

Foundations of Faith - Part 2

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In this part of my treatise I would like to discuss in more detail the criteria I believe must be applied to any alleged divine writings in order to determine if they are in fact inspired of God.

The primary criterion that must be used is to compare the writings with the things we know for certain to be true. Some would say that there is nothing we know for sure. All is subject to interpretation. I challenge this assertion. There are several areas of knowledge that are certainly true. Mathematics is one such area. It is true that all of mathematics is based on a set of primary ideas called axioms. These axioms cannot be proved to be true in a formal sense; however, they are so basic to our understanding of reality that to claim the opposite would be considered absurd. For instance, who would deny that A is equal to A ? All such axioms are accepted universally as being true. Once these self-evident assertions are accepted, many corollaries and proofs can be used to show that other, less obvious, statements are also true. A large structure of mathematically true statements now exists, all built on the foundation of self-evident axioms. This whole structure is held together with a glue called logic. These are the rules we use for drawing conclusions about other statements. One simple example is as follows: If $A=B$ and $B=C$, then $A=C$. In essence, this is just a corollary of the axiom $A=A$. The rules of logic are universally accepted as true. In fact, we cannot exist without them. For instance, if I reject the logical conclusion, based on observation, that states: "If you jump off the Empire State building, you will die or be severely injured." and jumped anyway, I would suffer the consequences. There are many such logical conclusions that, if rejected, would lead to our harm. We are rational creatures and cannot survive without using logic to the best of our abilities.

Logic can apply to other areas of life, also. These include such things as philosophy, politics, social systems, etc. However, these topics differ to some extent from mathematics in that sometimes it takes a long history of experience to draw logical conclusions about these topics whereas mathematics, to a large degree, can be determined by thought (although this thought may be based on years of real world experience).

As an example, the statement, "Socialism and freedom cannot coexist," is true. How can we know this? First, history has shown this to be true. No socialistic system ever tried has existed for long without it disintegrating or force being used against its members. Secondly, with just a slight knowledge of human nature, the statement can be logically deduced. Let's follow the logic to see how it works.

Suppose that 100 people start a commune. Everyone is free to do what he wants but all of the production of the group will be shared equally among all of its members. One person in the group decides that since he will get his share of the group's production regardless of what he does,

he will do little or nothing. The group's production will then drop to 99% of what it was unless the remaining members work harder. Next, a second member of the commune will see the one unproductive member living well without having to do anything. He then decides that it is not fair that he works for his keep but his comrade does not. He will then either cut back on his work or stop work altogether. Eventually, others will stop work also for the same reason. If 50% of the members stop work, then everyone will only have half as much as they did initially unless the other 50% work twice as hard. Eventually, the group will have to disband or the non-working members will have to be forced to work. Thus, socialism and freedom cannot coexist. A friend who is also an engineer once told me that if our government ever sets up a free, socialist society, he was going to be a poet.

On the other hand, freedom and capitalism can coexist. Some people say that a person is not totally free in a capitalist system because if one is not productive, then he cannot live. Therefore, since a person must work in this system, he is not free. This is just a redefinition of the word "free." Freedom means the ability to choose one's action without interference from someone else. The consequences of these actions have no bearing on whether or not the person is free. Only the ability to choose a path for oneself determines that. When analyzed, all social systems require its members to work if they want to live. After all, someone has to grow the food to eat, build the houses we live in, and make the clothing we wear. Production has to occur. The question is: who will benefit from one man's production? Other men or the man doing the producing? Capitalism rewards the producer and punishes the non-producer. Under socialism, everyone suffers at the hand of the non-producer.

I have discussed all of the above to lay groundwork for how we must use logic and reason in every facet of our lives. These are the only tools we have available that, if used, allow men to communicate. Every concept we form must fit into a logical whole within our minds. No contradictory ideas can coexist. All of our knowledge must fit together like a puzzle. This does not mean we have to have complete knowledge. Just as we can know that 100 pieces of a puzzle are pieced together correctly even though we have 900 pieces to go, so we can know when concepts fit together logically even though many concepts are yet to be formed. In conjunction with this, if we, at any stage of our life, discover that we have pieced some ideas together incorrectly, we must be willing to rearrange or even discard the corrupting pieces. This is the process we must use diligently when studying alleged divine writings.

