

Of the Holy Scriptures

An Exposition of
The Whitefield Declaration of Faith
Chapter I

Nathaniel S. Bickford

The 
Whitefield
League

Of the Holy Scriptures:

An Exposition of the Whitefield Declaration of Faith Chapter I

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This volume is the first installment of a planned exposition of the Whitefield Declaration of Faith

The Whitefield Declaration of Faith

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Preface

When we think of *exposition* we normally think of the faithful preaching of Scripture. That is appropriate, as Scripture is of the highest importance for our faith and lives. And the association is a testament to the high regard the church has maintained for the preaching of God's Word. The word *exposition*, however, refers simply to the clear explanation of something. Historically, Christians have used this term to refer not only to the preaching of the Word, but also to doctrinal explanations of confessional and catechetical statements.

This project began in the early months of 2025, shortly after the publication of the Whitefield Declaration of Faith (WDF). Within my own congregation I saw a need and desire for fellow Christians, at various levels of their faith, to deepen their understanding of Christian doctrine. This resulted in a series of emails that worked through two and a half chapters of the WDF. The church-wide emails on *Chapter I: Of the Scriptures* were the second set in the series and became the most well-developed.

The original goal of this project was to work through the entirety of the WDF. But as is often the case, various matters of life and ministry arose that interrupted my progress. The overall goal remains the same, yet completion of this endeavor will likely require many years. Rather than wait until every chapter is complete, I have decided to release sections of this exposition as they become available for the benefit to the wider church. Since the doctrine of Scripture is the foundation for the rest of theology, this is a fitting place to begin.

The intent of this book is to provide a theological and practical introduction to the doctrine of Scripture, as developed in chapter I of the Whitefield Declaration of Faith. It is *not* intended as a systematic

theology, a devotional guide, a text-by-text exposition of the Scriptural citations found throughout the confession, or as a thorough defense of every doctrinal position presented herein. Rather, this book seeks to explain the doctrinal statements found in the WDF for the benefit of pastors and laypersons alike.

This volume is written, therefore, with pastors, lay leaders, and thoughtful Christians in mind. It serves as a teaching tool and a resource that guides Christians through a biblically grounded, confessional understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, while simultaneously providing an introduction to technical terminology and historical theology. As such, this work should not only lead the reader into a better understanding of God's Word, but should also open the door to further study.

This exposition, and any others that may follow it, are intended to faithfully represent the teaching that God himself has given us in his Word. It neither seeks to replace Scripture nor act as an authority over it. The WDF, and this exposition of it, is beneficial for our faith and life only insofar as it faithfully represents what Scripture teaches.

With those things in mind, I invite you to explore the doctrine of Scripture with me, that as we understand God's Word better we will be well equipped to be grounded in it, strengthened by it, assured of faith and salvation through it, faithfully live it out, and accurately communicate it.

May the Triune God, in his great grace, use this book not merely to increase your theological understanding, but to deepen your love for the One who has so graciously revealed himself, the mysteries of the Gospel, and his will to us in his Word.

~Nathaniel S. Bickford

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“Man should have known God from nature as Creator, as provider, and as Judge. Yet man needed the revelation of God’s grace to himself, and man needed to have this brought home to him irresistibly. God could not dwell with the sinner as a sinner; man was without God’s presence; he was without God in the world. . . In special revelation, God came down in power for the salvation of man. God *Almighty* no longer merely displayed his power to destroy, but even moreso displayed his power to save.”

~Cornelius Van Til¹

¹ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, pp. 221-222.

WDF I.1 ~ The Necessity of Scripture

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable;¹ yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation:² therefore it pleased the Lord at various times, and in diverse manners, to reveal himself, and to declare his will to his Church;³ and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit that revelation wholly unto writing;⁴ which therefore makes the holy Scripture to be most necessary;⁵ those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.⁶

1. Rom 2:1, 14-16; Rom 1:18-20, 32; Ps 19:1-6

2. John 17:3; I Cor 1:21; 2:13-14

3. Heb 1:1-2

4. Luke 1:1-4; John 17:17; 20:31; Rom 15:4; Matt 4:4, 7, 10; Isa 8:16, 20

5. II Tim 3:15; II Pet 1:19

6. I Cor 14:37; I John 5:13; I Cor 10:11; Heb 1:1-2; 2:1-4; Eph 2:20-21

Explanation

Revelation is communication in which things that are hidden are made known. Looking at everyday human interactions, revelation is seen in many different ways. Sometimes it is verbal. A conversation takes place where one person explains thoughts, actions, expectations, or ideas to another through words. Done well, words are a very effective revealer of what is going on in our minds. We also communicate in other ways. Facial expressions express our attitudes, approvals, and disapprovals. Gestures convey simple yes and no. Artistry – painting, sculpture, music, even architecture – can effectively communicate emotions and thoughts. The revealing of our own hearts, minds, and personalities can take many forms. Similarly, God communicates with his creation; his communication is called revelation. More directly, it is rightfully called God's self-revelation for it is God communicating himself to his creation. Understanding that revelation is God's self-revelation is crucial. Although it communicates things about the created world, including about ourselves, the ultimate purpose of all divine revelation, of any type, is to point creation back to him.

This communicatory self-revelation is normally divided into two categories: *general revelation* and *special revelation*.

General revelation is the topic of the very first statement of the Whitefield Declaration of Faith and can be defined as God revealing himself to humanity through the light of nature, creation, and his works of providence. *General revelation* is the first means by which people are able to learn about God. Consider the three forms this takes.

First, God reveals himself through the *light of nature*. Although it is not commonly used today, *light of nature* was, it appears, a rather common term among the puritans, and was frequently used without

explanation. Some puritans, however, were helpful in explaining the term by comparing *light of nature* with *light of grace*. The overall idea was this: the *light of nature* is the natural faculties, because of the image of God in which humanity is created, by which people understand things; the *light of grace* is the spiritually changed and informed faculties given by God's good favor through the work of the Holy Spirit by which people are able to understand things spiritually. More simply put, the *light of nature* is our understanding as we have been created by God (and subsequently marred by Adam's sin) and the *light of grace* is our understanding as we are recreated in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. Because people are made in the image of God, God has revealed something about himself in us through the ways we think and what we think. There is a light in us by nature. If that light were pure and unaffected by sin, then it would allow us to know God.²

Second, *general revelation* is seen in creation. Psalm 19, which explains both general and special revelation, begins by proclaiming "The heavens declare the glories of God," and Romans 1:20 similarly states, "... his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." God made all things, and thus all things bear the imprint and show forth the handiwork of

2 This understanding of the light of nature is found in quotes from two members of the Westminster Assembly: Anthony Burgess and William Twisse. Burgess stated, "Faith therefore, and the light of Nature go to the knowledge of the same thing different waies: faith doth, because of the testimony and divine revelation of God; the light of Nature doth, because of arguments in the thing it self by discourse. And faith is not a dianoeticall or discursive act of the understanding, but it's simple and apprehensive." (*Vindiciae Legis*, p. 73, London: printed by James Young, for Thomas Underhill, at the signe of the Bible in Wood-street, 1647, reprinted by Reformation Heritage Books, 2011. Twisse similarly explained, "Never was it said, I presume, that a man regenerate had two understandings in him, by the one to understand things naturall, and by the other to understand things spirituall; but that by the same understanding he understands both, but by light of nature the one, by light of grace the other." (*Riches of God's Love*, p. 246, Oxford: Printed by L.L. and H.H. for Tho. Robinson, 1653.

the Creator. Just as we see the character of an artist in a painting, so also we see the character of God in creation.

And Third, God's very acts of providence proclaim God to people. God's acts of providence will be explained in depth in WDF V. For now, a brief, and helpful, explanation is seen in the Westminster Shorter Catechism's Q&A 11, which explains "God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions." God is not a sort of cosmic watchmaker who created the universe and then simply sat back to watch what would happen. The Creator remains actively and intimately involved in the workings of the things he has made. This is proclaimed many times in Scripture. One example is Hebrews 1:3, which states plainly that the eternal Second Person of the Trinity "... upholds the universe by the word of his power." With God so intimately involved in the sustaining of, and even the workings of, creation, that involvement necessarily shines through.

The *light of nature*, creation itself, and God's acts of providence all communicate to humanity who he is. Paul, in his letter to the Christians in Rome, tells us that these things are even enough to make us and our sin inexcusable before the holy and just God.³ There is enough for us to know who he is and what he requires of us. And yet, a few verses earlier Paul also states that we suppress that truth in our unrighteousness.⁴ If human reason was pure and undefiled, powers of observation were not twisted by idolatry of self and other created things, and eyes were not blinded by sin, then humanity would know God through *general revelation*. Due to our own sinfulness, and the sinful nature we have inherited from Adam, *general revelation* is not sufficient for us to know God, to be saved from sins, or to bring glory to our Maker.

