

Why I'm A Christian | The Bible | 2/9/2020

Good morning. I'm Michael. One of the pastors here. Glad to be with you this morning as we continue in our series, "Why I'm a Christian?" Where we're trying to take a look at the rationality behind our faith.

Originally, I wanted to call it "Why Am I A Christian?" because I thought that encapsulated a bit more of how it can feel sometimes... like, "Am I crazy to believe this? Am I crazy to believe that there is a God? Am I crazy to believe that Jesus really rose from the dead?"

Today, we're going to be talking about the Bible. "Are we crazy to trust the Bible?" Is it irrational to submit ourselves to the wisdom and authority of a 2000+ year old collection of writings?

I don't know if you're aware, but the book you hold in your hands, or store on your phones throughout history has been rather controversial. I know for many of us it probably doesn't feel that way, especially if you grew up in the south like I did... the Bible just felt common place. We had like 20 of them in my house growing up... in the kitchen, on the coffee table, by our beds... it's presence in our house felt anything but controversial... it was just there... like the rug.... Looking pretty for whenever guests came through. But, that is not how this thing was treated throughout the majority of its history and even throughout much of the globe today.

- In the 15th and 16th century, men were **burned at the stake** for translating it into the common language so the everyday person could read it.
- Some of the greatest empires of history - Rome, Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia - **all burned or banned or at least censored the Bible...** regimes like North Korea and China still do similarly today.
- In fact, there are **52 countries** in the world today where it is highly dangerous and/or illegal to own or distribute copies of the Bible.
- And even in countries where it's not illegal, like our own, there is **near constant debate on the right and on the left about what the Bible really is and how it should be treated...** and all of that is not to even mention how it has been used and abused to further personal and political agendas.

So, the question is, if the Bible is *this* controversial, are we crazy to trust it?

Now, obviously I'm going to answer that question with a "No." Otherwise, I'm fired. But, what I hope to show you today is that there are actually very good and very important reasons why it's not crazy to trust the Bible at all.

But before we do that, let's get straight what the Bible is - because in my experience, misunderstanding what Christians actually believe the Bible is often derails people's trust in the Bible before they even begin.

Let's look together at **2 Timothy 3:14-17**, here Paul gives us a great little snapshot of what Christians believe the Bible is and it's purpose in our lives... so let's check it out...

2 Timothy 3:14-17 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Alright, so you'll notice first of all Paul refers to what we call the Bible in two ways... "sacred writings" and "All Scripture". Now, this might feel a little too elementary for you, so if this insight offends you, I apologize, but you'll notice how these are referenced in the plural - as in more than one.

The title "Bible" is actually misleading. "Bible" is from the latin word "biblia" and it just means book. The Holy Bible means The Holy Book. The problem is that the Bible isn't a book, **the Bible is a library.**

We miss this because the Bibles we hold or have on our phones are bound together in, well, a book... with the chapter of Genesis, the Chapter of Matthew and so on, but that's not what they are.

But the Bible is not one book, it's a library - a collection of many books. 66 to be exact. Written over the course of 1500 years by many different people in many different languages and many different geographic locations and cultures in many different genres - such as narratives and poetry and proverb and prophecy and letters and history and, even some apocalyptic literature thrown in there for good measure.

And the reason that matters, is because all sorts of problems happen when we don't read the Bible like a library full of different genres and writers spanning different eras.

For example, often people want to write off the Bible (if not Christianity as a whole) because they'll read something like Psalm 19, for instance, and it's descriptions about God's creation and ordering of the sun and conclude, "Well, obviously the Bible is untrustworthy, because we know that the Earth isn't the center of the universe. The sun doesn't revolve around the Earth, but the Earth around it." But the problem is Psalm 19 is poetry... and it's meant to be read and understood as such.

The type genre you're reading affects how you read it. **Very few of us sit on the couch at night with a blanket to curl up and read a math textbook... some of you weirdos might, but most of us don't... we'll do that with Harry Potter or whatever... Few of us would sit down with highlighters and pens to take deep in-depth notes about Twilight.** The genre, and the author, and the context affect how we read the material. **And the same is true with the Bible.**

But, the Bible doesn't claim to just be some vast ancient library. It claims to be a library of simultaneous divine and human origin. **It claims to be written by both God and men.** Or like Paul says in **2 Timothy** "All Scripture is breathed out by God."

