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The Inspiration of the Bible

What is the Inspiration of Scripture and why does it matter?

When we talk about the inspiration of Scripture, we wade right into a significant battlefield of modern Christianity. The primary passage addressing this topic in the Bible is 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

“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, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

– 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Believing in the inspiration of Scripture is to believe that it is supernaturally authored by God. While this seems like a straightforward statement, there are many who would oppose the concept of Divine inspiration completely or would condition the statement. Ultimately, when we study the topic of inspiration we must answer the question, “is the Bible accurate, and if so, how accurate is it?”

Satan is highly motivated to undermine respect for the Word of God. By discrediting the Bible, the devil attacks faith, which must be based upon the promises of God. Satan is described in Ephesians 6:16 as an archer who shoots fiery darts of doubt at Christians. Only the shield of faith is able to block and quench his arrows. When we are unconvinced about the perfection of God’s Word, we are vulnerable to the adversary.

Furthermore, the Bible gives us the message of salvation. For someone to be saved, they must hear and exercise faith in the message. If there is no confidence in the accuracy of the message, all hope of salvation is lost. As Hebrews 11:6 reminds us, “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

A little compromise on this topic can be spiritually deadly. If we begin to label portions of Scripture as “uninspired”, where do we draw the lines?¹ What portions of Scripture are inspired and what portions are uninspired? Are there different degrees of inspiration? These initial questions become endless and the result is a horrible mess of confusion and chaos. No possibility for spiritual unity can exist within a church body when there is disagreement over whether the Bible is fundamentally accurate (see Ephesians 4:13-14).

Before we address why we believe Scripture is inspired, it will be fruitful for us to first discuss the essence of what the Bible is, the revelation of God to man.

Revelation – What is it?

Revelation is the intervention of God into human life and history. Read the following accounts. What is the common thread between them?

- Genesis 3:6-9 – Adam and Eve hide from God after sinning

¹ Note that we are not addressing the issue of Bible translations or specific and limited texts that have been included in many versions of the Bible but have been found to be of questionable origin for generations.

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- Genesis 6:8-14 – God guides Noah to build an ark
- Genesis 12:1-3 – God calls Abram to make him a people
- Genesis 28:10-16 – God calls Jacob and promises him a blessing
- Exodus 3:1-5 – God calls Moses

These men did not discover God; He revealed Himself to them. None of these men were seeking God when He called them. In fact, some were running from Him. Jesus is very blunt in His assessment of this topic when He addresses His disciples in John 15:16, and said, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...”

The significance of this fact needs to be highlighted. To see its significance, let’s take a moment to consider the origins of Buddhism, one of the world’s largest religions.

According to the early Buddhist texts, after realizing that meditative jhana was the right path to awakening, but that extreme asceticism didn’t work, Gautama discovered what Buddhists call the Middle Way - a path of moderation away from the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, or the Noble Eightfold Path, as was identified and described by the Buddha in his first discourse, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. In a famous incident, after becoming starved and weakened, he is said to have accepted milk and rice pudding from a village girl named Sujata. Such was his emaciated appearance that she wrongly believed him to be a spirit that had granted her a wish.

Following this incident, Gautama was famously seated under a pipal tree - now known as the Bodhi tree - in Bodhi Gaya, India, when he vowed never to arise until he had found the truth. Kaundinya and four other companions, believing that he had abandoned his search and become undisciplined, left. After a reputed 49 days of meditation, at the age of 35, he is said to have attained Enlightenment. According to some traditions, this occurred in approximately the fifth lunar month, while, according to others, it was in the twelfth month. From that time, Gautama was known to his followers as the Buddha or "Awakened One" ("Buddha" is also sometimes translated as "The Enlightened One").²

Contrast the origin of Buddhism with what we have learned about the origin of Biblical Judaism and Christianity. Read Romans 1:18-25 and 3:11. What conflicts do you see between the direction of mankind the Bible describes and what is described by Buddhism?

The Bible stands in contrast to many other world religions in that it does not declare itself to be a pathway discovered by man, but the way revealed to man by God. Our basic understanding of the depravity of man is at stake in this issue. God didn’t reveal Himself in response to our cries or to offer us an assist; He revealed Himself to a creation that was heading away from Him into further darkness.

B.B. Warfield describes the origins of Biblical revelation clearly, “... the religion of the Bible presents itself as distinctively a revealed religion.”³ Throughout Biblical history, God revealed His purposes and

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddha>

³ Warfield, Benjamin B. (1948). *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, NJ, (Inspiration and Authority) p72.

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plan to individuals, then to a nation (Psalm 147:19-20), and then to the whole world through His church. Revelation is a gift from God, not the result of our efforts or yearning.

The Two Types of Revelation

As we consider the subject of revelation, we must recognize that there are two ways in which God has revealed Himself to mankind: natural revelation and special revelation.

Natural Revelation

What is natural revelation? Natural revelation is the witness of God's creation to His existence and the demonstration of His attributes. This revelation is found in everything that God has made, including man Himself. Read Job 38:1-41. This is the beginning of God's response to Job's complaint about his situation. God asks Job a series of questions that relate to his perspective on natural revelation. If you recall, Job is likely the oldest book of the Bible. Although special revelation existed in some form during Job's day (like God speaking out of a whirlwind), natural revelation was all around him and God expected that Job would be able to perceive some basic truths about Him from nature. What do you learn about God in this passage? Here are some examples as thought-starters.

