

# NORTHERN LIGHT

*Digest*  
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## **Reflecting The One Above**

*I was in a deep conversation recently with someone about the direction of our society and culture. It struck me as we talked, that in a number of significant areas, the things I valued simply weren't valued in the same way by many people.*

I was in a deep conversation recently with someone about the direction of our society and culture. It struck me as we talked, that in a number of significant areas, the things I valued simply weren't valued in the same way by many people. I realized how much the Bible has for many years, formed and molded my thinking. To be honest, many of us likely couldn't list many of the sermons we've heard over the years—if we've been part of a church congregation. Yet, hearing the words of scripture being read on a regular basis clearly has

an effect. The Holy Spirit works in our lives on a constant basis, and draws our minds to the biblical stories and texts that help us handle life and its challenges more effectively.

No doubt our nation once had deeper roots in biblical morals and teachings. Not that Canada was perfect. In fact our history tells us it was a long way from perfect. However, for decades now church attendance rates have been dropping, with the result that many simply have little or no knowledge of the biblical texts. The Bible contains some of the most powerful stories, parables, and examples that have ever been written. Yet, rather than being vivid parts of our memory and imagination, they are fading fast as we don't learn them or if we did, forget them.

We have more distractions as well. Think about Cable TV with multiple channels specializing in everything from golf, old black and white movies, cooking shows, to home renovations. Then there is the internet with almost boundless possibilities for entertainment, and distraction, as well as solid learning. We also have smart phones that allow people to live constantly in a "cyber world." These are among the changes that have affected our society and distracted many from becoming deeply immersed in the Bible.

In the Bible, we have the record of Jesus' life, teaching and his work. In its pages are found the teachings that form the core of the Christian faith and beliefs. We have revealed the standard of morality that reflects the mind of God, expressed in human living.



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Add to that the revelation of God profound love for humanity, and his plan to redeem us from destructive behaviour and its consequences.

We are given the vision of a world reconciled to God as described in Revelation 21 and 22—the last two chapters of the last book in the Bible. This gives us tremendous hope—a hope that includes, but extends well beyond this temporary life we live today.

The Bible also contains practical instruction that can guide a person in living a constructive and fruitful life. The book of Proverbs contains many passages that provide a person—especially a younger person—with guidance to best navigate this life. Telling us that the borrower is servant to the lender (Proverbs 22:7) for example—an admonition to avoid debt as much as you can—can save a great deal of stress and heartache in life.

Over my lifetime, the word of God has helped guide me to take a direction that was contrary to the natural pulls of my human nature. Of course, it was Christ living in me through the presence of the Holy Spirit that provided both the desire and the strength to live contrary to the natural pulls of the culture. I didn't do it perfectly, and as we all do, experienced the consequences of sin and foolishness. Yet, God was always there to pull me back, and through his Spirit and his Word to guide me back on his path.

One needs to approach the hearing of the word preached, or the reading of the word from a posture of faith. We must be willing to put our trust in God and in the truth and wisdom of what he has inspired to be recorded for us (Hebrews 4:2). Culture, our own desires, and social pressure from others may conspire to draw us back. However, we must come to trust God, and believe what he says and trust the wisdom of our Creator. Then apply what it says—step out in faith and act where action is needed (James 1:22).

Looking back on my life, I see how profoundly positive it has been to be able to live life in a parent/child relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. The same relationship is available to every single person, if they will but reach out and receive the gift God so wants to give them. Through the pages of the Bible God has revealed his purpose to me, has taught me good from evil, right from wrong, wisdom from foolishness, and light from darkness.

Let's take the time to read the Bible, and hear it preached and taught. Let it form our thinking and mold our values. If you do, I know you'll find—just as I did—that God's Spirit will work in our minds and will shape us more and more into the image of Jesus. If we don't, we'll find ourselves molded in the image of our shifting social norms. Rather than becoming different than the world and an example of a better way, we'll become merely a reflection of what is around us—rather than reflecting the light of the one above!

**Gary Moore**

## ***Is The Bible Still Up-to-Date?***

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Decades ago many of us reading this responded to an ad that went "Is the Bible Up-to-Date in the Space Age?"

It was a powerful ad given the tenor of the times. The 1960s were the era of the "God is Dead" movement and Pierre Berton's "The Comfortable Pew" evaluating Canada's churches. Yet a time when humanity through NASA was reaching to the stars all on its own, it seemed.

Is the Bible up to date in a world moving at the speed of Twitter? This is still a good question.

