

FINAL WORD



WHY WE NEED THE BIBLE

**JOHN
MACARTHUR**

“At the bottom of many of the controversies plaguing the church today is the question of authority. Doctrinal errors and heresies thrive where Scripture is ignored or rejected. But God has spoken, and the Bible is His *Final Word*. No one in our generation has understood this more clearly nor defended it more courageously than John MacArthur. In this book he demonstrates—from Scripture itself—how and why God’s written Word must be recognized as the ultimate authority for people who confess Jesus as Lord. Such commitment to Scripture must never be assumed or else it will soon be lost. Read this book, and use it to help others understand how to live faithfully under the authority of Jesus Christ.”

—DR. TOM ASCOL
Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Fla.
Executive director, Founders Ministries

“*Final Word* is a profound and, unfortunately, very necessary book. I say ‘unfortunately’ because this book addresses issues that have been raised and responded to for generations. The attacks to which it responds are neither new nor sophisticated. And that is what makes its necessity unfortunate. It is unfortunate that the enemies of the Bible must be confronted yet again. However, confront them we must, and that is precisely what John MacArthur does in *Final Word*. May this profound and necessary book bolster your faith in God’s Word as it answers questions, dispels myths, and reasserts the inerrancy, sufficiency, and beauty of the Scriptures.”

—DR. VODDIE BAUCHAM
Dean of the seminary
African Christian University, Lusaka, Zambia

“In every generation, God raises up one primary champion to contend for the authority and sufficiency of the written Word of God. In the sixteenth century, that valiant individual was Martin Luther. In the nineteenth century, the leading figure was Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. I believe history will reveal that for the twenty-first century, John MacArthur has been that strong man who has stood immovable for the divine inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture. For more than half a century, MacArthur has advanced to the frontlines in the battle for the Bible and has fought the good fight to defend it against the relentless assaults of radical unbelief. Read this book, *Final Word*, and you will be fortified and emboldened in your faith.”

—DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON
Founder and president
OnePassion Ministries, Dallas

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- Chapter One -

THE BIBLE IS UNDER ATTACK

Elizabeth Charles, the hymn writer who gave us “Praise Ye the Triune God,” was also a novelist. She wrote a work of historical fiction set in early sixteenth-century Germany—the dawn of the Protestant Reformation. Leo X has just issued the papal bull *Decet Romanum pontificem* formally excommunicating Martin Luther. Roman Catholic officials go on a quest to silence Luther’s teaching and intimidate his followers. Luther’s works are publicly burned. Anyone who admits to being in agreement with him is arrested and charged with heresy. One of the novel’s characters is a monk named Fritz who decides to confess his agreement with Luther on the doctrine of justification by faith, even though he knows it means he too will be excommunicated and sent to prison. The character, Fritz, explains his willingness to confess:

It is the truth which is assailed in any age which tests our fidelity. It is to *confess* we are called, not merely to *profess*.

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If I profess, with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity. Where the battle rages the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battle-field besides is mere flight and disgrace to him if he flinches at that one point.¹

Fritz's statement reflects Luther's own perspective about the importance of standing firm when a particular point of biblical doctrine is under fierce assault—and especially when the consequences of defending a controversial truth are costly. Such an insight on the Christian's duty to be steadfast and immovable has never been more important than it is today.

Without a doubt, the ground Satan most vigorously and continuously attacks these days is the trustworthiness of Scripture—its authority, sufficiency, inerrancy, integrity, and perspicuity. The battle for the truth is the battle for the Bible, and in this fight God's people cannot flinch. Biblical truth is under relentless and endless assault. And like Luther and the heroes of the early Reformation, we must meet the enemy head-on and be willing to stand and fight for the truth, especially when others avoid or even abandon truth when it becomes controversial.

Satan's Ancient Strategy

Where did the war for the truth begin? In Genesis 3, we see the first instance of Satan's strategic assault on God's Word:

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Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:1–5)

Satan earns his title as the “father of lies” (John 8:44) here in Genesis 3. He is the source of the first lie, which was the serpent’s falsely telling Eve that God was lying to her. And he has relentlessly continued sowing that same doubt and distrust in God’s Word ever since. In fact, the only time Satan is ever consistent is in his lying. Everything in him is lies and deceit.

