

## What View do You Hold of the Bible?

~ Jude 24-25

Pastor Tom  
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Jude 1:17-25 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” <sup>19</sup> It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. <sup>22</sup> And have mercy on those who doubt; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

<sup>24</sup> Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Some parents were concerned about their son. They had lived a Christian life and taken him to church from birth. But they noticed an increasing hardness in him towards God and the Gospel. A Christian apologist named Abdu Murray was speaking in their city at a multi-day event. He converted from Islam to Christianity. So after one of his talks, the parents approached him and asked if he would meet with their son.

The son attended the next event and after it talked with Abdu Murray. Murray expected hostility and anger. Instead, the young man conversed respectfully and listened. Murray writes “I asked him his biggest objections to Christianity, and he told me that the Bible was full of scientifically impossible fables and morally questionable stories.” The conversation went so well that Murray decided to ask where the young man got his arguments against Christianity. He answered, “I watch a lot of YouTube videos by atheists. I hear these things on the Daily Show on Comedy Central. And I read a lot of posts on the Internet.” As it turned out, he hadn’t read a single book or scholarly article that defended Christianity. Nor had he taken the time to ask a pastor or theologian a single question. He wanted to disbelieve, so he turned to sources that would reinforce his preferences.<sup>1</sup>

Now this young man is not the only person who does this. We all have viewpoints. They are shaped by many different influences. Today I want you to think about your view of the Bible. Specifically, **what view do you hold of the Bible?** Everyone holds some view of the Bible even if we’ve never thought about or explained it to someone else.

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<sup>1</sup> Abdu Murray, *Saving Truth: Finding Meaning and Clarity in a Post-Truth World*, Zondervan, 2018, 19.

My view was shaped by my childhood home life. I grew up in a Bible-believing home. My parents believed the Bible to be true and accurate in everything it said. They never expressed that verbally to me. They didn't sit me down when I was 4 and say, "Tommy, we just want you to know our view on the inerrancy of the Scriptures so you can tell your friends on the playground." But they lived their belief. They treated the Bible as God's Word with authority over their lives and our home. They sometimes referred to what the Bible said. They would sometimes explain that the Bible's teaching influenced their decisions. They did this imperfectly. But I came into my young adulthood with a pretty solid belief in the trustworthiness of the Bible.

This is one possible viewpoint to hold of the Bible. **Viewpoint 1 – The Bible is true and accurate in everything it says.** This view claims the Bible is trustworthy and we can trust it as God's Word to us. There are some variances in some of the older manuscripts we have of the Bible. If you have a Bible, your translation will point these out. Two of the most prominent examples are the end of the Gospel of Mark or the account of the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53. But this viewpoint says these variances can be dealt with very well. The Bible is by far the most supported and reliable ancient book in the world. Therefore, it can be trusted as true, accurate and God's Word. Some of you hold this viewpoint maybe because you grew up in a Bible believing home or you have come to this because of other reasons.

But, as you well know, the vast majority of people today do not hold viewpoint 1. So let's look at some other possible viewpoints.

**Viewpoint 2 – The Bible is true and accurate in theology but it may contain inaccuracies in other areas such as history, science and origins.** I've come across this view more and more especially among Christians. I saw it during an ordination paper review that I participated in. Ordination is a certification process for pastors. In our denomination you are required to write out your statement of beliefs. One of those areas concerns the view of the Bible. This candidate believed the Bible was accurate in theology. But it contained inaccuracies in all other areas. The young man honestly and earnestly believed this. He wasn't trying to be difficult or defiant. Many factors shaped his viewpoint. He saw many challenges brought against the Bible that he believed brought doubt about its reliability in these areas. So he pieced these all together to form his view.

**Viewpoint 3 – The Bible may contain some truths about God. But it needs a lot of updating to address our current world.** You might find this view held and preached in some churches. It might show up in areas like one's view of God.

