

The Confounding Power of God, The Christian and the Bible

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To study the written words of the Bible is an **objective** exercise. The words are right there - in black and white. A Christian apologist is one who defends the Biblical record from internal - and external - assaults. "*Apologist*," comes from a compound Greek word, "*apologia*" - "*apo*" (from) + "*logos*" (a word, or an account). So, it is literally, "*an accounting from*" someone. In the New Testament, it means, "*a verbal defense.*" Paul was "*appointed for the defense ('apologia') of the gospel*" (Phil 1:16). Peter admonished his readers to always be "*ready to make a defense ('apologia') to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you*" (1Pet 3:15). Every Christian is an apologist. Some ... are just better than others.

I was sent a file of "*144 Bible Contradictions*" ... and challenged to examine them. I've seen similar lists, but as it had been while, I decided to look it over. The result? Well, the same as before. Most of these can be resolved, but there are several I will probably never resolve ... on this side. Actually, I could add a few more.

Since my primary motivation in life is to expound, in as great a detail as possible, the Word of God as just that, this confession should give me pause - maybe even create panic. But, it doesn't. In fact, I am enjoying working through these "*contradictions.*" So, **why** doesn't this rattle me? As I thought on this (because I wanted to know myself), I came up with four reasons. Two are objective, one is semi-objective, and one is subjective.

Two Objective Reasons

1. ***The problem may be due to a corrupted text copy.*** I believe the originals were flawless. We now work with copies - and copies of copies. See, "*Textual Criticism and the Bible.*"
2. ***The problem may be due to a translation error.*** The original Bible languages are long extinct. That exponentially complicates an already difficult task of accurately relaying thoughts from one language - and culture - to another. See, "*Translations and the Bible.*"

Reason Three: A Semi-Objective Reason

The problem may be due to an inability to accurately understand what is being said. This is actually an objective - and subjective - problem. While the Bible's words are **objectively** black and white, there is also the **subjective** element of "understanding." Supposedly, a dog can understand about a hundred words. Well, my vocabulary is larger than that. When I speak in words (or concepts) the dog does not understand, that does not mean I do not know what I am talking about. It's just the dog doesn't get it.

This understanding problem is referenced throughout the Bible. Here are several

examples. After rising from the dead, Jesus appeared to His disciples. They were understandably dumbfounded. As Jesus began explaining things, “*He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*” (Lk 24:45). Elsewhere, God says, “*Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are ... My thoughts than your thoughts*” (Isa 55:9). Paul told the Corinthians “*a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them*” (1Cor 2:14). Before reading the Bible, when thinking right, I take a second ... and ask Him to teach me.

Having said this, I do not want anyone to think that proper Bible understandings are a product of mysticism. Benjamin Franklin said he wasn't bothered by what he *did not* understand about the Bible - as much as what he *did* understand. Frank Zappa, a psychedelic guru of the '60's, said the Bible was from an alien intelligence. He's right ... and the Bible basics are clear.

Many times, when I did not initially understand something in the Bible - later, it was made clear. I just needed more information. This is so common, that now, when I encounter some “contradiction,” I doubt my understanding first ... not the Bible first. Such a subtle shift is a huge sea change. Internally, I know I am missing a piece to the puzzle - and at some point ... it will come. The importance of this change cannot be overemphasized.

“I have not spoken in secret, in some dark land ... I, the Lord, speak righteousness declaring things that are upright” (Isa 45:19). Seeming contradictions I now relegate to one of these three reasons - a corrupted text, translation errors, or an unilluminated understanding.

“What a cop-out! That means you can just dismiss all objections to the Bible and not deal seriously with any of them!” Well, that would be true - except for ...

Reason Four: The Confounding Power of God

Jesus told a lot of people He would rise from the dead. After His crucifixion “*the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together with Pilate and said, ‘Sir, we remember that when He was still alive, that deceiver said, ‘after three days, I rise again.’”* (Mt 27:62,63). I guess that little detail initially slipped their minds. But after that midday darkness, earthquake, ripped veil in The Temple and opened tombs - with sightings of many raised saints - I guess they thought Pilate ought to know about this. My point? For Jesus to rise from the dead would simply ***be consistent*** with His Word. But, when that happened ... hardened, unbelieving, Gentile Roman guards, assigned to the tomb of some dead Jew (in this pit of a Roman province) - “*became like dead men*” (Mt 28:2-4). But all Jesus did - was what He said. While God is consistent with His words - the reality of God is far beyond those words.

When God breaks into my personal situation with His word - those words become more than just objective data. They change me. At times, they have overpowered me. This is the opposite of *confusion* - it is a ***confounding power*** of the reality of the living God. Because this is based upon personal experience (oftentimes in relatively complex circumstances), it is impossible

to *objectively* verify to another this has been an encounter with the God of the Bible. But these kinds of experiences make one less eager to attack the Bible. In fact, that one never attacks it. That one studies it - and seeks assistance from the Author of it when problems are encountered.

As I am writing this, and reflecting on some of these encounters, I think I am going to catalogue, in black and white, these *subjective* experiences. “*Seek the Lord and His strength; Seek His face continually. Remember His wonderful acts ...*” (Ps 105:4,5). In a time of crisis, to review such a record will supply strength. That in itself often confounds onlookers - be they friend or foe.

Conclusion

I think there is a difference between *defending* the Bible (or faith) and *being defensive* about it. When one has passion about something, when that something is attacked, it is easy to become defensive. Defensiveness is too often ruled by emotion and, in this case, ends with one trying to *prove* the Bible to the opposition - or prove some point. This can degenerate into a contest of wills and egos and probably, in the end, does not accomplish much. While it is right to “*contend earnestly for the faith*” (Jude 3), contentiousness is probably another matter. If someone is unteachable, there is a point one is casting “*pearls before swine*” (Mt 7:6). While an overseer is not to be “*self-willed ... (or) pugnacious,*” they still must “*hold fast the faithful word*” so as to be able “*both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict*” (Ti 1:7-9). If they can not - or will not - do this, they are not qualified to be an overseer among the saints. If you are familiar with any of my work, you know that I believe *all* error (regardless or reason or cause) never leads to benefit ... and is always void of God. Even small error usually leads to bigger error, so I seek to bring it all down - while also presenting the accurate alternative. When challenged, *my challenge* is to try and not become defensive. Here is why.

Ultimately, I am not responsible for the material in the Bible. I did not write it. And that is the point. It is *His* Book. He calls Himself, “*The Word*” (Jn 1:1,14) - and will “*defend*” His Word. He is *The* Apologist. God is going to emerge from all involvement in this morass absolutely clean - and that includes this black and white document. These seemingly irreconcilable “*contradictions*” will be swatted away like the sewer gnats they are.

In one sense, I am grateful these problems exist. If I understood everything in His Book, I might begin to subtly conclude, “*He is not really that big a God.*” So, as a little Christian apologist, in reference to these seemingly conflicting passages that finally do stand as seemingly contradictory ... this is my “*apologia.*”