

The Authority of the Bible

OUTLINE

Inward evidences of the Bible's authority
The Bible's ancient wisdom on spirituality

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest arguments for Christianity is the Bible itself. There is no other book like the Bible. Immanuel Kant who for the most part rejected Christianity said this of the Bible, 'The existence of the Bible, as a book for the people, is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it is a crime against humanity.' The Bible has fallen upon hard times and is seen as refuted, as a set of myths, as a collection of politically motivated books to suit the governing power, as merely a record of the religious life of a group of people from the Middle East. However, it has made more of an impact than any other book. The most common push back I receive anytime I talk with anyone about Christ and Christianity is that the Bible is just an ancient out of date book written by men that has been surpassed, that at best should be respected but not imitated; studied but not believed. My task this evening is to remind us that the Bible is God's word; that we have not been left in the dark; that God has spoken to us about who we are; why we are here; why there is sin and death; the biggest problem we face which is our sin against Him; His great love for us in sending Jesus to pay for our sin debt; the eternity that awaits us if we refuse His offer of pardon; and the eternity that awaits us if we do.

There are many lines of evidence to show that the Bible is the word of God. I will give a brief sketch of a few of these so that we can feel that there is an overwhelming case to see the Bible is a book like no other, the place where God has spoken. And then secondly I want to tease out one of these ideas in particular in relation to a modern phenomena. So lets begin by thinking about some of the ways the Bible shows itself to uniquely be the Word of God.

Inward evidences of the Bible's authority

The Bible is a collection of 66 books written over a period of about 1500 years. Approximately 40 authors were involved in writing the Bible. Unlike the Koran that only has one, the Bible has a wide variety of authors. Moses was from the royal courts and trained in the highest education of the time in Egypt. Solomon, who was considered to be the wisest man on earth in his day and was widely educated. Isaiah was a prophet. Ezekiel was a priest. Ezra and Nehemiah had important political positions in pagan countries. There were farmers like Amos, tax collectors like Matthew, physicians like Luke, Pharisees like Paul, fishermen like John and Peter, even a prime minister in Daniel. They are not the writings of one class of people, or of one type of education. God spoke through people of all walks of life. The Bible was written in the desert in palaces in peace and war. It was written in three continents in Asia, Africa and Europe, in the three languages of Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. It has many different types of literary genres in it such as historical narratives, epistles, prophecy, apocalyptic, poetry, philosophy, love letters, songs of praise, lament, law, parables, genealogies, and biography. It uses nearly every form of literary device such as metaphors, similes, hyperbole, satire, etc. Yet despite this diversity over thousands of years

by so many different authors, there is an incredible unity, a single story of redemption through Christ, of a God of love saving sinners by His Son. It gives evidence of a single author and story.

This story of salvation is prophesied from the beginning. The Bible stands out among other books because of its clear prophecies revealing that God is speaking and God is powerful to perform what He promises. There are many promises in scripture but the central story line of the Bible where humanity is sinful, in danger of being judged by a holy God, but God who is gracious makes provision to save us, is clearly outlined in prophecies that we know come to pass. Our first parents sinned in the garden bringing upon themselves the promised judgements, the day that you eat of it you shall die. But instead of God giving sin all that it deserves and wiping out the human race God mercifully provides a Savior. We know that Jesus is the fulfillment of these prophecies and promises. The OT is full of all sorts of details about Him. It was prophesied many years before His birth that He would be born of a virgin, Is. 7:14; in the town of Bethlehem, Micah 5:2; a descendent of Judah, Gen. 49:10; David, 2 Sam. 7:13-14; and Abraham, Gen. 22:18. It was prophesied that He would not only be human but divine, Is. 9:6-7; eternal Micah 5:2, and Ps. 110:1. The Spirit wrought miracles of His ministry were foretold in Is. 11:1-5; 35:4-6 and 61:1-2. Many of the prophecies focus on the last 24 hours of Jesus life before He dies on the cross. Jesus was betrayed by a friend, Ps. 41:9-Matt. 26:49; Judas sold Jesus at the price of a slave, Zech. 11:12-Matt. 26:15; Jesus would be forsaken by His disciples, Zech. 13:7-Mark 14:50. Two longer OT portions which have various details of Christ's last day are Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.

Psalm 22:1, Jesus was God forsaken-Matt. 27:46

22:7, the mocking of Christ-Matt. 27:29.

22:8, the challenge for God to rescue Him-Matt.27:43

22:12-13, surrounded by strong enemies

22:14-15, physical weakness and thirst

22:16, pierced hands and feet-Luke 23:33

22:17, public humiliation and nakedness

22:18, gambling for clothing-John 19:23-24

Isaiah 53

52:13 speaks of the future exaltation of Christ

52:14 foretells the disfigurement through being tortured and mistreated

52:15 foretells how He will 'sprinkle' not only Israel but the nations for the forgiveness of sins

53:1 reveals how many will not believe the truth about Jesus

53:2 reveals His true and ordinary humanity as He comes in weakness and humility not pomp.

