

Reflections on Various Issues Related to Supposed "Bible Contradictions"

Introduction

Some people may, through ignorance or misunderstanding of the facts, reach the conclusion that there are contradictions in the Bible - and they may do so with a teachable spirit, willing to learn when the opportunity arrives.

In contrast, there are others - *enemies* of the Bible - who use so-called "Bible contradictions" in an attempt to attack the Bible. Those in this group have *no* interest in having a humble and teachable spirit, which would make them *capable* of seeing reality the way it is. It is for this second group of people, that the conclusion of this study is intended:

The more I examine the so-called "contradictions" that those who attack Scripture so often *claim* exist in Scripture, the more I realize how important it is for Scripture to be the way it is. Otherwise, the Bible would be no different than the fake man-made "holy writings."

In man-made "holy writings," the contradictions are *genuine*.

In the Bible, they come into existence through ignorance of the facts, or when people, who have *already* suppressed the truth they know, superimpose false assumptions over it.

At the Day of Justice, the very words spoken by those who suppress the truth and attack the Word will testify against them.

ISSUE 1 - Four perspectives that Christians may have on issues related to "Bible contradictions"

Some Christians enjoy exploring the issue of "Bible contradictions." They are willing to go beyond the superficial level where the Bible's adversaries dwell. They can see past the shallow arguments being paraded by their opponents. They know the potential *legitimate* options to the relatively few questions that are more difficult to answer. They might not always have the answer, but they know the Author of the Book, and they have observed how, over and over again, seemingly insurmountable arguments in the past have crumbled into the dust, once further evidence was brought to light. I encourage such people to continue in their defense of the faith and truth of Scripture, provided that they do not neglect to *also* show love to friends, as well as to enemies. Scripture admonishes us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Some Christians have never seen a need to examine such issues, so they have never developed a viewpoint. They have focused on what they *do* understand. They might not understand some of the verses that others take issue with, but they have chosen to focus their attention on living-out the new life that is in them. They have decided to let *God* take care of those other issues, for they believe that there are many

things that are much more important - such as the expression of love toward God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). I commend these people, and would encourage them to keep their focus on both *accepting* the Word and *living it out* - and on doing it as an expression of love for the One who saved them.

Others, who feel less secure in their relationship with God, or who are weak in their faith (Romans 15:1), may respond in various ways that reflect their insecurity. I hope that those in this group will be encouraged to see that there is nothing to fear in admitting that they don't know all the answers. The important thing is to know the One who *does* know the answers, and to realize that he can be trusted.

There are others who call themselves "Christian," but who do not really know what the Bible means by that concept. They confuse "following Jesus" with "being religious." For this group, they do not need to worry about "Bible contradictions," for there are *more important issues* they need to deal with. They need to become acquainted with the Author of the Bible. Until they do this, they won't even be *capable* of understanding the Bible and its significance - things which are much more important than the so-called "contradictions."

Issue 2 - The corrupt nature of the human heart and mind

OVERVIEW

The human mind is corrupted by sin and is filled with rebellion. It rejects the revelation from God that it *innately* knows is true. Because of this, the human mind cannot (and will *choose* not to) accept the revelation given to us in the Bible.

Until the person changes, he cannot see God's Word for what it is, but will always find something wrong with it. The sad thing about his response is this: The "wrongness" he sees is a product of his own corrupt and distorted thinking, and is not inherent in the Word itself.

WE ALL HAVE A BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRUTH, BUT WE SUPPRESS IT

The Bible was not written for the purpose of alluring "adherents" from other religions, or for the purpose of sounding "good" to those who reject it, in order to gain their approval. Rather, it was written for the purpose of communicating truth that *demand*s a response - even when that truth doesn't please us. This truth, communicated in the Bible, has been written in a way that is *consistent* with the ways and *nature* of God, the Creator of all. What it says is given *not* for the purpose of gaining the approval of its opponents, but to show us what is right. Rather than begging and pleading for us to accept its message, it *demand*s acceptance and warns us that we will be held accountable for our response.