There was nothing outside of God (whether another being or an independent standard) that required, or even expected, God to

³ Romans 2:1, 14-16

⁴ Romans 1:18-20

communicate with his fallen creation. Yet according to his eternal plan, and in his gracious condescension to his rebellious enemies who were instead deserving of his wrath, he gave to us *special revelation*. Whereas *general revelation* is seen in the natural world and through God's ordinary working, *special revelation* is God's *supernatural* communication to people. This communication is *necessary*, but it is not necessary to God. Rather, it is *necessary* for us, that is for our salvation, and for the fulfilling of his eternal plan of salvation. If God has not spoken to us, we are fully without hope and await only a judgment of condemnation and destruction. Praise God that he graciously condescended to us so that we might instead have life in Christ!

Consider a few key points about *special revelation*:

1. Special Revelation is *sufficient* and *necessary* for salvation. Through it God communicates all that we need to know in order to know him, to know ourselves, and in order for us to know how to be saved and how to live a life that glorifies and enjoys the Creator God. Without it no one is saved.
2. It was given at *various times*. Most of the books that are the focus of the world's religions were written over a short period of time: a few years, or a single individual's lifetime. The Bible, however, was written over the course of centuries by the hands of dozens of different people. Yet it maintains a consistent, non-contradicting message: the most important message that has ever been spoken, written, or read.
3. God used *diverse manners* to communicate himself and his plan to sinners through those whom he has chosen in history. Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley helpfully categorize these manners into four categories: verbal (verbal communication from God to man), visual (dreams, visions, and *theophanies*, or visible appearances of the Lord), providential (God's sovereign, and often miraculous, acts in history), and incarnational (the incarnation of the Second Person of the

Trinity).⁵

4. Special Revelation was recorded in history as Scripture, commonly called the Bible, and reveals God and his will to his Church.
5. The written form of Special Revelation has been and will be preserved (Isaiah 40:6-8).
6. Through Scripture God preserves, protects, and comforts his people (see footnote 4 above for Scripture references).
7. The canon of Scripture, and thus the giving of Special Revelation, is both complete and is closed. No new Special Revelation is given today, though God continues to use ordinary means⁶ to communicate to his people through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Although these topics will need to be addressed in more depth, for now remember that the Bible is sufficient and necessary, that it is a gift of God's gracious condescension, and that we ought to value it and use it for our spiritual growth and to glorify God, both individually and as we hear the Word of God read and preached each Sunday.

⁵ For a helpful, in depth, treatment of this, see Beeke & Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, v. 1, pp. 271-276.

⁶ WDF XV.1

Reflection

As you reflect on these things, consider these verses of a hymn written by Benjamin Reddome in 1787:

God, in the gospel of his Son,
Makes his eternal counsels known;
Where love in all its glory shines,
And truth is drawn in fairest lines.

Here sinners of a humble frame
May taste his grace and learn his Name;
May read, in characters of blood,
The wisdom, pow'r, and grace of God.⁷

⁷ Benjamin Reddome, *The Gospel of Christ*.

Study Questions

1. Explain the differences between *general revelation* and *special revelation*. How does God use both to communicate to humanity?
2. Why is it said that *special revelation* is both sufficient and necessary? What is it sufficient and necessary for?
3. What is meant by “God’s gracious condescension” in the giving of *special revelation*? Give some specific examples of how this gracious condescension is found within the pages of Scripture.
4. Why is it essential that God’s *special revelation* has been committed to writing?
5. Outline the key points Psalm 19 makes regarding *general* and *special revelation*. List ways that these points should be applied to your own life.

“The Bible is none other than the voice of him
that sits upon the throne. Every book of it, every
chapter of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it,
is the direct utterance of the Most High.”

~John William Burgon

WDF I.2 ~ The Canon of Scripture

Under the name of holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the Books of the Old and New Testament; which are these:

- a. OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations. Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- b. OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, The Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Epistle to the Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, The Epistle to the Hebrews, The Epistle of James, The First and Second Epistles of Peter, The First, Second and Third Epistles of John, the Epistle of Jude, The Revelation
- c. All of these, which are the Holy Scripture, are given by the inspiration of God as the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, life, and obedience.⁷

7. II Tim 3:15-16; Luke 16:29, 31; Luke 24:27; John 5:46-47; I John 1:3-4; Eph 2:20; Isa 8:20; Rev 22:18-19; Gal 1:8-9; Ps 119:11, 105

Explanation

The previous paragraph ended noting that God's giving of *special revelation* has ceased. This means that God has already given to the church all the divine self-revelation that is needed for saving knowledge, faith, life, and obedience. The Bible, consisting of sixty-six books that were written over the course of roughly 1500 years, by approximately forty human authors with greatly varied backgrounds, is the entirety of God's *special revelation* for God's people. And it is complete: no other books are needed, and no books are missing.

These sixty-six books are divided into two *testaments*: *Old* and *New*. The term *testament* derives from a Latin word that was commonly used to translate the Greek and Hebrew words for *covenant* in the Bible. So then, the two major sections of the Bible could rightly be called *Old Covenant* and *New Covenant*, referencing the two major administrations of the *Covenant of Grace*.⁸ Although we distinguish the two *testaments* with the incarnation as the dividing line when organizing the books of the Bible, it is crucial to also notice that "The two are one in origin and content . . . and in both we are presented one faith, one covenant, one way of salvation" (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*).

The *Old Testament* contains thirty-nine books, while the *New Testament* has twenty-seven. Together these sixty-six books in two testaments are referred to as the *canon* – a term derived from an ancient Greek word for a measuring stick or a rule – because it is the measuring stick for all Christians. That is, the Bible is the sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, life, and obedience.

⁸ The concept of covenant, along with the covenants of Grace (with its various administrations), Works, and Redemption, are explained in WDF VII & VIII

The Bible is fully authoritative because it is *inspired* by God. *Inspired* in this case does not mean that God gave people some general ideas and they fleshed those ideas out, or that God merely influenced people to write these books. Instead, *inspiration* is God's speaking his words through faithful men. In the early 1900s, B. B. Warfield noted that, "The Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of the Holy Ghost and in the highest and truest sense are his creation" (B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*). This is brought out clearly in II Timothy 3:16, where Paul coined a new word to express the idea. The NIV translates it closest using the term "God-breathed." Another option to capture Paul's idea would be, "breathed out by God." Although God used people to do the physical writing, the words are truly his own words. In order to help us understand this, J. I. Packer compared the inspiration of Scripture to a symphony: God is the composer and conductor. "...each instrumentalist has been brought willingly, spontaneously, creatively, to play his notes just as the great conductor desired, though none of them could ever hear the music as a whole."⁹ Since God is the composer, every "note," or word, is his. Since he directed the writing of those notes/words, we also know that the human authors faithfully recorded every word that God composed and directed. And at the same time, since these people involved were the instrumentalists, their own writing styles, languages, dialects, and even personalities come through in the writing down of God's very words.

Inspiration in the biblical sense that has just been discussed is different from how it is used more commonly today. We might speak of a person being inspired to compose a song, paint a landscape, or simply with a correct interpretation of Scripture. In such instances, the ideas originate with the individual, even though they may have good, even divine, influences: a song written because of God's amazing grace, a painting brought about by the beauty of creation, or a right interpretation caused by the *illuminating* work of the Holy

9 J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken*, p. 99.

Spirit. But only the Bible is directly *inspired* by God himself: its words are not merely influenced by him, but breathed out by him.

Since the Bible is *inspired* by God, we can also say with confidence that it is *infallible*. By *infallible* we mean that the Bible is true, unfailing, and does not deceive in everything that it intends to teach. In Numbers 23:19 we are taught that God cannot lie. If God cannot lie, neither is God's Word able to do so. Similarly, Jesus stated, while praying for his disciples who were present with him as well as all future disciples, "Your word is truth."¹⁰ The Word of God is true and we are able to trust and depend on all that it teaches. And it does not merely *contain* truth, it *is* truth itself.

"The entire Bible carries the certification of the
Son of God, which brings with it infallible
authority. Thus the written Word of God has the
seal of the living Word of God" ~John H.
Gerstner

Just as *inspiration* leads us to the doctrine of *infallibility*, so also the doctrine of *infallibility* leads us to *inerrancy*. *Inerrancy* tells us that because the Bible cannot lie, deceive, or be in error, it therefore *does not* lie, deceive, or contain errors in all that it teaches. Throughout much of church history the doctrine of *inerrancy* was assumed and little spoken of because of how closely related it is to the doctrine of *infallibility*. In the mid to late 1800s many scholars and pastors were beginning to believe and teach that the Bible does deceive and err on many issues. For instance, they would often claim that miracles, like Jesus' resurrection from the dead on the third day (an event with far more recorded eyewitness testimony than has ever been needed in any court of law), cannot happen according to observable science and therefore are not true. Among these scholars there was often an attempt to pick apart the Bible to remove or deny anything they decided was not true. The results were numerous understandings of the Bible that were reflections of man rather than

¹⁰ John 17:17

the self-revelation of God. In response, biblically faithful pastors and scholars distinguished *inerrancy* from *infallibility* in order to make known the truthfulness of God's Word.

