

Why We Believe the Bible: Response to historical argument for inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible found in chapters 7 & 8 of Daniel Fuller's work entitled Hermeneutics, produced in 1983.

by Alex Chediak

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but 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

To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. – Acts 1:3

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. – Romans 1:21

If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. – John 7:17, ESV

Authority demands belief and prepares man for reason. Reason leads to understanding and knowledge. But reason is not entirely absent from authority, for we have got to consider whom we have to believe. – Augustine, Of True Religion

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. – C.S. Lewis

**Practical Theology
Dr. John Piper**

November 28, 2005

Introduction

Basically, there are two ways to attempt to show that the Bible is true. The first is to argue from historical origins; the other, to argue that God must give a person faith to recognize it as true. In the former, one is provided rational, convincing evidence that yields understanding *prior to believing*. In the latter, one *first* believes, and then this God-given faith begets understanding. Daniel Fuller takes the former view, which will be presented and critiqued.

Fuller's historical (or evidentiary) argument for believing the Bible

For Fuller, to say that belief must precede rational understanding is to call a man to make a mystical step rather than a rational one. Yet the apostles seemed to appeal to “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3; Heb 2:3-4) that Jesus had risen, and it was based on an accurate recording of these that others, it was hoped, might gain “certainty” concerning Christian teachings (Luke 1:4).

Paul took the same approach with those in Galatia. He sought to first establish for them that he was an apostle. He notes his direct call from Jesus Christ as grounds for why they should trust him (Gal 1:1). And this direct call harkens back to a historical event – Paul’s conversion on the Damascus road. Paul describes his pre-conversion manner of life (Gal 1:13-14) with the goal, it seems, of convincing his audience (as the other apostles were convinced, Gal 1:24) that nothing short of a miracle could explain his spiritual transformation. When before King Agrippa, Paul again gave a rational presentation of his conversion in the hopes of persuading the King to become a Christian (Acts 26:2-29; note especially 25-29).

Fuller proceeds from establishing that Paul’s apostolic commission was authentic to deducing that his letters must therefore be God’s words, to deducing that others with whom Paul was associated (I Cor 2:6-13) also wrote God’s words (e.g., Peter, James, Jude). Fuller next observes that since the Jews in Christ’s day regarded the Old Testament minus the Apocrypha as inspired, we should too. Lastly, he points to the witness of early Christians that the apostolic writings had ceased. Thus, he arrives at sixty-six inspired books.

Key to Fuller's approach is the desire to not appeal to mysticism. If Mormons appeal to a "burning in the bosom" (by which one can supposedly know from God that Joseph Smith wrote God's words), Fuller would want Christians to make no similar appeal. Fuller summarizes his view by stating:

Thus, on the basis of the historically controllable event of Paul's apostolicity as demanded by his having spearheaded the Gentile mission, we know both the historicity of all the events of the Bible's redemptive history as well as the truth of the way the biblical writers interpret these events....Our faith rests on the sufficiency of the evidence.¹

Fuller observes that since the individual is distinct from the Holy Spirit, it is always incumbent upon him to determine if and when the Holy Spirit is moving on him and drawing him to a particular conviction. His conclusion is that one argues circularly by saying "I believe the Bible because the Holy Spirit told me it was true." This draws a false dichotomy between reason and faith and (stated crassly) encourages people not to exercise intelligent belief but something closer to superstition.²

Response to Fuller

The key shortcoming in Fuller's argument is the apparent assumption of a neutral bias on the part of the non-Christian. The Bible repeatedly informs us that the fundamental bias of all of humanity is anti-God; we simply prefer that He not rule over us. Rom 3:11 says "no one understands". Natural man, by virtue of original sin, is at enmity with God (Rom 8:7)—he is not even *able* to submit to God's rule. For example, the Pharisees did not want to humble themselves and believe Jesus, his many miracles and "convincing proofs" notwithstanding. The problem was not a lack of convincing evidence but a lack of willingness to believe (John 3:19; 5:39-40).

Interestingly, Fuller himself notes that reason is not the leading agent in the pursuit of truth. Desire is primary: man pursues that which he perceives will make him most happy. In fact, it is precisely because people love (i.e., find happiness in) darkness that they do not come to

¹Daniel Fuller, Hermeneutics, Chap VIII, p. 19.

² R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley make this argument well in Classical Apologetics (Zondervan, 1984), p. 22.

Christ (John 3:19-21) even when presented with otherwise convincing evidence.³ Rather, men suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18, 21).⁴ The Holy Spirit must illuminate one's mind to see the rationality of the Christian faith and its Bible (II Cor 4:4-6).

In fairness, it should never be denied that the Christian faith is eminently reasonable. Beyond question, the attestation (both internal and external) for the veracity of the Old and New Testament far exceeds that of all other ancient literature.⁵ Noting this often gains a hearing for the gospel and strengthens the faith of troubled believers. But we must not rely exclusively on historical evidence. If the three aspects of true faith are knowledge, assent, and trust, then evidence can at best secure "knowledge". One still must incline the will towards God (a miracle of God's grace!) for there to be assent and trust.⁶

Alternatively, it can be helpful to ask non-Christians to explain reality from their worldview. Simply listening and pointing out areas of inconsistency in their argument and underlying assumptions can be valuable.⁷ One could then note the Christian worldview's beautiful self-consistency—how it truly makes sense out of so much of reality. The Bible is self-authenticating—if one truly wishes to do God's will (John 7:17). Nevertheless, historical arguments are helpful at supplementing and buttressing a robust apologetic that starts from God's inescapable reality (and hence authority), explains man's present condition, and points to the Christ of the Bible. And the best apologetic comes from a lifestyle that matches our theology, so that our words and deeds are seasoned as with salt, bringing an aroma of grace to those in our midst.

³ John 3:19-20 states the general (negative) observation. Verse 21 notes that God must act if any are to respond positively. (εἰργασμένα is a perfect passive participle, "have been carried out" by God)

⁴ Rom 1:21 explicitly states that they "knew God". So whatever data they had, it was sufficient to illicit trust—had they only wished to acquiesce in the face of convincing evidence.

⁵ See for example, F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents: Are they reliable? And Walter Kaiser: The Old Testament Documents: Are they reliable and relevant?

⁶ This experience differs from the Mormon's "burning bosom" because of the Bible's historical reliability, which the book of Mormon lacks, and because of the Holy Spirit-wrought fruits of conversion that appear in the Christian.

⁷ One thinks of Francis Schaeffer's ministry, for example.