The book of James in the Bible states that faith without works is dead (*James 2:17*). Likewise, faith without reason is blind. If a person accepts a certain belief based on faith only, then he must accept all beliefs because one is just as valid as another if it is based on faith only. This is because faith asks a person to believe something regardless of how irrational or unreasonable it is. Reason is the only tool we have to discriminate between differing ideas and to justify a particular belief.

There are three ways that people typically abuse writings they believe to be from God. First, they either discount or try to explain away obvious contradictions or inconsistencies within the writings. Second, they form their beliefs first and then try to justify them by twisting what the writings say. Third, they use illogical arguments of their own invention to try to promote the

writings. I plan to cover the first two ways in the next part of this treatise. For now, let's look at a few examples of the third kind.

Example 1. Why not just accept the Bible as being true? If it is true, then you will reap the benefits at judgment. If it is not true, you have not lost anything.

The illogic of this argument is so obvious that I am amazed that anyone uses it. Yet, I have heard it many times. There are two major flaws in the argument. First, how can someone who is a diligent seeker of truth accept as true that which logic and reason has shown to be untrue? Would a Christian respond in a like manner to a Buddhist making the same argument about Buddhism? I doubt it. To do so would require the person to hold contradictory beliefs, and everyone has a limit to the number of contradictory beliefs they can hold.

The second flaw is that the statement assumes that if God exists, then the Bible is true. It is an all or nothing proposition. Either the Bible is true and God exists or the Bible is false and God does not exist. What about the third possibility which is that God exists and the Bible is false? Think of the consequences. How does God view someone who worships a man (Jesus) as being equal to Him? Even the Apostle Paul said that if Jesus was not resurrected then our (Christians) preaching is in vain and we are false witnesses of God. Also, if we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied (*I Corinthians 15:12-19*).

Example 2. Although the book of Esther never mentions God, nowhere in the Bible is the hand of God more prominent.

This is a statement that a Christian friend made to me once. I believe he had heard it from a teacher at a Bible college he attended for a while. This is an example of trying to read more into the text of the Bible than is written. The book of Esther tells the story of a beautiful Jewish woman who becomes a wife of King Ahasuerus. When Haman, a ranking official under the king's rule, convinces the king to kill off the Jews, Esther pleads for their lives. The king is sympathetic and countermands his order to kill the Jews. Thus the Jewish race, at least in that part of the world, is saved. There is no need to invoke the supernatural in this story. All the events of the story are plausible without such intervention. However, some people cannot seem to accept that God is not supernaturally guiding every event in the Bible, even if the Bible makes no such claim. There are many other stories that describe God's miraculous power in the Bible; additional ones need not be invented. In fact, when my friend originally made the above statement, I answered, "You don't really believe that, do you? What about the parting of the Red Sea or the creation of the Earth and all living things or the resurrection of Jesus? Do they not show the hand of God at work much more than the story of Esther?" He had no answer.

Example 3. The Bible is true because it is God's word. The Bible is God's word because it claims to be so.

This argument is usually never made so succinctly. But it is many times the basic argument being made after boiling a lengthy argument down to its essentials. This argument claims that the Bible is God's word because it says it is. Of course, this cannot be logically accepted. If all it takes

for a writing to be accepted as divine is for it to state that it is divine, then all writings with claims to a divine origin would have to be accepted. Also, anyone could add more writings to the list quite easily.

One of the side arguments along these lines is that the Bible has been shown time and again to be accurate in historical matters; therefore, it can be trusted in spiritual matters. This is obviously false. Anyone can write a story that is historically accurate yet contain false miracles or spiritual guidance. Historical fiction is a case in point. The major events in the story are historically accurate, but the details of the major characters in the story, whether natural or supernatural, are fiction.