This view affirms God is love. But any portrayal of God as wrathful or judging or violent are simply products of the time in which the authors lived. So those portrayals need updating. Or it shows up in how one interprets the Bible. This view would argue that the Old Testament supported a patriarchal society where males dominated and females were little more than property. Therefore, anything associated with that needs to be tossed out. Or this view argues that a lot of the stories in the Old Testament didn't really happen. Instead they were written to make a point or inspire people in the fight of good against evil. In the book "Five Views On Biblical Inerrancy" a couple of the contributors argue that much of the Old Testament story did not really happen. One writes the Bible "tells of God's acts but also reports some events that either may have not happened or have been significantly reshaped and transformed by centuries of tradition."<sup>2</sup>

**Viewpoint 4 – The Bible is a collection of fables and stories used for oppression and power.** This is a pretty hostile view towards the Bible. But it is out there. Sometimes you'll see it in the comments section on a news article or Facebook debate. A Christian will identify themselves and make their point from the Bible. Then subsequent commentators will say things, "you Christians can continue to hold to the fantasy of your imaginary friend called God, but don't push it on others." Or "the Bible has been proved false and inaccurate. Don't quote it at me."

You likely can think of other viewpoints. Maybe one of these comes closer to where you stand. Some of you may have once held viewpoint 1. But you have walked away from that for various reasons. Maybe you asked a lot of questions. You became disillusioned with the anti-intellectual responses of "Bible believing" Christians. "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it. Don't ask any more questions." Maybe you just aren't sure about the Bible. You think some of it makes sense but other parts bother you. Or you may have walked are walking through a crisis and looking for somewhere to stand.

Some of you grew up in homes without a Bible. You only saw it when on the news or in a movie when people used to put their hand on it to swear they told the truth. It had no part in your childhood and you grew up learning about life apart from the Bible. Many factors and sources contribute to the view we currently hold of the Bible.

I shared with you earlier that I grew up with viewpoint 1. I appreciated the foundations my parents gave me. I came into young adulthood with a strong confidence in the Bible's truthfulness. But once I moved out from home and lived with other people, that confidence got shaken. During university, I was challenged by roommates from Christian families

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Enns, *Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does*, Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy; Zondervan, 2013, 83.

who had concluded they didn't believe in the complete trustworthiness of the Bible. I started to get nervous every time they brought up a strong sounding argument against the Bible. When my roommates raised questions to me, I responded with anger and condemnation. "You're supposed to be Christians. How can you ask questions like that? How can you think the Bible is full of myths?" My anger came out of fear. If the Bible was full of myths, my viewpoint would crumble. My faith might crumble. I was scared to even ponder some of these questions because I wasn't really sure the Bible could stand up to tough questions. So I had to think more seriously about my viewpoint. I realized that though I believed the Bible to be true, I didn't know why.

But something happened that began to address my fears. Though I went to seminary to go into the ministry, I had never actually read through the Bible. I was 26 years old and had only read parts of it. A wise, older pastor who had tremendous character mentioned that his parents read the Bible to them as kids every morning at breakfast. They read 5 chapters a day to them. So by the time he was 17 and going to Bible College, he had been through the Bible 10 times. So I thought better later than never. I began to read the Bible in its entirety. My confidence in the Bible grew dramatically when I began to read through it myself. It struck me how it fit together so well and the unity of the message. I now believe that it was not just my reading and intellect that put this all together. God led me, spoke to me and showed me the unity of the Bible and how it held up well to many hard questions.

Yet even in the last 5-10 years, I have been exposed to new challenges towards the Bible. At one of annual preaching retreats I attend, the visiting scholar argued that Adam and Eve weren't historical people but part of a story written to explain origins to ancient people in a way they could understand. I also saw people I'd been with at Bible College and Seminary wholeheartedly agree with macro evolution which includes an affirmation that humans evolved from apes. These friends joined a belief system now called Theistic Evolution or God-directed evolution. This view attempts to marry the macro evolutionary view that everything came from one common ancestor with the Bible that gives God the credit for creating the universe. So they argue God used evolution to create. Believers in this view state we "invite the church and the world to see the harmony between science and biblical faith as we present an evolutionary understanding of God's creation."<sup>3</sup> I read this ordination paper of a young pastor who believes the Bible is accurate in theology but nowhere else. .