- God is older than the earth and creation itself (v4-6)
- God is orderly in that He created a world order, structure, and boundaries (v5-11)
- God is brilliant in that He created a world that experiences cycles of day and night through the revolution of the earth (v12-15)
- God's knowledge is much greater than ours because there are so many things that are unattainable to us, but He has clearly made and ordered them (v16-21)
- God is concerned about man's affairs, directing nature in accordance with His desires (v22-23)
- God is concerned about places and situations that are even beyond man's concern (v24-27)
- God is creative in that He has made a way for water to fall and then freeze (v28-30)
- God's power and order extends to the heavens and directs the universe (v31-33)
- God is in control, directing the courses of nature at His will (v34-35)
- God's unique nature is displayed in miniature within man, giving him intelligence (v36)
- God is able to change the state of a situation, bringing moisture to what is barren (v37-38)
- God's care extends to even the "small" things of life... feeding the raven and the lion (v39-41)

Special Revelation

What is special revelation? Special revelation is God's direct communication with mankind. There are many manners in which God has conveyed special revelation to men. Here are a few examples:

- Visions (Gen. 15:1, Num. 12:6, 24:4)
- Dreams (Gen. 20:3, 31:11, 1 Kings 3:15)
- Theophanies - God taking on a human likeness and appearing to men (Gen. 18:1-3, Jos. 5:13-15)
- The direct control of the Holy Spirit (Num. 11:25-26, 1 Sam. 10:6-11)

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- Songs and works of poetry (Ex. 15:20-21, Prov. 1:1-6)
- Study of prophetic writings and historical works (Dan. 9:1-3)
- Prayer (Dan. 9:4-6ff, 2 Chron. 6:12-14ff)
- A disembodied hand appearing and writing on a wall (Dan. 5:5-6)
- Historical accounts (Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-5)
- Letters written to individuals or churches (Phil. 1:1, 2 Peter 3:15-16)
- The collection of various forms of special revelation in a book (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- God Himself coming in the flesh and appearing to men (John 1:14-18, Heb. 1:1-2)

As we compare and contrast natural and special revelation there are a number of good questions we could ask. Why are there two types of revelation? Is there a different purpose for each? Are they repetitive? There are also several questions we could ask about each type of revelation, for example why are there so many different types of special revelation? Many of these questions are addressed in the handouts used for class discussion.

Complete the Inspiration of the Bible - Handout One

Concerning the distinction between the messages of natural and special revelation, Bible scholar, Dr. B.B. Warfield said, "The one is adapted to man as man; the other to man as sinner; and since man, on becoming sinner, has not ceased to be man, but has only acquired new needs requiring additional provisions to bring him to the end of his existence, so the revelation directed to man as sinner does not supersede that given to man as man, but supplements it with these provisions for his attainment, in his new condition of blindness, helplessness and guilt induced by sin, of the end of his being."⁴

Examining Three Modes of Special Revelation

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;"

- Hebrews 1:1-3

In the last section of this lesson we demonstrated that there were many different ways in which God communicated special revelation to mankind. Dr. Warfield divides special revelation into three types: (1) external manifestation, (2) internal suggestion (direction), and (3) concursive operation. I believe a fourth type is also warranted: (4) the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

We will begin by defining and discussing the first three types of revelation and its application to our interaction with God today. We will separately address the fourth type of revelation.

⁴ *Inspiration and Authority*, p74.

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External Manifestation – the giving of revelation from a source outside of man Himself (i.e. someone or something else is talking to him).

Many of the examples we have before mentioned qualify as external revelation, such as a theophany, an angel, the talking of a donkey, or the writing of a hand upon a wall.

Internal Direction – the giving of revelation internally to man, typically by means of a vision or a dream.

Numbers 12:6-8 is a key passage that distinguishes external manifestation from internal suggestion as two distinct modes of revelation. We find that the Lord promised to speak to prophets of Israel by visions and dreams but said that he would speak to Moses differently, by direct conversation and by appearing to him in a likeness (similitude). In both cases, the one receiving the revelation from God was able to discern that the message was clearly and completely from God. They were only the vessels that received the message and passed it along.

Peter describes the process of internal direction in 2 Peter 1:20-21, when he says, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The word “moved” here in the KJV means to be borne or carried. The internal direction the prophets received was more than a prompting or a burden that we might more typically relate to, but rather specific words were given to them so that they knew exactly what to say and when to say it.

Jeremiah described it as the Lord putting forth his hand, touching his mouth and saying, “Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth”. (Jer. 1:9). Ezekiel said that the Lord told him, “... Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.” (Ez. 3:4)

Concursive Operation – the word concursive is not common today and seems to be derived from the word, “concourse”, which is a moving, flowing, or running together of two or more different things. Concursive operation refers to the joint operation of man and God in the process of revelation.

“We are to think of the Spirit’s inspiring activity, and, for that matter, of all His regular operations in and upon human personality, as (to use an old but valuable term) *concursive*; that is, as exercised in, through, and by means of the writers’ own activity, in such a way that their thinking and writing was *both* free and spontaneous on their part *and* divinely elicited and controlled, and what they wrote was not only their own work but also God’s work.”⁵

The important thing to remember about this type of revelation is that the finished product is entirely perfect and inspired. It is not a lesser degree of revelation.

