

“The Bible Myth”

Deuteronomy 8:1-3; Luke 8:16-18

July 28, 2021

I don't think any of us would disagree that as people get to know us, they're going to rather quickly learn your most common traits. To this day, my guess is that my close friends really pretty quickly I have some strengths and some weaknesses. Somewhere between those two points lies probably my greatest strength as well as my greatest weakness. I am trying to think of the kindest way to put this so here's how I would phrase one of my clearest cut tendencies – I tend to question authority. I have all the days of my life. Honest to goodness, I wish it wasn't true for every single time aversion to authority helped me, it probably caused me trouble a dozen times.

You'd think such a tendency would abate over time, after all, I'm quite a way from being a spring chicken but I haven't seen any signs of my anti-authoritarianism waning, in the slightest. Once, somebody from the organizing committee of the Mount Holly Springfest told us our church would be prevented from having a bouncy house on the front lawn. Y'all, I just about went to war over that...nobody is gonna tell my church that they can't do something on their front lawn. Thankfully, a compromise was brokered but, honestly, I'm lucky I made it through that first year of ministry without a court summons if not a misdemeanor.

And, true to form, I spent a good many fruitless years arguing with others about the Bible. And I probably wouldn't have been on the side you expect. While I didn't study the topic in general, you'd be amazed at the number of things you hear about the Bible that are very wrong but also very easy to repeat. And because I rejected the authority of Scripture, I had no problem whatsoever flouting it. I mean, why bother following what some ancient writings of men recorded. I wouldn't take living advice from a Neanderthal why should I from someone just a few hundred years younger?

Needless to say, my attitude has changed...a lot. Not only would I say to this day that the Scripture is supremely authoritative in my life, talking about it represents one of the most enjoyable aspects of my job.

What happened? Well, that's a rather long yarn, one that I'd be happy to spin for you some other day and not from the pulpit. Suffice it to say that it took God doing a 180 on my life. But the thing to really notice is that I was changed while the Scriptures, they didn't change a thing.

Which, if you think about it, is a desperately needed thing. An anchor. Something to navigate by. Because if we think about it, we're always in motion. Right now, for example, even though it seems like you're sitting there in your pew mostly motionless except to grab a Kleenex or pinch a rebellious child, you're actually moving...quite fast. You see, the earth moves at about 30 kilometers per second. Which, in case you were wondering means you're moving in one direction at about 67,000 miles per hour. And, that's not all. For not only are you moving in an orbit around the sun, you're also rotating on the Earth's axis. In some ways, you're on a cosmic tilt-a-whirl and you don't even know it.

And it's not just that. When I was a kid, they made us watch a movie called, *Koi-anna-scotsi* which used motion capture photography to document changes to all number of things over time. Motion and change are sometimes all we can count on, it'd seem.

It sure feels that way sometimes, doesn't it? Not so much that the earth is moving but rather that the goalposts are changing. Without question, we've experienced more societal upheaval in the last 50 years than we'd likely realize. If you wake up, read the news and think, "how the heck did this happen?" then you should be ecstatic that there is one thing that is constant. That doesn't change.

1 Peter 1:25 – *“but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*”

Isaiah 40:8 – *“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”*

Hebrews 13:8 – *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”*

The Bible makes clear that, in this world of constant change and motion, there is one thing most steady and most sure. The Word of God.

And yet, that's the very thing that often gets quickly discredited or thrown aside in all matter of debates. One of the primary reasons for this comes to us from history. Now, for this next part, please know that I'm not talking about current politics. When I say liberal or liberalism, I'm talking historically, not your next-door neighbor.

Well, liberalism began as the intellectual class began debating the truthfulness of the Scriptures. In short, liberalism begins as a rejection of Scripture, or at least a large part of it. Liberalism's founding father, if you will, was John Locke. Now look, John Locke is extremely important in the founding of America so he's not all bad, by any stretch of the imagination. Ostensibly, he was Christian. Raised a Calvinist though, John Locke's faith beliefs changed quite substantively. He ends up a Socinian Christian. Socinians believe, ultimately, Jesus was a smart, compassionate man but was not divine. God didn't know the future. Humanity wasn't afflicted with original sin but were moral free agents, able to choose their way in the world. Essentially, Socinian Christians end up rejecting a healthy amount of what the Bible actually says which, necessarily, makes it a heresy.

Liberalism is born, therefore as a rejection of the Authority of Scripture.

It continues further as a man named Immanuel Kant arrives on the scene. He turns the world upside down. Objective reality no longer exists as we humans end up being the ultimate determiners of everything. It is only that our mind puts together a tree that we actually know what a tree is. So, NO a tree falling over in the woods would NOT make a sound because there is no HUMAN around to perceive it. That's an oversimplification but sufficient for the task at hand.

Locke and Kant become the most significant voices in academia for the next 300 years, sadly. Their views are taken up by the academy, the collective of upper academicians at universities and never once much challenged.

