

The Foundations of Truth

A FOUNDATION FOR LIFE *THE DOCTRINE AND POWER OF SCRIPTURE*

PRE-GAME

Theodore Roosevelt once said that “a thorough knowledge of the Bible is more valuable than a college education.” His wisdom reflects Moses’ perspective that the words of Scripture are “not just idle words for you, they are your life.” (Deuteronomy 32:47) What makes Scripture so valuable? On one hand, all of Christian theology is based on the doctrine that Scripture is more than just a human document - it is the very word of God. As a result, Scripture is our inspired, infallible and authoritative source of knowing God and understanding his will for us. On the other hand, the Bible not only contains information, but power for guiding and directing us to a life of growth and maturity. The doctrine and power of Scripture is indeed valuable - it is the foundation for our life.

THEME

The Bible is the inspired, infallible, authoritative Word of God that powerfully equips us for a life of godliness and growth.

PRACTICE

Understanding the richness of the doctrine and power of Scripture should lead us to a lifetime of regular, devoted study and application of Scripture.

SYMBOL KEY



Indicates discussion questions



Indicates Biblical passages to look up



Indicates application questions to be discussed

The Foundations of Truth Series

A Foundation for
Confidence

A Foundation for
Trust

A Foundation for
Growth

A Foundation for
Community

A Foundation for
Life

I. THE DIVINE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

✦ Is Scripture God’s word or man’s word? In what sense could both be true?

Unlike other religious books, the Bible is not just the words of men speaking about spiritual things. Rather, God has inspired the words of Scripture. Divine inspiration refers to the way in which God has sovereignly guided the human authors of the Bible so that their writings are an expression of God’s will and mind in human language.



Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The term ‘breath’ in both Greek and Hebrew is associated with the activity of God’s Spirit. Though human authors were still involved in writing Scripture, this verse indicates that the formation of all Scripture is fully an act of God.



Read Galatians 1:6-12 and 2 Peter 1:19-21

- Why was it so important for Paul to demonstrate that his writing was not his own but was from God?
- What should our response be to the fact that Scripture is from God and not from man?

In Greek:
theopneustos =
God-breathed

pneuma =
Spirit, wind or breath


✦ What does the divine inspiration of Scripture imply about the content of the Bible?

The authority (see section II), reliability (see appendix), and the infallibility of Scripture hinges on the Bible being the inspired Word of God. For instance, consider how the infallible nature of Scripture is affected by different views on inspiration.

- **human-constructivist perspective** - Scripture is purely a human document, based on sociological, cultural and political factors and thus is riddled with errors, inconsistencies and biases.
- **human-response perspective** - Scripture is man’s subjective response to God’s inspiration. God gives the human authors a divine message, but leaves them to figure out what it means and how to express it. Errors are possible because Scripture is still only a human (and thus fallible) interpretation of a divine truth.
- **divine-inspiration perspective** - Scripture constitutes the very words of God. God moves in and through the intellects and wills of human authors to express exactly what he intends. Because God himself is free from error or defect, Scripture as God’s Word is infallible.

infallibility =
all the Bible’s
assertions are truthful
and worthy of entire
confidence.

Only this last view is the Biblical perspective on inspiration. The divine nature of Scripture forms the foundation of the doctrine of the Word of God in our lives.

 Do you think the infallibility of Luke or Acts looks any different from the infallibility of Genesis 1-2, Psalms or Proverbs?

It is important to note that infallibility is relative to what the text intends to teach. In a historical document like Luke or Acts, the text intends to communicate facts in a straight-forward, literal manner. Elsewhere - such as in poetry, parables, narratives and wisdom literature - the intended meaning of a text does not require a rigid, literal reading. For instance, we can claim that Jesus' parables are infallible without having to claim that each parable is a historical fact. The divine inspiration and infallibility of Scripture means that the Bible is completely truthful and trustworthy, but not necessarily literal.

Infallible does not always mean literal.

II. THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

At the root of many religious debates is the issue of authority. Christians agree that God is our ultimate authority. But where do we encounter the mind and will of God most clearly? While creeds, confessions, churches and individuals are legitimate and useful sources of authority, Scripture is the clearest, most direct revelation of God's authority.



Read Matthew 4:1-11

- In what sense do you see Jesus using Scripture as the ultimate authority?

"It is written..." is used nearly 90 times in New Testament to appeal to the authority of Scripture.



Read Matthew 15:1-9

- How did the Pharisees undermine the authority of Scripture?
- Are all human traditions inappropriate sources of authority?



Read Acts 15:6-19

- How did James confirm what the proper, authoritative response should be in this decision?

"I tell you the truth until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen will by in any means disappear from the Law (Scripture)."
- Matthew 5:18

The Bible's inspiration implies its authority and infallibility. We must be aware that certain religious documents - such as the 'Gospel of Thomas' - have historical elements but lack ultimate authority and infallibility because it is not divinely inspired.



How should the time and effort you put into studying Scripture and applying it to your life change in light of the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture?

III. THE DIVINE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE

The divine inspiration and authority of Scripture is not merely theoretical. This doctrine means that we should see Scripture as the essential foundation for every aspect of our lives.

