

Biblical Studies Program Fall 2011

Introduction to the Bible

Lesson Four

The Doctrine of Revelation, the Characteristics of Scripture, and the Canon of Scripture

- I. The Bible and Revelation
 - A. Knowing God is the most important thing in life
 1. God created people fundamentally for relationship with Himself
 2. This relationship depends on knowing who God is
 - B. God has taken the initiative to make Himself known
 1. God is personal (which means God has a mind, will, emotions, relational ability, and self-consciousness)
 2. Because He is personal (and not merely an impersonal object or force) God must personally reveal Himself to us
 3. Man can know God only in so far as God actively makes Himself known – without revelation, man would never have been able to acquire any knowledge of God
 - C. God has revealed Himself to in two primary ways:
 1. General revelation (God’s revelation of Himself through all that He has created; that which comes to all people *generally*)
 2. Special revelation (supremely, in the Word of God)
- II. General Revelation
 - A. General revelation is revelation of God given to all people at all times
 1. This revelation is found both in the external creation (Ps 19:1, “*the heavens declare the glory of God*”)
 2. And in internal human experience (Rom. 1:19–20, “*what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse*”)
 - B. General revelation shows attributes of God (such as His existence, power, creativity, and wisdom)
 - C. The testimony of human conscience also provides some evidence of God’s moral standards to all human beings (Rom. 2:14–15 – “*For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them...*”)
 - D. This means that from general revelation all people have some knowledge that God exists, some knowledge of His character, and some knowledge of His moral standards
 1. This knowledge results in an awareness of guilt before God, as all people know that they have not lived up to His moral requirements

2. The many false religions that have been invented are mankind's attempt to lessen their sense of guilt
 - E. General revelation does not provide knowledge of the only true solution to man's guilt before God – the forgiveness of sins that comes through faith in Jesus Christ
 1. This means that general revelation does not provide personal knowledge of God as a loving Father who redeems His people and establishes covenants with them
 2. This knowledge only comes through special revelation
 3. God has provided this special revelation throughout redemptive history (His historical supernatural activities), in the Bible, and (definitively) in Jesus Christ
- III. Special Revelation
- A. The Bible is God's written revelation of who He is and what He has done in redemptive history
 - B. Humans need this divine, transcendent perspective in order to break out of their subjective, culturally bound, fallen limitations
 - C. Through God's written Word, His people may overcome error, grow in sanctification, minister effectively to others, and live the abundant lives God intends
- IV. The Inspiration of Scripture
- A. The Bible is "God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16) and gets its true, authoritative, powerful, holy character from God Himself, who inspired human authors to write exactly what He wanted them to write
 - B. God spoke through the human authors and worked through their unique personalities and circumstances
 1. Scripture is therefore both fully human and fully divine
 2. It is both the testimony of men to God's revelation, and divine revelation itself – *"No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Pet 1:20–21)
 - C. Because the Bible is God's Word in human words, it can be trusted as the definitive revelation from the mouth of God Himself
- V. The Inerrancy of Scripture
- A. The doctrine of inerrancy means that the Bible is entirely truthful and reliable in all that it affirms in its original manuscripts
 - B. The Bible does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact
 - C. God is the ultimate author of the Bible, and God is perfectly truthful; therefore, His Word is completely truthful as well
 1. He is the *"God who never lies"* (Titus 1:2)
 2. It would be contrary to His character to affirm anything false

- D. God is all-knowing, always truthful and good, and all-powerful, so He always knows and tells the truth and is able to communicate and preserve His Word
- E. The following quotation from the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* summarizes what inerrancy does not mean:

*“We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.”*¹

- F. The inerrancy of Scripture gives the believer great confidence in the Bible as his sure foundation for understanding all God wants him to know and all that he needs for godliness and eternal life

