

The Doctrine of Scripture

A Brief Survey of the Firm Foundations of
Christian Belief in the Bible as the Word of God.

by

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The Doctrine of Scripture is vitally important to all Christians. It is through the instrumentality of the Word that God saves His people. Furthermore it is through reading the Bible (and of course, the reading and hearing of faithful teachers of the Bible) that we learn, by the Spirit, of our God and grow in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Consider:

If the Old Testament is not true, neither is the New (Heb. 1:1-2).

If the Bible is fallible, God is fallible.

If the written Word of God is a sham, so is the Incarnate Word of God.

If the Scriptural faith (Jude 3) is spurious, so is yours.

As Christians, we believe in General and Special Revelation. General Revelation is that which all mankind receives, the unevangelised heathen included. It includes (1) **Conscience** [Rom. 2:14-15], (2) **Providence** [Ps. 9:16] and (3) **Creation** [Rom. 1:20]. From these man can know something about God [Rom. 1:21], and is left without excuse [Rom. 1:20]. However these alone are not sufficient for man to come to the knowledge of the way of salvation - by faith in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. And so God has given us Special Revelation - the Holy Scriptures - to make us wise unto salvation [II Tim. 3:15], and also for us to rightly interpret General Revelation.

We shall now consider what the Bible claims for itself.

(A) The Bible is the Revelation of God.

(1) Is Revelation possible?

Those who hold it is not, argue that:

(a) *God would not want to reveal Himself to man.*

But why then did God create man? Before the Fall the LORD God revealed Himself to, and communed with, man in the Garden of Eden. Thus from the beginning God showed that He delighted in revealing Himself. Now God's supreme revelation to us is the Scriptures.

(b) *Man could not possibly understand the Revelation of God.*

It is true that no man will, or can, understand God in His entirety [Job 11:7] - for then he would be God, which is absurd. But it must be said that no man (nor angel) knows anything in its entirety. Just because knowledge is not complete it does not mean it is not true knowledge. Moreover, that we can understand the Revelation of God appears from the infinite Wisdom of God. He has willed to reveal Himself and knows how to communicate even with finite man whom He created. We can easily understand that adults can manage to explain things to children. God's being infinitely superior in wisdom to man, rather than being a barrier to His being able to reveal Himself, actually enables it.

(2) Is Revelation necessary?

Yes. God must reveal Himself or He will never be known, for if He chose to hide Himself who would find Him? Furthermore man, since the Fall [Gen. 3], is sinful and cannot know God by his own searching or his own theories. Thus God has revealed Himself in the sixty-six books of the Bible.

(B) The Bible is Inspired of God.

Inspiration is:

(1) **Plenary** - All Scripture is equally inspired. Some parts are not more [or less] inspired than others, though not all parts are of equal value for edification. When Christ or His Apostles quoted from the Older Testament they made no distinction between the Pentateuch [Gen. - Deut.], or the Prophets or any of the other books as having different degrees of authority, for they were all the Word of God. In that 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God' [II Tim. 3:16], Biblical teaching of history, geography and science are included and not merely 'theology'. If God cannot give us the truth regarding earthly things, how can we trust Him when He tells us of heavenly things [cf. John 3:12]? And if parts of the Bible are not inspired who is to tell us what parts they are?

(2) **Verbal** - Every word of the autographs [the original manuscripts] is inspired. This is so of necessity, for God's written Revelation consists of propositions which are communicated by means of words. It also follows from an intelligent consideration of New Testament quotations of the Old Testament, e.g., Matt. 22:32 and Gal. 3:16. In the former, Christ's argument rests on the fact that God's words in Exodus 3:6 [which He quotes] are not in the past tense, and in the latter Paul proves his point by showing that Genesis 12:7 speaks of 'seed' and not 'seeds'. Some argue that God merely inspires the author's thoughts, but the Scripture speaks of the 'words' [Mt. 4:4; II Peter 3:2; Jude 17]. And anyway how can these ideas be transmitted to us,

but by words?

(3) **Organic** - God used men to write Scripture [2 Peter 1:21] but not mechanically, as we might use a typewriter, but as rational creatures with predetermined gifts and abilities. For example, Paul was not equipped to write what John wrote, or vice versa. All the authors wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; therefore those things they wrote were His, directed by His will. Thus the prophets and apostles did not alter or erroneously record His message.

(C) The Bible is Inerrant.

The original manuscripts are without error. This must be so because the Bible:

(1) **reflects the Person of God.** If it contains errors God is not perfect.

(2) **is the Revelation of God.** The God of Heaven reveals Himself in Scripture. It is an affront to His Wisdom to think He could make a mistake, and to His Veracity that He could tell a lie cf. [Titus 1:21]

(3) **claims to be perfect** [Ps. 19:7]. Jesus said, 'Thy word is truth' [John 17:17]. He Himself was 'the truth' [John 14:6] and told no lies. Since the Bible is perfect, it is without error. Christ's argument in John 10:35 teaches that it is impossible that the Scripture could be wrong.

(D) The Bible has the Authority of God.

This is evident from:

(1) A logical consideration of sections A, B, and C preceeding.

(2) The following syllogisms*: God has all authority, therefore His Word is all-authoritative. The Bible is God's Word, therefore the Bible is the authoritative Word of God.

(3) Express Biblical reference to it. For example, Isaiah 1 :2 says, 'Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken' [cf. Micah 1:2]. It is also seen in the declaration 'Thus saith the LORD' and Christ's words 'Verily, I say unto you'.