In the garden, he begins with what sounds like an innocuous question that might come from a disinterested observer. He pretends he is concerned only for Eve’s well-being. Soon, any imagined neutrality disappears as he boldly claims to know more than God does. He insinuates that God is wrong and he is right. God may have said that they would die, but Satan assures Eve they won’t. This perverse deception that we see in Genesis 3 is repeated throughout history: God says one thing; Satan says God is a liar and counters with a different story.

It is instructive for us to examine Satan’s time-tested strategy.

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In the garden, he began his campaign with a facade of innocence, just asking a simple question: “Indeed, has God said?” (Gen. 3:1). You could actually translate his words as, “So, God has said, has He?” Here we have the first question in the Bible, which introduces the first dilemma in human history. There were no questions or dilemmas before this one. Up to this point, Adam and Eve had walked in perfect fellowship with God. Then there was the first question, and it was about the integrity and honesty of God. This query was designed to start Eve down the path of doubting the truthfulness of what God had said, and doubting God’s word is the essence of sin. For the first time, that deadly spiritual force was covertly smuggled into the world.

Satan’s lie about God also included a distortion of God’s original command: “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17). The devil twisted the positive of God’s abundant provision into a negative, perverting and inverting the emphasis to *not eating* and pressing the issue of prohibition. He implied that God’s word should be questioned, evaluated, and judged by Eve. He picked at the issue of the limitation that God put on Adam and her, hoping to persuade her that there is a flaw in God’s character that makes Him unnecessarily restrictive and narrow. Satan suggested that by restraining their free will, God was withholding some delight from them—that there was some good, some pleasure, some joy, some advanced level of satisfaction or fulfillment He was denying them.

Satan painted God as the One who wanted to take away

their choices, crimp their freedom, and limit their rights. The assumption underneath everything Satan said was that God is not loving and caring—and that if He presents Himself that way, it's a deception, and He cannot be trusted at all. In fact, Satan was subtly suggesting to Eve that *he* was more devoted to her well-being than God was, because he was the one looking out for her full freedom and satisfaction in doing whatever she wanted. He was the one who was committed to her real rights and true happiness. In this way, Satan set loose in her mind the idea that this simple prohibition from God proved a serious divine character defect, casting suspicion on both God's goodness and the trustworthiness of His words.

At this point, Eve wasn't quite ready to cave in, so she clarified God's command: "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat" (Gen. 3:2). In other words, God had certainly put a limitation on them, but there were plenty of alternatives. It's not a strong defense of God; she should have been outraged in her response to the serpent's twisting of His word. After all, she knew God—she was intimately acquainted with His goodness, perfection, and holiness. She knew He had given an unmistakable and unambiguous command, and she also should have been suspicious of a talking snake twisting her Creator's words. Ultimately, she should have made a bold and emphatic defense of God in the face of this attempt to question and undermine His command. She could have responded as Christ did in the face of Satan's attempts to likewise sow doubt in His heart. Christ affirmed His perfect trust in God and the authority and sufficiency of His Word (Matt. 4:1–11). But Eve did not.

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Instead, she fell into the trap of her deceiver. She continued, “But from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die’” (Gen. 3:3). Not only was Eve succumbing to doubt, but she also began to misrepresent God’s word herself by adding a word to God’s command—the word “touch.” That’s a clear indication that she accepted the devil’s argument that God is restrictive, showing her displeasure with God by making the exaggerated claim that she and Adam couldn’t even *touch* the tree. The temptation was successful, and she believed the lie that God was evil in exercising illegitimate and unfair restraint on her and her husband.

