

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines

Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24

3 | Special Revelation & Biblical Interpretation

## WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

### 1. Inspired Word of God; God's sufficient self-revelation to His people

1. **2Tim 3.16** - *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." See also 2Pet. 1.19-20*
2. **Heb. 1.1** - *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."*
3. **WCF 1.1** - *"Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased."*
4. **WCF 1.6** - *"The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture...."*

### 2. Inerrant Word of God

1. Consider Jesus' belief of Scripture as God's Word
2. If God is the Author, He cannot make mistakes
3. **Important qualification: Understanding Author's Intent** - *"It is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses"* (Chicago Statement) - For example:

Exod. 15.6-8, did God's "right hand" or "nostrils" literally work in this way?

### 3. Established Rule of Faith (Canon)

1. Canon from "reed" as a tool for measurement... that which is the "rule" or "ideal standard" against which all things can be measured—"rule of faith and practice"
2. Lost Scriptures and Gnostic Gospels? From Dan Brown, Elaine Pagels, etc. - are the Scriptures merely a product of man, not God, produced by men with a political agenda to solidify their power?

#### 3. Orthodox Response

1. **Recognized** vs. Conferred by Church
2. **Test of OT Witness:** "the prior rule of faith" already implied by 1st century and the Marcion Controversy settled in mid-second century
3. Bottom Up vs. Top Down—the battle was waged not in the fourth century but in the middle of the second century, wherein the "winners" were not the politically advantaged
4. Canon mostly "settled" by 200 AD and formally ratified ecumenically in 350 AD at the Synod of Laodicean

#### 4. Deposit of Apostolic Foundation and Succession - Passing down the gospel

1. *Acts 2.42 - "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."*
2. *Eph. 2.18-22 - "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."*
3. *2Thess. 3.6 - "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us."*
4. *1Cor. 11.2 - "Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you."*

5. **2Thess. 2.15** - *"So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter."*
6. **2Tim 1.13-4** - *"Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."*
7. **Rev. 22.18-9** - *"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."*
8. **2Peter 3.15-16** - *"And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as 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."*
9. **Special Note:** The development of things like the "Apostle's Creed" or statements like them in Scripture itself (Rom. 10:9; 1Cor. 15:3-4; Phil. 2:6-10; 1Tim. 3:16), to serve as a summary statement against which all authority could be measured.

#### 4. "Perspicuous" or clear enough for salvation

1. **Intimate self-revelation** - wouldn't it be strange if God sought to reveal Himself in an intimate way to His people, and then made it inaccessible?!
2. **Clarity vs. Easy** - See 2Peter 3.15-6

#### 5. Complete & Sufficient - Do we have to believe ALL of it?

1. Remember - WCF 1.1 - "...those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased."
  1. WCF 1.6 - "... unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."
  2. "There cannot be other facts than God-interpreted facts. In practice, this means that, since sin has come into the world, God's interpretations of the facts must come in *finished, written form and be comprehensive in character*. God continues to reveal himself in the facts of the created world but the

sinner needs to interpret every one of them in the light of Scripture. Every thought on every subject must become obedient to the requirement as he speaks in his Word....If God is really self-contained and if he has really causally created this world and if he really controls it by his providence then the revelation of himself and about this world must be that of *fully interpreted fact*. All facts in the whole of created reality are then God-interpreted." - Cornelius van Til

1. In other words, we don't only need God to do something, we need Him to interpret what He does as well! This interpretation must also be comprehensive and finished, lest we lose any objective revelation from God to us, and become lost in competing subjectivities. If we don't believe in Scripture as sufficient, complete, and infallible, we don't have an objective basis on which to know God. **Only God can reveal God.** Only an infallible Scripture ensures that it really is *God* doing the revealing. If we pick and choose, we're not reading God's Word, we're reading ours.
3. How does this connect to the sufficiency of Christ's work?
4. Our ultimate authority is the written Word of God, but why is it insufficient for a church to simply say "we believe in the Bible and nothing more"? This is a setup for next week.

**How ought this to impact our prayer, character, and community?**