

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
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“DEFENDING THE FAITH” (Apologetics - 4)

I. Review of Previous Study

1 Pet. 3:15: “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

A. Arguments for the Existence of God

B. The Nature of God: God exists absolutely, infinite, one – the ultimate unity, spirit, eternal, perfect, unchanging, transcendent and imminent, intelligent, omniscient and omnipotent, good, righteous and all are summed up in the word HOLY!

II. Is the Bible Really God’s Word?

As Christians we believe the Bible is God’s Word to all of humanity. It has transformed history like no other book. It is the most read, printed, and translated book in human history. Its principles form the foundation for Western Civilization. As a result, it is treasured the world over.

However, for many, the Bible is just a book by human authors. It may contain some gems of human wisdom and “moral” stories, but it is not God’s final word on life and salvation. Others see the Bible as having many contradictions and being out of date. Still others view it as *the problem, not the solution*, for the challenges of our world. Listen to some of these quotes:

Soren Kirkegaard: *“Stupid clergymen appeal quite directly to a Bible passage directly understood.”*

Friedrich Nietzsche: *“What is the point of the arts of reading and criticism as long as the ecclesiastical interpretation of the Bible, Protestant as well as Catholic, is cultivated as ever?”*

Voltaire: *“Another century and there will be not a Bible on earth.”*

Thomas Paine: *“I have gone through the Bible as a man would go through a forest with an axe to fell trees. I have cut down tree after tree; here they lie. They will never grow again.”*

Joseph Stalin: Following Lenin’s death in 1924, Stalin instituted a *“ban the Bible”* purge. He and his thugs sought remove God’s Word from the minds and homes of their people until his own death in the 1953.

The notion of the Bible as God’s Word is even debated within the Church. Now retired Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania, the Rt. Rev. Charles Bennison, infamously said in 2004, *“The Church wrote the Bible, therefore the Church can rewrite the Bible.”*

III. The Challenge for Believers

One of the admonitions we find in the Scriptures is that we are called to test everything to see if it is good. **1 Thess. 5:21: “Test all things, hold fast to what is good.”** We call this discernment. Discernment is the ability to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong. Regardless of what some in our world like to believe and claim, we do live in a moral universe. There is truth and falsehood; there is a right and a wrong way. So, when it comes to the Bible, we should be able to put it through a so called “test of discernment.” And one of the ways we can do that is by asking the four following questions:

- 1) **What does the Bible claim?** In other words, what does it teach? What is its message?
- 2) **Is the Bible relevant?** Does what the Bible have to say relevant to every man, woman and child regardless of their background, their culture, or when they lived in history?
- 3) **Is the Bible reliable?** Can we trust what the Bible teaches? Is it consistent? Has it stood the test of time?
- 4) **What has the Bible produced?** In other words, how has it changed lives, how has it affected human history, and how has it impacted our world?

If you can answer these four questions, then you will have answered the original question “*Is the Bible really the Word of God?*” This is essential for us as believers because as noted earlier we will be challenged by those who misunderstand or ridicule our faith and our book.

Before we continue by answering these questions, let me just say something that I have found true about life. Everything in life, in the natural realm, doesn’t just happen. There is a process involved. Our bodies grow and develop. Our minds grow and develop, so too, our families, our communities, the nations of the world, indeed all of nature and civilization. And it is no different when it comes to the salvation and spiritual development of an individual and of the world. The way God has revealed Himself and the way His message of truth and grace have spread, ***all take time***. Why is this? It is simply how God has structured life in the natural realm. And the same can be said of the Holy Scriptures themselves. The Bible didn’t just fall from the sky or was dropped off a spaceship. It came together over a period of 2000 years and we will see how it has withstood the test of time.

Of course, we need to know what the Bible actually says about itself and God. Second century Stoic and Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius said, “***The opinion of 10,000 men is of no value if none of them know anything about the subject.***” Unfortunately, many don’t know much about the Bible or what it says or why it says what it says or how it came to be! They assume it is composed of myths and fables, that it is made up or make believe, and has many contradictions. They make ignorant assumptions before doing the work of investigating the Bible themselves, or they base their conclusions on what other so-called scholars have said. As followers of Christ, we need to know what the Bible claims and how to interpret God’s Word if we are to reflect true discipleship and point others to the truth and love of Christ.