The miracles of the Bible need independent verification just as do the historical events. When Christians use archeology, history, etc. to show the truth of the historical events of the Bible or the falsehood of other writings, they are in a sense admitting that faith alone is not sufficient for their beliefs. They want independent verification of the Biblical stories. They then take a leap of faith when it comes to the miracles and say they need no proof of these. This is disingenuous. Either faith is sufficient or it is not. You cannot have it both ways. Otherwise, the puzzle pieces do not fit.

Example 4. The Bible had about 40 authors and covered a period of about 2500 years. Yet, there are no inconsistencies or contradictions. This would be impossible without God being the author.

The first flaw in this argument is that there are inconsistencies and contradictions in the Bible. I will be discussing some of these in the next part of this treatise. But even if these discrepancies did not exist, the argument still has a problem. It assumes that all of the authors were working in a vacuum without knowledge of the others' writings. If you put 40 people in separate rooms and asked them to write a story, and then you compared all of the writings and found no contradictions between them, this would indeed be a miracle. However, suppose you asked one person to write a story, then you allowed another person to read what he wrote and asked him to write another story based on the first. You then repeated this process for 40 people. Would you consider it a miracle that no contradictions occurred? You might find it unusual but not a miracle. The Bible was written in the latter way. Each author had access to prior authors' writings and was thus able to build on them.

Example 5. Many prophecies were proclaimed throughout the Bible and all came to pass. Only God could have this degree of knowledge.

The problem with this argument is basically the same as that for the previous example. The author recording the fulfillment of a prophecy had access to the original prediction. Thus, he can either make up an event to fulfill the prophecy or interpret some actual event in a way to make it look like a fulfillment. Also, in the case where the writer records both the prediction and the fulfillment, the entire thing could be made up or both could be recorded after the fact.

Example 6. Jesus was 100% man and 100% God.

I have heard this from many people. On the surface it sounds good because it seems to make Jesus look like a super being connecting man and God. However, the argument falls apart once you understand what the Bible teaches about man and God. The Bible says that all men are sinners, and God cannot sin. Thus, if Jesus was 100% man and 100% God, he would have to be a sinner who cannot sin. In effect, A is not equal to A. This is illogical.

Example 7. God's wisdom is greater than man's wisdom. Therefore, even if God does something that makes no sense to man, his actions cannot be questioned.

I have heard this more than any of the examples presented in this paper. It is designed to strike fear in the hearts of those who have questions about God's actions as presented in the Bible. Be wary of any religion that uses this argument because it is not open to critical analysis. It is asking people to accept what the "divine" writings say by faith only. Only writings that have irrational elements in them cannot stand up to a rational critique.

An example of this argument is given in *Romans 9:14-24*. Let's take a look at it in the New American Standard version.

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And *He did so* in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, *even* us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

Here is a clear statement from Paul that God sometimes creates people for the specific purpose of performing evil deeds leading to their destruction in order that He might demonstrate His power to those people created for mercy. Not only this, but if you even question God's actions in this matter, you are totally out of line. Some say that God only used Pharaoh because He was already an evil man. If this is true then why did not Paul let us in on this bit of knowledge? Paul

says God hardens whom He desires, not just those who are evil of their own accord. In the book of Exodus, God tells Moses before he even goes to Pharaoh for the first time that He will harden Pharaoh's heart (*Exodus 4:21*).

Now it is true that the Creator of the universe has to be wiser than man. However, I believe His wisdom is greater, not different. God has given us the power of reason and logic to guide us in our decisions in life. If a "divine" writing asks us to discard these tools and use faith only, we must consider it invalid.

Well, enough of these examples. I believe the list I have presented gives a good overview of the type of illogical arguments used by people to justify their beliefs. As I stated earlier, I will be presenting some of the most obvious inconsistencies and contradictions in the Bible in the next part of this treatise.