

INTRO: In a couple of weeks we are going to start a verse by verse study in the book of St. John. This has been on my heart to do for several months. Our Vision for the New Year is VISION 20 DEEP AND WIDE. And it speaks to going DEEP in God's Word and then intentionally taking what we learn into our community and sharing the Word and Love of God with those around us.

Over the months that I have been praying about our study in John, I sensed God was moving me to address the issue of Biblical Inerrancy. As your pastor, I can take you book by book, verse by verse, word by word through the entire Bible, but if you do not believe that the Bible is true, or believe that it is indeed the Word of God, all my teaching will be in vain.

So, in light of the fact that the culture has for the large part denied the truth of God, I wanted to preach a sermon today on Biblical inerrancy, and the trustworthiness of scripture. Today I want to ask you a question, "DO YOU BELIEVE?" I'll ask it now, and I will ask it again at the end of the sermon. And when we conclude today, if you still have questions, I would encourage you to set up a time to meet with me one on one and let's talk about your concerns. Because this is the most important issue in your life. It literally has life or death implications.

A recent Barna Research Group survey regarding what Americans believe, asked the question, "Is there absolute truth?" 66% percent of adults responded that they believe that "there is no such thing as absolute truth; different people can define truth in conflicting ways and still be correct."

Now, if we're honest, we can see where this line of thought might come from. For example, I'm going to ask all of you a question and I want all of you to simultaneously blurt out your answer. WILL YOU PLAY ALONG? Nod for yes. Okay, the question is, now be ready to answer out loud... "What is the best flavor of ice cream? Okay, we had several answers. And I believe you all answered truthfully according to your thinking. Now I didn't answer. I couldn't answer truthfully. Because when I was a kid, I would have quickly said Chocolate is without a doubt the best flavor of ice cream. But as I got older I developed a love for vanilla. But now, there's hundred's of mixed flavors like, chocolate covered cherry fudge ripple. And my mind just blows up at that point. I don't know what to say. But you get the gist of what I'm saying. Some say chocolate, some vanilla, some chocolate covered cherry fudge ripple. And your all telling the truth according to you.

But, this ideology of "no such thing as absolute truth" breaks down when scrutinized. For instance, what if I asked, "Is it acceptable to physically or sexually abuse a helpless child?" Did you know there are thousands of people in the world that have done just that, and don't feel they did anything wrong.

And since this is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, what about taking the life of an innocent, helpless baby from the womb of it's mother and destroying this child before birth. There are millions of people on both sides of this battle. IS EVERYONE RIGHT?

NO! Common sense (that's not that common after all) tells us that much.

So, where are modern men and women to turn for stability and a foundation on which to build their lives?

Many look inside of themselves, assuming that truth and enlightenment come from deep within. When people do this there is:

- No stability to any belief, because we're always changing.
- No enduring ethical standards.
- No way to validate one's conclusions. No way to test experiences.
- No basis for concluding that one person is right and another is wrong.
- No real hope for the future.

But as Christians our hope is in the fact that, "The Bible and the Bible alone is our only rule of faith and practice."

When it comes to the Word of God, let's look at a couple of things first...

The Authority of God: God reigns as the supreme ruler of the universe. He holds ultimate authority. Nothing or no one else possesses any authority except when granted by God. **Romans 13:1** "*for there is no authority except that which God has established.*"

This holds true of the Bible. The Bible finds its authority not in its human writers, not in its ability to stand the test of time, and not even in its subject matter. Scripture has authority only because of its origin. Notice...

1. **2 Timothy 3:16** "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,*"
2. **2 Peter 1:20-21** "*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*"
3. Paul, speaking to the church in Thessalonica, says, concerning his instructions to them, that it was given "*...by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*" **1 Thessalonians 4:2**

When people speak of the "authority of Scripture," this phrase serves only as acknowledgement that God, who holds all authority, invested authority into His Word.

Sometimes we do not handle the Word of God as it should be. Sometimes we treat the Bible as an answer book. Sometimes we view it as a devotional work meant to give us warm fuzzies. Sometimes we approach it as a checklist of rules to define what is right and wrong. Other times we go to the Bible to find proof for our favorite doctrines. This has kernels of truth but when we view the Bible in only these ways we miss the transformative power of God's Word.

Unfortunately sometimes we view the Bible as a textbook. Now studying the Bible does involve work at times but such work should lead us into a greater awe of God, not just lead us into more academic exercises.