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<sup>3</sup> <https://biologos.org/> - accessed Sept 12, 2018.

All of these come to my attention at the same time in my life. It was like I got a glimpse of new questions surrounding the Bible's trustworthiness and new influences that would shape people's viewpoints. But just as God provided for me when I was 26 by placing that older pastor in my life who encouraged me to read the Bible through in its entirety, God provided for me again in addressing these new challenges. He gave small and large provision.

One small provision came from the intelligent design movement and Discovery Institute especially. This is a group of scientists (some who are not Christians; many who are) who present scientific arguments against Darwinian evolution which denies the intelligent design in the universe. They also argue the Theistic Evolutionary view. The Intelligent Design community came out with a massive collection of 35 articles entitled: *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Critique*.<sup>4</sup>

So I read this book last year. I found some of the scientific articles way over my head because I'm not a scientist. Yet from what I understood, they present a very thoughtful challenge to common beliefs about evolution accepted by many people. But the philosophical and theological critiques I found to be very convincing and faith strengthening.

Another smaller way God has encouraged me in thinking about His Word came through another book entitled "A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures reveal their complete truthfulness" by Pastor John Piper.<sup>5</sup> In this book and two subsequent ones, he argues that we can gain confidence in the Scriptures because they themselves reveal the glory of God. He argues that "the glory of God in and through Scripture is a real, self-authenticating reality". So it's one thing to argue about this passage's accuracy and translation and how you reconcile this or stay with modern science. It's another thing to encounter the living God in and through His Word. What does our theme verse for this year state on the front of your bulletins? "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." When we see and behold God's glory we can experience transformation by the Holy Spirit's work. Piper's book is another small provision of God.

But the greatest provision from God is God Himself. God continues to show me His glory in His Word. God reminded me that through His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit I can encounter Him and discover afresh how much more glorious He is than the competing glories of this world. When we see God's glory, we can be transformed into His likeness.

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<sup>4</sup> JP Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann K. Gauger and Wayne Grudem - *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Critique*; Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper: *A Peculiar Glory; How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness*, Wheaton, Illinois; Crossway, 2017.

Yet if we are going to actually see God's glory in the Scriptures, we need to spend some time thinking about our view of the Scriptures. We need to think about how or what has shaped the view we hold of the Scriptures. We need to think about how our view can hinder or help us see God's glory in the Bible.

I do hope through this series to increase your confidence in the Bible's trustworthiness from wherever you stand today. But that is not my ultimate hope. Our faith does not ultimately depend on the views we hold. The strength of our faith depends on the object of our faith. Our faith ultimately depends on the One we put our faith in.

People can hold very strong views about something. But the object of their view or faith might be false. There were all kinds of people in the Bible who had a strong faith in Baal. But Baal was just an idol. It had no power. It was nothing compared to the true God. Yet Baal worshippers strongly held their views. Their faith was more in their view than in their god. In fact even after it had been proven that Baal was a false god, some Baal worshippers continued to believe in him because their faith depended on their view and not their god.

The same can be true for us. If we put our faith in the view we hold of the Bible, that is not a solid foundation. It's important to consider our view and gain a clearer understanding of the Bible. But our view of the Bible will not ultimately save us. God will ultimately save us.

So today, I want to invite you to a subtle but potentially profound change in your thinking. This is something that God has been doing in me. **Instead of placing your ultimate trust in the view you hold of God and the Bible, trust God's hold on you.** Instead of basing your faith on your hold of the Bible, trust God who holds you. Do you see the difference? Instead of ultimately trusting your viewpoint, put your ultimate trust God. Piper writes "my seven decades of experience with the Bible have not been mainly a battle to hold on to a view. They have been a blessing of being held on to, namely, by beauty – that is by glory. I am captive of the glory of God revealed in Scripture."

Is there any Scriptural back this up that talks about God's hold on us? The book of Jude provides one example. We read a portion of the letter at the beginning of this message. Jude is that short letter just before the book of Revelation. Jude was Jesus' half-brother.