Now, there are times that the Bible records lies, deception, and other falsehoods. This first example of this is Satan's deception of Eve in Genesis 3. There are also times when God chose to describe the world through everyday observation rather than through modern scientific precision, like the many times when the Bible describes the sun as setting rather than explaining that the earth revolves around the sun. Yet these types of things are not errors or lies, and they do not deceive. God's Word remains always the truth.

All of this reminds us of the infinite value of the Bible. What other book is completely and entirely true? History books disagree with one another. Science changes year after year. Documentaries frequently alter the facts. But the Bible is always the truth. Therefore we ought to trust in what God teaches us in it. Rather than doubting its teaching because it is uncomfortable, or simply not what we want, rest in its teaching. For within the pages of this singular book are found all that we need to know for saving knowledge, faith, life, and obedience. This, then, is why these sixty-six books, and these alone, have been treasured by the church throughout the generations as the canon of Scripture. What a great treasure the Triune God has given us!

Reflection

As you reflect on these things, consider also the final two verses of the hymn we looked at last week, written by Benjamin Reddome in 1787:

Here faith reveals to mortal eyes
a brighter world beyond the skies;
here shines the light which guides our way
from earth to realms of endless day.

O grant us grace, almighty Lord,
to read and mark your holy Word;
its truths with meekness to receive,
and by its holy precepts live.¹¹

¹¹ Benjamin Reddome, *The Gospel of Christ*.

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that the Bible is “inspired by God”? How is inspiration distinguished from human influence?
2. What do the terms *inspiration*, *infallibility*, and *inerrancy* mean? Why is a right understanding of these doctrines necessary for us to properly trust God’s Word?
3. The Bible sometimes records lies without being deceptive (as in the case of Satan’s deception of Eve in Genesis 3:1-6. How does this reality help us to better understand the absolute truthfulness of Scripture?
4. How does the Bible’s claim to be the “only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, life, and obedience” shape our everyday lives?

“We are to believe and follow Christ in all things, including His words about Scripture. And this means that Scripture is to be for us what it was to Him: the unique, authoritative, and inerrant Word of God, and not merely a human testimony to Christ, however carefully guided and preserved by God. If the Bible is less than this to us, we are not fully Christ’s disciples.”

~James Montgomery Boice¹²

¹² James Montgomery Boice, *The Preacher and God’s Word*

WDF I.3 ~ The Authority of Scripture

The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the Author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.⁸

8. II Tim 1:13; II Pet 1:19-21; I Tim 3:15; I John 5:9; I Th 2:13;
Rev 1:1-2

Explanation

Scripture holds authority. In fact, it holds ultimate authority. Everything it teaches us we are to believe and in every way that it instructs us we ought to obey. But why is this the case? The answer is simple: since the Bible is *inspired* by God, we know also that it bears the very authority of God. It is his book and his words, therefore it holds his authority. Everything that Scripture teaches and instructs ought to be received by those who read it with the very same acceptance and obedience as though God was verbally speaking to us, for the very words of the Bible are God's words. Therefore Richard L. Platt concluded, "God demands complete loyalty to His Word."¹³

And yet, many throughout history have questioned this foundational truth. Rather than seeing God as the primary author, they view man as the primary author, and God only as secondary. Similarly, many also diminish the authority of Scripture by claiming that its authority comes from someone or something other than God.

It is important to understand that the Bible was given by God and that the church *recognized* it as Scripture.

Nearly all Bible scholars affirm that by the First Century AD the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, was fully written and recognized by the Jews. This acceptance of what God had already written naturally passed down to the New Testament church. Jesus himself affirmed this in Luke 24:44 when he spoke about the Scriptures as the Law, Prophets, and Psalms, which were the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The recognition of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament occurred quickly and organically. At the beginning of the

¹³ Quoted in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*.

Second Century, Polycarp referenced more than half of what we call the New Testament as Scripture. The late Second Century provided us with the Muratorian Fragment, which included an important list of all except five of the books of the New Testament (Hebrews, James, I-II Peter, and III John). From that point on, there was broad agreement about which books were from God himself. By the time of the Council of Nicea in the Fourth Century, both sides of the Christological debates referenced the very same New Testament books as God's own revelation.

The overall history reminds us that the church did not create the canon of Scripture, but rather recognized what God himself expressly gave to us.

There are, however, two common alternatives that would undermine the necessary authority of Scripture. The first is that Scripture is determined by man. Here are a few views within that category:

1. The Bible contains Scripture, but is not itself Scripture. The individual encounters Scripture, with some help from the Holy Spirit, when reading the Bible. This view was held by the famous Twentieth Century European theologian Karl Barth and placed human experience as the determining factor. Experience, however, is changing and subjective. In this approach, there is no solid standard and what standard there is changes with every wind of doctrine¹⁴ and every pair of itching ears.¹⁵ Thus “We are not to make our experience the rule of Scripture, but Scripture the rule of our experience.”¹⁶
2. Scripture is fully determined by human reason, with the individual as the final arbiter. This view was held by the

¹⁴ Ephesians 4:14; James 1:6

¹⁵ II Timothy 4:3-4

¹⁶ Anonymous, quoted in C. H. Spurgeon, *The Salt-Cellars. Being a Collection of Proverbs, Together with Homely Notes Thereon.*

philosopher Emmanuel Kant, the Socinians during the post-Reformation era, and many theologians of the past two hundred years. Their assumption is usually that reason itself is pure and objective, and thus is able to perfectly determine matters of both science and religion. However, as we will see later on in WDF VI.2, as a result of sin we are wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. That is, both our reason and our spiritual understanding, among other things, are negatively impacted by the original sin brought forth by Adam.

The second, faulty alternative for the source of Scripture's authority is that held by the Roman Catholic Church: Scripture is determined by the church itself. In essence, this view makes God's word subservient to whatever authority the church has, and as a result the church is able to pick and choose, or even add to, Scripture. A prime example of this took place during the Reformation. As the reformers universally rejected certain Roman Catholic doctrines, like purgatory and indulgences, the Roman Catholic church declared the books of the Apocrypha (which includes Baruch, Tobit, Maccabees, and a few others) to be Scripture because they were the only works that supported such false doctrines. This took place during the Council of Trent in the last half of the Sixteenth Century. For roughly 1500 years Christians almost unanimously viewed those as books as not being inspired by God.

Neither man nor the church are able to decide for themselves what books are Scripture. Rather, we recognize what God has inspired and declared to be Scripture. We could say, with pastor-theologian Robert Letham, that "Ultimately, the canon imposed itself on the church."¹⁷ And therefore we accept the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as God's inspired, and infallible, and authoritative Word.

What about other books like the Apocrypha? If you compare the

¹⁷ Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology*, p. 189.

Whitefield Declaration of Faith to the confessions of faith it is based on, you will notice that the older documents specifically rejected the Apocrypha in a separate paragraph. For that time, this was a crucial inclusion. It was only about one hundred years earlier that the Council of Trent declared that the Apocrypha was part of the Bible. It was recent, controversial, and divisive news. And it undermined the consistent, faithful, and true teaching of the real sixty-six books of the Bible. Thus such a declaration was necessary. Today we confidently say that the Apocrypha is not Scripture. Neither is the Book of Mormon, the Quran, or the Gospel of Thomas. Over time people try to add, or take away from, the Bible. It is sufficient for the day to state plainly what the Bible *is* and what books are contained in it. More false books will come, and we must reject them all. And some people will try to deny the true books contained in God's Word, but we must accept them. As John wrote at the close of the book of Revelation, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."¹⁸

The Bible, in its entirety, nothing less and nothing more, requires our full allegiance, trust, and obedience. This is not because it is an object of worship, but because it is the very Word of God. Treasure it; study it; believe it; follow it. For in the Bible God reveals himself, convicts sinners, turns hearts to himself, and shows us how to glorify and enjoy him forever.

¹⁸ Revelation 22:18-19

Reflection

As you reflect on these things, consider these two verses of a hymn written by William Cowper around 1770:

A glory gilds the sacred page,
Majestic like the sun;
It gives a light to every age;
It gives, but borrows none.

Let everlasting thanks be Thine
For such a bright display.
As makes a world of darkness shine
With beams of heavenly day.¹⁹

¹⁹ William Cowper, The Light and Glory of the Word, in Olney Hymns II.

Study Questions

1. Where does Scripture derive its authority?
2. How much authority does the Bible have? Are there any higher authorities?
3. Why is it significant that the church recognized Scripture rather than determining it? Who determines what is Scripture?
4. What is wrong with the idea that the Bible *contains* the Word of God rather than *is* the Word of God?
5. When have you been tempted to prioritize human reason, emotions, desires, or traditions over Scripture? In what ways might you safeguard yourself from this temptation in the future?

“The word of God is dearer to a gracious heart than all the riches
in the world.”

