

Theological Equipping Class

What about supposed contradictions in the Bible?

2/9/20

Why does it matter?

- It profoundly affects our confidence in the word of God.
- What we think about the nature and character of Scripture reveals what we believe about the nature and character of God. Can He lie? Can He contradict Himself?

"For it seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books...For if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement as made in the way of duty, there will not be left a single sentence of those books which, if appearing to anyone difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away." (Augustine)

Does the Bible itself testify to internal consistency?

1. Simple syllogism

- a. If God cannot lie. (...in which it is impossible for God to lie... Hebrews 6:18)
- b. And if Scripture is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16)
- c. (And if God is omniscient)
- d. Then, Scripture must be consistent and cannot contain a contradiction.

2. Scripture's claims to be true.

3. Argument from the way that the authors themselves think

Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time? As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. (2 Corinthians 1:17-20)

Theses:

1. There is no actual contradiction in Scripture for Scripture is inherently true and a contradiction would imply a falsehood.
2. There are places of seeming inconsistency in Scripture.
3. The appearance of contradiction is not something to avoid, but to embrace.
 - a. Matthew 27:3-8 Judas hangs himself
 - b. Acts 1:18-19 Judas falls in a field and bursts open
 - c. What happened to Judas?
 - d. Why do Matthew and Luke present different perspectives?

Interpretive Mistakes that lead to Charges of Contradiction

1. Not knowing what a contradiction actually is.
 - a. Trinity: God is 1 and God is 3.
 - b. Hypostatic union. Christ is fully human and fully divine.
2. Failing to take into account literary conventions.
 - a. Variation in accounts
 - i. The resurrection account. Matthew and Mark mention one angel, Luke mentions two.
 - b. Estimates or rounding

- i. *Then he made the sea of cast metal. It was round, ten cubits from brim to brim, and five cubits high, and a line of thirty cubits measured its circumference. (2 Chronicles 4:2)*
 - c. Use of popular non-technical language: 4 corners of the earth, sun rises.
 - d. Summarization.
 - i. *Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. (John 19:39)*
 - ii. Jesus asks who do you say that I am
 - 1. Matthew: you are the Christ, the son of the living God.
 - 2. Mark: You are the Christ
 - 3. Luke: The Christ of God
 - iii. Sermon on Mount in Matthew vs. Luke
 - e. Figurative language: God's right hand. The eyes of the Lord.
- 3. Failing to take into account the role of progressive revelation.
 - a. Shellfish and homosexuality
 - b. Categories
 - i. Things that God commands in the OT that He forbids today.
 - ii. Things that God allowed in the past, but now prohibits.
 - iii. Things that God forbid that He allows today.
 - iv. Things that God commanded or forbid in the past that He still commands or forbids.
- 4. Failing to distinguish copies of Scripture with the autographs of Scripture.
 - a. The Wicked Bible
 - b. *And the Syrians fled before Israel, and David killed of the Syrians the men of 700 chariots, and 40,000 horsemen, and wounded Shobach the commander of their army, so that he died there. (2 Samuel 10:18)*

- c. *And the Syrians fled before Israel, and David killed of the Syrians the men of 7,000 chariots and 40,000 foot soldiers, and put to death also Shophach the commander of their army. (1 Chronicles 19:18)*

5. Confusing interpretations of Scripture with Scripture itself.

- a. Calvinism vs. Arminianism
- b. Paedobaptism vs. credobaptism

6. Failing to understand the context or genre.

- a. Psalm 14:1 says there is no God.
- b. Losing your salvation
- c. Give to the one who asks.
- d. Proverbs. Train up a child in the right way.

7. Failing to interpret difficult passages in light of clearer ones.

- a. Justification in James and Paul.
- b. Hebrews 6 and the question of losing your salvation.

Even if you cannot explain some alleged inconsistency in Scripture, that doesn't mean that its actually unexplainable.

Exercise:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (Exodus 20:8)

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (Romans 14:5)

A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. (Ecclesiastes 1:4)

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:10)

But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (Exodus 21:23–25)

But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matthew 5:39)

When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” And he said to him, “I will come & heal him.” But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, & my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ & he goes, & to another, ‘Come,’ & he comes, & to my servant, ‘Do this,’ & he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he marveled & said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east & west & recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping & gnashing of teeth.” And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment. (Matthew 8:5–13)

After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.” And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. (Luke 7:1–10)

- *Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. (Matthew 27:26)*
- *Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” (John 19:19)*

But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."
(Matthew 19:26)

so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. (Hebrews 6:18)

Helpful hints for dealing with alleged contradictions:

1. Approach Scripture in proper reverence and humility.

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (Psalm 119:18)

2. Learn how to study the Bible. Learn the tools and rules of hermeneutics.

Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. (2 Timothy 2:7)

3. Get a good study Bible. I recommend the ESV Study Bible.

4. Don't try to do everything on your own.