Which might pop a circuit in your brain. However, I read one NT scholar recently that I thought put it really well. **He likened it to a Master musician playing an instrument. Say you go to a jazz club and there is some famous saxophone player there... or you know what better yet, just think of Micah when he gets up here and plays the guitar... cause that dude can make that thing sing... and you hear this music that just moves you to your core... is that music coming from the guitar or from the musician Micah?**

The answer is simply yes. There is an intelligence and a brain and a skill and breath that is coming from outside the instrument... but it is coming *through* the instrument.

And in the same way, Scripture is God-breathed - there is a vast mind and being of intense intelligence, creativity, skill and wisdom that is playing through or breathing through this human instrument. The Spirit of God is breathing through the instrument of Moses or David or Isaiah or Peter or Paul or whoever to make the sound of the music of Scripture.

And this is one of the things **about the Bible that tends to really cause people problems**. I know many of you have been turned off to the Bible because it got forced down your throats like there was nothing to investigate or discern or dig deeper about it. That it was just like these “golden tablets” dropped out the sky by God for you to accept - but that’s a Mormon idea not a Christian one.

But, the Bible never tries to hide from you it’s human side. It’s actually very honest that it was written and recorded by real human beings, in real time and real space. It’s not a dirty little secret. For example, there are times when Paul is like - “To be honest, I can’t remember who I baptized” or “I say, not the Lord”. It’s not even an open secret... its just open.

But - and you need to hear this - it doesn’t attempt to hide it’s divine side either. It never shies away from informing the reader that it’s to be read as the true access point to reality, that it holds divine weight and authority in our lives because God is it’s author.

Jesus shows this very clearly in **Mark 12:36: David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.”** (Direct quote from Psalm 110).

- He doesn’t see it as **invention**. He doesn’t say, “David speaking from his own experience.” Or “David airing out his own opinion” or “Or David imagining this with his narrow view of God and his built in prejudice”...
- But also doesn’t see it as **dictation** either. Like David fell asleep with a pen in his hand and woke up with magical words written on a leaf of papyrus... or that the Spirit sat David down like a boss to a receptionist and told him to take down a memo.

He says, **“David, himself in the Spirit.” He sees is it as a Divine and Human collaboration.**

So, the Bible is a library written by God and men... that tells a unified story that leads to Jesus.

As Paul says it here... **to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

The purpose of the Scriptures is to get us to Jesus - to know him, trust him and become more like Him... the Bible is not primarily history, though it does contain history, the bible is not ultimately a rulebook or a roadmap for life, though it does contain instruction and wisdom for living. The bible is not even primarily about you, though it applies to you - the Bible is primarily about God and what He is doing through Jesus.

Jesus says as much himself...

Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Matthew 5:17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

That word fulfill means “to bring to completion what it's talking about.” Jesus is saying He is the key to unlocking the meaning behind everything in the Scriptures. **All of it, it’s all pointing to Him.**

- The Old Testament is pointing to Jesus who is to come.

- The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are pointing to a Jesus who is here.
- Acts-Revelation is pointing us to a Jesus who came and who is coming again.

It's all about HIM. Jesus is the climax and center of all of it.

Now to be clear, this is just what the Bible says about itself... the question we want to answer is - are we crazy for trusting it? To which I would say, no. And I'll give you some reasons why - though be prepared... this might feel like drinking from a fire hydrant.

The first reason is Jesus.

I love how British pastor and theologian **Andrew Wilson** in his book "**Unbreakable**" which is a resource for this series says it:

"I don't trust in Jesus because I trust the Bible. I trust the Bible because I trust in Jesus. I love him, and I've decided to follow him, so if he talks and acts as if the Bible is trustworthy, authoritative, good, helpful and powerful, I will too....Even if some of my questions remain unanswered, or my answers remain unpopular."

Now, if you're a skeptic, you probably think this is unfair. Like I'm about to try to **Jesus-juke my way out of dealing with your real concerns** with the Bible. I feel you. I do. And I promise that's not what I'm trying to do and in a few minutes, I'm going to address some of those concerns...

But, I will say, for me personally, the number 1 reason why I trust the Bible and all of its claims in their entirety: because Jesus did.

Last week, we laid out the argument that Christianity is the only religion grounded in one major historical event - the Resurrection. We said that if the resurrection really did happen, then Jesus must be the one true access point to reality - then the Christian worldview is the only right and true framework for life here on planet earth.

