

“BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE: CREDIBILITY”

The Bible is, by far, the most popular book of all time. No other book is even close. It's estimated that over 5 billion copies of the Bible have been printed and obtained around the world. But, don't take that to mean that the Bible is loved by everyone. Of course, we all know that that is not true. There's not a book on earth that provokes that strong feelings and reactions that the Bible does. There isn't a book in existence that has been the target of any more hate or opposition than the Bible. One of the great evidences of the Bible's power and, I believe, supernatural source, is the fact that centuries and centuries of suppression and efforts to discredit and even destroy it have been futile. There's a poem that reads:

Last eve I paused beside the blacksmith's door, And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;

Then looking in, I saw upon the floor, Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

“How many anvils have you had,” said I, “To wear and batter all these hammers so?”

“Just one,” said he, and then with twinkling eye, “The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.”

And so, I thought, the Anvil of God's Word for ages skeptic blows have beat upon;

Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard, The Anvil is unharmed, the hammers gone.”

Attributed to John Clifford

That poem reminds me of the words of the apostle Peter.

I Peter 1:24-25 “...the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever...”

It's amazing to think that the Bible and those who believe it have been the targets of bloody campaigns to wipe it and them off the face of the earth. Yet believers remain thousands of years after the Bible was penned and the book itself remains the most popular book in the world. But since it was first spoken by God and penned by His scribes, it has been the object of a great battle, and remains so today. It has been a physical battle at various times, in the form of persecution. It has been a legal battle, in the form of governments and leaders down the stream of time outlawing it. But I'm convinced that the most heated and far reaching battle of all is raging as hot as ever today, and that is an ideological battle over the Bible. I believe that Satan and wicked men have waged an unrelenting war on the Word of God that is being fought on at least four fronts: its credibility, its relevance, its sufficiency and its authority. In this study, we'll consider the first point, the battle for the Bible's credibility.

Satan's attack, or this battle for the Bible, actually began in the garden of Eden, when God first spoke to man. In fact, it's ironic that the Genesis account of creation in the garden described how the devil tried to discredit and undermine God's Word with Eve, and now, many who claim to believe in God deny the

Genesis account all together and say that it never happened. That should tell us that Satan has worked very effectively on the hearts and minds of men since the beginning. Do you remember the story of the fall of man? What lured Eve to the forbidden tree? What seduced her to take the fatal bite of that which God had forbidden? I mean, God had explicitly said that she and Adam could eat the fruit of every tree of the garden, except that one tree: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But the serpent beguiled her. How? How could there be any mistaking what God had said? We wonder that sometimes today, but here, God's prohibition was clear: *Don't eat of that tree.*

Genesis 3:1 "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

Now that question is KEY to this. Do you suppose that Satan was ignorant of what God had said, and was seeking information from Eve? Do you think he really wanted to know, Did God say that? No, the question itself implies that Satan had some knowledge of the conversation that had taken place between God and Adam. What Satan is asking is, Did God *really* say you shouldn't eat of *every* tree? Are you *sure* that's what God said? Do you *really* think that you're going to die simply because you eat a piece of fruit? I mean, isn't that a little ridiculous? After all, it's called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, therefore, if you eat its fruit, your eyes will be open and you'll be like gods. So, Eve, you need to rethink this. It's not a bad thing to eat this fruit. It's a good thing! It's pleasant to look at and it will enlighten you...Well, the Bible says she did eat, and Adam ate and their eyes were opened and they lost their innocence. They sinned against God, and they were lost.

That sums up Satan's unrelenting battle on the Bible that has raged ever since: "Surely, you don't believe the Bible. I mean, intelligent and educated people don't believe the Bible! You can believe in God if you want to, but the Bible?" You see, Satan's question is the same today: "Hath God said...?" When he asked that question of Eve, you could see the wheels turning when Eve heard that. The battle in that very moment was being waged in her mind. Man's reason vs. God's revelation. That's the battle that we are still fighting, millennia later.

