

Got Questions? Can I Pick Which Parts of the Bible to Believe?

Matthew 5:17-20; Matthew 12:38-45

September 19, 2010

It happens. It may even be happening in your house right now. It's not something that is a concern for everyone, but for others it can be all-consuming. It's the question:

Can I pick which parts of the Bible to believe?

Now, it's not always phrased that way. It comes out in conversation as:

Do you really believe that creation was completed in 6 days?

You don't really believe Jonah was inside a fish for 3 days do you?

Come on....there's no way that God parted the sea and let the Hebrews walk to the other side on dry land.

You've heard these types of questions or comments, or perhaps you've made them yourself. These are the types of ideas that arise in the minds of thinking people. God is a thinking God and we are created in his image – therefore we think...we ponder...we are curious. God never meant for us to not ask questions just because we are in relationship with him. He gave us a brain and intends for us to use it.

So, I'm going to dispense with the answer to the question, *can I pick which parts of the Bible to believe*, right up front. The answer is, "Yes." Your salvation is not contingent on you believing anything except that Jesus is the Son of God who lived, died, and arose again...all so that you can be forgiven for your sins and be made friends again with the Father. So, yes, you can choose to cherry-pick the Bible if you wish.

However. (I hope you didn't believe that was the end of the sermon!) I don't think the question of "can we" is the best question to ask. I would contend that the better question is:

Why would one want to choose to believe parts of the Bible and not others? Why would someone want to do such a thing?

It is this question of WHY that continues to challenge me. WHY one would wish to choose to believe some parts of Scripture while making the choice to discount other parts. It is around that question of WHY that I want to challenge you this morning. I am going to present a number of possible mindsets that could cause one to believe that either it is okay to cherry-pick the Bible, or to believe that it is merely a matter of personal preference that does not affect others. With those mindsets I will offer some possible problems to consider. My end purpose being to try to get you to think theologically about this issue before you make your decision to declare parts of the Bible irrational.

1. I am smart enough, wise enough, or discerning enough to tell which parts of the Bible to believe.

As Christians we should approach every issue in our lives primarily from a theological perspective. And theologically, we must remember that we are each a product of the Fall. Therefore, our reasoning is flawed, our wisdom is flawed, even our society is flawed (it doesn't take much discernment to see that is true). So if we are by nature flawed, how can we be sure that we are not making flawed decisions about what could be possible and what couldn't. We need to also remember that God's understanding is greater than ours; and God's ability to make things happen are dependent merely upon his will. God doesn't have to obey what we have come to call laws of nature or science.

2. I hold other authorities in higher regard than God's Word.

Last week we talked about the authority of Scripture. The authority of Scripture is actually the authority of God vested in his written Word. We need to ask ourselves whether there is truly an earthly authority that is more credible than God.

Jesus said:

"You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

"Your approval means nothing to me, because I know you don't have God's love within you. For I have come to you in my Father's name, and you have rejected me. Yet if others come in their own name, you gladly welcome them. No wonder you can't believe! For you gladly honor each other, but you don't care about the honor that comes from the one who alone is God. (John 5:39-47)

We must be careful not to replace Jesus with mankind – or to put it another way – to replace the Creator with the Created.

What this does not mean is you have to choose between science and God. Those two do not have to be mutually exclusive. Next week I am going to attempt to address the question posed of whether one can believe in Creation and Evolution. I believe you can.

3. I wish to call all of the Word of God into question.

When we call part of the Bible into question we have to allow for the next logical step that ALL of Scripture must be called into question. Let me tell you...that can be a pretty slippery slope. Pretty soon you've gone so far as to call the person of Jesus into question...his birth, death, and resurrection...and before you know it you've single-handedly dismantled the entire redemption of humanity by God...at least in your own mind.

4. I am more discerning than Jesus.

This one partially goes back to the first one in which we need to remember that we are fallen; however, it has more to do with the fact that Jesus believed the Scriptures. Listen again to the words of the Son of God:

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and

three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The story of Jonah is one that people have a hard time swallowing, but Jesus presents it as an historical event. What does it say about us if we are willing to set ourselves up as more discerning of truth than the Son of God?

5. I am not concerned about my witness to others.

Paul spoke about Christians compromising their witness to others by what they chose to do and not do. The passage that follows is about eating foods that had been offered to idols of false gods. Paul and his fellow Christians knew that those gods did not exist, so food offered to them was just food...not tainted in any way. However, Paul was concerned about those who were not as mature in their faith, and who might not understand the truth of what was going on.

Romans 14:20-23 says:

Don't tear apart the work of God over what you eat. Remember, all foods are acceptable, but it is wrong to eat something if it makes another person stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another believer to stumble. You may believe there's nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who don't feel guilty for doing something they have decided is right. But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it.

I find that it is helpful sometimes to listen to an assessment of those who don't believe as I do just to see how we Christians are coming across. So, periodically, I check out atheist publications and websites to see what they have to say about Christians. I found this comment recently on the website, The Atheist.com, in an article titled, "Which Part of the Bible Should Be Ignored Next?" The author grew up in a Christian home and then chose to be atheist as an adult. This is the first sentence in the article: "I've mentioned previously that one of the major problems I have with Christians is this growing trend of only "believing" certain aspects of The Bible."

When our cherry-picking the Bible bothers atheists, then we need to be concerned about how that practice within the Christian community affects our witness to the world.

6. Finally, I am not willing to struggle with, or open myself to, what God would reveal to me through the texts that trouble me.

As I sat discussing the subject of this sermon with our Children and Youth Minister, Audrey, she confessed that there are parts of the Bible that she struggles with, such as Paul's admonishment that women should be silent in worship. However, she offered that it may be those very parts with which we struggle that contain a truth we need to understand. She said, "When we choose to ignore parts of the Bible we may be missing something that God wants to say to us."

So, I would challenge you this morning to seek through prayer, study, conversation, or whatever means you can use, what is God trying to communicate to you, or teach you, through the texts that trouble you?

As you and I wrestle with portions of God's Word that challenge us, I pray that we will consider Why we are considering cherry-picking His Word, and struggle with why those texts challenge us.

I want to end with the words from Hebrews:

"By faith we know . . . by faith we understand . . ." (Hebrews 11:3).