The Bible warns us that *all of us* have a basic comprehension of what God is like, so that we have no excuse for rejecting what he says. Yet by nature, we *suppress* that innate knowledge we possess, and refuse to submit to God - and we do this, from our earliest moments of conscious existence.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to

them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20)

We cannot escape this knowledge of God. For *all creation* is revelatory of the Creator. For instance, about the skies, we read:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard. (Psalm 19:1-3)

There is a *distinction* between creation and the Creator. Creation itself is not deity, but is a *reflection* of deity - of the God who created it. Yet the fact that this revelation *does* permeate all creation means that there is a sense, in which we can say, "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). It is *impossible* for us to escape this revelation of God. Thus it is impossible for us to escape our responsibility to submit to the truth (even though we choose, instead, to suppress our awareness of it).

Not only does the world around us reveal truth about God, *truth that we, by nature, do not want to see*, but we ourselves - *our very own beings* - testify against us. We ourselves reflect God's image (a partial expression of his character).

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

Sin has negatively impacted all creation around us, and it has even partially distorted this reflection of God's image within us. *Yet what remains is still sufficient to leave us without excuse.*

Our suppression of this revelation - an understanding about God which we have even *without* the Bible, an understanding that exists both within us and about us - leaves us doubly without excuse. And since we *choose* to suppress this testimony, we are not "neutral." We choose to reject it, even though this revelation permeates *all* creation, and we *cannot* escape it! No wonder the Bible says that it is the *fool* who claims that there is no God! (Psalm 14:1)

The Bible also tells us that, because of our sins, our entire beings - even our minds - have become corrupted. We refuse to accept the Word, in the way God has revealed it to us, because doing so would require us both to acknowledge our evil ways, and to turn away from them. More than that, we are not willing to accept *anything else in creation, the way God has revealed it to be*. Scripture describes us in this manner:

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. (Ephes. 4:18)

The very foundation that forms the basis of our thinking is distorted because of our sin (and our suppression of truth). Our ultimate underlying perceptions of reality, which control the way we think,

have become warped. And since our foundation has become corrupted, it has influenced *every aspect of the use of our mind - even the way we use logic* (which God created). We have become rebels against an accurate perspective of reality. As rebels, we cannot accept reality the way it is, even though Scripture reveals it to us.

This is the way each of us is (or was). Until we are willing to *submit* to God's Word, we can neither comprehend his Word nor accept the truth that surrounds us. Instead, when we are exposed to genuine wisdom (which originates in God), we consider it "foolishness." (This is why Scripture tells us that God's "foolishness" is wiser than man's "wisdom" - 1 Corinthians 1:25.)

ISSUE 3 - The close connection between the historical and doctrinal statements in the Word

COMMON GRACE...

In the following paragraphs, you will read statements which say that people live in a world that is revelatory of God, in spite of the fact that sin and evil has marred and masked that revelation. You will read that people, by nature, reject that revelation, and therefore, cannot understand the significance of creation. Because of that, they cannot function in creation - cannot properly interact with it - the way that God intended.

With comments such as these, you might wonder, "If these things are true, how could a person who rejects God's revelation function at all in the world?"

It is because of God's *grace* that it is possible. God prevents people from living consistently with their "starting point" of rejection. In a world that is *permeated* with the revelation of God's glory, nature and power, the very God they reject makes it possible for them to function, at least to a degree! (Theologians often describe this graciousness as "common grace," in contrast to his "saving grace.")

These things must be remembered, when reading the following paragraphs. They explain why those who rebel against God don't always respond *totally* the way that is described. Praise God for the inconsistent thinking of those who reject him!

The things described below also apply to the fakes who *claim* to be following God, who "love" him with their mouths, but deny them with their lives. To some degree, these things might also apply to those who have just repented of their sins, and who are just *beginning* to grow in their understanding of the Word: It may take some time before they reach their goal of having totally "renewed" minds (Romans 12:2).

IN NATURE...

God created reality so that it would be revelatory of his nature. He also created it in such a way that all aspects of it would be *consistent*. This means that the nature of truth, when dealing with the *physical* world, is consistent with the nature of truth, when dealing with *spiritual* matters - for *both* are built on the same foundation. (It cannot be any other way, for if it were, one or the other would cease to be revelatory

of God's nature!) Since both are built on the same foundation, if we accept the one, *in its fullness*, we will be able to accept the other, also.

