2017 Spring Semester

Foundations

# The bible

## Pontius Pilate asked probably the most debated question in history when he looked at Jesus and asked, “What is truth?” (John 18:38).

### The dominant view amongst academia is that truth is defined by the scientific method.

#### The problem with defining truth by the scientific method is that the scientific method cannot account for every possible scenario or every piece of data. As a result, when technology improves and we can take more accurate measurements, or see things more clearly, we often find that our original conclusions were either incomplete or wrong. This happens all the time in science and as a result, you can never be certain that what you believe is true. There could literally be a discovery tomorrow that causes your entire worldview to crumble.

#### This is not to say that the scientific method isn’t useful, because it is. The study of science is an incredible tool that God has given us that has produced a large amount of benefits for humanity, but as we’ve seen, science is not a suitable standard to stake your life upon.

### The dominant view amongst our culture is relativism: “what’s true for you is true for you and what’s true for me is true for me.”

#### The danger of relativism is that it is a slippery slope that eventually saps all meaning and purpose from the world. If we can define our own truth, then anything can be truth. If truth is everything, then truth is nothing. It completely loses its meaning.

#### This is especially dangerous when it comes to issues of morality and this is the most obvious example of the danger and inadequacy of this view. Since we believe we can define for ourselves what is true, we seem to think that applies to our genders as well, and even our ethnicities.

## The solution to this problem is that we must have a standard to which we must conform. One that doesn’t constantly change, like the “truth” generated by the scientific method; and one that that doesn’t exist only in our own minds and is subject to everyone’s subjective emotions.

## The Bible is the standard by which we derive, examine, and test what is ultimately true.

#### Everything we will learn in this class is derived from the Bible because it is the only authoritative resource that defines our faith and its practice.

#### The Baptist Faith and Message, which is the standard of doctrinal truth that every Baptist church adheres to, says this: “[The Bible] is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.”

## What is the Bible?

### The word “Bible” comes from the Greek word *biblos*, which simply means “book.” But the Bible is more than just a book, it is a collection of books; 66 total. The Old Testament contains 39 books and the New Testament contains 27 books. The bible contains several different genres of writing including books of law, such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy; historical books, such as Ezra and Acts; books of poetry like the Psalms and Ecclesiastes; books of prophecy, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Revelation; biographical works, like Matthew and John; and epistles (formal letters) like Philippians and Ephesians. The Bible was written over a span of 1500 years, in three different languages, by 40 different authors all from various cultures, countries, and backgrounds, yet despite all this diversity, it is incredibly unified in its message and content.

## How Did We Get the Bible?

### Considering what the Bible is, an appropriate question now is, “how did we get the bible?” Or, if we understand that the bible is a record of absolute truth and that absolute truth belongs to God, then we can refine this question even further by asking, “how did this truth get from God to us?” There is a term that we use to describe this process and it’s called *inspiration.*

#### Inspiration – **a term referring to the fact that the words of scripture are spoken by God.**

##### Inspiration in this sense is NOT the kind of inspiration that we talk about when we say that a movie or a song or a sermon has “inspired” us. We’re not referring to a stimulation of our minds and feelings. We’re talking about God’s direct involvement in the composition of Scripture so much so that the words of the Bible are the words of God Himself.

#### This is a claim that Scripture makes for itself and the most pertinent passage relating to the doctrine of inspiration is found in 2 Timothy 3:16:

##### “All Scripture is **breathed out** by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness…”

###### “Breathed out” is the literal translation of this Greek word. It doesn’t really get plainer than that.

##### You can see the extent of inspiration here, “All Scripture…”, meaning that the very words themselves in all the bible are inspired by God, not just concepts and ideas. God didn’t just give Moses a writing prompt and tell him to get to work. God moved through Moses in such a way that Moses wrote down exactly what God wanted down to the very word.

##### But this doesn’t mean that Moses or the other biblical authors were just machines that God used to write the Scriptures. Each author wrote of their own will and accord, using their own writing styles, injecting their own personalities and quirks, and drawing from their own experiences when writing.

##### This is seen in 2 Peter 1:21: “No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

###### “Men spoke”, but they were influenced and directed by the Holy Spirit.

## The Four Characteristics of Scripture

### Authority

#### If the Bible is indeed the very words of God, then by default it is of the highest authority. The verse in 2 Timothy isn’t the only place where the Bible claims to be the very words of God.

##### The hundreds of “Thus says the Lord” phrases used throughout the Bible

##### Matthew 4:4 – “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” In the context, Jesus is recited several passages from Deuteronomy to resist the temptation of Satan, therefore, the “words that proceed from the mouth of God are the words of Scripture.