This was a pivotal moment in the gestation of sin and the fall of the human race. As soon as she did not completely, wholeheartedly, and unreservedly trust in the word of God as absolutely true and the source of her highest joy, greatest good, deepest satisfaction, broadest pleasure, and most consummate fulfillment—at that moment, the sin of mistrust corrupted her heart. Eating the fruit was the consummation of Adam’s and Eve’s sin and the event that signified the fall of the human race, but this moment of thought was the first appearance of sin in Eden. Sin arrived when Eve stopped trusting the truthfulness of God’s word and began believing that He was wickedly restrictive.

Satan then moved in for a full denial. He knew exactly what she was thinking because of what she said. The serpent boldly, blatantly, and flatly declared to the woman, “You surely will not die!” (Gen. 3:4). He led her to believe that God wanted to rob her of her liberty and impinge on her freedom. God did

not tell her the truth, Satan said, assuring her that she wouldn't die. Essentially, he said that what God says cannot be trusted and that He did not have her best interest in mind. His path is not the path to truest fulfillment. And she believed, ever so slightly, that God is flawed, deceptive, and needlessly limiting. God was not only holding back her joy, but He also lied when He said there would be judgment for disobedience.

That, in effect, is the prototype of Satan's big lie—no limits, no consequences, and no judgment. Live any way you desire, without accountability or retribution. Furthermore, he claims, a God who puts such limits on you must not really love you. Satan essentially says: “Do what you want. I won't put any restraints on you. I'm all love, not law. God is all law, not love.” And he's been peddling that same lie—with great success—since he confronted Eve in the garden.

At this point, an obvious quandary presents itself: Why would God be like this? Satan said in 3:5, “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” This was simply an extension of his assault on the character and nature of God. He effectively told Eve: “God is jealous, envious, and controlling. He knows if you eat from that tree, you will be His equals and share His unfettered freedom. He knows that if you eat from the tree, you will be as free as He is—that you will essentially *be* God. And He can't tolerate rivals.” Satan knew this issue personally. It was his desire to be equal with God that led to his being thrown out of heaven and becoming Satan (Ezek. 28:14–16). And in this crafty conversation with Eve, the frustrated

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father of lies who was expelled by God brought down the whole human race on the premise that God could not be trusted.

We won't take the time to trace the full flow of the satanic assault on the truth that began in the garden of Eden. However, Scripture reveals throughout redemptive history Satan's uninterrupted attempts to sow error and destroy truth. The Bible chronicles an endless litany of diabolical false prophets, false teachers, liars, false apostles, and deceivers from Genesis to Revelation. And even since the canon was closed and the Word of God was once for all delivered to the saints, the battle has not diminished at all. He always attacks the Bible.

Friendly Fire

Today, the landscape of the battle for the truth extends far and wide, and it rages on countless fronts. Every attack on the Bible is an attack on divine truth and God's holy nature, no matter where the attack originates. And what is most shocking in this endless battle is how often Scripture is hit by friendly fire.

Perhaps no doctrine has been as consistently assaulted from within the church as the inerrancy of Scripture. Reaching back to the Age of Enlightenment, the integrity and reliability of God's Word have been questioned and denied routinely by critics in the church who have fallen under the sway of worldly wisdom. Some see the Bible as imprecise and unscientific—in particular, they believe the account of God's creative work in Genesis does not hold up against the world's theories on evolution, origins, and the age of the earth. Others simply dismiss

Scripture as outdated and out of step with modern social views on sexuality, marriage, and gender roles.

At the core of the typical objections to God's Word is the issue of inerrancy (the Bible's historical, scientific, and factual accuracy). This is a debate I have been engaged in almost continuously throughout five decades of ministry. In 1978, I had the privilege of convening with more than two hundred evangelical pastors and theologians in Chicago at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. There, we drafted and signed the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in defense of Scripture's comprehensive integrity and infallibility.