But since it is our nature to reject the *foundation* for truth, our concept of reality is distorted. This means we are not able (and not qualified) to accept the truth of reality, as it exists in the world around us. And so, when we are brought face-to-face with that reality, we will see "contradictions" that don't actually exist. Or, as an alternative, we will see only the fragments of truth and reality that we *want* to see, and reject the rest. (Anything we *don't* want to accept we will define as *not* being part of "reality.")

IN THE BIBLE...

Since creation has been marred by sin *and* it is our nature to interpret it wrongly, we *need* special revelation from God (the Bible), in order to comprehend it rightly. However, just as we (by nature and by choice) respond wrongly to the world around us, so also we will tend to do the same with the Bible. We will either accept some parts and reject (ignore or explain-away) other parts, *or* we may attack the parts we don't like, by calling them "contradictions" (whether it involves doctrinal, historical or scientific parts of the Bible). Our perception of the Bible will be marred, just as it is for the rest of reality. (This is why people can disagree in just about *any* area of life, not just when it comes to the Bible! Different people will accept and reject different parts of reality.)

Our focus here is specifically on people's perspective of the Bible, so we mention these other issues only in passing. Since the Bible is in print, those who reject its truth will look for printed parts they don't like, and will attack what they find. (It is their *nature* to do so.) Since the rest of reality around them is *not* in print, they will more often ignore what doesn't fit with what they want to believe - and if their opponents (who *do* accept those other aspects of reality) put it in print, they will attack what their opponents write.

FINDING "BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS"...

Because of this distorted perception of reality, some people who are exposed to the Bible will simply ignore it. Others, with a more outgoing (or confrontational) personality, may openly attack the Bible, claiming it is full of historical (or scientific, or even theological) "discrepancies." We must remember, however, that these people are not "neutral." Since they have rejected the God who is the *foundation* of reality, they are totally engulfed by a preconceived hostility - even before they open the Bible for the first time. Until they humble themselves in the sight of God, they will *never* be able to comprehend *historical* or *scientific* facts the way God intended us to do so (whether or not they're in the Bible) - much less the *doctrinal* facts. On the other hand, if they *do* repent and get to know the original author (God), their preconceived hostilities will vanish. Not only will their minds be open - for the first time - for finding genuine answers to their questions, but the very nature of their questions will change.

A person who has repented of his hostile attitude toward the Word will see these "attacks" against the Word from an entirely different perspective. He will have accepted the foundation that enables these facts to come together. He will be open to the idea of allowing the Word *itself* to explain the so-called "difficulties." This alone will cause many of the "difficulties" to disappear! By the time he has removed the false assumptions he once held whenever he looked at the Word, he will discover that there aren't as many difficulties as he once - in his hostile days - supposed.

Issue 4 - Dealing with alleged "contradictions"

As long as people exist, who reject God's revelation of truth, there will always be claims that the Bible is full of contradictions. It has to be that way, for to be different, a person must first submit to God. Until then, though *genuine* contradictions don't exist, claims about contradictions will.

Now suppose we would attempt to analyze some of the so-called "contradictions" that such opponents of Scripture might claim are in the Bible. Even if we merely took into consideration the *context* of each passage they use, many of the "contradictions" would instantly vanish! Most of the others would fall into one of two categories:

- 1) The first category would include those so-called "contradictions" which were nothing more than the expression of two *different* facts. The false assumption would be that the two statements were making reference to the same thing.

An example of this is the passage about Judas hanging himself (Matthew 27:3-10), and the events that later occurred to his body, probably after it had begun to decompose (Acts 1:18-19). Some people who attack the Bible claim that these passages describe two different methods of death, and thus contradict each other!

- 2) The second category would include those instances in which the *same* basic facts are being expressed, but from different perspectives. This can be seen in instances of parallel accounts of the same event.

An example of this can be seen in the illustration given above. In Acts, we read that Judas bought the field; but in Matthew, we read that the religious leaders used Judas' money to buy it. In modern terms, they were his "proxy," his representative in the purchase; but opponents of the Scriptures won't tell you this (even though making legal transactions on behalf of someone else is a common practice even *today*).

