

Jesus - The Word of God

Previously

In a previous monograph, [The Word of God](#), I wrote about the fact that we need revelation from God Himself in order to have any hope of understanding Him, why He created us and what our response to Him should be.

I shared that I have come to believe that the only authoritative messenger of God's words is Jesus Christ. He came directly from the Father to bring us His words. I also briefly mentioned that in order to follow Jesus' teachings I had to abandon Christianity.

This monograph dives deeply into Jesus' teachings and attempts to explain why I have come to believe that Jesus, not the Bible, is the Word of God.

Our Starting Point

If you are a Christian I am going to assume that you agree with this statement: **Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** (Matthew 16:16)

Just so the reader is clear, I also agree with that statement.

Jesus claims to have actually come directly from the presence of God and that he was placed into a human body in order to bring us God's words. He backed up his claims by demonstrating his command over natural laws (miracles) and by rising from the dead. There are also many historically preserved prophecies that predicted intricate details of his coming.

I am also going to assume that you agree with Jesus' statement:

"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life." (John 6:63)

If this is true, let's start with Jesus' words and build from there.

Seekers

Jesus challenged us to be seekers:

“But seek first God’s Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)

“Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you.” (Matthew 7:7)

However, if we think that we have already “sought” and have already “found”, it is natural to stop seeking any further. But, if what we have “found” is not actually the result of an honest effort to seek then we are deluded. We haven’t really “found” anything; we have only accepted what someone else told us.

The Heart is the Key To Understanding

Jesus made a connection between our ability to hear and see and understand and to our heart. He referred to Isaiah and said:

‘for this people’s heart has grown callous, their ears are dull of hearing, they have closed their eyes; or else perhaps they might perceive with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and should turn again; and I would heal them.’ (Matthew 13:15)

When our heart has grown callous (e.g. when we think we already know what we need to know and we are not open to being challenged), then our ears and eyes are closed and there is no understanding available to us. We **must** soften and open our hearts in order to see and hear the truth.

Many Christians were born into a family and/or culture that gave them their religious starting point. I, myself, was “born into” the Christian religion. Any real seeker of spiritual truth will not just automatically assume that they “got lucky” being born into the right religion, but will honestly seek in order determine what is really true.

There are also Christians who have become so thru the efforts of another person whom they have come to trust and believe. There is nothing wrong with this, as long as the person seeks God first and doesn’t just blindly accept what that other person told them. What if that other trusted person is wrong?

If your heart is not soft and you are not open to the possibility of the truth being different than what you have believed, then you might as well stop reading.

The Word of God: The Bible

Since Christianity is built on the notion that the Bible is the Word of God, let's dig into this assertion.

Description

The Bible is commonly accepted as the Word of God for Christianity. It consists of 66 "books", written over a period of 1500 years, by ~40 authors that are compiled into a single volume. It is divided into two major sections: the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT) which are purported to show how God interacted historically with His human creation in two different ways.

Contents

Today, there is a generally broad consensus about the "canon" (collection of writings) that defines the Bible. However, the consensus is, even now, not universal. Throughout history there has been much debate and disagreement about what writings should be included or excluded.

In addition, there are several religions which accept the Bible as the Word of God but also add other texts and consider them also as the Word of God (e.g., Mormons, Catholics). Muslims also accept parts of the Bible as the Word of God, but not all.

The acceptance of the writings to be included in the Bible has had a long and tortuous history. The fact that there were many "councils" over thousands of years who were constantly arguing about this should be worrisome at the very least. If it was clear which writings were inspired by God and which ones weren't, one would think that this would have been a lot easier to determine which ones should be included in the Bible. For example, the earliest "official" recognition of the books to be included in the current New Testament was almost 700 years after they were written. It should also be noted that the "councils" who made these decisions were under the influence of the theology and church doctrine that was accepted at the current time. There were also political entanglements and influences as well. It is also worth noting that none of these "councils" directly came out and said anything like "God spoke to us and told us which writings to include". They used a set of human guidelines in

order to make their determinations. Of course, they claimed that God "led" them to the correct decisions about what should be included in the Bible and what should be excluded. I have to say, after studying this historical process, the whole thing sounds pretty shaky to me.

Interpretations and Denominations

The variety and complexity of the writings included in the Bible have produced some very disturbing results. There are many Biblical texts which offer apparently contradictory or inconsistent teachings. For example, one can find verses which support a God who insists on blood sacrifices for sins while there are many other verses which tell us that God desires mercy, not sacrifice. Other examples in which one can find verses that support opposing viewpoints include slavery, violence, governments, etc.

The abundance of contradictory and/or inconsistent teachings in the Bible have led to the creation of hundreds, if not thousands, of "denominations", many of whom say the others are wrong and possibly even going to hell. You would think that the Word of God would be clear enough to prevent this type of thing from happening.