~ Thomas Manton²⁰

²⁰ Thomas Manton, An Exposition of Psalm 119, Sermon LXXX

WDF I.4 ~ The Perfections of Scripture

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the holy Scripture;⁹ and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God. Yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.¹⁰

9. Pss 19:7-8; 33:4; Neh 8:5-6

10. I Cor 2:9-10; Heb 4:12; John 10:35; Isa 55:11; Rom 11:36;
Ps 19:7-11; II Tim 3:15; I Cor 2:4-5; I Th 1:5; I John 2:20, 27;
Isa 59:21

Explanation

As we delve into the depths of Scripture we find a book that truly is unlike any other, and in the best possible ways. It has already been noted that the Bible is the Word of God and thus is of a unique character: inspired, infallible, inerrant, and with ultimate authority. There is yet much more to consider. Over time the church itself – formed and ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ – has recognized in this remarkable book many of the following distinctions that any honest reader should also be able to notice. The church, however, has not decided these things for herself, but rather has observed them to be true through the working of the Holy Spirit in her midst. When put together it is these observations that cause us to understand that the Bible really is what it says it is: the Word of God. So the church acts as a witness to what Scripture itself says, does, and is.

Psalm 19:8 declares that the Word of God rejoices the heart and enlightens the eyes. As we read the Bible, we find this to be true. As we see God, ourselves, and the work of God spelled out for us, our eyes finally see the light and true delight is worked in us. The Word of God has a profound effect on anyone who reads it ready and willing to hear what it says: a high and reverent esteem resulting from the various ways in which the Bible evidences itself to be the Word of God. Our confession of faith now turns our attention to these excellencies.

1. The contents, or overall subject matter, of the Bible is such that it cannot be the invention of man, but can only come from the very mouth of God.²¹ The things revealed in it, the very teachings of the gospel, are foolishness and stumbling blocks²² for people attempting to understand by their own reason and wisdom, and yet the foolishness of it is far wiser

²¹ Jeremiah 1:9; II Peter 1:20-21

than the greatest wisdom of any man.²³

2. The doctrine, or teaching, contained in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments is effective. It is living and active²⁴ and accomplishes that which it sets out to do in the lives of its readers.²⁵ The Bible is not simply a book of philosophical ideas, moral lessons, or interesting stories. It is a book whose teaching acts as a mirror to our very souls,²⁶ revealing our sin and need, and showing the reader what is good and right. And as it works upon a person, the person desires to change, and does change. It changes minds, hearts, and actions. Why? Because it brings about faith and repentance, enlivens hearts and enlightens minds, and provides food to nourish the hungry soul.
3. The words of the Bible itself are majestic. Here is a book composed over many centuries containing poems that express our deepest emotions and heart struggles, narratives that two thousand, and more, years later connect to the experiences of our lives, and prophecies that never fail. It is a book that transcends the words of man. The words carry a particular beauty that transcends time, the work of the greatest author and craftsman who has ever existed. There is truly nothing else like it, and that is because it is the message from the High King of Heaven!
4. In Scripture we find no contradictions. At first glance it may appear that there are contradictions, but in truth there are not. From Genesis through Revelation the teaching found throughout is entirely consistent with itself. Sometimes when

22 I Corinthians 1:23

23 I Corinthians 1:25

24 Hebrews 4:12

25 Isaiah 55:11

26 James 1:23-25

we look at the various parts our first reaction is to say, “Look! There’s a contradiction!” In most cases, what the reader initially sees as contradictions is simply the varying perspectives of different reporters. When two people look at the same event they see it differently, and therefore report it differently. R. B. Kuiper, one of the founding professors of Westminster Theological Seminary, said, “Scriptural paradoxes are seeming, not actual, contradictions.”²⁷ The question we must ask ourselves when we see apparent contradictions and seek to evaluate them is this, “Has God’s Word shown itself, repeatedly, to be trustworthy and self-consistent?” Millions of Christians throughout history have found that the answer is a resounding “Yes!”

5. In a book written over the course of about 1500 years and with roughly 40 authors, one would expect some variety in the primary message. And yet, the central teaching is the same throughout. The Westminster Larger Catechism identifies that central teaching: “The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”²⁸ This is true of every book of the Bible, whether Genesis, Esther, Romans, or James. The individual books may teach the same things in different ways, but the message remains the same throughout. At times some have doubted this about certain books. For instance, Martin Luther called James “a right strawy epistle” and, along with Esther, initially removed it from his Bible. But as he studied them further he came to understand that both books were teaching the very same message that the other sixty-four books teach. John Owen was more specific about this scope of the Scriptures: the glory of Christ. And Owen expected the reader of it to look for the glory of Christ on every page

²⁷ Quoted in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*.

²⁸ Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 3; Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 5

because “We can see nothing of it [the glory of Christ], know nothing of it, but what is proposed unto us in the Scripture” (Owen, *Works*, V.1, p. 409).²⁹

6. We are able to see the glory of Christ as the central message of Scripture because it also makes plain to us the only way of salvation. Jesus made it quite plain that there is only one way, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6). And that one way of salvation is centered on the person and work of Christ. There is either faith in Christ and his work, or there is no salvation. Once again, this is taught consistently throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament this is made known through shadows, types, and prophecies. Not every detail is given, but enough is there to point the readers to the fulfillment. The New Testament reveals all that was hidden in those shadows, types, and prophecies. Together, the Holy Spirit uses the fullness of the Bible to provide all that we need intellectually in order to act upon the inward working of the Holy Spirit.

Altogether these things, among others, make up the incomparable excellencies and perfections of Scripture, and such excellencies and perfections attest to the incredible truth that God is the author of them. Who else except he who created all things visible and invisible, out of nothing, by the power of his very word could write such a book? And what other proof is needed other than the proof that the Bible itself provides for its readers?

Even still, the Bible is not esteemed by the natural man. These excellencies are not enough to convince the sinful, fallen heart. It is precisely the remedy the natural man needs to address his wayward and errant thinking, but on his own he will reject it. All people need

²⁹ John Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, v. 1, p. 409.

to be filled with and enlivened by the Holy Spirit,³⁰ for it is the Spirit who takes hearts of stone and turns them into hearts of flesh,³¹ gives understanding,³² and attests to the very words of Scripture.³³

Pray, then, for the Spirit to cause you to see the excellencies of, trust fully in it, and be changed by God's Holy Word.

³⁰ I John 2:20, 27

³¹ Ezekiel 36:26

³² I Corinthians 2:14

³³ Isaiah 59:21

Reflection

As you reflect on these things, consider two more verses of a hymn written by William Cowper:

The Spirit breathes upon the Word
And brings the truth to sight;
Precepts and promises afford
A sanctifying light.

The hand that gave it still supplies
The gracious light and heat;
His truths upon the nations rise;
They rise, but never set.³⁴

³⁴ William Cowper, The Light and Glory of the Word, in Olney Hymns II.

Study Questions

1. Explain some of the evidences that show the Bible is the Word of God.
2. What role does the work of the Holy Spirit play in assuring believers of the truth of Scripture?
3. What does the Bible principally teach? Has this principal message ever changed?
4. In what ways is the bible self-authenticating?
5. Have you ever encountered an apparent contradiction in your own reading of Scripture? How did further study help to relieve this seeming paradox?

“The simple and external demonstration of the Word of God ought, indeed, to suffice fully for the production of faith, did not our blindness and perversity interfere. But such is the propensity of our minds to vanity that they can never adhere to the truth of God, and such is their dullness that they are always blind even to his light. Hence, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit the Word has no effect.”

~John Calvin³⁵

³⁵ John Calvin, Institutes III.2.xxxiii

WDF I.5 ~ The Illumination of Scripture

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, as well as for man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.¹¹ Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word,¹² and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.¹³

11. II Tim 3:16-17; Gal 1:8-9; II Th 2:2; Matt 12:9-14; Deut 29:29

12. John 6:45; I Cor 2:12-15; Eph 1:17-18; II Cor 4:6

13. I Cor 14:26, 40

Explanation

Here we are taught what it is that God reveals to us through his holy Word. He does not communicate, in Scripture, all things. For instance, God's Word does not communicate certain intricacies of the natural world, like the speed of light, or the differences between protons, electrons, and neutrons. Yet it does teach us that the natural world was created, and is sustained, by the all-powerful and infinite God of life and order. The goal of the Bible, then, is not to teach everything there is to know, but to teach all that is *necessary* in four key subject areas: God's glory (the nature, attributes, and works of creation, providence, and redemption), man's salvation (its necessity, accomplishment in Christ, and application by the Holy Spirit), man's faith (the nature, gift, and fruit of saving faith), and man's life (what God requires of man and how his people may rightly glorify and enjoy him). Regarding each of these four areas, the Bible is the ultimate authority.