Another example would be the various accounts of what happened at the resurrection. One account may mention several people at a specific scene; another may mention only the key people (or person) who had an important role in what happened. Opponents of the Scriptures will insist that all accounts must mention *all* the people who were present, or else they are contradictory and filled with error!

Though all Scripture has its origin in God, he used different human authors to communicate his word at different times, in different contexts, and often with different emphases. From the "human standpoint," these different authors will choose the specific details that are most important for what they are communicating to their immediate readers. This would be influenced by many factors, such as the culture and background of the *reader*, or the reader's prior knowledge of the Bible. Each *author's* own background - such as being a fisherman or a physician - may influence the words he chooses to communicate this, and which details are included. Because of this, different accounts will often have somewhat different focuses, but *in no instance* will the facts in one account be a *denial* of the facts recorded in the other account. Instead, Scripture simply affirms that *both* accounts are true.

The person who has submitted to the Word can explore ways in which the two perspectives of an account complement each other. In doing so, he will grow his appreciation for the *preciseness* and *technical accuracy* of the Word, as well as in his love for, and trust in, God (Scripture's ultimate author). In contrast, the person who has *not* submitted to the Word will superimpose *his own assumptions* into the text - such as the assumption that the passages *inherently* contradict. Once this is *assumed*, the accuser will be unwilling to even consider the complementary nature that actually exists between the two statements. Instead, he will view it as an opportunity to attack the Word. His mind is *closed* to any other option.

Ultimately, the historical facts are *not* the issue, for one's rejection of the facts is *not* caused by the facts themselves, but by the person's inherent suppression of truth and his unwillingness to accept the complementary nature of those Scriptures he is attacking.

Issue 5 - The parallel nature of historical vs. doctrinal facts; and one's attitude toward the Word

All truth is revelatory of God. All truth is consistent and coherent, whether doctrinal, historical, etc. God didn't give us the historical facts one way - a way that satisfies the demands of people who reject his Word - and the doctrinal facts a different way. All truth - whether historical, doctrinal, scientific, or belonging to any other category - has its origin in God. Because of this, *all* truth in Scripture (historical, doctrinal, scientific, etc.) reflects the nature of truth *the same way*.

Since God has designed "historical" facts to complement each other *the same way* that "doctrinal" facts complement each other, a person's response toward the one group of facts (whether historical or doctrinal) will tend to be comparable to his response to the other group. In other words, those who attack the *historical* and *scientific* facts of Scripture, accusing the Word of "contradictions," will tend to do the same when they approach the *doctrinal* facts.

The Bible demands that we submit to its message with an attitude of *humility*. Those who do so will increase in understanding and wisdom, and will increase in their understanding of *all* of life. In contrast, the Bible will not tolerate those who are *unwilling* to come to it with a humble spirit, but who are filled with unbroken pride and arrogance. God has promised that those who come *this way* will lose even whatever capabilities they still have for right thinking (even if they are "religious" or *claim* to be "Christian").

Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. (Matthew 13:12)

God has designed his Word so that the *same* message will enlighten one person, but will have a hardening effect on another. The same words will either have a life-changing effect or a condemning effect, depending on the attitude the person has when he comes to it. People will hear the same message, but will respond in opposite ways. And so, the Word will give life to the one person, and leave the other in a state of spiritual (and ultimately, eternal) death.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? (2 Cor. 2:14-16)

One of the most basic manifestations of people's corrupt, sinful nature is their desire to have God submit to *them*. One method of doing this is to invent "criteria for acceptance," and to demand that God submit to those criteria, before we "accept" him (or his Word). And when God doesn't submit to those criteria, we attempt to attach the blame to *him*, rather than accepting the fact that it is *our sin* that separates us from God. Sometimes we may even claim that his "silence" to our demands is "proof" that he doesn't exist!

