

Systematic Theology Pt. 7

Bibliology (F)

“The Bible, its Human Nature”

The Bible is divine in its origin; yet it has human authors. Therefore, the Bible is both a human and divine book. It is both the Word of God, and the word of man.

- So we must avoid two extremes!

“Two extremes are to be avoided when describing the Bible; Either denying or diminishing its divine characteristics while affirming its human traits, or else affirming its divine properties while denying or diminishing its human elements. Most liberals do the former and many fundamentalists fall into the latter. These two errors are the bibliological equivalents of arianism and docetism, respectively. Many on the conservative end of the theological spectrum tend to forget that it is as heretical to deny Christ’s humanity as it is to deny His deity; conservatives tend to neglect, if not deny in practice, the humanity of Scripture. Biblical docetism, however, is a serious doctrinal deviation, for the Bible is truly a human book, and to deny this is no less a doctrinal deviation than to deny the humanity of Christ.” -Norman Geisler

The Human Characteristics of the Bible

1. The Bible has Human Authors

“Every book in the Bible is the composition of a human writer, nearly forty persons in all. This includes Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Ezra, Nehemiah, David, Solomon, Agur (Prov. 30), Lemuel (Prov. 31), Asaph (various psalms), the Sons of Korah (various psalms), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude. Other than these traditional authors, there are the unknown human authors of Job, Esther, and Hebrews. Like all other books in the world, the Bible had human composers.” -Norman Geisler

2. The Bible was Written in Human Languages

“The languages of the Bible are human languages. Some have ventured to speak of “Holy Ghost Greek,” believing God created some special language to convey His truth. However, this speculation was put to rest with the discovery of the Greek papyri manuscripts and a better understanding of Koine Greek, the common trade language of the first century (in which the New Testament was written). The Old Testament was also written in a human language known as Hebrew, with some small sections of Aramaic, Hebrew and Aramaic were common Semitic languages, and there is nothing nonhuman or superhuman about them. God simply deemed them particularly fitting to be the vehicle by which He originally conveyed His truth to humankind.” -Norman Geisler

3. The Bible has Human Literary Styles

“The Bible also utilizes different literary styles. Even readers not familiar with the original languages can detect a distinct difference in the literary ability and forms of biblical authors. Amos, a farmer from southern Israel (Judah), reflects his earthly roots in his style of speech, while Dr. Luke’s use of specialized and technical terms reveals a more sophisticated training in the Greek culture (as does the wording used by the author of Hebrews).

For an exalted poetic style, the book of Isaiah stands out. By contrast, the mournful tone of Jeremiah in Lamentations is distinctive by its differences. All first-year Greek students appreciate the simple grammar and vocabulary of John the fisherman in contrast to the complex Greek of Luke. The simple fact of the matter is that not only is the Bible a human book, but it also reflects different degrees of human ability and training in the various languages in which it was written.” -Norman Geisler

4. The Bible Uses Different Human Literary Forms

“The Bible not only reflects different literary styles but it also employs various human literary form of speech. These include narrative form, as in Samuel and Kings; poetry, as in Job and Psalms; parables, as in the Synoptic Gospels; some allegory, as in Galatians 4; the use of symbols as in the Revelation; and metaphors and similes abound in Scripture (cf. James 1-2). Even satire (Matt. 19:24) and hyperbole are found (Col. 1:23). Like other human writings, the Bible uses a wide range of literary forms to convey its meaning.” -Norman Geisler

5. The Bible Reflects Different Human Perspectives

“The human finitude of the Bible is seen in the variety of human perspectives it manifest. David spoke in Psalm 23 from a shepherd’s view. Kings is written from a prophetic vantage point, and Chronicles from a priestly perspective. Acts manifests a historical interest (cf. Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1), and 2 Timothy reflects a pastor’s heart. Unlike a modern book on astronomy, biblical writers speak from an observer’s perspective when they write of the sun rising or setting (Josh. 1:15; cf. 10:13), and remember that even round numbers are used (Josh. 3:4; 4:13; 2 Chron. 4:2).” -Norman Geisler

6. The Bible Reflects Different Human Thought Patterns

“The Bible reveals human thought patterns and processes, including human reasoning. The book of Romans, for example, is a tightly knit logical treatise that has been used to demonstrate the principles and processes of rational thought. Acts 17:2 says, “As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures.” Nothing is more human than forgetfulness. In 1 Corinthians Paul reveals this very trait, writing, “I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else)” (1Cor. 1:14-16).”