And I'm not going to rehash with you all that we covered last week - please go back and check it out if you missed it - but, our **conclusion was based on the data we have the most reasonable explanation for the Resurrection is that it really did happen....** And that, quite simply, changes everything. Including, how we think about the Bible.

If Jesus is alive, that means He's God. And it would be really strange to think that the God who defeated death had some misguided opinions about Scripture.

When you look at Jesus' words, you see over and over again that He trusted the Bible and saw it as ultimately authoritative. There are lots of instances in the New Testament I could take you too to show this, but I'll just draw your attention to my favorite in **Matthew 4**.

In Matthew 4, Jesus and the devil are basically having an epic showdown - where the Devil is trying to get Jesus to fail like Adam originally did in the Garden of Eden.

Matthew 4:1-11 [1] Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. [2] And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. [3] And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." [4] But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

[5] Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple [6] and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you,’ And “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” [7] Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

[8] Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. [9] And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” [10] Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” [11] Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

I love this. Here is Jesus and the Devil going at it. Jesus has all the resources of heaven available to him... like in my mind this was the perfect moment to introduce lightsabers into the course of human history, right? yet Jesus fights by trusting and using the authority of the Scriptures.

And each point of the skirmish reveals a different aspect of Jesus’ commitment to Scripture. **In the first exchange, he shows that God’s word is enough** or that it’s sufficient: Jesus believes whether you’re wandering in the wilderness for forty days or forty years, you’ll find that bread alone doesn’t satisfy, but only the words that come from God’s mouth. That God’s word is what He really needs.

In the second, faced with an attempt to distort the text’s meaning, he shows that God’s word is coherent: yes, Psalm 91 says that God protects his people, but Deuteronomy 6 tells us not to test God, and faithful submission to the Scriptures holds these two things together - it doesn’t pick and choose.

In the third, he shows that God’s word is authoritative: if God tells us to do something, then we do it, no matter what anyone says, or how easy or alluring options may seem.

Jesus, it seems, loved the word of God with his heart (being satisfied by it), his mind (understanding it), and his will (obeying it).

And as I showed you earlier, Jesus absolutely affirmed the Divine and Human nature of the Scriptures and how it is meant to point to Him and those are just some quick snippets but you can begin to see the idea. **Jesus through his life and teaching showed that He not only affirmed but defended the authority of the Bible.**

You see many times in the Gospels different Jewish circles confronting Jesus and trying to trap him in a theological debate. You have the Pharisees who were the religious conservatives of the day thinking he was too far on the left, hanging out with drunkards and tax collectors and trying to trap him in not taking the Bible seriously enough. You have the Sadducees were the religious progressives of the day thinking he was too far right, because he upheld the authority of the Bible a little too much.

And they both try to trap Jesus over a confusing passage in the Bible, or set up weird scenarios to mock his beliefs, and **Jesus never shies away from or apologizes for the Scriptures,** rather he always defends and teaches it correctly with truth and grace.

But, maybe you’re like, “Okay, cool, Bailey. But that’s the Old Testament, the New Testament wasn’t written yet. So, maybe Jesus was down with the OT, but whose to say we should trust the NT?” Well, actually Jesus would, too.

John 14:25-26 These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Many biblical scholars point to this referring to the eventual writing and teaching within the New Testament. Jesus commissions His disciples, and then later Paul in Acts 9 - the people who literally eyewitnesses to his life, who followed him for years - he commissioned them to write what they wrote and the things that we now have.

Add this all together, it's pretty clear that Jesus viewed the Bible - both the Old and the New - as the Word of God, pointing forward to and pointing back to Himself.

So, Jesus is one reason. And I'd argue the most important reason that it's not crazy to trust the Bible. But let me give you another reason...

2. The quantity, quality, and accuracy of the historical documents

For those of you who are natural skeptics, this is where we start to deal with some of your concerns. Perhaps you'll grant me that Jesus trusted the Bible... and that if He is really alive then, yes, we should trust the Bible, too... but how can we be confident that the Scriptures he had and affirmed are the ones we've got and should affirm?

Afterall, we don't have the original manuscripts and the majority of us read the Bible in a language that it wasn't originally written in. **How do we know that what we've got now isn't the result of some 2000 year-long game of telephone?**

Y'all remember that one from youth group back in the day? Everyone sits in a circle and someone starts by whispering a made up phrase like "The elephants wrapped the packages" in their neighbors ear, and then their neighbors is supposed to whisper into the next persons ear and so forth and so on until it comes back around and it usually winds up being something out of leftfield like, "The infants hid the snacks again." And everyone's like, "What?! No way! OMG! Who changed it!?"

