

Mr. Roby: We are resuming our study of biblical theology today by examining why we should believe that the Bible is, in fact, the very Word of God.

Dr. Spencer, in Session 1 you argued that being an atheist is intellectually untenable and everyone should be concerned to know what the Bible says because it claims to be the Word of God. I'd like to spend some time today examining that claim. How can we know that the Bible is the Word of God?

Dr. Spencer: We can know because the Bible claims to be just that, the Word of God.

Mr. Roby: But isn't that circular reasoning? You're saying, in essence, that because the Bible is the Word of God, you believe it when it says it is the Word of God. Most people think circular reasoning is invalid. How would you respond to that charge?

Dr. Spencer: Let me defer answering that question for a moment. We need to establish an important principle first. Namely, that all human beings, whether we are aware of it or not, have some ultimate standard for determining what we believe to be true. Of course, we all have many different ways of determining if a *particular statement* is true.

For example, if you ask me whether or not some mathematical formula is correct, there are techniques I have learned that I would apply to determine whether or not I think the formula is right. And, if you ask me whether some theological statement is true or not, I would use different criteria to evaluate it.

But, independent of the many different ways we have for determining the truth or falsehood of a particular statement, we all have some ultimate standard to which all other standards or methods are subservient. And the really surprising thing is that when you sit down and consider the possibilities carefully, there are really only two possible ultimate standards; human reason, or divine revelation.

Mr. Roby: Now when you say human reason, do you mean that each of us sets *ourselves* up as the ultimate standard?

Dr. Spencer: Not necessarily. When I say human reason, there are different possibilities. It may be that you have a particular person that you hold in such high regard that he or she is your ultimate standard, at least in a particular area. More commonly, it is human reason in the abstract that we hold as the ultimate standard. What I mean by that is that although we realize that any individual person is fallible and might be wrong, we may have faith that the collective wisdom of mankind can determine what is true, at least in the end. But, of course, it is hard to find a meaningful question for which all of humanity will agree on the answer. So, if human reason is your ultimate standard, you either have to go with certain individuals, or a majority opinion, or you must trust your own ability to decide which answer is right, those are your three choices.

Mr. Roby: Sounds like the famous Greek saying, "Man is the measure of all things!"

Dr. Spencer: I think that expresses it fairly accurately. The other possible ultimate standard though is divine revelation. And if God, who is the infinite, eternal, unchangeable and perfect

creator, chooses to reveal to us what he determines we need to know, then clearly that revelation should be our ultimate standard for truth.

Mr. Roby: But, don't we still have to use our reason to determine that we believe something to be divine revelation and to understand that revelation?

Dr. Spencer: Of course we do. We can't escape the use of our reason, nor should we try to do so. God gave us our minds for a purpose and we must use them. The Bible is full of admonitions to use our minds. Perhaps the most famous is in Chapter 1 of the book of Isaiah, in verse 18 God tells his people, "Come now, let us reason together, ... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."¹ So, we must use our reason. In fact, we should apply our reason most carefully to the Word of God since it is the most important thing we can possibly think about.

But, our reason should not be our ultimate standard. Martin Luther made a distinction between the magisterial and ministerial uses of human reason.² The magisterial use of reason is to have it serve as the magistrate, or judge, presiding over God's Word. In other words, it is to set up human reason as the ultimate standard. And that we should never do. Who are we to stand in judgement over the Word of God? The ministerial use of reason, on the other hand, is as a servant of God's Word. The word minister comes from the Latin word for servant. So, the ministerial use of reason refers to our using our reason to understand and apply the Word of God properly.

But, there is a problem here, and the problem has to do with sin. Sin affects every aspect of our being, including our thinking. In our natural state, we are in rebellion against God and, because of that rebellion, we do not think correctly. Our fundamental problem is a moral problem, but it affects every aspect of our being. So, God must draw us to himself and change our hearts or we will not accept the truth presented to us in the Word of God.