-Norman Geisler

7. The Bible Reveals Human Emotions

“The Bible does not hide the emotions of the authors. The apostle Paul, for example, expresses great anguish over Israel, saying, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” (Rom. 9:2). He

also reveals great anger over the Galatian error, declaring, “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified” (Gal. 3:1). Melancholy and loneliness are manifest in his last prison days (2 Tim. 4:9-16). Of course, joy is expressed in various passages like the following: “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy” (Phil. 1:4). The writers of Scripture were not passive androids; they were real human beings, and their emotion is expressed in their books” -Norman Geisler

~ Conclusion ~

The Bible is a thoroughly human book. It has human authors, is written in human languages, and shows virtually every human characteristic of any other book- except that it is without error. But its errorlessness does not make it any less human than Jesus Christ, who was completely human, yet without sin. In fact, if anything, it is not the lack of error and sinfulness that diminishes one’s humanity; it is the presence of them. Adam before the Fall as well as the saints in heaven lacked sin but was not less human for it. Among all books known to humankind, the Bible is as human as people are, but without error.

Jesus and the Bible

Jesus’ view of the Bible is of particular interest to evangelicals, since he is held to be God Incarnate and, hence, whatever he affirms has divine authority. Thus whatever Jesus taught about the Bible is the last word on the topic. Granting that God exists and that miracles are possible, even non-evangelicals are hard-pressed to avoid the conclusion that Jesus speaks with divine authority- at least if one accepts the authenticity of the Gospel accounts. If the Gospels present accurately what Jesus taught, and if what He taught was confirmed by miracles to have divine authority (cf. John 3:2; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:2-4), then what Jesus taught about the origin and nature of Scripture is divinely authoritative.

I. What Jesus Taught About the Old Testament

Since the New Testament was not yet written, Jesus’ words apply directly only to the Old Testament. However, since Jesus made certain promises to the apostles about New Testament truth, and since the apostolic writings were considered on a par with the Old Testament, then what Jesus taught about the divine authority of the Old Testament applies indirectly to the New Testament as well.

1. Jesus Affirmed Its Divine Authority

Over and over Jesus declared, “It is written” (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). He instructed, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Jesus even appealed to Scripture as the highest authority by which Satan can be rebuked: “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord thy God, and serve him only” (Matt. 4:10).

2. Jesus Affirmed Its Imperishability

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-18).

3. Jesus Asserted Its Unbreakability

“If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came- and the Scripture cannot be broken...” (John 10:35). (This is the equivalent of claiming that the Bible is infallible.)

4. Jesus Declared Its Ultimate Supremacy

The Bible is exalted above all human instruction. Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, “Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?... Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition” (Matt. 15:3, 6).

5. Jesus Insisted on Its Historical Reliability

Jesus even affirmed highly disputed passages, such as the Flood of Noah’s time and Jonah and the great fish, as historically true. “For [just] as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40; cf. 16:4). Further, “as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark” (Matt. 24:37-38; cf. 10:15; 12:42; 19:4-6).

6. Jesus Affirmed Its Scientific Accuracy

Even on the highly disputed matter of the origin of the world and of humankind, Jesus insisted on the truthfulness of Scripture. He referred to the creation of the universe, saying, “Those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now and never to be equaled again” (Mark 13:19).

Jesus also affirmed the creation of Adam and Eve, saying, “Haven’t you read... that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’” (Matt. 19:4-6). He added elsewhere, “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not know believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?” (John 3:12).

So the authority of the Bible is confirmed by the authority of Jesus; if He is the Son of God, then the Bible is the Word of God. Indeed, even if Jesus is only a prophet of God, the Bible is the Word of God. Only if one rejects the divine authority of Christ can he consistently reject the divine authority of the Scriptures, for if Jesus is telling the truth, then it is true that the Bible is God’s Word.

II. CHRIST AND THE CRITICS

To the everlasting embarrassment of Bible critics, at least those who claim to be followers of Christ, Jesus affirmed exactly the opposite of what much negative “higher criticism” teaches. The following are a crucial sampling of the topics on which there is a clash between Christ and His detractors.

1. Jesus Affirmed that Daniel Was a Prophet, Not a Mere Historian.

Many critics insist that Daniel was a historian, not a predictive prophet, who wrote around 165 B.C. after the events he announced about Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Dan. 2, 7). Jesus however, claimed

that Daniel was a prophet who predicted things in advance, saying, “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken through the prophet Daniel- let the reader understand- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matt. 24:15-16). Jesus went on to give a detailed prediction about the destruction of Jerusalem almost four decades in advance.

2. Jesus Confirmed That God Created Adam and Eve.

Most Bible critics believe that the first human being evolved from lower forms of life. But in response to a question on the relationship between a husband and a wife, Jesus established the basis for marriage of the first couple, whom He said were created by God: “Haven’t you read... that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?” (Matt. 19:4-5).