Others see the Bible as a book of history. It is a book of history, HisStory. The Bible begins with, In the Beginning, God created. It ends with happily ever after, as John describes the glory of the New Jerusalem and Jesus' promise to return. Between these bookends lies the story of God's redemption of a deeply flawed, but deeply loved, creation. Had God given only a list of rules or a series of logical principles, people may have simply ignored it or explained it away. Instead His Story, God's story, energizes and transforms. As God's people, we find our identity and purpose in His Story, God's story- the Holy Scriptures.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE DISCIPLES: In this New Testament age, God has revealed His authoritative truth through Jesus and His apostles. Acts 2:42 states of the early Christians, *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching..."*

We have the same privilege today. Although the apostles died long ago. We still have the apostles' teaching recorded in the NT. The books of the NT come from the pens of apostles such as Matthew, John, Peter, and Paul; and from the pens of those who recorded what they heard directly from the apostles, such as Mark (mainly through Peter but also through Paul), and Luke (mainly through Paul).

God holds all authority. And He invested His authority, through the apostles.

Now let's look at some terms you need to know when it comes to the Word of God...

I) INSPIRATION: Inspiration is the term used to refer to the special supernatural supervision exercised by God over His messengers to make sure they communicate His message accurately. Even though the word inspiration seldom appears in Scripture, the fact that God himself is speaking through the Biblical writers is often repeated.

Again 2 Peter 1:20-21 says, *"...men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

When God invested His authority into Scripture, He did not simply deliver completed manuscripts, penned by His own hand, to printers around the world for distribution. Instead, the Holy Spirit transmitted His authoritative Word through the pens, personalities, and participation of human beings. As a result, the Spirit's involvement ensures that the Bible consists of God's true and authoritative Word, and the involvement of human writers results in various writing styles, emotions, and a reflection of their experiences.

II) PLENARY: The Bible teaches and we believe in the plenary inspiration of Scripture. Wait what? Plenary means entire or absolute. Every part of the book was produced under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This means the NT as well as the OT is inspired. Paul says that all Scripture is God breathed (2 Timothy 3:16).

All biblical genres and themes bear the quality of inspiration. One cannot say that the historical sections are not inspired while the doctrinal and law sections are. There is no basis for this. If the Bible is not correct historically, or scientifically, it cannot be what it claims to be, THE WORD OF GOD! How can a God who created all of science, and knows time from beginning to end, write a book that is wrong on those subjects?

I) INSPIRATION:

II) PLENARY:

III) INERRANT: Inerrant means “free from error.” This applies specifically to the original manuscripts as they came directly from the inspired apostles and prophets. Today we do not have any of the original physical manuscripts produced by these writers. But what we do have is amazing!

Manuscript Evidence: To date, there are more than 5,800 known Greek manuscript copies of the New Testament, comprising and astounding 2.6 million pages of biblical text. And that doesn't include the over 10,000 manuscripts in Latin and over 9,300 other versions totaling more than 25,000 manuscript copies of the whole or portions of the New Testament in existence today, ranking it first in manuscript evidence of all historical documents.

The Iliad, by Homer, is second ... with 643 surviving manuscripts.

Dating of the manuscripts: The New Testament autographs date between 40 and 100 A.D. Until 1995, the earliest extant manuscripts dated to the fourth century (a 250-300 year difference between the original and the earliest known copy). But since then fragments of New Testament manuscripts have been found that date to within 100-150 years of the original. Norman Geisler states that the average gap between an original composition and the earliest available copy is over 1,000 years for other works of antiquity.

Variant readings: Can the copies be trusted? Through the proper application of textual criticism, comparing all the available manuscripts with one another, we are able to confidently reconstruct the original reading. Let's briefly compare numbers on variant readings. The New Testament contains approximately 20,000 lines, of which only 40 lines are in question at all. This equals .5% (one half of one percent).

The Iliad contains approximately 15,600 lines, of which 764 lines are in question. This equals five percent. That's ten times more variants than the New Testament in a document which is only three-quarters its length. The sheer number of extant NT manuscripts we possess narrows tremendously the margin of doubt on the correct reading of the original documents (known as autographs).

Of the 0.5% of the New Testament variant readings, only one eighth of those amount to anything more than a stylistic difference or misspelling. Let there be no mistake, what we have today is a divine preservation of God's Holy Word passed down to every generation. **Psalm 12: 6-7** “The words of the Lord are pure words, Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times. 7 You shall keep them, O Lord, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.”

IV) INFALLIBLE: Infallible means it is “incapable of error.” The terms infallible and inerrant go together, but they are not the same. Infallible is a stronger term. A statement or document may be inerrant without being infallible, but it can never be infallible without being inerrant. The Bible is inerrant because it is infallible, and it is infallible because it is the inspired Word of God. Since God knows all things, he cannot make a mistake, and since he cannot lie, he cannot deceive us.

John 17:17 “Your word is truth.”