

DOCTRINE 1

UNIT FOUR THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD

COVENANT AND SCRIPTURE

- ↳ The Divine Origin of Scripture
 - The Bible is referred to as the “Word of God”.
 - Jesus clearly regarded scripture as having the force of the word of God.
 - The Holy Spirit was frequently referred to as the one who is responsible for the words of scripture.

- ↳ The Human Origin of Scripture
 - God used human servants to announce the gospel.
 - Paul was aware that the gospel had been promised by the prophets.
 - God used the authors that he had developed throughout their lifetimes – their personalities and their gifts.

- ↳ Covenants
 - The major division in the Bible is between the old & new testaments or ‘covenants’.
 - Covenants can be made by mutual agreement, can be one sided gifts or can be imposed.
 - Covenants relate people by the use of language, and evoke faith as the initial response.
 - God made several covenants – such as those with Noah, Abraham & David.

- The 'old covenant' is that made with Moses, and the 'new covenant' is that made through the blood of Jesus Christ.
- The new fulfilled the old, but didn't render it totally useless – it still has the power to explain what Christ accomplished.



- ↳ From Covenant to Scripture
- Before the whole Old Testament was formed as such, God was relating to his people through words of promise.
 - The Old Testament books consist of commentary, explanation, application and mediation on the covenants between God and his people.
 - Scripture is covenantal in nature.
 - God's relationship with his people therefore has a covenantal character, centred on the words of the Bible.
 - This character of the relationship has not been changed by the demise of the old covenant and the coming of the Spirit.

KINGDOM AND SCRIPTURE

↳ The Kingdom of God

- God reigns over all the world, but Adam and Eve began a human revolt against his rule.
- Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was at hand – God intends to reassert his rule and we should be prepared.

↳ Covenant and Kingdom

- The purpose of the covenant was to re-establish God's rule over fallen humanity, and so to save.
- God now rules his people through the covenant made with them through Jesus.
- Jesus is the covenant, as he is the kingdom, he is the very centre of the whole Bible.
- Some believe scripture to be inspired by God through the prophets and apostles, some see it only as human witness to God.
- Such people may say that there is a danger of worshipping words, not God.
- The covenantal nature of the Bible helps to answer this criticism – God's people were always ruled by his words.
- Jesus believed and obeyed the words of scripture – in doing so he was trusting God himself.
- Scripture is not just a list of truths about God for us to believe.
- There is a variety of different kinds of material through which God guides and sustains his people.

↳ Rivals for Authority

- The authority of scripture is unrivalled – it is through scripture that Christ expresses his lordship, his rule does not rival scripture.
- Some may suggest that the Bible should be added to, others that it should be modified for modern culture.
- The best perspective to view such questions is through the coming of Christ.
- Hebrews 1:1-3 states the importance God speaking to his people through Jesus.
- It was the coming of Jesus that divides history in half.
- Once God spoke through the prophets, now through a unique son – his last and great word before the end.
- There can not be a third great outburst of revelation – this would demolish the unique status of Christ.
- The New Testament writers were aware of the danger of false teachers and drew readers back to the authorised writings.
- There is a danger in referring too readily to the 'leading of the Spirit' or 'words from the Lord'.
- Other Christian experiences should not be confused with revelation akin to scripture.

↳ Authority and Church

- The church must ensure that the scriptures are taught and applied.

TRUTH AND SCRIPTURE

↳ The Need for Truth

- Scripture is the medium of God's communication with the world and so it needs to be trustworthy.
- Scripture encapsulates God's covenant with us.
- Covenants create relationships through words received by faith, and false words make relationship impossible.

↳ God, the Source of Truth

- The Bible calls God 'the true God', to distinguish him from the false gods of paganism.
- The Bible says that God "remains faithful for ever", he can always be trusted.
- It is inconceivable that one who 'is reliable' could tell lies as the "evil one" does.

↳ The Location of Truth

- The only words of God accessible to us come in human language and through the lips or writing of human beings.
- This does not compromise their truth – being fully human did not stop Jesus from speaking the pure word of God.
- If Jesus could do this, so could the prophets and apostles.

↳ The Bible and Truth

- In the past two centuries some Christians have begun to question the truth of the Bible.
- There is no longer universal belief in infallibility & inerrancy, in some cases there is denial that scripture is the word of God.
- We can not think of the world as our ancestors did.

- In supporting inspiration, some emphasise the purpose of scripture – to lead us to faith in Christ. This view supports infallibility, but not inerrancy.
- Other emphasise the perfection of scripture – difficulties can be explained. This supports both infallibility and inerrancy, but some points must be noted.
- The purpose of a passage or book must be kept in mind – using everyday language to make a point is different from trying to teach scientific facts.
- Biblical descriptions of nature are usually similar to the way most people talk – they can be better thought of as pre-scientific, rather than unscientific.
- Historical sections use methods still used today – things may be described differently depending on the purpose of the passage.
- We must often remember our ignorance of life in Biblical times.
- The Bible uses language such as approximation, hyperbole and metaphor.
- It must always be remembered that the Bible includes different types of literature.
- These observations do not solve every difficulty, but remind us that the difficulties are not insoluble.

↳ What Kind of Truth?

- Discussions on infallibility and inerrancy can prove to be misleading.
- Attention can be focused too much on historical details and forget that the scriptures have authority from God.
- To see the Bible as inerrant is to say that we see the truth in it, that we will face its truth and not try to evade it.

INTERPRETATION AND SCRIPTURE

↳ Inspiration and Interpretation

- Inspiration makes the Bible unique – three important elements need to be noted.
- Its truthfulness: the Bible presupposes belief in its reader.
- Its unity: despite its variety, God's authorship gives the Bible unity, and helps us to use one part of it to understand another.
- Its clarity: there are undoubtedly difficult passages, but the fundamental message is very clear.
- People can help each other to interpret and apply scripture but there is no barrier to understanding.
- The Bible itself appoints no authorised interpreter and we should not create one.

↳ Humanity and Interpretation

- While inspired, the Bible is also a book, and we must ask the same questions as we do of other books.
- We need to note the context, take account of the type of literature and understand the background.
- It is literal, not literalistic – we must seek the author's meaning through the type of literature that is used, this must not be ignored.
- Any passage is part of a wider whole – interpretation begins with the passage involved but we must consult the whole context for further light.