VI. The Authority of Scripture

- A. The divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture results in its authority
- B. 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”*²
- C. Our ultimate conviction that the words of the Bible are God’s words comes only when the Holy Spirit speaks in and through the words of the Bible to our hearts and gives us an inner assurance that these are the words of our Creator speaking to us
- D. Apart from the work of the Spirit of God, a person will not receive or accept the truth that the words of Scripture are the words of God
 - 1. This conviction does not come apart from or in addition to the words of Scripture
 - 2. Rather, as people read Scripture, they hear their Creator’s voice speaking to them in the words of Scripture – the Bible is a book of God’s own words speaking to their hearts

VII. The Clarity of Scripture

- A. The Bible itself acknowledges that some passages of Scripture are “hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:16 [referring to some aspects of Paul’s letters])
- B. In general, however, with the illumination of the Spirit (2 Tim 2:7), the

¹ Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Article XIII

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 73

teaching of the Bible is clear to all who seek understanding with the goal of knowing and obeying God

1. Old Testament believers were instructed to teach God's commands to their children with the expectation that they would understand it: *"These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise"* (Deut 6:6-7)
 2. God's Word is said to *"make wise the simple"* (Ps 19:7; 119:30)
 3. Jesus based His teaching on the Old Testament Scriptures, and He assumed its teaching was clear
- C. The clarity of Scripture means that *"the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God's help and being willing to follow it"*³
- D. The clarity of Scripture means that when Christians disagree over the meaning of a passage, they can assume that the problem is not with the Bible but rather with themselves as interpreters
1. Misunderstandings may be due to various factors (such as human sin, ignorance of enough of the relevant data, faulty assumptions, or perhaps trying to reach a definite conclusion about a topic where the Bible has not given enough information to decide the question)
 2. The emphasis of the Bible is not on difficulties in understanding but on the fact that ordinary believers are capable of comprehending Scripture for themselves
 3. In addition, God provides teachers of His Word to help His people's understanding (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11)
- E. Believers have the responsibility to read, interpret, and understand the Bible because it is basically clear
1. This was an assumption of the Protestant Reformers who sought to translate the Bible into the language of the common people
 2. They believed that all true Christians are able to know God for themselves through His Word and to help others do the same
- VIII. The Necessity of Scripture
- A. The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God's will
 - B. The Bible is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about His character and moral laws (these are communicated to human beings through general revelation)
- IX. The Sufficiency of Scripture
- A. The sufficiency of Scripture means that *"Scripture contained all the words of*

³ Grudem, page 108

God He intended His people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that the Bible how contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for trusting Him perfectly, and for obeying Him perfectly”⁴

- B. Scripture provides all the words from God that we need in order to know God truly and personally, and everything we need Him to tell us in order for us to live an abundant, godly life
- C. God has given His people a sufficient revelation of Himself so that they are able to know, trust, and obey Him
- D. God commands in His Word that nothing be added or taken away from the Bible, which indicates that it has always been exactly what He has wanted at each stage in its development throughout the history of salvation
 - 1. *“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you”* (Deut 4:2; cf. Deut 12:32; Prov. 30:5–6)
 - 2. The warning that stands at the conclusion of the entire Bible (found in Rev 22:18–19) applies primarily, of course, to the book of Revelation
 - a. But in a secondary sense what it says may be applied to the Bible as a whole
 - b. *“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book”*
- E. Believers should find freedom and encouragement in the knowledge that God has provided all of the absolutely authoritative instruction that they need in order to know Him and live as He intends
 - 1. God’s people should never fear that He has withheld something they might need him to say in order for them to know how to please Him
 - 2. Or that He will have to somehow supplement His Word with new instructions for some new situation that arises in the modern age
 - a. The New Testament allows for the activity of the Holy Spirit in leading and guiding individuals (as in Rom 8:14; Gal 5:16, 18, 25)
 - b. But this guidance is always in line with Scripture (and never in opposition to Scriptural commands)
- X. Jesus’ View of Scripture
 - A. The most convincing reason to believe that the Bible is inspired, inerrant,