IV. What Does the Bible Claim and Is It Relevant?

A. In the beginning... Of course, we should start at the very beginning! **Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And God said, “Let there be light, and there was light.”** Notice everything begins with God, and everything was created by God. And notice that everything was created simply ***by His Word***. God spoke and it was done! We see now a parallel in in the beginning of the Apostle John’s Gospel: **John 1:1-3, 14, 17-18: “In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with God and the WORD was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him...and the WORD became flesh and dwelt among us,... full of grace and truth. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”** Notice that the WORD was the means through which all things were created, but more importantly the WORD is God and the WORD is Jesus Christ, the Son of God! So, **the whole message of the Bible is that everything begins with God and the WORD, Jesus Christ.**

Then we find that when our first parents rebelled against God (Gen. 3), the Paradise that God had most graciously given them, was lost! And we all suffer this loss as a result of our sinful human nature which is the reason for physical and spiritual death. But Paradise lost is Paradise regained in Revelation. And *everything in between* Genesis and Revelation is how God is working to restore that which was lost by our

first parents in the Garden. And the key to understanding and experiencing God's restoration which in theological terms includes our redemption, justification, and sanctification is knowing the WORD made flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ. For it is Christ's ministry on earth, His death on the cross and His resurrection that reconcile us to God. **That's the core message of the Bible – it is the good news (the Gospel).**

The Bible reveals who God is and who we are. We find throughout its pages that God is holy, just, loving, compassionate, forgiving, infinite, everlasting, perfect, truthful, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, unchanging, and is Spirit (not confined to a body or part of the creation). Many of the ancient Greek philosophers and those who believe that in order for the universe to exist there must be a higher power believe that many of these attributes must be present in order for the present time/space continuum to exist. However, the Higher Power of the Bible is a *personal* being who loves His creation *unconditionally!* This is the unique revelation that distinguishes the Jewish and Christian faiths from all others. In fact, in the Book of Psalms we have declaratory statements that tells us about the character and nature of God over and over again. The psalms are not just prayers, they contain theological statements of truth concerning the nature and character of God! Two noteworthy examples include: **Psalm 99: Note how many times (3 – allusion to the triune nature of God?) God is declared Holy.**

- 1The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble;
He is **enthroned above the cherubim**, let the earth shake!
- 2The LORD is great in Zion,
And He is exalted above all the peoples.
- 3Let them praise Your great and awesome name;
Holy is He.
- 4The strength of the King loves justice;
You have established **equity**;
You have **executed justice and righteousness** in Jacob.
- 5Exalt the LORD our God
And **worship at His footstool**;
Holy is He.
- 6Moses and Aaron were among His priests,
And Samuel was among those who called on His name;
They called upon the LORD **and He answered them.**
- 7He **spoke to them** in the pillar of cloud;
They kept His testimonies
And **the statute that He gave them.**
- 8O LORD our God, You answered them;
You were **a forgiving God to them**,
And yet **an avenger of their evil deeds.**
- 9Exalt the LORD our God
And worship at His holy hill,
For holy is the LORD our God.

Psalm 100: the love and faithfulness of God who is our Creator/Shepherd

- 1Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.
- 2Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing.
- 3**Know that the LORD Himself is God;**
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
- 4Enter His gates with thanksgiving
And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
- 5For **the LORD is good;**
His lovingkindness is everlasting
And His faithfulness to all generations.

But the Bible not only makes declarations about God it makes declarations about itself!

The key verse that sums it all up when it comes to the written Word of God is found in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**: ***“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God might be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*** The Greek word we translate as “inspired” literally means “God-breathed.” In other words, it is God who is ultimately doing the talking. When the Apostle Paul writes **“all Scripture”** he is referring to our Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible. The New Testament had not yet been compiled but we will see that it became considered also Holy Scripture and God’s Word.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible we hear over and over it again, the words, **“Thus saith the Lord”** or **“The Lord spoke these words”**, or **“The angel of the Lord came and spoke”** or we read that God revealed Himself to a prophet in a vision. In fact, there are **over 3800 such declarations** in the Old Testament alone.

