

Why Is The Bible So Important? Bibliology - The Doctrine of the Bible

The Bible is truly a miraculous book; there is no other like it. No other book has sold more copies. No other book has been more cherished; nor has any other book had more impact on mankind than the Holy Bible. In our church, we might refer to current events, we might examine issues that affect our lives, we might even resource other materials including books, periodicals and media, but it is the Bible that is the first and foremost text that we speak to and use. But... why is that? Is it simply because we're a church?

In a real sense, it all comes down to "beliefs". I often hear such questions as... Why are there so many religions? Who's right? How could we know? Does it make a difference what you believe? Beliefs come from *somewhere*, and they are based on *something*. Each of us has beliefs regarding things that relate to or affect us in life. It is from our personal belief system (a.k.a. our "worldview") that we deal with our past, live in the present (e.g. make choices), and face the future. Our perceptions of love, joy (happiness), peace, hope, endurance, self-control, contentment, and more are directly affected by our belief system.

The question that begs to be answered is, where does what *you* believe come from; or put another way, what are *your* beliefs based on? Are they consistent? Are they defined... codified? Can you articulate your beliefs, and then defend them? Who says your beliefs are accurate? You... some "person"??? The simple truth is it makes every difference in the world, and heaven for that matter, what we believe!

Consider a verse from the Bible, "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and **always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.***" (1 Peter 3:15 emphasis added) Can you? Are you ready... can you give a defense for the reason of the hope that is within you???

*"I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for **You have magnified Your word above all Your name.**"* (Psalm 138:2, emphasis added)

I. The Bible – How It Came Into Being

God used essentially three methods to bring about this miraculous book:

- *Revelation* – From God to man (man hears that which God wants written).
 - *Inspiration* – From man to writing (man writes that which God wants written).
 - *Illumination* – From writing to the heart (man receives the light of that which God has written).
- A. Revelation – "*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.*" (Hebrews 1:1-2)
1. God often spoke through angels (E.g. Genesis 18; Daniel 9:21-27; Luke 1:26-37; Luke 2:8-14; Matthew 28:5-7; Acts 8:26; Acts 12:7-10).
 2. God spoke to men with a loud voice (E.g. Genesis 3:9-19; Genesis 6:13-21; Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus: 20:1-17).
 3. He spoke to men through a "still, small voice" (E.g. 1 Kings 19:11-12; Psalm 32:8).
 4. God spoke to men through nature (E.g. Psalm 19:1-3; Acts 14:15-17; Romans 1:18-20).

5. God spoke to one man (Balaam) through the mouth of an ass (Numbers 22:28).
6. God spoke to men through dreams (E.g. Genesis 28:12; 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; Matthew 1:20; 2:13; 2:19-22; Matthew 2:12).
7. God spoke to men through visions (E.g. Isaiah 6:1-8; Daniel 7, 8, & 10; Ezekiel 37; Acts 9:10; Acts 10:3-6; Acts 10:10-16; Acts 19:19; 19:9; 23:11, and more).
8. God spoke to men through " Christophanes " or through pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus Christ, often referred to as " *Angel of the Lord* " (e.g. Genesis 18; Genesis 32:24-30; Exodus 3:2; Exodus 14:19; Joshua 5:13-15; Judges 6:11; 1 Kings 19:7; Daniel 3:25).

How did God reveal Himself to the 40 or so human authors of the Bible? We don't really know. It could be one or any combination of these modes of revelation.

- B. Inspiration – The word "inspiration" is found only once in Scripture – 2 Timothy 3:16, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*" "Inspiration" comes from the Gr. word *theopneustos* and literally means, "God-breathed".

While there are numerous theories of inspiration, there is only one that is correct, only one that is supported by the Bible itself: **The plenary-verbal inspiration of the Bible** – that all (plenary) the very words (verbal) of the Bible are inspired by God.

The following are just a few of the many passages in the Bible itself that speak of the inspiration of Scripture (Proverbs 30:5-6; Matthew 4:4 & 5:18; John 17:8; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Peter 3:2 & 15-16; and let us note the Apostle John's warning in Revelation 22:18-19).

