

Arbor Foundations

2 – The Bible I: What is so Important About the Bible?

Sep 16, 2018

Suggested Reading

n/a

Key Ideas / Biblical Basis

Before we look at the characteristics of Scripture, we should mention the ***canon of Scripture***, which is the list of all books that belong in the Bible. This is too large of a topic to cover here, but here are a few summarizing points:

1. The canon has had wide agreement for thousands of years
2. The NT writers understood that they were writing Scripture
3. The early church came to fairly clear agreement as to the canon relatively soon after the NT books were written (evidence in late 2nd centry)
4. We consider the canon to be “closed”, meaning that there will be no new books added to the canon or new revelation (and there are many good reasons for this)
5. Regarding the accuracy of translations down through the centuries: The Bible has, by just about any measure, more manuscripts that were written closer in time to the original manuscript than any other ancient text. There is very high agreement among the manuscripts, and the very few portions of the text where there is some disagreement have no real impact on any significant belief or doctrine.

We will be looking at five different “characteristics” of the Bible that are important to understand in order to respond properly to what it says. The organization and expression of these ideas given below has been mostly extracted from Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*.

Characteristic 1: The Authority of Scripture

*The **authority** of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God. (W. Grudem)*

- A. All the words in Scripture are God’s words
 1. This is what the Bible claims for itself.
 - a. In OT, we see the phrase “Thus says the Lord” hundreds of times
 - b. We also see God speaking “through” a prophet
1 Kings 14:18, 2 Kings 9:36, Jer 37:2

- c. The NT claims that the OT writings are God’s words
2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:21, Matt 1:22, Matt 4:4, Acts 1:16, Rom 15:4, Luke 24:25,27
 - d. NT authors also consider NT writings as “Scripture”
2 Pet 3:16, 1 Tim 5:18, 1 Cor 14:37
 - 2. We are convinced of the Bible’s claims to be God’s words as we read the Bible.
 - a. A true believer has the Holy Spirit indwelling within him attesting to the Bible as God’s word
 - 3. The words of Scripture are “self-attesting” (There is no higher authority to “prove” or “attest” to God’s authority)
 - 4. Note: Saying that all the words in scripture are God’s words does not mean that God “dictated” every word of God. He generally worked through the personalities and writing styles of the writers.
- B. Since they are God’s words, we need to submit ourselves to the Bible, not submit the Bible to our own judgments.
- C. The Bible is the ultimate standard of truth
John 17:17, Titus 1:2, 2 Sam 7:28
- D. *Written* Scripture (the Bible) is our *final* authority
 - 1. It is the Scripture we have in *written* form that is the authority
 - a. Not “what Jesus actually said” (but is not recorded)
 - b. Not “what Paul really thought” (but is different from what is written)
 - 2. Scripture is the supreme judge or *final* authority “by which all controversies of religion are to be determined” (as expressed in London Baptist Confession Ch. 1 Sec. 10)
 - a. Not the church
 - b. Not subsequent writings
 - c. Not other revelation apart from the written scriptures

Characteristic 2: The Inerrancy of Scripture

The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. (Grudem)

Inerrancy flows from the authority of Scripture (all the words are God’s words) and his truthfulness. Note that it does not mean that the Bible tells us every fact that there is to be known, but that what it does speak about it speaks about truly.

Note that absolute truthfulness is consistent with some other types of statements, such as:

- A. The Bible can be inerrant and still speak in the ordinary language of everyday speech.
 - Can speak of sun “rising” and “falling”, because that’s how we normally speak of such things
 - Inerrancy has to do with truthfulness, not the degree of precision with which events are reported. (For example, it would be reasonable for someone to say that 8,000 people died in a battle when in reality the precise number may have been 7,853).
- B. The Bible can be inerrant and still include loose or free quotations
 - 1. Written Greek at time of the New Testament had no quotation marks or equivalent, and an accurate citation of another person of another person only needed to include a correct representation of the content of what he said, not every word exactly as spoken.
- C. It is consistent with inerrancy to have unusual or uncommon grammatical constructions in the Bible
 - 1. The fact that some of the writers had some grammatical errors does not mean that what was said is not entirely true.

Characteristic 3: The Clarity of Scripture

*The **clarity** of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it. (Grudem)*

The Bible frequently affirms its own clarity

- a. Deut 6:6-7 tells parents to teach God’s commands to their children
- b. Scripture states that even the “simple” can understand it
Ps 19:7, Ps 119:130
- c. New testament epistles written to churches, not to church leaders
1 Cor 1:2, Gal 1:2, Phil 1:1, Col 4:16

The London Baptist Confession has a good summary statement on the clarity of scripture:

LBC Chap 1, Sec. 7 (in modern language): Some things in Scripture are clearer than others, and some people understand the teachings more clearly than others. However, the things that must be known, believed, and obeyed for salvation are so clearly set forth and explained in one part of Scripture or another that both the educated and uneducated may achieve a sufficient understanding of them by properly using ordinary measures.

Why do people misunderstand Scripture? Why do people disagree on matters of doctrine?

