
Title: What is the Bible?

Series: Speaking of God

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Introduction We begin our study of basic Bible doctrine with a quote from R. C. Sproul: “Every Christian is a theologian. We are always engaged in the activity of learning about the things of God. We are not all theologians in the professional or academic sense, but theologians we are, for better or for worse. The ‘for worse’ is no small matter. Second Peter warns that heresies are destructive to the people of God and are blasphemies committed against God.” None of us escapes from being a theologian. We are theologians every moment of our lives. It is inherent to every decision we make. All of life is lived within the framework of what we believe to be true about Jesus Christ and His Word.

Christ, the starting point for doctrine

When we talk about this word doctrine, we should not be intimidated. What is doctrine? **Doctrine** is what the whole Bible teaches us about some particular topic. Doctrine isn’t just for the elders here at Clearcreek Chapel. It is not just for seminary professors. The reason we study doctrine is that it enables us to teach ourselves and others what the **whole Bible** says in order that we may live Christ-like as His image bearers. Notice the “ourselves and others”. What does that look like here at Clearcreek Chapel? Doctrine is a necessary part of the “one-anothering” that we value in our body life.

The self-attesting Christ of Scripture is always the **starting point** and foundation for everything we teach from the scriptures. What do we mean by “self attesting”? Many can get hung up on this point because we are taught in school that anything that is self-attesting is invalid reasoning. People make this claim because they do not understand the nature of why we believe what we believe and how we arrive at our beliefs. What we mean by self attesting is this: if an appeal to some higher authority were used to prove that Christ is who He says He is, or that the Bible is God’s Word, then the Bible itself would not be our highest or absolute authority: it would be subordinate in authority to whatever or whoever to which we make our appeal to prove He is Christ or that it is God’s Word. Whatever it is that proves or explains why Christ is Who He says He is becomes the highest authority.

If we ultimately appeal to human reason, to logic, to historical data, or scientific research as the authority by which Christ and His Scriptures are shown to be Who and what they claim to be, then we have assumed that what we have appealed to is a higher authority than Christ and His Word, and that higher authority is more truthful and more reliable than Christ and His Word. Attempts to prove the deity of Christ or the authenticity of what he says outside of The Word are ultimately self-defeating, because all arguments for an absolute authority must ultimately appeal to that authority for proof. Otherwise, what you have in Christ and the Bible is an authority that is not an absolute or highest author-

ity. Everyone either implicitly or explicitly uses some kind of circular argument when defending his or her ultimate authority for belief. The rejection of this kind of circular argument is prevalent in our post-modern society which claims there are NO absolute authority's to appeal to... and the irony is that THAT claim then becomes the absolute authority.

It is the Word through which **THE WORD** speaks to us from heaven.

We cannot understand any fact **rightly** unless we see it in its proper relation to Christ as our Creator-Redeemer. We say this because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is THE ultimate fact to which all other facts must subordinate themselves. There are numerous reasons for saying this, not all of which we have time to go into right now. The resurrection is first and foremost a historical fact. You'll find many people who want to relegate the resurrection to the realm of faith. While it is true that no one was around to see the resurrection and thus, we have to have some kind of faith that it happened, this kind of faith is no different than the faith we have that George Washington actually existed and was the first president of the United States. And yet we never hear about having faith in George Washington. He is a historical figure and is understood within the historical realm. This is exactly where the resurrection belongs. All facts must be understood in light of the resurrection and Jesus Christ. This is why Christ is the starting point for all thinking. This doesn't include just theology, but also philosophy, biology, etc. etc.

Christ, The Source and Authority for Scripture

Van Til is right when he says, "Christ has, by His Word and by His Spirit, identified himself with us and thereby, at the same time, **told** us who and what we are." Christ's incarnation is the ultimate event in history... that includes not only his birth, but his life, his death, his physical resurrection and physical ascension. The Creator's physical reign from heaven has a demand on those of us who live under that rule as Creatures. Christ has the divine right to tell us who and what we are. Our meaning comes from outside of ourselves. When we see that Gatorade commercial and it asks us, "Is it in you?", our emphatic response should be "no, it is not in me." The worldview which is manifested in that commercial is not my worldview. My meaning does not come from within me. It is not self-derived. It must be given to me. Since my meaning comes from outside of me, so does life's interpretation. All of meaning and interpretation comes from Christ. It is Christ who, in the Scriptures, gives us the "system" of truth which men must **believe**. Christ said "I am the Truth". That statement imposes itself on me and the rest of Creation as a demand and claim on my belief system.