Inerrancy vs. Truth

The topic of inerrancy is truly a hot topic in the area of religion. In the religious realm, here is [one common definition of inerrancy](#):

"without error or fault in all its teaching"

This definition also includes this key statement:

"Some equate inerrancy with infallibility; others do not"

This is a point that many people miss.

The dictionary definition of "inerrant" is:

free from error

(from Merriam Webster:

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inerrant>)

This simply means there were no mistakes (errors) made when copies of the original were made. **Inerrant does not mean that the writings are true.**

For example, if we had the original version of *Grimms' Fairy Tales* and compared it to a current copy and found no differences between the two, we would be able to declare that the copy was inerrant. However, that doesn't mean that the stories are true.

The Bible arguably has the highest inerrancy claim of all religious writings. However, to repeat, inerrancy refers to the preservation of the accuracy of the original writings; it does not necessarily mean that the contents of the writings are true. Please keep this in mind. We will revisit this topic later.

Spiritual Smorgasbording

A smorgasbord is a buffet meal that allows people access to a lot of different foods. They get to select the ones they like and skip the ones they don't like. There is a phenomenon that I refer to as "spiritual smorgasbording". Spiritual smorgasbording consists of selecting the parts of God's Word that one likes and passing by the parts one doesn't like. Of course, they don't admit that they are ignoring certain parts of God's Word they don't like. They have "legitimate" explanations as to why certain parts don't apply to them. Peace-loving Muslims live by the parts of the Quran that talk about living peacefully. The parts that talk about being violent are explained away, in some way or another, as being no longer relevant. Muslims who practice violence use the same spiritual smorgasbording to justify the opposite, violent approach. Christians also do this, some justifying peace while others justify violence. Both Christian interpretations use the same "Word of God".

Clearly, it is a challenge to be totally honest and consistent in anything that we do. After all, we are human and are imperfect. However, we should make the effort to be as honest and consistent as possible. We should commit to hearing and understanding God's Word as He intended it and try, as much as possible, to avoid applying our own opinions or preferences to what God says. In other words, we should acknowledge God as **He is** not how **we want** Him to be.

When I am talking with Christians and presenting my learnings (more details below) they frequently tell me that we cannot be selective and choose only the parts that we like while ignoring other parts (spiritual smorgasbording). I heartily agree with that. What is ironic is that these Christians, without exception, are doing exactly that without recognizing or admitting it. For example, when speaking to a married man, I ask him if his wife covers her head

while in church, is silent in church and waits until she gets home to ask questions of her husband (I Cor 14:34-37). This writing from Paul is VERY clear that anyone who claims to be spiritual will recognize this is a "commandment of the Lord" and that it is to be practiced in "all the assemblies of the saints". However, the vast majority of the Christians that I know are ignoring this command. When asked about this, they will give you a reason why this particular command can be ignored. Typically, it has something to do with being a cultural issue of that day and that it no longer applies to us today who live in more "enlightened" cultures.

Here is the problem with that rationalization. Once you have established an "exception" process, there is nothing to stop you from applying it to any part of the Word of God that you simply don't agree with and wish to ignore. And since the Bible itself gives no guidelines on how to apply an exception process, you're free to apply it however you want. Hence, spiritual smorgasbording is now OK for you (because you have perfectly justifiable reasons), but it's not OK for others that don't agree with you. More accurately, the results of their spiritual smorgasbording are different than yours. So, now you're arguing about things that can never be settled because these things are strictly in the realm of rationalizations and "interpretations".

The Problem of Complexity

The Bible is so lengthy, so complex and says so many different (and apparently conflicting) things that it is easy to come up with virtually any theology that can be imagined. And, that is exactly what has happened. There are thousands of Christian belief systems, all of whom point to the same Word of God for their source. They can't ALL be right!

So, how do you figure out what is right? If we assume that there must be one interpretation that is right and the others must be wrong, and there are hundreds, or even thousands, of interpretations to choose from, you have a very high probability of choosing the wrong interpretation. Not very reassuring, is it?

A Wikipedia article (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations) lists about 40 major divisions of Christian denominations, each of whom have some variation in belief within their denomination. This only counts organizations "identified

by traits such as a common name, structure, leadership and doctrine". Any group (i.e, church) that is independent from an organizational structure is not included in this list. If we added the independents, many of whom have different beliefs, this would add hundreds or even thousands to the list. We could add more groups to this list; the groups that would be considered by "mainline Christianity" to be cults but who also claim that they are Christians following the Bible (e.g, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unification Church, The Way International, The Gathering, etc.)

The fact is, there are literally thousands of interpretations out there to choose from. And they all get their information from the same Word of God!

The complexity of the Bible makes it impossible to come up with a complete, comprehensive theology that includes all statements made and contains no contradictions, without employing some form of spiritual smorgasbording. Wouldn't it be nice if there were a simpler, more straightforward option?