Part of that system of knowledge is a complete rejection as faith being reasonable. That is, to the eyes of the highly educated, faith can't be proven rational and, as such, it can be entirely disregarded. Its why when you go into a university's class on, let's say, New Testament, they're not talking about Jesus as resurrected, they're talking about it like it was fiction.

But here's where things get interesting. The majority of faculty at mainline denominational seminaries hold their PhD's from secular universities. That's right, the same people teaching the future religious study professors are also the ones teaching future seminary professors. Now, are some wise enough not to wholeheartedly embrace an epistemology that rejects their beliefs? Certainly. But are they all that capable? Certainly NOT.

If you ever wondered why some pastors sound almost identical to professors on matters of social policy, it's likely because they trained at the same place.

And, you know how it is, if you're around one prevalent attitude or outlook, it becomes hard not to adopt some of it, even if it's done so subconsciously.

See those professors train us pastors. So, again, it's not surprising to me that a lot of what I hear from denominational pulpits sounds an awful lot like what comes from the lectern in a sociology class.

Look, I had the advantage of finishing my undergraduate degree at 30 as opposed to most of my fellow students. They were, obviously, much younger and much more willing to idolize professors. And what they heard from their professors was largely ongoing mockery of Christian beliefs. And all of this occurs right at the age when kids are learning to fly, so to speak. It's terribly effective. First of all, mockery is powerful stuff, don't miss that.

But then there's this. The Milgram effect. The Milgram effect is a well-studied psychological phenomenon. It was first discovered through a particular test that went something like this. Two people meet under the direction of white-coated medical professionals. They're told each will take part in an experiment. Separated into different rooms but communicating by intercom, the two people are told that one will ask a series of questions with increasing difficulty.

The other person, in the next room, will answer them. When they get answers wrong, the first person will administer an electric shock as a "punishment" for getting the question wrong. Oh, and just as the difficulty of the questions rise, so does the voltage of the shock being administered.

At first upon missing, the person receiving complains mildly. But, as the power of the shock increases, the person begins asking, then begging the other person to stop. They don't. They keep shocking the person in the other room, up until the subject in the other room passes out from the shock.

So, as it would turn out, your neighbor can in fact be coaxed into shocking you nearly to death insofar as certain conditions are maintained. But the length to which you'll shock the stranger in the room next to you is

entirely dependent on your perception of the study's leaders. If you think that the person guiding the experiment isn't that bright, you won't shock the other person very long. BUT, if they're white-coated experts from Yale University telling you to do it, you'll drop that person in the other room like a bad case of the flu.

I've endured sermons in which vital, Biblical Christian beliefs are derided by people wearing long black robes and stoles and some even have nifty patches on their arms – means that they have a doctorate. Every bit of it, I believe, is designed to take advantage of our deference to authority. That is to say that IF YOU BELIEVE I'M AN EXPERT, then I can likely get you to metaphorically SHOCK your neighbor to the point of exhaustion.

I can't help but know that God created us to enjoy life to the fullest. Adam and Eve (and presumably you and I) had paradise in Eden and they threw it away. But it would make sense that God would devise within us all an easy deference to authority. But to the right source.

But what I see is that when a great many Christians are asked why they believe the Bible, they start out strong but fade fast. You know they type, there's always one or two in the mix. You know the kind. The type that's all about poking fun of Christian beliefs. Or debate them, what have you. They typically win. Why? Because often Christians aren't aware of some important times.

First, relying on faith isn't an absurd premise. You do it every time you add two plus two and get four. That's right. Math. Gödel's Uncertainty Premises demonstrate that, get this, for mathematics to work, you must make several, ultimately unprovable moves. This means that all of math and much of science is contingent upon FAITH as well.

Secondly, there's always someone that'll point out that there isn't just one Bible. There are hundreds of translations, many with errors such that you simply can't believe that any one of those scrolls or codices are accurate.

Again, this objection to the Bible's authority is actually pretty easy to refute. There are far more copies of the sacred writings of Scripture than there are ancient extant copies of the Iliad for example. Moreover, the "errors" those scribes did appear to make? Well, a comprehensive analysis demonstrates that none of the disputed errors would make a bit of theological difference. It isn't the case that there's a verse out there in some copy that says that Christ didn't rise from death. Not one version suggests that God isn't, well, God.

On top of that, it shouldn't be overlooked that the New Testament texts were written at a time when other witnesses could've easily objected had the source material be false. Guess what there isn't one shred of? A document written at the time that suggests that Jesus didn't exist or didn't rise from the grave. Somebody likely would, of course. Written something like that down. Like, "hey, these people are saying this, not one word of it went down like that." Not. One. Word.

Or maybe one of those doubters raises whatever objections were raised in the last Discovery channel documentary on those "missing gospels." You know, the ones like Dan Brown talked about in "The Davinci Code." First of all, that book's fiction but, moreover, there aren't any that date correctly or hold similar views as the remainder of the Scriptures.

All of this to say simply that the Scriptures are reliable. But factoring in what the Bible says about God's Word, you could bet your life on it.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.