How is it that we know all of this? If truth is outside of ourselves, then how is it that we come to know this Truth in the person and scriptures of Jesus Christ? Van Til rightly answers that it is Jesus who "has sent His Spirit, the Comforter, to **dwell** in our hearts so that we might believe and therefore understand all things to be what Christ says that they are." This reality was visibly portrayed at Pentecost, when the Spirit descended from the enthroned Christ into the church; but it is also a reality that is true of all who would understand and know Christ through the scriptures.

Christ, The Center of Scripture

Not only is Christ the beginning point for the study of the Bible, Christ is both the **subject** and the **object** of all of scripture. All of the Bible has to do with Christ. As we study the scriptures and its doctrine, we must hear Christ's words to the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24: "he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe **all** that the prophets have spoken!"²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"²⁷ And beginning with Moses and **all** the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself...Then he said to them (the disciples), "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **everything** written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things." Notice the words "all" and "everything". These words are comprehensive. There is no place I can go in the Old Testament and not find Christ. I should not be able to preach an Old Testament passage and have an adherent of Judaism sitting there agreeing with my conclusion. If I do not make an Orthodox Jew uncomfortable with the Christocentric thrust of the passage, I have failed to preach the passage rightly. The Orthodox Jew should not agree with our understanding of *any* Old Testament passage. And the centrality of Christ is not just true of the Old Testament. Every jot and tittle of the Bible is about Christ.

Because the scriptures are all about Christ, the Scriptures are to be read, as Van Til says, in light of Christ's **testimony** about himself. Christ told the Pharisees, "**You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,**"⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40). All of the Bible is a witness about Christ, telling us that He is who He claimed to be.

Jesus told his disciples in John 14, "I am the Truth". This has a lot of bearing on what we are saying. When Christ said "I am the Truth", he was placing himself over against all other truth claims. Among the implications is that Christ and His Word are the final **measure** by which all supposed truth is to be gauged. Again, if there were a standard by which we could stack up Christ's claims then that standard would be the supreme truth and not Christ. This is exactly what has happened in our day with liberal theologians who attempt to verify and validate what Christ has said in the scriptures with other documents and research. And their mindset is such that if what they find doesn't seem to mesh with the Bible, guess what is jettisoned? The Bible takes a beating. Christ and His Word are no longer the ultimate truth standard when that happens.

And because Christ *is* THE TRUTH, that which conforms to Christ and His Scriptures is **true**; that which doesn't conform to Christ and His Scriptures is not **true**. This point is important because even in our own Reformed circles, the Scriptures are posited as the supreme truth standard. We must insist that it is Christ who is the supreme Truth standard. Now, it is true that we know that truth through The Word. But we must not allow that reality to lull us into thinking the Scriptures are supreme truth above all others. The

Bible is the only standard of faith and practice and is the only way to know the true God only because Christ THE WORD has breathed out The Word in revealing God to us. The importance of the incarnation is that Christ as Incarnate Truth is prior to His Word. The Word only has the divine claim on all other written forms of truth because Christ himself has the divine claim on all truth, period.

The Authority of the Bible

Because Christ is the source of all that is written in the Bible, All the **words** in the Bible are God's words. To disbelieve or disobey what is written in the Bible is to disbelieve or disobey **God** himself. Because Christ is the supreme authority, the Bible as The Word from Christ, has all authority over our lives. The Bible is *how* God makes His will known to us. It is the ONLY way we know what God has done for us in Christ and what He expects from us.

Since the Old and New Testament writings are both considered Scripture, it is right to say they are both, in the words of 2 Timothy 3:16, "**breathed out** by God." That word is the same word that is used of God's creative breath that spoke the world into existence. Just as Christ breathed the world into existence and life into man through the Holy Spirit, Christ has spoken The Word into existence.

When we talk about the role of the Holy Spirit in the writing of the Bible, it does not mean that God dictated the words to men. It was not an "invasion of the body snatchers" in which the Holy Spirit took over and usurped the bodies and minds of the authors and forced them to write God's words down. The words the Biblical authors put down on parchment were an extension of them—their personalities, skills, backgrounds, and training. But they were also exactly the words God wanted them to write — the very words that God claims as his own. This is known as the "inspiration" of the Scripture. It's not that the Holy Spirit inspired the men like you and I would think of inspired. God superintended the writing of the Bible and made sure that what the men were writing to their audiences was precisely what He wanted written.