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections: **the Law, the Prophets and the Writings** (or *Hagiographa* which literally means “sacred writings” and from which we get the word, “Holy Scriptures”). This threefold division consisted of 24 books or scrolls. Our present OT consists of 39 books. Why the difference? A number of books were originally just one scroll – e.g. **1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles; Ezra & Nehemiah, and the 12 Minor Prophets were all combined to make five scrolls.** Jesus affirms this three-fold division on several occasions noted in the gospels. For example, in **Luke 24:44**, after His resurrection Jesus says His disciples **“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms (first book of the Writings) concerning Me.”**

And then all the books of the Hebrew Bible are honored by Jesus in **Mt. 23:35** and **Lk. 11:51** when He uses the phrase **“from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah.”** This phrase is a reference to all the martyred prophets from one end of the Hebrew Bible to the other, from **Genesis 4:3-15 to 2 Chronicles 24:19-22.** For while **Malachi** is listed as the last book in our English Bibles, the Book of **Chronicles** is listed last in the Hebrew Bible. **Therefore, with that one statement Jesus is affirming the Hebrew Bible as God’s Word!**

Now some in and certainly many outside the Church contend that the Bible cannot be error free. Hence, they do not consider God’s Word to be always true. Yet, let’s look at what the Lord God says concerning His Word in the Hebrew Scriptures from each of the three sections noted above:

Num. 23:19 (The LAW): “God is not a man, that He should lie, or a mortal, that he should change His mind. Has He promised and will He not do it? Has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it?”

Is. 40:8 (The PROPHETS): “The grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of our God will stand forever.”

Ps. 119:89 (The WRITINGS): “The Lord exists forever; Your Word is firmly fixed in heaven.”

Now let’s look at what Jesus said about the Hebrew Scriptures, His Bible. Recall He *read* from it, *quoted* from it, *talked about* it and *taught* from it. He said in **Mt. 5:18**: **“For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”** Or when Jesus says in **Mk 14:49**, after the authorities come to arrest Him, **“The Scriptures must be fulfilled.”**

B. God communicates to us

None of the above should surprise us, for if God is an all-knowing God and loves us, He will communicate His will to us. He does so through what is called *revelation* – uncovering that which would be unknown unless it was shown. God’s revelation consists of *natural* or *general* revelation – that can know from the world we see and experience (nature and human experience) that there is a higher power. Many Scriptures highlight this reality – **Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-20; Hebrews 11:3**. But man needs more. While we can know that there is a God from looking at the world and the universe, we cannot personally know God unless He personally makes Himself known to us! And so, there is what is called *supernatural* or *special* revelation which is God directly revealing Himself to us in a supernatural/special way. We can see how below:

1. the **WORD** is the means of **GOD’S REVELATION**

Now when we go back to the beginning, to the time of Creation, we read in **Gen. 1:26-27** that God created us in His image. That means we have a mind, emotions, a will, and a spirit, all of which enable us to be in a *loving* relationship with each other and with God. God has also given us a body which enables us to use words and actions to communicate what’s on our minds and in our hearts, and to accomplish our desires and will.

But how does God supernaturally communicate with us? He communicates through words, visions, dreams, angelic beings, nature, and miracles. The Hebrews/Jews had a term for this - “**Dabar**” or “Word.” “**Dabar**” meant anything God did to reveal Himself to mankind. But there is only one problem with this means of revelation. It is limited in that it never can fully disclose God. The only way to truly know someone is to be with them in person. And that is exactly what God did with us. That’s why we read in **Hebrews 1:1: “God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.”**

Thus, Jesus, the Son of God, is the ultimate means of God’s revelation. And that’s why Jesus is called the WORD by the apostle John. Jesus is the embodiment of God to mankind. And as God in human flesh, He is the only means by which one can be saved. Jesus said, “***I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, except through Me.***” (Jn. 14:6).

2. the **WORD** is written down by **GOD’S INSPIRATION**

Now if God’s people are to be able to know and remember what God has done, they need to write it down, don’t they? Let’s face it, if you don’t write something down, you will forget it. In fact, in **Exodus 17:14 and 24:4 God tells Moses to write down what He says**. And if God is the one telling Moses what to record, do you not think God is going to preserve what He wants written down throughout the ages? And we will find that is exactly what the historical record affirms.

