

Is the Bible Still Relevant Today?

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Today, more so than ever before in our nation's history, the word of God is under attack. Increasing numbers of people feel no obligation to live their lives according to its precepts, and many of its most vicious opponents publicly describe it in the most disgusting, degrading terms imaginable. All of this hostility has one source. These enemies of the Scripture know what the Bible teaches, especially about sex, and they don't like it. In order to justify their own failure to obey, they claim that the Bible is a dead letter, irrelevant to today's moral landscape.

This is a serious charge. If indeed the enemies of the word can establish that the Bible is irrelevant, that it has no bearing on the moral decisions of modern man, not only should its enemies not obey it, we who follow it also should not obey it. If the Bible is irrelevant and meaningless, by attempting to conform ourselves to what it teaches, we are wasting our time and squandering our opportunities for happiness. However, if the Bible is relevant, then disobedience carries with it the penalty of eternal punishment. Let's ask, then, is the Bible still relevant today?

What Makes the Bible Relevant?

The best way to answer this question is not by looking at the semi-informed objections of the critics of the word. Instead, we need to consider the Scripture itself, because only as we consider its contents can we determine whether those contents are still relevant. The first justification that the Bible presents for its own relevance is **ITS DIVINE ORIGIN**. There are numerous passages that speak to this. One of them is 2 Peter 1:20-21. In this world, there are a lot of books. The largest library in the world is the Library of Congress, and it contains some 22 million different volumes. However, there is only one book in all the world that was written by God. Only the Bible can rightfully make that claim.

Certainly, this is an audacious claim for the authors of Scripture to make, that although human hands held the pens that wrote it, the will that determined what to write was God's. However, this is a claim that the Bible is able to support. First, we must consider the reliability of the Bible as a historical document. The founding texts of many other world religions are founded in myth. They bear little resemblance to what actually happened in centuries past. By contrast, the records of other ancient texts and the efforts of archaeologists have only reinforced the historical value of the Scripture. The Pharaohs and kings and governors and nations who parade across its pages were real, historical entities that did what the Bible says they did. The evidence leads us to conclude that the Scripture is a faithful witness.

Even beyond that, the authenticity of the word is established by its ability to predict the future. No man can do that, but the pages of Scripture contain numerous predictions that were borne out by later events. To take only one example, the Old Testament, written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, contains dozens of prophecies about the Messiah. The life of Jesus fulfilled every one of those prophecies, even the predictions that Jesus could not have controlled. When confronted with evidence like this, the honest heart must acknowledge that the Bible is the word of God that it claims to be, and if the Bible is truly God speaking to us, then we must listen.

The Scripture is further made relevant by **GOD'S UNCHANGING NATURE**. God affirms this about Himself in Malachi 3:6. Many of the religiously ignorant like to make noise about how there are actually two different Gods in the Bible: the vengeful God of the Old Testament and the merciful God of the New Testament. In reality, the Scripture reveals a God whose nature did not change from its earliest records to its most recent. The Old Testament, which supposedly dwells on God's wrath, actually spends more time, both comparatively and absolutely, discussing the love of God than the New Testament does. God has always been both perfectly just and perfectly merciful, and those, along with all of His other attributes, will continue unchanged until the end of time and beyond. Because God's nature is inalterable, the things that pleased Him 2000 years ago will still please Him today, and the things that angered Him 2000 years ago will still anger Him today. If we desire to please our Creator, then, there is no better guide than the Bible.

The moral precepts of the Bible are not just relevant with respect to God. They are still relevant with respect to us as well, because of **OUR OWN UNCHANGING NATURE**. This is starkly illustrated by the words of Stephen in Acts 7:52-53. The Jews of the time of Jesus thought they were better than their wicked forefathers. In reality, they were exactly the same as their forefathers. The ancestors killed the prophets who foretold the coming of Jesus, and the descendants killed Jesus and those who proclaimed Him as Lord. Likewise, friends, people today are no different from the people whom the Scripture describes. Many of our countrymen believe that America is evolving into some new, enlightened state, in which for the first time we accord everyone the civil rights that are their due. In reality, we are not evolving. Instead, we are continuing to walk in the same circular rut that mankind has been stuck in ever since Eve took the devil's advice on produce. God has always understood the heart of man perfectly, and that understanding is reflected in His word. In my own studies, I often find myself amazed by how appropriate words that were written 2000 years ago are to the circumstances of today. The Bible is for all of us, and it is for all time.