A prime example of concursive operation is Paul’s letters (epistles), which comprise much of the New Testament. Paul wrote many letters during his missionary journeys and while imprisoned. Only a few of letters have remained for us to read and are recognized as inspired by God. Some of his other

⁵ Packer, James I. (1958), *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, p80.

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correspondence are referenced in his letters that are divinely inspired and included in Scripture (see 1 Cor. 5:9, and 2 Cor. 10:10). Did Paul always know when a letter was inspired and when it was not? This is a hard question to definitively answer. What about other biblical writers who wrote poetry, proverbs, songs, and compilations of history? Did they always know that what they just completed was divinely inspired? No doubt, they felt the compulsion to write and the enabling of God to do so. Yet, this type of revelation stands distinct in that there is no indication that these writers received internal direction in which they simply served as scribes while the Holy Spirit directed words. Their thinking, reasoning, creativity and personality remained engaged but were elevated by God so that the result was beyond their capabilities and resulted in the perfect work of God.

Perhaps another example of concursive operation is our future state of glory. Do you get the impression from Scripture that you will be possessed by the Spirit of God in eternity, such that every word and action that comes from you will be out of your control? I don't have such an impression. I get the sense that we will remain ourselves, but will be freed from sin and divinely enabled such that all our thoughts, words, and actions will be energized by God and will be perfect (Rom. 8:21). The result will be the work of God, but somehow we will be in the mix too. We will know that He is with us and in us, but we will also be participating freely with Him. In a sense, this is concursive operation!

The Three Modes of Special Revelation in Biblical History

BB Warfield said, "There is no age in the history of the religion of the Bible, from that of Moses to that of Christ and His apostles, in which all these modes of revelation do not find place. One or another may seem particularly characteristic of this age or of that; but they all occur in every age. And they occur side by side, broadly speaking, on the same level."⁶

Consider some of the following examples of the different types of revelation.

1. External Manifestation

Old Testament – God appearing to Abraham in his tent (Gen. 18); Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2-5); Balaam's donkey speaking to him (Num. 22:28-30); the angel Gabriel speaking to Daniel (Dan. 9:21-22).

New Testament – An angel appearing to Zacharias (Luke 1:11-13), Mary (Luke 1:26-28), and the Apostles (Acts 1:9-11).

2. Internal Direction

Old Testament – Isaiah (Is. 1:1); Zechariah (Zech. 1:1-3), and about any of pronouncements of the prophets

New Testament – Agabus (Acts 21:10-11); Ananias receives a vision (Acts 9:10-16); Peter receives a vision from God (Acts 10:9-16).

⁶ *Inspiration and Authority*, p83.

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3. Concursive Operation

Old Testament – The Book of Job; Jacob blessing his sons before death (Gen. 49); Psalm 62; Psalm 88; at least some of Jeremiah’s lamentations

New Testament – The New Testament letters (epistles); 1 Thessalonians written by Paul, Silas, and Timothy (1:1-2, 3:1-2); A letter written to churches by the apostles and elders (Acts 15:23-29); and the decision to ordain deacons led by the Apostles but approved and carried out by the whole church (Acts 6:1-6).

What about Special Revelation Today?

This is a subject worthy of much study, prayer, and thought. At this time, we will be very cursory and just hit the high points. Does God still communicate with us today by special revelation? The answer is affirmatively yes! All true Christians should at least agree that we have the Word of God as our primary and authoritative external manifestation of God’s special revelation. In fact, we are blessed above many other ages of history to have this completed volume of God’s truth (1 Cor. 10:11, 1 Pet. 1:12).

We are also told that we have the Spirit as a witness to us (Rom. 8:9, 14-16). This witness is internal to us and manifests Himself in many different ways. Because we are sinful and live in a fallen world with an active adversary, we must make an important distinction in the type of special revelation we receive both internally and externally. Every form of “revelation” we may receive **MUST** be tested against the Word of God, no matter whether it is an external manifestation (Gal. 1:8), an internal direction (1 Thess. 5:19-22), or what we perceive to be a concursive operation (1 John 4:1). Any true revelation will complement God’s Word and will neither annul it nor render it unnecessary.

Complete the Inspiration of the Bible - Handout Two

Examining the Final Mode of Revelation: The Incarnation

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;”

- Hebrews 1:1-3

We have already described the appearance of God in the burning bush or at Abraham’s tent as an external manifestation. What is different about the incarnation of Jesus Christ? First, notice that the Scripture distinguishes the incarnation from the diverse manners in which God had

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The word incarnation describes Jesus, the Son of God, becoming human flesh. The incarnation occurred within the womb of Mary when she was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:35) Prior to the incarnation, Jesus existed eternally as a spirit, a member of the Godhead. (John 8:58) Scriptures teach us that the incarnation was not a temporary event, but an eternal joining of both God and man together in one. (Luke 24:36-43)

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previously revealed Himself to mankind. One primary reason I believe the incarnation is distinguished is because it is not a passing figure like the burning bush, the man at the door of Abraham's tent, or the Captain of the Lord's army. This is a body that Christ, who is God, will retain for eternity. (Luke 24:36-43). Christ's humanity was more than a cover; it is part of the full revelation of Himself... not a weakness or limitation. Christ's eternal humanity has in no way limited His divine powers.