53:3 speaks of His rejection by the majority, and the many pains He faced

53:4 predicts how He will undergo punishment as a substitute and how those who see Him will think Him cursed by God, hanging on a tree was a symbol of being cursed.

53:5 repeats the idea of substitutionary suffering as an innocent and mentions the stripes He received for us.

53:6 amplifies how one was dying for many, the innocent for the guilty

53:7 predicts His silent suffering

53:8 exposes the unjust treatment He received by various false trials. As well as the fact that he is cut off from the living and dies.

53:9 points forward to Jesus death among thieves and yet buried in a rich man's tomb. This verse also protests His innocence.

53:10 speaks about God's good will in crushing Jesus and the good fruit of our salvation that will come from it.

53:11 points forward to the many who will be justified by Christ's work.

53:12 points forward to the reward Christ receives from His work.

Zech. 12:10 foretells the stabbing of the spear into His side-John 19:34.

Ps. 34:20 predicts that none of His bones would be broken-John 19:33.

Is. 50:6 speaks of the spitting and beating He received-Matt. 26:67.

But that is not all. There were also prophecies of Jesus resurrection on the third day. Jesus Himself prophesied this, John 2:19, 'Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."' Matt. 12:39-40; and Ps. 16:10-11.

This one line of proof that the Bible is in fact God's word is so compelling it could stand all on its own. It proves that there is one author behind all these prophecies some thousands of years apart. That God is driving towards one goal, to save sinners from sin; that Jesus Christ is not just a man who taught us a nice message about love, but become flesh to live and die to save His enemies. And here is the challenge for all of us. If God has proven His truthfulness in this matter, then we must be very sure to hear Him as He warns us of the judgement we must all one day face. He has sent Jesus Christ to live and die to cleanse us of our sins, but if we will not return to our Maker through the cleansing that He freely offers in Christ; if we will not put away our doubt and rebellion and cast ourselves on His mercy seeing in Jesus death our only hope for payment for our sins. Then one day we will have to bear our own punishment, and God will give our sins all that it deserves, eternal judgement.

Other lines of investigation could include the fact that the Bible has the best manuscript tradition and integrity than any other manuscript; that there are many archeological confirmations of the people, places and events in the Bible; the vital role the Bible has played in shaping western civilization; but I want to take a bit of time to talk about how the Bible has proven to be true in another area, spirituality.

The Bible's ancient wisdom on spirituality

Let me set this up a little bit. We are in an interesting moment in history. We have come through the modern era where man as a rational creature has tried to give a natural explanation for everything. Christianity with its wisdom on our spiritual nature as human beings; our identity as male and female; the moral life that we are made for and causes us to flourish; its teaching on marriage and family and sexuality; and many other aspects were cast off. We are living in a post Christian era where we are reaping the consequences of those choices. Marriage is falling apart; the sexes are confused and not prospering; the family unit is undermined; morals are degrading; and we have allowed a world where self-serving desire; untested digital products that make addicts of us and harm us are put in the hands of children; we are overwhelmed with information. Many have woken up to the barrenness of our lives in the 21st century. It has amazed me that the madness of the transgender movement; the impact of childhood going online; the loss of manhood and womanhood; the dividing of historic communities and the family has begun to wake people up and guess what they are turning to religion for solutions. I often feel like that cartoon is true, where you have the experts climbing the mountain of knowledge and when they get to

the top they find out that the theologians have been there for thousands of years.

Here is an example of what I am talking about. In his recent book *The Anxious Generation* atheist social psychologist Jonathan Haidt wrote on how technology is robbing our children of their childhood and is harming them so that they grow up to have higher rates of suicide, depression and anxiety. It is an excellent book as it looks at the data from Gen. Z who went through puberty with a smart phone in their hands. It looks at the negative effects on boys and girls and talks about what a healthy childhood looks like. It may be surprising to you but chapter 8 in the book which is titled *Spiritual Elevation and Degradation* is an encouragement by an atheist, in light of the way we are harming our humanity with an irresponsible use of technology, to return to traditional spiritual practices.

God made us to know Him, Augustine said that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him. Our hearts are wired for worship, to pray to Him, to look at what He has made and to return it back to Him as praise. God made us in His image to love what He loves and hates what He hates; He made us to be merciful and gracious in imitation of Him. He is the ultimate servant and we find satisfaction in giving to others. He has made us to live in community, to be a part of a people before Him. So listen then to what an atheist says we need in this digital age. Summarizing this chapter he says that the phone based life degrades spirituality. Phone based living pulls us downward and does not lift us upward. It blocks 6 spiritual practices. 1. Shared sacredness . 2. Embodiment. 3. Stillness, silence and focus. 4. Self transcendence. 5. Slow to anger quick to forgive. 6. Finding awe in nature.

