

So, how do we grow spiritually?

1. Read Your Bible. This is Job #1. Think about it. Spiritual growth is growth in faith, that is, in confidence in our God. How else can one grow confident in somebody other than getting to know them and understand what their purpose, motivations, and fear/concerns are? Faith demands knowledge. We are confident in things or people that we know. Likewise, our faith in God can only grow by coming to learn and know what God says of Himself and of His Plan. How can anyone be sure what God says? How can we know what He says if not by reading the Bible? The Bible is the only way that we can know. There are definitely arguments against this position on the Bible, but in the end, the question that everyone must answer for themselves is, if the Bible is not exclusively God's Word, then what is and how can we be sure that it is? There are all sorts of things - books, people, totems, talismans, etc - that claim to be the source of God's Word. But how do we know that their claim is true? How can we be sure what to trust?

If anything is truly God's Word, then it is going to be perfectly objective, completely independent of human beings. That is a truism. It is the same as saying that if a testimony is to be truly original from some witness A, then it must not contain any input from some other witness B. This is the claim then that the Bible makes about itself in this regard:

<sup>20</sup> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy *never had its origin in the human will*, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.  
2 Peter 1:20-21 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is *God-breathed* and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness  
2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)

It is true ordinarily that a claim is not in itself proof that the claim is true. That is, normally, something does not become true just because somebody said that it is true. So, why should we believe the Bible when it claims that its words do not have a human origin but rather that they originate from God Himself? The more important question though is "why should we not?" Granted that there are other books and writings and even people that claim to be God's mouthpiece, the question is still legitimate. We don't judge a thing by the existence or lack of its competition. We don't ask why we should believe one witness just because there are other testimonies. The question is whether the witness we are hearing is speaking the truth. If other witnesses contradict a given witness's claim, we do not call the witness we are evaluating false for that reason. Rather we ask why the other witnesses contradict it. So, the fact that there are other books etc purporting to be God's Word is not why we should call the Bible's claim into question. Rather, it is good reason to ask why they make the claims that they also do.

So, why should we not believe the Bible? It was clearly written by men. How can we be sure that it wasn't their own opinions that they wrote?

The simple answer to this question is that we can know how true the Bible's claim is by reading it with an open mind, with a willingness to give it the benefit of the doubt.

<sup>8</sup> *Taste and see* that the LORD is good;  
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.  
Psalms 34:8 (NIV) (compare Psalm 119:103; Hebrews 6:5)

Since the Bible presents itself as an authority subject to none here on earth, the only way that we can prove its claims is by giving it the benefit of the doubt and then watching to see if the things it says do not prove true in our experience. We do this very thing all the time in all manner of personal experiences. When we go to the hospital, we accept that we are not experts and therefore must trust the professionals there unless we find good reason not to. This is what we are told by the Bible to do with its own words. We need to read them and assume that they are true and operate as if they are until we can see that there is reason to believe that they are not. Is it worth it to do so? We obviously cannot give the benefit of the doubt to every single book or person out there that claims to be God's mouthpiece. How do we decide what book or person deserves this benefit of the doubt, this testing that we have to do? We can tell that we can trust a person regarding our health if we can see their qualifications. What then are the qualifications of the Bible that we should even consider giving it the benefit of the doubt? Why should we even taste it and see that it is the good word of God Himself?

The most important answer is that it is of the greatest importance that we should know what God has to say, therefore, in our pursuit to know what God says we would be wise to be leery of dismissing a real contender for the source of God's Word. But there is another answer.

At this point in our exploration, the reader is likely already saved, that is, they are likely a believer already, so they have already gone past the point of natural revelation, that is, the point of learning of the existence and nature of God from the world around them. It only makes sense that unbelievers who do not yet have a vital, living relationship with God should have some way of learning of both His Existence and His Nature and Character, so that they can make an informed decision about their relationship to Him. Whether a person believes that the faith that the Bible teaches is the Truth or not, it makes sense that the God Who made the universe must have some way of telling His creatures about Himself, some way of demonstrating what His Identity is and therefore what is true of Him and what isn't. This is just common sense. It is the same as including a calling card in a gift package, so that the receiver can tell who it is from and how to get in touch with them should they want to.