Why should I believe the Bible? Can I be a Christian, can I be a believer in God, and NOT believe the scriptures? That is the question that applies to multiplied millions of people today. An increasing number of people who say they believe in and worship God don't really believe the Bible, as an inspired and infallible book. According to Gallup's 2014 Values and Beliefs Poll, only 28% of Americans believe that the Bible is the literal word of God. 21% believe that the Bible is merely a secular book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts written by men altogether. But 47% believe that the Bible IS the word of God, but should NOT be taken literally. I think that that number well characterizes a lot of people that you and I meet in our communities from day to day. It might describe YOU. 47% believe that the Bible is a divine book and is the word of God, but it really shouldn't be taken as the literal word of God. In other words, it's merely a book of general principles that, to some degree are true, but it's not the inspired and infallible word of God. It might seem that the encouraging thing is that ¾ of Americans believe that the Bible IS in some way connected to God. But, friend, the troubling thing is that ½ of them do not believe that the Bible is what it claims to be! That's where a lot of people are today, I think. Is the

Bible an extraordinary book? Well, sure. Is it the word of God that dependably tells us who God is, what His express will for our lives is? Eh, not so much. That's what people think. Here's the thing: if it's NOT the inspired word of God, then it's a book of lies, and it has no credibility whatsoever. Why? Because it CLAIMS to be the revelation of God and His will for man.

Nature around us testifies of the existence of creator God. But nature doesn't reveal His person or His character, and certainly not His will to us. You can look into the starry sky at night and determine that there had to be a creator to put all of that into place. You can look at the complexity of life and this world and the universe and rightly conclude that that didn't happen by itself. There's an intelligent, all powerful designer and creator behind all of that. God reveals Himself in His creation, but that's about as far as it goes. God then revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ and in His Word, which He inspired men to write. That is how we come to know God's mind and God's will.

2 Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Now, the Greek word that Paul used that is translated "*inspiration*" is the word *theopneustos* and it means '*God-breathed*' or '*the breath of God.*' That's what the very word Paul used means. You know, when I speak, it's the product of my breath leaving my lungs, passing through my throat, over my vocal cords, causing them to vibrate, than passing over my tongue, through my teeth, which shape that sound and articulate words. In other words, my breath forms my words. Paul says that ALL scripture—not some!—ALL scripture is given by the breath of God. It IS the breath of God. In other words, it is just as God revealed it and spoke it.

Now, how did God speak it? How did we get our Bible? Well, God imparted His Holy Spirit unto the prophets and the apostles, who inspired them what to write. It's superintended, the writing of every word that makes up the Holy Scripture.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

The spirit of God gave us not merely the thoughts, but He taught us the words to use to convey the revelation of God. That's what Paul is saying. He carefully superintended and chose the words necessary to convey the knowledge of God and spiritual things to man. Thus, the writers of the Bible were inspired by the spirit of God to write what they did. God speaks to man, you see, through His revelation. Not through feelings and dreams, or intuitions and visions, but He speaks to man through His revelation.

Now, what of the person who says that he believes in God, but then he rejects the Bible? Notice that I didn't say the man who doesn't believe in God. THAT man automatically rejects the Bible, by reason of the fact that he doesn't believe that God exists. You know, you need not try to convince a man to believe in God by merely reading the Bible to him. In fact, the Bible was never intended to prove that

God exists. The Bible was revealed by God to those who already believe in Him, through the testimony of nature and conscience. But, back to that first man, the believer in God who rejects the Bible. Here's where the real battle for the Bible is taking place, and where souls are perilously at stake. Let me show you how God describes the person who believes in the existence of God, but doesn't believe the Word of God. When Paul was on his second missionary journey, he came to the city of Athens. Athens was the center of intelligencia and learning of that day, and it was also steeped in pagan idolatry. Sophisticated idolatry. When Paul passed through that city, he beheld all of their devotions and idols to their false gods, and he saw that alter with the inscription, "*To the Unknown God.*" This was the god that man today often sees in nature, but knows very little or nothing about, just like those people of Athens. Paul acknowledges that these people were religious people, and that's a good description of multitudes around us today. They're religious, or spiritually minded, if you use the word spiritual to mean that they believe in some power beyond themselves. Perhaps they even think they believe in the God of the Bible. But there are a lot of people who believe in a god. But, you see, that god is what they make him in their mind to be, and not who the Bible says He is. They believe in some god of creation, but they don't know the God of covenant. To them, god is a product of their own design. They believe in God, so long as He's what they think He is. He is whatever each person imagines him to be. That was also the case with the people of Athens. They acknowledged the existence of God, but He was unknown to them. Paul said that they "ignorantly worshipped" Him.

Acts 17:23-27 "...him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:"

What does that mean, "*haply they might feel after him, and find him?*" The word "*feel*" means '*to grope, as in the dark.*' You've probably had to grope your way through some darkness, when you can't see and are just blindly reaching and feeling along, hoping that you get where you're trying to go and find what you're trying to find. Paul says that that is the way it is with men and God. Without a clear revelation from God, men are just feeling after Him. They're just groping in the dark in search of Him. Why are they looking in the first place? Well, because they can look at the world and the universe and see design and wisdom, and only a fool would look at the things that are, and say, There is no God.