The teaching of Scripture is given in two ways: directly and indirectly. The direct teaching is what we normally think of: everything that the Bible *expressly* states. However, our confession of faith also states that other things may "by good and necessary consequence . . . be deduced from Scripture." Notice the two qualifiers: *good* and *necessary*. These two qualifiers provide guardrails for rightly interpreting Scripture. That which we conclude must be *good*, that is, it must follow faithfully from Scripture. Good deductions from Scripture are logically sound, biblically grounded, and scripturally faithful. They also must be *necessary*. In other words, the interpreter must not depend upon conclusions that they like the sounds of, but rather those conclusions that are thrust upon us by the text. As we move through this confession of faith we will find a number of instances where *good and necessary consequence*

determine the conclusions that are made. For instance, the practice of church membership is never directly worked out in Scripture for the church, and yet it has been rightly deduced by *good and necessary consequence*.

Whether we are seeking the *direct* or *indirect* teaching of Scripture, our understanding of God's Word is fully dependent upon the *illuminating* work of the Holy Spirit. On our own, we twist the words of Scripture in order to force them to say what we want them to say, thus the work of the Spirit is needed so that we might see, believe, and follow the Word of God. In I Corinthians 2:12-15 we are told about this work of the Spirit:

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

The Spirit shines the light of God in our hearts, and as a result we understand what is taught. Richard Baxter gave us an important caution related to a common misunderstanding of the illuminating work of the Spirit:

"It is not the work of the Spirit to tell you the meaning of Scripture, and give you the knowledge of divinity, without your own study and labour, but to bless that study, and give you knowledge thereby... To reject study on pretence of the sufficiency of the Spirit, is to reject the Scripture itself."³⁶

It is tempting to say that the Spirit will simply give us the meaning, but that is not the way God normally works in the lives of his people. Rather, he expects people to put in the necessary, and good, effort towards understanding. Quickly reading the words of the Bible may at times be necessary and even beneficial, but such a

³⁶ Richard Baxter, in *A Puritan Golden Treasury*, compiled by I.D.E. Thomas, by permission of Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA. 2000, p. 143.

practice will never provide the depth, the meat, that is needed by spiritually starving people. We will explore *how* to rightly study God's Word when we discuss WDF I.8.

All of this teaching of Scripture, brought forth by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit and proper interpretation by God's people, must never remain stagnant in our minds. Instead it is to be applied to every aspect of life, whether in the church, our homes, or our interactions in the world. In many cases we are given clear direction. Yet, as was stated above, the Bible does not give us every single instruction needed for every single aspect of our lives. Therefore, God also gives to his people wisdom;³⁷ wisdom that is informed by the right and true teaching of Scripture that is then able to be applied in every aspect of our lives: in general decision making, our homes, workplaces, governments, and even in the workings of the church. Through the application of Scripture's overall teaching, and the principles derived from it every facet of our lives is impacted and, by the help of the Spirit, changed for God's glory and our good.

³⁷ James 1:5

Reflection

As you reflect on these things, consider two verses of a hymn written by Anne Steele:

Father of mercies, in thy word
What endless glory shines?
For ever be thy name ador'd,
For these celestial lines.

Divine instructor, gracious Lord!
Be thou for ever near;
Teach me to love thy sacred word,
And view my Savior there.³⁸

³⁸ Anne Steele, *Father of Mercies, In Thy Word*, in *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional* 1760.

Study Questions

1. In what four key subjects is the teaching of the Bible both necessary and sufficient?
2. What does *good and necessary consequence* mean? What boundaries does it place around our interpretation of Scripture?
3. What is *illumination*? Why is the work of the Holy Spirit necessary for a person to understand and believe Scripture? Does *illumination* eliminate the importance of our own efforts in Bible study?
4. Explain one instance where your own study of Scripture has changed how you think or act?
5. What are some ways that you can cultivate the application of Scripture in your life regularly?

“... Although the subjects of Scripture are often difficult to understand, nevertheless, its mode of teaching and explaining them, especially in those things that are necessary, is clear and perspicuous, at least for those who have the power of spiritual sight.”

~Petrus van Mastricht³⁹

³⁹ Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 1.1.2.xiv

WDF I.6 ~ The Perspicuity of Scripture

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all:¹⁴ yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly set forth and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain a sufficient understanding of them.¹⁵

14. II Peter 3:15-16

15. Pss 119:105, 130; Deut 30:10-14; Acts 17:11

Explanation

The Bible is by no means simple, but rather intricately complex. There is an inexhaustible depth contained within for God's people to mine. From its very beginnings, God's people have sought to read and study his revealed word, this continuing on for thousands of years, and still God's people have not reached the bottom of that mine. It is quite possible for a person, reading and studying in faith, dependent on the work of the Spirit, to read the same verse or passage a hundred times, even a thousand, and learn more from it. Since the Bible is itself God's own self-revelation, this makes sense. It is as the Apostle Paul said regarding the will of God, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"⁴⁰

This profound depth should not be taken as obscurity. Yet we must admit that, at times, Scripture is confusing to our minds and difficult for us to grasp. How could finite, limited minds, like ours, attempting to comprehend the communication of the infinite God, not face some difficulty? The Apostle Peter noted this regarding Paul's letters, "There are some things in [Paul's letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures".⁴¹ What Peter states, however, is not a deficiency in Scripture itself, but rather with those trying to comprehend Scripture. Peter goes so far as to call them "ignorant and unstable." That is, their minds and hearts are so badly twisted by their own sinful natures that they take the truth of God and alter it to fit their sinful delusions. This is one of the consequences of the first sin, which resulted in the corruption of the image of God in humanity. Martin Luther explained this problem

⁴⁰ Romans 11:33

⁴¹ II Peter 3:16

well for us in his discussion of the nature of the human will, “In a word, if the Scripture be obscure or ambiguous, what need was there for its being sent down from heaven? Are we not obscure and ambiguous enough in ourselves, without an increase of it by obscurity, ambiguity, and darkness being sent down unto us from heaven?”⁴²

Overall, however, Scripture is plain and clear. This is the doctrine of *perspicuity*. Today such a word is humorous. *Perspicuity* is so unfamiliar to the twenty-first century mind that it shouts forth confusion and obscurity, yet it is the traditional theological term, derived from the corresponding Latin word which means “transparent,” or “clear.” The doctrine of *perspicuity* communicates to us that everything necessary to be known, believed, and observed for a sinner to be saved is made clear within God’s written word. The *perspicuity* of Scripture is not dependent upon levels of education, or even cognitive ability. We may even go so far as to say, in the words of Petrus van Mastricht, that regarding the message of the Gospel, Scripture is in fact “luminous and illuminating,”⁴³ for this Word of God penetrates into our minds and hearts and achieves the purpose for which it was sent forth.

God makes these things clear and, through the working of God the Spirit, brings about saving, vital faith through what are called the *ordinary means of grace*. The *ordinary means of grace* are “the instruments Christ uses to birth and strengthen the faith of the elect as he is present among them,”⁴⁴ namely, the ministry of the Word (the reading and preaching of it), administration of the sacramental seals (baptism and the Lord’s Supper), prayer, as well as some other God-ordained practices of the local church, in the context of the gathering of God’s people. The *ordinary means of grace* are addressed more fully in WDF XV.1. Look to God’s Word and the

42 Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, section XXXVI.

43 Petrus van Mastricht, Theoretical-Practical Theology, 1.1.2.xiv.

44 J. Ryan Davidson, Green Pastures: Ordinary Means of Grace for Ordinary Believers. p. 6.

ordinary means of grace to give and strengthen faith in Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit in us.

How gracious God is to give rebellious sinners both the information and the means needed for saving faith in Christ Jesus!

Reflection

As you reflect on these things, consider two more verses of a hymn written by Anne Steele:

Here may the wretched sons of want
Exhaustless riches find;
Riches, above what earth can grant,
And lasting as the mind.

Here may the blind and hungry come,
And light, and food receive;
Here, shall the meanest guest have room,
And taste, and see, and live.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Anne Steele, *Father of Mercies, In Thy Word*, in *Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional* 1760.

Study Questions

1. What does the word “perspicuity” mean? What does it inform us about the Bible?
2. Are all passages of Scripture, and all the teachings of Scripture, similarly clear? Explain your answer.
3. How does the doctrine of *perspicuity* explain both the basic accessibility and the great depths of God’s Word?
4. What are the *ordinary means of grace*? Give an example of a time when God has used one of these ordinary means to strengthen your faith.
5. Choose a passage of Scripture that you have read and studied many times. In what ways has your understanding of that passage changed and deepened each time you have studied it?

“While God’s Word is read in either of the chapters, whether of the Old or New Testament, receive it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe (I Thess 2:13). And therefore hearken to it with the same attention, reverence, and faith as you would have done if you had stood by Mount Sinai when God proclaimed the law and by our Savior’s side when He published the gospel.”

