



Introduction to

APOLOGETICS

Session V: Is the Bible Reliable?

The Bible Introduction

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Up to this point, we have not relied heavily on scripture to support our arguments. This is because the argument for the Bible's authority had not been addressed yet. This may lead many to wonder why we do not start here in our pursuit of apologetics. In fact, some apologists believe that the best way to do apologetics is to begin by establishing the authority of the Bible. They believe that when this is accomplished, everything else (Truth, God's Existence, Jesus and the Resurrection, etc.) falls into place. This course did not start with the Bible as the beginning. This is because a defense of the Bible rests on several presuppositions which had to be supported first. Presuppositions such as Absolute Truth, God's existence and miracles to name a few. Having explored questions concerning these topics, or presuppositions, it is now time to explore the reliability of the Bible. This is a must as it is the source of much of our information concerning God. As Calvin wrote, "Credibility of doctrine is not established until we are persuaded beyond doubt that God is its Author." So let us turn our attention to the case for Scripture and the Bible.

What is Unique about the Bible?

Even denying the Bible is divinely inspired, it is itself one, if not *the* most unique books ever written. As a book, it is unique in its continuity with a story that ranges over 1500 years by more than 40 authors with very different backgrounds. It is written in very different places ranging from deserts to a palaces. It was also written in very different situations (war, peace, persecution) and in a variety of styles and languages. The Bible touched on hundreds of subjects yet maintained a single unfolding narrative about the one true living God. The Scriptures, in there circulation have sold more than one billion copies worldwide. There are still more than 10 million copies sold every year. The Bible is unique in its translation as more than 2200 languages and dialects and reaches more than 90% of the world population. In fact, the first translations were already made in 250BC. The Testaments are unique in their survival. In fact, there are more manuscript copies of the Bible than of all the other historical documents combined. The variations between these documents are extremely small, despite the immense time differences of hundreds of years. The Bible has also survived extreme persecution and criticism as many have attempted to destroy the Scriptures and Christianity. People have tried repeatedly to undermine the Bible, to label it as merely man made, to cast doubt on authorship and its dates, to prove it historically inaccurate. None, have succeeded.

Define the Term

BIBLE, *n.* [Gr. βιβλίον, βιβλος, a book.]
 THE BOOK, by way of eminence; the sacred
 volume, in which are contained the revelations
 of God, the principles of Christian faith, and the
 rules of practice. It consists of two parts, called
 the Old and New Testaments.
 The *Bible* should be the standard of language as
 well as of faith. The word *Bible* comes from the
 Greek word *bibliā*, which means “books.”

The Bible contains unique teachings not found in any of the other religious texts of the world. It presents prophecy as many were made, many took place exactly as predicted, some are still open but none failed. Other books claim divine inspiration yet none gives predictive prophecy. It presents historical events, people and places reliably. The most influential and cited book in all of literature. All Western societies are strongly influenced by Jesus' teachings even though many people do not believe in Him. Frankly put, regardless of its authorship the Bible is an extremely unique work. It has continued to influence the world 2000 years after the last chapter was written. We hardly know any other that even survived that long, let alone is still being used.

How We Got The Bible

So ok, got it, the Bible is unique. So what? Why does that matter. It doesn't make it divine or anything more than a book written by men. This can be true and if this were the only facts concerning the Bible it would be true. To respond to this we must look at how we got the Bible we see today. We have to inspect the history of the Bible. This is not about divine inspiration quite yet but rather the reliable as a document that states certain facts. Can we trust the text that we read? Are the documents we have really the same as the original text? Is it accurate in what it describes?

Ancient Writings

First we must understand that most of the original scrolls for the Biblical texts were written on papyrus, which lasts longer than today's paper but nevertheless decays. It is important to note that finding a document older than 1000 years in general is a rare event. For this to happen it must have been preserved in a special way. Unfortunately, we don't have any originals at this point, only copies. One of the big questions often given is "If we do not have the originals how do we know we have what was actually written down?" So let us go deeper.

The first 5 books, known as the Pentateuch, were stored in the Ark of the Covenant. During the time of David and Solomon, the books that existed at that time were stored in the temple treasury. The books were carefully cared for by the priests. More books were added during the reign of King Hezekiah, (Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah. Around 540 B.C. Ezra re-collected the writings and added other works to the compilation. They were then stored in the Ark that was constructed for the second temple. The Ark was very secure as only the High Priest once a year could enter into the temple where the Ark was located.



