

Why should a Christian believe the Bible is the word of God?

By Craig W. Manners

To the unsaved much of the Bible is probably somewhat interesting but mostly not easily understood. Many are antagonistic toward it because they are antagonistic toward God, so they ignore it altogether, or maybe investigate it a bit further but do so from a secular position, not willing to accept it is divinely inspired from God, and therefore they read it with a critical spirit, their motive being to disprove it's divine origins. This is all very understandable and in many ways, it is highly reasonable.

However, to the regenerated, those who have been moved by the Holy Spirit to receive Christ as their Saviour, by the grace of God alone, it can and should be accepted as the word of God. Interestingly though, many who say they are believers do not, for various reasons but with similar end results.

Rather than the non-believer, this investigation is concerned with why a *Christian* should believe the Bible is the word of God and argues that *only* a Christian is able to fully believe this.

Although there are many rational proofs, it is ultimately the Holy Spirit who enables this belief. Just as salvation is through faith enabled only by the grace of God, the turning point to a Christian believing that the Bible is the word of God comes from God's work in that person's heart, through the Holy Spirit witnessing to their spirit, revealing this truth. Those

who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit subscribe unreservedly to the authority of Scripture.

Introduction:

The Bible is “the record of God’s revelation of Himself.”¹ It is “the sourcebook of Christian teaching,”² communicated to men by the one who formed the mouth (cf. Ps. 94:9), and recorded in written form for our lasting benefit.³ But how do we *know* that?

Just as Jesus needed to open the minds of his disciples to enable them to understand the Scriptures (Lk. 24:45) he likewise, through the Holy Spirit, enables the Christian to believe the Bible is God’s Word. None can comprehend the mysteries of God except those to whom comprehension is given.⁴

God created the world by speaking words. God reveals himself to those made in his image (who likewise have the ability to reveal themselves to others) through communication such as by words, verbal and written. It should be no surprise that God has communicated with us and that it is in lasting written form.

Prerequisite piety and peace:

Only once a person is regenerated does the Holy Spirit enable that Christian to then fully believe the Bible. It is a post-justification act (1 Cor. 2:14). “Justly does Augustine remind us, that every man who would have any understanding in such high matters must previously possess piety and mental peace.”⁵ The Bible remains just a book filled with

¹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* Vol I (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 22.

² G. Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 15.

³ Kuyper notes four advantages of a written record: durability; universal dissemination; fixedness and purity; finality and normativeness: B. Milne, *Know the Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), 40.

⁴ J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 72.

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 82-83.

words “until we have a perfect conviction that God is the author,”⁶ then it becomes the word of God.

Faith comes before reason in our “apperception of biblical authority,”⁷ and, as John Calvin logically states, it is “foolish to attempt to prove to infidels that the Scripture is the Word of God,”⁸ since this can only be known by faith. J. I. Packer says only “true Christians” can “acknowledge and live under the word of God.”⁹

“Since no daily responses are given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognised, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them.”¹⁰

If the Bible is the word of God, it must be the final authority in all matters of faith and life. It therefore becomes a vital question, “Is the Bible the word of God?” As we should expect, like salvation itself, the answer is not dependent on man.

The necessity of the Holy Spirit:

“True faith cannot be detached from the Spirit of regeneration.”¹¹ It is finally the Spirit¹² which allows a regenerated Christian to convincingly know that the Bible is the word of

⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 71.

⁷ J. D. Woodbridge, “Biblical Authority: Toward an Evaluation of the Rogers and McKim Proposal,” in D. J. Moo, General Editor- *Biblical Authority and Conservative Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 9.

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvin%27s_view_of_Scripture

⁹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 130.

¹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 68.

¹¹ Calvin quoted in: P.C Marcel “The Relation Between Justification and Sanctification in Calvin’s Thought,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 27 (1955), 132.

¹² The same Spirit who inspired the writing of the *autographia* (Jn. 14:26; 15:13; 1 Cor. 2:13, 7:40).

