

What We Believe... Why We Believe It

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## Proving the Inspiration of Scripture

This week we're going to talk about proving the inspiration of scripture. The reason we're making this our first apologetics topic, followed by proving the existence of God next week, is because I feel like this is the logical progression of topics. After next week's installment, we can do anything we want, but you'll be able to work with the Bible with confidence once you can prove it's inspired.

Some people say the reason they believe the Bible is inspired is because it's "inspirational". The problem with this is that the Bible is not always inspirational. Some of it is as dry and uninspiring as military statistics. Indeed, parts of it are merely military statistics! So claiming the Bible is inspired simply because it seems inspirational doesn't prove the inspiration of scripture.

What about the Bible's own claim of inspiration? Most people in modern society don't believe the Bible is anything more than a group of stories. Among believers, however, most of them believe in the inspiration of the Bible because they think the Bible itself claims inspiration. However, the Bible makes no such claim. And even if every chapter of the Bible began with the words, "This book is inspired," it wouldn't prove that it is indeed inspired.

Even the Koran and the works of Mary Baker Eddy, the foundress of Christian Science, claim to be inspired writings. However, we know they're not. Just because something claims inspiration doesn't mean it is inspired.

Some people merely subscribe to the dictation theory. The dictation theory claims that God gave the inspired writers *exactly* the words He wanted them to use. This presents a problem, though.

Consider this... In I Corinthians 1:14-16, Paul wrote: "I am thankful that I baptized Gaius; lest anyone should say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether it baptized any one else.)"

Under the dictation theory, with Paul simply transcribing what God whispered in his ear, you'd have to conclude God temporarily forgot who it was Paul baptized. Of course, if God forgot something, He can't be perfect. And if He's not perfect, He's not God. So the dictation theory doesn't float. So how can we prove the Bible is inspired?

Our first step is to approach the Bible as we would any other ancient work. From textual criticism we are able to conclude that we have a text that is accurate. Indeed, we are more certain of the Bible's accuracy than any other ancient work. Sir Frederic Kenyon notes that, "For all the works of classical antiquity we have to depend on manuscripts long after their original composition. The author who is the best case in this respect is Virgil, yet the earliest manuscript of Virgil that we now possess was

written some 350 years after his death. For all other classical writers, the interval between the death of the author and the earliest extant manuscript of his work is much greater. For Livy it was about 500 years, for Horace 900, for most of Plato 1,300, for Euripides 1,600.” Yet no one seriously disputes that we have accurate copies of the works of these writers.

Not only are the biblical manuscripts we have older than those for classical authors, we have in absolute numbers far more manuscripts to work from. Some are whole books of the Bible, others fragments of just a few words, but there are thousands of manuscripts in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, and other languages. What this means is that we can be sure we have an accurate text, and we can work from it in confidence.

Next we look at what the Bible, considered merely as history, tells us, especially the New Testament, and particularly the Gospels. We examine the account of Jesus’ life and death and his reported resurrection. Using what’s in the Gospels themselves, what we find in extra-biblical writings from the early centuries (patristics), and what we know of human nature (and what we can otherwise, from natural theology, know of divine nature), we conclude that Jesus either was what he claimed to be, God, or he was a mad man. (The one thing we know he could not have been was merely a good man who was not God, because no merely good man would make the claims he made.)

We’re able to eliminate His being a madman not just from He said—no mad man ever spoke as He did... for that matter, no sane man ever did either—but from what His followers did after His death. The hoax of an empty tomb is one thing, but you don’t find people dying for a hoax, at least not one from which they have no prospect of advantage. The result of this line of reasoning is that we must conclude that Jesus indeed rose from the dead and that He was therefore God and, being God, meant what He said and did what He said He would do.

One thing He said He would do was found a Church, and from both the Bible (still taken as merely as a historical book, not at this point in the argument as an inspired one) and other ancient works, we see that Christ established a Church with the rudiments of all we see in the Catholic Church today—papacy, hierarchy, priesthood, sacraments, teaching authority, and, as a consequence of the last, infallibility. Christ’s Church, to do what He said it would do, had to have the note of infallibility.

We have thus taken purely historical material and concluded that there exists a church, which is the Catholic Church, divinely protected against teaching error.

Now for the last part of the argument, which is that the Church tells us the Bible is inspired, and we can take the Church’s word for it precisely because the Church is infallible. Only after having been told by a properly constituted authority (that is, one set up by God to assure us of the truth of matters of faith) that the Bible is inspired do we begin to use it as an inspired book.

Note that this isn’t a circular argument. We are not basing the inspiration of the Bible on the Church’s infallibility and the Church’s infallibility on the word of an inspired Bible. That would indeed be a circular argument. What we really have here is a spiral argument. On the first level we argue to the reliability of the Bible as history. From that we conclude an infallible Church was founded. Then we take the word of that infallible Church that the Bible is inspired. It reduces to the proposition that, without the existence of the Church, we couldn’t tell if the Bible were inspired. As St. Augustine said, "I would not believe in the Gospel if the authority of the Catholic Church did not move me to do so.” And that’s What We Believe... Why We Believe It.

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