So, then, the Bible is still relevant because of its cutting critique of mankind's eternal problems. On a happier note, it is also relevant because of **THE UNIVERSALITY OF ITS SALVATION**. Look, for instance, at Hebrews

5:8-9. Notice that the text doesn't say that Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for the people who obeyed Him in the first century. It doesn't say that Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for the first 144,000 lucky winners. Instead, it says that He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him. That includes the sinner who obeyed the gospel last week just as surely as it includes the sinner who obeyed the gospel 2000 years ago. As we saw just a moment ago, we continue unchecked in the same wickedness as our forefathers. We have the same sin problem. Thankfully, though, we also have the same sin solution. As we recognize that we have violated God's eternal law, we too must seek redemption through the blood of Jesus. He is our only hope. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one can come to the Father except through Him. However, the grace of Jesus is more than great enough to cover us all.

Finally, the Scripture is still relevant because of **THE REALITY OF JUDGMENT**. Jesus Himself depicts the scene that will take place on the Day of Judgment in Matthew 25:31-32. To put things another way, the last judgment is a party to which every soul is invited, and it is a party that every soul is going to attend. Like it or not, every single one of us is going to be there, and every single one of us is going to have to give an account before God of the life we chose to live. We can be as devoted as we want to any other religion under heaven. For that matter, we can deny the existence of God until we're blue in the face. None of that's going to make a difference. We will still appear before Jehovah, and He will still judge us according to His word. If He counts us righteous by that standard, eternal life will be our reward. If He finds us unrighteous, eternal death will be our punishment. There is no third way. That being the case, because we know that there's this final exam that we're all going to have to take, shouldn't we prepare for it beforehand? Only God's word can help us to prepare, and if we have readied ourselves for eternity according to the Scripture, we need fear nothing.

How Did Jesus View the Word?

To me, one of the odd things about all the Bible-attackers is that many of them, perhaps even most of them, profess respect for Jesus. However, this respect is much more commonly based on ignorance of His teaching than familiarity with it. In fact, Jesus Himself took a strong stand for the Scripture they reject. To illustrate this, let's look at how Jesus viewed the word. This will help us reflect on our own discipleship before we partake of the Lord's Supper.

When we're talking about the word that Jesus revered, of course, we're only referring to the Old Testament. The New Testament didn't exist during His ministry. However, the way He dealt with the Scripture He had tells us how we should consider the Scripture we have. First, the gospels tell us that Jesus **TOOK IT LITERALLY**. The best illustration of this principle appears in Matthew 12:39-40. It's fashionable among liberal theologians today to pretend that the miracles of the Bible never happened. Many of these scholars call themselves followers of Jesus, but they deny that the bodily resurrection of Jesus ever happened, along with all the rest of the supernatural events that the word records. In their unbelief, though, they are certainly not following Jesus! As this passage illustrates, Jesus believed that by the power of God, the prophet Jonah was imprisoned for three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, and that by the power of God, Jonah was vomited out on dry land. The gospels reveal that Jesus was often skeptical about the motives of men, but He was never skeptical about the truth of Scripture. If we wish to be disciples of Jesus, we will regard the Bible in the same way. We will accept that it teaches the truth, from God's creation of the world to its prediction of the world's destruction. It accurately recounts the supernatural work of God, and our souls can rely on its words.

Second, Jesus **REGARDED THE WORD AS SUFFICIENT**. Read with me from His words in Luke 16:30-31. Jesus, of course, does not present this parable as a record of something that actually happened. Instead, it's a story He's telling to illustrate some spiritual truths. One of these truths, somewhat surprising, coming from the greatest miracle worker ever to live, concerns the limitations of miracles. What Jesus wants us to understand here is that anyone who refuses to repent and obey God on the basis of the testimony of the Scripture is also not going to repent and obey God if someone rises from the dead to warn him. No sign can convince one whom the word will not convince. Conversely, it is true that the word can accomplish just as much in the good and honest heart as can the most spectacular miracle. Jesus believed in the word and in its power to change lives and win souls for God. It was His greatest tool, and the only one that really mattered. As His disciples, we too must trust in the sufficiency of the word to accomplish God's purpose.