Mr. Roby: And that change happens when we are born again.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. There is a radical change that takes place, which changes our mind, our will and our affections. We are no longer in rebellion against God and we accept his Word as our ultimate standard for truth. Theologians talk about the internal witness of the Holy Spirit as being the greatest evidence we have. God opens our eyes so that when we read the Bible we see that it is true. It is true about things that we can verify in other ways, and it is also true in things that we can't possibly verify. When I read in the Bible, for example, that there is no one who does not sin, I know that the statement is true. I don't need to be able to examine the life of every human

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² Noted in W.L. Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, Crossway Books, 1984, pg. 36

being who has ever lived or ever will live to be able to confirm the statement. I know it is true because God, who knows all things, has told me it is true.

Mr. Roby: But, of course, it also is seen to be true in our own experience. I've certainly never met anyone who was perfect.

Dr. Spencer: Nor have I. So, we see that our own experience – when it is correctly understood – corroborates the truthfulness of what the Bible tells us, but the Bible is the ultimate standard, not my reason or my experience.

Mr. Roby: And that brings us right back to my original question. We've taken a slight detour to discuss ultimate standards, but let me ask again, "Why should we believe the Bible's claim to be the Word of God?" If you answer that you believe it because the Bible is your standard and it claims to be the Word of God, you are using circular reasoning. And we don't want to engage in that kind of circular reasoning, do we?

Dr. Spencer: Well, the truth is that we can't avoid circular reasoning when it comes to justifying our ultimate standard. If I claim that human reason is the appropriate ultimate standard, how can I justify that position? I must use human reason to justify that choice. So, the reasoning is always going to be circular when we justify our ultimate standard precisely because we must *use* our ultimate standard to *justify* our ultimate standard.

Mr. Roby: Can that ultimate standard be tested or verified to be true?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it absolutely can be tested. I believe the Bible to be the infallible Word of God because of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, but that faith is buttressed to a huge degree by external evidence. I want to be clear that I am absolutely *not* saying that we must subject the Bible to external proofs in order to trust it as our standard. I am simply saying that it would be irrational to put your trust in a standard that was obviously wrong. But that is certainly not the case with the Bible. In fact, quite to the contrary, there is a massive amount of evidence to corroborate the truthfulness of the Bible, and we will get to some of that evidence in upcoming sessions.

But for now, I want to consider what the Bible itself says. If it is our ultimate standard, then it must be the ultimate source for all of our doctrines, including our doctrine about the Bible itself.

Mr. Roby: And the Bible quite emphatically *does* assert that it alone is God's word.

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely true. The Bible claims from beginning to end, both implicitly and explicitly, to be the very Word of God. For example, the Old Testament uses the phrases "God said", "The Lord says", and similar statements over 3,800 times according to D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones³, and these expressions are clearly an explicit claim to being, at least in part, the Word of God.

In addition, there are implicit claims. For example, in Genesis 1 we are told things about creation that no mere man could know unless God revealed them to him. Similarly, in Job 1 and

³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016, pg. 50

Zechariah 3, to name just two places, we are told about events in heaven that no man on earth could possibly know about unless God revealed them to him.

Also, it is clear that Jesus Christ and the writers of the New Testament considered the Old Testament to be the infallible Word of God. For example, in John 10 we read about an exchange between Jesus and some Jews who gathered to hear him speak. In that exchange, Jesus said that he was one with the Father, and, as a result of that statement, the Jews wanted to stone him for blasphemy. He then quoted from a psalm and, in the midst of the quote, made an interesting statement. He said, “and the Scripture cannot be broken”. The point he was making was that the Scripture, even the psalms, which are certainly not historical narrative, are infallible. In other words, he was saying that the Bible, in its entirety, is infallible. Not one word of it can fail to be true. So, when it speaks of future events, we can be certain that they will come to pass.

Mr. Roby: I also think of Christ’s responses when Satan came to test him.

Dr. Spencer: That is certainly one of the best examples. Jesus said “it is written” over and over and the clear implication of that statement was that since it had been written in the Scriptures, it was absolutely true and binding on all beings. Then again in Mark 14:49, when he was speaking to those who came to arrest him, Jesus said that “the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” We can also look at Matthew 26:56 where Jesus said that what had been happening had “all taken place [so] that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.” And the gospel accounts are filled with examples, like Matthew 2, verses 15, 17 & 23, and many other places, where we are told that what happened with Jesus was foretold in the Old Testament.

