

Characteristics of the Bible

I. The Necessity of the Bible.

Romans 1:18-22 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”

God created a very large universe. How large is it? It is so large that we have never seen the end of it. Thus, God revealed that He is very great and powerful, the Almighty.

Also, the universe is very complex. The planets move in an orderly fashion, and even the smallest things are made into wonderful organs. So God showed that He is very wise. Above all, God showed that He is God, the Creator, and that He is governing all of creation. This revelation is so clear that people who do not recognize and worship God are without excuse.

According to the Bible the first man and His descendants sinned against God. To sin is to deny God’s authority, and even perhaps His existence. It is rebellion. It is an insult to God. As a result all mankind came under God’s judgment, His curse. Man’s way of thinking became foolish. Instead of being wise, his heart became darkened. He was so stupid that he began to make his own gods and worship them. Morally, he became depraved.

Therefore, even the created world was cursed by God. Thorns and thistles would grow up. And diseases, wars, earthquakes, floods, plagues; and death came upon every man.

So in this condition man could not understand God's creation. He became stupid and blind. Even if the created world taught him about God, he could not understand about God, and did not want to know God. Therefore, mankind became so bad that God destroyed them all in the great flood, except for Noah and his family.

Genesis 6:5 tells us how bad they were. "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And so, because man was so depraved, he could not understand God's great work of creation. And because the created world was under God's curse, a new revelation to man was necessary. Without a direct revelation from God no one would be saved. All people must go to hell forever.

God spoke first to Adam and Eve. Then He revealed Himself to Enoch and to Noah. After that, to Abraham and Isaac, to Moses and all the prophets. This was a Word of salvation. But a greater revelation was necessary for the salvation of all God's elect, and that was the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is only by the mercy of God in Christ that any person is saved from sin. God has given us special revelation in the Bible and in Christ and through the Apostles and chosen men in the New Testament. Oh, How grateful we should be for His gracious Word.

II. The Authority of the Bible.

Many people deny that the Bible has any authority. They think it is a book of myths and fables. It tells us the history of the Jews, but even they cannot believe the miracles of the Old Testament. It tells us of many customs of the Jews, and describes their religious ceremonies. There are many moral teachings and laws in the Bible, but we do not have to obey them, they think. The Bible contains good literature, but has no authority over people. Many people do not want even to talk about the Bible.

The Roman Catholic Church says the Bible has authority, but the Pope or the Cardinals say that it has no authority IN ITSELF. The church must interpret the Bible, therefore the authority is not in the Bible, it is in the Church. Only the great priests could interpret it. For many years ordinary priests were not even allowed to READ the Bible.

But the Reformers declared that the Bible itself has inherent authority. The Bible itself is the authority, not any church. We cannot prove the authority of the Bible using science or archeology, or philosophy or history, etc. The Bible itself reveals its authority. This is stated in the Westminster Confession chapter 1: 4

“The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God. (II Peter 1:19, 21; II Timothy 3:16; I John 5:9; I Thessalonians 2:13)

Therefore, because the Bible is the word of God, we should recognize its authority.

II Peter 1:21 “For the prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the holy Spirit.” The Word is not from the will of man, the Spirit of God moved man to write it, so it is the Word of God.

II Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Again, the Word says the whole Bible is given by the Spirit of God. Therefore, it is not only trustworthy, it has behind it the authority of God.

I John 5:9 “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.” The witness of God is superior to man’s, and the witness of Christ is the witness of God. Therefore, we ought to hear and obey it.

Matthew 28:18,19 “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.’” Jesus had all authority, so what He taught must be obeyed. And He commanded His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”

The almighty God, and God the Son to whom all authority is given, and the Holy Spirit; the Triune God gave us this word. The authority of this great God gives absolute authority to this Word, the Bible. We should hear with humble and obedient hearts.

III. The Perspicuity of the Bible

Many people think the Bible is too difficult to understand. It is a big book and there are some difficult passages. Often the first question is “Where did Cain get his wife?” or, “How did all those animals get in the ark?” or “Abraham and Sarah were more than 90 years old, so how could they have a son? Or, “How could all of Israel cross the Red Sea in one night?” Some might say, “Why didn’t Jesus come sooner? But these

questions are not about fundamental truths of Scripture. Some may be looking for a reason to NOT understand and NOT believe the Bible.

