

**Answering Christianity's
Most Puzzling Questions**

Volume One

by

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Puzzling Questions About the Word of God

IF THE BIBLE IS TRUE, WHY DO SO MANY PEOPLE REJECT IT?

Duane has a fertile brain. He truly enjoys looking at life philosophically. He has been accepted into the undergraduate program of a major university. He enjoys his classes. He is surrounded by brilliance. He particularly enjoys an elective course called "Man and His Religion." Duane's spiritual background is better than that of many young people just going into college: he grew up in a local evangelical church, where he was a passive participant.

The professor of religion is speaking: "My friends, I have

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devoted the better part of my life to the study of religion and holy books. I grew up in a religious home. In fact, my parents believed that every word of the Bible is true. Quite frankly, I admire their faith. But I must be truthful. It is just not possible to do an objective study of the origins, the teachings, and the contradictions of the Scriptures and believe that the Bible is completely true.”

Duane is thrown into the struggle of his life. And the struggle he is facing is, unfortunately, being fought and lost by many young people like Duane who come from evangelical backgrounds.

If the Bible is true, why do so many intelligent people reject it? How can an informed college professor who obviously knows a lot about the Bible be so certain that it is untrue? What is behind the rage that scoffs at the very idea of absolute truth?

Look at a few of the arguments of those who deny the truth of the Scriptures:

“THE BIBLE IS THE SAME AS OTHER RELIGIOUS WRITINGS”

Some assert that the Bible is just like other religious writings in its origin. They all claim to be inspired. The Mormons attribute their Book of Mormon to the magic spectacles of Joseph Smith. The writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg and Edgar Cayce were supposed to have been inspired while their authors were in trances or having visions. Most religious writings make equally ridiculous claims to supernatural origins. Really they are men's attempts to give absolute authority to their own personal prejudices. The Bible, some say, is just one more pathetic example of a human attempt to speak for God.

If that is true, the Bible is of little value other than as a curiosity—something to arouse our interest. But if it is *not* true and the Bible really is the Word of God, the Bible is truly unique

and there must be a way to distinguish it from all religious counterfeits.

Can you imagine this scene in a doctor's office? A cancer patient comes in for an examination and treatment. The doctor gives him seven identical bottles of blue pills and says, "One of these bottles has pills in it that could cure your cancer. The other six are pure poison. Be careful which ones you take."

The patient replies, "How will I know which pills to take?" "Good luck!" answers the doctor.

What would you think of such a doctor? What would you think of a God who would allow fantasy and truth to be virtually indistinguishable—especially if eternal life and death were at stake?

But God is *not* like that doctor. He has made His revelation clear and able to be verified. We can observe its uniqueness. In fact, there are several ways God has set the Bible apart from all spurious religious literature.

First, the human authors of Scripture did not simply share opinions. They claimed to be God's spokesmen, and they substantiated their claims with *mighty deeds*. Those mighty deeds, miracles in many cases, became a significant credential (see Acts 2:22, 43; 5:12).

In addition, the story of Scripture is the story of *fulfilled prophecy*. And some of it has been fulfilled against incredible odds. Some biblical prophecy can be observed being fulfilled today. For example, look at Paul's description of the last days in 2 Timothy 3. Does it sound like modern times?

Third, take note of the Bible's unusual *consistency and authority*. Written over a period of about 1500 years, in sixty-six separate books and by more than a score of different authors, drawing from educated as well as uneducated men of all kinds of occupations, the Bible is an astounding example of

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unanimity and consistency. And it speaks with such authority! It has the undeniable ring of authenticity.

Fourth, consider *the witness given to Scripture by Jesus Christ Himself*. One cannot deny the authenticity of the Bible without denying the authority of Christ (see Matthew 5:18; 24:35).

Finally, no one can deny *the powerful effect of the Bible* on those who open themselves to it. The apostle John tells us that he wrote his gospel with the confidence that it would have a transforming effect on those who read and believe it. Millions can testify to firsthand experience of that transforming effect.

"THE BIBLE IS SUSPICIOUS IN ITS ORIGINS"

Many charge that it took our contentious church fathers 350 years to agree on which books belong in the Scriptures. The Bible was written over many centuries. Every time a new book was written there were new questions. In fact, after the death of Jesus a whole flood of books that claimed to be inspired appeared. This argument claims that the dispute over which ones were true was so intense that the debate continued for centuries. Finally, in the fourth century a group of church leaders called a great council and took a vote. The sixty-six books that comprise our cherished Bible were declared to be Scripture by a vote of 568 to 563.

It is amazing to see how many people believe that argument. Actually, what really happened was not like that at all. From the writings of Justin Martyr (A.D. 100–150), Polycarp (A.D. 115), and Irenaeus (A.D. 180), it seems clear that by the end of the first century the Scriptures as we know them were considered authoritative. The early church asked one great question: "do these writings evidence the fact that the authors

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were exhaling the very words of God inspired by the Spirit of God?"

