

Bible 101 – September 2011

Two questions:

- 1) How can you believe the Bible is “God’s Word”?
- 2) How can I study the Bible more effectively?

So how and why can I say I believe the Bible is God’s word?

- Flatiron’s first value is “the Bible is our authority for life.” When we disagree with what the Bible says, the Bible wins, and we submit ourselves to its authority.

What is it about the Bible that makes you think it’s authoritative? Why should I give credibility to the Bible, much less authority?

- Koukl says that “*Faith is based on information that we can have confidence in.*” Is there any information that can give us confidence in the Bible?
- Also, he says, “*Faith is not religious wishful thinking. Faith is discovering reality.*”

So what does the Bible claim to be? And can that hold up?

- 1) “Bible” comes from the Greek word for book, so Holy Bible means, Holy book. It was written in three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek by over 40 authors, over 1500 years. 66 books: 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament.
- 2) The Bible claims to be “inspired”; 2 Timothy 3:16 says all scripture is “God-breathed.”
- 3) By definition that means the Bible is claiming to be without error or “inerrant”. As well as infallible.
 - a. Inspired means God controlled the process in which the scriptures were written.
 - b. Inerrant means free from all falsehood and mistakes.
 - c. Infallible means not misleading. In other words you can trust it.

Three challenges against Scripture

- 1) How do you know its inspired?
- 2) What about changes in the Bible due to translation?
- 3) It was written by people, and people are fallible, therefore the Bible is fallible.

Inspiration: the claim is that there is a God and He has spoken. So the question about the Bible is:

- 1) Is this a book written by people about God?
- 2) Is this a book written by God for people?

Which does the Bible itself give us evidence for?

Challenge #1: Inspired.

- 1) Prophecy. Detailed prophecies that have come to pass. Over 60 in the life of Jesus alone. Isaiah 53 about Jesus. Look at just a few lines of that. That was written hundreds of years before Jesus came to this earth. How is that possible? Jesus Himself prophesied about the destruction of the temple that happened in AD 70.
- 2) Unity. There seems to be a supernatural unity in the Bible. If you asked 40 authors to write about God today all from the same country, time period and culture you would get major differences in the story line...significant disagreement and major inconsistency. What we have in the Bible is amazing. 40 authors over the course of 1500 years, several continents, various situations and contexts and no disagreement, inconsistency or discrepancy. How is this possible outside of a supernatural influence? In other words -- inspiration.

- 3) The Bible addresses our deepest questions. The Bible resonates with reality. The Bible (think back now) does not tell us to deny the existence of pain and suffering, the Bible tells us that it does exist, and what its purposes are. Eastern religion does not do this. One example would be, why is it that when humans read Jesus' sermon on the mount there is something deep within us that resonates with that, even though it goes against our grain? Why is it that we often have a strong sense of, yes that is how things ought to be? Why is it okay for us to mass murder termites by gassing their habitat if that happens to be an inconvenience to us, but not to usher people into a gas chamber? The Bible resonates with what we know to be true, when it teaches that we are all image bearers of God and life is to be honored. People are not to be murdered, etc...
- 4) Historically accurate. The past 100 years of archaeology have been a tremendous step forward in this.
 - a) John Elder says "It is not too much to say that it was the rise of the science of archaeology that broke the deadlock between historians and the orthodox Christian. Little by little, one city after another, one civilization after another, one culture after another, whose memories were enshrined only in the Bible, were restored to their proper places in ancient history by the studies of archaeologists...Contemporary records of Biblical events have been unearthed and the uniqueness of Biblical revelation has been emphasized by contrast and comparison to newly discovered religions of ancient peoples. Nowhere has archaeological discovery refuted the Bible as history."
- 5) It is undeniable that the Bible has changed lives. What I find significant is how the Bible has changed lives in places that are so different and diverse. One example would be us. We live in a western technological, postmodern age and somehow the most consistent comment I hear around here is how the Bible is so relevant and addresses the most important issues of life. How is that possible? How is it that I have taken the Bible to Haiti and it transforms lives, and to Northern Ireland? Those two places couldn't be more different.
- 6) The Bible has survived...and thrived. It would actually be impossible to destroy the Bible now. Even if every Bible was destroyed we could easily reconstruct the whole thing from commentaries books etc.... The Bible has sustained major attacks over the past centuries and yet here we are and it's the number one selling book every year.