As we said, the Roman Catholic Church said the Bible is too difficult for ordinary people. So only the Pope and scholarly priests were allowed to read the Bible. The real truth is that they wanted to control the teachings of the Church. They did not trust the understanding of the common people. This is all a big mistake. The Bible was given to the common people and if they can read, and if they earnestly seek they can understand the basic truths of the Bible. Let us think of some basic truths they can understand.

1. They can understand that there is one God, the Creator of all things.
2. They can understand that men are sinners; very bad sinners.
3. They can understand that God severely punishes sin; in the flood, etc.
4. They can understand that only by a sacrifice can sins be forgiven.
5. They can understand that God sent His Son Jesus to be the Savior.
6. They can understand that Jesus died as a sacrifice for sin.
7. They can understand that Jesus rose again and ascended to heaven.
8. They can understand that God requires faith in Jesus and repentance.
9. They can understand that believers are received as beloved children.
10. They can understand that the gift of God is eternal life.

When earnest readers of the Bible believe these things they become able to understand and believe and do many things which God commands. But it is important to be earnest inquirers, not only half interested. And we must remember that we need the help of God's Spirit to really understand. I Corinthians 2:14 Tells us, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Yes, God has given us a wonderful book, which gives us light and life, and it is for every man to read and study, believe and obey, with the Holy Spirit leading and teaching us. The Scriptures tell us how wonderful it is, and how wonderful Christ is, and how wonderful His salvation is. In Jeremiah 15:16 we read, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Psalm 19:7, 8 "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

IV. The Sufficiency of the Bible.

Has the Bible revelation been given completely. Or as the centuries pass and things change should we add various things to it? Some believers say they have heard God's voice speaking to them. Should we add those words to the Bible? The Roman Catholic Church's Popes and scholars have highly respected traditions, even to the extent that they seem to have more authority than the Bible. Should such traditions and the fourteen books of the Apocrypha be added to the Scriptures? The Catholic Church already recognizes them as part of the Scriptures. Should we also recognize such writings as holy Scripture?

The scholars of the Reformation declared that in the age of the Apostles the Scriptures were perfectly completed, so now we should not add various writings to the Bible. Is this the position we hold today?

The Westminster Confession (Ch. 1:6) declares as follows: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."

Does the Bible actually teach this way? In the Old Testament God said concerning His commands that men should not add anything.

Deuteronomy 4:2 "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." In Deuteronomy 12:32 we read, "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it." We are to obey all of God's commands. We are not allowed to add to them or subtract from them.

Proverbs 30:6 says, "Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar."

Revelation 22:18, 19 gives the final word: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book? If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

These verses and others in Scripture teach us that God is greatly displeased if we take away from His word or add to it. If we add to His Word it is because we think something is lacking in it. Is not God's Word perfect?

Must something be added? If we add to or take away from God's Word, it is because we think something God wrote is not good. We must fix it.

Moreover, if people are allowed to add to or subtract from God's Word, through the years there will be many changes, and no one will know what is really the word of God.

The Word is translated into many languages, and is put into poetical form for singing. If the translators are not very careful to translate accurately they may be changing God's Word. Some modern translations are so different that they seem to be an interpretation of the Word instead of a translation. And some Psalms adapted for singing are paraphrases or clearly additions to the words of the psalms. God condemns such serious evil.

Down through the centuries scholars copied the Old Testament manuscripts. They did it with great care. They counted the lines and even the words so they would not leave any words or lines out. By the wonderful grace of God the Bible has come down through the centuries in a very pure form. This Word of God is precious. It is the great light of the world. We must earnestly preserve the Word, obey its teaching, and preach it widely. We must be bold to declare that it is truly the Word of God, It has the authority of God, and all men should obey it. It is the truth, and the truth gives us light, and freedom, and eternal life in Christ. We must not change it or wrongly translate or interpret it. We must let it shine in its original glory.