⁴ Grudem, page 127

- authoritative, clear, and sufficient is because this is what Jesus believed
- B. His teaching assumed that the Old Testament was the authoritative Word of God – *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished”* (Matt 5:17–18)
 - C. Jesus referred to dozens of Old Testament persons and events and always treated Old Testament history as historically accurate
 1. He quoted from Genesis as his Father’s Word when he said, *“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate”* (Matt 19:4–6)
 2. Jesus not only assumed that the creation story was true, He also freely quoted words from the Old Testament narrator as words that God Himself said
 3. Jesus’ view of the Old Testament as the Word of God aligns with the way the Old Testament regularly speaks concerning itself
 - D. Jesus saw His entire life as a fulfillment of Scripture (Matt 26:54; Mk 8:31)
 - E. Jesus saw His teaching as no less divinely inspired than the Old Testament
 1. Jesus taught with an authority that distinguished Him from other teachers of the law
 2. He interpreted the law on His own authority (not depending on rabbinic sources [Matt 5:21–48])
 3. Jesus viewed both the Old Testament and His own teaching as the Word of God
- XI. The New Testament Canon
- A. The “canon” of Scripture is the list of books that belong in the Bible
 - B. The New Testament apostolic witness was a result of Jesus giving His disciples authority and power through the Holy Spirit to impart spiritual truths in writing no less than by word of mouth (Mk 3:13–19; Jn 16:12–14; Acts 26:16–18; 1 Cor 2:12–13)
 - C. It is primarily the apostles who are given the ability from the Holy Spirit to recall accurately the words and deeds of Jesus and to interpret them rightly for subsequent generations
 1. Jesus promised this empowering to His disciples (who were called apostles after the resurrection) in John 14:26
 2. They are promised amazing gifts to enable them to write Scripture: the Holy Spirit would teach them “all things,” would cause them to remember “all” that Jesus had said, and would guide them into “all the truth”

- D. Those who have the office of apostle in the early church are seen to claim an authority equal to that of the Old Testament prophets, an authority to speak and write words that are God's very words
1. 1 Cor 14:37 – *"If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord"*
 2. Peter encourages his readers to remember *"the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles"* (2 Peter 3:2)
 3. *"...our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures"* (2 Peter 3:15-16)
 - a. The word translated "Scriptures" is *graphē*
 - b. It occurs fifty-one times in the New Testament and that refers to the Old Testament Scriptures in every one of those occurrences
 - c. Thus, the word "Scripture" was a technical term for the New Testament authors, and it was used only of those writings that were thought to be God's words and therefore part of the canon of Scripture
 4. In 1 Tim 5:17-18, Paul says, *"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'"*
 - a. The first quotation from "Scripture" is found in Deut 25:4
 - b. The second quotation, "The laborer deserves his wages," is found in Luke 10:7 (with exactly the same words in the Greek text)
 - c. So here we have Paul apparently quoting a portion of Luke's gospel and calling it "Scripture"
- E. This is evidence that very early in the history of the church the writings of the New Testament began to be accepted as part of the canon
- F. The early church used a combination of factors (to include apostolic endorsement, consistency with the rest of Scripture, and the perception that a writing was "God-breathed") to decide that a writing was in fact God's words (through a human author) and therefore worthy of inclusion in the canon
- G. In A.D. 367, the *Thirty-ninth Paschal Letter* of Athanasius contained an exact list of the twenty-seven New Testament books we have today
1. This was the list of books accepted by the churches in the eastern part of the Mediterranean world

2. Thirty years later, (A.D. 397), the Council of Carthage, representing the churches in the western part of the Mediterranean world, agreed with the eastern churches on the same list
3. These are the earliest final lists of our present-day Old and New Testament canon

XII. Summary

- A. As we saw earlier, Jesus took Scripture to be the authoritative Word of God upon which He based His entire life
- B. Those who follow Jesus Christ are called to treat Scripture (both the Old Testament and New Testament together) in the same way
- C. God is to be diligently sought in His Word (1 Pet 2:2), for the Word of God is a precious treasure that deserves to be studied, meditated upon, and obeyed