

Modern Theological Issues in the Church
Lesson 1 – The Bible
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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There are many theological issues facing the Church today. While there are probably an almost infinite number of topics that we could cover, we have chosen seven to begin this study. Each topic stems from one of the ten branches of Systematic Theology: Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology, Pneumatology, Angelology, Anthropology, Hamartiology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology.

Our topics will (probably) be:

- 03 Feb: Bibliology – “Reliability, Inerrancy, Sufficiency, and Perspicuity of Scripture
- 10 Feb: Christology / Soteriology – “Lordship Salvation”
- 17 Feb: Hamartiology – “Good Person or Sinner”
- 24 Feb: Eschatology – “Hell – Who, What, When, Where, Why”
- 02 Mar: Ecclesiology – “Gender Roles in the Church”
- 09 Mar: Angelology – “Deliverance Theology”
- 16 Mar: Theology Proper – “Openness Theology”

Depending on the time available we may add in: Pneumatology – “Manifestations of the Spirit – Charismatic Issues”

Introduction

³Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. ⁴For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, Jude 3-4

... In the **sixties and seventies**, the doctrine of biblical *inerrancy* came under direct attack. The Bible, it was said, was full of errors, and thus could not be trusted as historically or scientifically accurate. In the **eighties and nineties**, the *sufficiency* of Scripture was targeted. The charismatic movement (with its need for additional revelation from God) and Christian psychology (with its emphasis on neo-Freudian counseling techniques) attempted to undermine the fact that God “has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him” as revealed in Scripture (2 P et 1:3). As the **millennium** drew to a close, the attack on God’s revealed truth came in a new way. This time the *relevance* of Scripture was the point of attack. Rather than being directly maligned, church leaders for whom biblical teaching was simply not a major priority quietly discarded the Bible. “The Seeker Movement” to some degree advocated limiting the presentation of divine truth to what unbelievers are willing to tolerate.

A **new movement** is now arising in evangelical circles. Apparently, the main object of attack will be the *perspicuity* of Scripture. Influenced by postmodern notions about language, meaning, subjectivity, and truth, many younger evangelicals are questioning whether the Word of God is clear enough to justify certainty or dogmatism on points of doctrine. Ironically, this new movement to a certain extent ignores all the previous debates. Instead, its proponents are more interested in dialogue and conversation. As a result, they scorn and rebuff propositional truth (which tends to end dialogue rather than cultivate it) as an outmoded vestige of twentieth-century modernism. PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE: THE EMERGENT APPROACH by John MacArthur in The Master’s Seminary Journal 17/2 (Fall 2006) 141-158

The Barna Group (www.barna.org), a Christian survey group reports the following statistics:

- 35% of US adults classify as born again, but not evangelical. (2007)
- 8% of US adults classify as evangelicals (2007)

In Barna Research Group studies, born again Christians are not defined on the basis of characterizing themselves as "born again" but based upon their answers to two questions. The first is **"have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?"** If the respondent says "yes," then they are asked a follow-up question about life after death. **One of the seven perspectives a respondent may choose is "when I die, I will go to Heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as my savior."** Individuals who answer "yes" to the first question and select this statement as their belief about their own salvation are then categorized as "born again."

"Evangelicals" meet the born again criteria plus seven other conditions. Those include saying their faith is very important in their life today; believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; believing that Satan exists; believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; **asserting that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches;** and describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today. Being classified as an evangelical is not dependent upon church attendance or the denominational affiliation of the church they attend. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as "evangelical"

John McArthur has quoted a pole by sociologist Jeffrey Hayden of 10,000 Protestant Clergyman where 7441 responded (GC55-19 "The Work of the Word Part 2").

Are the Scriptures the inspired and **inerrant** Word of God?

