

Chapter 4: The Four Characteristics of Scripture: (1) Authority: How do we know that the Bible is God's Word?

Explanation and Scriptural Basis (73)

The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.

A. All the words in Scripture are God's words. (73-81)

1. This is what the Bible claims for itself.(73-77)

(a) "Thus says the LORD."

Deut. 18:18-20: I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.'

Jer. 1:9: Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.

Jer. 29:31-32: "Send to all the exiles, saying, 'Thus says the Lord concerning Shemaiah of Nehelam: Because Shemaiah had prophesied to you when I did not send him, and has made you trust in a lie, therefore thus says the Lord: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah of Nehelam and his descendants. He shall not have anyone living among this people, and he shall not see the good that I will do to my people, declares the Lord, for he has spoken rebellion against the Lord.' "

Ezek. 2: 7: And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear, for they are a rebellious house.

(b) God speaks "through" the prophets

1 Kings 14:18: And all Israel buried him and mourned for him, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Ahijah the prophet.

2 Kings 9:36: When they came back and told him, he said, "This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel,

Hag. 1:12: Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord.

Deut. 18:19: And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

(c) In the NT, a number of passages indicate that all of the Old Testament writings are thought of as God's words.

2 Tim. 3:16: All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

2 Peter 1:21: For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

- i) In other passages in the NT, various sections of the OT are referred to as God's words.

Matt. 1:22: All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

Matt. 19:4-5: He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'?"

Mark 7:9-13: And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God)— then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

Acts 1:16: "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

- ii) New Testament writings also referred to as Scripture.

2 Peter 3:16: as [Paul] does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

1 Tim. 5:18: For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

1 Cor. 14:37: If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.

(a) Objection: 1 Cor. 7:12 cf. 7:25, 40

1 Cor. 7:12 cf. 7:25, 40: To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

2. We are convinced of the Bible's claims to be God's words as we read the Bible. (77-78)

(a) Our ultimate conviction that the words of the Bible are God's words comes only when the Holy Spirit speaks *in* and *through* the words of the Bible.

John 10:27: My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

1 Cor 2:13-14: And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

3. Other evidence is useful but not finally convincing. (78)
WCF 1.5: We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend 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.
4. The words of Scripture are self-attesting. (78)
 - (a) They cannot be “proved” to be God’s words by appeal to any higher authority.
5. Objection: This is a circular argument. (78-80)
 - (a) That this is a kind of a circular argument does not make it invalid, for all arguments for an absolute authority must ultimately appeal to that authority for proof.
6. This does not imply dictation from God as the sole means of communication. (80-81)
 - (a) Up to this point it has been argued that all the words of the Bible are God’s words, yet this requires a word of caution.
 - (b) When we say that all the words of the Bible are God’s words, we are talking about the result of the process of bringing Scripture into existence, not the process itself.
 - (c) The Bible does not speak of only one type of process or one manner by which God communicated to the biblical authors what he wanted to be said.
Heb. 1:1: Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
Luke 1:1-3: Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,
John 14:26: But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

B. Therefore to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God. (81)

1. Jesus can rebuke his disciples for not believing the OT Scriptures
Luke 24: 25: And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!
2. Believers are to keep or obey the disciples’ words.

John 15:20: Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

2 Cor. 13:2-3: I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.

2 Thes. 3:14: If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.

2 Peter 3:2: that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,

C. The Truthfulness of Scripture (81-84)

1. God cannot lie or speak falsely.
 - (a) Since the biblical writers repeatedly affirm that the words of the Bible, though human, are God’s words, it is appropriate to look at biblical texts that talk about *the character of God’s words* and to apply these to the character of the words of Scripture.

Titus 1:2: in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began

Heb. 6:18: so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.
2. Therefore all the words in Scripture are completely true and without error in any part.

Num. 23:19: God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

Ps. 12:6: The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.

Ps 119:89: Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

Prov. 30:5: Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

Matt. 24:35: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
3. God’s words are the ultimate standard of truth.

John 17:17: Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.
4. Might some new fact ever contradict the Bible?
 - (a) Every true fact is something that God has known already from all eternity and is something that therefore cannot contradict God’s speech in Scripture.

D. Written Scripture is Our Final Authority

1. The final form of Scripture is its written form; and it is authoritative in this form.

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2. Hypothetical reconstructions of what “Jesus/Paul/the apostles really said” cannot replace the Scripture itself as the final authority.