~William Beveridge⁴⁶

⁴⁶ William Beveridge, *Great Advantage*, p. 81

WDF I.7 ~ The Language of Scripture

The Old Testament in Hebrew and Aramaic (which were the native languages of the people of God of old¹⁶) and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of writing of it was most generally known to the nations) being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic;¹⁷ so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them.¹⁸ But because these original languages are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded in the fear of God to read and search them;¹⁹ therefore they are to be translated into the common language of every nation unto which they come,²⁰ that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner,²¹ and through the endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures may have hope.²²

16. Rom 3:2

17. Matt 5:18

18. Isa 8:20; Matt 15:3-6; Luke 16:31

19. John 5:39; Acts 17:11; Rev 1:3; II Tim 3:14-17

20. Matt 28:18-20; I Cor 14:6-12

21. Col 3:16; Ex 20:4-6; Matt 15:7-9

22. Rom 15:4

Explanation

The Old and New Testaments were written in the common languages of the people who initially received it. Hebrew was the language of the Israelites, and the bulk of the Old Testament was written in it. In the later days of the writing of the Old Testament books, during the period beginning with the Babylonian Captivity which occurred in 586 BC, a few passages were written in Aramaic, which was common throughout much of the Near East.⁴⁷ The entirety of the New Testament was written in Koine, or Common, Greek, which was the everyday language throughout most of the Roman Empire during the 1st Century AD.⁴⁸

It was the *autographs*, meaning “original manuscripts,” written in those three languages, which were directly and particularly inspired by God. As was noted in WDF I.2, is here emphasized, and will be dealt with more fully in WDF I.9, the inspired Word of God as recorded in these autographs is the ultimate authority for God’s people. In all matters, we are called, even required, to base all matters of faith and religion not on the wisdom and knowledge of man, but on the revealed wisdom and knowledge of God. Because God inspired those authoritative *autographs*, and because he is all-sovereign, all-powerful, faithful, and true, he has providentially preserved his Word throughout many centuries of time.

⁴⁷ The passages written in Aramaic are: Daniel 2:4b-7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Jeremiah 10:11.

⁴⁸ Some scholars have argued that the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, or perhaps Aramaic, based primarily upon the early claim by Papias of Hierapolis (near the end of the 1st Century or beginning of the 2nd, but recorded in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 3.39.16 in the 4th Century) that there was such a book. However, Jerome, the famous 4th Century Latin Bible translator, mentioned in his commentary on Matthew that he translated both the Hebrew version of Matthew and the Greek version, noting that the Hebrew version was different and the Greek version was the authentic one.

Yet, the original *autographs* themselves have not been physically preserved, but are found in a multitude of copies. B. B. Warfield helps us to understand what is, and is not, meant by God's providential preserving of his inspired Word: *preservation* “. . . is to be understood not as if it affirmed that *every copy* has been kept pure from all error, but that the genuine text has been kept safe in the multitude of copies, so as never to be out of the reach of the Church of God, in the use of the ordinary means.”⁴⁹ In other words, while the *autographs* have not survived through history, their content has survived, albeit through a variety of copies. This fact ought not to shake our faith, for God works in truly mysterious ways. While there are variant readings in the copies that have survived, these variants are few, and rarely, if ever, affect the teaching of Scripture.⁵⁰ When these manuscripts are assessed, we find therein the fullness of the inspired Word of God. It has been preserved, and always will be preserved, just as Jesus said, “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished”.⁵¹

The discipline of studying the various manuscripts and discerning which readings are original is called *textual criticism*. This discipline has been valued throughout the history of the church as a practical means of helping the church remain faithful to the *autographs* even when individual scribes and scholars made mistakes.⁵²

49 B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. VI, p. 238.

50 For the New Testament alone there are roughly 5,800 surviving manuscripts and manuscript fragments, plus nearly 20,000 more of the early translations of the New Testament (Latin, Coptic, Syriac, etc). When all of these manuscripts are compared, there is less than 1% variance between them, and the vast majority are spelling variations and word order differences. When studying ancient manuscripts as a whole, such accuracy is practically unheard of, even when only a few copies are being compared.

51 Matthew 5:18

52 Examples of important Christians who practiced textual criticism in the past include Jerome, Lucian of Antioch, Origen of Alexandria, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, Robert Stephanus, John Lightfoot, Thomas Goodwin,

As has been mentioned previously, God gave us an *authoritative, inerrant* text. And he preserves this text, yet he has done so by means of preserving a multitude of manuscripts rather than by miraculously preventing scribal mistakes. So then, the inerrant text of God's Word is by no means lost. It is well preserved in the many manuscripts that God himself has abundantly preserved. The goal of *textual criticism* is, therefore, to identify the original text of the autographs, even down to the spelling of words, as best as we are able. This endeavor should not raise doubts in our minds and hearts as to the faithfulness of our modern Bibles. On the contrary, it should affirm God's continued *preservation* of his Word through the many manuscripts and Spirit-empowered study of those manuscripts.

Due to mankind's rebellion against God, and his attempt to become like God at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9, we live in a world filled with a multitude of languages. As Christians we look forward to the day when people of every nation, tribe, people, and language will stand around the throne of God and before the Lamb who was slain⁵³ and all understand one another, and, more importantly, all understand God himself. Until that day comes, we have need of Bible translations. Wilhelmus À Brakel explained why, "Since Scripture has been given to the congregation, to every individual member and must be read by everyone, and since the church of the New Testament is to be found throughout the world among various nations and languages,⁵⁴ it becomes a necessity to translate the Holy Scriptures into every language."⁵⁵ Thus not only does the multitude of languages require it, but so also does the very necessity of Scripture itself, for if a person cannot read God's Word, how is he to believe?

Although it is certainly a benefit for all Christians to learn the

and Samuel Rutherford, among many others.

⁵³ Revelation 7:9

⁵⁴ Revelation 5:9

⁵⁵ Wilhelmus À Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 1, p. 69.

biblical languages, it is simply not feasible for most. But God the Spirit has spread gifts, abilities, and time differently throughout the body of Christ.⁵⁶ Those so equipped by the Spirit ought to use what has been given them to study the Bible in its original languages for the sake of the Church. And whenever possible, teaching elders and pastors ought also to learn these languages so as to most accurately communicate God's Word to the local church. After all, while the original writings are inspired, Bible translations themselves are not.

Translations are a gracious gift of God to his people through the efforts of faithful men to communicate his Word as accurately as possible into different languages. Yet even though the translated words are not inspired, they faithfully communicate the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God given in the original writings. God has blessed us with many English translations of his Word.⁵⁷ These translations all seek to faithfully convey the meaning of Scripture into English, and they succeed. Although the choices can become overwhelming, they end up being a benefit. No single translation is able to convey every nuance of the original languages. When we place various translations side-by-side, we are often given a fuller picture of the overall meaning.

Between God's providential preserving, the work of the Holy Spirit among his people, the efforts of faithful translators, the teaching of the elders of the church, and the access of God's Word in the common languages of the people, the Church can be confident that we still have the faithful Word of God to guide, direct, and instruct us.

⁵⁶ I Corinthians 12:12-26

⁵⁷ Examples of faithful translations include, among others, the ESV, NASB, LSB, CSB, HCSB, KJV, NKJV, NIV.

Reflection

As you reflect on these things, consider two verses of a hymn written by Henry W. Baker in 1861:⁵⁸

Lord, thy word abideth,
And our footsteps guideth,
Who its truth believeth
Light and joy receiveth.

O, that we discerning
Its most holy learning,
Lord, may love and fear thee,
Evermore be near thee!

⁵⁸ Henry W. Baker, Lord, Thy Word Abideth, in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 1861.

Study Questions

1. Why was the Bible written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek? Is it important to study these languages today?
2. How has God providentially preserved his Word?
3. What are the differences between *manuscripts*, *autographs*, and *copies*?
4. How important are Bible translations? Why?
5. Can we be confident that the Bibles we have today, even in translations, are the Word of God? Explain your answer.

“God’s truth always agrees with itself.”

~Richard Sibbes⁵⁹

⁵⁹ A Puritan Golden Treasury, compiled by I.D.E. Thomas. Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA. 2000, p. 37.

WDF I.8 ~ The Interpretation of Scripture

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.²³

23. Acts 15:15; 17:11; John 5:46; II Pet 1:20-21; Luke 24:44

Explanation

It would be easy to think that understanding God's Word is as simple as reading it. If the text and message are plain, then the meaning should always be obvious. Yet it is not always that simple, and when we treat it that way, we are likely to end up drifting into all sorts of false teaching. Scripture is plain, or *perspicuous*, yet those who seek to understand it rightly must use care in doing so. We each come to the text with a set of *presuppositions* – foundational beliefs or starting points – that we are often unaware of, or at least pay little attention to. Yet these *presuppositions* deeply influence how we think and act, what we believe, and how we understand God's Word and the world he has made. This is even the case with the Bible itself, which begins, in Genesis 1:1, with an essential presupposition: God exists. God never attempts to prove his existence in the Bible, but rather reveals his existence to his creation. Similarly, all people come to the Word of God with our own *presuppositions*. Sometimes they align with what Scripture teaches, but other times they do not. Therefore it is necessary, first, to depend upon the work of the Holy Spirit to correct our thinking, and, second, to use proper methods in approaching the Bible.

