

THE WORD OF LIFE

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In the beginning, God spoke, and the universe was created.

Psalm 33:6 *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.*

With His own hands, God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

Then, God spoke to man the word of life, and man became spiritually alive.

God Sent His Word

God sent His Word...

- through angels (to Moses and to the prophets), revealing His will
- through Moses (to Israel), codifying prescribed patterns of behavior
- through prophets, to warn His people of their disobedience to His words and revive their faith
- finally, through Jesus, to reveal Himself most fully

Hebrews 1:1 *Long ago God spoke many times and in many (fragmentary) ways to our ancestors through the prophets. ² And now in these final days, he has spoken to us (finally) through his Son.*

The Word of Life is Jesus. John made this pointedly clear:

John 1:1 *In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God and the Word was God.*

John 1:14 *So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*

1 John 1:1 *We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life.*

The Bible Is Also the Word

The Word of Life (Jesus) is known to us through the Bible — a collection of 66 books, written over a period of more than 1400 years, by more than 40 authors, in several languages, yet demonstrating a remarkable unity of purpose and content.

But how can we know that the words of the Bible have been accurately preserved?

For starters, it was the rigorous religious training and discipline of the Jewish scribes that preserved the Hebrew scriptures, which we call the First Covenant or Old Testament. From generation to generation, they painstakingly copied the Scriptures by hand, while every letter of every word was examined for its correctness. Since it was copied with ink on papyrus or animal skins, erasure was impossible. Therefore, any error that was found meant re-copying that entire page again. You can believe they were careful!

Add to that the fact that multiple copies and fragments of copies have been found to verify the integrity of the text.

And how can we be assured that the authors have not written from a personal bias or isolated imaginations? Apostle Peter offers inspired insight:

2 Peter 1:20 Above all, you must realize that no prophecy of Scripture ever originated from the prophet's own understanding,²¹ or from human initiative. No, those men were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

Luke, the physician who accompanied Apostle Paul on several of his journeys and wrote two of the books in the New Testament, explained with great care:

Luke 1:1 Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us.² They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples.³ Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you, most honorable Theophilus,⁴ so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.

"Theophilus" means *lover of God*. It is not known for certain whether this was someone's given name, or a generic title for all the followers of Christ who would read his words.

And Paul also transparently defends his words:

2 Corinthians 2:17 You see, we are not like the many hucksters who preach for personal profit. We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ's authority, knowing that God is watching us.

2 Corinthians 4:2 We don't try to trick anyone or distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know this.

These writings circulated among the authors' contemporaries, many of whom were also eyewitnesses and could easily have objected if the content misrepresented the truth. Instead, we find confirmations, like this one from Apostle Peter:

2 Peter 3:15 This is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him—¹⁶ speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture. And this will result in their destruction.

"As...with other parts of Scripture," Peter wrote, equating Paul's letters with the God-breathed words of the ancient Hebrew texts.

Finally, we have the inspired words of the psalmist, who reminds us:

Psalms 12:6 The Lord's promises are pure, like silver refined in a furnace, purified seven times over.

The writer of Proverbs explains that this testing of the Word actually takes place in the daily lives of countless human beings:

Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God proves true. He is a shield to all who come to him for protection.

Every generation has searched for truth and questioned whether the Bible really contained divine answers and prescriptions for human life. This questioning is natural and not to be feared, and will continue in every future generation, as long as people still think for themselves and seek after God. Their

questions and arguments have been the fires that tested the value of the words recorded in the Bible again and again.

Still, after thousands of years of formal, scholarly discussions and violent efforts to eradicate the book, the text remains intact. The inescapable conclusion? God watches over His Word to preserve it.

God Still Speaks

Also important for us today is the fact that God continues to speak to people through His Word. While the Scriptures are complete and need no additions or modifications (other than continuing to try to translate them into contemporary language), God's words continue to generate life — spiritual life, fullness of life — for those who receive them by faith and follow them.

There exist certain cultic (per)versions of the Bible, and other written works purporting to supersede the content of the Bible, which have distorted the long-accepted words of Holy Scripture, and each generation raises again the questions about what are called "lost" documents of other disciples, like Thomas and Mary Magdalene, and even Judas. These spurious documents have never been able to unseat the Bible, except in the minds of those who are fascinated by fantasy.

Which translation is best? The one you will read most often. Seriously. The differences between translations and paraphrases do no damage to the core doctrines of Scripture, for the central teachings are not founded in a single verse or passage or word. The most important thing is to use a translation which does not *add* difficulty to your enjoyment and understanding of God's truth.

I urge people to do as I have done and read from a different translation each time you read through the Bible. It will widen your understanding and your ability to communicate God's Word to others in language that grips them.

In the language of the New Testament, there are two Greek words that translate as *word* or *teaching* or *saying*. They are *logos* (the generic or general truth) and *rhema* (the specific or applied truth).

Jesus Himself is the *Logos*; His applications of truth (His teachings) are the *Rhema*.

The Bible is the *logos*; the Holy Spirit's prompted applications are the *rhema*.

You are not responsible each day to the entire text (that would be legalism; both impossible and impractical). But you are responsible to the inspired text (that which the Holy Spirit highlights for you day by day).

For instance, the Spirit may:

- Highlight a passage or verse (esp, by connecting the meaning or application of one verse with another)
- Remind you of a verse or principle that you have previously read (even one you have not attempted to memorize)
- Impress you with a lesson from your life's circumstance
- Convict you of a specific sin, so you may repent and receive forgiveness
- Prompt an act of love for someone else

A word received from the Lord in such a way becomes the ground of your faith and the direction for your obedience.

² *Peter 1:4* Because of his glory and excellence, God has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

⁵ In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's words. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

⁸ The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And, the word of the Lord is a seed for our prayers... but that's a subject for next week.