God will *not* submit himself to people, even when it comes to acceptance of his Word. And so he has fashioned the Word in such a way that only those who come to it with the proper attitude will be able to receive it. The person who arrogantly demands that the *historical* facts in the Word submit themselves to some "criteria for acceptance" that he has invented will be no more capable of accepting those facts, than he does the *doctrinal* facts. In contrast, the person who humbly submits himself to the Word (rather than trying to submit the Word to himself) will be able to accept *both* the doctrinal facts and the historical facts. This is because he has begun to understand the way those facts (whether doctrinal or historical) complement each other. Even in instances that he does not fully understand those facts (whether doctrinal or historical) he will accept them, as best as he can understand them, because he has come to know the *integrity* of the Author, who chose to include those facts in his Word.

Issue 6 - Responding to the Historical Facts of the Bible

COMMENTS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE *NOT* SUBMITTED TO GOD:

To you who have not submitted to God, consider this: Even if God *did* describe the historical facts of the Bible in a way that suits your fancy, would that cause you to accept the doctrinal facts? Not likely, for the problem is in your heart, mind and will, not in the facts.

Let's take a look at some doctrinal facts that may illustrate this. Scripture reveals to us, for example, the fact that God is sovereign over all Creation, as well as the fact that people are responsible for their actions. Do you call these statements "contradictions"? (Most opponents of the Bible do.) Scripture treats these two concepts as "complements" of each other. Both are affirmed; neither is denied. This means that you will be held accountable for your actions on the Day of Justice (the "responsibility" fact); and the Sovereign God, who is both impartial and righteous, guarantees it will happen (the "sovereignty" fact).

Scripture also testifies that the "Word" (Jesus) "was with God," yet at the same time "was God" (John 1:1). These two facts complement each other, each being an affirmation of a separate fact, neither being a denial of the other. Are you like many people, who superimpose assumptions into the text, and view these complementary concepts as though they were contradictory? This "Word" (Jesus) is the one you must bow down before, if you ever want to clearly understand the "Word" (Bible). And even if you *don't* want to bow down now, you *will* bow down at the Day of Justice - when the very light of his presence will burn away all your pretension.

You may not like that God describes historical facts the way he does, but who are you to demand that God submit to *your* "criteria"? Who do you think he is? Your personal slave? A trained animal who sits when you command it to sit, and rolls over when you tell it to do so - and who bows down before *you*? If you have this attitude toward historical facts in the Bible, you will have the same attitude toward everything else God says. Your attitude is completely the opposite of what God requires in those who seek him.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6b)

God is not "lonely" or "incomplete" without you. He doesn't "need" you.

And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. (Acts 17:25)

Even so, God is being gracious to you, showing kindness that you don't deserve - *even in the midst of your rebellion against him!*

He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matthew 5:45b)

Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (Acts 14:17)

This present time of kindness will someday come to an end. If you continue to reject his kindness, he will someday reject you. You may *arrogantly* judge God and his Word, right now. But the day will come in which he will *righteously* judge you.

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (Romans 2:4-5)

Do not be quick with your mouth,
do not be hasty in your heart
to utter anything before God.
God is in heaven
and you are on earth,
so let your words be few. (Eccles. 5:2)

COMMENTS FOR THOSE WHO *DO* BELONG TO GOD:

To you who belong to God, who have humbled yourselves and submitted to what God's Word says: When God changed your heart, he began to change the false perceptions you previously held. But it takes time. So do not be surprised if there are things you don't understand, whether historical or doctrinal - especially

if you are new at exploring the Word. As you focus your thoughts on God's Word, and allow it to change the way you think and act (this is the basic meaning of the word "repentance"), these things will begin to fit together as a unit. You will begin to see the complementary nature of truths that you once thought opposed each other. The more you succeed in conforming your thinking to the perspective Scripture teaches us, the more you will be able to see the beauty and integrity of what God has said.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

One more thing: Never forget that you once had the same perspective as those who now oppose you. You were once dead in your sins (as they are). It was *God* who gave you life.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. (Col. 1:21)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephes. 2:1-5)

Do not be surprised when those who oppose you do not seem to be able to hear what you are saying. Remember that *even now* they are spiritually dead. They *cannot* accept what you hear, until God changes their hearts. Do not have an arrogant attitude over them; for you, yourself, were once among them. Instead, pray that God might perhaps have the same mercy on them, as he had on you.

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty. (Malachi 4:1-3)