Hermeneutics “is the science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation.”⁶⁰ People have devised all sorts of systems governing the interpretation of Scripture, and each of these systems has one critical, overarching principle regarding the ultimate authority in interpretation. For instance, Roman Catholicism teaches that the final authority in interpretation is *living tradition* and the *magisterium*; Eastern Orthodoxy teaches that it is *tradition* as well as the teachings of *councils* and the *church fathers*; Jehovah's Witnesses look to their *governing body* and certain *Watchtower* publications; Mormonism relies upon *living prophets*, other *writings*, and *continuing revelation*; and theological liberalism trusts primarily in *human reason* and *skepticism*. As we come to God's Word, however,

60 Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 11.

we must come to it understanding that because it is God's Word, it is itself the final authority in matters of interpretation. This is historically referred to as the *regula fidei*, or *rule of faith*. Flowing from this doctrine is a critical interpretive principle: the *analogia fidei*, or *analogy of faith*, which is expressed by the phrase *Scripture interprets Scripture*.

These phrases express for us the foundational idea that since Scripture is itself the authority, then we must rely, primarily, upon Scripture to interpret itself, and any interpretation we come up with regarding any singular passage must be consistent with the rest of Scripture. By extension, it also means that the faithful believer, relying on the work of the Holy Spirit and the truths about God's Word that have already been laid out prior to this, ought to be able to read and interpret the Bible, on its own and without initially relying upon any other tools, resources, or outside information, and at least gain a basic understanding of the message (both doctrine and application) of most any passage of Scripture. That is not to say we will be able to understand all doctrine and applications that way, or that we can answer every question we have concerning any particular passage, for God has gifted his church with many resources, gathered by his people, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit that are a wealth of knowledge and God's truth discerned throughout the generations of the church, and we ought to make use of them to guide and refine our understanding of the Word of God.⁶¹

It is also important to keep in mind as we study that all of Scripture centers around Christ: both his person and work. Jesus himself made that clear to his disciples after his resurrection when, in Luke 24:27, "he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things

61 These other resources – creeds, confessions, commentaries, systematic theologies, etc. – are crucial for the development of right theology and practice from a biblical perspective, and they will be discussed in our comments on the next paragraph of the Whitefield Declaration of Faith. It should also be noted that seeking to understand the full sense of Scripture without the help of the church – of today and of the past – is a dangerous endeavor that most often leads into grave error.

concerning himself.” As we look at God’s Word, then, we must expect to see Christ throughout, in the shadows, types, plot, promises, symbols, and even the overall structure. Further, the teaching of any singular passage of Scripture only has one meaning. Sometimes the meaning is complex, occasionally even involving layers whose full significance unfolds, like the layers of an onion being peeled away, as the narrative of Scripture progresses. Although there is only one meaning, that meaning is sometimes revealed a little at a time, through historical examples, stages of fulfillment, and developing patterns.

A significant example of this is Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14. Within the historical context, it appears that Isaiah’s readers may have understood this prophecy as referring to a child in their own day, with many modern scholars pointing to the birth of Isaiah’s son Maher-Shalal-Hashbaz. Many scholars today refer to this as an *initial* or *partial* fulfillment, though *historical anticipation* may be a more accurate description. But when the passage is fully understood it becomes clear that no normal human child could perfectly fulfill that prophecy. The God-man, Jesus Christ, is the only possible ultimate fulfillment. Such layering is not uncommon, and yet even in such cases there remains only one true sense of Scripture. There is no need to search out secret, hidden meanings on some deeper level, as they are not present in God’s Word.

These two points – that Christ is the center of all of Scripture and that there is only one true meaning to any passage of Scripture – was summarized well by A. A. Hodge, “No one truth is rightly held till it is clearly conceived and stated, and no single truth is adequately comprehended till it is viewed in harmonious relations to all the other truths of the system of which Christ is the centre.”⁶²

With all of this in mind, consider now a simple method for

⁶² A. A. Hodge, *The Higher Life*, in *The Family Treasury of Sunday Reading*, 1876, p. 379.

reading and interpreting the Bible. These five steps help to guide and direct a fruitful study of the Word of God.

1. **Pray** for the Holy Spirit to illumine your mind and heart, and to guide your study of God's Word. Or, in the words of the Puritan pastor and theologian Richard Baxter, "Before and after you read the Scripture, pray earnestly that the Spirit who wrote it may interpret it for you, keep you from unbelief and error, and lead you into the truth."⁶³
2. **Read** the passage and its context. This may seem obvious, but it can be easily overlooked. The idea here is not to simply read through a passage quickly, but to read it thoroughly, perhaps even multiple times, in order to gain familiarity and to bypass our preconceived notions of what we have read.
3. **Observe** what the passage says. This is often the most difficult step. Notice the basic ideas, themes, grammar, structure, words, etc. Ask questions of the passage, but don't answer them. Take note of what is especially clear, and what is not. This causes us to slow down and observe the passage itself rather than what we expect it to say.
4. **Interpret** what the passage means. Answer the questions from your observations. Put the passage together with the rest of the book it is from, seeking to understand what the human author was communicating and then put it together with the rest of the Bible to better understand the full idea that God is communicating. If time permits, then look at commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and other resources that may help to answer your remaining questions, and to point out things you may have missed.
5. **Apply** the meaning of the passage to your own life. If the former steps are completed, but this final one was ignored, then all the rest was in vain. God's Word is intended to

⁶³ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, p. 264.

communicate the truth and by it to change those who hear and read it. Consider, then, how all that you have learned impacts your life. Does it change how you think about God or yourself? Does it call you to more fully glorify God or follow him? Is there an instruction, whether directly or by example, to repent of sin or change your behavior? Or perhaps the call that is given is to have greater faith in the Triune God in the midst of sorrows, sufferings, trials, and tribulations. All of these applications, and a multitude of others, are present throughout Scripture.

Let us, therefore, seek to study the Word of God with Scripture itself as our ultimate authority, and then apply it to our own lives so that we might more fully glorify and enjoy God today, tomorrow, and forevermore.

Reflection

As you reflect on these things, consider two other verses of a hymn written by Anne Steele:

Here the Redeemer's welcome voice
Spreads heav'nly peace around
And life, and everlasting joys
Attend the blissful sound.

But when his painful sufferings rise,
(Delightful, dreadful scene!)
Angels may read with wondering eyes
That Jesus died for men.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Anne Steele, *Father of Mercies, In Thy Word, in Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional* 1760.

Study Questions

1. What are *presuppositions*? How do they impact our understanding of God's Word?
2. How do Scripture and the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer work to correct our *presuppositions*?
3. What does it mean that *Scripture interprets Scripture*? How does this *rule of faith* guide biblical interpretation?
4. Choose a passage in the Old Testament. How does it showcase the centrality of Christ in all of Scripture?
5. Explain the five basic steps of biblical interpretation in your own words. Choose a passage of Scripture and study it using those five steps.

“A supreme and infallible judge is one who never errs in judgment, nor is he able to err; is uninfluenced by prejudice and from whom is no appeal . . . God speaking in the Scriptures claims these as his own prerogatives alone, as incapable of error in judgment, being truth itself, uninfluenced by partiality, being no respecter of persons; nor can any appeal be made from him because he has no superior.”

~Francis Turretin⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. I.2.XX.x, p. 156.

WDF I.9 ~ Sola Scriptura

"9. The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit.²⁴ By this Scripture so delivered our faith is finally resolved.²⁵

24. Matt 22:29, 31; Acts 28:25; I John 4:1-6

25. Eph 2:20; Acts 28:23-24

Explanation

In this world God has created there are all sorts of authorities, all relating to each other in a variety of ways. The American government and its states, for instance, have a series of courts, each with its own jurisdiction. A case normally starts in a lower court, but through a series of appeals may ascend to the US Supreme Court, where a final, authoritative judgment is made. When it comes to matters of faith, something similar happens.

Francis Turretin helpfully divided religious authority into three different types: *supreme*, *ministerial*, and *private*.⁶⁶ *Private* authority is found at the level of individual, personal matters; *Ministerial* refers to the authority granted to various people and bodies by the Lord Jesus Christ, who is himself Head of the Church; and *Supreme* speaks of the highest level of authority which governs, gives laws, and from which there is no appeal. While *ministerial* authority does not determine what passages of Scripture are read in the home, which would be a matter of *private* authority, it does determine which passages of Scripture are read in the local church. The *supreme* authority is that which is over everything else, the final arbiter and determiner: Scripture itself. Everyone and everything is subject to the *supreme* authority because it is the very authority of God himself. Such authority cannot and is not held by human reason, pastors or theologians, creeds or confessions, or modern-day self-professed prophets. It is held only by Scripture, the very Word of God, and all things must submit to it.