The Overall Message of the Bible

Here is a common assertion of Christendom in regards to the overall message of the Bible:

"Despite forty authors writing from three continents over nearly two thousand years, it maintains a perfect consistency of message. Its words point unerringly to Christ, whose work on the cross was ordained by God—the true author of the Bible—before the world began." [\(1\)](#)

Is God **able** to have the Bible written over thousands of years by multiple authors and have a perfectly consistent message? Of course He is **able** to do that! But the question is not "is it possible?", the question is "Is this what God really **did** do?"

Statements like the above are crafted to align with beliefs that have already been accepted. In other words, these people **want** the Bible to be consistent and to not contain any contradictions. Therefore, they make these kind of statements because it is what they **want** to believe. However, these type of statements make absolutely no sense to anyone who approaches the Bible with no preconceived theologies. For example, a non-Christian who is investigating

the claims of Christians could ask "How is the genocide of entire nations (men, women, children and even animals) a "perfectly consistent message" with the son of God telling us to love our enemies and to turn the other cheek?"

Defenders of the Bible will go thru all kinds of mental gymnastics in order to "prove" their assertions. But, to anyone who is honestly seeking the truth, it is obvious that these people **want** to believe there is a "consistent" message throughout the Bible and they find ways to delude themselves into justifying their beliefs. Once they have deluded themselves, they accuse others of ignoring the "obvious". If it were really that "obvious" why doesn't everyone else get it like they do?

The following is how many non-Christians view the claim of a "consistent message throughout the Bible" that Christians put forth. Although no professing Christian would present this message in quite this way, the following is essentially what the "message of the Bible" boils down to:

There is a God who created the universe. His crowning act of creation was mankind whom He created in His image. He desires for us to have some kind of relationship with Him. However, He is a perfect God who demands perfection from us in order to be in His presence. Of course, God knew ahead of time (after all, He is God) there was no way humans could be perfect, so from the beginning He knew He would have to figure out a solution to that problem. So, He set up a legal system whereby it would be permissible for a perfect being to be sacrificed to pay for the sins of imperfect humans, thus satisfying God's requirements of perfection. Once our sins were "paid for", we could be declared perfect and then we would be able to come into His presence. This is really what God wanted in the first place, but He just couldn't seem to make it work out that way in the beginning. Hence, the newly created legal system that was able to magically pronounce humans perfect (even though we really weren't). Under this newly invented legal system, the sacrifice had to involve the shedding of blood resulting in death. Not electrocution, not the breaking of a neck by falling off a cliff, not kidney failure or heart attack; it had to involve the intentional shedding of blood brought about by someone else. Since all humans are imperfect, the candidate would have to be a non-human who was able to meet God's standards of perfection. The only candidate who met this qualification was the Creator's own son. So, God placed His son into a human body (Jesus) and allowed him to be sacrificed (killed) in order to pay for our sins. The killing, of course, had to involve bleeding since that was an essential part of the legal system that God made up. But, a quick and relatively painless

death didn't seem to be good enough. It had to be preceded by torture. Then, the actual death itself had to be a long, slow, painful death in order for it to really count. Somehow, a long, slow and brutal death must have been more satisfying to the Creator of the universe as an acceptable sacrifice rather than a quick, painless one. (Never mind that the rules for sacrificing animals, given to us by God Himself, were very specific about how to "humanely" kill them; i.e. the death was quick and relatively painless.) As a result of this bloody, brutal death, God is now able to pretend that us imperfect humans are now perfect (even though, deep down, he really knows we are not) and we are permitted to come into His presence. Now, anyone who "accepts Jesus as their personal savior", is declared perfect in God's eyes and is guaranteed eternal life in God's presence regardless of how they actually live. In effect, God did away with the whole issue of perfection and sin; they're not really relevant issues anymore. It doesn't matter anymore if these people continue to sin or not, since Jesus paid the price for their sins past, present and future. This message doesn't address the issue of the billions of people who have lived and never heard about Jesus, but we are told by some Christians not to worry about it and by others that it's just too bad for them.

Really? That's what God is really like? What a convoluted picture of the Creator this message presents. A perfect Creator creates imperfect humans, ignores them for thousands of years, then demands that they be perfect and invents a legal system that requires bloodletting (knowing that this system doesn't actually work, it's just an example), requires His son be brutally murdered all to the end result that He can **pretend** that humans are perfect. This is nothing short of ludicrous to an investigating non-Christian.

One might say "just because it sounds ludicrous doesn't mean it's not true." Granted. However, something this ludicrous should really be viewed with skepticism unless one can uncover a really good reason to believe it.

Responding to Contradictions in the Bible

There are two (that I can think of) basic responses when encountering the contradictions in the Bible:

1) We can hold to the assumption that the Bible doesn't contradict itself and that the problem is in our understanding. (This is the position that I, personally, held for all of my "Christian" life.)

