

What Do We Believe about Scripture? – The Authority of God’s Word –

***“We are passionate about the proclamation and defense of the Scripture,
as our final authority for faith and practice.”***

Introduction

*The B-I-B-L-E
Yes, that’s the book for me!
I stand alone on the Word of God
The B-I-B-L-E*

All Christians love and venerate the Bible, but no tradition of Christianity loves and venerates it more than Bible-believing, conservative Christians. Indeed, Baptists claim to “stand alone on the Word of God” – even to what many Protestants would deem an extreme. For Baptists, the Bible is the fundamental and supremely authoritative reference for religious life. It is truth.

The Bible is God’s Word to us about who He is and what He wants us to know. God also has a great deal to say about His Word. Most Christians would agree that the Bible is our authority in some sense. But in exactly what sense does the Bible claim to be our authority? And how do we become persuaded that the claims of Scripture to be God’s Word are true?

The Authority of the Bible

The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God. (Grudem, 73)

I. The Bible is authoritative because all its “words” come directly from God.

All the words in Scripture are God’s words. This is what the Bible claims for itself.

A. 2 Timothy 3:16 – “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” – *inspiration*

All Scripture—not just parts, not just the words of Jesus Christ, not just the applicable parts for our lives—but *all* Scripture is given by God. It is “theopneustos” – “God breathed” – God *breathed out* His Word. (Our word *inspiration* comes from a Latin word that means “to breathe into.”)

Inspiration – (Definition) The term *inspiration* identifies the work of the Holy Spirit in which He superintended (controlled and directed) the reception (to the writers) and communication of the divine message to mankind such that the product is verbally (every word) and plenary (all of it) both inerrant and authoritative.

- B. 2 Peter 1:19-21 – There is one Author of Scripture, using human authors.

Men recorded or wrote down as they were instructed by God. The idea is that in what they spoke or wrote, they were carried along by an influence from above. (The Greek word in v.21– “to be carried” “to be borne along”– was used of a ship carried along by the wind (Acts 27:15, 17) i.e., progress made by the vessel is to be measured by the impulse bearing upon it, so the statements made by the writers are to be traced to the impulse which bore upon their minds). Men spoke: God spoke (A/a).

It is important for us to note:

- The process was not through dictation.
- The process was through the heightening of man’s abilities and sensibilities.
- God directed the writers to express precisely the thoughts He desired expressed in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages.
- Because the message comes from God Himself (1 Cor. 2:9-13), we can apply the words *inerrant* and *infallible* to the autographs. (The autographa was without errors in words, letters, distinguishing marks; and there also were no errors in history, science, or revelation.)

- C. Numerous “thus says (sayeth) the Lord” phrases occur in the OT (Exod. 4:22; Josh. 24:2; I Sam. 10:18; Isa. 10:24) – over 2000 times.

There are frequent claims in the Bible that all the words of Scripture are God’s words (as well as words that were written down by men). In the Old Testament, this is frequently seen in the introductory phrase, “Thus says the Lord.” In the world of the OT, this phrase would have been recognized as identical in form to the phrase, “Thus says king . . . ,” which was used to preface an edict of a king to his subjects, an edict that could not be challenged or questioned but that simply had to be obeyed. Thus, when the prophets say, “Thus says the Lord,” they are claiming to be messengers from the sovereign King of Israel, namely, God himself, and they are claiming that their words are the absolutely authoritative words of God. (Grudem, 74)

- D. 2 Peter 3:16 – Peter puts the writings of Paul on the same level as the rest of “Scripture,” i.e., the OT.

II. God caused His words to be written in many different ways by different individuals (Heb. 1:1).

A. He directly spoke to the author (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12).

B. He allowed the authors to do their own research and study to produce Scripture (Luke 1:1-3).

They wrote under the influence of divine revelation, but the sources and basis for their communication came from several factors. Some was from personally observed or experienced events (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-18; 1 Jn. 1:1). Some was from reading, or researching and questioning of individuals who were eyewitnesses. He used the various writers backgrounds, education, and audience to influence what they wrote. God did not dictate what to write, but rather moved them (influenced them) as they wrote His words.

God's providential oversight and direction of the life of each author was such that their personalities, their backgrounds and training, their abilities to evaluate events in the world around them, their access to historical data, their judgment with regard to the accuracy of information, and their individual circumstances when they wrote, were all exactly what God wanted then to be, so that when they actually came to the point of putting pen to paper, the words were fully their own words that God wanted them to write, words that God would also claim as His own.

C. The Holy Spirit brought recall to the minds of the writers (John 14:26 and 16:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would bring all that He had said to the disciples' remembrance and would guide them into all the truth. This indicates a special *superintending* work of the Holy Spirit whereby the disciples would be able to remember and record without error all that Jesus had said. Similar indications are also found in 2 Peter 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Thess. 4:15; and Rev. 22:18-19.

III. While Scripture ultimately gains its authority from itself (claiming to be the words of God), it also solidifies itself as authoritative by other means.

A. The Holy Spirit uses the words of Scripture to convict and change individual believers.

B. External evidence backs up the truthfulness of Scripture: historical reliability; fulfilled prophecy; and internal consistency.

Implications from the Bible's Authority

- I. If the Bible contains the “words of God,” disbelief and disobedience of the Bible are disbelief and disobedience of God.
- II. If the Bible contains the “words of God,” then the teachings of Scripture are not only true, but they are truth itself (John 17:17). Everything else must be measured according to Scripture.
- III. If the Bible contains the “words of God,” then Scripture does not affirm anything contrary to fact. If it did, it could not be trusted, and God Himself could not be trusted. The Bible is true because God is true.

The Clarity of Scripture

- I. The Bible is written in such a way that the most important concepts necessary to becoming and living like a Christian are clear. One does not need to be a “rocket scientist” to understand the message of Scripture (Ps. 19:7; 119:98-100, 130).
- II. God has written His Word in such a way that it can only be properly understood by those who have the Holy Spirit working in their lives (1 Cor. 2:14). One’s spiritual condition plays a more important role in understanding Scripture than does one’s intellectual competence. In fact, to even the smartest individuals who reject Christ, the Word of God seems foolish (again 1 Cor. 2:14).
- III. When a passage proves difficult to understand, we need to use other Scripture to help us better understand it.
- IV. Ultimately, the clarity of Scripture implies that our misunderstandings of God’s Word stem not from the Word itself, but from our spiritual condition.

The Necessity of Scripture

- I. It is necessary for us to either read Scripture or else have someone tell us what Scripture says in order for us to know God and properly obey Him (Rom. 10:14; 2 Tim. 3:15; see also Psalm 119:105).
- II. Scripture not only introduces us to God, but it also is necessary for our spiritual growth (Matt. 4:4). Therefore, we must be in God’s Word regularly, daily.
- III. It is also from Scripture that God reveals His will to us (Deut. 29:29).

* Some elements of this handout are from chapter one, “What is the Bible?” in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 13-20.