

English Transcript

Foundations of the Christian Faith – Course 1

Lesson 1 - The Bible (Part 1)

Welcome back to Foundations of the Christian Faith, Course 1. We are continuing in our handout on page 5. This is Lesson 1 and the topic will be the doctrine related to the Bible. This will be done in two lessons. When we think of the phrase “Word of God,” what comes to mind? We might think about the decrees of God that were handed down through the prophets in written form and spoken form.

The phrase “Word of God,” should also cause us to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ as the incarnate, living Word of God.

Isaiah 40:8 tells us, *“The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of God remains forever.”*

Let us begin these lessons on the doctrine of the Bible, the Word of God, with a short statement of belief.

“We believe in the Holy Bible as originally written by the Holy Spirit-controlled men. It is inerrant in every respect, infallible and verbally and plenary inspired. We believe the Bible is the complete, final, and authoritative revelation of God's will and Word, therefore being the absolute authority for Christian union and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions shall be tried. By scriptures, we mean the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, always accepted by historical Orthodox Christian churches.”

There are a number of theological terms in this statement that need to be defined.

- **Verbal:** The very words on the pages of the Bible are inspired by God, not just thoughts and concepts. Isaiah 55:10-11 says that every word is flawless. Proverbs 30:5 says that every word of God is true. And Matthew 5:18 states that not a jot or tittle, the dot of an “i” or the crossing of a “t” will pass from the Word of God until all is accomplished.
- **Plenary:** This term means complete or full. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that all Scripture is inspired by God, and it is useful so that the man of God will be equipped for every good work. This means that every book of the Bible, every chapter, every paragraph, every word is breathed out by God. God it is the complete revelation of God.
- **Complete and Sufficient:** Since all Scripture is inspired by God, the 66 books that make up the Bible, 39 of the Old Testament, 27 of the New Testament are the complete revelation of God to Man. Revelation 22:18-20 issues a warning to anyone who adds to and subtracts from God’s Word. The Word of God is sufficient to address the needs and issues of life related to salvation and living a life that honors God.

- **Clarity and Perspicuity:** The Bible is intended to be clear. Perspicuity means that the Bible was written to be understood. Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we can read, study, and grasp the meaning of spiritual truths. We have not received the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so we can understand spiritual truths.
- **Inspiration:** This phrase means breathed out by God. In Greek, the phrase is “theopneustos” or “God breathed.” The reference for this is 2 Timothy 3:16.
- **Authoritative:** The scripture is binding on all mankind. It is authoritative for salvation and how we live in a way that is honoring to God. We are not dependent on science, religious organizations, or the opinions, feelings or experiences of man or the culture. Our final authority is the Word of God because it is the representation of the character of God.
- **Inerrancy:** The Bible is without error. In this lesson we will talk more about this doctrine.

If you remember our course on The Story of the Old Testament, we introduced a simple song that helped us remember the structure of the Old Testament.

5-12-5-5-12, 5-12-5-5-12. You can fill in the chart of page 5 as a quick review of the books of the Old Testament.

5-12-5-5-12

5 books of the Law.

12 books of History.

5 books of Poetry.

5 major Prophets.

12 minor Prophets.

On the top of page 6 you see the structure for the Story of the New Testament.

4-1-21-1

4 Gospels

1 Book of History (Acts)

21 Letters/Teaching

1 Book of Prophecy (Revelation)

The question that is often asked relates to how the 66 books made it into the Bible?

What were the selection criteria?

And what about other writings that are not included in the Bible?

The word canon just means rule or standard. There were criteria used by the Old Testament leaders and the early church to assess whether a book was inspired by God and worthy of inclusion in the canon of Scripture.

A few of the tests for canonicity were as follows:

1. Authority: Was the book written by a prophet, an apostle, or someone taught by Jesus?
2. Orthodoxy: There could be no contradiction in doctrine or teaching from one book to another.
3. Transformative: Was it evident that the book had divine capacity to transform lives.
4. Inspiration: Was there agreement that the book was inspired by God.
5. Miraculous: The writers of books performed miracles to authenticate their message and authority.

There were many things written but not everything was viewed as inspired and made it into the Bible, the canon of the scriptures.

The Old Testament was written between 1400 to 400 BC. It was accepted as inspired by the end of that period (200 to 150 BC) with the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, called the Septuagint.

The New Testament was written between 50 and 95 AD, and it was accepted as inspired in a progressive way, between about 90 AD through 397 AD.