God, and to exclude the Spirit's role in this discussion would be to "cast the whole inquiry out of the limits of Christian religion."¹³

The Spirit testifies with our spirit, and then we know the truth. We require "the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts (1 Jn. 2:20, 27; Jn. 16:13, 14; 1 Cor. 2:10-12; Is. 59:21)."¹⁴ Unless our conviction of the truth of Scripture is derived from a higher source than human ones, we will be "driven about in a whirl of uncertainty, from wavering, and even stumbling at the smallest obstacle."¹⁵

The Apostle Paul made it clear when he said faith is not founded on "the wisdom of men," but on "the power of God," (1 Cor. 2:5). "With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God?"¹⁶

Biblical authority:

Inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit "on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God," by "divine superintendence rather than by dictation." J. Gresham Machen points out that it is often necessary to make very clear that translations are not inspired. The original texts, the *autographia*, the writings by the inspired writers, alone are inspired.¹⁷

¹³ J. Owen, *The Works of John Owen Vol IV* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), 110.

¹⁴ *Westminster Confession of Faith (W.C.F.)*, Ch. 1, Sec. 5: R. Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Ross-shire, England: Christian Focus, 1998), 47.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 71.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 68, 69, 75.

¹⁷ B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), 420; A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 19-20. J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 38-39.

The doctrine of *inspiration* leads to the doctrine of *authority*, and no doctrine “is more foundational than biblical authority.”¹⁸ “It results in identifying a set of writings as possessing a unique authority.”¹⁹

Scripture’s authority is the authority of God himself,²⁰ and so the Bible in no way depends on human or earthly evidence but is solely reliant upon its author, God (e.g. 2 Pt. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 3:7, 4:7).²¹

Jesus clearly regarded the Old Testament (O.T.) as “the word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4). Jesus viewed O.T. occurrences as factual, historical events; O.T. prophets spoke the whole word of God (Jer. 26:2; Exod. 4:30); The O.T. was widely accepted as the word of God by Jews and early Christians and no debate on was necessary.²²

Jesus also “gave the church ample reason to regard the N.T. in the same way.”²³ For example, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would ensure the Apostles words were his words (Jn. 14:26; 15:13). Paul, in 1 Tim. 5:18, describes as “Scripture” both an O.T. verse *and* a saying of Jesus.²⁴ Peter in 2 Pt. 3:15-16, considers Paul’s writings equal with “the other Scriptures.”

Warfield reminds us that Paul claims direct divine inspiration for himself (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:40; cf. also 1 Cor. 2:13; Gal. 1:11-12; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Pet. 3:15-16), and for others (Eph. 3:5)

¹⁸ Moo, *Biblical Authority*, 5.

¹⁹ P. Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2002), 184-185.

²⁰ http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm

²¹ W.C.F. Ch. 1, Sec. 4: Shaw, *An Exposition*, 47; C. Balzer, “Authorship and Authority of Biblical Books,” in C.R Thomas –Editor, *Evangelism and the Reformed Faith* (Sydney: CEC of PCA, 1980), 27.

²² See also: Mt. 15:3, 6, 22:29; Jn. 10:35, 17:17; Rom. 3:2; Heb. 4:12; J. Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 73.

²³ R. L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), xxxi.

²⁴ Milne, *Know the Truth*, 44.

and we have no reason to think that this inspiration is limited to certain texts. Yet Barr suggests that we cannot claim the *whole* N.T. to be inspired and inerrant just on the grounds of individual texts such as 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Pt. 1:20.²⁵

J.M. Boice sees the testimony of Jesus as the greatest proof of all. Jesus not only expounded Scripture as the word of God (e.g. Mk. 14:27; Jn. 10:34),²⁶ he used Scripture to reform belief and practice with those who were misusing it (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; Mt. 5:21ff; 21:13; 22:29-32; Mk 9:12), and he himself submitted to its authority.²⁷ The Christian should do likewise.²⁸

We need Scripture as our rule of faith and life. Much hinges on our view of Scripture as to where we look for authority. Paul tells us in 2 Tim. 3:16 that “all Scripture is God-breathed.” Its *purpose* also points to it being a purer, more reliable source of authority than fallen mankind or any of their experiences or organizational structures, as it is “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3: 16-17).²⁹

Submission to authority:

A Christian, by definition, is someone who has accepted the Lordship of Jesus Christ. “Those who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ are bound to accept the principle of

²⁵ Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 424; J. Barr cited in: J. Begbie, “Who is God? Biblical Inspiration Revisited,” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 43.2 (1992), 269.

