Often when the biblical writers talk about things we find immoral (slavery/polygamy/treatment of women) they are simply describing what happened... not prescribing an action.
 9. **The biblical writings describe evil, but never prescribe it.**

E. **Problem #3- Christians pick and choose what they follow in the Bible.**

1. Truth is... many actually do... but they shouldn't
2. Many people (xian or not) do not understand what the bible actually is and b/c of that they find all kinds of contradictions and crazy rules that people obviously don't follow today...

F. So what is it...

1. Extremely important... 2 parts. Testaments. Covenants
 - a. Covenant= contract/agreement/pact
2. First part is OT- Old Contract
 - a. How God related to and dealt with the ancient nation of Israel.
 - b. **Every law/rule in the OT is for the nation of ancient Israel.**
 - c. These are specific laws for a specific time given to a specific people for specific purpose... to show the need for a savior and to bring about that savior.
3. The OT tells the gives us the back-story of Jesus but it is not what Xianity is about.
 - a. All equally inspired not all equally applicable.
 - b. No law in the OT applies to anyone today... WHY?
4. Something better/someone better has come- **Luke 22:19-20**
 - a. Jesus fulfilled the OC law- fulfilled- brought to a designated end. **Mat 5:17**
 - b. **Jesus brought the Old testament law to it's designated end.**
5. And he has a better law... **John 15:12**
6. He made the old law, the old covenant OBSOLETE (Hebrews)- Not bad, just DONE. Doesn't apply anymore.
7. God now deals with us individually and all the work is on Him.

8. **Many of the hurts caused by Xians are a result of trying to impose an old covenant law onto someone else**

9. When people pick and choose what to follow in the OT its b/c they don't understand what it is and what it was for.
- G. So the biblical writings aren't a list of rules that people can pick and choose which to follow. Emphasizing one and ignoring others.
- H. They weren't written to get people to do what others wanted them to do... in fact, and this is important if you are just checking us and Xtianity out today, if you're not a Jesus-Follower- you're not expected to do ANYTHING written in the bible. You are WELCOME to try it out, but for sure NOT required to.
- I. They are the story of how much God loves his creation.
1. Its this story... **GOSPEL**
 2. This is the core of Xianity- and it wasn't the Bible that created this story... this story and those who saw it play out wrote to tell us about it... and those writings were collected and put together in one place.
 3. This story changed the world 200 years before there ever was a "The Bible"
4. **The message of the Bible is a message of love and freedom.**
- a. If your version of Christianity doesn't make you feel loved and free... you're doing it wrong.

IV. YOU

- A. So what do you think?
- B. Historically the bible is the most reliable collection of writings in the world.
- C. To reject it outright b/c of misunderstandings about its history or the culture it was written in would not be following the evidence.
- D. To reject it b/c you or someone you know didn't understand the progression of God's covenants and tried to pick and choose which laws to guilt you with... would be to reject on the basis of misunderstanding... not following the evidence.
- E. So why don't we try it again... Jesus-follower or not... Let's just read it for what it is... the story of God's love for his creation.
 1. Start with John's eye-witness account of Jesus' life.
 2. **Challenge- Read the Gospel of John**
 3. And let it speak for itself.
 4. John says the reason he wrote his account was so people (we) "might believe Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing have LIFE in his name."
 5. Pretty good deal
 6. LIFE- real/full/meaningful/purposeful life now and forever in a perfect relationship with the God who created you.
 7. What do you have to lose?
 8. Should take about 2 hrs total.
 9. Extra credit- underline or note every time you see the word BELIEVE... then ask yourself, "What would believing in this context/instance mean fo me?"

10. You can even download a bible app or just read it online on your phone... I know you have at least 5 minutes a day with nothing to do but look at your phone... so that would take you 24 days... you can do better I'm sure.

11. I think you owe it to yourself to at least try it for two hours out of your life.

V. WE

- A. So what if we started with what the biblical writings are truly about, Jesus, and then read it in that context?
- B. What if we followed the evidence?
- C. I think we would find what the first Christians found... there is more to this than some old book with obsolete rules for a time and place that is long gone.
- D. There is a living breathing God who loves you and died for you...
- E. And there are historical eyewitness accounts that prove it.
- F. Jesus fulfilled the OT so we can live in the freedom of the NT.

G. The biblical writings are a reliable history of God's love for you.