Historically, this doctrine is known as *Sola Scriptura*, or Scripture Alone, meaning that Scripture alone is the final and ultimate authority in all religious matters and controversies. Scripture, as the *supreme* authority, is therefore what theologians call

⁶⁶ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. I.2.XX.iii, p. 154.

the *norma normans*, or norming norm. That is, since Scripture holds the very authority of God, it acts as the rule and judge for all things having to do with the Christian faith, governing God's chosen people, Christ's own Church, and all the ideas produced therein. This was exhibited well in Acts 17:10-12. As Paul traveled through Greece proclaiming the gospel, he stopped in Berea and preached at the Jewish Synagogue. Although they listened to Paul eagerly, they did not blindly accept what he had to say. The message may have sounded good, but it needed to be tested, and so they were "examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." The result? Many Jews and Greeks believed! The power and authority were not Paul, but the message of the Word of God proclaimed. Jesus also shows the authority of Scripture during his earthly ministry. When Satan tempts him after his forty days and nights of fasting in the wilderness, Jesus responded to each temptation with rightly applied Scripture. In contrast, Jesus confronted the Pharisees and scribes because they had elevated their own religious traditions above God's Word.⁶⁷

This does not, however, discount the value of other writings. God the Holy Spirit has gifted individuals throughout the history of the Church with knowledge and understanding of God's Word. That is not to say that they receive God's Word itself as the Apostles and prophets who recorded the Bible did, but that God-given wisdom and insight are a valuable gift to the Church. Faithful men and women have written creeds, confessions of faith, commentaries, and works of theology. And there is no individual, or single generation, that has ever been, or will ever be, able to fully mine the depths of the riches and wisdom of God. Each generation of God's people should seek to preserve and develop the biblical teachings of the generations that have preceded it, thus increasing the wealth of doctrinal and applicational insight available to God's people.

And yet, not all the contributions of God's people are of equal value and use. In order for them to have an enduring benefit to

⁶⁷ Matthew 15:3

Christ's Church, they must be tested by Scripture, and be found to be in conformity to it, just as the Bereans did with Paul's preaching. Foundational statements, like creeds and confessions of faith, ought to be *norma normata* – normed norms, or rules and guides of faith and doctrine that have been brought into faithful conformity with the ultimate norm, Scripture. They serve as clear, faithful guides for individual belief, local churches, and groups of churches insofar as they are derived from and remain faithful to biblical teaching. And as long as they are judged by Scripture, commentaries provide deeper insight into passages of the Bible that most people would not be able to gain through their own personal study, theology books help to synthesize the myriad teachings of Scripture, and devotional resources cause God's people to see applications of his Word that they may have otherwise missed.

These resources are all the more important because the Christian faith is not an individual faith, but a corporate one. God's people are chosen by him as one body, they are called into unity with Christ and one otherwise, they are instructed to use their varying gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. This singular, unified, growing body transcends time and space, consisting of all true believers of every location and every period of time. For us to neglect these great resources God has given to us through his people is a great danger to us because we thereby reject the blessing God himself has given. Thus other writings besides the Bible are beneficial, and crucial, for the life of the church, but for them to be so, they must submit to, and be judged by the supreme authority of God's own Word.

None of those extra writings, however, will ever serve to resolve our faith. They will only help to guide and inform it. As Romans 10:17 says, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." And every word in the Bible is the word of Christ, recorded through the apostles and prophets for the building up of the household of God as it is all placed in line with Christ the cornerstone.⁶⁸ In Scripture, and there alone, will we find the answers

⁶⁸ Ephesians 2:20

to our deepest questions, needs, and desires, which ultimately focus on none other than the Triune God who has called sinful people into salvific community and relationship with him.

Reflection

As you reflect on these things, consider these two verses of a hymn written by Anne Steele:

Here the fair tree of knowledge grows
And yields a free repast;
Sublimer fruits than nature knows,
Invite the longing taste.

Oh, may these heav'nly pages be
My ever dear delight
And still new beauties may I see,
And still increasing light.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Anne Steele, *Father of Mercies, In Thy Word, in Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional* 1760.

Study Questions

1. Explain the phrase *Sola Scriptura*. Why is this doctrine necessary for a right understanding and application of the Bible?
2. How do creeds and confessions relate to Scripture?
3. Select a series of books, including the Bible, and at least one book from each of the following categories: theology, devotionals, creeds and confessions, and church history. Stack them in an order that you believe reflects their relative authority for Christian faith and life. Explain:
 - a. Why did you place the Bible where you did?
 - b. How do the other books relate to God's Word?
 - c. What role should each category play in shaping your faith and life?
4. Identify one theological or applicational question you have been struggling to understand. How would you use Scripture as the *supreme judge* to find the biblical answer?

Glossary

Analogia Fidei: *Latin: analogy of faith.* The principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. Every faithful interpretation of Scripture must be consistent with the whole of Scripture. **I.8**

Apocrypha: A collection of ancient Jewish writings composed primarily between the Old and New Testaments. Although valued by many Christians throughout history as useful writings, they were generally not recognized as Scripture. While Protestants formally rejected the Apocrypha, the Roman Catholic Church formally recognized most of these writings as canonical at the Council of Trent. **I.3**

Autographs: The original manuscripts of the individual books of the Bible. These autographs are not known to exist today. **I.7**

Canon: The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as the completed rule of the Christian faith and life. **I.2**

Copies: The hand written, mechanically printed, or digitally maintained copies of the original autographs or other copies. **I.7**

Covenant: A solemn, binding relationship established by God through which he reveals himself, relates to his people, and accomplishes his redemptive purposes. **I.2**

Covenant of Grace: God's gracious covenant by which he saves lost sinners whom he has chosen from before the foundations of the world. This covenant is progressively revealed throughout Scripture beginning from the fall in Genesis 3. **I.2**

General Revelation: God revealing himself to humanity through the light of nature, creation, and his works of providence. **I.1**

Good and Necessary Consequence: The principle that faithful doctrines and applications may be logically deduced from Scripture itself when those deductions are grounded in and required by Scripture itself. **I.5**

Hermeneutics: “The science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation.” ~*Louis Berkhof* **I.8**

Illumination: The light of God shining in human hearts and minds by the work of the Holy Spirit that causes people to understand and believe what God communicates in Scripture. **I.5**

Inerrancy: The Bible does not lie, deceive, or contain errors in all that it teaches. **I.2**

Infallibility: The Bible is true, unfailing, and does not deceive in everything that it intends to teach. **I.2**

Inspiration: Scripture is breathed out by God through the work of the Holy Spirit, using human writers, and is therefore the very words of God. **I.2**

Light of Grace: The spiritually changed and informed faculties given by God's good favor through the work of the Holy Spirit by which people are able to understand things spiritually. **I.1**

Light of Nature: The natural faculties which result from the image of God in which humanity is created by which people understand things. **I.1**

Ministerial Authority: Authority exercised by church officers and church bodies under the authority of and as expressed in Scripture. **I.9**

Necessity: Scripture is needed because God uses it as the ordinary means of instructing sinful people in salvation and bringing them to saving faith. **I.1**

New Covenant: The administration of the Covenant of Grace established through the person and saving work of Jesus Christ,

recorded in the last twenty-seven books of the Bible which are referred to as the New Testament. **I.2**

Norma Normans: *Latin: norming norm.* Scripture possesses the very authority of God and therefore serves as the ultimate rule and judge of all matters of faith and practice. **I.9**

Norma Normata: *Latin: normed norms.* Rules and guides of faith and doctrine – like creeds, confessions, and statements of faith – that have been brought into faithful conformity with the ultimate norm, Scripture. **I.9**

Old Covenant: The administration of the Covenant of Grace before the incarnation of Christ, recorded in the first thirty-nine books of the Bible which are referred to as the Old Testament. **I.2**

Ordinary Means of Grace: “the instruments Christ uses to birth and strengthen the faith of the elect as he is present among them.”
~J. Ryan Davidson **I.6**

Perspicuity: Everything necessary to be known, believed, and observed for a sinner to be saved is made clear within God’s written word. **I.6**

Preservation: The text of Scripture is kept safe, by God, and remains the genuine Word of God throughout all ages and is always within the reach of God’s people through the multitude of copies. **I.7**

Presuppositions: Foundational beliefs or starting points that we are often unaware of which influence how we act and think about God’s Word and world. **I.8**

Private Authority: Authority at the level of personal, private matters. **I.9**

Regula Fidei: *Latin: rule of faith.* Scripture is the final authority in matters of faith. **I.8**

Revelation: God’s communication in which he makes known things

that would otherwise remain hidden. **I.1**

Sola Scriptura: *Scripture alone* is the *final* and *ultimate* authority in all religious matters and controversies. **I.9**

Special Revelation: God's *supernatural* communication to people. **I.1**

Sufficiency: Scripture contains everything necessary for saving knowledge, faith, life, and obedience. **I.1**

Supreme Authority: The final arbiter of matters of faith and religious practice, that is, Scripture itself. **I.9**

Testament: One of the two major divisions of the Bible, derived from the Latin word *testamentum* which was the traditional translation of the biblical word for covenant. The Old and New Testaments can rightly be understood as the Old and New Covenants. **I.2**

Textual Criticism: The discipline of studying the various manuscript copies and discerning which readings are original. **I.7**

Theophanies: Visible appearances of the Lord God in Scripture. **I.1**

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