Challenge #2: Changes in the Bible due to translation

- 1) What about that thing I saw on National Geographic that said there are over 200,000 errors in the Bible? You watch National Geographic and Discovery Channel to learn about furry creatures, for shark week and Man vs. Wild. You do not watch it to have any amount of decent information from anyone who could legitimately call himself a scholar about the Bible. What they present and who they present, 99% of the time is a joke, and is laughable, but it makes for good TV.
- 2) I'll quote RC Sproul here to give us some context "*God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of transmission.*"
 - a. In other words the claim is that the Bible is inerrant in its original form. Not that the NIV you hold in your hand is without any mistakes. Now that sounds scary, but we have to dig a little to understand what we are really dealing with here.
 - b. The Bible was not translated in a "telephone game" style, it was 1-1 1-2 1-3 1-4 etc. They kept going back to the original.
 - c. The copying of the Old Testament was such a rigorous process it would boggle our minds. There were laws on how it was to be done. Everything from the kind of material that was to

be used, to how many columns and lines were to be used on each page. Nothing was to be written from memory. If a copy had one mistake it had to be destroyed.

- d. To quote Koukl about the New Testament: *"We have 5,366 manuscripts to compare and draw info from. Many of which were made within one generation of the originals. Comparatively we have 643 copies of the Iliad. We have 10 copies of Julius Caesar's "Gallic Wars" the earliest of which was made 1,000 years after the events described in it."*
- e. Driscoll says *"Its amazing that people try to argue that we cannot trust the Bible because we do not have the original copies. But it would never occur to them to question the writings of Plato, Sophocles, Homer, or Caesar Augustus when we have fewer than ten copies of each book, and those copies were made at least 1,000 years after the author wrote the original."*

Challenge #3: It was written by men and men make mistakes.

- 1) Alright but how did the thing get put together? Wasn't it just the church using it for their own benefit?
 - a. F.F. Bruce says *"One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect."*
 - b. The first councils to classify certain books as canonical were in Hippo in 393 and later in Carthage in 397.
 - c. J.I. Packer puts it *"The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Issac Newton gave us the force of gravity. God gave us gravity, by His work of creation, and similarly He gave us the New Testament canon, by inspiring the individual books that make it up."*
- 2) What about those lost gospels? Why were some books not included?
 - a. Driscoll says *"Contrary to false accusation, not one of these lost 'lost gospel's was hidden by the church. Furthermore, no 'lost' gospels have been discovered. All of the discovered books were referred to in the church father's writings because the fathers knew of their existence but simply did not consider them sacred scripture."*
 - b. To call them lost is very misleading, they were not lost or hidden, they were not included for many reasons.
 - i. You can read about this at length in [The Case for the Real Jesus](#) by Strobel, [The Historical Reliability of the Gospels](#) by Craig Blomberg, [What Have They Done with Jesus](#) by Ben Witherington, and [Fabricating Jesus](#) by Craig Evans
 - ii. They were not authored by apostles, they were authored by people hundreds of years later by people writing under the name of apostles. Today this would be called fraud.
 - iii. They were not written within a generation of those who were eyewitnesses like the gospel's we have. Rather much later.
 - iv. They are silly, unorganized, poorly written etc...

Simple tools to study the Bible more effectively

First, what not to do!

- 1) Flip the Bible open and hope.
- 2) One year Bible Genesis to Revelation (especially for beginners).
- 3) Do not proof text.
- 4) Don't allegorize everything.

5) Don't make the first application to you. What was the application to the original audience?

What to do - Start with context

- 1) Pick a book of the Bible to study (1 book at a time). Romans for example
- 2) Start with Jesus (if a beginner)
- 3) Ask: Who wrote this? Does the text tell you?
- 4) Ask: Who is it written to? Does the text tell you?
- 5) Ask: When was it written? Why?
- 6) Ask: Where?
- 7) Ask: What type of literature is this?

Remember: Context is everything! If you miss the context you will get it wrong. You have to first understand the original context in order to make appropriate application of it.

How do I find answers?

- 1) Find as many answers as possible within the Bible itself.
- 2) Then, use helpful resources.
- 3) Here are some resources to look to:
 - a. ESV study Bible
 - b. *"How to Read the Bible Book by Book"* – Fee/Stuart
 - c. *"How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth"* - Fee/Stuart
 - d. *"On the New Testament (Book You'll Actually Read)"* – Driscoll
 - e. *"On the Old Testament (A Book You'll Actually Read)"* - Driscoll

Next- interpretation

- 1) Let the Bible read you more than you read the Bible.
- 2) Read from the Bible not into the Bible- let it speak.
- 3) Interpret the Bible literally- except for where its obviously metaphor (the hills clap their hands).
- 4) Distinguish between descriptive and prescriptive texts- Solomon's wives for example.
- 5) What immediately stands out?
- 6) Look for "so that" "therefore"...application is coming.
- 7) What immediately doesn't make sense?
- 8) Let the Bible interpret the Bible (cross reference).
- 9) Write down the "big idea", what's the main point?
- 10) How does that apply to my life? What should I do?

Track with us through Romans until Christmas, but take it really slowly!