Before we go further, consider the context of Jesus' day. John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets (Matt. 11:13). He spoke and acted under the authority of God with clarity and boldness (Matt. 3:1-6, 21:24-26). Jesus also stated that John was the greatest man ever born from a woman (Matt. 11:11). Although Israel was without a prophet for 400 years, God saved the best for last! Yet, John said, "...He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals..." (Matt. 3:11)

In what ways did the revelation of Christ surpass the revelation of prophecy, even the greatest prophet that ever walked the earth? Consider the following points:

- To a degree, the revelation of God through Christ was unmediated, meaning that hearing and seeing Christ is the same as hearing and seeing the Father (Matt. 1:23, John 1:17-18, 14:8-9).
- He was given the Spirit without measure (John 1:32-34, 3:34-35) compared to other means of revelation in which the individual was only given a portion of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11, 1 Pet. 1:10-12).
- He taught with a power that none had ever witnessed, allowing Him both to authoritatively expand upon and interpret prior revelation and provide new revelation (Matt. 5:17-22, 7:28-29).
- His behavior set the standard for righteousness and carried equal authority to His words (Matt. 27:54, John 13:34), unlike any prophet who ever came before Him (1 Kings 19:2-4).
- His incarnation allowed a deeper revelation of the character of God than was previously possible (Rom. 5:6-10 – note that in Rom. 5:8, the word "commendeth" in the KJV means "displayed").
- Jesus did not come as a message-bearer but as the message, the object of faith and worship (John 3:36, 14:6, 20:27-28, 24:52); no other prophet or preacher compared (Dan. 2:30, Acts 10:25, 14:15).
- The incarnation is an eternal mode of revelation, unlike all others (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

"Here [in Christ] revelation as act and revelation as word come together. Jesus both spoke the Father's word and demonstrated the Father's attributes. He was the most complete revelation of God, because he was God. John could make the amazing statement, 'That which was from the beginning... we have heard... we have seen with our eyes... we have looked upon and touched with our hands' (1 John 1:1). And Jesus could say, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9)."⁷

⁷ Erickson, Millard (2001). *Introducing Christine Doctrine*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, p57.

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Inspiration – Overview

The issue of inspiration and inerrancy asks the question, “is the Bible accurate, and if so, how accurate?” Satan’s original means of undermining God was to ask Eve, “has God said...” (Gen. 3:1) Even today, this question is often asked by those seeking to undermine and distort God’s Word.

We will begin by discussing the degree of inspiration of Scripture, meaning to what extent is it inspired? Are there general principles that are inspired, certain thoughts or passages, or is every word truly the Word of God? We will then look both internally at Scripture itself and externally at historical and theological circumstances that support our premise: every Word of God is inspired by God. To some extent, we will provide a general defense of the Bible as God’s Word with our study of the degree of inspiration.

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The belief that every word of Scripture is inspired by God is called, “verbal plenary” inspiration.

Verbal – relating to or in the form of words.

Plenary – without qualification, absolute.

Therefore, verbal plenary inspiration asserts that EVERY word in Scripture is inspired by God, without qualification.

Complete the Inspiration of the Bible - Handout Three

Inspiration – To What Degree?

We established that the Bible claims to be inspired. Yet, do the writers of Scripture believe every word of Scripture to be inspired, or are the general concepts inspired? If so, how can we know and demonstrate this? Your belief on this doctrine matters because it is foundational to what translation method you support and how you use various versions of the Bible available in our native tongue.

Defense 1: The Character and Nature of God

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.”

Psalms 12:6

The Scriptures speak of themselves as the revelation of the One True God; He is the One who knows all things, possesses all power, fills all things, and reigns over the universe and all within it. The basis of our belief in the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture begins with the very character of God. He is the inventor of language (Gen. 1:3, 11:7-8) and is called the living Word (John 1:1-2). All communication between God and man with mankind begins with Him (Gen. 3:8-9, Rom. 3:11). The Word of God is a reflection of His character because He is the One who spoke it. Therefore, it:

- Is true (Psalm 119:160)
- Is faithful (Heb. 6:18)
- Contains spiritual power (Heb. 4:12)
- Will endure forever (1 Pet. 1:24-25)

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While it is true that God's revelation in the Bible has passed through imperfect people, God has demonstrated on many occasions that His power to communicate clearly and accurately is not limited by the sins or imperfections of men (Num. 22:22-30, 36-38, John 11:49-52). In fact, He is glorified by demonstrating His perfection despite our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). When we focus on human frailty, our confidence in inspiration may falter; we must look beyond the weakness of the scroll to the Divine hand yielding the instrument for our confidence in the inspiration of Scripture.

Defense 2: The Understanding of the Writers & Interpreters of Scripture

The writers of Scripture, largely were aware that they were not speaking of their own power but by the power of One much higher than them (2 Sam. 23:1-2). Consider the words of the Apostle Peter:

"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

2 Peter 1:20-21

Peter speaks explicitly of scriptural prophetic writings here. His view of the degree of inspiration was clear: Scriptures were completely inspired (in a verbal plenary) by God. Notice that his view of inspiration dictated his interpretation of Scripture. Peter was not a fan of Bible studies in which people went around the room and asked what the Scripture meant to them. The question is, what does God intend to communicate?

Going further, let's look at two examples of Scriptural interpretation from within Scripture, one from each testament. Read each of these passages and notice how they are interpreted.

