**Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?**

*Lesson 6 – Can We Trust the Gospels?*

*The Content of the Gospels*

1. Why would the Gospel authors paint themselves and the apostles in a bad light if they were making this stuff up?

1. They scatter when Jesus is arrested.
2. Peter constantly sticks his foot in his mouth
3. James and John argue about being the greatest
4. Women (who are unreliable witnesses in Jewish thinking at this time) are the first to encounter the empty tomb and women are supporters of the apostles in their missionary travels.
5. What about supposed contradictions between the Gospels?
	1. Over 90-95% of the apparent contradictions between the Gospels can be cleared up by keeping a few facts in mind:
		1. Different people may report on a common event truthfully but include or exclude different details.
		2. Jesus was an itinerant preacher, which means He gave the same or very similar teachings in multiple places on multiple occasions.
		3. Gospel writers don't necessarily arrange material chronologically, even if it seems like they do. Their arrangement of the narrative is suited to their purpose, but that doesn't make it inaccurate just because the order of events is different between the different Gospels.
	2. In one sense, it's really very reassuring that the Gospels are not identical in every respect. These differences show us that the Gospel writers did not collude with one another to make sure their stories matched just right. If you have multiple witnesses retelling events from different perspectives, you should expect the accounts to differ somewhat: Details will be included by one person which are excluded by another, etc. This is normal and supports the truthfulness of the witnesses' accounts.

*Historical Evidences*

1. The supposed differences in all the Bible manuscripts are widely overblown.
	1. First, the only reason we have thousands of “differences” is because we have so many copies of manuscripts of Scripture or parts of Scripture available to us. No other historical writing (Philo, Josephus, Greek philosophers, Julius Caesar, Homer, etc.) is as well attested by the manuscript copies like the Bible is.



* 1. 99.9% of these differences are so minor in nature as to not affect any doctrine.
		1. “Jesus Christ” vs. “Christ Jesus” vs “Christ” vs “Jesus”
		2. “the” vs. nothing
	2. Out of ~20,000 lines in the New Testament text only ~40 lines are in doubt as to whether or not they are original, and those in doubt appear in 2 sections - the longer ending of Mark's Gospel and the first 11 verses of John 8. So, the total number of seriously disputed lines in the New Testament is less than 1/2 of 1% of the total text. The New Testament text we have is over 99.5% reliable, based on the comparison of thousands of manuscripts from three different continents over 15 centuries. By reliable, what I mean is that the text that we have today is the text as it was originally written.
	But what about the disputed .5%? Surely that's where all of the core Christian doctrines are, right? Wrong. There is not a single Christian doctrine of any kind that is affected by the longer ending of Mark and those 11 verses in John 8.
1. Why 4 Gospels and these 4 Gospels?
	1. These 4 Gospels are the only self-proclaimed Gospels that date reliably to the 1st century.
	2. These Gospels from the beginning have been associated with an apostle or a companion to an apostle.
2. Nothing the New Testament asserts as a historical fact has ever been definitively disproven. On the contrary, the New Testament, and the Gospels in particular, provide us with an incredibly accurate, detailed historical context for the life of Jesus. The details of life under Roman occupation, life in first century Israel, etc. all ring true with what we have from other ancient writers, like Josephus. Moreover, Luke especially is careful to give us precise historical references so we can place the events of the Gospels in history, not in mythology.