The church did not determine what was inspired by God. The books were inspired by God and the church discovered which were ones were inspired. It would be like taking a vote for the top 10 basketball players of all time. Michael Jordan undoubtedly be on each person's top 10 list. He would not be on the list because the people voted for him but rather because he is one of the top 10 players of all time. People just affirmed what was evident to all.

There are extra biblical writings in the Catholic Bible referred to as the Apocrypha.

- The Apocrypha means hidden.
- Most of these books were written during the 400 silent years, the time between the end of the Old Testament and the time when John the Baptist came to break the silence as the promised prophet who would prepare the way for Jesus as Messiah.
- These books were never accepted as inspired books of the Hebrew Bible, and they were not quoted in the New Testament.
- There are proven errors and contradictions which would go against one of the tests for canonicity.
- The Catholic Church did not add these 12 books to their Bible until the Council of Trent in 1546 A.D. Many believe this was in response to the movement of the Reformation, led by Martin Luther.

There is another set of extra biblical writings called the Pseudepigrapha, and that just means false writings.

- These are written between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D.
- The authors are unknown.
- They contain historical errors and many heretical teachings, so those books were not accepted as inspired.

Turn with me to page 7 in your handout, as we begin the discussion on the Revelation of the Bible.

There are two categories of revelation, General and Special. “Biblical Revelation” is the act of God whereby He discloses to mankind what would otherwise be unknown.

The picture at the top of page 7 illustrates several ways that God has revealed himself to us through General and Special Revelation. We will first define General and Special Revelation and then explain all the doctrine related to special revelation such as Inspiration, Inerrancy, Authority, Clarity, Illumination, Sufficiency, Necessity, and Canonization.

General Revelation

General Revelation refers to God revealing Himself through creation.

Psalm 19:1-6. The heavens declare the glory of God. Day after day, they pour forth speech. It says, even though the creation does not use words, it is shouting out that God exists.

We see the same principle in Romans 1:18-20.

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

God also reveals Himself through the human conscience. We will discuss this later when we look at Romans 2:14-15.

Our knowledge about God through general revelation is limited though because it only communicates knowledge about God and His character. There is much more that we need to know regarding our need for salvation and how to live in relationship with God.

Characteristics of General Revelation

- It reaches all people. God reveals Himself to everyone in general ways through the sun, rain, and harvest as examples.
- It encompasses the entire world. Once again, we refer to Psalm 19:2, “The heavens declare the glory of God.”
- It is general in its methodology. It employs universal means, for example, like the heat of the sun. refer to Psalm 19:4-6. Also, the human conscience referenced in Romans 2:14-15, “(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.” God has placed our conscience within each person made in the image and likeness of God that is another means by which God has revealed himself and his presence to every person.

- General Revelation affects all people wherever and whenever they live and it brings light and truth to all, and if rejected, it brings condemnation, because no one is without excuse.

Content of General Revelation

To grasp the meaning and content of General Revelation, these three passages we have referenced are most helpful: Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:18-20, and Romans 2:14-15.

- General Revelation focuses on the glory of God (Psalm 19:1)
- God's power in creating the universe is revealed. Psalm 19 tells us the sky proclaim the work of God's hand.
- Creation reveals God's supremacy and nature. Romans 1 tells us, *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."*
- Creation reveals God's providential control over nature. The rains from heaven bring fruitful harvests.
- We can see God's goodness in the truth that the sun rises on the evil and the good. It rains on the just and the unjust. God's goodness flows to all through general revelation and his common grace.
- God's intelligence and wisdom are revealed through creation. Acts 17 says that God is greater than the thoughts and ideas of man.
- Our very existence should be evidence of God's revelation. Acts 17 also tells us, *"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"*

These truths are examples of the ways in which God has revealed himself in general ways to all people through his creation. There is a picture on the top of page 8 that might help to remember the doctrine of General Revelation.

Think of Genesis 1:1-3. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."*

God spoke into the darkness and created all that we see out of nothing. Hebrews 11:1-3 tells us, *"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for: By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."*

The value of general revelation is that it displays God's common grace towards humanity. Even after the fall, God's common grace continues to overflow to all people. This makes the case for theism, meaning that there is at least an intelligent designer of the universe. This view, discredits atheism, agnosticism, and evolutionism. And since there is a divine creator, God is just when he condemns those who reject his clear and obvious general revelation to all people. We are without excuse.