2) We can consider the possibility that either the entire Bible or at least some parts of the Bible are not from God.

Option (1)

If your starting point is an assumption that the entire Bible is the Word of God, then I can identify with this position. This was my position for all of my "Christian" life. However, I ultimately found that I could not continue to accept the many contradictions as simply problems with my "understanding".

Option (2)

For me to consider this option would be considered heresy by most Christians. However, ultimately I could not entirely dismiss this possibility. I had to spend time investigating this possibility with an open mind.

The Word of God: Jesus

A New Approach

In my particular situation, I was born into a "Christian" family and environment. I was exposed to snippets from all parts of the Bible. They all were presented as equally coming from God. Jesus' words were the same in authority as all the other words in the Bible. This is a natural approach if one assumes that all of the Bible is God's Word.

However, after decades of struggling with contradictions that I was unable to truthfully address, I determined that I needed to find a "different" approach to getting answers to my questions.

A while back, I purchased a chronological Bible. This book attempts to put all the Biblical writings into chronological order. As you might expect, the writings jump from one book to another, then back, then to another, etc. It's quite interesting and also very complicated. But the thing that took me by surprise was that the first writing in this chronological Bible came from the New Testament, not the Old Testament. It was this:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made

through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made.

(John 1:1-3)

After that, it jumped back to Genesis where the creation of the world was described. That was something I hadn't really thought about before. What a new and exciting perspective! In the beginning, before the universe was even created, was the son of God who was, in fact, the actual creative agent of all things in the universe. And the Bible does not record this very first event at the beginning, it was found in the gospel of John, two thirds of the way thru the Bible. Maybe that's why we got off track.

I decided that the "new approach" I was looking for was to start at the beginning. I would study the words and life of Jesus and set aside all other teachings for the time being, including the OT and the rest of the NT. After all, here is the one who came directly from the Father's presence. This is first hand information. It is based on Christ's real experience in God's presence. The information that all other humans proclaim is second hand information. There's no comparison.

I started with this assumption (I think it's safe to say that all of Christendom would agree with this):

The most important person in the Bible is Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnation of the son of God.

Jesus said:

"For this reason I have been born, and for this reason I have come into the world, that I should testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (Joh 18:37)

"The word which you hear isn't mine, but the Father's who sent me." (Joh 14:24)

"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life." (Joh 6:63)

So, I set aside the rest of the Bible for a period of time and focused solely on what the son of God said. I reasoned that if I could really absorb what he said and make it my standard for truth, then all other information could be viewed thru this lens.

The Preeminence of Jesus' Teachings

The typical approach to Christian doctrine is to consider all the teachings of the Bible in a chronological fashion. It goes something like this:

1. read the Old Testament to see what was foretold about Jesus and his teachings
2. read the Gospels and see what Jesus had to say
3. read the post-Gospel NT writings and allow them to add to or explain what Jesus taught

There is a problem with this approach and it was clearly demonstrated by the Pharisees reaction to Jesus' teachings. They were experts in the OT. They knew the history and the prophecies. However, in spite of all their knowledge, the conclusions they drew were dead wrong. When the Messiah appeared, they didn't recognize him. Jesus pointed this out:

"You search the Scriptures (the Old Testament), because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify about me. Yet you will not come to me, that you may have life." (Joh 5:39-40)

The thing that **really** got them upset was when Jesus said:

"Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM." (John 8:58)

You see, Jesus did not come on to the human scene when he was born in Bethlehem. He preexisted humanity! The universe and all of humanity was created through him (John 1). His teachings are **not** to be "stuck in the middle" of a book that humans assembled. He is the Word of God; he came from the presence of the Father to show us what the Father is like and to bring us the Father's words directly from the source.

We have been taught that in order to understand Jesus, we need to first read the OT. I came to realize that this is absolutely backwards! In order to understand the OT, **we need to first read the words of Jesus!** He is the absolute authority on God and we must give his teachings the preeminence they deserve!

Jesus was constantly teaching and clearing up false conclusions from the OT. For example, when the Sadducees (who didn't believe in the resurrection, and who based their doctrine on the OT) tried to trap Jesus, he replied:

But Jesus answered them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. ([Matthew 22:29](#))
and explained the OT scriptures to them.

Jesus did the same thing with the Pharisees. For example, when they asked him about divorce (in which Moses said it was OK), Jesus made it clear to them that what Moses said was a compromise that was not at all what God intended: **"Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so."** ([Matthew 19:8](#))

This raises a **major issue**. Either God decided to be "flexible" about His own commandment, or Moses said something that was **not** from God.

If we have a God who is "flexible" about His own commandments then how are we to know which commandments to follow? For me, this too much to deal with. I have to believe that God is consistent and does not change.

On the other hand, if Moses said something that was not from God, then we have at least one example in the Bible where the words claimed to be speaking for God, but in truth the words were not from God. In fact, those words contradicted God's commandment. Once we recognize this we have to honestly consider how many other parts of the OT are possibly **not** God's teachings.