People argue that the same is true of the Bible. Since it's been so long since the original manuscripts were written, **we can't possibly trust what we hold in our hands today.** So how do we know an ancient telephone game is not what happened with the Bible? Glad you asked.

While it's true that we do not have the original manuscripts, **if you look at the evidence we do have** - all of the copies of all of the Old Testament and New Testament - you see that unlike any other piece of literary work in history what we have is unbelievably reliable - more than any other community, the Jewish and Christian community went to great stakes to preserve the original writings.

- **Side note:** if you want to dive in more, there's a great lecture called The Making of the Bible on our website WhyImAChristian.com you can check out. It is a wonderful, in-depth almost two hours journey of delightful Bible nerdiness. You'll love it. Trust me.

But to give you an overview: Let's start with the New Testament because it's the easiest.

When you look at the New Testament we have over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, about 8,000 Latin manuscripts, and another 1,000 manuscripts in other languages (Syriac, Coptic, and the like.) Among all those manuscripts there's about 99.5% congruence among all of them. 99.5% AMONG ALL OF THEM.

You find no other work of literature or history preserved in the same way the Bible has been preserved. So just compare this to other historical documents and books circulating in and around that time period.

<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>DATE WRITTEN</u>	<u>EARLIEST COPY</u>	<u>TIME SPAN</u>	<u>NUMBER OF COPIES</u>	<u>ACCURACY¹</u>
Euripedes	Ca. 440 BC	ca. AD 1100	About 1,500 years	9	
Plato	Ca. 380 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,300 years	7	
Aristotle	Ca. 350 BC	ca. AD 1100	About 1,400 years	5	Not enough copies to reconstruct the original.
New Test.	Ca. AD 60	ca. AD 130	Less than 100 years	About 14,000	99.5%

Now like me, you may recognize those names and say, “Hey wait a minute, Plato didn’t write history - he wrote philosophy - that comparison isn’t 1-to-1. I need to see recorded history” And if you’re the one other nerd in the room who knows that here’s a list of other historical works at that time for you to compare.

<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>DATE WRITTEN</u>	<u>EARLIEST COPY</u>	<u>TIME SPAN</u>	<u>NUMBER OF COPIES</u>	<u>ACCURACY²</u>
Herodotus	Ca. 450 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,350 years	8	
Thucydides	Ca. 420 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,300 years	8	
Tacitus	Ca. AD 100	ca. AD 1100	About 1,000 years	20	Not enough copies to reconstruct the original.
New Test.	Ca. AD 60	ca. AD 130	Less than 100 years	About 14,000	99.5%

¹ *I'm Glad You Asked*, Ken Boa, p.78

² *I'm Glad You Asked*, Ken Boa, p.78

Simply put, if someone seeks to eliminate the trustworthiness of the New Testament then to be consistent they would also have to dismiss significant portions of western literature and ancient histories and pull everything from the book shelves and out of classroom discussions.

This was mentioned last week. But if you look at the writings of the early church fathers, and attempt to reconstruct the New Testament without looking at any manuscripts, just the verses they cite - you can reconstruct about 95% of the entire New Testament.

And if you notice in the chart, the earliest manuscripts we have of the New Testament were written within 100 years of the events of the New Testament, to where there was a unanimous consensus that we have in our New Testament is exactly what the disciples of Jesus had in mind.

So, much to the disappointment of DaVinci Code fans and bad History channel “experts” and I use that term loosely... there was no secret conspiracy that the early church tried to pull a power play to get the books they wanted in the Bible. Rather when the Council of Nicea came together in 325AD, they simply affirmed what they already knew to be true primarily due to fake Gospel accounts being circulated waaaaay after the life of the first century eyewitnesses.

Henry Gamble,³ a NT scholar put it succinctly...

The New Testament was not self-consciously created by the church, either as a response to external pressures or as a means to some end, but arose naturally and spontaneously from the inner life of early Christianity, above all in contexts of worship and instruction.

Henry Gamble, important to note, not a Christian and recognizes that the New Testament writings are reliable.

Now admittedly, the Old Testament is a bit tougher because it is considerably older. But what we do have is enough evidence to affirm their reliability and confirm that the Old Testament we’ve got, is the same one that Jesus did. There are 3 major pieces of evidence that get us here.

