

## WE CAN BELIEVE THE WORD OF GOD

There is an old saying, “Don’t believe everything you hear!” The point being, not everyone may be telling the truth. Some people speak without a real knowledge of the subject on which they are speaking. They simply don’t know what they are talking about. And some people, well, they are just plain nuts! Now I am more inclined to believe Dr. Oz on what is best for my health than I would a bureaucrat who never went to Med School. I found it hard to believe Moammar Gadhafi, who was denying that his mercenaries were killing his own citizen while live television was showing the actual slaughter going on at that moment! And who in his right mind is going to believe what Charlie Sheen as to say about anything? Hello! Why is that guy even being given the opportunity to speak on TV? Is there really that big a void in real news that the networks have to give him so much press?

The same is true in the area of the Christian faith. In our text St. Peter responds to those self-appointed gurus who tried to foster their ideas on the end times rather than follow the Scriptures. In their denial it would happen they mocked the Word of God. We call those who would replace the Biblical teachings with their own imaginative ideas and who would twist the real meaning of the Scriptures to support their beliefs, “FALSE TEACHERS!” Their teachings were just groundless speculations and lacked any authoritative source for support for their ideas. But sadly innocent people, who were weak in their faith and limited in their own knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures, were deceived and led astray.

We see the same thing happening today. False teachers, who have absolutely no understanding of the Bible teachings, languages, or historical context, spout off with a pompous arrogance trying to convince people that their wild, speculative, sometimes off the wall ideas, are actual factual and true. Often they have an axe to grind, a prejudice to forward, or a need for publicity. These false teachers will attack the Biblical truths with a viscous desire to change or eliminate the Commandments, mislead people away from God and leaving them with no assurance of their salvation, and ultimately resulting in some being lost in hell.

While we often find the writings of religious false teaching in the religious or self-help sections of the bookstores or library, they really belong in the

area marked, “FICTION!” Look at verses 16-18. The false teachers of Peter’s day had no reliable, factual basis for their teachings; and probably never heard Jesus, let alone studied under his direction. But Peter can make that claim! Peter stated that he and the other New Testament writers did not base their teachings on wishful thinking, political correctness, personal prejudice, or mere speculation. Peter and the other apostles were eye witnesses! They knew Jesus, they heard Jesus, they walked with Jesus! In fact, the Greek word that Peter uses for “eyewitness” means that he was part of the inner circle around Jesus. Who went into the room with Jesus when our LORD raised Jairus’ daughter? Peter was one of three! Who did Jesus bring closer to Himself when our LORD prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane? Peter was one of three! Who was one of three apostles who witnessed the Transfiguration of Jesus? Peter! False teachers cannot claim to have seen Jesus or to be close to Him. But Peter can!

Peter notes in verse 16 that neither he nor any other New Testament writer were part of a 2000 year long clever conspiracy when they wrote their works. And this begs the question on our part, “How did we finally arrive at the New Testament having 27 books?” In the first century there were literally dozens of writings about Jesus and the Christian faith including “The Sayings of Jesus, The Gospel according to Peter, and The Gospel according to Thomas.” Many writings claimed to be the work of one of the apostles. Why were the 27 we have chosen and others excluded?

The early Church applied five criteria to determine which writings would be received as the Word of God. **First**, which works were really written and accepted as the work of one of the twelve apostles? **Second**, which letters were accepted as being the work of the apostle St. Paul? **Third**, which books or letters were written by someone who was guided by an apostle? **Fourth**, which letters and books were most widely circulated and accepted by congregations as being the authoritative Word of God, as opposed to which were used by only one or two churches. And **fifth**, do these writings under consideration in any way conflict with or contradict the teachings in the Old Testament or in the accepted New Testament writings. Much research and investigation went in to the choosing. In 393 AD the Council of Hippo Regius became the first council to officially accept the present 27 Books of the New Testament as canon.

In his work, “The Case for Christ,” Lee Strobel cites three special types of evidence that support not only the authenticity of the Gospels, but the entire

New Testament. These include **one, Documentary evidence**: the overwhelming number of thousands of copies of the writings of the New Testament that predate 800 AD. Almost 30,000! And they all agree theologically with each other. **Two, Corroborating evidence**: the references internally of the writers referring to the works of others, the witness of the early church fathers, and the historians of the day. **And three, Scientific evidence**: not one archaeological finding rejects any of the New Testament historical claims, while archaeological finds have confirmed many of New Testament names, dates, places, and events. We can be sure that we have the Word of God in the New Testament.

It is also interesting to note that the early Church took seriously its quest to identify the works the Holy Spirit was guiding them to select. Twenty out of the twenty-seven New Testament works were accepted by the early Church without any questions. These are called “*homologoumena*” or “agreed upon”. Only seven of the New Testament Books had questions raised about their source or content. Those are called “*antilegomena*” or “spoken against.” Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. But after careful study and prayer, the Spirit guided the Church to include them, too.

Because we know the Scriptures are reliable, we can turn to them and find them very helpful in life. **First**, we can use the Word of God for direction and guidance in life. As we make choices in the decisions, the values, the morals, or response to a crisis in life, let the Word be our guide. **Second**, we can believe and trust in the promises of God. Scripture shows us God is faithful in keeping His promises. Knowing the promises we can find strength, encouragement and hope that will empower us in our life as a child of God. Promises that will guide us in our parenting, assure us in our sufferings and hardships, and comfort us in our tragedies and losses. And **third**, we can be certain that through faith in the blood of Jesus we have God’s forgiveness for all our sins and His free gift of eternal life. We can be confident today that we have salvation now!

Look at verses 20-21. Peter’s words about the origin of the Scriptures make it clear that never did the Scriptures begin in the mind of the writer or as a result of the writer’s interest, agenda, or fantasy. Peter’s words lead us to reject as God’s Word the *Koran* and the *Book of Mormon*. If for no other reason they contradict the clear teaching of justification through faith alone.

And finally, understand how really unreliable are those so called voices of religious authority who say, “I don’t care what the Bible says! I believe this is right, this is true, or this is the way to do things!” Their position and beliefs are not based on the Word of God or by the inspiration of the Spirit. Nor are they part of the inner circle around Jesus. In experience, any other source will lead you away from Jesus, away from God’s grace, and away from the love of God that is ours only through faith in Jesus. And finally my friends, I don’t want any of you to be misled and lose your faith in the work and person of Jesus Christ so that you go to hell instead of being saved. Rather I want you to be sure that Jesus died for your sins and that through faith alone you are justified before God and have salvation!

Trust in God’s Word. In the Scriptures we have the sure prophetic Word. Want to believe in something? Remember: **WE CAN BELIEVE THE WORD OF GOD!** IJN, amen.