1. The Exile of the Jews in Babylon: Jeremiah 25:11-12 and Daniel 9:2-3.
Daniel interpreted the prophet of Jeremiah literally when God told him that Israel would remain under Babylonian captivity for 70 years. Daniel believed that these specific words were inspired.
2. The Raising up of an Heir to Abraham: Genesis 22:17-18 and Galatians 3:16.
Paul makes a case for Christ being the true heir of the promises of Abraham based on not just the word chosen by God in Genesis, but upon the fact that it is singular and not plural.

Thus, we find both Old Testament and New Testament examples of godly men who believed in the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture.

Defense 3: The Authority of Jesus Christ

There is yet a greater authority, Jesus Christ Himself. How did Jesus view the inspiration of Scripture?

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle (the smallest letter or stroke) shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

Matthew 5:17-18

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“Jesus answered them, “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? “If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),”

John 10:34–35

Jesus was far from silent on His view of Scripture. He viewed every word as inspired, important, precious, and faithful. Every word was meaningful and would be upheld and fulfilled. Keep in mind, Jesus is the Living Word. His view should be the end of the discussion among those who hold faith in Him.

Defense 4: The Intent of Scriptures

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17

This passage not only speaks of all Scripture as inspired by God, but also states that it is a foundation for our entire life. All of our beliefs and actions should be informed and transformed by the Word of God, so that we are adequate and equipped for every good work. The use of the Word in this way is incompatible with any other view of inspiration. If we cannot trust every book, chapter, verse, and word of the Bible to have meaning, how can we build our life upon it reliably? How can we distinguish faith in God from presumption?

Jesus made it clear that those who heard His teachings and built their life upon them were building upon a rock; those who did not were building on sand (Matt. 7:24-27). If you cannot have faith in God’s Word, how do you find the rock upon which to build?

The earliest recorded Christian creed is likely found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. Paul simply and succinctly explains the foundations of the faith, a predecessor document to our Declaration of Faith (aka Articles of Faith). It is noteworthy that twice in this statement, he uses the phrase, “according to the Scriptures”. Paul was making clear that the Scriptures are authoritative when it comes to our beliefs. This is only possible if the words of Scripture can be trusted as inspired.

The very success of Christianity is dependent upon having a clear and firm foundation of words. In Romans 10:17, Paul said, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” The salvation of souls is dependent upon having a clear understanding of the words of Christ, His promises to those who place their faith in Him. If the words of Scripture are not trustworthy, how can anyone have faith in the words of Christ passed along to us in the Bible?

didyouknow?

creed \ 'krēd\ *noun*

from the Latin *credo* (first word of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds), from *credere* to believe, trust, entrust;

- 1** : a brief authoritative formula of religious belief
- 2** : a set of fundamental beliefs
also : a guiding principle

Taken from Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Ed.

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If we were to step back from Scripture and look at it from the very first verses recorded, to the very last verses, we would see a startling emphasis on the power, clarity, and endurance of God's Word.

"Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light."

Genesis 1:3

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book."

Revelation 22:18-19

First, notice the power in the very words of God. It is the origin of all that exists, save God Himself. This power is echoed throughout all of Scriptures as the words of God are described as living (Heb. 4:12). This power is not contained within the use of specific words (i.e. the power of using magical words), but within a very specific message from God communicated to us in carefully chosen words. The communication of the message is so important that the last book of the Bible ends with a curse to those who would add to or take away from the words written therein, thereby altering the message. While the immediate application of that passage is to the book of Revelation itself, I do not believe it is an error to apply it broadly to the whole of the Bible, upon which God has placed His seal.

Defense 5: The Perception of Historical Jews and Christians

If we are to start looking outside of Scripture, we will find that many devoted followers of Judaism and Christianity have held the verbal plenary view of inspiration. From 500 to 1000 A.D., a certain sect of Jews called the Masoretes became the gold standard for preserving the text of the Old Testament.

"Around the end of the fifth century, a fourth group of scribes called the Masorete inherited the scribal traditions and carried on the work of preserving the text. Their diligent labors from about 500 to 1000 helped to preserve the Hebrews text that we have, the Masoretic Text. These scribes were extremely careful and treated the text with great reverence. They made meticulous notes regarding the text, from recording the number of letters used in the book to indicating the middle letter of a book; as H. Wheeler Robinson of Oxford University observes: 'Everything countable seems to be counted.'"⁸

If we were to study the perspective of early Christians, we would find the same thing. Polycarp, believed to be a disciple of the Apostle John, wrote a letter to the Church at Philippi.⁹ Much of the letter consists of direct quotations or paraphrases of other New and Old Testament passages. It is obvious that a high view of Scripture existed among early Christians.

⁸ Wegner, Paul D. (1999). *The Journey from Texts to Translations, The Origin and Development of the Bible*,. Grand Rapids: Baker Books. (JTT) p170.

⁹ As of the date of the writing of this lesson, an English translation of [Polycarp to the Philippians](http://www.supakoo.com/rick/PolycarpToPhilippians-2010-01-05.pdf) can be found at: <http://www.supakoo.com/rick/PolycarpToPhilippians-2010-01-05.pdf>

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Defense 6: The Preservation of the Word

Another evidence of the inspiration of the Bible is its endurance over the millennia. If God wrote a book and intended it to be available to all mankind, we would expect Him to preserve it. That is exactly what He has done in the face of innumerable obstacles constructed by men and Satan.