Norman Geisler and William Nix list five guiding principles used by the early church to determine the canon:

- (1) Is it authoritative—did it come with the authority of God?
- (2) Is it prophetic—was it written by a man of God?
- (3) Is it authentic—did it tell the truth about God, man, etc.?
- (4) Is it dynamic—did it come with the life-transforming power of God?
- (5) Was it received, collected, read and used—was it accepted by the people of God?¹

Actually, when the Council of Hippo in A.D. 393 and the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 named the twenty-seven books of our New Testament as authentic, they were simply recognizing the inspiration of those books. That declaration did not add one iota to the authority of the writings—they only acknowledged their inherent canonicity.

"THE MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE IS SO RADICALLY EXCLUSIVE!"

Contemporary man rejects the notion that some sort of absolute truth exists. The issue is an emotional one. Today's categorical dismissal of all absolutes comes with a fury and an intensity unparalleled in history.

But the Bible speaks of absolutes. It speaks in absolute terms. It confronts relativism head on. Four biblical propositions are particularly disquieting in their unequivocal absoluteness. All are unacceptable to the relativist.

First, *moral law is absolute*. Moral law is defined by the eternal character of God and cannot change. Romans 2:13-16 declares that this absolute moral law is present even in socie-

1. Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago:Moody, 1968), p.138.

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ties that don't have the written law of God. Because moral law is absolute, sin is also absolute. Sin cannot be satisfactorily rationalized, justified, or explained away by an appeal to cultural conditioning.

Second, the Bible asserts that *all have sinned*; all are guilty before God. Remember how you squirmed the first time you understood that the commission of just one sin makes us guilty of all? We cower under the weight of James 2:10, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." God's standard is perfection. Nothing else will satisfy him. Sin is coming short of what God requires, and everyone is guilty of that (Romans 3:23). Therefore, there are no good men. All have sinned. In our own devices we are equally helpless, equally lost, equally in need of a Savior.

The Bible also teaches that *there is no salvation apart from Christ*. No wonder those who reject Him go to great length to discredit the Bible. Jesus Christ is presented in Scripture as *the* way; not *a* way, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Christ's death is God's only answer to man's problem. He is the resolution of the ageless question "How can a Holy God save sinners?"

Finally, according to the Bible, *heaven and hell are not myths*. Modern man will deny the very possibility of knowing absolute truth if that denial can rid him of the notion of a Christless eternity. But God is extending to all an invitation to come to Him through faith in Christ. All who do will be given the gift of life. But that gift must be claimed by choice. God will force Himself on no one.

The Bible is indeed radically exclusive. Its claims are revolutionary and its demands are universal. But isn't that fitting for the Word of God?

"THE BIBLE CLASHES WITH 'MODERN' THOUGHT!"

People reject the Bible because it clashes with their most cherished presuppositions. Why is it difficult for scientists to dismiss the illogic of the evolutionary theory? Because there are so few alternatives. Scholars cannot abandon their commitment to evolution even if the evidence warrants it, because the only alternative is creationism. And to acknowledge creationism admits accountability to the Creator. So even scientific opinions are formed presuppositionally, not scientifically.

Here are the popular presuppositions of the twentieth century:

The rationalistic presupposition: we live in a closed system. Scientists postulate that the present is the key to the past. Observable processes give us our only understanding of our origins. Modern science is based on the principle of uniformitarianism, which supposes that all things happen in the present as they did in the past and shall continue to happen in the future. The idea is clearly believable. Yet such an assertion has staggering consequences. It does not allow for miracles or any intervention by God. We can be sure only of the things that can be observed scientifically.

The existential presupposition: there is no such thing as absolute truth. Proponents assert that life is but a series of fragmented, unrelated moments of consciousness. Life has no eternal dimension. I validate my existence by leaping into life through the choices I make. My existence precedes my essence. Life can be only what I make it. I am responsible to no one but myself. All that exists is this moment of time. All I can do is experience today to the fullest extent of my capacity. Because no truth exists I will do whatever feels good to me. All else is absurdity.

The humanistic presupposition: all men are basically good,

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and all human problems are within their power to solve. Humanists believe that most of man's problems have been caused by his society. For example, humanists may assume that men would lose their hostile tendencies if they did not envy those who had more than they. Equality cures hostility, they teach. We must therefore redistribute the world's goods so that each person has exactly what all others possess. We can solve our problems through education, social and political action, and, if necessary, revolution!

It is little wonder that the Bible has become such an irritant. It flies in the face of all those presuppositions. The apostle Paul must have had the twentieth century in mind when he said, "For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21-22).

Ultimately human issues always boil down to moral questions. Contemporary philosophic, religious, and scientific theories are in essence moral justifications. The apostle John came to the heart of the matter when he said, "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). The horrendous conclusion of the first chapter of Romans is that men would crucify their intellects and abandon their God rather than come to grips with their immoral nature.

SUMMARY

Certainly the Bible is not the only "holy book" on the market competing for the approval of men. If the Bible is true, it must be distinguishable from all others. And so it is. It is set apart by self-evident authority, fulfilled prophecy, internal consistency,

the testimony of Christ, and its positive effect on all who read it.

Why do so many reject the Bible? Is the evidence deficient? Hardly. Most of those who reject it do so to escape moral introspection. They fear what they may find, not in the pages of the Book, but hidden in the recesses of their own lives.