First we have the Masoretic text which dates between 600-1200 AD

This contained the entire Hebrew Bible as well as extra rabbinical teachings. Many of the earliest English Bible translations - such as the King James translation in 1611 - were based off of this.

Which that’s great if we have something older to compare it to cross-examine accuracy.... But that’s still 600 years after Jesus and 1000 years after the last Old Testament book was written. So, if that’s all we’ve got... it’s no bueno.

Secondly, there is the Septuagint. Which was formed between 250s BC - 70AD

This is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. “The Septuagint” is Latin for 70, because the story goes that the Greek King of Egypt commissioned 72 Jewish scribes to take their Hebrew Bibles and translate them over from Hebrew to Greek, the dominant language of the time. So these 72 scribes independently begin translating the entire Old Testament into Greek and then when all of them were done, they showed each other their work, and as the story goes all of them translated the Hebrew Bible in the exact same way.

³ “The New Testament Canon in Recent Research” *The Canon Debate*, Henry Gamble

Regardless, this puts us back 250 years before the birth of Jesus! We're there! But we can actually do better. The Septuagint is greek. It'd be fantastic if we had one that old in Hebrew... then we could cross-examine for accuracy to an even better degree.... And it just so happens, we have that, too.

Third, we have the Dead Sea Scrolls.

And their story is a wild one. They were discovered back in 1946-1947, by a shepherd boy who just randomly out in the desert throwing rocks into a cave - as one would assume a shepherd boy would do - and, no lie, he hears something smash and is like, "uh oh. What was that?" And he discovers an almost endless cave system filled with these old pots that contained tons of ancient scrolls including parts of every single Old Testament book except one dating as far back as 400 BC. It was considered by many to be the greatest discovery of the 20th century. Archaeologists and Bible scholars to this day are still uncovering all of the scrolls in there.

So you have 250 years before the birth of Jesus, clear manuscript evidence that the Hebrew Bible was not only formed, but established and held as authoritative.

And what's incredible is if you overlay all of these different documents together - the Masoretic text, the Septuagint, and the Dead Sea Scrolls - you find they are all saying the same thing. There's no major theological discrepancies or contradictions one from the other. Any discrepancies you find in these three documents are for the most part either a misspelling, or a misplaced word, or one will use a pronoun instead of a proper noun. Almost all of which you can find in the footnotes of your Bible.

In fact, of the 475 (and yes someone took the time to tally them up) supposed contradictions in the entire Bible - the OT and NT. The vast majority of these are contradictions like this, or ones that can be quickly and simply resolved through understanding how theology works or the context, purpose, genre and authorial intent of the passages.

In Sum We have at our disposal an unbelievable record of historical data and the literally resurrected Jesus to back up the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible.

So, why all the controversy?

Again, **Andrew Wilson** says really well...

Let's be honest: the Scriptures can be difficult. Sometimes...the difficulties come from within the texts themselves. Accounts vary, theology develops, tensions exist and authors bring different perspectives on things (not to mention the fact that all the texts were written in languages and cultures which are completely different from ours). In my experience, though, most of these difficulties are fairly easy to resolve, with a mixture of study, imagination and honesty. They can make people puzzled, but they rarely make people angry. The things that really get people riled up, at least in our day, are areas where Scripture challenges our deeply held beliefs (or where Scripture is challenged by them, depending on which way you look at it). When you get into conversations about the Bible, you find that the biggest challenges for most people are not over issues where the Bible is unclear, but over issues where the Bible is very clear, and people don't like it. Judgment. Miracles. Sex. Things like that.

His point? Why all the controversy over the Bible? Because 99% of the time the real issue people have with the Bible is not a textual issue or a contradiction that they can't resolve - **people don't ban books or kill people because they miss a detail here or there - no, people ban books because of**

their power. And if the Bible really is true- then it is a collection of writings with power - that at the very least means we are meant to follow it. And that gets us really uncomfortable really quickly.

It's my experience, in my own life and in ministry - most of our problem with the Scripture has nothing to do with manuscripts or translation issues or discrepancies or whatever - **Most of our distrust of the Bible is because we don't like what it says.**

A pastor I really respect and learn a lot from, Tim Keller, said that whenever someone from his church who's been faithfully following Jesus meets up with him and says, "Pastor, I don't think I'm a Christian anymore. There's just too many theological problems with the Bible," his immediate response has become, "So tell me who you're sleeping with?" (FWIW, I wish I could do that. He's almost 70, so lookout for me in 35 years...)