We call this process of putting down God’s revelation in writing, the process of inspiration. And the Bible time and time again declares that what has been written is either directly come from God or is inspired by God. **In fact, the Old Testament refers to itself as the “Word of God” 3808 times.** The phrase, “*God spoke all these words*” is found 160 times in the book of Exodus alone. That’s why read in **2 Tim. 3:16: “All Scripture is inspired by God...”** The Greek word for inspiration is “*theopneustos*” which literally means “God breathed.” It does not mean mere dictation or that the writer is a robot, or in a coma like trance, but that God is working through the writer’s individual personality, ability and circumstances to convey His will and word. So we have seen the message of the Bible, and we have seen that the Bible claims that it is the very Word of God. But is the Bible relevant?

3. the **WORD** is received through God’s **ILLUMINATION**

One only has to turn through the pages of the Bible to see that what it teaches is relevant for all people. For example, the words that God spoke to the prophet Isaiah 2700 years ago are just as relevant today as

they were then. God said, ***“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.” (Is. 41:10).*** What Jesus said, did, and promised is just as relevant today as it was then. Even those things recorded that were meant specifically for the people of God at the time, are meant to teach us about the nature of man and God, and how God has not only worked in the lives of His people, but how God is restoring all things to Himself. The truth is if you don't know where you have come from, you can't appreciate where you are and or where you are going. Everything has a purpose in God's Word.

When we see the relevance of the Bible for our lives, theologians have used the term “illumination.” It is when we receive God's Word in our hearts.” “To illuminate” means “to make known, to see clearly.” It's when the light bulb goes on in our hearts and minds. It is that “a-ha” moment when we see that yes, this is the Word of God. But even if one has not yet been illuminated by God's Spirit, who can argue that the Bible does not give us clear and logical answers to life's most fundamental questions? Questions like, *Who am I? Why am I here? Where did I come from? What is my purpose? What is the significance of my life? Where am I going? What is my destiny? What should I do? How should I live? Why do I die?*

Can you get those answers from Hollywood? Can you get them from Wall Street? Can you get them from government? From Madison Avenue? How about from school or from science? Our public schools and science teach us that we evolved from some primordial soup by random chance. That our grandparents a billion times removed were frogs and a million times removed ape-like creatures! The truth is the Bible not only answers the fundamental questions of life, but the Bible gives us answers that are found nowhere else in the world. Answers that are relevant regardless of person, place, or time. That's why there is not only a consistent message throughout the Bible, and but there is a consistent call for us to know God's Word. Listen to these verses for a moment:

“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength. And these words which I shall command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Dt. 6:4-9).

Jesus said, ***“Man shall not live by bread alone, by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” (Mt. 4:4 and Lk. 4:4) “If anyone loves Me, He will keep My Word.” (Jn. 14:23).*** The Apostle Paul wrote, ***“Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.” (Rom. 10:17)*** And the Apostle Peter tells us ***“Like newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” (1 Peter 2:1).***

4. A BOOK LIKE NO OTHER

The truth is that the Bible is unlike any book ever written. In fact, it is a book of books, 66 in all, written over a period of 1500 years, by forty different authors on three different continents, in three different languages, speaking about hundreds of controversial subjects, and yet there is a remarkable unity. Only God could have preserved such a book. And the Bible is today not only the best-selling and most read book, but the most translated book in human history. Thus, if there were any book that would have supernatural origins, the Bible would be the leading candidate, bar none.

Yes, the Bible claims that it is the Word of God. Moreover, as the Word of God, it claims that it is the foundation for knowing and understanding God, for building our faith and for giving us a blueprint for life that we might be a success in the Lord's eyes. While many in our world and even in the Church refuse to believe that the entire Bible is God's Word, we know better. And if we know better, we also need to know why the Bible is God's Word. We need to be able to defend its authenticity and authority. Next study we will look at the question *“Is the Bible reliable?”* and in doing so we will answer the question of how did it come to be? We also will answer the question *“What has it produced in our world?”* In other words, how has it impacted our world and transformed the lives of billions?