Jesus gave multiple examples of what was taught in the OT along with non-OT teachings of the Jews and stated that these teachings were clearly, at best, incomplete and, at worst, just plain wrong. The example of Moses' teaching on divorce is only one. Here are some other examples:

"You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not murder;' and 'Whoever shall murder shall be in danger of the judgment.' But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna." ([Matthew 5:21-22](#))

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery;' but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." ([Matthew 5:27-28](#))

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you, don’t resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. If anyone sues you to take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and don’t turn away him who desires to borrow from you.” ([Matthew 5:38-42](#))

After Jesus’ resurrection, he appeared to the disciples and they were having a hard time believing it was really him. After he convinced them he was real (and they were not seeing a ghost), we read:

Then he opened their minds, that they might understand the Scriptures (the OT). ([Luke 24:45](#))

This is what we must do: let Jesus open our minds to understand the OT (and the rest of the NT for that matter). We must not think that the OT will help us to understand Jesus. That is backward thinking.

Jesus said:

“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life.” ([John 6:63](#))

I cannot emphasize this enough! We should look to the son of God to understand the OT, not the other way around!

If there are verses in the OT or the rest of the NT that seem to conflict with what Jesus taught, we should **first** see what Jesus had to say and make our determination based on that. We must use his words as our Rosetta Stone, the lens through which we will examine OT scriptures and other NT scriptures.

The Ultimate Endorsement

There is an account in the life of Jesus whose real significance has been missed by most people. I know I missed it until I began to take Jesus’ teachings seriously and gave them the preeminence that they deserved. This event is commonly referred to as “the Transfiguration” and is found in [Matt 17:5ff](#) and [Mark 9:7ff](#). In this event, Moses and Elijah (from the OT) appeared and conversed with Jesus. Peter, James and John witnessed this spectacle. They must really have been in awe of this situation. Here they were in the presence of two of the greatest OT figures plus the miracle-working Messiah! They suggested the idea of building a shelter for each of the three. At that time, they still hadn’t fully realized how superior Jesus was to these OT figures. God,

Himself, took charge of the situation and cleared this up for them. This is what happened:

A cloud came, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly looking around, they saw no one with them any more, except Jesus only. (Mark 9:7-8)

God removed Moses and Elijah from the scene and made a clear statement that His son was the **only** one they should listen to.

Moses and Elijah had been used by God in the past as earlier, imperfect messengers. However, the time was now at hand when God sent His own son to tell us what our Father wanted us to know. From that point on, according to God, Jesus became the preeminent, authoritative voice of the Father to humanity.

That is when I truly came to realize that the teachings of the OT needed to be viewed from the perspective of what the son of God taught, not the other way around. We should not try to understand the teachings of the son of God by looking to the OT to interpret them for us.

John tells us:

From his fullness we all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (John 1:16-17)

Note the law was given thru Moses. **But truth** is realized through Jesus Christ. Does this seem to imply that the law was not truth? Good question! I challenge you to wrestle with that one for a while.

Jesus said:

"everyone who hears from the Father, and has learned, comes to me." (John 6:45)

We must focus intently on the teachings of Jesus until his words and example are so ingrained in us that our thoughts about spiritual matters always begin with the question "What did Jesus have to say about that and how did he demonstrate it in the way he lived?" We must set everything else aside (including the rest of the Bible) until we have been thoroughly grounded in his words. Note what Jesus said when commissioned the Apostles:

"Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus **didn't** tell the Apostles to teach people about the OT so they could understand his teachings. He told them to teach people the same things he just spent 3 ½ years teaching them. That's all they needed to know.

Jesus' teachings are our starting point and they are our ending point. They should be the standard to which every other teaching is compared and understood, including the OT and the rest of the NT. Once Jesus' teachings have become an integral part of our thoughts and our lives, then we are properly equipped to consider other teachings including the rest of the NT, the OT and any other writings.

We can, with full confidence, make this statement:

Jesus is the Word of God

Most Christians would agree with this statement. However, they would also add "in addition to the rest of the Bible." It is at this point where I found that I had to take a direction that I never imagined myself taking.

Putting Jesus' Teachings First

When I changed my approach to starting with Jesus' teachings and then started looking at the OT and other NT writings, the old "conflicts" that I had previously wrestled with came back up. With my new perspective, how would I handle them?

Earlier I referenced a situation where the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce (in which Moses said it was OK), Jesus made it clear to them that what Moses said was a compromise that was not at all what God intended:

"Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so." ([Matthew 19:8](#))

Moses spoke a "commandment" that was **not** from God (Deut 24:1). It was Moses' own compromise. If I give Jesus' teaching the preeminence, I have to acknowledge there is at least one commandment in the OT that is **not** from God. If there is just one instance, that opens the door to there being other

instances. I have to conclude that there are OT teachings that are **not** God's teachings.

