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Introduction.

Man has so little “time” and so many important questions to settle before he is “gone”.

What is the universe?

Who or what is “God”?

What is this thing called “time”? How much do I have? How can I get more?

The question of eternity, the possibility of life after death, and what it would be like.

The question of “truth and conscience” is a time-taker and usually involves a good deal of anxiety.

Questions like: “Who am I? Why am I here?” usually are time-consuming and bring on an identity crisis of some sort.

The paramount question is: Where does he go for answers in the time that he has?

The simple facts are: Man is born, lives a life span of 70-90 years (maybe) and then is returned to the earth. Along the way questions arise like:

Is there a God?

Is there life after death?

Is there a Heaven? If so, how do I get there?

Is there a Hell? If so, how do I avoid going there?

We (believers) claim that the answers are in the Bible - The Word of God.

Let me read an article I read recently regarding the Bible:

“The Bible is a good book. It’s far from being a history book but it does at least give us a peek at the lives and thought patterns of the people and societies that existed way back when. It can give us an appreciation for the efforts of the ancient historians who verbally passed on the stories, legends

and traditions from generation to generation until the written word came into being. It can give us insights into the religious beliefs and politics that were prevalent at various times in our history. It can provide at least a glimpse of who we were.

Too often I think we forget to step back and look at the “big picture”. We focus so heavily on individual chapters and verses of the Bible that we miss much of the really good, pertinent information that this book contains. Sure, it was written a long time ago by and for the people of that time – and it reflects only that level of understanding of life and all its components that existed during those times. If we can work our way past the historical inaccuracies, the misconceptions, the rules and the purposeful embellishments we’ll find a lot of good basic guidance on living productively – and happily – in the twenty-first century.”

Article Source: <http://www.todays-woman.net>

The Bible has been the most used, abused, and misused book to prove, or approve the most absurd thinking, grotesque behavior, bizarre cults and religions for centuries.

It is misunderstood, shunned, ignored, belittled, trivialized, and hated. Yet this book is the most seriously studied, the widely disseminated, critically examined word by word, phrase by phrase, verse by verse of any book ever written - annotated, commented on; given birth to lexicons, dictionaries, concordances, maps, charts, historical background of related cultures, by the most scholarly of men.

So, why all the fuss about one book?

Because some people insist that it is, and has the authority as, the Word of God.

God versus Man.

Man is very proud of his accumulation of knowledge. Books and writings on theology, philosophy, science, history, literature fill many libraries around the world and in them man feels that he has captured truth. However, the Bible is at odds with this view. The Bible claims that it, and it alone contains the truth. Hence we have a constant conflict.

General Revelation and Human Knowledge.

“General” in the sense that it is knowledge available to all men through:

1. Creation (Ps 19:1; Rom 1:18-23); they know about God through creation, which is not enough to save them, but is enough to condemn them.
2. History - providence of God (Ps 75:6-7; Israel-Deut 32:8-9)
3. Preservation - Holding the universe and humans together (Acts 17:28; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3)
4. Conscience: There is no Hebrew word for conscience in Old Testament.

The Hebrew word *leb* is translated “heart” or “mind”. Through progressive revelation,

the NT Greek word *Suneidesis* is the word for “conscience” and defined as:

1. the consciousness of anything.
2. the soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter, commending one, condemning the other.

Conscience is a standard by which one judges an action as right or wrong.

It is received from God, but can be informed by the world, the flesh, and the devil;

or informed by God’s word (Rom. 12:2).

By reading, studying, and/or being taught God’s Word, God moves our conscience from the world’s standard to His standard.

Influenced by culture.

Western Culture, Modernism, and the growth of Liberalism (especially in education) have impressed upon young, fresh minds propaganda ideas that promote an over-sensitivity to the environment, global warming, individual rights (over parental rights), the evolutionary theory of mankind, the rights of animals over man’s right, capital punishment is wrong, etc., etc.

New ways of speaking have been instituted:

“height challenged”, “physically challenged”, “mentally challenged”, “educationally challenged”, and on, and on, as long as people feel good about themselves; lower the grading scores so no one has to “fail”, or not keeping score at a game, so no one “loses”.

We’ve come a long way in Political correctness:

Be tolerant of people and their ideas.

