

CBC Sunday School
Bibliology: What the Bible Says About Itself
September 19, 2021

“Scripture contains a doctrine of Scripture.”
John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 102

I. Table Discussion

Discuss the following paragraph, from the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 1, section 5:

“We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.”

-See John 16:13-14 and 1 Corinthians 2:10-12

II. The Bible Has a Consistent View of Itself as the Word of God

- A. The prophetic “Thus says the LORD” appears hundreds of times.
 - Each occurrence is a claim to have a message direct from God, repeating His words.
 - Jeremiah 1:9
 - Any prophet speaking anything other than God’s very words was to be declared as false.
 - Numbers 22:38; Deuteronomy 18:18-20; Jeremiah 14:14-15
- B. God is often said to speak directly through the prophets, their words being God’s words.
 - 1 Kings 14:18; 16:12; Zechariah 7:7, 12
 - See also Hebrews 1:1
 - Thus, in the OT are many written words which are claimed to be divine words.
- C. The NT Apostles unanimously hold a high view of OT Scripture.
 - Paul sees the sum total of the Old Testament as God’s words.
 - 2 Timothy 3:1-17
 - graphe* – word for “Scripture” in NT; used 51 times; in every occurrence referring to OT
 - So, the OT is seen as a word “breathed-out” by God; i.e. His word.
 - Paul refers to the Scriptures as “the oracles of God.” Romans 3:2
 - Paul sees the Scriptures as God’s very voice, speaking and preaching.
 - Galatians 3:8.

- Peter views the OT as not merely a human product, but as speech from God.
 - 2 Peter 1:21
- James warns against speaking evil against or judging the law in your actions.
 - James 4:11-12
- D. Various NT quotations of OT speak of the words quoted as coming from God Himself.
 - See Matthew 1:22 (quoting Isaiah 7:14); Acts 1:16 (quoting Psalms 69 and 109); Acts 2:16-17 (quoting Joel 2:28-32, Peter says this is God's declaration)
 - See Acts 3:18, which summarizes "all of the prophets" as God's foretelling speech.
 - Also, Luke 1:70; 24:25; John 5:45-47; Acts 4:25; 13:47; Romans 1:2; 3:2; 9:17
 - "for the NT writers, God and Scripture were interchangeable... because the Scriptures were nothing less than the Word of God." John Frame, The Doctrine of the Word of God, p. 122
- E. Jesus sees OT writings as authoritative and words of God, and not just man.
 - Matthew 5:17-19 – Jesus does not abolish the Law, but fulfills it.
 - When Jesus argues with the leaders of the day, he argues with their interpretation of the Law. He never dismisses the Law/OT as unimportant or unauthoritative.
 - Matthew 19:4-5 (referring to Genesis 2:24); Mark 7:9-13
 - Note how Jesus sees these words as both Moses' words and God's!
 - See Luke 24:25, and how Jesus holds the words of all the prophets as requiring belief.
 - "Jesus, the supreme speaker of God's word, validates through his word the authority of God's written Word." John Frame, The Doctrine of the Word of God, p. 118
- F. The NT writers also see the NT writings as Scripture, on par with the OT.
 - 2 Peter 3:16 – How does Peter view Paul's writings?
 - 1 Timothy 5:18 – Paul quotes Jesus' words in Luke 10:7, and calls them Scripture.
 - 1 Corinthians 14:37 – Paul sees his own words as a command from the Lord.
 - What about 1 Corinthians 7:12?
 - Paul is not saying his own word carries no authority.
 - He is simply saying he has no direct quote from Jesus Himself on the matter.
 - He still sees his own words as worthy of following – 1 Corinthians 7:25.
- G. Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit of God would continue to speak through the disciples.
 - John 14:26 and 16:13
 - 1 Corinthians 2:13 – Their words are not just human words, but the Spirit's.
- H. New Testament writers expected their words to be seen as authoritative.
 - 2 Peter 3:2 – The Lord's commands were given through the apostles,
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:15 – Paul claims to speak with a word from the Lord.
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:27 – Paul sees the reading of his letter as a solemn responsibility.
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 – Anyone disobeying word of the letter should be disciplined.
 - See also 1 Corinthians 14:37-38
 - Revelation 22:18-19 – The words of this book (all Bible?) are not to be tampered with.