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As mentioned the early caretakers of the Scripture (Israelites) truly believed the scrolls they had to be the actual Word of God. This belief spurred them to create a copying system to preserve the Scriptures. A coping process that was very specific and taken extremely serious. They understood it would be very easy to make copying mistakes.

As stated before Ezra greatly enhanced and advanced the study of the Bible. Assisted by fellow priests and Levites of the Great Assembly or Synagogue, they completed the final editing and canonization of what we call the Old Testament in the late fifth century B.C. Scribes, even after Jews returned to the land after their captivity, continued the tradition of ensuring the preservation and accurate copying of the Scriptures.



As seen above the process scribes went through to ensure an error free Bible was laborious. Never the less there were scribal errors in the Scriptures. Does this mean we have a twisted and distorted Bible? Does it mean the message intended was somehow distorted? No, but let us unpack why this is not the case.

In the process of copying the manuscripts, scribes often made small changes, some of them unintentional and others intentional. For example, early copies of the Greek New Testament were composed in an ancient style in which words were written in all capital letters with no spaces, punctuation, or paragraph divisions. A classic illustration of this style is the phrase “GODISNOWHERE.” one of these scribes would have to decide whether the phrase meant “God is now here” or “God is nowhere.” Context would determine the meaning of the phrase, so it’s not surprising a scribe could occasionally get things wrong. Furthermore, scribes sometimes misspelled words, wrote the same word twice when it should have been written once, or skipped over sections of text because the same words occurred later down the page. These are all examples of unintentional changes.

Other times, however, scribes changed the texts they were copying on purpose. This happened for a variety of reasons. They might make grammatical improvements or liturgical changes, or they might eliminate apparent discrepancies, harmonize passages, or make doctrinal changes. However, even Bart Ehrman, a New Testament scholar who argues against the reliability of the Bible, recognizes, “Most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another.”

Variations? Let us consider the following examples

Copy 1: God is #ust and the justifier
 Copy 2: God is j#st and the justifier
 Copy 3: God is ju#t and the justifier
 Copy 4: God is jus# and the justifier
 Original: God is just and the justifier

Copy 1. You Have Won Ten Million Dollars
 Copy 2. Thou Hast Won 10 Million Dollars
 Copy 3. Y’all Have Won \$10,000,000



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The Dead Sea Scrolls

Almost all biblical scholars agree that the New Testament documents were all written before the close of the First Century. If Jesus was crucified in A.D. 33., then that means the entire New Testament was completed within 70 years. This is important because it means there were plenty of people around when the New Testament documents were written people who could have contested the writings. In other words, those who wrote the documents knew that if they were inaccurate, plenty of people would have pointed it out and yet they did not have this issue.

So what does the manuscript evidence mean? It means that if the critics of the Bible dismiss the New Testament as reliable information, then they must also dismiss the reliability of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, Homer, and many other ancient writers then are taken as accurately depicted. On the other hand, if the critics acknowledge the historicity and writings of those other individuals, then they must also retain the historicity and writings of the New Testament authors; after all, the evidence for the New Testament's reliability is far greater than the others. The Christian has substantially superior criteria for affirming the New Testament documents than he does for any other ancient writing. It is good evidence to suggest that the Bible written is the Bible we have and is essentially the same documents.

The Canonicity

It is important to note that the church did not *determine* what should be in the Bible but rather attempted to discover this. If indeed it was actual God who wrote the books of the Bible, then He would have made sure that we could recognize his authority in the writings. The church did recognize the authority in all the books we have in the Bible today but not in other books. To recognize the books of the Bible as authority the Church applied a threefold test. Many have show great unease at the Church having a selection process for Scripture but the thoroughness of their process should alleviate doubt in this regard.

1. The first test of canonicity to verify a book's authority was it's Apostolic Origin.
 - a. To be of Apostolic origin, a document had to have been written either by an Apostle or under the direct and immediate sanction of an Apostle.
2. The second test for acceptance into the canon was reception by the primitive church.
 - a. The Gospel writings were widely circulated among first-century congregations, as were all of the New Testament letters. The church, when considering what to include in the canon, took into account how a particular document had been received and quoted as authoritative from early on.
3. The third test concerned the compatibility of the doctrine and teaching of these books with the core books.

