

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW
LESSON 1
THE BIBLE: INSPIRATION, AUTHORITY & REVELATION

INTRODUCTION

Pontius Pilate asked arguably the most profound question in the history of the world when he asked Jesus: "What is truth?"(John 18:38) What makes Pilate's question even more powerful is that he was asking the One Who said that He was the Truth(John 14:6)!

It has been estimated that as high as 70% of today's generation (both church and un-church) believe that absolute truth does not exist. Most of them will say that truth is negotiable and it cannot be known except by personal experience. Our modern culture has dethroned God as the ultimate source of truth and put man in His place. They say: what is true for you may not be true for me and vice-versa.

So, we return to Pilate's question: What is truth?

The Barna Research Group recently did a study to show significant changes since 1991 of "Faith Groups". Consider this: the largest change in beliefs was the ten-point decline in those who firmly believe that the Bible is accurate in all of the principles it teaches. Only 43% of self-identified Christians now have such a strong belief in the Bible!

We at Second Baptist Church believe that truth is found in God's Word, the Bible. We believe that the Bible is uniquely inspired by God and provides THE authoritative guidelines for faith and practice. Everything we will teach in this class originates from the Bible. What we know about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Christian life, sin, Satan, heaven or hell comes from the Bible. *The Baptist Faith and Message* says this about the Bible: "It 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."[*The Baptist Faith and Message*, Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2000]

1) **WHAT IS THE BIBLE?**

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word *biblos* which means "a book". Actually, the Bible is a book made up of 66 books: 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books. It was written over a period of 1500 years by 40 different authors from different cultures and backgrounds. And yet, the Bible has amazing unity! Its unusual character is due to the fact that it is indeed God's Word even though written by human authors. In the next 2 lessons we will look in more detail at the Old Testament and the New Testament.

2) **THE SENDER: HOW DID WE GET THE BIBLE?**

Another way to phrase the question: How did the truth get from God to us? A key concept in the process is called the doctrine of inspiration. What do we mean by inspiration?

First, what we do NOT mean: Shakespeare had inspiration which resulted in some of the greatest literature known to man. Michelangelo, da Vinci and Mozart had inspiration and produced incredible works. This type of inspiration means “Stimulation of the mind or emotions to a high level of feeling or activity”. [*The American Heritage College Dictionary*, page 704] This is not what is meant by the doctrine of inspiration in producing the Bible.

What we DO mean by inspiration

The Baptist Faith and Message uses the term “divinely inspired”. The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. The key scripture for the doctrine of inspiration is 2 Timothy 3:16:

“All Scripture is *inspired* by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction
For training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every
Good work.”(NASB)

[TEACHERS: I am a NASB man, so all scriptures will be from that version unless otherwise indicated]
The word for “inspired” in the Greek literally means “God-breathed”. God breathed out His truth to us through the human writers of the Bible. Those human writers did not take dictation from God like robots. One of the beautiful things about the Bible is that it is written in the style of the human writers. It is also written using different types of literature: narrative, poetry, prophecy, letters, etc.

Speaking of inspiration, *The New Scofield Reference Bible* states, “Without impairing the intelligence, individuality, literary style or personal feelings of the human authors, God supernaturally directed the writing of Scripture so that they recorded in perfect accuracy His comprehensive and infallible revelation to man.” (page 1304 of the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, New York, Oxford Press, 1967)

QUESTION: So, God breathed His truth through the human writers - how do we know that those men did not corrupt/change that truth in the process?

2 Peter 1:20-21 answers this question:

“ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit.”(NASB)

These verses use the word “prophecy” to mean *foretelling* as well as *forth-telling* the Word of God. In other words, “prophecy” does not always mean predicting the future. It can also mean simply presenting God’s truth about any topic. Let’s break down these verses...

Verse 20 – The Scriptures did not come from the prophets themselves; their writings came from God thru those prophets. The source was God; the instrument was the human writer.

Verse 21 – This verse elaborates on verse 20. The writers were “moved”(NASB), or “carried along”(NIV) by the Holy Spirit. This word for “carried along” is a fascinating term in the Greek language. It is the picture of a sailing vessel under full sail carried along by the wind – as Luke used the word in Acts 27:15 & 17. In those verses from Acts the NASB translates it “driven along” as does

the NIV. So, the human writers of the Scriptures did not dream up the message. They were carried along/controlled by the Holy Spirit in writing the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the very words of God! [Note: this discussion of 2 Peter 1:20-21 is partially based on *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, page 869]

3) THE RECEIVER: THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

We are not talking about the Book of Revelation. That is the last book of the Bible. No, this is the doctrine of revelation. We receive God's truth by revelation.