“We do not have the original manuscripts, called ‘autographs,’ of any book of the Bible. These were lost, mostly during the persecution of the early church. Roman emperors felt that if they could destroy the church’s literature, they could eliminate Christianity. Others were lost due to ‘wear and tear.’ The fact that some early churches did not keep these autographs, but made copies and used them, demonstrates that they were more concerned with the message, than the vehicle of the message. God in His wisdom allowed the autographs to vanish. Like the relics from the Holy Land, they would have been venerated and worshipped. Surely ‘Bibliolatry’ (worship of the Bible) would have replaced worship of God.”¹⁰

We can see divine purpose in the means by which God has preserved His Word. By allowing the originals to be lost but spreading numerous copies around, the message was preserved (see Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:27, and Revelation 1:11).¹¹ We also see a distinction in the evidence we have for the accuracy of the New Testament when compared with other ancient writings. Consider the table below and notice both the time span between the original writings and the age of the earliest copies that now exist and the number of copies available. What do you notice about the New Testament?

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span (years)	No. of Copies
Caesar	100-44 BC	900 AD	1,000	10
Plato (<i>Tetralogies</i>)	427-347 BC	900 AD	1,200	7
Tacitus (<i>Annals</i>)	100 AD	1,100 AD	1,000	20
Pliny the Younger (<i>History</i>)	61-113 AD	850 AD	750	7
Thucydides (<i>History</i>)	460-400 BC	900 AD	1,300	8
Suetonius (<i>De Vita Caesarum</i>)	75-160 AD	950 AD	800	8
Herodotus (<i>History</i>)	480-425 BC	875 AD	1,300	8
Sophocles	496-406 BC	600 AD	1,000	100
Cattullus	54 BC	1,550 AD	1,550	3
Euripedes	480-406 BC	1,100 AD	1,100	9
Demonsthenes	383-322 BC	1,100 AD	1,100	200
Aristotle	384-322 BC	1,100 AD	1,100	5
God (<i>New Testament</i>)	35-90 AD	125-200 AD	35-165	18,000*

* This includes 5,000 Greek Manuscripts and 13,000 manuscript copies of portions of the N.T.¹²

¹⁰ Towns, Elmer L., (2002). *Theology for Today*, Wadsworth/Thomas Learning, Belmont, CA, p74 (TFT)

¹¹ It is likely that copies were required from the very beginning so that many would have access to them.

¹² This table is reconstructed from TFT, p74

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The Greek manuscripts and copies of portions of Scripture are separate and apart from quotations of Scripture in other writings. When you look at the writings of ancient Christians between the time of the Apostles and around 325 A.D., we find myriad quotations of Scripture that give us insight into the reading of the texts they were using at that time (either the originals or early copies of the originals).

“A brief inventory at this point will reveal that there were some thirty-two thousand citations of the New Testament prior to the time of the Council of Nicea (325). Those thirty-two thousand quotations are by no means exhaustive, and they do not even include the fourth-century writers. Just adding the number of references used by one other writer, Eusebius, who flourished prior to and contemporary with the Council at Nicea, will bring the total citations of the New Testament to over thirty-six thousand. Hence, prior to the period of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, there is overwhelming evidence in the manifold witness of the outstanding church Fathers to the text of the New Testament.”¹³

Defense 7: Harmony Across the Ages

It is uncontested that the Bible is assembled from various authors writing over a span of approximately 2,000 years. There is a harmony of themes and messages that is unsurpassed across the pages of this book. From paradise lost in Genesis to paradise regained in Revelation, we see a story arc spanning the ages that follows lines of clear continuity. We can each testify that over the course of our life, we have grown and changed our thoughts and opinions on many issues. If I were to sit down and read my opinions on a specific issue from 10 years ago, it is likely they may have changed or been refined. In short, I would probably find some way to change what I wrote, either altering the content or clarifying the communication. How much greater would the chance for change be if another person were to write on the same issue a hundred or even a thousand years later?

Not so with Scripture! The writers of Scripture frequently quote one another as solid authorities, providing insight consistent with prior revelation. A later writer may reveal more to us on a subject than we knew before, but it will complement, not conflict with prior revelation. Such consistency indicates that each of these writers over the years were tied to something solid that has remain unchanged from generation to generation. What else but God?

“For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

Malachi 3:6

Defense 8: The Brutal Honesty of Scripture

Another unique characteristic of Scripture is its brutal honesty. Many of the Biblical writers share open and honest insight into the worst moments of their life. Abraham’s lack of faith (Gen. 12:10-20, 20:1-

¹³ Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1986). *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded., p. 427). Chicago: Moody Press.

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18), Moses' wrath (Num. 20:11), Elijah's suicidal thoughts (1 Kings 19:1-4), David's adultery and murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 11-12, Psalm 51), Peter's denial of Christ (Mark 14:30-72)... the list could go on and on. Great men and women of faith are often portrayed as weak, fallible people who are not sustained by their commitment, but by the grace and power of God. We find this pattern from Genesis to Revelation. This is not consistent with the way authors typically portray themselves. Consider King Nebuchadnezzar's open letter to the inhabitants of the world, included as Chapter 4 in Daniel.

"Nebuchadnezzar the king to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language that live in all the earth: "May your peace abound! "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. "How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom And His dominion is from generation to generation." ...

