

# 10 Hard Questions

*“Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”  
(1 Peter 3:14–16 ESV)*

*“be ready in season and out of season...”  
(2 Timothy 4:2 ESV)*

## **Why Should I Trust The Bible?**

**May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**1 Peter 3:14-16**

**John 10:30-38**

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### **Introduction:**

Well good morning church! It's good to be with you today. I'd love for you to open your Bibles once again to 1 Peter 3:14-16. We're going to move on to some other passages today – but I'd like to go back to this foundational passage and just do a little groundwork that I thought would fit better here than it would have done last week.

Hear now the Word of the Lord:

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,<sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,<sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:14–16 ESV)

Thanks be to God!

This passage is generally considered Ground Zero for any discussion of Christian Apologetics – in fact this is the passage from which we get the word “apologetics”. The Greek word underneath our

English “make a defense” is the Greek word *apologia*. It doesn’t mean to apologize; it means to defend. The word has a legal background – it was the word that was used to describe a person who defended themselves in court against an accusation.

So apologetics is simply evangelism in a hostile world. It is evangelism in the context of opposition.

Kenneth Scott Oliphint gives this definition, he says:

“Christian apologetics is the application of biblical truth to unbelief”.<sup>1</sup>

You see, apologetics, at the end of the day, represents a CONFLICT between AUTHORITIES. It is a conflict between the WORD OF GOD and the WILL OF MAN.

Now maybe you expected me to say that it is a conflict between the WORD OF GOD and THE WORD OF MAN – but the Bible says that actually, the WORD OF MAN is dependent upon the WILL MAN. Meaning that what MAN WANTS TO BE TRUE is what MAN SAYS IS TRUE. The WILL comes first. So the Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:18:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness **suppress the truth**. (Romans 1:18 ESV)

The Bible says that human beings DON’T WANT God to be God. They don’t WANT the Word of God to govern their lives. They want to make their own decisions. They want to sleep with whomever they choose; they want to take whatever they are strong enough to take – they don’t WANT GOD to tell them right and wrong.

That is the essential conflict – and that was the ORIGINAL CONFLICT. You remember that from Genesis 3. Last week we talked about how God made the world GOOD and he put men and women in the world and he called them VERY GOOD. So the world was good and we were good – everything was very good.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 29.

But then, to test our love and loyalty to God – who is the source of all enduring good – God made a rule.

One rule!

In a world of permission and abundance – God set up a little fence. Around one tiny tree. It was a barrier. It was a way of establishing a limit. It was a way of reminding human beings that they could only be who they were if they acknowledged who God IS. Their power, their authority and their blessing were derivative. It came from God. They came from God. And so they could only be HUMAN if they submitted to God as God – that was the substance of the test.

And the test was facilitated by a creature whom we later came to refer to as the devil. He came into the garden and he asked the question that lies at the heart of every other question ever asked by human beings in rebellion against their creator. He asked:

**“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”** (Genesis 3:1 ESV)

DID GOD ACTUALLY SAY?

CAN WE REALLY TRUST THE WORD OF GOD TO GOVERN OUR LIVES?

That is the fundamental question at the headwaters of all human rebellion against God.

Can we trust the Word of God – must we trust the Word of God? Should we trust the Word of God?

Or should we trust ourselves?

That IS the FUNDAMENTAL DECISION that every human being has to make. That is THE FUNDAMENTAL CROSSROADS that every thinking human being eventually comes to. When

you arrive at this question you HAVE TO TURN ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. Will you trust the Word of God or will you trust yourself?

The story goes on to tell us how Eve decided:

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:6 ESV)

Are you seeing that? Eve made the decision to trust in what her eye saw, to trust in what her heart desired and to trust in what would serve her best interests, over and above what God had said.

And her children have been using that exact same decision-making formula – to their great harm and destruction - ever since.

That’s what the Bible says.

And that’s why I said last week that we were going to be moving from the immediate to the fundamental. The FIRST question our friends are likely to ask on the other side of COVID19 will likely have something to do with suffering. How do we understand suffering in a world supposedly created and ruled over by a Good and Kindly God – that’s the first question – that’s the immediate question – but as I said that isn’t the ultimate question. Eventually you are going to have to get here. And in fact if you answer their question the way we talked about last week, you will get here. Because we answered their question FROM THE BIBLE. And when you answer a question from an unbeliever by appealing to the Bible – what is the next question that you are going to be asked?

You know the answer.