But many in the church remained unmoved in their denial of Scripture's inerrancy. They argued—incongruously—that God's Word could be authoritative even if it wasn't entirely true. Borrowed from the secular academy, that corrupt concept of Scripture was particularly influential at seminaries and Bible colleges. I was even invited to debate the issue at Fuller Theological Seminary, where two faculty members—Jack Rogers and Donald McKim—had been promoting their unorthodox ideas. Their subtle but dangerous denial of inerrancy is spelled out in the introduction to their influential book *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*:

The central Christian tradition included the concept of accommodation. This was a grateful acknowledgment that God had condescended and adapted himself in Scripture to our human ways of thinking and speaking. God's ways are not our ways and his thoughts are

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not our thoughts. But for our sakes, God became intelligible to us in the incarnation, the person of Christ, as well as in the normal language and experiences of human beings recorded in the Bible. Through both of these very human means, the Good News of God's salvation is clearly shown. To erect a standard of modern, technical precision in language as the hallmark of biblical authority was totally foreign to the foundation shared by the early church.²

Of course, we understand that the Lord, in communicating His revelation through Spirit-inspired human authors, graciously accommodates His truth to our fallen, finite minds. That's why the authors of Scripture use figures of speech, symbols, and anthropomorphic expressions to illustrate and illuminate complex biblical truth. However, the kind of accommodation Rogers, McKim, and others refer to goes a fatal step further, introducing error into the biblical text by way of its human authors. From their perspective, Scripture's lack of "technical precision in language" is the answer for any discrepancies between the Genesis account and modern theories about the origins of the universe, and every other biblical claim the world calls into question.

But a flawed and erroneous Bible is no longer the authoritative Word of God. And that low view of Scripture has successively given license to liberal theologians, militant feminists, homosexuals, and many others intent on assaulting the authority and relevance of God's Word. Moreover, the view of Scripture as not

inerrant has proven to be a slippery slope—one that frequently leads to the outright denial of the Bible and to apostasy. Assaults on Scripture are deadly, no matter where they come from.

Modern Battlegrounds in an Ancient War

Such instances of friendly fire are all the more tragic when we consider all the ways Satan is actively attacking the church's confidence in the authority and sufficiency of God's Word today. His all-out assault spans several battlefronts. He doesn't need the assistance of heedless believers too.

In order to withstand Satan's attempts to shake our confidence in God's Word, it's helpful for us to consider and categorize his primary points of attack.

Critics

First, God's Word is under constant assaults from critics. Higher textual criticism poisoned the well, killing churches across Europe and America, by denying the inspiration and reliability of Scripture. And while the true church has thoroughly answered the specious claims of higher criticism and theological liberalism, the doubts they sowed continue to spring up in the church like weeds. We see contemporary proof of their lingering influence every year, as new books and documentaries purport to uncover "the real Jesus" or unlock the secrets codes supposedly embedded in the Bible.

One of the most concerted assaults on the authenticity of God's Word came in the form of the Jesus Seminar. The

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seminar was ostensibly an effort to identify the historical Jesus by determining the historicity of the words and deeds attributed to Him in the Gospels. Made up of more than two hundred fellows (with varying academic credentials and theological expertise), the Jesus Seminar sat in judgment over the integrity and reliability of Scripture for more than twenty years. And the group's findings reveal just how little respect they had for the authority of God's Word. According to the seminar's website, "In the judgment of the Jesus Seminar Fellows, about 18 percent of the sayings and 16 percent of the deeds attributed to Jesus in the gospels are authentic."³

That's more than 80 percent of the Gospels swept aside and eliminated as fiction. Among the ousted quotes are Matthew 5:11, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me," and Mark 10:32–34, in which Jesus foretold His crucifixion. In fact, the Jesus Seminar jettisoned all of the Lord's prophetic words and His apocalyptic teaching, along with the entire gospel of John—except 4:44, which was deemed "possibly authentic," and ironically reminds us "a prophet has no honor in his own country." Seminar founder Robert Funk argued for the dismissal of John's gospel on the grounds that "Jesus speaks regularly in adages or aphorisms, or in parables, or in witticisms created as a rebuff or retort in the context of dialogue or debate. It is clear he did not speak in long monologues of the type found in the Gospel of John."⁴

How did these twentieth-century critics determine what Jesus said and did? Through a simple majority vote. They kept

anything that didn't offend their politically correct sensibilities and theologically liberal ideologies, and they eliminated everything else. That includes all of Christ's calls for repentance and His prophecies of the judgment to come. Gone, too, are all Christ's affirmations of His deity, along with all His miracles that proved those claims. Their copious edits to the Gospels turned the Son of God into a superficial sage. In the end, the Jesus Seminar was nothing more than a deceitful exercise in biblical redaction and godless skepticism—a coordinated assault on the person of Christ and the Word of God, disguised as an academic pursuit.