Mr. Roby: And, of course, we have the most classic statement of all in 2 Timothy 3:16, where the apostle Paul wrote that “All Scripture is God-breathed”.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that verse is probably the first you think of. And, of course, Paul was speaking about the Old Testament there, since the New Testament had not yet been written. And the Greek word used there is θεόπνευστος (theo-pneustos), which is well translated by the NIV as “God-breathed”. The Scriptures were breathed out by God himself, no less than if he were speaking directly to us.

Mr. Roby: And we also read in many places that the Holy Spirit is directly speaking in the Bible.

Dr. Spencer: That’s true. For example, in Acts 4:25, after Peter and John had been released from jail, they joined with the other disciples in prayer, and in that prayer they said to God, “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?’” Which is a clear statement that the Holy Spirit was the author of what was written by King David in Psalm 2. In fact, in 2 Peter 1:21 we are told that “prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” So, although we don’t know precisely how the writers were “carried along”, it is clear that the Holy Spirit was somehow guiding the process and ensuring the infallibility of the result. The Holy Spirit is, ultimately, the author of the Bible.

Mr. Roby: Alright, so we have adduced a number of Scriptures to show that the Bible claims the Old Testament to be the very Word of God, but, what about the New Testament?

Dr. Spencer: We can also firmly establish that the New Testament is the Word of God. First, notice that, in John 14:25-26, Jesus told his disciples, “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” And, in John 16:13 he said, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” So, we see that Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would guide them.

Mr. Roby: So, we again see that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate author of the Bible.

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. And the apostle Paul addressed this issue in 1 Corinthians Chapter Two. He tells his readers that he is speaking about the secret wisdom of God, and in verse 10 he says that “God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.” Then, in verse 13 he says, “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”

Mr. Roby: And we also know that the Spirit is also necessary for someone to be able to understand the Bible correctly.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. In the very next verse, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul wrote that, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Mr. Roby: And the only people who have the Holy Spirit are those in whom God has done a radical inward work, what the Bible calls being born again. And in light of that fact, everyone should cry out to God with the plea of the tax collector in Luke 18, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Dr. Spencer: So true.

Mr. Roby: What other evidence do we have that the New Testament claims to be the Word of God?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I would also look at 1 Thessalonians 2:13, where Paul, Silas and Timothy wrote, “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” So, we see that the words these apostles spoke to the church, which certainly includes the letters we have, were the Word of God.

Also, a very important verse is 2 Peter 3:16, wherein the apostle Peter wrote specifically about the letters of the apostle Paul and said, “He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” So, Peter clearly considered Paul’s letters to be Scripture.

Mr. Roby: Alright. Let me ask you about a verse that is sometimes used to argue that Paul did not consider himself to be writing words that carry the same authority as God’s own words. In 1 Corinthians 7:10 he prefaces some remarks about marriage by saying, “To the married I give this

command (not I, but the Lord) ...”, and then, in verse 12 he prefaces some other remarks by saying, “To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord) ...”. How would you explain these remarks?

Dr. Spencer: I actually think these are excellent evidence that Paul’s writings *are* the inspired Word of God! If you look at the passage you will notice that in both sets of comments he uses imperatives, the word “must” appears several times. There is no difference in tone nor is any indication given that there is a difference in the authority of the two passages. All that the apostle is doing is noting in passing that the first comments dealt with an issue about which Jesus Christ himself had spoken while he was here on earth, while in the second instance Paul was dealing with a situation that Jesus had not explicitly addressed himself. Nevertheless, Paul spoke with equal authority both times. And, if you look at Chapter 14 of this first letter to the Corinthians, in verse 37 Paul wrote, “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.” Which is a pretty explicit claim to authority.

Mr. Roby: Well, we are out of time for today, but I look forward to continuing this discussion next time.