Some will argue that Moses did not declare that issuing a certificate of divorce (Deut 24:1) was from God. So, does that mean only the things that Moses prefaced with "God said" are valid? If so, there is a LOT of the OT that would be discarded.

On the other side of the coin, how many people have said "God told me..." and followed that up with something that was clearly not from God. Is it possible that some in the OT were guilty of this? For example:

Samuel said to Saul, "Yahweh sent me to anoint you to be king over his people, over Israel. Now therefore listen to the voice of Yahweh's words. Thus says Yahweh of Armies, 'I have marked that which Amalek did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way, when he came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and don't spare them; but kill both man and woman, infant and nursing baby, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" (I Samuel 15:1-3)

Contrast that with Jesus' teaching:

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil." (Luke 6:35)

Some will perform a complicated set of mental gymnastics and end up declaring that these two scriptures are compatible. The human brain is amazingly capable of doing this. As for me, the answer is pretty simple and straightforward. In early school years, children are taught to make distinctions between objects; "one of these is not like the other". To me, this is clearly an example of "one of these is not like the other". I will believe Jesus and reject the other. God cannot be "kind toward the unthankful and evil" while commanding them (men, women, nursing infants and animals) to be slaughtered. I am incredulous that I believed for a long time these two "scriptures" could be made to be compatible and consistent.

Once I accepted the conclusion that at least some of the OT was clearly not God's Word (based on the teachings of His son), the log-jam broke for me. And, if I was willing to consider that parts of the OT were not true, then it would be no different to conclude that parts of the NT might also not be true if Jesus' teachings indicate this.

Yes, this means that I have become a “heretic” in the Christian world. But, I am more interested in what God says than what Christianity says:

Nevertheless even of the rulers many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they didn't confess it, so that they wouldn't be put out of the synagogue, for they loved men's praise more than God's praise. (John 12:42-43)

What a relief! Now I don't have to “explain away” all the conflicting verses in the OT and NT. If I ground myself in Jesus' teachings, they will be my guide in understanding what is true and what is not true in the rest of the Biblical writings.

Of course, this new perspective opens up a whole new set of challenges for which I do not have all the answers. However (as an example), just because I do not understand calculus does not mean I have to throw out the basic math that is foundational to it (e.g. $2+2=4$). Neither do I have to reject the simple teachings of Jesus simply because I don't understand all the implications of them.

Recording the Words of the Messenger

Here is an interesting thing that is unique about Jesus: he didn't personally write down his teachings. Mohamed, Joseph Smith, Buddha, Confucius, all of them wrote down their own teachings. Jesus relied on his disciples to record his teachings and his life. All other alleged messengers of God wrote down their own “revelations”. Why didn't Jesus do this?

Anyone can write down their own teachings and then, through their own persuasion, convince others to believe him. But a person who relies on others to write down what he taught and did truly allows his words and actions to speak for themselves. Jesus said:

I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous; because I don't seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me. If I testify about myself, my witness is not valid. It is another who testifies about me. I know that the testimony which he testifies about me is true. You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. But the testimony which I receive is not from man. However, I say these things that you may be saved. He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony which I have is greater

than that of John, for the works which the Father gave me to accomplish, the very works that I do, testify about me, that the Father has sent me.

(John 5:30-36)

Jesus was so confident in his origin, in his message and in the witness of his life that he relied on others to record it and to pass his teachings along to others. And God made sure those writings were preserved for us today.

The Beauty of Simplicity

Here is some food for thought with respect to the simplicity of Jesus' message versus the complexity of having to digest all of the Bible as God's Word.

There are over 750,000 words in the entire Bible (in English translations). With that many words to choose from, people can justify (and have done so) practically any idea or action based on strategically selected verses from the Bible.

There are ~65,000 words in all four Gospels. Many of those words are duplicates of the same recorded event. Only a portion of those are words that Jesus spoke. A rough, conservative estimate of Jesus' unique recorded words would be in the neighborhood of 16,000. This is approximately the same number of words that an average person speaks in one day. That means everything you need to know about Jesus' teaching can be read in a single day. After that, it becomes a matter of putting his teachings into practice (which will take the rest of your life).

Clearly, Jesus did and said a lot more than the record we now have. The Apostle John tells us:

There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they would all be written, I suppose that even the world itself wouldn't have room for the books that would be written. (Joh 21:25)

However, it is significant that God chose to have such a small number of words recorded and preserved for us to read. If all followers of Jesus focused just on Jesus' teaching alone there would be a much more unified group of believers who would have the power to change the world. This is, in fact, the way things started out:

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayer. Fear came on every soul, and many wonders

and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together, and had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods, and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need. Day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the assembly day by day those who were being saved. (Act 2:42-47)

Think about what would be included in “the apostles’ teaching” at that time. The twelve apostles would be teaching exactly what they just spent 3 ½ years learning from Jesus. They would teach what is recorded in the Gospels, Jesus’ words. The first believers were characterized by power, love, unity and growth. These are exactly the things that Jesus prayed for in [John 17](#).