Now, there is no more universal way for God to tell human beings of Himself than through the Universe that He made for them to live in. The way that He designed it, the laws that govern it so that everyone experiences the same things in general are of necessity His "calling card". These things tell us what kind of "thing" or "person" God is. They give us a general but very distinct idea about His Identity. So, when claims are made about Him,

the Universe is a witness as to how reasonable such claims might be. Again, this is common sense. But it is also what the Bible teaches -

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
<sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.  
<sup>3</sup> They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.  
<sup>4</sup> Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.  
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.  
<sup>5</sup> It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,  
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.  
<sup>6</sup> It rises at one end of the heavens  
and makes its circuit to the other;  
nothing is deprived of its warmth.  
Psalms 19:1-6 (NIV)

<sup>20</sup> 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 people are without excuse.  
Romans 1:20 (NIV) (Compare Acts 17:24-29)

That is to say that all human beings can tell from the world around them just what God is truly like and therefore what is likely to be true of Him and what isn't. Because it gives us an idea what God must be like, we can tell when we read or hear anyone claiming to be speaking for God whether what we hear is compatible with what this idea. For example, clearly, death is the common unpleasant destiny of all mankind, but we also see that every human being receives sustenance and protection to some significant degree. Why do we have this apparent contradiction? It speaks to both the kindness of whatever made us and also to its "severity." For another example, we live in a vast universe filled with things designed right down to an extremely minute detail. Again, this speaks of a very powerful creator and an infinitely wise one too. Importantly though, the existence of a sense of "good" and "evil" within us is proof too of the character of the creator of this universe, and when the knowledge of this sense is combined with our observations of the universe, the Gospel, which is fundamental to all Bible teaching, makes perfect sense once we hear it for the first time. This is already proof that the Bible is the very word of the God Who made the universe of which we are part, and that is the point.

It should be kept in mind that in general we interpret things in ways that suit our preferences. It is not particularly common that people evaluate objective reality with an open mind. Only those who are willing to embrace Truth no matter what the cost might be to them for doing so are going to be able to admit that what is is actually what is. So, the counsel again is to do an honest appraisal and see if one will not find that the things

that we do know and see in the world around us testify that the Bible is what it claims to be - that is, the very word of God, not the opinions and delusions of mere unreliable men.

If the Bible then is really the testimony of God, His very Words, His Counsel, His Mind, His Thinking, then our faith in Him can only grow as our knowledge of the Bible's words also grow.

<sup>2</sup> as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of *the word*, that you may grow thereby

1 Peter 2:2 (NKJV)

<sup>20</sup> But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy *faith* and praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Jude 1:20-21 (NIV)

<sup>17</sup> So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by *the word of God*.

Romans 10:17 (NKJV)

Job #1 then is to diligently read the Bible everyday to learn what God wants us to know about Him and His Plan. This is critical to any spiritual growth that we will experience. There is no shortcut here.

<sup>19</sup> [This copy of the book of the law (lit., teaching)] is to be with [the new king], and he is to *read it all the days of his life* so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the *words of this law* (lit., teaching) and these decrees

Deuteronomy 17:19 (NIV)

<sup>3</sup> He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every *word* that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 8:3 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one  
who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,

<sup>2</sup> but whose delight is in the *law* (lit., teaching) *of the LORD*,  
and who meditates on his *law* (lit., teaching) day and night.

Psalms 1:1-2 (NIV) (compare Joshua 1:8)

This is the only way that we can protect ourselves from the lies of the enemy, the only way that we can be sure of what God is saying about anything. If we don't know what God says, then we will find ourselves very susceptible indeed to the deceit of the evil one. When people claim that God says such and such, we may ignorantly go along with them

out of fear or lust in our hearts (1 Kings 13:15-24; cf. Deuteronomy 13:1-4), but if we know what the Bible says, then we will find ourselves protected from such lies.