""But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' "At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Daniel 4:1-3, 34-37

Who else but God could prompt the greatest king in the world at that time to write such a letter? When God's hand is writing through a man, the result is truth... even when it is inconvenient.

Lewis Chafer said it best, "It [the Bible] is not such a book as man would write if he could, or could write if he would."

Defense 9: Unique Message of the Gospel

When comparing the message of the Bible to other world religions (and even false versions of Christianity), we find a startling distinction. Let's explore this for a moment.

- Hinduism – Espouses reincarnation and the concept of karma, meaning what goes around comes around. If you are bad in this life, you will be reincarnated as a less-privileged human or some animal. If you are good in this life, you will be reincarnated as a higher-privileged human.
- Buddhism – Denies the existence of God and teaches that life and death are a type of illusion. Buddhists also embrace the concept of karma. The greatest achievement of a Buddhist is to escape the karmic world and reach a state of nirvana, or nothingness. Nirvana is reached by meditation, detaching yourself from the world and your thoughts and joining yourself to nothingness.
- Islam – Acknowledges sin and Hell and the existence of one true God. The hope for sinful man is to escape God's wrath by doing righteous deeds, as described in their holy book, the Koran.

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Ultimately, man's good deeds and adherence to the Koran will be weighed against their bad deeds, either granting you admittance to Islamic heaven or Hell.

- Mormonism – Recognizes the Bible as God's Word, but also includes the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrines and the Covenants as holy books. Mormons believe in Christ, God, heaven, and hell. Mormonism requires faith in their interpretation of Scripture, but believes that it is deficient apart from works to achieve the highest levels of glory (becoming god of your own realm).
- Catholicism – Recognizes the Bible as God's Word, but also grants certain writings of the Catholic Church equal authority. Catholicism requires a degree of faith in Christ, but believes it must be augmented by specific works to be effective. Catholicism provides no assurance of salvation to its followers because it is ultimately dependent upon their obedience.

Now let us compare these religions with the simple message of the Bible. Even though there are hundreds of world religions, there really are only two: true religion and false. We would expect that false religion finds its origin in Satan, who produces the "doctrines of demons" that lead men astray (1 Timothy 4:1). Satan was not created as an evil being; he was an angel of light. What was the origin of his fall? Consider this passage from Isaiah.

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit."

Isaiah 14:12-15

When we read through this passage, we find a theme. It is the same theme found in the other world religions described above. False Christianity and false religions typically share one thing in common: they are based upon human achievement.... I will. Throughout Scripture, we see a consistent theme that man does not come to God by human works (I will) but by faith in the work of God (He will). Does that ring true with your testimony of salvation? You didn't find peace with God by anything you did, but because of what He did. There really are only two religions in the world: the religion of human achievement and the religion of Divine achievement. True Christianity is the latter. The message of the gospel is unique among all other messages

Defense 10: Fulfilled Prophecy

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

Isaiah 46:9-10

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The Bible is unique from many other works of literature in that it is strongly prophetic, foretelling the events of the future, sometimes with great specificity. Many of the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament were fulfilled within the Old Testament time period or within the New Testament. Yet, there are also prophecies about events yet to occur.

It isn't so unusual to read a book that predicts the future, often based upon current trends. Economists specialize in this line of work. Yet, the Bible is prophetic in a completely different way. The prophecies of the Scripture are not built upon current trends or what is predictable based upon human observation. The prophecies of Scripture are the decrees of God, which He promises to bring to pass regardless of the obstacles and resistance He encounters.

"I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass... I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them."

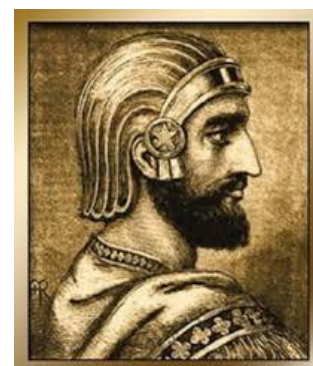
Isaiah 48:3,5

We learn from Isaiah that part of the purpose of prophecy is to convince men of the reality of God's knowledge and power when His decrees are fulfilled. This is one of reason God takes prophecy so seriously. Consider the warning of Deuteronomy 18:20-22. Someone speaking prophetically on behalf of the Lord must be true or they were to be killed. God wants His ambassadors (those speaking for Him) to be trustworthy because His promises are trustworthy.

Here are some examples that demonstrate the amazing power of God's prophetic utterances.

Cyrus the Great

Isaiah 44:28-45:4 was written by Isaiah around 700 B.C. This prophecy predicts that a King by the name of Cyrus will be responsible for the rebuilding of the City of Jerusalem and of its temple. When Isaiah recorded this prophecy, the City of Jerusalem was populated and in good order. The city would stand for over 100 years more years before being destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. Cyrus' subsequent decree to rebuild the temple was almost 200 years after the prophecy of Isaiah.



Understand, a prophesy providing a name (Cyrus) and an event (rebuilding a temple and wall) were provided 100 years before the need was present (temple destroyed) and almost 200 years before it happened. This would be akin to finding an American letter dated from 1814, predicting that we would have a black president whose name would be Barack Obama and that he would enact massive health care legislation. People would have thought it impossible to have a black president, much less embrace his name or the idea of federal health care laws. The Jews would have felt much the same way about the idea of having their temple destroyed and rebuilt. Yet what happened? Read Ezra 1:1-8.