Special Revelation

Special Revelation can be defined as God revealing himself to humanity through historical events, miracles and signs, dreams and visions, theophanies, prophets, Jesus Christ, and through the written words of God in the Bible. Through special revelation, man can learn about God's character, his will, purpose for creation, and the plan of redemption. Special revelation shows us how we can know God through a saving relationship in the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

There are two passages to better understand Special Revelation. Psalm 19:1-6 provided a picture of General Revelation, while verses 7-11 illustrate Special Revelation through God's Word.

Psalm 19:7-11

*"The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.
By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward."*

Also, Hebrews 1:1-3

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

The Bible is clear that God spoke in many different ways in the past. He revealed himself in many ways beyond just through his creation. Some of these ways are listed in your handout on page 8. God spoke in the past through ...

- the casting of lots
- through the Urim and Thummim
- through theophanies or supernatural appearances of God

- through dreams and visions
- through miracles
- through the prophets
- through historical events
- in these “last days” through Jesus Christ
- and through the Word of God.

There are a number of doctrine related to Special Revelation that we will study throughout the remainder of this lesson and the next lesson.

In this lesson we will explain the biblical doctrine of Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Authority.

Turn to page 9 as we discuss Special Revelation doctrine of the Inspiration of the Bible.

The key verse is 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

- All Scripture is breathed out by God.
- It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.
- The purpose or result is to equip every believer to serve God.

Does the Bible have higher authority than other great books? Yes! It is the only book in which every word is breathed out by God. Every word is true. Every word is without error.

The Greek word for “breathed out by God” is the phrase “theo-pneustos.” This is what I have tried to picture on page 9. Inspiration means that the Word of God is “divine”. God provided direction to the human authors of the Bible, so they composed and recorded His messages to humanity in their original writings. God moved men by the Holy Spirit to write the words of God. By inspired, we mean every word on every page is breathed out by God. This is inspiration beyond any other ordinary book. There is much evidence to this truth as well, and some of those are just listed below.

You can read and look at the references on your own. I will highlight a few here.

- The Old Testament claims to be inspired by God, and many times you can see the phrase, “thus saith the Lord.”
- The New Testament claims to be the Scriptures or God’s Word.
- Jesus referred to the Old Testament as the Word of God.
- Jesus confirmed the believability of the Scriptures. He said everything that is written about him, from Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms, pointed to him.
- The Bible is spiritually convincing. When you look at the 66 books written over 1,500 years by 40 different authors, three different continents, three different languages, with one common message, that alone is convincing.
- The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies, more than 350 prophecies pointing to Jesus that have been fulfilled.

- The Bible has influenced the course of human history more than any other book.
- The Bible has changed the lives of countless millions of people, and that was promised in Genesis 12:3 in the Abrahamic Covenant. Through the faith of Abraham all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. The Bible is meant to be transformative.

A second doctrine related to Special Revelation is the Inerrancy of the Bible.

This means that the Bible is 100% truthful on the subjects that it speaks to. A key passage is 2 Peter chapter 1:19-21.

“We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

- How does this passage describe Scripture? It is a prophetic word.
- What does verse 19 tell us to do? It tells us to pay attention because this is God speaking through His Word.
- Based on verse 20, what should we understand more than anything else? That the Scriptures were not written based on man's ability, thoughts, or ideas. Instead, human authors were moved along by the Holy Spirit as they wrote.

This is what I tried to illustrate with the picture on page 10. The Scriptures are breathed out by God, and the Holy Spirit was guiding the human authors as they wrote the Scriptures. The key word of the doctrine of Inspiration is “Divine.” The key word for Inerrancy is “Truth.” In John 17:17 Jesus prayed to the Father, *“Your Word is truth, sanctify them by your truth.”*

Read along with the paragraph on the top of page 11.

“The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. This means that the Bible speaks truthfully on every subject which it addresses. Believing the Scriptures to be inerrant does not preclude the biblical authors’ inclusion of observations from a human perspective, the use of round numbers, unusual grammatical constructions, varying perspectives on a particular event. It does mean, however, that Scripture is an infallible guide to salvation and that it is truthful in all that it affirms.”

Take note of a number of references listed to reinforce these points on inerrancy.

- In Deuteronomy 18:22 we read that the mark of a prophet was that they spoke the truth of God and if what they prophesied did not happen that prophet would die.
- Proverbs 30:5 says, every word of God is true.
- Matthew 5:18 tells us that until heaven passes away, not a jot or tittle will be taken away from the Word of God.
- John 10:35 tells us that the Word of God cannot be broken.