##### Acts 1:16 - “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.” Peter then quotes from Psalm 69 and Psalm 109.

##### Several other verses could be cited, but the point is that Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles considered the Scripture to be the very words of God Himself.

#### If the Bible is indeed the words of God, then by default the Bible is completely truthful.

##### Titus 1:2 – “This truth gives them confidence that they have eternal life, which God--who does not lie--promised them before the world began.”

##### Hebrews 6:17-18 – “In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.”

##### 2 Samuel 7:28 – “You are God and your words are true.”

#### God’s words are the ultimate standard of truth

##### John 17:17 – “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” This verse is interesting because Jesus doesn’t say “Your words are true”, He says the words of God are truth themselves.

##### This is significant because it’s not as though the bible is “true” in the sense that it conforms to some higher standard of truth. Jesus is saying that God’s words **are** the standard of truth.

#### Therefore, to disbelieve or to disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.

##### Several times Jesus rebukes the Pharisee’s and the disciples for not believing everything that the prophets have spoken. They’ve disobeyed and disbelieved Scripture, therefore they’ve disobeyed and disbelieved God.

##### The Word of God is our sole, final, ultimate authority for all matters of our faith and its practice.

### Necessity

#### Necessity – the bible is necessary for knowing the Gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing certain aspects of God’s will.

##### Necessary for knowing the Gospel

###### Romans 10:13-17 – “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

##### Necessary for maintaining spiritual life

###### Anytime anyone complains to me about being spiritually “dry”, the first question that I always ask them is whether or not they are spending time in the Word of God.

###### Matthew 4:4 – “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Just as our bodies are nourished by physical food, our spirits are nourished by the Word of God.

###### In speaking of the importance of the Israelites devotion to the words of God, Moses says in Deuteronomy 32:47 – “For it is no trifle for you, **but it is your life**, and thereby you shall live long in the land which you are going over the Jordan to possess.”

###### 1 Peter 2:2 – “Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation.”

The “pure spiritual milk” that Peter mentions is referring to the discussion Peter had concerning the Word of God in chapter 1 verses 22-25, just a couple verses earlier.

###### Therefore, the Scriptures, the very Words of God, are necessary for us to not only maintain our spiritual health, but also to grow in our salvation.

##### Necessary for knowing certain aspects of God’s will

###### Many people live with the idea that the only way God reveals His will to us is through intuition or some form of spiritual prompting: “I *feel like* I God wants me to do this or that…” But this is not true, because God has revealed His will for us in certain instances through His words in the Bible.

###### For example, God has told us several things the He *doesn’t* want us to do. Like sin. This is part of His will for us. Kevin DeYoung is a pastor who is famous for saying, “When you don’t know what to do, do anything you want to, except sin. You can be assured that you are in the will of God if you do that.”

###### To put it positively, the Bible even plainly says, “this is the will of God for you, your sanctification.” – 1 Thessalonians 4:3

###### 1 Thessalonians 5:18 – “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you.”

#### The bible is a necessary part of the Christian life. It is by reading, memorizing, and meditating on it that we can grow deeper in our relationship with the Lord, find nourishment for our souls, and help us discern the will of God.

### Sufficiency

#### This brings us to another concern. The Scripture may be necessary for me, but is it enough for me? Is there any other source of truth or instruction that I need to draw from? Do the Scriptures really contain all that I need to live a spiritually abundant life? The answer is “yes.”

#### Remember 2 Timothy 3:16, which we’ve already looked at, but let’s also look at the verses directly before and after it:

##### 2 Timothy 3:15-17 – “…from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are **able to make you wise for salvation** through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

##### All that we need for anything that God would require of us can be found in the Scriptures. In fact, that’s what Jesus has been unpacking for us in the Sermon on the Mount.

###### Matthew 7:12 – “So in everything that you do, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

This statement “the Law and the Prophets” points back to Jesus’ statement in chapter 5:17, where He says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have come to fulfill them.” This forms a literary element called an “inclusion”, meaning that verses 5:17 and 7:12 form somewhat of a “bracket” around the material contained between.

#### We can approach Scripture with the confidence that it contains everything we need to sustain us in this life.

#### The sufficiency of Scripture also means that we are to derive our understanding of God, mankind, and the world from it and it alone. I’m not saying that we cannot consult other sources to help us understand certain things, but what I am saying is that we need to be like the Bereans, who “were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

#### We undermine the gift that Scripture is whenever we derive our theology and understanding of biblical matters from movies like The Shack and books like Left Behind. These works are demonstrably false in many harmful and even heretical ways, yet a large number of people take what they say at face value without comparing their claims to Scripture.