The next question you are going to be asked is this:

## But Why Should I Trust The Bible?

So this will almost always be the SECOND conversation that you have with your unbelieving friends and neighbours. So what should you say when they ask you: Why should we trust the Bible? The first thing you need to say is this:

### 1. Because Jesus says we can

Now – at first, this answer will not satisfy your friends. They will say: “That’s a circular argument. You are saying that I should believe in the Bible because the God of the Bible says that I should believe the Bible – that’s a circular argument”.

And they’re right!

You don’t have to pretend that they’re not – they are.

But their argument is circular too – and you just need to help them see that. Your friend’s circular argument goes like this:

“I have decided to only trust the evidence of science. Science cannot prove the existence of God. Therefore I do not believe in God.”

But that’s the ultimate circular argument – that is the ultimate rationalistic *cul de sac*.

Science has a limited observational purview. Science deals in things that can be seen, measured and quantified. That’s what science is – and that’s a problem because God by definition, cannot be seen, measured or quantified. According to 1 Timothy 6:16 God dwells in:

“unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.” (1 Timothy 6:16 ESV)

God told Moses that a long time ago, he said in Exodus 33:20: no one can see me and live.

So that's a problem. If you will only trust what your eyes can see – then you will never see God. Your decision to only trust what YOU CAN SEE, TASTE and QUANTIFY for yourself – has PRECLUDED YOU from ever encountering God.

Your unbelieving friend has basically said: “I looked in my suitcase and I did not see God, therefore he does not exist.”

That is an intellectual cul de sac.

Right? So you are both making circular arguments – which is all human beings can do in a universe in which they don't have access to all the information. As a result, we all have to begin our inquiry with a fundamental decision: Will we trust the Word of God or will we trust ourselves?

Your argument, brother or sister believer, begins with that decision – and so does the argument of your unbelieving neighbor. And once you both understand that, then all you are really asking your neighbor to do is consider another perspective.

And in Canada, most people are polite enough to agree to do so.

So that's how you get here – that's how you get permission to begin where every truly Christian apologetic on any topic must begin – with the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Remember, the Apostle Peter said, at the beginning of his passage on apologetics:

“Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but **in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy**, always being prepared to make a defense ...” (1 Peter 3:14–15 ESV)

So don't be intimidated, he says. Gather your courage – and clarify your allegiance. You can't begin to engage with your neighbour until you are absolutely clear with respect to your own authority. All Christian apologetics has to come from a place of wilful submission to the Word of God. The Word of God written and the Word of God incarnate. Make your decision to honour Christ as Lord – or as the NIV puts it:

“in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV11)

That’s where apologetics begins – with an acknowledgment of your authority. Your neighbour has an authority – and you have an authority. And it must be acknowledged that this conversation is a conflict between those authorities. This is not a conflict between his opinion and YOUR opinion; this is a conflict between his authority and your authority.

So you have to begin there.

You say to your neighbour: “Would you be willing to hear what my authority, Jesus, says about the Bible?”

And if they say yes, as most polite Canadians will do, then here are a couple of the verses that you will likely want to refer to.

I think I would begin with Matthew 22:29.

In this passage Jesus is arguing with some of the leaders of the temple and they seem to be coming to all manner of strange conclusions about marriage, divorce, death and the afterlife, so finally Jesus cuts to the chase and he says:

“You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”  
(Matthew 22:29 ESV)

You see, according to Jesus, you cannot think straight and you cannot arrive at reliable conclusions if you do not acknowledge the reality of God and trust in the authority of his Word. If all of your reasoning begins from a place of rebellion and denial then you will never be able to think your way to the truth. Every single road on the other side of this chasm leads to chaos. You will always put the puzzle pieces together wrong and you will always decide in favour of your own lusts, passions and interests.

Jesus believed, not just that the Scriptures were the light – he believed that the Word of God was the light by which all other truths may be discerned.

And the most important of those truths, of course, was the truth about himself. Jesus believed that the ultimate function of the Bible was to lead people to a correct understanding of who he was and what he had come to do. He said in John 5:39-40:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,<sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” (John 5:39–40 ESV)

Do you see that? Once again it is the will that gets in the way of the Word. Jesus says that if you are reading the Bible with an open mind you can't help but see the central point. The whole Bible is about me!!! Everything in the Bible testifies to me - BUT YOU REFUSE TO COME.

Do you see that?

He doesn't say: “You don't see”, he says, “You won't come”.

As I said at the beginning, the WILL OF FALLEN MAN comes before the word of fallen man. We will only see what we want to see and we don't want to see Jesus because of what Jesus says about himself. Jesus makes it very clear that if we come to him, we must come to him as Lord. He says:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46 ESV)

You see?