Consider some implications of the plenary-verbal inspiration of Scripture:

1. It does not *guarantee* the inspiration of any modern or ancient translation of the Bible, but deals only with the original writings (e.g. Wycliff translation vs. KJV; the "New World Translation"; some of the "revisionist" and gender-neutral Bibles coming out on the market.)
2. It does not hold that all parts of the Bible are equally important, but that they are equally inspired (e.g. Leviticus 3:16 vs. John 3:16).
3. It does not allow for any false teaching, but does on occasion record lies, human musings, and even behavior that is either outright wrong or less than ideal. (e.g. Satan's lies to Eve in Genesis 3; the unbiblical theology of Job's "friends"; the existence of polygamy, slavery, murder, and more.)
4. It does not permit or allow for any historical, scientific, or prophetic error whatsoever. The Bible is not a history book, or a science book, yet every historical and scientific statement is absolutely true.
5. It makes allowance for the personality of the human authors. The human authors were not in zombie-like trances, nor were they human dictation machines. God worked with their personalities and in the context of their culture to convey His message for all time and eternity.
6. It allows for the usage of pictorial and symbolic or metaphorical language. I.e. God does not demand that we accept every word in the bible in a wooden legalistic way. (E.g. we do not have to assume from Psalm 91:4 that God has feathers like a chicken; and Christ used "parables", which are fictional stories that teach a biblical truth.)
7. It does not require uniformity in all details given in describing the same event (e.g. All four Gospels record differing versions of the sign placed over

Christ while on the Cross. All show different perspectives, yet none contradict each other in the legalistic sense of the word. Another example is the accounts of Christ healing one or two blind men while either leaving or entering Jericho found in Matthew 28, Mark 10, and Luke 18. What appears to be a contradiction is in fact different perspectives of the same event and very easily reconciled. At the time of Christ there were two Jericho's – the ancient one destroyed by God at the time of Joshua and the conquest, and a contemporary Jericho that was close by. Bartimaeus was apparently the spokesperson and thus would receive greater focus than the second blind man.).

8. It assures us that God included all the necessary things He wanted us to know, and omitted everything else (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Note: Is God still "inspiring" new revelation today? For nearly twenty centuries now, evangelical, or Bible-believing Christians have held to the fundamental belief that that when the Apostle John penned the last word, in the very last book that was written in the Bible we hold in our hands ("*Amen*"), inspiration stopped. If not, then we must allow for chaos; that there might in fact be validity to the writings and theology of Joseph Smith, Charles Russell, Mary Baker Eddy, Rev. Moon, Jimmy Jones, and the perversion of the Word of Faith movement. If inspiration was not complete with Revelation 22:21, then perhaps we do not have all that we need to be saved from eternal death in Hell... Who's to say what is true and what isn't? Truth is up for grabs.

- C. Illumination – Without inspiration, no Scripture would have been written. Over the centuries since Christ ascended back into Heaven, it has been apparent that God has chosen to use the written Word as the vehicle for making Himself and His will known to us. We would be wise to be suspect if we hear of people who say they had a "conversation" with God, or had "a dream" where God told them to do this or that. When hearing about such things, we should take them (it) to the written revelation that is the Bible, and come to grips with the truth that God would not, and cannot contradict Himself.

Hebrews 13:8 says, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*" This and other passages of Scripture clearly teach that the nature and will of God have not and will not change. How He has chosen to relate to His people has changed, insofar as the Old Testament and it's Law looked to the coming of the Christ (Messiah); while the New Testament looks back on the person and work of that Christ (Messiah), Jesus. It also presents to us His "New Covenant" that He spoke of in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (OT), and again in Hebrews 8:8-12 (NT). But again, His nature and His will have not changed and it will not change; and thus, God cannot and will not contradict His Word.

So, we have the Word, the Bible the "revelation" of God that is "inspired" by God... But, how does it get from the pages of this book into our hearts? In Romans 10:10, the Apostle Paul wrote, "*For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" Clearly, from [this and other passages in] God's Word, we see that man is not saved, not given eternal life through knowledge alone; one cannot simply *know* the Word, or *know about* God, and find that sufficient for salvation. There must be a true "belief", and while belief may originate *from* the mind and information or knowledge that we have come to process and understand, true belief comes from our very souls, the very essence of who we are.

God has provided for us "illumination" which is the written revelation of God to the human heart. In John 16:7-8 & 13-14, as Jesus was preparing His disciples for His very immanent crucifixion, He spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit to make God's Word... to make Christ known to man (i.e. to those who would be

saved). In essence, it is the Holy Spirit – God Himself - that illuminates His revelation, the Bible, to us. But... Why is this necessary? Isn't just having the Bible enough?