### Clarity

#### Anyone who has ever read the Bible seriously has probably soon realized that some parts of it can be understood easily and some parts are rather difficult to understand and make sense of.

##### 2 Peter 3:15-16 – “So also our beloved Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. 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.”

#### But difficult does not mean impossible to understand.

##### Deuteronomy 6:6-7 – “And these words I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

###### Not only was the Old Testament considered simple enough to teach to children, it was also expected that the parents would know the Scripture well enough to be able to teach them diligently. The Old Testament!!

##### Psalm 19:7 – “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”

##### Psalm 119:130 – “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”

#### Jesus never justifies any of the disciples or Pharisee’s misunderstandings of Scripture by saying, “Oh yeah, that is a bit unclear…” But instead He always says, “Have you not read?”, or “Does it not say?”. Jesus assumes that the Scriptures are clear and should be studied and understood by people.

#### Another interesting point to make is that most of the New Testament is written not to scholars or educated church leaders, but to the general public and to lay members in the churches.

#### We also have a great help in understanding Scripture because we have the Holy Spirit indwelling each of us.

##### 1 Corinthians 2:14 – “The unspiritual man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

##### This shows us that even though the Bible is written clearly, a person who is not willing to receive its teachings will not understand it. A person who does not have the Spirit of God within them will have a much harder time trying to understand what the Scriptures say and how they apply to their life. But, an unbeliever who is sincerely desiring truth will be able to find what they are looking for in the Bible. For the church, and for the lost who are pursuing truth, the Bible is able to be understood and applied.

## H.E.A.R. Journals

### H.E.A.R. journals are something that we have incorporated into our small group curriculum and our discipleship groups. The H.E.A.R. journaling method is a way to read the bible with a life-transforming purpose.

#### Hebrews 4:12 – “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

### Since we believe that the Bible is authoritative, necessary, sufficient, and clear, we believe it only makes sense for us to do whatever we can to encourage you to dig into the Bible for yourselves. If the only “feeding” of the Word that you get is on Sunday morning, then you’re doing this whole Christian life thing all wrong.

### H – Highlight

#### After reading a passage of Scripture, highlight each verse that speaks to you by copying it down.

### E – Explain

#### At this stage you will explain what the text means. By asking some simple questions, with the help of God’s Spirit, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.

##### Why was this written?

##### To whom was it originally written?

##### How does it fit with the verses before and after it?

##### Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?

##### What is He intending to communicate through this text?

#### The answers to these questions may not be immediately apparent in the text that you’re reading, so don’t be afraid to consult study bibles, commentaries, etc. But do not rely upon these materials exclusively. Remember, the Bible is sufficient and clear. It’s all you need. Robby Gallaty says, “Get into the Word, until the Word gets into you.”

### A – Apply

#### This application is the heart of this process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you’ve done before, answer a series of questions to uncover the significance of these verses to you personally, questions like:

##### How can this help me?

##### What does this mean today?

##### What would the application of this verse look like in my life?

##### What does this mean to me?

##### What is God saying to me?

#### It is important to distinguish the Application portion from the Explain portion. These are the most commonly confused steps in this process. When you are explaining the text, you are only trying to understand the immediate context of that verse as the original writer would have intended it and the original audience would have received it. But when you are applying the text, you are taking the basic principle or meaning of the text, pulling it into your own context and circumstances, and then trying to understand how you can conform your life to the principle or message within that text.

### R – Respond

#### Your response to the passage may take on many forms. You may write a call to action. You may describe how you will be different because of what God has said to you through His Word. You may indicate what you are going to do because of what you have learned. You may respond by writing out a prayer to God. For example, you may ask God to help you to be more loving, or to give you a desire to be more generous in your giving. Keep in mind that this is your response to what you have just read.

## Psalm 119 is an amazing psalm. It’s the longest Psalm in the Bible and it celebrates the Word of God like no other. In almost every verse the Psalmist gives tribute to the Word of God:

### Psalm 119:1 – “How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.”

### Psalm 119:89 – “Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven.”

### Psalm 119:105 – “Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path.”

### Psalm 119:142 – “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth.”

### Psalm 119:151 – “You are near, O Lord, and all Your commandments are truth.”

### Psalm 119:160 – “The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.”

## John Piper said, “When all your favorite preachers are gone, and all their books forgotten, you will have your Bible. Master it. Master it.”