Psalm 14:1 "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God..."

I believe that there is something built into our minds and consciences to reach for God and seek a higher being, but without God's revelation, we are just groping. But the Holy Spirit of God came and turned on the light. Jesus Christ was sent from God to be born into this world and give us a glimpse of the eternal creator.

John 14:9 "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father;"

When His Holy Spirit indwelt the hearts and minds of His prophets and apostles, He revealed through them a complete and inspired revelation of the God who desires for us to intimately KNOW Him.

Paul also said, *“though he be not far from every one of us.”* In other words, God is not some distant being whom we cannot know or understand anything about. He can be near to us in our conscious understanding. Why? Because He has revealed Himself to us in His divine Word. The Bible is truly an amazing book. The skeptic says, It was written by men, merely their speculations about natural phenomena that they didn’t understand or couldn’t explain. Friend, the person who is at a loss to satisfactorily explain something is the person who can read the Bible—and I mean truly read, with an open heart—and not see something amazing, to the point of supernatural, about it. When you consider that the Bible, by nearly all accounts, was written by some 40 people, who lived on 2 continents, more than 1,500 years apart, who wrote in 3 languages—think about that, now—whose writings were all preserved and canonized or collected, and those words tell one, consistent story centered on one theme, affirm one historical account, one body of moral truth! And if you don’t understand all of that about the Bible, then you’ve not really read the Bible. You might’ve skimmed through it. You might be able to pick and choose some verses from here and there to twist and use as you want to try to discredit it, but you’ve not really opened the Bible in Genesis 1 and read it through Revelation 22 with an open heart. How can anybody understand that, yet say that it’s a book, just like any other book? Come on.

Perhaps the most compelling proof of the inspiration of the Bible is its prophecies and their fulfillment. The Old Testament alone contains hundreds upon hundreds of direct and indirect prophecies about events that took place exactly as they were foretold hundreds, and even more than a thousand years before they happened. The skeptic says, Well, that’s merely chance. It just so happened that way. But HUNDREDS of prophecies?! They’ll say, When Jesus came claiming that He was the Messiah, He just arranged for those prophecies to fit. He just lived out those prophecies intentionally. Well, I know one that He didn’t “just arrange.” Psalm 22. David paints a heartrending portrait of the crucifixion. Listen to what the psalmist is saying.

Psalms 22:1-19 “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me in to the dust

of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me.”

There’s no mistaking what the psalmist is talking about, if you understand the Bible message. He not only wrote this psalm one thousand years before Jesus lived and was crucified, but did you know that he wrote in hundreds of years before crucifixion was ever devised? He was writing about something that nobody in the world knew anything about! The psalms and the Old Testament prophecies were written, by any account, hundreds of years before Jesus, but places, circumstances, people, words and events involving multitudes of unrelated people were foretold exactly as they came to pass in the first century! How can that be without divine inspiration, and the prompting of One who knows and is in control of the future and who transcends time and space? My friend, if you don’t understand that the Bible is a phenomenal book that has marks of wisdom and authorship beyond human ability, I submit that you haven’t TRULY read the Bible.

Psalm 119:161 “...my heart standeth in awe of thy word.”

Prophecy and the knowledge of scientific facts in a pre-scientific era are things about the Bible that simply cannot be honestly explained without a divine explanation.

Now then, if I can believe that God exists, and in His power, why can’t I believe in His word? This is where multiplied millions of people are on the spectrum of belief today. Do you want to know the answer? Here it is: To acknowledge the Bible as the inspired Word of God means that God makes the rules. Why is there a battle for the credibility and inspiration of the Bible? Because our increasingly secular and humanistic world resents a God who tells them how to live. So we have people who salve their consciences by going to worship and saying they believe in and love God, but they don’t want the consequences of believing that the Bible is HIS Word. It’s like a friend said to me the other day about the majority of religious people, I’ll believe in God, so long as He agrees with me. That’s where we are today. How can we know anything about God unless God reveals it? And God HAS revealed it in His Word, which He inspired by means of His Holy Spirit, to be written down and preserved! But men reject His Word, just as Eve did in the garden, because of pride and the promise of self-enlightenment.

We’re fighting a very real battle for the credibility and the inspiration of the Bible, and I ask today, Which side are you on?