Understanding the Meaning

"The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *biblos*, which means "book." However, although the Bible is bound up in one volume, it is not a single book but rather a collection of sixty-six individual books. It is a library of books. Since there are so many books that together make up the sacred Scriptures, how do we know that the right books have been included in this collection or library of books? That question falls under the issue of *canonicity*.

We get the word *canon* from another Greek word, *kanōn*, which means "measuring rod" or "norm." To call the Bible "the canon of Scripture" is to say that its sixty-six books together function as the supreme measuring rod or authority for the church. The Bible often has been described as *norma normans et sine normativa*. A form of the word *norm* appears three times in that expression. *Norma normans* means "the norm of norms," and *sine normativa* means "without norm." The Bible is the norm or the standard of all standards, and it is judged by no other standard." R.C. Sproul

So what about the Apocrypha?

Reasons to exclude a book are *inaccuracies* (historical, geographical), *doctrines that are inconsistent* with the other scriptures, lack of divine characteristics (prophecy, teaching, expression of relation to God), focus on legends and folklore.

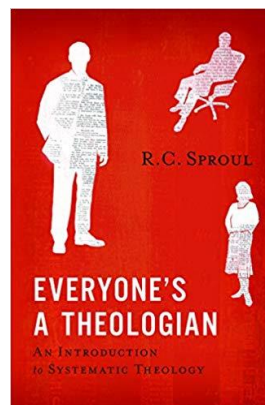
The *apocrypha* (hidden/concealed books) enjoyed only local and temporary recognition but were excluded very early because they do not meet *all* the acceptance criteria. R. C. Sproul writes about this issue in *Everyone's a Theologian*. He says:

"The Roman Catholic Church embraced the Apocrypha; the Reformation churches, for the most part, did not. The dispute centered on what the first-century church and Jesus Himself had accepted as canonical. All the evidence from Palestine indicates that the Jewish Palestinian canon did not include the Apocrypha, whereas many in Alexandria, the cultural center for Hellenistic Jews, did include it. However, more recent scholarship suggests that even the Alexandrian canon recognized the Apocrypha only at a secondary level, not at the full level of biblical authority. So the question remains as to who was right—the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestants? In other words, by what authority do we determine what is canonical?"

According to the Protestants, each book found in the Bible is an infallible book, but the process undertaken by the church as to which books to include was not infallible. We believe that the church was providentially guided by the mercy of God in the process of determining the canon and thereby made the right decisions, so that every book that should be in the Bible is in the Bible. However, we do not believe that the church was inherently infallible, then or now. By contrast, the Roman Catholic formula says that we have the correct books because the church is infallible and anything the church decides is an infallible decision. In the Roman Catholic understanding, the formation of the canon rests on the authority of the church, whereas in the Protestant understanding, it rests upon the providence of God.

I would commend to you further study of the development of the canon. Let me emphasize in conclusion that even though there was a historical investigation, I believe that the church did exactly what God wanted it to do, and that we have no reason to be anything but fully assured that the right books were included in the canon of sacred Scripture."

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Is the Bible really the Word of God?

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There are people who accept that the Bible is a reliable and very useful historical document but who reject the idea that it has any authority beyond that. They may accept the moral teachings of Jesus, they draw conclusions from the history of Israel and quite often develop very high ethical standards on the basis that history teaches us insights about good and bad behavior. But when it comes to claims that the Bible shows us the only way to God then they refuse, stating that no book in the world can give us that kind of knowledge. For them, the Bible was written by men and that's it.