Consider some passages of Scripture that speak to this (1 Corinthians 2:14; Matthew 16:16-17; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; and then 2 Corinthians 4:5-6). It is God's own Word, not *ours*, and He makes it known to us by His Holy Spirit. May we join the Psalmist who pleaded: "*Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.*" (Psalm 119:18)

II. The Bible – Our Foundation and Authority

In the Discovering Church Membership class that I teach, I share these words under "What We Believe":

As a church, and as Southern Baptists, we believe that the Holy Bible is our foundation and sole authority for faith and practice. We believe very strongly in a literal (i.e. what God says in the Bible, God really means) and contextual (i.e. each word or passage is contained within a larger passage, chapter, and book, as well as within the entirety of the Bible itself) interpretation of Scripture. The Bible does not simply contain truth, THE BIBLE IS TRUTH... God's Word or truth revealed to us. All of man's words, writings and traditions are to be examined in the light of the Bible. We believe that whatever is contrary to or conflicts with God's Word is false or untrue.

As a Southern Baptist fellowship, we have embraced, or are in agreement with "The Baptist Faith and Message", adopted by the S.B.C. on June 14, 2000, which articulates the basic beliefs of those who identify themselves as such. Beginning with...

I. The Scriptures

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. [Plus supporting Scripture]

Our belief in the Bible is a fundamental, or essential, even a non-negotiable belief. Our belief in the totality of Scripture is not something we will compromise on. It is true that we all struggle in applying the Bible consistently in our lives, but it is nonetheless our absolute standard of faith and practice, of right and wrong. The Bible is "true truth". Why?

Probably the best summation of the authority of Scripture is found in the Scriptures itself, and was penned by the Apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Through the Apostle Paul God tells us that the Bible is profitable...

1. For *Doctrine* – The Bible is to be used as the perfect textbook to present the systematic teachings (doctrines) of the great truths relating to God Himself. All that is true and necessary for life and godliness is contained within the Scriptures.
2. For *Reproof* – The Bible exposes sin, and thus serves to rebuke or convict us of what is wrong in our lives, be it behavior or belief.

3. For *Correction* – The Bible shows us the “right way” or the way to live godly.
4. For *Instruction in Righteousness* – The Bible contains all that is necessary to teach and train us to walk with God... to fully live out the life of a child of God.

Because of this, the Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice, exceeding all other authorities, including but not limited to...

1. Human Reason - God gave us our brains, and He expects us to use them. God makes clear, however, that we are nevertheless to submit our human reasoning to Him (e.g. Proverbs 3:5-7; Isaiah 55:8-9).
2. Feelings and Experiences – While the Christian life is meant to be “experienced”, and recognizing that we are emotional beings, we must nevertheless be on guard, because there are times when our feelings can be treacherous and our experiences can be flawed or mistaken. E.g. Eliphaz, one of Job’s “friends” based his counsel to suffering Job on his experiences. He was wrong, and God told him so in Job 42:7. (Also see Psalm 42:5; Proverbs 28:26; Jeremiah 17:9-10).
3. The Church – While God created the church as a vehicle of worship and to make Him known, Scripture makes clear that it is Christ, not man that is head of the Church – both the Church at large and each individual church (e.g. Ephesians 5:23-24). The Christian is to ultimately look to the Bible, not simply to an earthly church, for final instruction, and to know what is “true truth”. A church that does not embrace the entirety of Scripture is not a true church of Jesus.
4. Preachers, Popes and **all** “Christian” leaders – Even the most godly of people are fallible and finite and fully capable of the most heinous of sins (e.g. Romans 3:10-18, 23). While Scripture tells us to honor and respect our spiritual authorities, they are **not** above the Word of God. All teaching and beliefs are to be in line with Scripture, and that especially includes the words of pastors and Christian leaders.
5. Tradition – Traditions can be wonderful expressions of our faith, they can be comforting in a time of rapid change, but traditions can also be wrong. Even the most cherished of traditions are all subject to and under the authority of Scripture; they are never ever an end to themselves (e.g. Matthew 15:5-6; Colossians 2:8).

III. The Bible – The Canon

We looked at how Scripture came about, but how did we get *the Bible*, as in the 66 Books, including 39 Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament?

CANON/CANONICITY – The word “canon” has a twofold meaning. It refers to the normative or authoritative books inspired by God for inclusion in the Holy Scripture. Those books that comprise the Holy Bible met certain tests or rules and thus were considered authoritative and canonical. But it also means that the collection of canonical books becomes our rule of life. It is not the antiquity, authenticity, or religious community that makes a book canonical or authoritative; that authority is established by God and merely discovered by God’s people. I.e. it is God who regulated the canon; man merely recognized the divine authority God gave to it. God determined the canon; and man discovered it.

