



guidelines for living

a 5 minute message

September 27, 2017

HOW DO WE KNOW?

Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Psalm 119:89

There are two kinds of people who are ignorant—those who have never had an opportunity to learn, and those who are willfully ignorant because they refuse to get the facts. There are millions of people in the world trapped by poverty and economic stagnation, who are ignorant because they have no choice, but the latter category includes some who have Ph.D.s and advanced degrees by the handful. Those who refuse the truth purposefully, are not only ignorant, they are to be pitied.

I couldn't help thinking of that when I had a conversation with a brilliant scientist, a man who has been honored by several countries for outstanding achievements in his chosen discipline. In our conversation I quoted the words of John 11 when Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25, *NJKV*). "How do we know Jesus ever said that?" was his response.

Answering that question is important. Have you ever wondered how certain we are that some of the statements found in the Bible are authentic, say, as opposed to someone adding them or putting words in someone's mouth that suits their purpose?

"What do you know about manuscripts or textual criticism?" I asked. The answer was: nothing. "If I read anything that makes a case for the credibility of the Bible," he argued, "to be fair, I would have to read those who opposed biblical authority." But the point is that he had read nothing. Willful ignorance is to be pitied.

Focusing on the one statement of Jesus which is found in John's Gospel, I pointed out that John wrote this Gospel in the last decade of the first century, yet we have a portion of that same Gospel, known as Ryland's Papyri P52, now in the library of the University of Manchester in Britain which dates to 125 AD—only 30 years after it was written.

The science of studying and collating biblical manuscripts is known as textual criticism, and it's a fascinating study. Today literally thousands of biblical manuscripts have been found, coming from all over the Middle East. We now know that as the early Christians scattered under persecution, four major centers were established where the emerging



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New Testament was preserved and collected: Alexandria in Egypt, Caesarea in Palestine, Rome in Europe, and Constantinople in Turkey.

The rules by which biblical scholars have determined what is authentic are interesting. For example, if they had three manuscripts which came from, say, Alexandria and two of the three had longer renderings of a passage, they would generally choose the shortest of the three as valid. Why? We have a tendency to add what we think would clarify the text, thus, helping God out.

By comparing the various manuscripts and translations, biblical scholars have resolved the issue of integrity when it comes to transmitting the Bible from generation to generation.

Dr. Kenneth Kantzer, one of the foremost biblical scholars of the past century, has said that in his opinion we have recovered 99.9% of the words in the original manuscripts.

Where does this leave the scholar who refuses to consider the authority for this book? Pretty much taking refuge in ignorance that is a pretty thin veneer of comfort.

Don't take my word on the issue. Find out for yourself how this unique book has been preserved through the centuries. It will only increase your faith in what you read, assured that men recorded accurately what God impressed on the authors of this book.

Resource reading: 2 Peter 1