Be willing to compromise your position for the sake of unity.
Be willing to accommodate all other beliefs.
Create within yourself a relational sensitivity i.e. all ideas have merit.
Always accept another point of view as true because truth is relative.
For “growth”, try to incorporate beliefs as you come upon them.

The Bible.

The Bible’s witness to itself is that it is God’s Word.
Our understanding of God, of man, and of the salvation He offers mankind in Christ is all very dependent on how much men believe and know the Bible.

God has revealed Himself in a number of ways:
in creation, in history, in miracles, and in visions given directly to the prophets.

But, primarily He has revealed Himself in the Person of Christ, the Living Word,
and the Bible.

If men reject the Bible outright, or do not hold the Bible in high esteem as the inspired and inerrant Word of God and fail to handle it properly (interpretation and application), then they will turn to other sources as their authority (human reason, science, church tradition, mysticism, experiences) for what they hold onto for truth. Recall what we learned about conscience. It is that rule or grid by which we judge right and wrong; good or bad; to be believed or shunned.

The Bible is the rule of faith.

It is the standard to which our conscience must conform, not the other way around.

Its authority must be the final say.

That was one of the cries of the Reformation: Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone).

The six attitudes toward the Bible

(1) Rationalism. The philosophy behind rationalism is “The theory that the exercise of reason, rather than the acceptance of empiricism, authority, or spiritual revelation, provides the only valid basis for action or belief and that reason is the prime source of knowledge and of spiritual truth.”⁷ The rationalistic approach toward the Bible may be extreme or moderate.

In its extreme form it denies divine revelation and represents the belief of atheists and agnostics. Moderate rationalism may admit divine revelation but tends to accept only those parts of divine revelation that personal reason approves. Under this approach the Bible is not viewed as authoritative, but the moderated rationalist seeks to eliminate or honor various Scriptures as he may choose. This is often the attitude of modern liberals.⁸

The issue in rationalism is that the *mind* is supreme and becomes the final authority.

(2) Mysticism. Mysticism also falls into a two-fold classification, a false mysticism and a true mysticism. The fundamental premise in false mysticism is that divine revelation is not limited to the Bible, but that God continues to give new truth beyond the Bible. In the final analysis, false mysticism makes human *experience* supreme; one's personal experiences become the final authority rather than the Bible. If it fits with one's experience, then it is accepted as valid; but if it does not fit one's experience, it is rejected as invalid. For this kind of mystic, the Bible is not complete or final. God is still in the business of giving truth if one is only receptive to its revelation. Those holding to some form of false mysticism believe spiritual truth is being added beyond the Scriptures. This type of false mysticism is seen in the ideas of pantheism, theosophy, modern-day spiritism, Seventh-day Adventism, new thought, Christian Science, Mormonism, Quakerism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the writing of Thomas à Kempis.

False Mysticism.

Let's take a look at Thomas à Kempis:

Theories most popular at the moment ascribe the *Imitation* to two or three men, members of the Brethren of the Common Life, an association of priests organized in the Netherlands in the latter half of the fourteenth century. That Thomas Hemerken of Kempen, or Thomas À Kempis as he is now known, later translated a composite of their writings, essentially a spiritual diary, from the original Netherlandish into Latin is generally admitted by scholars. This Thomas, born about the year 1380, was educated by the Brethren of the Common Life, was moved to join their community, and was ordained priest. His career thereafter was devoted to practicing the counsels of spiritual perfection and to copying books for the schools. From both pursuits evolved *The Imitation of Christ*. As editor and translator he was not

without faults, but thanks to him the *Imitation* became and has remained, after the Bible, the most widely read book in the world.¹

Here is an excerpt from his *Imitation of Christ* book.

The Fifth Chapter

READING THE HOLY SCRIPTURE

TRUTH, not eloquence, is to be sought in reading the Holy Scriptures; and every part must be read in the spirit in which it was written. For in the Scriptures we ought to seek profit rather than polished diction.

Likewise we ought to read simple and devout books as willingly as learned and profound ones. We ought not to be swayed by the authority of the writer, whether he be a great literary light or an insignificant person, but by the love of simple truth. We ought not to ask who is speaking, but mark what is said. Men pass away, but the truth of the Lord remains forever. God speaks to us in many ways without regard for persons.

Our curiosity often impedes our reading of the Scriptures, when we wish to understand and mull over what we ought simply to read and pass by.