*Scripture’s Witness to Itself*

* Scripture itself refers more than 3,000 times to its own inspiration. Now this may not “prove” that the Bible is the Word of God, but if it didn’t say it was the Word of God, we wouldn’t expect it to be.
* “It may not prove what it claims to be by its mere claim, but it certainly is impressive that a book which has so many extraordinary qualities does indeed claim to be no mere human document.” –Gertsner/Kelly
* Examples: 2 Samuel 23:2, Luke 1:68-70, Acts 4:24-25, Matthew 5:18, John 10:35, 2 Peter 3:15-16, et al

*Westminster Confession of Faith*

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. (1 Tim. 3:15) And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts. –Chapter 1, Paragraph 5

There are several external factors about the Word of God:

1. **Testimony of the Church over the years testifying to the Scripture**
	1. 1 Timothy 3:15 – “…the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”
	2. “It is a very impressive fact that the church through the ages, in virtually all of its branches, has borne testimony to the Bible as the word of God.” –John Gertsner & Doug Kelly
2. **The heavenliness of the matter** – miracles, fulfilled prophecies, creation, etc. The Bible unfolds itself as the product of a single, divine mind.
3. **The efficacy of the doctrine** – It is the proclamation of Christ and the call to repentance that has brought people to faith; no human wisdom or philosophy can or has ever accomplished this
	1. “Show me a place on the face of the earth ten miles square where a man may provide for his children in decency and comfort, where age is venerated, where womanhood is protected, where human life is held in due regard, and I will show you a place where the gospel of Jesus Christ has gone before and laid the foundation.” –James Russell Lowell
	2. “What other book being dropped in the midst of a degenerate and pagan culture has been able to transform the live of individuals and the society in which they live?” –Gertsner/Kelly
4. **The majesty of the style** – Genesis 1:1, Psalm 23, John 1:1, John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 13, the Golden Rule, etc.
5. **The consent of all the parts** – They are free from contradiction although they were written over 1600 years by 40 authors, in different contexts and cultures, with different personalities and writing styles.
6. **The scope of the whole which is to give glory to God**
	1. “Considering that the Bible was written by men and obviously for the interests of men it is all the more remarkable that it keeps its eye singularly on the glory of God.” –Gertsner/Kelly
	2. Ultimately the heart of all the stories, the different genres, the history, and the experiences, is to give glory to God.
7. **Only it makes plain to us how man is to be saved** – No other book reveals how to deal with both a Holy God and sinful mankind. The Bible reveals how both are dealt with in Jesus Christ and that He is the only means of salvation.
8. **Many other incomparable excellencies**
9. **Entire perfection**

There is 1 internal factor about the Word of God:

1. Only the Holy Spirit testifying to Himself through the Word can open our eyes to see all of the above external factors.
2. “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” –1 Corinthians 2:14
3. This internal testimony is not “new revelation” but rather the act of the Spirit opening the eyes of a sinner to see what is in God’s Word.
4. “The Spirit opens our eyes subjectively to see these objective marks.” –Dr. Michael Kruger
5. “Thus God authenticates Holy Scripture to us as his Word—not by some mystical experience or secret information privately whispered into some inner ear, not by human argument alone (strong as this may be), nor by the church’s testimony alone (impressive as this is when one looks back over two thousand years). God does it, rather, by means of the searching light and transforming power whereby Scripture evidences itself to be divine. The impact of this light and power is itself the Spirit’s witness “by and with the Word in our heart.” Argument, testimony from others, and our own particular experiences may prepare us to receive this witness, but the imparting of it, like the imparting of faith in Christ’s divine Saviorhood, is the prerogative of the sovereign Holy Spirit alone.” –J.I. Packer

**Conclusion**:

There are plenty of external, historical, and rational evidences and arguments to believe the Bible is true and the Word of God. But, ultimately it comes down to whether you are a believer or not. If you are a believer, you’re going to take the Bible at its Word because the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to see and has fully persuaded and assured you that the Bible is the very Word of God Himself. If you’re an unbeliever, you reject the Bible as the Word of God and think it’s just another book because you are spiritually blinded and have not had the Holy Spirit persuade you otherwise. In other words, it comes down to your presuppositions and worldview. All of these critics of the Gospels and the Christ of faith started from a position of doubt and said unless it makes irrefutable sense to me with no problems or mystery whatsoever, I’m not going to believe it. So is it any wonder that they end up denying Scripture itself. We shouldn’t be surprised by this and this will continue through the ages until Jesus comes back.