²⁶ J. M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, (Leicester: IVP, 1986), 57.

²⁷ J. I. Packer, *‘Fundamentalism’ and the Word of God* (London: IVF, 1963), 72

²⁸ The *W.C.F.* reflects Jesus’ use of Scripture when it says that the Bible as we have it today “is given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.” Lk. 24:27, 44; Rom. 3:2; 2 Pt. 1:21; *W.C.F.* Ch. 1, Sec. 2: Shaw, *An Exposition*, 41.

²⁹ Keesmaat (further against Barr) points out that 2 Tim. 3:16-17 was applied by the early Christian community to early N.T. writings as well as to the O.T.: S. C. Keesmaat, “Biblical Inspiration,” in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (C. Campbell-Jack and G. J. McGrath, Eds; Leicester: IVP, 2006), 114.

biblical authority.”³⁰ They are under Christ’s authority. When we receive Christ by repentance and faith, we must receive the truth about him as the Word of God.³¹ “Authentic faith involves the capacity to trust and obey words, sentences and paragraphs. The very nature of the Christian life itself is at stake.”³²

The New fulfils the Old and forms one Word of God:

The New Testament (N.T.) builds on what God did in the O.T. and now becomes the “covenant charter” for the people of God.³³ The old revelation is the presupposition of the new.³⁴

Our commitment to Jesus as Lord means that we accept him (and the N.T.) as fulfilment of the O.T. (cf. Mt. 5:17; 26:24, 53f; Lk. 24:25-27, 44, 46f; Jn. 5:46), therefore “it would be strange not to join the two together as one.”³⁵

The Christian stands in the same relation to the Bible as the Jew to the O.T., and just as God used the O.T. to govern the Jewish church, likewise Christ uses the O.T. and its fulfilment, the N.T., to govern His church today. In both cases God rules by His written word.³⁶ “To deny the normative authority of Scripture over the Church is to misconceive the nature of Christianity, and, in effect, to deny the Lordship of Christ.”³⁷

³⁰ Packer, *Fundamentalism*, 68.

³¹ Jensen, *Revelation*, 153.

³² Jensen, *Revelation*, 83.

³³ N. T. Wright, “How can the Bible be Authoritative?” *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991) 20.

³⁴ Packer, *Fundamentalism*, 59.

³⁵ Jensen, *Revelation*, 153.

³⁶ Once again, this is important as it shows that God has chosen to reveal things about himself in words. Once a Christian acknowledges this it becomes easier to treat the Bible as authoritative.

³⁷ Packer, *Fundamentalism*, 68.

The evidence confirms the credibility of the Bible:

What sets the Bible apart from other religious books? This would seem a reasonable question and one which should be answerable by reason. There should be certain evidence, as far as natural reason admits, pointing to it being quite unique, set apart from other writings at the very least.

While the Holy Spirit enables belief, the following evidence is confirmatory.³⁸ As Calvin tells us, “those proofs which were not so strong as to produce and rivet a full conviction in our minds, become most appropriate helps.”³⁹

The evidences may compel and induce a high and reverent regard for the Bible, and they include: the testimony of the church; the heavenliness of the subject matter; the efficacy and power of the doctrine; the unity and consent of all the parts;⁴⁰ the longevity of Scripture;⁴¹ the remarkable self-authenticating way in which Scripture interprets Scripture, is perspicuous and is sufficient to be the only source of Christian doctrine (*sola Scriptura*); the representations of God’s character which they reveal; the true nature of its revelation as to man’s state; the full discovery in it of man’s only way of salvation; the overwhelming majesty of its literary style; the manner in which God is at its centre as the one to receive glory, rather than man; and that the whole Bible relates to the one over-arching theme of the salvation of man.⁴²

³⁸ Just as the miracles were evidentiary, i.e. pointing to Jesus being the Christ (Jn. 20:29-31).

³⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 75.

⁴⁰ In spite of being written by varying writers over many centuries.

⁴¹ Scholars and critics come and go every century but the Bible goes on as strong as ever. Its longevity has not been without intense, constant and active opposition too, which in itself adds credibility.

⁴² 2 Pt. 1:19, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Jn. 5:9; 1 Thess. 2:13; *W.C.F.*, Ch. 1, Sec. 4, 5, 9; Shaw, *An Exposition*, 47, 48, 58.

I find it fascinating that new scholars and critics come and go every century, but the Bible goes on as strong as ever. Its longevity has not been without intense, constant and active opposition, which adds credibility.

Others typically listed as *general* defences of the reliability of the Bible would include: the high number of original manuscript copies; early dating of original texts; the power of the truth in defending itself; the effects produced upon individuals, consistently, over such a long period of time; and the effects produced upon societies and whole civilizations.⁴³

We have over two thousand years of time which has revealed the truth of Scripture, but also the power of God in fulfilling its truth. In Acts 1:11 Jesus tells us that the Gospel will go forth to the ends of the earth unhindered. It has done exactly that. No matter the opposition God's word will not fail.

The power of the Bible to change lives and save souls is unquestionable for those hundreds of millions of human beings who experienced this power over the past two thousand years. I am one and I testify to this power. It was the power of God through the Bible which changed me and saved me. I had nothing to do with this miracle. It happened to me because of the grace and mercy of God and is, in part, evidenced by the lasting changes in me since 1998.

Particular proofs from the Old Testament (O.T.) include the antiquity of the books of Moses, their authority, his miracles and prophecies, as well as the predictions of the other prophets and their fulfilled accuracy. Special New Testament (N.T.) proofs include the

⁴³ http://www.apologetics.com/default.jsp?bodycontent=/articles/historical_apologetics/habermas-nt.html; Calvin, *Institutes*, 74.

harmony of the Gospels in their account of heavenly mysteries, the majesty of the writings of John, Peter, and Paul, and the remarkable calling of the Apostles and conversion of Paul.⁴⁴

Christianity is founded on God's actions in history. Therefore, we could expect there would be historical,⁴⁵ archaeological evidence available. “The New Testament fares exceptionally well in terms of its historical reliability, exceeding what is often expected of an ancient text. We have in the New Testament essentially what the authors originally penned, and the texts have been confirmed time and again by various means.”⁴⁶

Additionally, we not only have the witness of millions of believers over two thousand years, we also have the confidence-building specific witness of those saints who shed their blood so boldly to attest to Scripture being God’s Word. “Being transmitted to us with such an earnest, who of us shall not receive it with firm and unshaken conviction?”⁴⁷

Rome exalts Romans:

There is a long history of attempts to undermine the authority of the Bible. For example the Roman Catholic’s *Bishops’ Conferences of England and Wales* teaching document, “The Gift of Scripture,” states that some parts of the Bible are not actually true.⁴⁸ The Vatican views the authority of the Bible as being derived from the church,⁴⁹ and that it is erroneous

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 74.

⁴⁵ Some even suggest that the historical accuracy of the Bible is sufficient to prove the theological assertions: Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 72.

⁴⁶ G. Habermas quoted at:

http://www.apologetics.com/default.jsp?bodycontent=/articles/historical_apologetics/habermas-nt.html

⁴⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 82.