If you would profit from it, therefore, read with humility, simplicity, and faith, and never seek a reputation for being learned. Seek willingly and listen attentively to the words of the saints; do not be displeased with the sayings of the ancients, for they were not made without purpose.²

There isn't a lot I want to comment on here, other than to express the sorrow I feel for those, who, like me, read this book as a devotional for years, thinking how profound these thoughts were and using them to promote myself before God to gain His favor; knowing nothing of Justification by Faith as it is revealed in God's Word.

¹Thomas Kempis: *The Imitation of Christ*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, 1996

²Thomas Kempis: *The Imitation of Christ*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, 1996

True Mysticism.

There is, however, a form of true mysticism, which stems from the indwelling and teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

True Mysticism is the illumination of the mind of believers by the Holy Spirit to enable them to grasp and apply the truth of the Scripture.

True Mysticism subjects our experiences to the judgment of Scripture.

Jude 3 (NASB95)

“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.”

Dr. Fruchtenbaum points out that in Jude 3, the term the faith refers to the whole body of truth; “the whole body of truth that has already been delivered once and for all to the Church by the Apostles...” meaning the Bible is complete and final.

Understanding illumination:

In his The Moody Handbook of Theology, Dr. Enns writes:

Even while applying proper hermeneutics and methodology, there is a divine element to understanding God’s truth.

The believer is aided by the Holy Spirit’s ministry of illumination in guiding the believer to an understanding of divine truth (1 Cor. 2:11–

13).

1 Corinthians 2:11–13

“For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.”

A true mystic in the biblical sense believes that the Bible is our final authority and seeks to always judge personal experience by the Bible. He does not allow experience to either take precedence over the Bible nor does he judge the Bible or what is biblical by his experience.

(3) Romanism. In Romanism, the Roman Catholic Church is both the channel of divine revelation and the final authority for how the Bible is to be interpreted in faith and practice. Since the Bible is the product of the church, and since the Scriptures are obscure (another teaching of Romanism), only the church can properly interpret the Scriptures. In Romanism, the Bible is viewed as incomplete; there is more truth available, but it can only come through the church. “Furthermore, the traditions of the church are, along with the Bible, a source of divine revelation. Ecumenical councils and popes have from time to time made pronouncements that are considered infallible and therefore binding on church members.”¹³

Particularly objectionable is the concept that the church can supersede Scripture itself. As a part of this approach to divine revelation, tradition must also be examined and should be studied in the light of important Scriptures (Gal 1:14; 2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6).

Galatians 1:14 reads: “and I ^awas advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my ¹countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ^bancestral traditions.” ³

² Thessalonians 2:15 reads: “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us.”

In His earthly ministry, Christ repeatedly had to contradict the traditions of men in affirming the truth of the Word of God.

(4) Neo-orthodoxy. Karl Barth (1886-1968), often viewed as the father of neo-orthodoxy, believed that the basis of authority is the Word, but for Barth, the Word is mainly Christ. The Bible only witnesses to the Word and only becomes authoritative when it speaks to the individual. This means that the Bible’s

^a Acts 22:3

¹ Lit *race*

^b Jer 9:14; Matt 15:2; Mark 7:3; Col 2:8

³ *New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update*. LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995, S. Ga 1:14

witness to Christ is fallible. The individual must determine what is the word of God within the Bible and what is not. To clearly grasp what is and what is not, there is the need for some type of divine encounter. In short, this means the individual becomes the final judge as to what in the Bible is the word of God and what is not. Since in neo-orthodoxy the encounter is primary, the encounter actually becomes the authority and anyone can have his or her own encounter and come up with totally different conclusions.

(5) Cultism. Many of the cults teach that the Bible *along with some other writing* is supreme and authoritative. A key characteristic of the cults, however, is that though they make a claim to believe the Bible is God's word, they either affirm another writing as having equal authority or raise the other writing as more important or authoritative than the Bible itself. The perfect illustration of this is Mormonism and the *Book of Mormon*, which Mormonism views as inspired. Christian Science views Mary Baker Eddy's book, *The Key to the Scriptures*, as equally inspired. In the final analysis, the Bible is not the only authority; in matter of fact it is relegated to a lower position of importance.

(6) Conservative Protestantism (the Orthodox Position).

