



THE COMMUNITY

The Foundation of Our Life | AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Overview

Christians believe that whatever the Bible teaches, God teaches. That's what gives the Scriptures their authority. The most helpful analogy is to think of the Word of God (the Scripture) just like the Word of God (Jesus). They are both fully human and fully divine. The Scriptures were written by a variety of authors for very specific purposes and occasions, and they were written in the personality and style of the human author – that's the fully human part. Yet God providentially used all these factors to lead the authors in such a way that what they wrote is fully divine.

This study will touch on some of the big picture issues and topics of the Scripture – the things we need to know and believe about the Bible for it to function properly in our lives. In no particular order, here are those big picture concepts:

The Bible is Inspired

While the biblical authors were certainly human, writing to address very specific situations and issues, God superintended the writing process so that the prophet's words were God's words, expressed through the personality and writing style of the Prophet. The apostle Peter describes it this way: “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20)

The Scriptures are Inerrant

The theological term for the Bible being without error is called “inerrancy” and it means that the Bible is completely true and without error in any part (not just on issues of faith). This claim is made only of the original documents (autographs), which we do not possess. Christians agree that in transmission there may be words or letters that contain error. That said, we have such a wealth of early copies and manuscripts (25,000 copies and fragments of the New Testament) that those errors are nothing more than a variant reading of a word here or there that has little bearing on the meaning of a text. If it does, the variant is put in the margin or footnote of the Bible.

God's word is spoken to and within the context of a culture. But it's principles and truth transcends that culture. God did not talk of gravity to the Hebrews but nothing the Bible says contradicts the truth of gravity either.

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What's the Big Idea?

Because the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, we can place our full trust and confidence in it for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

What's the Problem?

Our apathetic hearts treat the Scripture as far less than the Word of God, reducing it to a rule book and merely the counsel of man.

The Foundation of Our Life | Authority of Scripture

The Bible can be vague without being untrue. The statement “I live about a mile from here,” is not an untrue statement. The same is true of numbers: when the Bible says that 12,000 men died it can mean roughly that number, unless it says 12 disciples, then it is clear that its intent is to be precise. The Bible is literature. By this we mean it follows the rules of genre and language. It contains hyperbole, and figurative imagery, which are meant to be taken metaphorically and symbolically. When the Bible says that the sun rose, it is not being inaccurate any more than when you say it.

All Scripture is Inspired and Inerrant

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (Tim. 3:16-17). As this passage in Timothy states, because of its divine origin the Scripture can be used authoritatively by God’s servants to teach and train others about the nature, purposes, and plans of God.

Old Testament inspiration. While this carries little weight with non-Christians, believers should have utter confidence in the inspiration of the old testament because Jesus did. He stated that not even the “smallest letter of the Law [would] pass away” without being fulfilled. His every mention of the old testament was with the affirming authority that it was the Word of God.

The New Testament. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the disciples in the process of transmitting His life and teachings, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). And it is their writings that comprise the New Testament.

The Canon. As far as the contents of our New Testament, the biggest question in deciding if a work was “inspired, was whether it was written by (or contained the teaching of) an apostle (Mark, for example relays the teaching of Peter; Luke that of Paul and others). By the end of the first century, the nt writings were pretty well established, so much so that the church felt no need to formalize the list until heresy, forgeries, and other factors of the third and fourth centuries necessitated a final unalterable list, confirmed by church council.

The Bible: The Big Picture

The Bible contains 66 separate books from many authors but it follows a single plot line. The plot is the expansion of the kingdom of God in this world and the proclamation of its king over and against the powers of evil that oppose the purposes, plans and reign of God. Israel is the center piece of that plan in the Old Testament and the church is the center of that plan in the New Testament.

The hero of the story. In a debate with Jewish leaders over His authority and identity, Jesus states, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). These religious leaders had come to believe that Scripture’s role in redemption was in detailing the commands and demands of God, and they had missed how Scripture points us to the Christ. If the Bible is the story of redemption and the expansion of God’s kingdom then the entire story leads up and climaxes in the coming of Christ.

The Law exposes us to God’s holiness, persuading us of our need for a Savior.

Wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and so on) compels us to look to Christ for meaning and for the ability to live wisely (see Colossians 2:3).

The psalmists and prophets sometimes spoke with the voice of Christ, anticipating His suffering (the Cross) and exaltation (the Resurrection).

Particular old testament offices (prophet, priest, and king) foreshadow Christ’s redemptive work. They invite us to look for a prophet who is greater than Moses, a priest who is greater than Aaron, and a king who is greater than David.