Today attacks on the Bible come from more seemingly sophisticated sources, from New Age, shapeless, cotton-candy like—though intriguing—speculations which make them harder to get at. And—true to type—from within the church itself. Today, it is God's absolute toleration over "bad things" people do—which is all the rage. Here is a quote for example from a controversial author, now spiritual advisor to many celebrities: "The church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2000 years ago as their best defense."

The writer was mainly referring to St. Paul's stance on sexuality. The wife of the author had a new book stressing "a new way of understanding marriage."

Of course, that last phrase reminds some of another 1960s phrase, "the New Morality" and the "open Marriage" syndrome of the 1970s, though the subject of sexuality has taken on much much broader overtones since then.

Is the Bible still relevant or is it indeed a relic of a more primitive era? Both Bible-believers and their critics deserve an answer. Rather than wading through a whole course on Bible Apologetics 101 let's answer this broad philosophical question from a broad-based analysis advancing three claims:

1. The attack of "irrelevance" ignores 2000 years of solid Biblical transmission.
2. It reveals a fatal blindness to some cultural behaviors and parallels of the Roman world of the First Century.
3. It denies the centuries-long transforming effect of what is in fact a Living Word.

#### **Bible Reliability**

The first point, of course, brings up the important subject of history, especially the story behind the manuscripts and documents of the New Testament going back to the First Century A.D. Are they trustworthy? Do they stand up to scrutiny in the Space Age or in our new Digital Age?



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A slim but potent volume now in its sixth edition—*The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* by legendary Bible teacher F.F. Bruce—plunges into this subject with vigorous clarity. Basing his claims on his background as an expert in classical literature, Bruce shows that Julius Caesar’s famous “Gallic Wars” for example is supported by only 9 or ten Latin manuscripts. The well-studied History of Thucydides is known from only 8. In stark contrast our New Testament has some 5000 manuscripts in support of its claims, many of which bear the unmistakable mark of eyewitness testimony (John 18:35; 12:3).

Toronto evangelist Wilbur Smith well stated: “We know more about the details of the hours immediately before and after the actual death of Jesus than we know about the death of any other one man in the whole ancient world.” This is as it should be. Christianity claims to be a historical not a speculative religion. It teaches that God himself came to us in a particular place (Palestine) at a particular time (early First Century AD) and to a particular people (the Jews of Judaea and Galilee). This is so unlike most of the world’s religions and the current and previous speculations against the Faith. The Apostles Creed almost strangely states that Jesus was crucified “under Pontius Pilate” (no Christian is mentioned) but the respected Roman historian Tacitus confirmed that very fact, almost verbatim.

What C.S. Lewis called our “chronological snobbery” allows too many of today’s glib critics too much leeway. They ignore (or never knew) that the Greco-Roman society from which issued the New Testament was a highly literate society. Nor was it easy to palm off forgeries on a Christian community composed of people who had seen Jesus die or had witnessed his resurrection. When St. Paul asked “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord?” he was affirming what seemed the test of apostleship in the early church: seeing the Risen Lord. Those first evangelists were presenting their extraordinary claims in the very real laboratory of the streets of Jerusalem. Anyone refuting their claim of the empty tomb simply had to walk across the city and check for themselves.

Any fair-minded person would have to admit that the written declarations that came from these people possessed a weight and an authority no other writings—even Christian writings—can claim. Let alone the speculations of someone 2000 years removed. “What is the chaff to the wheat?” the prophet Jeremiah asked of the counter-arguments of his day.

#### “Anything Goes?”

In failing the history test, would-be debunkers of the New Testament’s authority too easily glide over the striking cultural similarities between permissive Roman society of the First Century and a lot of the behavior we see about us today—a development amplified through the power of the mass and social media. Roman authors testify that so many cults, sects, religions and philosophies had poured into Rome that many people were confused about any objective standards of right and wrong. The solid Roman families that had anchored the Roman conquests far and wide had given way to centuries of affluence which had its corroding affect on individual behavior.

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In Romans 1:18-32 St Paul laid out the spiritual autopsy of the First Century world. He lists 21 particular vices familiar to us in such pop culture phenomenon as the movies “Ben Hur” or “Gladiator” and the latest TV specials. The point is not to revel in human depravity for, as theologian Charles Hodges once said, Paul’s dark synopsis is not so dark as the Greek and Roman authors themselves set down.