Other critical assaults on Scripture attack not the authenticity of the text itself but rather the meaning of the language the Bible frequently employs. In a now-infamous article for *Christianity Today*, Robert Brow described what he called the “new-model evangelicalism”:

One of the most obvious features of new-model evangelicalism is an emphasis on recalling the warmth of a family relationship when thinking about God. It prefers to picture God as three persons held together in a relationship of love. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it argues, made humans in their image with a view to bringing many children to glory. So instead of being dragged trembling into a law court, we are to breathe in the atmosphere of a loving family. . . . New-model evangelical theology argues that the Roman law court is the wrong context for understanding the Scriptures.⁵

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In essence, Brow was promoting a dynamic shift in how the church interprets and explains key theological concepts. He argued for a reinterpretation of terms such as *faith*, *sin*, and *church*, with their new connotations grounded in fiction and parables rather than the historical context of the biblical authors. Regarding the concept of hell, Brow writes, “In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis rejected the idea that God sends people to hell by a judicial sentence for failing to hear or understand. His picture of a gray city and the freedom to move into the light of heaven suggested that no one could possibly be in hell who would rather be in heaven. I would identify this understanding as new-model, and suggest that it is now a common assumption of many Christians in thoroughly biblical churches.”⁶

Brow’s reinterpretation similarly corrupts the biblical notion of God’s wrath:

In new-model theology, a fourth term, *wrath*—specifically God’s wrath—similarly means something different from the old-model understanding. Wrath connotes not angry punishment, but the bad consequences God assigns, as any loving parent might, to destructive or wrongful behavior. The word *wrath* as used in the Old Testament, it is argued, is not primarily a law-court term. It never means sending people to an eternal hell. In fact, it can simply be translated “bad consequences”—the bad consequences of pestilence, drought, and famine, or the ravages of wild animals and invading armies, experienced in the here and now. Likewise, Jesus spoke

of terrible consequences that would come about in the fall of Jerusalem—for his generation.⁷

Brow's point was to eliminate the courtroom imagery from Scripture, to do away with any understanding of guilty sinners' facing the due penalty of their sins and standing before a righteous Judge who demands satisfaction and who offers forgiveness and justification to those who surrender themselves in faith and repentance to Him. In the end, Brow's new model for evangelicalism was rooted not in Scripture but in his own imagination. This was not God as He has revealed Himself in the pages of Scripture but God as Brow would prefer to think of Him, refashioned to fit the priorities and perspectives of a therapeutic culture.

That critical, revisionist perspective didn't begin with Brow, and it didn't end with him, either. Like flotsam from the shipwreck of theological liberalism, countless revisionist movements—like open theism, the emerging church, and the New Perspective on Paul—continue to crash onto the shores of the evangelical church, attacking the authority and integrity of God's Word.

Cultists

Just as devastating are the devilish attacks on Scripture from cultists. A cult, for our purposes, is a religious movement that claims to be a Christian group but that deviates significantly from or outright denies the teachings of Scripture and the historic creeds on crucial points. Groups included in this definition are the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christian Scientists. These groups develop their doctrine through a

combination of Scripture-twisting and extrabiblical revelation. Under the leadership of self-proclaimed prophets such as Joseph Smith, Charles Taze Russell, and Mary Baker Eddy, these cults consistently pervert biblical truth, denying the deity of Christ and the gospel of grace. Cult leaders relentlessly attack the truth of Scripture through their singular, authoritative interpretation. It's a tragedy that Satan has had such success in twisting elements of biblical language and leveraging pseudo-Christian imagery to lead men and women away from the truth and into these corrupt cults—usually with deadly results.