Another important point about the authority of the Bible is that Scripture ultimately gains its **authority** from itself. The Bible is self-authoritative. If there was something else that could verify the Bible's authority, that "something else" would become the supreme authority. Since God claims that the words of Scripture are his own, then there is ultimately no higher **authority** one can appeal to for proof of this claim than Scripture itself.

As God's very words, the words of Scripture are more than simply true; they are truth itself (John 17:17). The Bible is truth itself, because its source is THE TRUTH, Christ himself. New scientific or historical facts may cause us to reexamine our interpretation of Scripture, but they will never directly contradict Scripture.

The Necessity and Sufficiency of Scripture

A scripture passage that we quote quite often here at the Chapel is 2 Peter 1:3-4:³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has

granted to us his precious and very great promises...” We have been given everything we need for life and godliness. We have been given Christ. And we have been given His Word. All things **necessary** to become a Christian, live as a Christian, and grow as a Christian are clearly presented in the Bible. There’s nowhere else we can go for knowledge about Jesus that will fix our fallen human condition. It is necessary to read the Bible or have someone tell us what is in the Bible if we are going to know God personally, have our sins forgiven, and know with certainty what God wants us to do. The Bible is our **only** source for clear and definite statements about God’s will.

There are a couple of ways that we talk about how God has let us know about Himself, His work on our behalf in Christ, and what he expects of us. “**General** revelation” about God’s existence, character, and moral law is given to all people, and is seen through nature, God’s historical works, and an inner sense that God has placed in everyone. Sometimes we talk about general revelation as “natural revelation” or what can be seen in nature.

“**Special** revelation” is God’s revelation to specific people. When we talk about “special revelation” we are talking about the Bible. The difference between “general” and “special” revelation is that “general” revelation is just that: it cannot tell us specifically about Christ and how to be saved.

Sometimes we will hear talk about general revelation being the 67th book of the Bible. That kind of talk is problematic. Does nature speak truth about God? Yes, it does. Can nature tell us about how to be saved? No. In that sense, we cannot talk about general revelation as the 67th book of the Bible. Natural revelation does not have the power to save us, even though it does have the power to condemn us...Romans 1 says there is enough knowledge about God in creation to leave us without excuse when it comes to acknowledging the Creator as Lord. Some evangelicals don’t like the implications of the creation being able to condemn but not save. Some have suggested that those who have never heard the good news about Jesus will get a second chance to believe in Jesus. Their motivation for such a claim is that it would not be fair for God to send someone to hell without giving them the chance to “accept Jesus Christ as their Savior”. Paul answers this fairness question in Romans 9:14 when he says, “¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means!” The context for that verse includes Romans 10:9-17: “⁹because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” The Bible lays out a definite plan by which man can be saved. It is only through hearing the Word from

Christ. There is no indication in Romans or anywhere else in the Bible that hearing the Word of Christ and from Christ will happen at any other time than when one is alive here on earth. When Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:2 “Now is the day of salvation” he means *now*, this current age in which we wait for the appearing of Christ, is The Day. The Day is a reference to that expected Day of Christ’s first appearing, in which Christ’s kingdom and our salvation has been inaugurated. All that to say that salvation is found only in Christ, only in His Word, and only in the time set by God for salvation. Nature cannot save. It cannot give man the necessary information about Christ that leads to salvation. But it does condemn. And man, the clay, cannot say that God is unfair.

Another big fancy theological word that you’ll hear from time to time is “inerrancy”. Inerrancy simply means without error. The **inerrancy** of scripture, according to Wayne Grudem (Systematic Theology), means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. When we talk about the Bible having no errors, we mean that the original writing of the authors, as they were God-breathed, had no factual, historical or conceptual errors. The original transmission of God’s Word from THE WORD breathed out by His Spirit was and is infallible. Does this mean that the copies of the copies that we have and the translations that we undertake from those copies are without error? No. But we can be assured, because God promises that His Word is forever, that the ideas, thoughts, and events that are in the Bible are indeed God’s very authoritative Word. And because we are confident that this in the very mind of God revealing His will to us, it is ONLY in scripture that we find God’s words to us. The Bible also tells us that because these are the Words of God and are His will for us, we are not free to add to or detract from the commands of Scripture what we have found to be pragmatically correct.

The Bible not only tells us what God’s will is in positive terms, but also negative. The Bible tells us what displeases God. We define as sin anything that is contrary to God’s will and violates His character. Nothing is sin that is not forbidden by Scripture either explicitly or by implication.

Finally, in our doctrinal, ethical, and moral teachings and beliefs, we should be content with what God has told us in Scripture. We have everything we need for life and godliness in the Bible because we have everything we need in Christ.

Conclusion