"What these passages tell us is that there will come a time in which no one can personally recall the living voice of a prophet or apostle, and that in that time especially we should turn to the written Word." John Frame, The Doctrine of the Word of God, p. 128

Questions:

Is the Bible the only word of God?

Is God's written word divine, or a part of creation? Is the distinction important?

How do we distinguish between God Himself and His written word? Is there a danger of "worshiping" the Scriptures, rather than God? See Acts 24:14.

III. The Bible Sees Itself as Life-Giving and Powerful

Discussion:

Read Psalm 1 (and scan through Psalm 119 if you can).

How do the Psalms view God's word (or law, commandments, teaching, promise, etc.)?

What will be the outcome for those who live by the word of God?

Consider Psalm 55:10-11 and Genesis 1.

What do these passages tell us about the word of God?

Do these same characteristics apply to the Bible, as God's written word? Is it right to say that the Bible has a "creative" or "performative" power?

IV. The Bible Claims God's Word to Be Perfect (True, Holy, Pure, Unchanging, etc.)

A. David says that God's words are true – 2 Samuel 7:28.

-See Proverbs 30:5

B. Jesus says that God's Word is truth – John 17:17.

-Note: This goes beyond saying God's word is *true*, as assessed by some standard of truth. Jesus says that God's word itself is *truth*. That is, it is itself the standard of truth.

C. God Himself does not lie – Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; Numbers 23:19.

-In fact, God *cannot* lie. It is against His very nature, and impossible for Him to affirm that which is not true. Therefore, His words are true and reliable.

D. God's word is holy and pure – Psalm 12:6. It is undefiled, unmixed with any impurity.

-James 1:25 calls the Law perfect.

-2 Timothy 3:15 refers to the holy Scriptures. Also Romans 7:12.

E. God's word is unchanging and eternal – Psalm 119:89; Matthew 24:35; John 10:34-36.

-Note: Scripture itself cannot be "broken," according to Jesus.

V. The Objection of Circular Reasoning

Objection: Isn't it circular reasoning to say that Scripture is true and authoritative because the Bible says so? Do we need to appeal to another, external authority to affirm the veracity of the Bible?

Answer:

- A. Yes, in some ways this is a circular argument. However, it must be noted that anything that claims absolute authority must ultimately be self-attesting. In other words, whatever claims to be the ultimate authority must ultimately look to itself as that authority, and affirm that authority in and by itself.
- B. If an "absolute authority" needed to look elsewhere for its validity, it would cease to be an absolute authority. That other standard would become the authority.
- C. So, this problem of "circular reasoning" is not unique to Scripture. It is a problem for anything that claims to be an absolute authority.
- D. For example, some may say that they do not believe in Scripture because Scripture contradicts their reason. So, their reason has become the highest authority. And why is reason the absolute authority? Because it seems reasonable. Their reason is true and unassailable, because of their reason. Or, some may say that Scripture is not true because they believe it contradicts science. So, science has become the absolute authority. How then is science itself affirmed as an absolute authority? Because of scientific study. Or, some may say Scripture isn't true because it violates either their experience or their personal morality or ethic. These things then become the absolute authority, whether sensory experience or personal morality/ethics. And why are they the ultimate authority? By what standard? By the standard of experience and/or personal ethics.
- E. The point is that something inevitably must have final epistemological authority in our lives. Something must determine what is true for us, and be the truth by which all others claims to truth are assessed.
- F. The question is whether that which is an ultimate epistemological authority in your life is worthy of its place. Is your ultimate authority a good and reliable one, or does it even claim to be? If your reason is the ultimate decider of all that is true, is your reason trustworthy and unassailable? Can your reason, or your perception of reality or experience, or any other arbiter of truth, be trusted to be an infallible guide?
- G. Whatever will be ultimately determinative of truth for you must claim to be ultimately true, and also prove to be worthy of that claim. My argument: Scripture alone is worthy.
- H. Furthermore, the more we understand Scripture and the world around us, the more we find Scripture to be the only perfectly reliable authority and guide, and lens through which to see the world and assess all other truth claims.