Because they were “breathed out” (inspired) by God; the books of the Bible were canonical the moment they were written. No Bible book became canonical by action of some church council. That said men and councils did have to consider which books should be recognized as part of the canon for there were some candidates that were not inspired. There were numerous books mentioned in the Old Testament that do not appear in Scripture. There were also a number of Apocryphal books (writings of doubtful origin and authenticity) written during the inter-testamental period, and a number of books and letters were in existence during the decades following the birth of the church – these were referenced by both John (21:25) and Luke (1:1). What marks

of inspiration guided the Fathers as they identified and collected the inspired books? Obviously some decisions and choices had to be made, and God guided groups of people to make correct choices (with guidelines) and to collect those writings that He wanted placed in His Word.

We know from history that there were some debates over the canonicity of some of the books. There were questions raised about Revelation (because of its confusing symbols), James (because it seemed to contradict the writings of Paul), Hebrews (because of uncertainty of authorship), and more. These debates, however, in no way weaken or detract from the canonicity of Scripture, nor do they take away from the inspiration of any book. We must remember, God inspired, man simply discovered. Just as God superintended the writing of Scripture, so He superintended the canonization of His Word.

How was the Canon of Scripture determined (discovered)? The various books of the Bible, particularly those of the New Testament, were submitted to certain rigid tests by the early church. These included:

1. Authorship – First and foremost, who wrote the book or the epistle? If it was clearly written by a prophet or Apostle, or an Apostle was behind its writing, then it was inspired and thus its place in the canon was secure. [Note: Not all writings of the Apostles, and possibly the prophets, became part of the canon. For example, Paul wrote at least two letters to the Corinthian church that did not become part of the Bible.]
2. Was it accepted by the people of God? – Or, was it accepted by the local churches? Was it read and recognized as being inspired by believers?
3. Was it recognized by the “Church Fathers”? – Had the pupils of the disciples quoted from and accepted the book? As an example, one of the Church Fathers, a man named Polycarp, was a disciple of the Apostle John, who as his title makes clear was himself a disciple of Christ. One test of a book might be, “What did Polycarp think of it?”
4. What did the Book teach? – Does the book teach the truth about God? Did it contradict other recognized books? Because God does not and cannot contradict Himself and is incapable of lying this was a critical test.
5. Did it come with the Power of God? – Did the book have the ability... the power to inspire, edify, convict, and teach local congregations and individual believers? Could it bring the lost to salvation?

Regarding the finalization of the canon – “By the year 300 B.C. (at the latest) all Old Testament books had been written, collected, revered, and recognized as official, canonical books. Many believe Ezra the prophet led the first recognition council... During the Third Council of Carthage, held in A.D. 397, the twenty-seven New Testament books were declared to be canonical. However, it absolutely must be understood that the Bible is *not* an authorized collection of books, but rather a collection of authorized books. In other words, the twenty-seven New Testament books were not inspired because the Carthage Council proclaimed them to be, but rather the Council proclaimed them to be such because they were already inspired.” (“Willmington’s Guide to the Bible”, pg. 805)

IV. The Bible – Proofs That It Is The Word of God

There are several truly supernatural elements that attest to the Scripture’s being the very Word of God.

1. The first supernatural element is the Bible’s complete and amazing unity – The Bible was written by forty-some human authors over a time span of about 1500 years. Nearly 400 years elapsed between the writing of Malachi and Matthew’s Gospel. From Genesis to Revelation there is a flow of unity that is nothing short of

miraculous, something only God could have done. When the Bible is taken in its entirety, and in its proper context, **NO** Scripture contradicts the other.

To give perspective on just how supernatural this really is, consider the words of Dr. Wilmington,

“Let us imagine a religious novel of sixty-six chapters which was begun by a single writer around the sixth century A.D. After the author has completed but five chapters, he suddenly dies. But during the next 1000 years, up to the sixteenth century, around thirty amateur “free-lance” writers feel constrained to contribute to this unfinished religious novel. Few of these authors share anything in common. They speak different languages, live at different times in different countries, have totally different backgrounds and occupations, and write in different styles.

Let us furthermore imagine that at the completion of the thirty-ninth chapter, the writing for some reason suddenly stops. Not one word is therefore added from the sixteenth until the twentieth century. After this long delay it begins once again when eight new authors add the final twenty-seven chapters.