Paul’s additional “revelations” were not necessary for the first believers to demonstrate the characteristics that Jesus wanted. In fact, after Paul began his missionary journeys and started adding his additional “revelations” to Jesus’ teaching (~15 years later), divisions started occurring. I am not saying that Paul was the cause of all the divisions. But I am saying that his multitude of teachings, which added to or contradicted what Jesus taught, contributed to the divisions. Over the course of human history it is clear that far more people now follow the teachings of Paul combined with a smorgasbord of selected OT writings than those who follow the pure, simple teachings of Jesus. Most Christians spend far more time talking about the rapture, millennialism, eternal security, church, etc. (none of which Jesus talked about) than about the kingdom of God (which is the thing Jesus talked about the most).

Jesus said:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give eternal life to them.” (John 10:27-28)

Those who are seeking God will listen to His son and **only** to His son.

All Scripture is Inspired?

Many Christians point to this writing to try to prove that all of the Bible is the inspired Word of God:

From infancy, you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. Every

Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:15-17)

Here are a few things to note about this passage:

- 1) the "holy Scriptures" referred to here are the books of the OT. The NT had not yet been written.
- 2) This was written by Paul, not Jesus. Jesus **never said** all OT scriptures were inspired. He did refer to some OT scriptures as being accurate, but he also referred to other OT scriptures as being inaccurate.
- 3) Even Paul never claimed that his own writings were inspired and without error.

New Insights and Challenges

As I mentioned above, accepting Jesus as the Word of God and rejecting many writings in the rest of the Bible has brought new challenging questions for me. It has also brought new and refreshing insights. I want to share a few of these.

Spiritual Smorgasbording?

Earlier I referenced the concept of "spiritual smorgasbording". Before you accuse me of spiritual smorgasbording, allow me to explain why this is not what I'm doing. Smorgasbording involves accepting a writing by an author and then "filtering" out portions of that author's writing, keeping only the parts we like. The collection that we know as "the Bible" is not, in fact a single book by a single author. It is a collection of writings by 40 different authors. This collection was assembled by councils of men using human reasoning as to why this made sense to them. I am disagreeing with their decision to proclaim the writings of all 40 of these authors as divine. I have determined that the Word of God is defined as the words that Jesus spoke while he was on the earth and was recorded by eyewitnesses who believed in him and his words. As such, I accept the writings of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and teachings as the Word of God, i.e, the four Gospels. (Actually, only 2 of the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses: Matthew and John. Luke and Mark were not eyewitnesses. Currently I do study all 4 Gospels; I have not found any reason to reject what Luke and Mark recorded).

Now, if I were to accept some portions of Jesus' words (that I prefer) and reject other portions (that I might not like), then, "yes", I would then be engaged in spiritual smorgasbording. However, I accept **all** of Jesus' teachings. I don't claim to be perfectly consistent in this area but I am working very hard at it. I do accept everything that Jesus taught. If someone sees something in me that smacks of spiritual smorgasbording I would be very grateful if they would point this out to me.

What I have found is that Jesus' teachings and his life were perfectly consistent; there are no contradictions!

Inerrancy vs. Truth

Recall the section above where I discussed the concept of inerrancy. Remember, that inerrant means "without error" in terms of the writing containing the same text as the original. As I stated, I believe the Bible arguably has the highest inerrancy claim of all religious writings. But, that doesn't mean that it is all true. For example, I do not believe that God ordered the genocidal slaughter of men, women and children as this is not consistent with the nature of the Father that Jesus revealed to us. Jesus said **"He who has seen me has seen the Father"** (John 14:9). And, Jesus was not wrathful and genocidal. He taught us (and modeled for us) that:

he (God) is kind toward the unthankful and evil." (Luke 6:35)

Jesus also taught us that God desires mercy not sacrifice (Matt 9:13, Matt 12:7). He never taught anywhere that he came to offer himself up as a sacrifice for our sins. This leads me to reject the OT writings that claim God instituted the sacrificial system.

What To Do About the OT

I have puzzled over this issue and its implications a great deal. While I no longer believe that the non-Gospel writings are completely true, I also recognize that Jesus frequently referred to parts of the OT.

However, just because Jesus referred to the OT we cannot automatically infer he was saying that all of it was true and that it was God's direct, accurate and preserved word. I can agree that some of the writings of Buddha or Muhammad reflect truth but that does not mean I accept all their writings as true.

Yes, I am familiar with Jesus' saying:

"Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished."