The Orthodox position holds:

- That the Bible is the infallible word of God, and the ultimate authority for faith and practice.
- That the Bible is inspired in the original autographs and is without error.

This means that, while it will record the lies of Satan who deceived Eve in

Genesis 3, it records it as a lie.

- That the Bible is true in everything it affirms to be true.

Thus, the Bible is supreme and the final authority for faith and practice.

The Conservative Protestant orthodox position with regard to these various views.

Regarding Rationalism: the mind or reason, it must be subservient to the word of God. If the mind is thinking in terms that are contrary to the

Scriptures, it is not the mind that judges the Scriptures, but the Scriptures judge the thoughts of the mind.

Regarding Mysticism: Concerning the experience of Mysticism, the Bible is the final judge of experience, and experience cannot determine the truth of Scripture.

Regarding Romanism: Concerning Romanism, it is not the church that determines the meaning of the Bible but, rather, the Bible determines the proper place of the Church.

Regarding Neo-orthodoxy: Concerning the encounter, a man does not need a unique encounter before he can comprehend what is the word of God in the Scriptures....

Regarding Cults: Concerning the issue of the cults, the answer of Orthodoxy is that the Bible, and the *Bible alone, is* supreme, and the 66 books of the Scriptures are all that has been inspired by God in written form. Any other writing is the writing of a false prophet or false prophetess. We who hold to the supremacy of the Bible believe that knowledge is subject to the Bible, and there is no inner light that adds revelation beyond the Bible.¹⁵

Why this position? Scripture

Hebrews 4:12

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

In John 5:39ff, Christ said to the leaders of the Jews:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;.....”

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

To continue with thoughts on this conservative Protestant position, Dr.Ryrie writes:

“Conservative” eliminates liberalism’s humanistic and subjective bases of authority, and “protestantism” removes the church as a base of authority. So one would agree that “orthodoxy is that branch of Christendom which limits the ground of religious authority to the Bible” (Edward John Carnell, The

Case for Orthodox Theology [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969], p. 13). The Scriptures contain the objective revelation of God and are therefore the basis of authority for the conservative Protestant.

To be sure, understanding God's revelation in the Bible involves using the rational processes of a redeemed mind, a commitment of faith in matters not revealed or not understood, a dependence on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, a conscience clear before God, and some insight into the lessons of history.

Why this position? Relationships.

All men have a Creator – Creature relationship. They may deny it, but they know it.

However, believers, by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, have another relationship: a Father (God) – Child relationship!

A Child of God.

As a child of God, we now move into areas called “abiding”, “resting”, “obedience”, “rewards”, “inheritance”; areas that we are told in scripture are pleasing the Father. Why would we not want to try to please the Father – the One who has bestowed so many wonderful gifts on us as believers (sinners, saved by grace)!

Living out our new relationship.

So, now, when we look at the “time” between our “spiritual birth” and our physical death, we have the opportunity allow God to work through us in the ways He wants, because we want to be obedient children.

Conclusion:

These human views influence the orthodox believer every day by appealing to the mind, pride, emotions, self worth, self determination, self importance....and self absorption.

These lead away from the relationship we have with a living and true God. These are, in fact, idols.

2 Peter 2:1-3 reads, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words;.....”

Taking in the Word of God regularly changes our frame of mind about truth. The earth was created 6,000 years old (not billions of years), man was created in the image and likeness of God (not evolved from apes), the Flood changed the topography of the earth (not evidence of evolution), man is a responsible sinner (not a victim of the environment), and, contrary to humanistic belief, man is not getting better. Man is born spiritually dead and cannot understand spiritual things. He still lives less than 100 years, and still has the same questions!

So, as children of the Father, we want to study the Bible to understand what He is revealing; Who He is, who His Eternal Son is, who the Holy Spirit is, what His plan is; what He has done, what He is doing, what He wants for us in eternity future.

As we understand the answers to these questions and relish the relationship He has provided us, we will want to walk by faith, trusting in our loving Father’s provision, and not by sight.

Resources:

Bob Deffinbaugh, Th.M. : Bibliology (www.bible.org)

Arnold Fruchtenbaum: The Inspiration of Scripture

Paul Enns: The Moody Handbook of Theology

J. Hampton Keathley III, Th.M.: Bibliology (www.bible.org)

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