Our source of salvation



Read 2 Timothy 3:14-15

- In what sense is Scripture the source of our salvation?

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”
- Romans 1:16

Our source of growth



Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17

- In 2 Timothy 3, how is Scripture shown as sufficient for all spiritual growth?

- How can we allow Scripture to teach, rebuke, correct and train us?

Our source of guidance



Read Joshua 1:6-9

- What do we need to do in order for Scripture to guide us?

meditate =
To contemplate or ponder

Our source of knowing God’s will



Read Romans 12:1-2

- How does Scripture renew our minds and reveal God’s will?

Scripture is our sufficient source of salvation, growth, guidance and knowing God’s will. As such we should study it, meditate on it, memorize it and obey it as a central foundation for our life in Christ.



Can you think of a specific time when Scripture functioned in one of these roles in your life? In what areas of your life do you currently need to look to Scripture for guidance?

IV. THE DIVINE POWER OF SCRIPTURE

In Deuteronomy 32:47, Moses says that the words of Scripture ‘are not just idle words for you - they are your life.’ We need to claim the divine power of Scripture by studying it, reflecting on it and living by it on a regular basis.



Read Hebrews 4:12-13

- Is Scripture ‘living and active’ in your life? What are some steps you can take to allow this to happen?



Read Psalm 119:9-24

- Where in this passage do you see the power of Scripture affecting our minds? Our hearts? Our ways of life?

In Scripture, we find power to live a transformed life in Christ. As we read its pages, we learn more about the nature of God, the depth of our sin, the beauty of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and the hope we have in life through faith.

V. POST GAME - CORRECTLY HANDLING THE WORD OF GOD

The doctrine and power of Scripture forms a foundation for life in Christ. Yet, if we do not intently study, learn about and apply Scripture, we will miss out on the rich, life-giving power of the Word. Scripture exhorts us to be a “workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). As such we need to work hard to learn the Word and correctly apply it to our lives.



What are some practical ways you can start to study Scripture?

Try some of these

- Read the Gospel of John.
- Read one Proverb a day (a total of 31) for a whole month
- Read through the whole Bible in 1 year
- Read Luke and Acts about a history of the life of Christ and the early church
- Read Romans and Hebrews about some important theological issues
- Read 1 Corinthians through 2 Timothy about great practical application



What obstacles prevent you from incorporating a serious study of Scripture into your life? Why?

In Acts 17:10-15, Luke says the Bereans are of ‘noble character’ for examining Scripture intently.

Psalm 119 is a great chapter to turn to see the power and importance of Scripture.

“A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.”
- Theodore Roosevelt

VI. APPENDIX: THE RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

Many scholars and students alike have questioned the reliability of Scripture. Can they be trusted? Are they accurate? Are they consistent? While we can trust the reliability of Scripture on the basis of its claims to be the inspired, authoritative Word of God, there are also commonly accepted principles of historicity that demonstrate Scripture's reliability. For instance, historians use the following points as confirmations of a text's authenticity:

- 1.) a large number of manuscript copies agree with one another
- 2.) there is a short time period between the events and the date the text was written
- 3.) proponents of the text are willing to sacrifice much for their claim
- 4.) established tradition is altered as a result of the text
- 5.) potentially discrediting statements are made

The New Testament meets each of these criterion with flying colors.

- 1.) Over 20,000 whole or partial copies of New Testament manuscripts from a vast number of locations are in existence today. The Iliad, which is second to the New Testament in manuscript authority, has 643 manuscripts. The earliest copies of the New Testaments are traced to under 50 years after the books were originally written. The next shortest time gap between the earliest copies and the original writing is 400 years (for the Iliad). There is ample evidence that our Bible today has been reliability preserved and transmitted through history.
- 2.) Many historians date the writing of the New Testament to within 25-60 years of Christ's death and resurrection. This is a remarkably short time considering the fact that oral traditions were favored over written documents in this time period. According to historical standards, this time gap would have been too short for legendary stories to have developed. As a result, it would be contrary to typical historical standards to think that the stories of the New Testaments were fabricated myths.
- 3.) The apostles (and hundreds of others, see 1Corinthians 15) were so utterly convinced they had seen the risen Lord that they rejoiced in persecution (Acts 5:41). As many as 11 of the 12 of them willingly died as martyrs for the sake of Jesus Christ. This would be unthinkable if the disciples had fabricated the stories and doctrine of Christianity.
- 4.) One absolutely immutable tradition in the Jewish culture was the Saturday Sabbath. However, after Christ rose from the dead on Sunday, Jewish believers recognized Sunday as the Sabbath. Paul refers to this as an established tradition. This change in tradition points to the remarkable power and credibility of the earliest Christian traditions.
- 5.) If the New Testament was a fabricated document, it certainly would be unusual for it to reveal many flaws in its key characters, the apostles. For instance, Peter denied Christ three times, Thomas doubts the resurrection and the apostles flee when Christ is arrested, not trusting his predictions of the resurrection. Similarly, it is remarkable that the Gospels say that women are the first to see the risen Christ. In first century Palestine, women were not even allowed to testify in court. All of this would be unusual for a mythical story that was trying to gain credibility. The other alternative is that this story - in all of its details - is actually true.