On multiple occasions, I have sat across from leading Mormon theologians who wanted to discuss the Bible and our theological differences. Each time, I explained that the only reason I agreed to meet was my hope that God would use me to convince them of the horrible error of their ways and lead them to the knowledge of the truth. And that's really the only valid reason to spend time with cultists. Many in the evangelical world today want believers to sit down and share ideas with Muslims, Roman Catholics, and members of other religions. But the truth of Scripture gains nothing in a dialogue with error. There is no Islamic teaching that will make you a better student of Scripture or Mormon doctrine that will give you new insight into God's Word. Error is not a hermeneutic (see Ps. 1:1–3).

Charismatics

Third, we see constant attacks from Satan against God's Word through the charismatic movement. That is not to say that all charismatics are doing the work of the devil or to condemn the

entire movement. Far from it—I believe many of the people who are caught up in charismatic churches are simply deceived believers. They are untrained and unable to distinguish between biblical truth and the lies that dominate the movement.

However, the leaders of the movement—the media faces of the charismatic church worldwide—are a different story. They routinely misinterpret and misapply Scripture. They carelessly deliver false prophecies in God’s name. And they hold up their own private visions, dreams, and mental impressions as trustworthy revelation from God, equal and sometimes superior to the Bible. Anytime there is a claim to continuing revelation, the sufficiency and authority of God’s Word have been assaulted.

Scripture tells us that God takes such attacks on His Word very seriously. Through the pen of the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord declared His own verdict on those who would pretend to speak for Him:

Thus says the LORD of hosts,
“Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are
 prophesying to you.
They are leading you into futility;
They speak a vision of their own imagination,
Not from the mouth of the LORD.
They keep saying to those who despise Me,
‘The LORD has said, “You will have peace”’;
And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of
 his own heart,
They say, ‘Calamity will not come upon you.’

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But who has stood in the council of the LORD,
That he should see and hear His word?
Who has given heed to His word and listened?”
(Jer. 23:16–18)

One of the pervasive problems in the church today is the utter gullibility of people who will believe anything and everything a so-called pastor or prophet says. There is a severe lack of noble Bereans, who faithfully tested everything they heard against the standard of Scripture (Acts 17:10–11). Today, countless men and women claim to hear fresh words from God—words that often contradict what His Word actually says, and despite the obvious fact that God wouldn’t be talking to those with bad theology and questionable behavior. In spite of their inconsistencies, people foolishly turn out in droves to hear what they have to say. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God disavowed those false prophets. The church today would do well to echo His condemnation:

“I did not send these prophets,
But they ran.
I did not speak to them,
But they prophesied.
But if they had stood in My council,
Then they would have announced My words to My
people,
And would have turned them back from their evil way
And from the evil of their deeds.
Am I a God who is near,” declares the LORD,

“And not a God far off?
Can a man hide himself in hiding places
So I do not see him?” declares the LORD.
“Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” declares the
LORD.

“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, ‘I had a dream, I had a dream!’ How long? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even these prophets of the deception of their own heart, who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal? The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?” declares the LORD. (Jer. 23:21–28)

God’s people ought to be able to discern the difference between His true revelation and the false words of these fraudulent prophets, who invite the judgment of the Lord through their brazen deception.

“Is not My word like fire?” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer which shatters a rock? Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the LORD, “who steal My words from each other. Behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the LORD, “who use their tongues

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and declare, ‘The Lord declares.’ Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,” declares the LORD, “and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit,” declares the LORD. (vv. 29–32)

The Lord concludes His condemnation of the false prophets with a look at the spiritual confusion they sow among their followers. These ancient words are an apt description of problems that pervade the church today—specifically, the proliferation of private revelation, which has left many people without any idea of how to identify the true Word of God.