What we need to realize is that in some significant ways human nature does not change. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” and that includes us. But too many modern preachers and teachers have discarded the very notion of sin and left their hearers to float freely on the changing tides of what is fashionable. Thing is, we’ve seen this before. The good news here is that just as the New Testament’s exposés are still relevant, the godly prescriptions are as well. But today it is simply not in vogue to write or speak about a God who judges sin. Yet Paul combined both God’s anger and mercy in a memorable phrase. “Behold the goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22).

Many sound Christian moralists have seen this: we cannot separate God’s anger from his mercy even if his anger is, in the words of missionary Stephen Neill, working “quietly and invisibly” by handing sinners over to themselves. His “strange work” the prophet called it. John Zeisler adds that God’s measured wrath expresses itself in Romans 1 by his not-intervening, by letting men and women go their own way.

Any skim of the nightly news shows this principle at work. Paul was right “God is not mocked,” that is, people don’t really get away with things. What we sow we reap. Missing these rock-solid Bible principles opens the way for some teachers to perform a supreme disservice to their often-unseasoned audiences. Neglecting core biblical truths often leaves people helpless in the face of spectacular public evils such as September 11, 2001.

As the Canadian theologian, James Packer once wrote: the Devil exists and “he has his own servants even in the church (Matthew 13:38) playing the part of pastors and theologians” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

### **The Christian Triumph**

Evil. Aye, there’s the rub.

Too much of present-day theologizing seems to sadly fulfill what a mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century historian feared what he saw happening to the churches back then. Richard Niebuhr worried about the portrayal of a God without wrath proclaiming a kingdom without repentance through a Christ without a cross. Sin and Evil seems to have disappeared from the philosophical offerings of too many would-be authorities in and out of the pulpit. How ironic when Romans 1 and other passages show us a New Testament cultural relevance flashing out like a beacon in its indictment of human folly, an arraignment that reads so much like our latest nightly newscasts.

As Packer states so tartly: “Belief in Satan is not illogical, for it fits the facts” (*God’s Words*, page 83). And another writer opined that Original Sin seems to be the only Christian teaching that doesn’t need proving.

But if the case histories of grief and trauma abound, so—thankfully—do the uplifting narratives of a God at work in the world, across the last 2000 years and even in our own fellowship. We could start anywhere but such evidences as the Welshman St. Patrick in the 400s being captured by pirates and serving as a slave for six years before escaping and feeling convicted to return and evangelize these wild tribes—this is worth remembering. Tom Cahill reminded us in his best-selling slightly tongue-in-cheek *How The Irish Saved Civilization*. Daring to return to your former murderous captors seems to broadcast some strong supernatural influence at work in a man’s mind. Ireland was Christianized without bloodshed through his example. By their fruits, you know them.

John Wesley, feeling his heart strangely warmed during a Moravian Bible Study after failing as an Anglican missionary, fits the pattern. Wesley’s about-face that night in 1738 helped launch the massive evangelical revival, of which we are a part. Then in 1981 a youth named E.M. from Hanford, California wrote our then world headquarters testifying how he had been brought up in a broken home, turned his life over to God one evening after hearing a radio evangelist. “In utter desperation, I fell to my knees and asked God to be the Father I never knew...God has remade me. I love people and people love me because I take after my Dad.”

In the summer of 1980, E.W. was a skeptic living in Lethbridge, Alberta with a wife who attended our fellowship. One day at work a ton of steel sheets from an uplifted forklift fell on him pinning his body with only his head was visible. His colleagues were emotionally wrought as they laboriously lifted each sheet one at a time. Remarkably they found only his right hand, arm, leg and foot damaged. Providentially, E.M. had fallen between stacks of four-by-fours which bore most of the steel load. He returned to work after eight weeks and asked his wife on the way home from the hospital, “Can I be anointed?”

Yes, God still works miracles in the whatever Age we find ourselves in. Anointing, of course, is that somewhat quaint but wonderful practice our ministers practice almost every day. Sometimes the results are astounding and perhaps we should publish them more often. The great Christian defender C.S. Lewis wrote about “the smell of Deity” that hangs about our lives, and even the natural world. For most Christians, there is simply too much evidence that the Biblical revelation speaks to us today across the centuries in spite of cultural shifts and styles. “Crowns and throne may perish/Kingdoms rise and wane.”

In our day-to-day experiences, Lewis wrote, “we know we are being touched by a finger of that right hand at which there are pleasures forevermore.” And that convinces us that the Bible and the Christian Church built upon it is very up-to-date in the Space Age, the Digital Age...and beyond.

**Neil Earle**