

What is Scripture?

Summary: *Scripture is the inerrant, sufficient and authoritative written record of God's self-revelation throughout redemptive history.*

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

θεόπνευστος – inspired by God, literally meaning 'God-breathed'

→ From The Village Church Statement of Faith

We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written Word of God. The Bible is an essential and infallible record of God's self-disclosure to mankind. It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Being given by God the Scriptures are both fully and verbally inspired by God. Therefore, as originally given, the Bible is free of error in all it teaches. Each book is to be interpreted according to its context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through it in living power. All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation or worldly wisdom. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession or theology must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture.

God has revealed Himself in many ways in different times and places. In creation, He testifies of His power and divinity.¹ Through acts of nature, He evidences both severity and kindness.² In the Old Testament, He spoke to His people through prophets. Now He has spoken finally and decisively in His Son.³ The good news of the Son and His redemptive work is contained within the Bible, or what we call Scripture. It is the written record of God's self-revelation. All Scripture points to Christ and it is only when interpreted through such a lens that it is rightly understood.⁴

So, what is Scripture? What sets it apart from other works? Basically, the answer to those questions revolves around the process of inspiration. Now, we all use the word inspiration and bring to it a plethora of meanings. However, as used of Scripture, the meaning is quite precise. It is derived from the

Greek for 'God-breathed' and technically indicates the process by which God superintended the prophets and apostles who wrote the particular books of the Bible. That does not mean that men were merely passive puppets, as though sleep-writing, but rather that God sovereignly dictated His message through the individual personalities, intellects, experiences and styles of those whom He chose to author His message. It is this understanding of inspiration which must bear upon all subsequent discussion.

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

2 Peter 20-21

Given that Scripture is inspired by God, we can further deduce that, as originally written, it must be inerrant and authoritative for all people at all times. In addition, we will also look at the doctrine of sufficiency. Lastly, we will attempt to deal with the issues involved with interpretation, especially relevant to the subjective views of postmodern thought.

Inerrancy

Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

John 17:17

God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

Numbers 23:19

Scripture is inerrant. By this we mean that Scripture is without error and is always true in everything of which it speaks. This does not mean that Scripture gives us exhaustive knowledge of

¹ Romans 1:20 *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

² Matthew 5:45 *...He causes His sun to rise on {the} evil and {the} good, and sends rain on {the} righteous and {the} unrighteous.*

³ Hebrews 1:1-2 *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*

⁴ John 5:39 *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me...*

anything in particular, but that the knowledge which it does give is objectively accurate.⁵

God cannot lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18). Typically we do not like to speak of any limitations upon God's character (given that He is able to accomplish His entire will), but in this case, the Bible testifies to the impossibility of God to do that which is contrary to His very nature. His words are truth. Because the Bible contains God's word, the Bible is true. Because there is no hint of falsehood or error in God, neither does the Bible contain such errors.⁶

Authority

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

As God is the ultimate and supreme authority, His words are not to be taken as anything less than the authoritative standard by which life is to be lived. This statement is applicable for both the believer and unbeliever as God is the Creator of all. Scripture includes the very words of God. Consequently, to disbelieve or disobey them is to disbelieve and/or disobey God.

Sufficiency

As was already stated, a recognition of sufficiency should not lend credence to the belief that Scripture sheds light upon every question which we might bring to it, but rather that it is enough and efficient to make us wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15) and to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). In other words, scripture is sufficient to lead us to Christ and to show us salvation and righteousness in and through Him.

⁵ The lack of exhaustive knowledge will be dealt with under the sufficiency of Scripture.

⁶ All would admit that various interpreters and publishers have accidentally included grammatical or typographical errors. We must remember that the definitions apply to the original texts of Scripture. It is important to note that there is not a single textual issue in which a major doctrine of the church is at stake.

⁷ Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It is concerned with how we know what we know.

⁸ The time period of the church fathers, typically in the 1st few centuries A.D.

⁹ A general term used to describe anyone who has moved past the modern period's reliance upon reason, logic and rational thought.

¹⁰ This idea is presented well in David Wells', *Above all Earthly Powers*

A Changing Perspective

Culture is constantly changing. Historically, mankind's epistemology⁷ has been founded upon three main sources: revelation, tradition and reason (or experiences and feelings). In the patristic age⁸ revelation was seen from a Christian perspective as being the primary means of knowledge. As the church moved into the age of Roman Catholicity, tradition was exalted alongside or (in some instances) even above revelation. The church claimed to be the sole authority for interpreting Scripture.

With the birth of the Reformation, the protest was not only against false doctrines in the church, but also the tendency to raise human interpretation over the clear testimony of Scripture. As this movement progressed, the reformers somewhat inadvertently yet effectively diluted the role of tradition as an epistemological pillar, leaving only revelation and experience.

Within a couple of centuries, the dawn of the Enlightenment brought about the rise of rationality and the retreat of revelation. No longer was knowledge something outside of man, but was rather a subjective truth to be pursued from within. Though many of the philosophers of this time were Christian, their emphasis on man's experience and feelings effectively neutered the role of revelation. It is this movement which produced modernism.

Late in the 20th century, philosophers and theologians began to rethink the Enlightenment project and the role of reason and rationality in the search for truth. As many came to the conclusion that reason and experience were limited in their ability to convey reality, they abandoned this last epistemological pillar. It is in this general environment that we find ourselves today. Absolutes and objective truths are said to be archaic concepts with no ground in reality. Worldview, language and biases are claimed to be too powerful to overcome and therefore truth (if it exists) is forever lost, being obscured by human limitation.

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

John 5:39-40

An Old Hope

The postmodern⁹ mind sees mankind as reaching upward toward truth.¹⁰ Because of natural and nurtured worldview biases and predispositions, man is not fully able to reach beyond himself toward that truth. While truth may be there, it is impossible for man to get outside of himself in order to know it.

Christian theism however disagrees with the basic premise of postmodern spirituality. Man is not reaching up for truth, but rather, Truth is reaching down to man. Jesus Christ is the truth;¹¹ the revelation of God, and in Him are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”¹²

Man is surely plagued with perverse biases, opinions, experiences and what not which obscure his ability to perceive and know truth. Even worse, knowledge is veiled and eyes are blinded to reality.¹³ Surely the postmodern is therefore correct in saying that man cannot get outside of himself in order to know truth. Because man cannot leave himself, the question is therefore whether something outside of man can get within him in order to reveal truth to him. It is here that Christian theology is distinguished. Though truth is veiled and hearts are darkened, the God Who created those hearts is able to shine light within.¹⁴

Therefore, Christianity is not at all concerned with whether man can find truth within or outside of himself. Rather, the focus is on whether one believes that God is able to reveal His truth as He so desires. The issue is not our ability but God's. If He is sovereign, it must be confessed that He is surely able to overcome our barriers. To absolutely deny man's ability to know truth is therefore really a denial of God's ability to reveal Himself. This is surely dangerous ground.

We believe that God spoke through His people to reveal His word. This word is contained in the pages of the sacred Scriptures which we call the Bible. Just as God was fully able to reveal Himself to those to and through whom He spoke, so He is now able to reveal truth to those to whom He so desires.

Pertinent Scriptures

- *... and the Scripture cannot be broken...*

John 10:35

¹¹ John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

¹² Colossians 2:2-3 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

¹³ 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

- *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

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