With all this in mind, what would be the chances of this religious novel becoming a moral, scientific, prophetic, and historical unity? The answer is obvious – not one in a million. And yet, this is the story of the Bible.” (“Wilmington’s Guide To The Bible”, pg. 811)

There has been much ado about the supposed apparent discrepancies in the Bible. Time does not permit me to cover this criticism in any exhaustive manner. What I will say is that there is simply and absolutely no validity to such criticism. In his excellent book, “The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict” (pg. 47), Josh McDowell speaks to the discrepancy controversy, and provides a...

Summary of Principles For Understanding Apparent Discrepancies In The Bible:

1. The unexplained is not necessarily unexplainable.
 2. Fallible interpretations do not mean fallible revelation.
 3. Understand the context of the passage.
 4. Interpret difficult passages in the light of clear ones.
 5. Don’t base teaching on obscure passages.
 6. The Bible is a human book with human characteristics.
 7. Just because a report is incomplete does not mean it is false.
 8. New Testament citations of the Old Testament need not always be exact.
 9. The Bible does not necessarily approve of all it records.
 10. The Bible uses non-technical, everyday language.
 11. The Bible may use round numbers as well as exact numbers.
 12. Note when the Bible uses different literary devices.
 13. An error in a copy does not equate to an error in the original.
 14. General statements don’t necessarily mean universal promises.
 15. Later revelation supersedes previous revelation.
2. The second supernatural element is the Bible’s indestructibility. Persecution, ridicule, higher criticism, liberalism, legalism, pseudo science, and atheism and more have for centuries worked to rip to shreds the Bible and drive it into irrelevant obscurity, but it all has been to no avail. At one time what was even called “The Church” even sought to drag the Bible and thus believers into a religion that had very little to do with God’s inspired revelation. From that was birthed the Protestant reformation, which in turn made possible the Bibles we now hold in our own language.

How did/will it survive? Well, it was God who said, "*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.*" (Isaiah 40:8) And it was Jesus who said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*" (Matthew 24:35)

3. The third supernatural element is the Bible's prophetic accuracy. One of the most critical tests of any religion is its ability to predict the future. The Bible was written by forty-some authors over 1500 years, and offers hundreds of specific predictions that were written hundreds of years before they were literally fulfilled. Many have centered around the coming of Christ (it has been argued that some 800 were literally fulfilled at His first coming), and others around world events.

While many critics played with the dating of the O.T., archaeological evidence, such as the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls and more, as well as the realization of more recent fulfillment of prophecies present a clear case for the Bible's uniqueness (Note Matthew 5:18). The very simple truth is that every single prophecy and promise of God will come to pass. There is no religion, not even Nostradamus and his so-called prophecies, and certainly no "psychic hotline" that are even remotely close!

4. The fourth supernatural element is the Bible's historical accuracy. Modern archaeology has thrown the final handfuls of dirt on the casket of criticism asserting the so-called "hundreds of historical mistakes in the Bible".
5. The fifth supernatural element is the Bible's scientific accuracy. The judge's recent decision in the Dover School district and the desperate faith of so many in the so-called science of evolution cannot alter the true truth that the Scripture is completely accurate in all measures of scientific fact. The Bible is not a science book, yet it does contain far more scientific facts than one might realize.

E.g. Before they were ever discovered by man, the Bible gave evidence for the: spherical shape of the earth, that earth is suspended in space, that the stars are innumerable, that there are mountains and canyons in the sea, that there are springs and fountains in the sea, that there are watery paths in the sea, that living things are reproduced after their own kind, facts about sanitation, and much, much more.

We can also point to...

6. The Bible's care and copy – No book has been copied as many times, with as much care, and with as much consistent accuracy as has the Bible.
7. The Bible's absolute honesty.
8. The Bible's universal influence upon civilization.
9. The Bible's amazing circulation.
10. The Bible's life-transforming power.

Conclusion: The problem of belief in the Bible as being the inspired revelation of God to man is not found in the Bible itself, but within the human heart. God has given us ample evidence of who He is so that we are truly without excuse if we reject Him and His Word (Romans 1:18-20; Hebrews 4:12; Proverbs 30:5-6) Our responsibility is found in (2 Timothy 2:15)... Do you know the Living Word?

Note: In addition the NKJV, John McArthur Study Bible, I used a variety of resources in the preparation of this lesson. Most notably was the excellent "Wilmington's Guide to the Bible", by Dr. H. L. Wilmington. Other resources used and/or recommended include "Basic Theology" by Dr. Charles C. Ryrie; "The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict", by Josh McDowell; "Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics", by Norman L. Geisler; "Know What You Believe"

and "Know Why You Believe", both by Paul E. Little; and "Fundamentals Of Our Faith", by Herschel H. Hobbs.