But that's a funny, if not a little mean way of saying what I've seen to be true that when our view of the world, or our sinful desires, or our wants or needs or preferences butt up against what the Scriptures say are right and true and good - it's much easier on our conscience to say - "Well I just don't know if the Bible should be trusted on that? We don't have the original manuscripts, you know. And it's in ancient languages and a different culture, how can we trust that it's true for us?" It is simply easier to write the Bible off than submit to it.

The truth is - we distrust it because we don't like it.

- We don't like what it says about money.
- We don't like what it says about sex or marriage or gender.
- We don't like what it says about divine accountability and justice... and especially our personal responsibility therein.
- We don't like what it says about confession or loving your enemy - whether that be annoying Susan at the office, or the person on the other ideological end of the spectrum, or maybe someone from the not-white parts of the world.

And that is not actually a Bible problem... that is an us problem. And this is not to write-off genuine questions and difficulties you may have with the Bible. There are questions and difficulties there.

But it is to say, that if you've rejected Jesus because something he says bothers you or you disagree with him about some issue, you've gotten it backwards. If He actually is God and rose from the dead to prove it, then you should assume He's gonna see some things differently than you do... and He's right.

I made a joke earlier about how if I were Jesus facing off against the devil, I would've brought the lightsaber out. It was silly, but I think the juxtaposition is very important. It says something about the power Jesus knew God's Word has - that it was his weapon of choice against the Devil's schemes.

Because here's the truth, when we take a **buffet approach** to the Bible - "I'll take a little care the poor here... I'll take a little bit of grace there... ooo, sexual ethics gross.... Not today..." When we bring this "pick-and-choose" mentality to the Bible, we do so to our own demise. **In fact, we rob the Bible of its power.**

Here's what I mean: You don't want other people to have the same "pick-and-choose" mentality that you want for yourself - no one does.

- So the guy who is abusing his wife...you don't want him to dismiss Colossians 3:9 or Ephesians 5 which tells him to love and not be harsh with his wife.
- The business owner who is taking advantage of his employees for his own personal greed and gain...you don't want him to reject Proverbs 11:1 which tells him that false bookkeeping is an abomination to the Lord.
- That woman who keeps gossiping and spreading lies about you...you don't want her to reject Ephesians 4:29 which tells her to build up and not tear down with her words.
- The racist down the street...you don't want them rejecting Galatians 3:28 which says that all are one in Christ Jesus
- The country on the other side of the world that treats people as lesser than because they're in a different social class you want them to obey Leviticus 18:19 that says you should love your neighbor as yourself.

You don't want other people to reject the Bible. You want them to be convicted. To be brought under its authority. To submit their lives to it and obey it so they don't destroy themselves and others. But it can't hold that power for them, if it doesn't actually hold that power for you, too. To say it another way: If you get to be the exception to what it says... why not them?

But it's not just that it loses its power to shape the world... but it loses its power to shape you. It loses its power to lead you to Jesus - to help you see your need for his grace - and to make you like Jesus and ultimately produce the life of Jesus in you - a life of love, joy, peace and all the other fruit of the Spirit.

I tell you this all the time, and I'm not gonna stop because it so crucial to putting the things God tells us into place: **God is not trying to take anything from you.** In the things that he says, and the things that he teaches - in his instructions and commands and wisdom... not a single one of them is to ruin your life - no, they are to give you life. They are all for your joy.

In **John 15:10-11** Jesus says, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. **11** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Or as Paul says in 2 Timothy 3 - **that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work**

And listen, I want you to hear me on this - If you only accept and trust and follow the parts of the Bible that line up with what you already think... if you never let the Bible disagree with you and then submit to it.. Then you rob it of the power to bring this to you.

You will never grow as a Christian if you only follow the parts of the Bible that agree with you. You will never experience the life of joy and fruitfulness you were made for if you only eat at the Bible-buffet. **Guaranteed.**

And that's where the Bible leads us - to submit to a higher authority than ourselves. An authority that brings real spiritual power with it. An authority and a power that can tell us we're wrong and show us a better way. An authority and a power that can contradict us and give us life.

So rather than me trying to challenge the Bible, I want to let the Bible challenge me. That I may become the person, in Christ, I was always meant to be. **Pray**