

Class Objective: To reaffirm, renew and expand the believer's understanding of and confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Class Overview

1. Clarify the role of the Bible in evangelical Christianity
2. Understand the factors that make the study of the Bible's reliability a critical necessity
3. Address the charge of circular reasoning in defending the integrity of Scripture
4. Remember that conversion is not primarily a product of logic but a work of the Spirit
5. Identify common attempts to discredit Scripture
6. Explore alleged contradictions in the Bible
7. Examine the formation of the Bible
8. Describe the history and importance of the copying of the Bible
9. Consider the principles and place of interpretation of Scripture
10. Explain the purpose and value of translations of Scripture
11. Reflect on the ultimate confirmation of the Bible's truthfulness
12. Delineate the practical implications of believing the Bible is trustworthy

Notes

Review

V. Common Attempts to Discredit Scripture

A. Generally speaking, attempts to discredit the Bible could be summarized as follows:

1. The Bible is **morally** objectionable.
2. The Bible is **socially** repressive.
3. The Bible is **scientifically** inaccurate.
4. The Bible is **historically** inconsistent.
5. The Bible is **literarily** unreliable.

B. The Documents Of The Bible Are Reliable

C. The Historical Data of the Bible Is Verifiable

D. The Content of the Bible Is Credible

1. Jesus' character is compelling.
 - a) C.S. Lewis' very often quoted assessment of the options for understanding Jesus still bear weight. To briefly summarize Lewis' comment which he wrote in his book, Mere Christianity, he said that if Jesus was not the Lord, as he claimed to be, then he was either a lunatic or a liar. Lewis and many others since, have shown convincingly that Jesus does not reflect the characteristics of someone detached from reality nor would he ever have been believed as truthful if his claims were not consistent with his miraculous works and his willingness to die for what he taught.
 - b) The wisdom of Jesus teaching combined with the power of his works and the grace of his character make his claim to deity eminently credible.

2. Events in the Gospels are recorded realistically.
 - a) As noted earlier, British scholar Richard Bauckham, using contemporary psychological research on recollective memory, has shown that the characteristics of the accounts in the Gospels and Acts reflect the testimony of eyewitnesses who gave credible accounts of historic events.
 - (1) “Recollective memory is selective—it fixes on unique and consequential events, it retains irrelevant detail, it takes the limited vantage point of a participant rather than that of an omniscient narrator, and it shows signs of frequent rehearsal.” R. Bauckham
 - b) The NT accounts are not given as people reporting private esoteric spiritual experiences. They are eyewitness accounts of objective events often involving many other observing participants.
3. Leading characters of the Bible are portrayed transparently.
 - a) Adam and Eve, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Noah, Sampson, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, and Peter among others, are all presented realistically.
 - b) This is particularly surprising in view of their prominent roles in the biblical narrative.
 - c) Of particular import are the accounts of David’s sins. Typically kings in the ancient east were extolled as omnipotent conquerors and even deified in some cultures.
 - d) The Scripture makes no effort to defend the sins or weaknesses of these people but shows them to be flawed human beings.
4. Human nature is described accurately in Scripture.
 - a) Not only are even the most prominent characters of the Bible presented candidly, the Bible’s direct commentary on the condition the human heart rings true.
 - (1) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9
 - (2) Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another. . . Colossians 3:5-9

VI. How Should We View Alleged Contradictions In the Bible?

A. Not all those who criticize the Bible have actually read it. Moreover, some who claim the Bible is “full of contradictions” cannot point to specific examples but are simply parroting what they have heard others say or write. Often those who attack the Bible are doing so as an excuse for not dealing with other issues in their lives. To put it in other terms, not all objections to the Bible or Christian faith are motivated by a desire to know the truth. If someone does give specific examples of perceived

contradictions we should make an effort to read through the biblical text with them and seek to understand the text in its context along with other relevant factors to resolve the question.

- B. Many alleged contradictions or errors concern the reportage of events in the four Gospels.
1. Each Gospel writer had their own particular purpose and style in writing.
 - a) Luke
 - (1) ¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. Luke 1:1-4
 - b) Mark
 - (1) The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark 1:1
 - c) Matthew
 - (1) The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Matthew 1:1 (see also 1:22, 23)
 - d) John
 - (1) ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:30, 31
 2. “. . . the existence of different perspectives makes a positive case that they are legitimate. If there were no differences to be found among the Gospels, we would assume the writers had colluded with each other and produced only one story of Jesus. The variations tell us that each of the Gospel writers wrote independently, using some of the same material but being led by their own purposes, exercising the normal freedom we all have to vary some of the details of our stories. . . . As a result we have four faithful streams of information about Jesus showing basic agreement but varying in some of the details.” William Mounce, *Why I Trust the Bible*
 3. Michael Licona, in his book *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*, demonstrates that ancient biography was written in a much different way than modern biographical literature. Through analysis of the writings of the Greek philosopher and historian, Plutarch (A.D. 46-119), he cites a variety of compositional devices that were commonly employed in ancient writing. These include:

- a) biographical relevance (provides more details where the event has greater relevance to that character and fewer details and less emphasis on those events that have less relevance)
- b) transferral (words or deeds of one character are transferred to another)
- c) displacement (an event is moved from one context to another)
- d) conflation (two or more events or people are combined and narrated as one)
- e) compression (events are portrayed as occurring over a shorter period in one instance than in another)
- f) spotlighting (one character is emphasized to the neglect of others)
- g) simplification (details are omitted or altered for the sake of simplification)
- h) expansion (details that were unknown are added to fill out a story in a plausible manner)
- i) paraphrasing (something similar is said using different words)

4. “There are significant similarities and differences among the Synoptics, and between the Synoptics and John [John has 80% different material than the Synoptics]. If you allow the authors to write according to the historical standards of their day, which include simplification, paraphrase and approximations; if you see how they used written sources and their personal memories; and if you understand their process of translating Jesus words and deeds into Greek, then many of the apparent contradictions can easily be explained.” William Mounce

C. Examples of supposed contradictions:

1. Are there two versions of creation? Genesis 1 as opposed to Genesis 2
2. Are we justified by faith (Paul Rom. 4:3-5) or works (James 2:24)?
3. Who is against or for Jesus? Matt. 12:30 vs. Mk. 9:38-40
4. Jesus didn't return before “this” generation passed away. Mk. 13:29
5. Were there two angels at Jesus tomb or one? Matt. 28:1, 2 vs. Lk. 24:4
6. Why is the order of the temptation of Jesus different between Matt. 4 and Luke 4?
7. All four Gospels say two thieves were crucified with Jesus only Luke records one repenting. Matt. 27:38 vs Lk. 23:42
8. Did the fig tree cursed by Jesus wither immediately or the next day? Matt. 21:19 vs. Mk. 11:20
9. Was Jairus' daughter dying or already dead when he asked Jesus for help? Matt. 9:18 vs. Mk. 5:22, 23
10. When did Jesus cleanse the Temple? Did he do it once or twice? Matt. 21:12, 13 vs. John 2:16
11. When did the Last Supper take place? Wednesday or Thursday? Matt. 27:17-19 vs. John 19:14, 31, 42