(4) Biblical references where the words of an Old Testament passage are affirmed

***Syllogism: Explanatory note.** This is a philosophic term concerned with the analysis of sentence structure and meaningfulness in language. The first of two syllogisms in the above reference has the following logical structure:

If God is all-authoritative, **then** His Word is all-authoritative, **and** God is all-authoritative, **therefore** His Word is all-authoritative. The reader should note the words in bold type, as they highlight the logical syllogistic structure of the language here, which is called the language of *inference*.

The second syllogism builds from the deduction made from the first, thus:

If the Bible is the Word of God, **then** it is all-authoritative, **and** the Bible is the Word of God, **therefore** it is all-authoritative.

In each of these syllogisms the antecedent (the clause following the initial "if") is affirmed, and therefore by the rules of formal logic the inferences are valid. In formal logic the simple syllogism can yield four possible conclusions, only two of which are valid, viz.: Affirming the antecedent, and Denying the consequent.

to be the words of the Holy Ghost [Heb. 3:7 cf. Ps. 95:7, and Heb. 10:15; cf. Jer. 31:33].

(5) Biblical references where the Scriptures are spoken of as if they are God [Gal. 3:8 cf. Gen. 12:3 and Rom., 9:17 cf. Ex. 9:16]. The Scripture [which did not then exist] didn't speak the words of Gen. 12:3 to Abraham., but God Himself, and similarly God, through Moses, made announcement [Cf. Exod. 9:16] to Pharaoh. From both of these texts we see that Paul habitually identified the text of Scripture as God speaking.

(6) Biblical references where God is spoken of as if He were the Scriptures [Mt. 19:4-5 cf. Gen. 2:24, and Acts 4:24-25; cf. Ps. 2:1]. Christ and Peter here quote words from the Old Testament as being 'said' by God, but it is not God in whose mouth these sayings are placed, in the text of the Old Testament. The words of Scripture thus have the authority of God Himself.

(7) The finality with which Christ quoted Scripture. The Lord Jesus used the Scriptures as authoritative. He constantly said, 'It is written' [Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; 21:13; 26:31; Mk. 7:6; 9:13; John 6:31, 45; 10:34], and so did the apostles [Acts 1:20; 7:42; 15:15; 23:5; I Cor. 1:19; I Peter 1:16]. The verdict of the Scriptures was final; it was not to be questioned. 'The scripture cannot be broken' [John 10:35].

Since the Bible is, as Dean Burgon said, "none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne"—it is the rule for what we must believe and how we must live [II Tim. 3:15-17; Ps. 19:7-9]. Note also that the Holy Spirit never contradicts Scripture but testifies to its truth, and that our subjective 'experiences' and 'science' do not interpret the Bible for us, but that all knowledge claims are subject to God's authoritative Word.

(E) The Bible has been Specially Preserved of God.

The God of Heaven has specially preserved His book - the record of His Son and God's Salvation [John 20:31]. From the preaching of Christ we can see:

(1) The Old Testament text in common use amongst the Jews during His earthly ministry was entirely trustworthy. For example, 1500 years after Moses wrote Exodus 3:6 Christ could presuppose its preservation. [Mt.22:32] He said, 'Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled' [Mt. 5: 18]. 'And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of the law to fail' [Luke 16: 17].

(2) The same divine Providence which preserved the Old Testament, will preserve the New Testament. Implied in the 'Great Commission', which has application also to Christ's Church throughout all ages, is the promise that the Church would always be in possession of an infallible record of Jesus' words and works. And He Himself said, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away' [Mt. 24:35; Mk. 13:31; Luke 21 :33].

(F) The Bible has many other Excellent Characteristics.

For example, the Scriptures are:

(1) **Eternal** - The Scriptures were written during definite historical periods, but they had their origin in the eternal mind of God. 'Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven' [Ps. 119:89]. Thus they are relevant to every age and people.

(2) **Perspicuous** - The Scriptures are clear and we are able to understand them. They are likened to light [Ps. 119:105] and can be understood even by children [II Tim. 3:15]. This does not mean that there are no difficult parts in the Bible [cf. II Peter 3: 16], but that its meaning can on the whole be grasped. Since God has given us His Word, which we can understand, Christ can command us to study the Scriptures that we would know Him more fully [John 5:39]. We must also pray that God would quicken our minds in our understanding of His Word [Ps. 119:18, 27, 34].

(3) **Pure** - Like the God who gave them, the Scriptures are pure. As David says, 'The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times' [Ps. 12:6].

(4) **Purifying** - The Scriptures being the pure Word of God, have a purifying effect on Christians. They are the means by which God purifies the Church. Accordingly Christ prays, ' Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth' [John 17: 17].

(5) **Sufficient** - All that is necessary for our salvation is revealed in the Bible [John 20:30-33; II Tim. 3:15-17]. The All-Wise God has given to us His Word and no new book(s) or alleged 'revelations of the Spirit' or anything else can be added to it [Rev. 22: 18] or placed as equal with it.

(6) **A Unity** - Both the Older and the Newer Testaments are the Word of God. Moses, David, the prophets, Peter, Paul and John wrote of the same God [e.g., Heb. 12:29 cf. Deut 4:24] and the same way of salvation [cf. Rom. 4]. Christ could say, 'in the volume of the book it is written of me' [Ps. 40:7; Heb. 10:7] and 'the scriptures . . . are they which testify of me' [John 5:39]. We, like the two on the Emmaus road, by the illumination of the Spirit, [Lk. 24: 44-46] can see Christ in all the Bible.

(7) **Self-authenticating** - Christians can see that the Word of God is in full accordance with General Revelation. What it teaches of ourselves, of fallen mankind and of the world, we know to be true. The agreement and harmony of the different books, the sublime doctrines and its overall end - to give all the glory to God - evinces it to be the very Word of God.

Nevertheless, "*our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority*" of the Scriptures "*is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.*"

[Westminster Confession of Faith I:V].