You cannot read the Bible for very long before discovering who Jesus is and what he demands from you. Which is why most people don't read the Bible for very long.

Jesus says that the Bible tells the truth about who he is and how we must respond to who he is.

It is the LIGHT by which we see everything else – and the first thing we see in its light is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ – hallelujah!



That's what the Bible is – and that's why you should trust it.

Now, as I said earlier, accepting that is, fundamentally, a decision of faith – just as your friend's decision to trust him or herself is a decision of faith. Neither of those FUNDAMENTAL DECISIONS are essentially rational – they can't be. For your friend's decision to trust in himself over and above the Word of God to be RATIONAL he would have to be able to prove that there is no God and he does not speak.

But that can't be proved.

Such a thing is beyond the reach of science.

So he or she has to make that decision on faith – just as you have to make your decision on faith. You have to REVERE CHRIST AS LORD just as your friend has REVERED HIMSELF as Lord. Both decisions are SUPRA RATIONAL by definition – but that is not to say that your decision is IRRATIONAL by definition. Supra rational means that you had to believe something FIRST in order to begin making subsequent rational or at least consistent decisions. Both of you have done that – but that does not imply that your trust in the Bible is IRRATIONAL – or contrary to evidence.

It is not.

In fact, and this is the next thing you want to tell your friend, the Bible is the most attested book in human history.

## **2. Because it is the most attested book in human history**

It is common to hear people say that the Bible, as we have it, has undergone countless revisions and changes over time – but that is simply and demonstrably untrue. In fact Peter J. Williams goes so far as to say:

“In terms of sheer volume of manuscripts in different languages, the Gospels, or perhaps the biblical Psalms, are the best documented texts from antiquity by some margin.”<sup>2</sup>

Meaning that the contest for the BEST ATTESTED books in human history is not a contest between the Bible and other books, it is a contest between particular books of the Bible. There has never been a book as well preserved and as clearly attested as Holy Scripture. We have thousands and tens of thousands of manuscripts from all across the ancient world, stretching all the way back across the centuries.

Now this is settled historical fact. I did my undergraduate degree at a secular university – York University – which is not exactly an institution known for its love or loyalty to Jesus – but even there, Classical scholars will tell you that there is no other book from that part of the world and that time in history that has been as well attested – or as thoroughly scrutinized as the Bible.

Just one quick comparison, the most famous man from that time in history other than Jesus Christ is Tiberius Caesar – the Caesar who was Emperor of Rome during the life of Jesus. There are 4 main ancient sources for his life – the earliest of which, in terms of manuscript date – comes to us from the 9<sup>th</sup> century – so 800 years after he died. The fourth earliest is from the 16<sup>th</sup> century – meaning 1500 years after he died. And yet, no one seriously doubts the accuracy of those works. In the world of Classical Studies, I can tell you that those books are considered VERY WELL ATTESTED. And yet they don’t even come close to the attestation for the Gospels – or for the Psalms – or for the letters of Paul. They are not even in the running.

We have FULL GOSPEL manuscripts from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Meaning we have SURVIVING COPIES of the Gospels from 270 years after the death of Jesus. We have fragments of the Gospels from way earlier than that – but we have full copies from the 4<sup>th</sup> century that you can read and compare to manuscripts that were copied in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. So you can see for yourself whether or not the words of the Bible changed over those 1400 years – and they did not.

They did not.

That is established fact – despite what you might hear on the internet.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust The Gospels?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 111.

The Bible is the best attested book in human history.

So it says what it says – and it says what it has always said.

And it should also be noted that what it says, in terms of its core message is also said in other historical sources that were not written by followers of Jesus. Craig Blomberg for example says:

“At least a dozen extra-biblical references in non-Christian (Jewish, Greek, and Roman) sources in the earliest centuries of the Christian era (Josephus, Thallus, Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny, Mara ben Serapion, Lucian, and several Talmudic tractates) confirm the main contours of the Synoptics: Jesus’ birth out of wedlock, his intersection with the ministry of John the Baptist, the existence of his brother James, his gathering of disciples, including five who are named, his running afoul of the Jewish leaders in interpretations of the law, his working “wondrous feats,” and his being deemed “a sorcerer who led Israel astray.” We learn that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate (and thus between A.D. 26-36), that his followers believed he was the Messiah and believed that he had been resurrected, and that his death did not put an end to those beliefs. Instead, his followers rather quickly began meeting together and “singing hymns to him as if he were a god.””<sup>3</sup>

So the main facts about Jesus – which according to Jesus – are the main point of the Bible – are also recorded in non-Christian sources from the same time. So it is certainly not irrational to trust in the Bible. You can reject what it says – and most people do – but you cannot honestly question its authenticity.