⁴⁸ Examples of passages not to be taken literally include the early chapters of Genesis and the apocalyptic prophecies of Revelation: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_inerrancy#Basis_of_belief

⁴⁹ That the Bible owes its existence and therefore its authority to the church: L. Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 46.

to “read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the Tradition and Magisterium.”⁵⁰ The *Vatican II* document *Dei Verbum* similarly states, “all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church.”⁵¹ The end result of this is that man is elevated in authority above God. This in my mind invalidates it and proves it is from man not from God.

I agree with Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who said, “A very good way of testing any view that you may hold is to ask, ‘Is this view humbling to me and glorifying to God?’ If it is, it is probably right. You will not go far wrong if whatever you are holding is glorifying God and humbling man. But if your view seems to glorify you and to query God, there is no need to argue or to go into details – it is wrong.”

Against Rome: What came first, the foundations or the building?

Commonsense, and Ephesians 2:20, makes it clear that the church is built on the foundations of the apostles and the prophets, and that Jesus himself is the chief cornerstone.

The authority of Scripture cannot come from the church,⁵² because the church was established upon the acceptance of Scripture and Jesus teaching, “without which the church itself would never have existed.”⁵³ The church, like a building, cannot long exist without foundations. The building would soon cease to remain a building, and the church would soon cease to remain a church.

⁵⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Declaration Dominus Iesus on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (Quebec City: Mediaspaul, 2000), 8.

⁵¹ *Dei Verbum* cited 23rd April 2007 at:
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html

⁵² *W.C.F.* Ch. 1, Sec. 5: Shaw, *An Exposition*, 47.

⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 119.

The words are God's; God is the Word:

The words, "The Lord said," and cognate expressions are used 3808 times in the O.T. alone,⁵⁴ signifying the writer is claiming to be giving the very word of God.⁵⁵

As Thomas Watson puts it: Where else could Scriptures come if not from God? Bad men would not employ their minds in inditing such holy lines, whilst good men could not have written it because they would not have counterfeited God's name by writing "Thus saith the Lord."⁵⁶

The apostles were given *words* by Christ (Jn. 17:8), then they were given the Holy Spirit to: teach them all things, remind them of everything Jesus said, and to reveal what is yet to come (Jn. 14:26, 16:13).⁵⁷

Future believers will come to faith through the *message* of the apostles (Jn. 17:20; cf. Acts 6:7; Rom. 10:17)), "full of grace and truth,"⁵⁸ to be communicated by *words*. The words referred to here are words from God, this is how he chose to communicate, and if these words are required for salvation, then the only true faith is "drawn from the doctrine of the apostles, and sure information of that doctrine will be found nowhere else than in their writings."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003), 25.

⁵⁵ N. L. Geisler in: D. Halverson -Ed, *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996), 254.

⁵⁶ Boice, *Foundations*, 58.

⁵⁷ Paul states that believers "reflect" this glory (2 Cor. 3:18) but they cannot be the source of it. J. Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol XVIII* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 185.

⁵⁸ Jn. 1:14; J. Owen, *The Glory of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 5.

⁵⁹ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol XVIII*, 182.

Thus, we can see that the “*apostles’ teaching*,”⁶⁰ becomes a central source of authority. This is also evident in that the first Christians were “anxious to believe and obey what Jesus and His apostles taught,”⁶¹ and they desired this teaching “above everything else.”⁶²

Conclusion:

Jesus is our highest authority (Eph. 5:20-23). If we claim him as Lord, we must submit to his authority. He is the Word of God (Jn. 1:1, 14; Rev. 19:13). His words are living and active (Heb. 4:12), must be heard and obeyed (Mt. 5:21f; 7:24; Jn. 8:31f) and will not pass away (Mk. 13:31). If we reject Him, we reject eternal life (Acts 13:46). “So all who question the divinity of the Bible only condemn themselves.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Out of which flow the more particular fundamentals. M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology- Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1148-1149.

⁶¹ John Stott quoted by K. B. Mulholland in: R. D. Winter and S. C. Hawthorne – Editors, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999), 135.

⁶² D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Authentic Christianity, Vol 1* (Edinburgh; Banner of Truth, 1999), 125.

⁶³ A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 75.

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