

Question One: What Is the Bible?*

As we begin this study on basic Christian beliefs, we need to address the basis for all of our beliefs, the Bible. 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. We will look at what God says about the Bible under four categories: authority, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency.

I. The Authority of the Bible

A. The Bible is authoritative because all its "words" come directly from God

1. 2 Timothy 3:16 -- "All Scripture is breathed out by God"
2. Numerous "thus says the Lord" phrases in the OT (Ex. 4:22; Josh. 24:2; 1 Sam 10:18; Isa. 10:24)
3. 2 Pet 3:16 -- Peter puts the writings of Paul on the same level as the rest of "Scripture," i.e. the OT.

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

1. He directly spoke to the author (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12).
2. He allowed the authors to do their own research and study to produce Scripture (Luke 1:1-3).
3. The Holy Spirit brought recall to the minds of the writers (John 14:26; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

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

1. The Holy Spirit uses the words of Scripture to convict and change individual believers.
2. External evidence backs up the truthfulness of Scripture.
 - a) Historical reliability
 - b) Fulfilled prophecy
 - c) Internal consistency

D. The Authority of the Bible implies the following:

* The material in this handout is a summary of 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.

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1. If the Bible contains the “words of God,” disbelief and disobedience of the Bible are disbelief and disobedience of God.
2. 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.
3. 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.

II. The Clarity of Scripture

- A. 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; 119:130).
- B. 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 (1 Cor. 2:14 again).
- C. When a passage proves difficult to understand, we need to use other Scripture to help us better understand it.
- D. Ultimately, the clarity of Scripture implies that our misunderstandings of God’s Word stem not from the Word itself, but from our spiritual condition.

III. The Necessity of Scripture

- A. 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).
- B. 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 on a regular (daily) basis.
- C. It is also from Scripture that God reveals his will to us (Deut. 29:29).
- D. God has chosen to reveal himself in two ways:
 1. General Revelation: God has revealed aspects of himself concerning His existence, character, and moral law to everyone through nature, His own historical works, and the human conscience (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:18-20). This

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general revelation is distinct from the Bible, yet is given to everyone and holds everyone accountable for recognizing it (Rom. 1:20, 32; 2:14-15).

2. Special Revelation: God has also revealed himself in special ways to specific people. The Bible is the main way that God has chosen to specifically and specially reveal Himself and His will for His children. He also has revealed Himself in special ways to individuals such as the prophets as recorded in Scripture. The ultimate revelation of Himself came in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

IV. The Sufficiency of Scripture

- A. The Bible contains all the words that are needed in order for one to become a Christian and live a life pleasing to God. The Bible properly equips us to accomplish “every good work” that God expects of us (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- B. The sufficiency of Scripture should cause us to search the Scriptures thoroughly to find God’s will on issues and difficulties in life. The Bible contains everything that God has wanted to tell us about the issues of life that we face. While we may not find the answer to every question we can contemplate (Deut. 29:29), the Bible will guide us to accomplish “every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17).
- C. Implications to the Sufficiency of Scripture:
 1. The sufficiency of Scripture entails that we should not look for messages from God outside of Scripture, and we should be wary of individuals who find such messages.
 2. While it is true that God will guide us as we faithfully seek to apply his Word to the various situations we face in our day, we are not free to elevate any modern revelations, leadings, and feelings to the level of Scripture. While we may give advice and counsel in such situations, it is not right for us to impose our own experiences with God’s leading on someone else when it is not either directly stated or implied by Scripture.
 3. Nothing is sin that is not either explicitly or implicitly prohibited in Scripture (see Paul’s discussion in 1 Cor. 8-10).

Questions to Ponder:

- Why is it important that the Bible is the basis for our beliefs?
- Will the Bible definitively answer every question we bring to it? Why or why not?
- Name both an issue the Bible speaks clearly about and an issue it does not speak clearly about. How should you handle each of these issues?