Science now shows that spiritual practices impact on ourselves and our community.

Shared sacredness: we are not made to be isolated individuals. We enter into God's presence together. Religious communities have lower rates of suicide, anxiety and depression. Times and spaces are set apart. Screens destroy consensual space; no sacred times; no true embodied togetherness. In person not on line communities define us differently.

Embodiment: we are also our bodies and need to enact our beliefs bodily, kneeling, singing, bowing, eating, drinking, laying on of hands. Life on line is disembodied.

Stillness, silence and focus: prayer needs a quiet mind that is not distracted that is fixed on higher things. Anxiety and depression are lower in those who have these religious habits. We need closed eyes, quiet spaces, unhurried contemplation.

Transcending the self: this 'Eastern' loss of self idea is contrary to scripture. A sense of awe, inspiration, or satisfaction in the good, the true or beautiful is wrongly described as transcending the self. As Christians we would see this as tapping into resources God has placed within us that emerge at times. These reveal a spiritual nature we suppress and deny and ignore that is freighted with sin and in need of salvation. Forced states of hyper awareness through drugs do not move from the God given feelings to truth, but put a blanket of forced feeling over our given tools for drawing nearer to God offering a simulation that has more than sights but has feelings too. Materialism, pleasure, distortions draw us away from these instincts.

Slow to anger, quick to forgive: this is embraced for its therapeutic and sociological benefits but not as obedience to God in imitation of the gospel that has saved us. Buddhism tells us to forswear judgement altogether, 'do not like

and do not dislike...never be for or against' supports moral relativism and forgiveness without injustice; and destroys righteous anger. Social media encourages quick judgements, no forgiveness, cancelling, shaming, etc. Awe in nature: sadly though this is true it is the lower awe of nature and not the awe in God. Pantheism through awe of nature is a terrible idolatry. But social media and phones and screens separate us even from nature which declares the glory of God. Children need to see their parents immerse themselves in nature, enjoy its beauty and allow that beauty to return them to God and praising Him. Children need to be outside in God's world allowing its voice to direct them to praise God. Watching drone footage of Victoria falls, or hiking there, feeling the water fall out of the air upon you, and hearing the sounds being immersed in it are two different things.

As I listen to these statements I rejoice because western society is opening up to the truth of God's word and its timeless wisdom; and I weep because instead of just reading the Bible and getting a full picture we continue to stand above the word of God, picking and choosing from it what suits us in what some have called bespoke spirituality. Bespoke spirituality describes the new modern post Christian lean into spirituality. It is looking to a spirituality within based within the self in self exploration; self-affirmation and self-discovery instead of knowing God. It is often driven by pragmatic considerations as it tries to negotiate the many viewpoints we are exposed to in this moment. It has a posture of openness not narrowness, because being chronically online; seeing the many differences, and wanting to be idealistic and inclusive we are tending to see what has been called a meta modern approach where even contradictory beliefs and practices are cherry picked and utilized. So a little bit of Buddhism with a little bit of Catholicism with a little bit of Hinduism with a little bit of paganism is common in many who are returning to spirituality.

Here is where we need to return to the authority of the Bible. Humanity without God; sexuality without God; society without God these projects have been attempted and failed. Many are feeling the need for God; prayer; connection with community; morality; a definition of man and woman; forgiveness of sin. We have tried to reinvent the wheel and have failed; we are coming up with counterfeits and shams. Jesus came to reveal the Father to us, to die for our sins, and make a way for us back to God. He said I am the way the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but through me.

It is this message that God through His Spirit wrote down through human authors and the Holy Spirit enabled them to record this most important message for us to hear and believe.

I will end with a few more quotes:

Jean Jacques Rousseau, 'Behold the works of our philosophers; with all their pompous diction, how mean and contemptible they are by comparison with the Scriptures! Is it possible that a book at once so simple and sublime should be merely the work of men.'

Theodore Roosevelt, 'A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.'

Woodrow Wilson, 'A man has deprived himself of the best there is in the world who has deprived himself of a knowledge of the Bible.'

Thomas Huxley, 'The Bible has been the Magna Carta of the poor and the oppressed down to modern times...Nowhere is the fundamental truth that the welfare of this state in the long run depends on the uprightness of the citizen so

strongly laid down. I do not yet believe that the human race is yet, and possibly ever will be, in a position to dispense with the Bible.'

Paul, 'But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.'