Now when this people or the prophet or a priest asks you saying, “What is the oracle of the LORD?” then you shall say to them, “What oracle?” The LORD declares, “I will abandon you.” Then as for the prophet or the priest or the people who say, “The oracle of the LORD,” I will bring punishment upon that man and his household. Thus will each of you say to his neighbor and to his brother, “What has the LORD answered?” or, “What has the LORD spoken?” For you will no longer remember the oracle of the LORD, because every man’s own word will become the oracle, and you have perverted the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God. (vv. 33–36)

Countless people under the influence of the charismatic movement are believing false claims of revelation and desperately looking for messages from God that they will never receive. And instead of the fresh revelation they've been promised, they receive messages of deception and false promises from the Enemy—all while they hold a closed Bible in their hands.

Culture

The culture is another key battleground wherein God's Word is always under attack. Throughout much of the twentieth century, the cultural assault on the truth came in the form of modernism. The modernist, naturalistic worldview claimed that only science can explain reality—that claims of supernatural power and miracles can and should be dismissed out of hand. Obviously, modernism stands in stark opposition to the supernatural truth of Scripture. Yet in the face of modernism's assault on the truth, many churches, seminaries, and even whole denominations rolled over and gave in to this utterly unbiblical worldview.

Modernism was eventually replaced with postmodernism, and today that worldview is similarly corrupting the church and leading to compromise with the godless culture. Unlike modernism, postmodernism does not adhere to one fixed rule to determine universal truth. Instead, it rejects the notion of universal truth altogether. In the postmodern worldview, truth can't be fully known—and it might not exist in the first place. Instead, all truth claims are evaluated subjectively. What's true for one person might not be true for anyone else.

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In this plurality of personalized truth, the greatest cultural virtue is tolerance. In the backwards economy of postmodernism, what matters most is one's willingness to tolerate (that is, validate, accommodate, and celebrate) other people's truth claims. This philosophical free-for-all has led to the cultural cesspool we endure today, wherein something as fundamental as one's gender is up for subjective interpretation and redefinition.

Of course, the tenets of postmodernism are diametrically opposed to the Bible, which is absolutely true and, therefore, fundamentally *intolerant*. But that hasn't stopped many in the church from foolishly attempting to blend the two opposing worldviews. The result is what some have called the hermeneutic of humility—the notion that believers shouldn't hold too tightly or dogmatically to an interpretation of God's Word, especially not to the exclusion of other views and perspectives. Such a mind-set undermines the authority and the absolute truth of Scripture, as well as any hope of confronting the spiritual and theological errors of the lost.

The message of the church cannot be dictated by the whims and values of the culture. Sinners can't be coddled into the kingdom. Rebellious unbelief demands confrontation at the point of unbelief. We must not skirt the offense of God's Word if we mean to lead people to faith and repentance—it is exactly at the point where the gospel offends that sinners need to be confronted. True saving faith is impossible if sinners don't yield to the guilt of their sin and submit to the authority of God's Word concerning their condemnation and salvation. We need to be humble, tender, and loving in our evangelism. But

we must not be confused into thinking that the goal is anything other than to smash deceptions and torch misunderstandings that nurture unbelief. The postmodern mind-set won't allow that—tolerance cannot abide the absolute truth of God's Word.

Capricious Approaches

A flippant approach to Scripture is just as dangerous as unabashed unbelief. Satan has launched many attacks on the Bible from the capricious—people who don't study or understand the Word and who lack the proper hermeneutics to do so.

One of the most influential examples of these attacks from several years back is Michael Drosnin's book *The Bible Code*. Drosnin claimed that the text of Scripture contains coded messages that predicted future events, including the assassinations of world leaders and the timing of the Apocalypse. Many other supposedly Christian authors and publishers leapt aboard the bandwagon, creating a deluge of books about all the secret codes and prophecies embedded in the pages of Scripture. Of course, these books are all nonsense—other authors have shown that employing the same interpretive gymnastics will elicit similar “prophecies” from *Moby Dick*. But the vast popularity of these books has signaled a comprehensive assault on the perspicuity of God's Word. And there is no end to the irresponsible misinterpretations of Scripture that are used to bolster lies and produce bad doctrine.