Certain Old Testament rituals, such as the Passover (Exodus 12), foreshadow God’s redemption of His people through the Cross.

What’s Our Response?

You want your group to have confidence in Scripture (old Testament and New), trust it as the inerrant words of God (which it is) and to use it in ministry with great authority and effectiveness.

You also want them to take the Word to heart in their personal lives by submitting to its authority.

Last, you want to come back to grace and the person of Christ. Apart from our relationship with Him and His forgiveness and empowerment, the Bible is not good news but a very heavy burden.

The Foundation of Our Life | AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

What Are the Questions?

Launch

Have you recently run into a passage of scripture that was a struggle to believe that it was “inspired?” What has been the greatest challenge for you in understanding the Scripture?

Explore

1. As both are referred to as the Word of God, what similarities do you see between Scripture and Christ?

2. Many did not recognize the identity of Jesus; many were embarrassed and scandalized by the things He said. What passages and teachings of Scripture have a similar effect on people today? What passages or teachings have been difficult for you to recognize Jesus in?

The Old Testament

3. If someone said to you, “I believe in the New Testament but I don’t believe the Old Testament is inspired.” How would you answer him?

4. though it has many authors and themes, as a unified book, what would you say is the plot of the Old Testament? Why is so much of the OT devoted to Israel?

5. Read John 5:39-40 and Luke 24:44-45. How does the Old Testament Law point to Christ? How about the books of the Prophets? The history books (like 1,2 Samuel)? The poetic books?

6. Read 2 Peter 1:20-21. In these verses we have a description of biblical inspiration. Summarize and explain how the writers were inspired? Did they just dictate what God told them to write?

7. What does inerrancy mean and how is it different from inspiration?

8. What passages from the gospels could you use to show that Jesus believed the Old Testament was both inerrant and inspired?

The New Testament

9. What does the word “Testament” mean, and why do we use it as a designation for Scripture?

10. What assurance do you have when you read the New Testament that you have the accurate and exact teaching of Jesus? Why?

11. Being that we don’t have the original writings of the disciples – only copies – how do we know there aren’t mistakes or that changes weren’t made?

12. Why were the writings of the New Testament considered inspired?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

13. If every word of Scripture is inspired, why do we have different Bible translations? What’s different about them?

14. define what’s meant by the following uses of the Scripture: “teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training.”

15. Which of these uses do you feel most gifted in and equipped to implement?

Apply

16. What keeps you from reading and listening to the Scriptures as the very words of God?

17. While there are rules in Scripture, what would be wrong with treating the Scripture as a divine rule book?

18. As we are saved by grace alone as a free gift. what is the benefit of knowing and reading the Bible?

19. This week try reading through the Old Testament book of Ruth with the following questions in mind: “What do I learn about God?” “What do I learn about my sinful nature?” “In what way does this book point forward to Christ?”

The Foundation of Our Life | AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

What Are the Answers?

1. 100% divine, 100% human. They both disclose the nature of God and God's salvation.
2. Certainly it's difficult for people to see anything the Scripture says about sex and divorce as being from God.
3. The easiest answer to a person who believes in Christ is to point out that Jesus taught that it was.
4. The plot is God's plan of redemption: to make His glory known to all nations. See notes "the Big Picture"
5. See final section of the notes under "the hero of the story."
6. God's Spirit moved and directed them to write what they did. God also orchestrated the circumstances to which they wrote but did not dictate the words.
7. See notes under "The Scriptures are Inerrant."
8. Matthew 5:17; John 13:18. His reference to Jonah and the prophets as real individuals.
9. It means covenant. The Old Covenant and the New. Christ initiated a New Covenant.
10. We know the disciples wrote them. We know they knew that they were writing Scripture (2Peter 3:16). and we know that Jesus entrusted this task to them (John 14:26) and promised God's Spirit would superintend the process.
11. See notes "The Scriptures are Inerrant."
12. See notes on question 10.
13. The translations revolve around what English words are used to express the original Greek and Hebrew. If, for example, the original text said "he lay with her;" we have a variety of English options for the word "sex." A word-for-word translation would simply say "he lay with her." A more dynamic translation might say "he was intimate with her."
14. Allow the group to discuss. 15. Allow the group to discuss. 16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. The Scripture is about a person, Jesus Christ, not about rules: a relationship not legalism or moralism.
18. To know God better and to know what pleases Him.
19. Perhaps discuss this next week before starting a new lesson.

Memorize

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17



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