Jude wanted to write to Christians about "our common salvation". But a much more pressing problem caused him to divert the focus of his letter. People had crept in among Christian congregations claiming to be Christians and trying to

act like Christians. But they weren't. In fact, Jude says "They pervert the grace of God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Jude wants Christians to be aware of this threat.

Then in the passage we read, Jude instructs them on how to live in light of this reality. Verse 20 "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the Love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life." The main verb in that verse is to "keep yourself in the love of God." How do we do that? "Build yourself up in the most holy faith." Learn about the faith. Learn about God and His story and His character and how to relate to him. Continue to cultivate a God centered viewpoint of the world. Keep praying in the spirit. And wait for the Lord's return. That's what we need to do with ourselves.

Then in 22 and 23 he gives instruction on what we need to do for others. "Have mercy on those who doubt; save others snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear." By the end of verse 23 Jude has several threatening realities – some people participating in churches and spread a false gospel; warped teaching; Christians need to be watchful; doubting brothers and sisters; snatching others from the fire. It seems pretty dangerous like we're at the edge of a cliff. It feels much like our world today and the many challenges brought against the Bible and God.

But then comes verse 24 – "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory" and everything else in verse 25. So did you catch what it says about God and what He can do at the beginning of verse 24? Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling. God is able to keep us from stumbling. God has a hold on us. This doesn't mean He'll protect us from tripping on the sidewalk. It means stumbling away from the faith in such a way that we will become an unbeliever. It means tumbling so deep into doubts that we never come back. He is able to keep you from stumbling. God has a hold on us. God will enable us to persevere to the end. So instead of placing your ultimate trust in the view you hold, trust God who holds you.

We see this keeping, guarding or holding work of God throughout Scripture. Numbers 6:24. "The Lord bless you and keep you." Psalm 121:3 "He who keeps you will not sleep." 121:5 – The Lord is your keeper. 121:7 – He will keep your life. Jesus prayed in John 17:11 <sup>11</sup>Holy Father, keep them in your name. Or John 17:15 - <sup>15</sup>I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 2 Thessalonians 3:3 <sup>3</sup>But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard (or keep) you against the evil one. 1 Peter 1:5 – We by God's power are being guarded through faith for a

salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Do you see God’s hold on you? Do you see how He constantly works to keep you?

Now some of you may already live like with this knowledge. Your Christian walk is an experience of God’s hold on you. But others of us might need to really think about the object of our faith. Do we trust our viewpoint more than we trust God? I am not saying that we refuse to consider any questions or doubts. I am not saying check your brain at the door and pretend there are no hard questions concerning the Bible. We need to go to the Bible with our hard questions. But we also need to evaluate the sources of our viewpoint. Perhaps most important, we may need to change our focus as we search the Bible. Instead of demanding answers from God, maybe our greatest need is God and discover Him more fully in His glory.

So in a few moments as we prepare for the Lord’s Supper, we will have a little more time to ponder God’s hold on us. But some here today have loved ones who seem to have exposed God as unable to fulfill Jude 24. They no longer act like Christians. They may even declare their de-conversion. It looks like God has not kept them from stumbling. Didn’t God fail to keep them?

Here are two possible encouragements. One: I believe “to keep you from stumbling” means “to keep you from permanently stumbling away from Christ.” Every Christian here remembers times when you have stumbled in your faith. There have been times when you’ve wandered away or lived in sin for a few days or months or years like King David did with his adultery and murder. He only repented about a year later. Yet in the end he returned to God. So your loved one may not walk with the Lord right now. But that doesn’t mean God is through with them or done with them.

The second encouragement is that even when everything seems hopeless, we always have hope because of God. Your loved one may be firmly convinced in their rejection of God. They might know more than you about the arguments. They might have a stronger personality or a sharper wit. They may be very happy in their life right now and see no need to change. But nothing is impossible with God. With Him there is always hope. He has the power to overcome hard hearts and turn them towards himself. He saved people here who once walked in rebellion against God. So if God can do that, He has the power to overcome the hardness in your loved one’s heart. Keep praying for with God nothing is impossible.

Keep yourself in the love of God as He is able to keep you from stumbling.