- The problem lies not in Scripture but in ourselves
 - o We may be seeking to make affirmations that aren't present in Scripture
 - o We may have made mistakes in our interpretations of Scripture
 - The disciples and even apostles sometimes did this
Luke 24:25, Gal 2:11-15

Characteristic 4: The Necessity of Scripture

*The **necessity** of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God's will, but is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God's character and moral laws.*

It's helpful to begin by recognizing that there are two categories of revelation:

- **General Revelation:** the knowledge of God's existence, character, and moral law, which comes to all humanity through creation
Ps 19:1, Acts 14:16-17, Rom 1:19-21, Rom 2:14-15
- **Special Revelation:** God's words addressed to specific people, including the Bible, but also words of Jesus or OT prophets or the apostles that are not recorded in Scripture

- A. The Bible is necessary for knowledge of the gospel
 1. One must hear the gospel message in order to be saved
Rom 10:13-17
 2. We can only learn of the gospel from God's word (or people explaining it according to God's word)
- B. The Bible is necessary for maintaining spiritual life
Matt 4:4, Deut 32:47, 1 Pet 2:2
- C. The Bible is necessary for certain knowledge of God's will
 1. We have some knowledge of God's will through our conscience. However, this is not always precise and can be distorted.
 2. We have clear and definite knowledge of God's will in the Bible.
 - a. God has not revealed everything to us, but those things which are necessary
 - b. We can be more certain about what the Bible says than any other knowledge we have (assuming we have become convinced that Scripture truly is the word of God)
- D. The Bible is NOT necessary for knowing that God exists or something about his character and moral laws (see general revelation description above)

Characteristic 5: The Sufficiency of Scripture

The **sufficiency** of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly. (Grudem)

- A. Biblical Basis for the Sufficiency of Scripture
 - 1. God's word gives us what we need to be saved
2 Tim 3:15, James 1:8, 1 Pet 1:23
 - 2. God's word gives us what we need for every good work
2 Tim 3:16-17

- B. We can find all that God has said on topics of interest, and can have our questions answered
 - 1. The sufficiency of Scripture means that we can trust that God has given us everything that we need for salvation and Holy living in the Bible.
 - 2. There is no other writing that includes additional words from God.
 - 3. The Bible addresses everything we need to know to have our questions sufficiently answered.

So What?

If we don't consider Scripture to be God's authoritative and true words:

- A. We will feel free to disobey it
- B. We will feel free to reinterpret it to mean what we want it to mean
- C. We might demand that the Bible conform to our thoughts ("My God wouldn't be the kind of God who...")

Problems that come up if we deny inerrancy:

- A. If we deny inerrancy, a serious moral problem confronts us: May we imitate God and intentionally lie in small matters also?
- B. If we deny inerrancy, we begin to wonder if we can really trust God in anything he says
- C. If we deny inerrancy, we essentially make our own human minds a higher standard than God's Word itself. (In other words, we get to decide what is true and what is not)
- D. If we deny inerrancy, then we must also say that the Bible is wrong not only in minor details, but in some of its major doctrines as well
 - a. Scripture explicitly says that it is completely true, but this major doctrine is proven wrong if we deny inerrancy.
 - b. Therefore, simply saying that Scripture is inerrant in only the big issues is not possible.

Encouragements we get from the clarity of Scripture:

- A. In general, we don't need to depend on others to understand what Scripture means
- B. If Scripture were not clear and accessible to a regular human being, then we would be forced to depend on fallible human beings

Why is the concept of the necessity of scripture important?

- A. We can get everything else right, but if we don't think that Scripture is really necessary we will fail to use it as it has been intended by God.
- B. We have confidence that we can have certainty about God's will
- C. We place ourselves in a more appropriate and humble position when we recognize that there is no way we could have figured everything out ourselves.

Practical applications of the sufficiency of Scripture:

- A. We can be encouraged that *everything* that God wants to tell us about any particular question can be found in Scripture.
 - 1. This doesn't mean that the Bible tells us everything that we want to know!
- B. The sufficiency of Scripture means that we should add nothing to Scripture and consider no other writings of equal value to Scripture.
- C. We are not required to believe anything about God or his work that is not found in Scripture
- D. No modern revelations from God should be placed on a level equal to Scripture in authority
- E. Nothing is required of us that is not commanded by God in Scripture.
- F. When teaching others, we should emphasize what the Bible teaches

For Further Study

Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon*

Previous Sunday School Series on the Canon of Scripture in 2016

<http://feeds.feedburner.com/ArborFeedWidgetSS> (dates: Sep 4, Sep 18, Oct 9, Oct 16 2016)

Wayne Gruden, *Systematic Theology (Chapters 3-8)*

B.B. Warfield, "The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible":

http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/The_Inspiration_and_Authority_o_-_B_B_Warfield.pdf

The Doctrine of Scripture -- Theology Refresh: Podcast for Christian Leaders (list of recommended resources):

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/the-doctrine-of-scripture>

Another list of related resources:

<https://www.monergism.com/search?keywords=doctrine+of+Scripture&format=All>