- Episcopalians – NO = 95%
- Methodists – NO = 87%
- Presbyterian – NO = 82%
- American Lutherans – NO = 77%
- American Baptists – NO = 67%
- Missouri Synod Lutherans – NO = 24%

Many people believe the Bible to contain the word of God, but not to BE the word of God. They believe that the Bible is a human book and contains historical and scientific errors and do not believe the Bible is accurate word for word.

The Historical Reliability of the Bible

There are three tests applied to determine historical reliability of the Bible.

- 1) Bibliographic – this test examines if the documents we have today are the same as those penned by the authors. This test considers the quantity of existing manuscripts and the time between the earliest copies and the originals.
- 2) Internal (or eyewitness) – this test considers the credibility of the authors and the truthfulness of what was written.
- 3) External – this test considers historical events, geography, archaeology, and cultural consistencies.

The Bible was written over 1500 years by 40 different authors in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) and yet there are no contradictions.

Divine Origin of the Bible

One of the most significant evidences for the divine origin of the Bible is prophecy. There are approximately 2500 prophecies in the Bible with ~2000 already having been fulfilled. (For examples

see various works including those of Josh McDowell.) It is statistically impossible for the Bible's detailed prophecies to have been fulfilled through chance, guessing, or intent.

²¹ You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' ²² "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." Deut 18:21-22

The logic for the divine origin of the Bible is as follows:

1. The Bible is a reliable and trustworthy historical document.
2. Jesus claimed to be God which is demonstrated by His resurrection.
3. The resurrection is a historic event.
4. Since Jesus is God, He speaks with authority on all matters.
5. Jesus considered the Old Testament the Word of God and promised to aid the New Testament writers.
6. Therefore, the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God.

Inspiration

So, does the Bible simply contain the Word of God or IS it the Word of God? The testimony of Jesus and the Scripture writers is that the Bible IS the Word of God. Inspiration is the doctrine that explains the means and extent of the Bible being the Word of God. In order to be specific about what is meant by the Bible being the Word of God several words are used.

Inspiration translates the Greek *theopneustos* which literally means "breathed out by God" or "God-Breathed". God is the source of Scripture and as such Scripture takes on His qualities.

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 2 Tim 3:16

Superintended describes the means by which God wrote His Word. This means that God directed, but did not dictate to the human authors so that, using their own personalities and styles, they composed and recorded without error in the original manuscripts God's specific revelation to mankind.

²⁰But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is {a matter} of one's own interpretation, ²¹for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Pet 1:21-22

Infallible meaning completely incapable of error i.e. true and trustworthy.

²in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, Titus 1:2

Inerrant meaning completely without error.

¹⁷"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. John 17:17

Plenary meaning inspired in equal parts, including every word and Verbal meaning extending to the very words.

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 2 Tim 3:16

²⁰But know this first of all, that **no** prophecy of Scripture is {a matter} of one's own interpretation, ²¹for **no** prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Pet 1:21-22

This is shown by the Lord Jesus' and Apostle Paul's statements, usage, and arguments.

¹⁸"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Matt 5:18

³¹"But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: ³²'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Matt 22:31-32

¹⁶Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as {referring} to many, but {rather} to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. Gal 3:16

The Bible is the inspired, plenary, verbal, infallible, inerrant in the original manuscripts Word of God.

Sufficiency of Scripture

Does the Bible answer every question you might have? A recent popular movie is quoted as saying concerning the Bible, "This book doesn't have any answers." (Homer Simpson in "The Simpsons Movie") Yet, nothing is farther from the truth. Only Scripture is perfectly adequate for all matters of faith and conduct – for salvation and sanctification. Only Scripture is able to meet all the spiritual needs of God's people. Scripture is all-sufficient in regards to the soul of man, in our relationship to God, and in our relationship to others. It is the supreme and final authority in all matters on which it speaks.

³seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 2 Pet 1:3

⁴But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" Matt 4:4

¹²For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Heb 4:12

¹⁵and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:15-17

²like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 1 Pet 2:2

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. ⁸The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. ⁹The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. ¹⁰They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. ¹²Who can discern {his} errors? Acquit me of hidden {faults.} ¹³Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous {sins;} Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. Psalms 19:7-13

⁹How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping {it} according to Your word. ... ¹¹Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You. Psalms 119:9,11

²⁴Your testimonies also are my delight; {They are} my counselors. Psalms 119:24

The sufficiency of Scripture from Psalm 119.

- Blessed (joy and contentment) who keep (Psa 119:1-2)
- Produces thankfulness (Psa 119:7, 170-171)
- Keeps from sin (Psa 119:9, 11, 133; 165)
- Produces joy (Psa 119:14, 111, 162)
- Counsels the believer (Psa 119:24)
- Revives (Psa 119:25)
- Strengthens from grief (Psa 119:28, 143)
- Produces reverence for God (Psa 119:38, 120)
- Source of hope (Psa 119:49, 92)
- Comforts in affliction (Psa 119:50)
- Affliction causes the learning of Word (Psa 119:71)
- Makes wise (Psa 119:98-100)
- Gives understanding (Psa 119:104, 130)
- Produces peace (Psa 119:165)

In spite of the clear teaching that Scripture is solely sufficient for all matters faith and conduct, many still deny its sufficiency (Introduction to Biblical Counseling, page 11)

Perspicuity of Scripture

The Scriptures are clear. Without clarity, God through Paul could not have been able to exhort Timothy and us to:

¹⁵Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Tim 2:15

The basic doctrine means that the Bible can be understood by people through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and that people need to search the Scripture and judge for themselves what it means. Scripture itself attests its own perspicuity, but not to the point that it cannot be misunderstood or is in every point equally simple and clear. The doctrine does not rule out the need for interpretation, explanation, and exposition of the Bible by qualified leaders. The doctrine does mean that Scripture is ... THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE by Larry D. Pettegrew in The Master's Seminary Journal TMSJ 15/2 (Fall 2004) 209-225.

1) clear enough for the simplest person

^{7b}The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. Psa19:7b

2) deep enough for those of the highest intellectual ability

³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! Rom 11:33

3) clear in essential matters

4) obscure in some places to people because of their sinfulness

“Have you not read...” Matt 12:3,5; 19:4; 21:6; 22:31; Mar 2:25; 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3

5) understandable through ordinary means

6) understandable by an unsaved person on an external level

7) understandable in its significance by a saved person through the illumination of the Holy Spirit,

¹⁴But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 1 Cor 2:14

8) and available to every believer whose faith must rest on the Scriptures. Each believer is responsible to read and study the Scriptures for themselves and not depend solely on other individuals or an institution.

¹¹Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily {to see} whether these things were so. Act 17:11

What does all this have to do with biblical clarity? Simply this: In Scripture, the person of God and the Word of God are everywhere interrelated, so much so that whatever is true about the character of God is true about the nature of God's Word. Thus, to deny the clarity of Scripture is to call into question God's ability to communicate clearly. But by affirming the fact that the Bible's message is inherently understandable, the doctrine of perspicuity rightly acknowledges that the Spirit of God has revealed divine truth in a comprehensible form. PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE: THE EMERGENT APPROACH by John MacArthur in The Master's Seminary Journal 17/2 (Fall 2006) 141-158

The Bible is the inspired, plenary, verbal, infallible, inerrant in the original manuscripts Word of God. Only scripture is all-sufficient in regards to the soul of man, in our relationship to God, and in our relationship to others. The Scriptures are clear and we each are responsible to read and study them.

This book contains:

the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers.

Its doctrine is holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable.

Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practice it to be holy.

It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you.

It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter.

Here heaven is opened, and the gates of hell disclosed.

Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end.

It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet.

Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully.

It is a mine of wealth, health to the soul, and a river of pleasure.

It is given to you here in this life, will be opened at the Judgment, and is established forever.

It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and condemn all who trifle with its contents.