- Titus 1:2 says that God cannot lie.
- Hebrews 4:12-13, the Word of God is living and active. It can penetrate. It uncovers everything within us.
- Hebrews 6:18 also says that it is impossible for God to lie.

What is the significance of this doctrine of Inerrancy?

- If the Bible is inspired but has errors, this leaves us with questions about God's character. If the Bible is inaccurate, God either lacks knowledge or He is a liar.
- If God can speak falsely, this destroys our confidence in anything He says. How do you know what is true? If He's not true about all things, how do you know He's true about anything?
- If the Bible has errors, then we become the judges of what is true or false.
- If the Bible has errors, how can we know what to teach and what to believe? We are left to our own intuition.

Our final Special Revelation doctrine for this lesson is the Authority of the Bible.

Because the Bible is inspired, God's special revelation to humanity is without error, it is the ultimate standard of authority for the Christian. Because it is truthful in everything it teaches, Scripture is humanity's source for wisdom, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.

The key word for Authority is "Final."

I have used the picture of a judge's gavel and the scales of justice. God and his Word are the final and authoritative judge of all matters of life and godliness. Another way of thinking about this is illustrated with the three doors pictured on the left of the page.

There are three doors, door A is the door of Religious Tradition; door B represents liberal theology based on reason, feeling, and experience; door C represents Scripture. The man standing in front of the doors has a key and only one door can be opened to find the inspired truth of God's Word that is the final authority.

Door A is the worldview that that relies on religious tradition as more important than God's Word. Jesus said this about being too focused on man-made rules and traditions found in Matthew 15:7-9 (quoting Isaiah 29:13)

You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."

Door B is the door of reason or experience. Liberal theology would be included in this worldview. People who desire to enter through this door find their truth in personal experience, feeling, and even changing cultural norms instead of the unchanging character of God and His Word.

Door C represents the Authority of the Word of God. The Scripture, God's Word, is the final authority. By authority, we mean that the last word always goes to Word of God. We must never allow science, culture, church councils, or merely human traditions to take precedence over the Scriptures.

Acts 17 offers a contrast between the Thessalonians and the Bereans regarding the final Authority of the Bible. The Thessalonians received the Word of God and some believed it, but most stirred up opposition. The apostle Paul and his team were forced to flee that city and traveled to Berea. We are told that the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, because whatever Paul taught, they went back to the Scriptures to confirm that what Paul was teaching agreed with the Old Testament Scriptures. We should follow the example of the Bereans as well.

I hope you now see how the doctrines of Inspiration, Inerrancy and Authority of the Bible are interconnected to Special Revelation. Since all Scripture is breathed out by God, it reflects and reveals his infinitely holy character. Therefore, to disbelieve the Bible is to disbelieve God. The Bible reflects God's character. To disobey the Bible is to disobey God.

One practical application from this lesson is to answer the question: Do we have a daily plan for reading the Bible and putting it into practice in our lives? What is your plan?

You can find many Bible reading plans online. You can read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. You can read the Bible chronologically. My wife and I read three chapters from the Old Testament each day and one chapter from the New Testament. You can read by topics. The key is to have a plan!

On page 12 there is a simple tool to guide your daily reading in the Bible. It is a four-letter word in English (SOAP), and each letter stands for a specific activity.

- The letter S stands for Scripture. Write down the Scripture passage for the day.
- The letter O stands for Observation. Write down what you observe happening in the passage that you just read.
- The letter A stands for Application. Once you observe what is happening in the text you consider how to apply what you have read in your life.
- The letter P stands for Prayer. Close your devotional time by praying about what you have read and how you plan to apply the truth of God's Word to your life.

Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer.

Time spent reading the Bible will also lead to meditating on and memorizing God's Word. As you faithfully read and study, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, you will not only understand the big picture story of the Old and New Testament, but you will experience transformation in your life.

On page 13 there are some notes to help you study the Bible in its proper context. You may read these on your own and know that we offer a course that is just focused on how to study the Bible.

The Bible is our final authority for all matters of faith and Christian living. The importance of its full inspiration cannot be overstated. The fact that it is without error flows from its inspiration. More importantly, its final authority in our lives flows from its inspiration and inerrancy as we grow in our relationship with God through a deeper understanding of all that He has revealed to us through His Word.