Third, we see that Jesus **CONSIDERED IT AUTHORITATIVE**. Consider, for instance, what He says in Matthew 5:18-19. If we don't want to fall into the trap of distorting the teaching of this text, we must be careful to account for everything that it says. Jesus here is not affirming the relevance of the Law of Moses for all time. Instead, He says that none of it will pass away until all has been fulfilled. We can pinpoint the precise moment when that took place, when Jesus cried out "It is finished!" and yielded up His spirit on the cross. From that point on, as several books of the New Testament reveal, the Law became a dead letter. Before that point, though, it was anything but.

In fact, Jesus teaches here that before His death, the only thing that determined a person's standing in the kingdom of God was whether he kept the Law or not. The traditions of the Pharisees didn't matter. The speculations of the Greek philosophers didn't matter. The only thing that did matter was whether Jews obeyed the revealed word. Today, even though our system of law has changed, the reverence with which we regard that law must remain the same. We will be accounted great in the kingdom only to the extent that we submit ourselves to the authority of Scripture.

Fourth, Jesus **TREATED THE SCRIPTURE LOGICALLY**. This is apparent, among other places, in Luke 20:37-38. Every so often, I run into people who don't believe that it is right to determine what God wants us to do by the process of necessary inference. There are several logical problems with that position, but one of the greatest is that Jesus employed necessary inference long before any Restoration preacher did. This is one of the places that He did so.

Let's look at His logic here. He starts with a Scriptural statement, which we can find in the story of the burning bush in Exodus 3, when God says, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He then refers to another Scriptural idea, that God is the God of the living, which we can find in Genesis 9. On the basis of those two Scriptural concepts, Jesus then begins to make logical, necessary inferences. The first is that if God is both the God of the living and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must be living. Makes sense, right? Then, Jesus makes a second necessary inference. If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive, even though their bodies died thousands of years ago, then the soul must be immortal, and there must be a resurrection from the dead. That's Jesus' argument for the resurrection from the dead, and it's a logical argument, but it simply does not work without necessary inference. If Jesus was not afraid to use inferential reasoning, we as His disciples shouldn't shy away from that logical technique either.

Finally, Jesus **OBEYED THE LAW PERFECTLY**. This is evident from Peter's description of Jesus in 1 Peter 1:18-19. When Peter describes Jesus as "a Lamb without blemish", that doesn't mean that Jesus had a clear complexion. Instead, it refers to the state of His soul, which was entirely free from the blemishes of sin. Alone of all the people who ever lived under the Law, Jesus kept that Law in every detail. He respected God so much that He never disobeyed once.

This is relevant to us for two reasons. First, just as the Jews offered animal sacrifices in the temple, Jesus offered Himself on the cross. Just as the animals to be sacrificed had to be without blemish, Jesus' soul had to be unblemished as well. Otherwise, both He and all of us would be dead in our sins. Second, we need to share His respect for the ordinances of God. We don't keep God's law perfectly, but we must do our best to imitate the record of Jesus' righteousness. Let's reflect, then, both on Jesus' perfect sacrifice and our own responsibilities as we partake.

How Should We Use the Bible?

So then, we see that the Bible is relevant to us both because our obedience to it determines our eternal destiny, and because our Master Jesus revered and obeyed it. That leads us logically to another question: How should we use the Bible today? Once again, the Scripture supplies a wide range of answers to this question, and we're only going to look at a few of them. First, we should use the Bible **DAILY**. This is succinctly expressed in Psalm 119:97. Notice that the psalmist doesn't say that God's law is our study all the day. Except for those of us who are either retired or blessed enough to work as gospel preachers, a full day of study every day isn't realistic. Instead, the text urges us to take God's law for our meditation all the day. This doesn't mean that we sit cross-legged on the floor and close our eyes and do that thing with our hands and hum the sacred syllable. Instead, meditation means that we take some concept from Scripture and turn it over and over in our minds, reflecting on what it means and considering how we should put it into practice. We don't live in a very meditative culture, and I fear that a lot of Christians want instant gratification from their interaction with the word. If thinking about the Bible doesn't change their lives Right Now, they aren't interested. In reality, we have to put in think time as well as study time if we want to understand God, and we have to do it every day.