3. Jesus Affirmed That Jonah was Swallowed by a Great Fish.

Many critics deny the story of Jonah and the fish, calling it a myth. Jesus, however, took it as literally true, comparing it with His own literal death, and resurrection: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).

4. Jesus Verified That the World Was Drowned by a Flood

Old Testament critics have long denied the historicity of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, especially that of Noah’s Flood. However, Jesus affirmed it as true, comparing it with His own literal second coming: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days of the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt. 24:37-39).

27

5. Jesus Maintained That There Was One Isaiah, Not Two.

Old Testament critics have long held that there were at least two prophets named Isaiah, the first who wrote chapters 1-39 and the second who wrote chapters 40-66. One reason prompting this is the disbelief the critics have regarding miracles. Since Isaiah refers to King Cyrus, who was not born until long after the first section of Isaiah was written, skeptics, on purely natural grounds, feel it necessary to postdate the second section after the time of Cyrus to account for the mention of his name.

However, Jesus quoted from both sections of Isaiah, referring them to one prophet. In Luke 4:17-20 Jesus cites Isaiah 61:1-2 and in Mark 7:6 He quotes Isaiah 29:13. What is more, one disciple whom Jesus taught cites from both sections of Isaiah in the same passage, referring both quotes to one and the same prophet named Isaiah (John 12:37-41; cf. Isa. 6:10; 53:1).

6. Jesus Confirmed David Wrote Psalms Ascribed to Him.

Most Old Testament critics deny that David wrote the seventy-plus psalms attributed to him, claiming that he wrote few, if any. Yet Jesus cites one of the disputed psalms (Ps. 110:1) and attributes it to King David, asking the Jewish leaders, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says, “ ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how then can he be his son?” (Matt. 22:43-45).

7. Jesus and His Disciples Affirmed Many Other Old Testament Persons and Events.

The most disputed sections of the Old Testament were personally validated by Christ and His disciples-whom He taught. Of these sections, some of which are mentioned above, they affirmed something in every one of the most disputed chapters in the Old Testament (Gen. 1-22):

1. Creation of the universe (Gen. 1 - John 1:3, Col. 1:16).
2. Creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1-2 - 1 Tim. 2:13-14).
3. Marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2 - 1 Tim. 2:13).
4. Temptation of the woman (Gen. 3 - 1 Tim. 2:14).
5. Disobedience of Adam (Gen. 3 - Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22).
6. Sacrifices of Abel and Cain (Gen. 4 - Heb. 11:4).
7. Murder of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4 - 1 John 3:13).
8. Birth of Seth (Gen. 4 - Luke 3:38).
9. Translation of Enoch (Gen. 5 - Heb. 11:5).
10. Marriage before the Flood (Gen. 6 - Luke 17:27).
11. The Flood and destruction of man (Gen. 7 - Matt. 24:39).
12. Preservation of Noah and his family (Gen. 8-9 - 2 Peter 2:5).
13. Genealogy of Shem (Gen. 10 - Luke 3:35,36).
14. Birth of Abraham (Gen. 11 - Luke 3:34).
15. Call of Abraham (Gen. 12-13 - Heb. 11:8).
16. Tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14 - Heb. 7:1-3).
17. Justification of Abraham (Gen. 15 - Rom. 4:3).
18. Ishmael (Gen. 16 - Gal. 4:21-26).
19. Promise of Isaac (Gen. 17 - Heb. 11:18).
20. Lot and Sodom (Gen. 18-19 - Luke 17:29).
21. Abraham’s sojourn in the Land (Gen. 20 - Heb. 11:9).
22. Birth to Isaac (Gen. 21 - Acts 7:8).
23. Offering of Isaac (Gen. 22 - Heb. 11:17).
24. The burning bush (Ex. 3:2-6 - Luke 20:37).
25. Exodus through the Red Sea (Ex. 14:22 - 1 Cor. 10:1-2).
26. Provision of water and manna (Ex. 16:4; 17:6 - 1 Cor. 10:3-5).
27. Lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (Num. 21:9 - John 3:14).
28. Fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:12-25 - Heb. 11:30).
29. Miracles of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1, 18:1 - James 5:17-18).
30. Jonah in the great fish (Jonah 2 - Matt. 12:40).
31. Three Hebrew youths in the furnace (Dan. 3 - Heb. 11:34).
32. Daniel in the lion’s den (Dan. 6 - Heb. 11:33).
33. Slaying of Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20-22 - Matt. 23:35).

In light of the evidence, the choice is clear: Christ or the critics? What Jesus affirms, they deny. But if Jesus is the Son of God, then the Bible is the Word of God, including what it says about these authors and

events. And if the Bible is not the Word of God, then Christ is not the Son of God. The two Words of God, the Living and the written, are tied together.