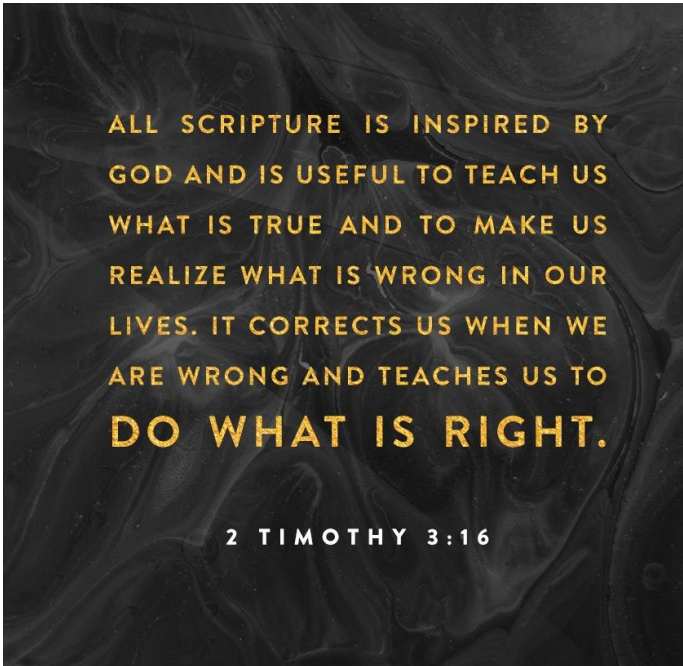
However, knowing that the Bible is more than just a word of men is crucial when it comes to matters of faith. After all, the Bible contains not just historical facts, but also a lot of revelation about God and claims to authority about what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. It does not spell out all the details but focuses on the essential issues, which in turn are sufficient for all the choices we have to make. The fact is the Bible certainly claims to be the inspired word of God. There are plenty of explicit references to that thought out its texts. That being the case lets look at why the Bible is more than a mere "Book".

The church historically has seen that the original Bible alone, of all the written literature in history, is uniquely infallible. You may have also heard the term inerrant. Inerrant means "without or free of errors" whereas Infallible is "that which cannot fail or err." The Church claims that the Bible is both Inerrant and infallible. It is important to note that something can be inerrant yet not infallible. If you took a test and got a perfect score the test was inerrant. This does not mean that you are incapable of ever erring in taking tests just this one happened to all be right. The Bible on the other hand is said to be inerrant *and* infallible therefore incapable of error. This is important for haven't we already established the Bible has errors? Yes. But what do you mean by errors? The errors described here pertains to the truth of the claims not scribal or grammatical errors. The fact is that there are indeed copyist errors on the biblical documents and they account for many alleged contradictions. Remember, it is the autographs (original writings) that are claimed to be inspired and inerrant, not the copies. The copies we have now are copies of inspired documents. The copies are not themselves "inspired;" that is, they have no guarantee of being 100% textually pure.



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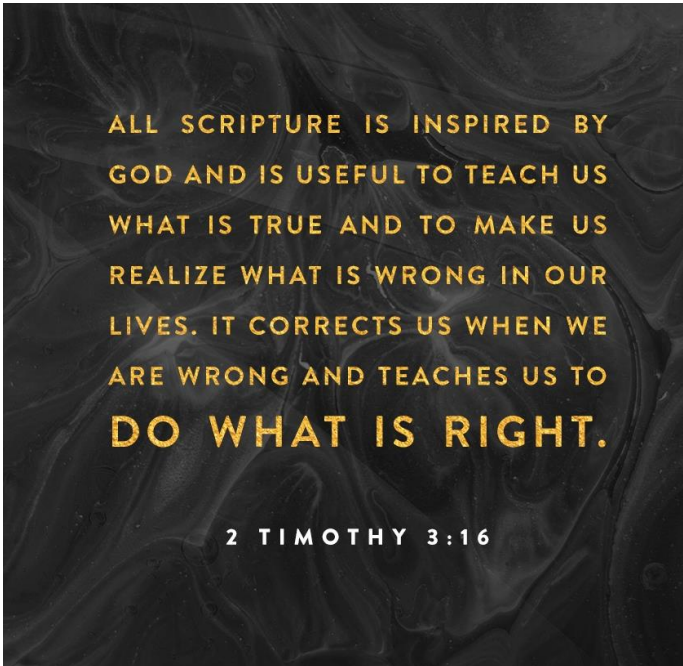
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2 TIMOTHY 3:16

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1. It could not be the invention of good men or angels; for they neither would or could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying, "Thus saith the Lord," when it was their own invention.
2. It could not be the invention of bad men or devils; for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell to all eternity.
3. Therefore, I draw this conclusion, that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration."