Second, we should use the Bible **PRAYERFULLY**. We learn why from James 1:5. I think that we see James' sarcastic sense of humor leaking through when he begins this statement by saying, "If any of you lacks wisdom. . ." In real life, every single one of us, along with every other Christian who has ever lived, is nowhere near as wise as we ought to be. That means that every single one of us ought to be praying for wisdom, and nowhere is that more important than in our study of the word. The Bible is hands-down the most important book ever written, and if we get something wrong, that mistake could very well cost us our souls. God's book is nothing to be taken lightly, brethren. We need to ponder it with every ounce of concentration we can bring to bear, along with all the help that we can ask from God. If we seek that help in faith, though, James promises us that we will receive it. Through prayer, we can find understanding.

Third, we must be careful to approach the Bible **MEEKLY**. We learn this too from the pen of James, in James 1:21. As always, we must remember that meekness is not the same as weakness. We are meek when we could assert ourselves, but we choose not to. In our time with the word, we always have the option to assert ourselves against it. God has given all of us free will, and we can even use that free will to disregard His Scripture and disobey Him. However, that's not the way that the child of God handles the word of truth. For all of us, there are some passages of Scripture that we find easy to obey. For instance, I don't believe that I've stolen anything since I was 3 and grabbed a pack of gum in the checkout line when I was at the grocery store with my mother. Let's just say that my mother's reaction when she figured out what I had done soured me on larceny forever after. As a result, I don't struggle too much with the commandment not to steal. On the other hand, for all of us, there are also sayings in Scripture that we will find hard, and the true test of our discipleship is what we do with those hard sayings of Jesus. Do we defiantly refuse to obey, or do we meekly accept God's commandment and do our best to put it into practice, even when it's unpleasant? Only the life of meek obedience, no matter what it costs us, can please God and result in the salvation of our souls.

Fourth, we must apply ourselves to the word **HONESTLY**. This spirit is best captured by the Bereans in Acts 17:10-11. When the Bereans first heard the gospel, they were excited about it. They wanted to believe what Paul was telling them. However, they didn't believe Paul on the basis of their want-to. Instead, they turned to the Scripture and examined it to learn whether what he said was so. This Berean attitude is challenging for any of us to imitate. We all have pre-existing beliefs about Bible teaching. We all have things that we want to believe about the word. Brethren, just because we've always believed it doesn't make it right, and just because we want to believe it doesn't make it right. The only thing that makes a doctrine right is whether it is contained in the pages of the word. Only as we set aside our prejudices and hopes and fears can we come to a clear understanding of the truth, and that honesty is what God expects.

Finally, we should use the Bible **ACTIVELY**. We find an example of an active hearer of the word in Acts 8:35-36. Here, Philip the evangelist has just proclaimed the gospel of Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. As part of this gospel, Philip has clearly told the eunuch that he must be baptized to be saved. So what does the eunuch do about it? As soon as they come to a body of water large enough for him to be immersed in, he asks Philip if he will baptize him. If baptism was what God wanted, then the eunuch was going to get himself baptized, right then. That's what an active hearer of the word does. Sadly, all too many Christians have fallen into the trap of being hearers of the word and not doers. They will hear a lesson like this one, in which they are encouraged to meditate on the word on a daily basis, they will nod thoughtfully when they hear the preacher raise the point, and then, they will go home and spend their week thinking about what's on TV, just like they did last week. Brethren, hearing Bible teaching or reading the Bible ourselves is not the end of the process. It's the beginning, and if we are nothing more than hearers or readers, we are failing utterly to carry out God's will. God means for His word to change our thinking and our lives, and only the active learner pleases Him.