By revelation we mean, "The disclosing to others of what was before unknown to them" [from *Bible Doctrine I Study Graph*, 1965, Moody Bible Institute]. The *Baptist Faith and Message* says that the Bible "...is God's revelation of Himself to man." (page 7)

What the doctrine of revelation means is that we cannot understand God's truth unless God reveals it to us. We cannot figure it out for ourselves. Charles Kelley, Richard Land and Albert Mohler explain it this way in their book about the *Baptist Faith and Message*: "Without this divine self-disclosure we would have no certain knowledge of God, and humanity would be left groping for answers in the dark." (page 8) In other words, spiritual truth would be up for grabs.

ILLUSTRATION: Using the sender-receiver analogy: God is the sender of truth through the human writers of the Bible but He also reveals Himself to us so that we can receive & understand the truth He has sent.

4) THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY...

Because the Scriptures are God-breathed and...

Because God reveals Himself to us through the Scriptures...

Then the Scriptures should be the supreme authority over our lives! We should do what it says.

The Baptist Faith and Message states that the Scriptures are "...the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried." (page 7) We do not judge the Bible, it judges us. It is not a matter of what you or I think but what does the Bible say?

In Luke 6:46 Jesus asked the people, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord', and do not do what I say?" Jesus was exposing their inconsistency and their hypocrisy. If He is Lord then we do what He says. If the Bible is God's word then it is the authority over our lives. It is not a series of suggestions or guidelines – it is ultimate truth from God.

ILLUSTRATION: Entire church denominations have fallen into unbiblical and ungodly practices because they long ago abandoned the authority of the Scriptures. Individuals do the very same thing.

5) THE WRITTEN WORD

In this lesson we are talking about the written Word of God. The written word of God is powerful! In Matthew 4 before Jesus began His public ministry, He was tempted by Satan. He went one-on-one with the Devil. Satan tempted Him in 3 different ways. In all 3 Jesus answered with the phrase, "...it is written..." and He quoted specific verses of Scripture from the book of Deuteronomy. He recited Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16 and 6:13. This is amazing! As the Son of God He had all the power of heaven at His disposal but He resisted the Devil by quoting specific verses of Scripture! This says 2 things to us...

- The written word of God is powerful.
- It is the same written word of God that is available to us.

6) WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

The benefits of reading and studying God's Word...

A. For Spiritual Growth. 1 Peter 2:1-3 says...

"Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."(NASB)

As the baby grabs for the bottle so you & I grab for the Book! Your spiritual growth is in direct proportion to your intake of the Word of God – not just sermons or Bible study lessons as valuable as they are – but your own personal reading/study of God's Word.

B. For Spiritual Maturity. Hebrews 5:14...

"But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."(NASB)

The "solid food" is God's Word. This gives us a pattern for maturity in the Christian life... God's word + practice + time = distinguishing between good and evil. This is the goal of the study of God's word: Christian growth and maturity.

C. For Spiritual Effectiveness. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we have already looked at but notice the 4 ways that we can profit from God's word:

- Teaching – we never stop learning
- Reproof – telling us what is wrong

- Correction – telling us how to get back on the right track
- Training in righteousness – thus, we as believers are equipped for every good work.

The ultimate purpose of the Scriptures is not to satisfy our curiosity or to make us “smarter sinners” but to change our lives and to equip us to serve the Lord!

CONCLUSION

So, did we answer Pilate’s question to Jesus? Truth is found in God’s Word, the Bible.

Psalm 119 is an amazing Psalm. It is by far the longest Psalm – 176 verses! Here is the amazing thing: in almost every single verse the Psalmist gives tribute to the Word of God. We have been talking about the word of God; now, let’s wrap up by simply listening to God’s word and let Him speak to us. Here is a small sample from Psalm 119:

[TEACHERS: Suggestion – select several people in the class to be ready to stand and read these verses]

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 a 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.”

Psalm 119:176 – “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments.”