Carnal Wisdom

Finally, the Word of God is under constant attack from the carnal wisdom of the world. This is the broad category of Satan's

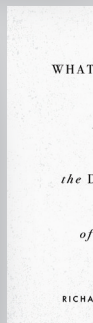
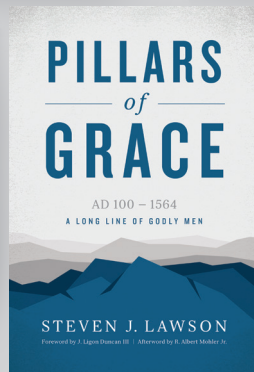
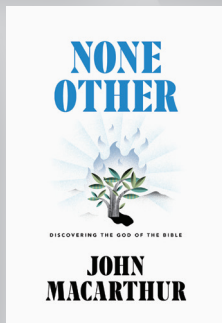
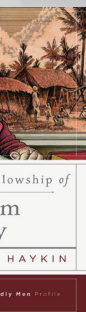
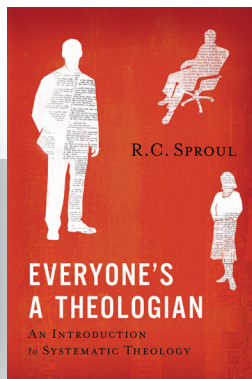
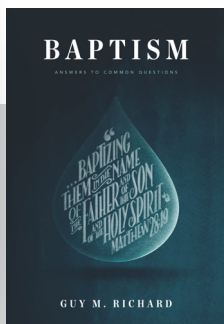
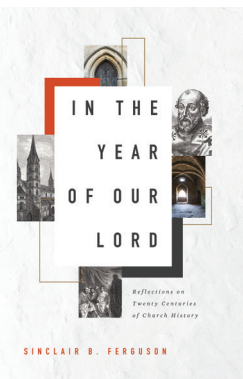
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attempts to make the truth of Scripture seem unreasonable to sinful people. It's every claim that the book of Genesis can't be trusted because it can't be scientifically proven. It's every objection that God's sovereignty in election is unjust or that it turns mankind into nothing more than preprogrammed automatons. It's the rejection of eternal punishment that results in universalism or annihilationism. And it's the foolish heart of unbelief that argues against the exclusivity of the gospel in favor of a "wider mercy" that paves other avenues for entrance into the kingdom of God.

In essence, carnal wisdom is whatever Satan attempts to stack against the authority and sufficiency of Scripture: so-called science, human reason, and feeble notions of justice and fairness. Satan uses man's inherent pride to undercut the truth and authority of God's Word at every turn.

Those are some of the key categories of Satan's constant assault on the truth. And our responsibility to defend the truth is clearly spelled out in the pages of Scripture. Jude 3 charges us to "contend earnestly for the faith." In 2 Corinthians 10:3–5, Paul charges us to rescue those imprisoned in corrupt ideological fortresses. Put simply, our battle is to bring the truth to people trapped in deadly lies. We must uphold the standard of God's truth, proclaiming its inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, perspicuity, and integrity. The truth is under attack, and that very truth is our only weapon in the ancient war. We must defend the Scripture with the Scripture, rightly interpreted.

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“In the face of ever-changing cultural trends, the church needs to boldly proclaim the eternal relevance and evergreen applicability of the Word of God.”

The Bible is under attack on all sides. Unbelievers denounce it as backward, narrow-minded, and intolerant, and even some professing Christians deny its truth to gain approval from the culture. With each assault, we hear echoes of the serpent’s question in the garden of Eden: “Did God really say?” Unfortunately, many believers don’t know how to answer these challenges and find their confidence in God’s Word shaken.

In *Final Word: Why We Need the Bible*, Dr. John MacArthur defends the trustworthiness of Scripture with the goal of equipping the church to stand firm for the truth even when others abandon it. Only when God’s people recognize the Bible for what it is—God’s inerrant, authoritative Word—will they be able to fulfill their calling and carry the message of God’s salvation to the world.


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