

October 14, 2012

Satan's Favorite Lies

The Bible Can't Be Trusted

Acts 8:26-34

Opening words:

Have you ever noticed the Bible generates an emotional reaction out of people? Sometimes the reaction is positive. For example, John Wesley, the founder of the great Methodist movement, called himself a man of one book, the Bible. Another positive example is U.S. Grant. He said, "*Hold fast to the Bible as the sheet-anchor of your liberties. Write its precepts in your hearts, and practice them in your lives.*" There are countless negative examples. During the 1980s, prior to the fall of Communism, a large shipment of Bibles entered Romania from the West. The authorities confiscated them and turned them into pulp. Then they had the pulp reconstituted into toilet paper and sold back to the West. How do you react to the Bible?

This is sermon number five in my seven part sermon series, *Satan's Favorite Lies*. We have exposed four lies to date. If you have been with us then you may remember them.

God can't be trusted.

Some things can't be forgiven.

God grades on a curve.

Suffering should be avoided.

I have called this message *The Bible Can't Be Trusted*. Our scripture reading for today comes from the New Testament, Acts 8:26-34. May God give you ears to hear.

Acts 8:26-34

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." 30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

In the year A.D. 303, the Roman Emperor Diocletian issued a decree which he hoped would extinguish the spreading flames of Christianity. One of his primary objectives was the seizure and destruction of the Christian Scriptures. Later that year, officials enforced the decree in North Africa. One of the targets was Felix, Bishop of Tibjuca, a village near Carthage. The mayor of the town ordered Felix to hand over his Scriptures. Felix refused to surrender the Word of God at the insistence of mere men. In time, Felix was shipped to Italy where he paid for his stubbornness with his life. Felix chose the scriptures over his very life. Can I state the obvious? The times have changed. Is there anyone here today who values the Bible over their own life? If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**"

Sometime back on the Tonight show Jay Leno went out on the street and asked people "simple questions." He calls that portion of the show "Jaywalking." On one particular evening he asked people simple questions about the Bible. He asked the first person to name one of the Ten Commandments. A young man answered, "Freedom of Speech. He then asked the person to finish the quote. *Ye who is without sin* _____. A middle aged woman answered, "Has the most fun!" He then asked who in the Bible was swallowed by a great fish. An elderly gentleman answered Pinocchio. The correct answers are Honor your father and mother; cast the first stone and Jonah. How many of the three did you know?

Several years ago, my good friend Russ Libb told me this story. For years he has served as the Chaplain of the Western Reserve High School football team. One day he was out in the community and he ran into one of the assistant coaches. The coach looked at Russ and said, "Next week before the game can we say the Lord's Prayer?" Russ responded, "Sure but why the Lord's Prayer?" The coach responded by saying, "I love that part about walking through the valley of the shadow of death. That is not part of the Lord's Prayer. It is part of the twenty-third Psalm. Do I have to go on? Do I really have to go on?"

We live in Biblically illiterate times. Let's just be honest. Our generation does know the Bible as well as previous generations. The reason is our generation does not read the Bible as often as previous generations. Some believe the Bible is outdated so it has nothing to offer our generation. Some believe Satan's lie, the Bible cannot be trusted. You really can't blame them.

The Bible is not a science book so it doesn't have to pass scientific standards. The Bible is not logical. However, the Bible is spiritual. It cannot be confined by science or logic. It is much bigger; it is much more profound. The Bible feeds your soul. Second Timothy 3:16 says, "*All scripture is God breathed and is useful in teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*" So today I want to encourage you to do two things. First, I would encourage you to read the Bible. Second, I would encourage you to read the Bible in the right way. Have you ever read the Bible in the wrong way? With that question let us look at the scripture lesson together.

According to the text, Philip is told by an angel to go to the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. It covers a distance of some fifty miles. Somewhere along that trek he finds an Ethiopian. On one hand, he was very special. He was in charge of his nation's treasury. On the other hand, he is very common. He was just one of the many faces who questioned the immorality and polytheism of their time. He was drawn to Jerusalem for two reasons. First, the Jews believed in the one true God. Second, the Jews promoted a moral lifestyle. He is traveling home and reading the sacred scriptures of the Hebrews. Listen to what I am about to say. He is reading the words but the words are not enough. With every word there seems to be a new question. Have you ever read the Bible and had a few questions? The good news is Philip was there to help the Ethiopian. The bad news is you are stuck with me.

Today, I want to help you read and understand the Bible. We are going to look at five ways you can read the Bible. Each one is found in America today. Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible **critically**? Their goal is to belittle the Bible. Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible **symbolically**? Their goal is to promote their own agenda. Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible **literally**? It is not as easy as it sounds. Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible **academically**? With each Biblical text there is historical background that must be considered. Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible **personally**? That is when you make yourself part of the Biblical story. I am going to look at these five ways you can read the Bible quickly. How do you read the Bible? If you are ready to begin say, "**Amen!**"

Critically

Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible critically? The other day I received a sad phone call. I was asked to pray for a young family because the parents were separating. They have three children, three, six and nine. I asked the mother of the wife, "What happened?" Hearing a one-sided response she said, "He was too controlling. He was too critical." You can criticize something to improve it. Or you can criticize something to tear it down or belittle it.

Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible critically? They don't criticize the Bible to improve its meaning. They criticize the Bible to tear it down or belittle it. Do you read the Bible critically? Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible critically? If someone pops into your mind say, "**Amen!**"

Symbolically

Do you know anyone who reads the Bible symbolically? I you haven't heard there is a national election coming up in a few weeks. On November 6, America will decide if President Barack Obama will return to the White House or if Mitt Romney will become our forty-fifth President. Every morning I wake up and check the church's email address. It is amazing our many emails the church receives pertaining to the election. The lines are clearly drawn. Both sides are using scripture to state their case. Romney supporters use scripture to plant the seed that Mr. Obama is the anti-Christ. Obama supporters use scripture to support the point that Mr. Romney is not fit for office because he is Mormon. I don't care if you are a "Red Person" or a "Blue Person." Both sides are equally guilty of using scripture to support their candidate.

Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible symbolically? Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible with their own agenda in mind? The goal in Bible study is not to support your opinions and agenda. The goal in Bible study is to be changed by the Bible. When you read the Bible are you open to change or are you looking for another bullet to put in your pistol? Do you read the Bible symbolically? Do you know of someone who reads the Bible symbolically? If someone pops into your minds say, "**Amen!**"

Literally

Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible literally? A literalist takes each word at face value. That sounds easy but it is really quite hard. I have never met a true literalist. We interpret phrases daily. Let me give you a few examples.

I slept like a log.

I'm dead tired.

You are driving me crazy.

I have a tiger by the tail.

I am worn to a frazzle.

The singer knocks me out.

None of us takes those phrases at face value. We understand the meaning behind them.

Consider these three phrases. Each one came from Jesus. The Master said:

You must be born again.

Become like little children.

You have a log in your eye.

Does anyone here take those words literally? Does everyone here understand you must find the true meaning behind those words? Do you read the Bible literally? Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible literally? If someone pops into your mind say, **"Amen!"**

Academically

Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible academically? If you read the Bible academically then you understand the scriptures were written by a certain person, at a certain place, at a certain time, to a certain group in history. Having the background will help you understand the authors' original intent? It is the opposite of symbolism. The symbolic reader is looking for verses to support their cause; the academic reading is more concerned with the original intent. This is the problem with reading the Bible academically. The Bible is more than an historical document. The Bible is a living testimony. Do you read the Bible academically? Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible academically? If someone pops into your mind say, **"Amen!"** I read the Bible academically but I also read the Bible personally.

Personally

Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible personally? When you read the Bible personally you become one of the characters in the story. You become Zaccheaus sitting in the tree. You become Nicodemus who came to Jesus with a question. You become one of the women who discovered the empty tomb on Easter morning. You become the Ethiopian, who sat reading his Bible in the chariot. This is the question that hounds the personal reader. What is the scripture saying to me? Karl Barth once said, *"The Bible becomes the word of God for us, not when we take hold of it, but when it takes hold of us."* Do you read the Bible personally? Do you know of anyone who reads the Bible personally? If someone pops into your mind say, **"Amen!"**

On Thursday, I went for my annual physical. I go every three or four years for my annual physical. I past few weeks I have had a stress test and I have had my blood drawn. Everything looked fine so the only thing left to do was go to see my doctor. Upon arrival, I was weighed and the nurse took my blood pressure. After my flu shot, she told me to take off my clothes because the doctor would be right in. I did what she said and sat there in that tiny room in my underwear. Can I tell you the truth? I was a little uncomfortable in my underwear so I began to flex my muscles. After about five seconds of flexing I got depressed. I began looking at the posters taped the wall. It is a sad collection. There was a picture of a diseased heart and a smoker's lung. I was just about to look at the poster on hypertension when the doctor walked in. I tried to look casual in my underwear. I didn't want to intimidate him with all my muscles. (I don't think he was intimidated.)

He looked at me and said, "Russ, how are you doing today?" I thought, "How do you think I'm doing? I am sitting here in my underwear. I said, "I'm fine. How have you been?" That question changed my whole visit. He said, "I not doing so well today. They are moving my mother to Hospice House this afternoon. She has been fighting colon cancer and the end is near."

As I sat there in my underwear the pastoral side of me came out.

He opened up part of his personal life to me and we talked a variety of things. We talked about his brother and sister. We talked about his childhood. We talked about Jesus and we talked about prayer. We talked about how much he loved his failing mother and I asked him if he had expressed that love to her. He said, "I told her two weeks ago how much I loved her and appreciated her. I thanked her for my eternity and my introduction to Jesus. I thank her for praying for me and with me. I thanked her for teaching me to read the Bible. "

What are you going to pass on to the next generation? I don't mean your possessions. I mean your core values. What are you teaching them about God? What are you teaching them about prayer? What are you teaching them about Bible? If you want them to value the Bible, then you have to read the Bible, yourself. George Washington once said, "*It is impossible to rightly govern a nation without God and the Bible.*" Why are we trying to live without valuing the Bible? And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"