

28 WAYS TO SPELL YOUR **FAITH**



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Fundamental Belief No. 1

The Word of God

God's Message to Us

Why the Bible Has Authority Above All Books

Gordon E. Christo

Even in today's no-nonsense world, the Bible outsells all other books. When a new version of the Bible is released, it quickly becomes a best seller. And the Bible does not show any signs of slowing down in circulation.

Do people actually read the Bibles they buy? Once bought, the Bible is one of the most neglected books. Though many Christians possess multiple copies, few have read through even one.

The Bible remains popular, but that is not why it is the most important book in the world. Here are three reasons why.

Reliable

Like the Bible, the scriptures of other religions are instructional and influential: the Vedas of the Hindus; the Koran of the Muslims; the Adi Granth of the Sikhs; the Gathas or Avesta of the Zoroastrians; the Confucian classics; and the Buddhist Tripitakas. All these contain excellent moral instruction.

In addition, the Upanishads claim that they and the Vedas (and certain commentaries) were breathed forth by the Great Being (Brihadâranayaka Upanishad 2.4.10). Koran asserts that it is verbally inspired. And the Adi Granth is a collection of hymns resembling the psalms and wisdom literature of the Bible.

But none of the scriptures of other religions has aroused so much interest or left so profound an impact on individuals as the Bible. Neither have they been translated or circulated as widely—even within their own native spheres.

For Christians, the Bible is the Word of God. We see it as the message in which we encounter the Lord of the universe; hence its wide circulation in Christian lands and beyond.

The overuse of religious language, however, can sometimes result in a loss of its real significance. It is possible for us to extol the Bible as the Word of God without reflecting on what this means. The Bible is God's word to us because *it conveys God's message to us*. It is God's means of communicating with us.

We can know God only because He has chosen to reveal Himself in two ways: through the special revelation of Scripture, and through nature (God's other book). It is in Scripture that we come face-to-face with God's supreme revelation in Jesus Christ.

Authentic

The human element in the Bible does not detract from its authenticity. Jesus Christ, who is called God's Word, took human flesh. In other words, He became a human being like us. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 2, 14). Jesus embodied divine and human elements, and He took human form to speak to humanity in person. God determined that it was the best way to communicate with us.

Similarly, the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of human beings, is a union of the divine and the human. How did this happen? "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers with thoughts, ideas, and information. But the writers expressed that communication in their own words. Thus, the scriptural Word of God, like Jesus the Word, is an indivisible union of human and divine elements.

Just as Jesus Christ took on weakened human nature, so the Scriptures

are conveyed in imperfect human language, and we should not be disturbed by inconsequential errors of detail. What is more important is the totality of the divine thought.

An assortment of 40 writers, spanning a period of 1,600 years, wrote the words of the Bible. They were fishermen and farmers, kings and statesmen, warriors, prisoners, and professionals. Their writings reflected their varying levels of education. What is most important is the message, not the vehicle or medium of the message.

Authoritative

The Bible is authoritative because it comes from God. Thousands of phrases in the document indicate its divine source.

Jesus recognized and upheld the authority of Scripture—which, in His day, was the Old Testament. He resisted the enemy by using Scripture. We live not only by physical food, He said, “but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4); and He condemned the Pharisees for elevating tradition above the Scriptures (Mark 7:9). These words “testify of Me,” He said (John 5:39, 46).

Some Christians have a tendency to read only the New Testament because

that is where they locate the gospel. If they read the Old Testament at all, they usually confine themselves to Psalms and Proverbs. But to skip over the Old Testament is to miss the background of the gospel. It is like watching only the second half of a movie or drama. The whole Bible must be read to develop a complete picture of the gospel.

The Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)

Second Peter directly or indirectly refers to most of the books of the Bible, asserting their authority. Peter covers the entire scriptural collection of his day when he declares that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20). He calls attention to “the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets [of the Old Testament], and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour [New Testament]” (2 Peter 3:2). He recalls events recorded by Moses (2 Peter 2:5, 6; 3:4–7); quotes from Proverbs (2 Peter 2:22); commends the writings of the prophets (2 Peter 1:19) and the eyewitnesses of the gospel (verses 16–18); and proclaims Paul’s writings to be Scripture (2 Peter 3:16, 17).

How Do We Know?

Some say it was human beings who decided which writings to include in the Bible. In a sense, that is true, but such human decisions were based on the conviction that these books were inspired by God. The stamp on a gold bar means something, but not if the bar is not actually gold. It is not the stamp that determines the nature of the bar. The stamp merely confirms, or recognizes, the reality.

Similarly, the Bible does not owe its authority to the Jewish and Christian councils that placed their stamp of approval on it. Rather, they merely confirmed the reality after the fact. In other words, they spoke long after the value of the documents had been recognized by the religious communities that had received them.

One cannot “prove” that the messages in the Bible are indeed from God. Inspiration cannot be demonstrated by logic alone. Much of the available evidence is appreciated only by those who already believe. So it is not possible to convert one who doesn’t yet believe by arguments and debates.

In whatever language we read the Bible, it has the same appeal, the same reforming influence. Every pastor can tell stories of the power of the Word. Alcoholics have been turned into loving husbands, gangsters into fiery preachers, and prodigals into faithful workers. The Word is the source of inspiration, energy, and strength.

In the Bible, we encounter God—what God is, what God has done, and

what God will do for us. We must read it not only for information but to know God and Jesus Christ, whom God has sent (John 17:3).

Gordon E. Christo served as the assistant to the president for the Southern Asia Division in Tamil Nadu, India, at the time he wrote this chapter.