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The Prophecies of the Messiah

“The Old Testament, written over a one-thousand year period, contains nearly three hundred references to the coming Messiah. All of these were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and they establish a solid confirmation of His credentials as the Messiah.”¹⁴ [Emphasis added]

We know that the newest passage in the Old Testament was recorded at least 400 years before the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Most of the prophecies of Jesus were well over that age, some dating back as far as the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). In Matthew 5:17, Jesus confirmed the importance of Old Testament prophecy and of His responsibility to fulfill every single prophecy about Him, many of which were beyond His control. Let us briefly consider eight specific Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Old Testament Reference	Prophecy	New Testament Fulfillment
Micah 5:2	Born in Bethlehem	Matthew 2:1
Jeremiah 23:5	Born of King David’s Lineage	Matthew 1:1
Isaiah 35:5-6	Had a Miraculous Ministry	Matthew 11:1-6
Zechariah 9:9	Rode a Donkey into Jerusalem	Luke 19:35-37
Zechariah 11:12	Sold for 30 pieces of Silver	Matthew 26:15
Psalms 34:20	His bones were not broken in Death	John 19:32-33
Isaiah 53:9	Buried in a Rich Man’s Tomb	Matthew 27:57-60
Psalms 16:10	Resurrection	Acts 2:29-32

Although there are almost 300 prophecies of Christ, a mathematician calculated the odds of an individual being born and fulfilling at least eight of the major prophecies made about Christ. This is what he learned.

“We find that the chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} [(10 to the 17th power). That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (17 zeros after the one)... [If] we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas... [t]hey will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting one right one?”¹⁵

The chance of picking the correct coin illustrates the probability of one man being born and fulfilling eight of the major prophecies about Jesus. What is the likelihood of someone being born and fulfilling the almost 300 prophecies?

¹⁴ McDowell, Josh (1999). *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, p164 (New Evidence)

¹⁵ *New Evidence*, p193

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Defense 11: Transcultural Appeal of the Message

When God chose a people to which He would reveal Himself and His Word, His aim was always much larger than just the physical descendants of Abraham... He was aiming for the whole world (Gen. 22:18). While the Jews had an advantage, having been entrusted with the oracles (words) of God (Rom. 3:2), they were not chosen based upon their superiority, but as a choice made by God's grace (Deut. 7:7-8). Throughout Old Testament times, God longed for international worship (Mal. 1:11) and from time to time, he brought strangers in to the nation of Israel as a display of that grace (i.e. Rahab and Ruth).

The marching orders left by Christ required a culturally expansive view of ministry (Matt. 28:18-19). The very last words of Christ before His ascension were:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Acts 1:8

The visible manifestation of the empowering of the Holy Spirit on the early church was a flaming tongue of fire, enabling them to speak God's Word in native languages (Acts 2:3-11). Sure enough the Word went forth through the preaching of the gospel throughout the known world and the work continues today. As we mentioned before, no book is as widely translated as the Bible.

In November 2012, Wycliffe presented statistics that said that scripture existed in 2,798 languages out of the 6,877 languages currently known to be in use in the world. There are currently 518 languages with a full Bible translation. At least 4.9 billion people (70% of the world's population) have access to a full Bible translation in their first language. A further 595 million (8.5% of the world's population), representing 1,275 languages, have at least the New Testament in their first language. Also, 1,005 languages (almost 20% of the world's population) have at least one portion of scripture (one or more books) available in their first language. By September 2012, personnel from participating bible translation organizations were involved in 2075 active language programs.¹⁶

Not only is the message going forth to the corners of the world, but the message finds relevance in every culture. The problem of sin is universal and the solution we find in Christ is for every man (1 John 2:2). Indeed, the scene of ultimate triumph in heaven we see is of multi-cultural diversity. The barriers erected by language, skin color, and culture are eradicated and all find unity in Christ alone.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Revelation 7:9-10

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_translations as of May 8, 2014

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Defense 12: The Power of the Word in You

What if I share all of these truths with someone and I still cannot get them to take God's Word seriously or even read it? The final defense and the most personal and powerful witnesses, is the power of the Word demonstrated in your life and the life of other believers. Scriptures are more than words on a page; they are alive, active, and powerful.

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Hebrews 4:12

You have most likely heard the saying, "you may be the only Bible someone ever reads". Scriptures support this sentiment. 1 Peter 3:1-2 instructs wives to be submissive to their husbands so that if they do not obey the Word, they might be won over "without the Word" by the behavior of their wives. It is clear that the power of the Word active in the life of a believer can be spiritually translated to open up the heart of an individual to receive the Word, even if they were previously opposed to it.

Later in the chapter, Peter continues the same sentiment when he instructs us to always be ready to give an answer for the reason of our hope with a spirit of meekness and respect, having a clear conscience. Even if they say evil things about us, they will be put to shame by the fact that we have a life that is transformed by the Word (1 Peter 3:15-16). You see, the Word alive in our life has the power to affect others, even if they are not initially willing to even pick up a Bible. This proof is external to the Word, but it is filled with the power of the Word. Above learning arguments to convince the naysayers, we should be seeking to take in God's living Word and let it transform our lives. This will do more to challenge, convince, and convert others than all of the arguments we can communicate.