(Matthew 5:17-18)

However, this can be taken several ways. It does **not** necessarily mean that Jesus was affirming that he believed what we call the Old Testament was the same thing as "the law or the prophets". Nor does it mean that he was declaring everything in the OT was God's direct, accurate and preserved word. I am currently working on a monograph on this topic and will provide a link to it when it is complete.

For now, whenever Jesus refers to the OT I pay attention. However, aside from what Jesus confirmed or denied in the OT, I do not feel at all equipped to say which parts of the OT are true and which are not. I doubt that I will ever know. However, this does not keep me from believing in what Jesus taught and trying to practice what he taught.

I think there is a reason that God has preserved the OT in terms of its accuracy. It is because of the prophecies about Jesus.

Jesus' authority has been demonstrated in several ways. He demonstrated his authority by his miracles and by his resurrection from the dead. I also believe that the Father provided prophecies about Jesus' coming that are so detailed and accurate that they could not have been faked or written after the fact. We **know** for a fact that the prophecies about Jesus were written long before he was born due to the fact that they are accurately preserved.

I know that this doesn't answer all questions about the OT, but it is the best understanding I have at this time. I'm sure I will continue to wrestle with this issue.

Similarly, Paul wrote some **very** good things in his letters. However, he also wrote things that conflict with Jesus' teachings. So, should I spend time going thru Paul's letters and weeding out the true statements from the false ones? For me, I don't think the time required to do this would be justified. Jesus said:

"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life." (John 6:63)

I find that I already have a full time job on my hands focusing on Jesus' words and trying to put them into practice in my life.

Rejecting Christian Theologies

Since I rely only on Jesus' teachings, I have had to reject some major Christian theologies like the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, eternal security, church, the "gifts of the Spirit" and many others. This has been very hard, in some cases, for me to do. Lifelong habits die hard. However, I have found that the real "theologies" (truths) of Jesus are much simpler to understand and put into practice. Having been a "Christian" for over five decades I still have a lot of "old stuff" in my life that sometimes I don't even recognize as "old stuff" that has to be reconsidered. However, God is merciful. He is interested in my effort in trying to behave like His child. He is not focused on how "perfectly" I have done this. Periodically, I get surprised at something in my life that I didn't recognize as being "Christian" teaching as opposed to Christ's teaching. Then I have to reexamine it.

Consequences

The thing that has been hardest on me is being rejected by the people that I once thought loved me. As long as I adhered to the theological teachings of a group of Christians, I was loved. As soon as I started doubting these teachings I was no longer "loved"; I was now the trouble maker, the doubter. Not a single one of my former "Christian brothers or sisters" ever showed enough love to me to try to help me "correct my errors" (as they perceived them) or to stick with me as I went thru this process.

I came to realize that being a Christian is like being in a social club and if you don't follow the rules you get kicked out of the club. This is yet another evidence that human institutions that are following human teachings have no clue as to how to truly love a person.

I am now considered a heretic by the Christian world. I know that Jesus warned me this would happen, that following him would mean rejection by men and even division in families (Luke 12:51). But, that doesn't make it easy to take.

The result of rejection also means that I find myself (with the wonderful exception of my wife) alone in my pursuit to "seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness".

You might (rightfully, I might add) ask me "Why are you seemingly the only one who has figured this out?" GREAT QUESTION! I ask myself this question all the time! I am constantly searching for others who have come up with similar conclusions. Every time I think I found someone, further understanding of their conclusions take off in an unexpected direction which is definitely not consistent with Jesus' teachings.

I repeatedly go back and revisit all this, looking for my mistakes or for what key thing that I'm missing. But, so far, I keep coming back to the same conclusions.

I have to assume that there are others out there who have also found this truth, but I just haven't met them yet. Again, Jesus spoke about this:

"How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it." (Matthew 7:14)

It can be very difficult feeling alone. However, we must be committed to being "faithful to the end" regardless of the cost.

Still Sorting It Out

Bottom line, I'm still sorting it all out. I stand with Peter's statement that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God. I'm doing the best I can to understand and put into practice what the Word of God (Christ) teaches. I am grateful for God's patience with me over the years and His mercy, which He lovingly extends to cover all of my shortcomings. I constantly pray that He will bring other seekers into my life (in addition to my wife) so we can seek the Father together and encourage and challenge each other along the way on this challenging and yet exciting journey.

With every ounce of my being I want to be like Him and I want to point others to Him.

The Bottom Line

If we are truly seeking God, we will listen to His son and follow him:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give eternal life to them.” (John 10:27-28)

For More Reading

As a result of giving Jesus' teachings the preeminence that they deserve, I have had to revisit the doctrines I grew up with and have come to some startling conclusions.

A monograph entitled [Why Did Jesus Come to Earth](#) dives deeply into Jesus' teachings and allows Jesus himself to reveal the Father's truths to us. Be warned, these are **not** the teachings of Christianity!

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from the Bible come from the World English Bible translation (<https://worldenglishbible.org>).