So if the conversation continues – and sometimes it won’t; remember if people don’t WANT to submit to Jesus as Lord then they will refuse to SEE what the Bible SAYS about him - but if the conversation continues and your friend is willing to consider more of what the Bible has to say then I would direct them to John 10:30-38.

Let me read that to you. The story begins with Jesus saying something incredible; he says:

“I and the Father are one.” <sup>31</sup> The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” <sup>33</sup> The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/reliability-new-testament/>

make yourself God.”<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’?<sup>35</sup> If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—<sup>36</sup> do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?<sup>37</sup> If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me;<sup>38</sup> but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” (John 10:30–38 ESV)

So in this story, Jesus makes an incredible claim. He says: “I and the Father are one. I am God!” So of course the Jews are very upset. They don’t mind Jesus saying that he is wise, or good, or even powerful and prophetic – but you can’t just run around saying that you are God – unless of course, you are God.

That’s the issue that has to be decided here – but what is interesting in terms of our conversation, is where Jesus goes in order to justify his self-designation as “the Son of God”. He quotes from Psalm 82 which is a very bizarre Psalm. In that Psalm – which is a prophetic poem – the Psalmist speaks about a scene from the future when God will sit in judgment on all earthly powers and authorities – and on the Jewish people in general who were supposed to be leaders and teachers of the nations. So God sits in judgment on little “gods”.

That’s what Psalm 82 says:

“God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment” (Psalm 82:1 ESV)

Jesus actually quotes verse 6 of Psalm 82 which says:

I said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.” (Psalm 82:6–7 ESV)

Now at first glance, to our western eyes, we wonder whether this should even be in the Bible. Is this Psalm suggesting that there are other gods?

No.

In Hebrew the word for God – Elohim – can also be used to refer to human judges. Just like how in the British Commonwealth we still refer to human judges as “Your Worship”. That tradition actually comes from this text. W.S. Plumer for example says here:

“Rulers of every rank are to be honoured. Jehovah himself calls them *gods*.”<sup>4</sup>

But who cares about Plumer – the more compelling fact is the fact that Jesus obviously understood the text in this way; look at what he says in verses 34-36; he says:

“Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? <sup>35</sup> If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—<sup>36</sup> do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? (John 10:34–36 ESV)

Are you hearing that? Jesus says here that GOD SAYS that you are gods because you have been given the Word of God. With the Word of God – we are image and likeness of God – that’s where the story began. That’s who we were before we rejected the word of God believing that we could be gods apart from God – deciding right and wrong for ourselves.

So Jesus says here, that in a sense, everyone who receives the Word of God is in some sense a god, how much more ME - as the Son of God consecrated by God and sent into the world to do his will?

The point he is making here is absolutely staggering: The Word of God changes and enlarges who we are.

So that’s why you should trust the word of God. Trusting the word of God – receiving it as the Word of God, submitting to it, and living by it – converts the soul, restores the soul and returns the soul to its intended glory.

### **3. Because it converts, restores and enlarges the human soul**

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<sup>4</sup> W.S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2016), 783.

Now that's what the Bible says and so we believe it implicitly – but of course that is also something that our friends and neighbours can see – if they are willing, with their own eyes. Ask your friend to join you on a brief survey of human history. Ask your friend what country they would like to live in that has not been shaped and affected by the Bible.

Where would you want to live – if you could not live here – where would you want to live that has not been shaped and affected by the Bible?

Can you name a single country where the rights of women are honoured; where the presence of slaves would not be tolerated; where every human life would be valued; where the weak would have protection in the law against the strong; where the sick would be cared for by the state - what government – untouched by the message of the Bible – would you wish to live under? Does such a place even exist? Could such a place even exist?

The historian Edward Grant in his book “God and Reason In the Middle Ages” argued that the biblical worldview produced a certain sort of person over time. A person that had never existed before in human history. No earlier culture had produced a person with the “capacity for establishing the foundations of the nation state, parliaments, democracy, commerce, banking, higher education and various literary forms such as novels and history”.<sup>5</sup>

That is what the Word of God did to ancient man!

“he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35 ESV)

You *should* trust the Bible; because it will change you. It will convert you. It will restore you and it will make you again who you were always meant to be.

That's what Jesus said. That's what Psalm 82 said. And that is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together. .... Amen. Pastor Jody, will you come and lead us?

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Grant, *God And Reason In The Middle Ages* as cited in Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 77.