

## CPC: FOUNDATIONS OF THE FAITH

### Class #1 - Scripture and Authority

Opening Question: How do we know? (epistemology)

- Our culture tends to distrust authority structures (institutions, organized religion, etc.)
- Yet, we all operate according to some ultimate standard; we can't escape it
- In the modern world, the "self" has become that authority
- But why should we trust the "self"? How do we know?

I. Christianity is based on the authority of God speaking in the Scriptures; the Scriptures *are* God speaking

- Without God revealing himself to us, we would know little about him; it would be impossible to speak of him in a meaningful way
- Special revelation: top-down, God reveals who he is to human beings
  - Heb 1:1-2 "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets..." "Many ways" = visions, dreams, prophetic sayings.
  - "but now he has spoken to us by his Son"—Jesus is the fullness of the revelation of God.
- *Revelation is progressive*: God reveals more and more of himself and his plan of salvation throughout redemptive history
  - E.g., the promised seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) → promise given to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) → promise made to a nation (Ex. 19:5-6) → promise to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16) → fulfilled in Christ (Gal 3:16) → extended to the church (Gal 3:29)
- Gal. 2:11 ff (thoughts on what we profess v. ground of action)
- Our faith stands or falls with Holy Scripture, though initially we may think it stands or falls with us (without Scripture, there's really nothing to believe other than a fabrication of our own)

II. The uses of Scripture: doctrinal & religious (belief and conduct)

- Westminster Shorter Catechism #3: "What do the Scriptures principally teach? Ans: "what man is to *believe* concerning God & what *duties* God requires of man."
- *Sola Scriptura* –Scripture alone is the sole source of authority for the Christian faith and practice.

### III. What is Scripture?

- Scripture is the breath of God. “All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16)
- Inspiration of Scripture: the Bible has been breathed out by the Spirit of God (see 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Though written by human authors, God is the ultimate author of Scripture.
  - Jesus affirmed this: “Your word is truth” (John 17:17); “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).
  - The Holy Spirit used human authors to communicate the words of God, superintending the process down to the very words used by the author.
  - Thus, Scripture is also inerrant and infallible.
  - Gal 3:8; Heb 3:7; Rom 9:17 - David, God or Holy Spirit, *all the same thing and effect*
- On the Spirit, Scripture and God’s word: “words of knowledge” and “prophecy” do not have the self-authenticating force of the apostolic era, yet this does not mean the Spirit is no longer dynamic nor working in all things.
  - Signs and wonders do not produce faith: Luke 16:27ff & 1 Cor. 1:22 “the Jews ask for a sign”

So - we seek to test our lives, and certainly what and who we are as a church, by God’s Word. It is our understanding of what is normal and right, though we are tempted to take culture/experience as normal.

### IV. How do we know it is the word of God?

- Many don’t think so - why should they? (They shouldn’t)
- How do we know anything is true? – back to epistemology, ultimate foundations; what counts as evidence?
- WCF 1.4 on inner testimony of the Holy Spirit: “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” (we know its true the same way we know honey is sweet; we’ve tasted it!)
- why we call it revelation (“reveal”); 1 Cor 2:6-16 & 2 Cor 4:3-6: the testimony of the Holy Spirit
- Other “evidences” –unity of themes/ message of Scripture; predictive prophecy (Psalms 22; Dan 2, 7; Isa. 53)

## V. Formation of the Canon

- In general, apostolic origin was recognized and accepted early -- this understanding begins in the NT itself
  - » 1 Thes 4:2 (authority of Jesus Christ); 2 Thes 3:14 (immediate recognized authority); 1 Cor 14:36ff (Paul's word = God's word); Col 4:16; 2 Peter 3:16 ("other" scriptures); 1 Tim 5:18 (Luke and Deuteronomy side by side)
- it carries into the early church: Polycarp quotes Psalms and Ephesians together; Clement quotes Isaiah and Matthew.
- Early church universally accepted the four gospels; Paul's thirteen letters; contested books: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, Jude, Revelation
- Question of canon was largely settled before Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. (contra Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*)
- Council of Carthage (397 A.D.): affirmed the complete list of NT books
- Church fathers did not "pick" which books to put in the Canon; they recognized which books were inspired.

VI. Hermeneutics: grammatico-historical. What it meant then is what it means today.

- "It cannot mean today what it never meant then"
- Not a matter of subjective opinion; but focuses on grammar/syntax (what words and rules of language meant to original audience); and the historical context)
- Good questions to ask: 1) who is the author? 2) what is the genre of the text? 3) when was it written? 4) where is it located? 5) why was it written?
- Question to Waltke: "Did people really understand what the prophets were saying to them?" Waltke: "Well enough to kill them!"

Amy Carmichael: "The amazing thing is that everyone who reads the Bible has the same joyful thing to say about it. In every land, in every language, it is the same tale: Where that Book is read, not with the eyes only, but with the mind and heart, the life is changed. Sorrowful people are comforted, sinful people are transformed, people who were in the dark walk in the light. Is it not wonderful to think that this Book, which is such a mighty power if it gets a chance to work in an honest heart, is in our hand today? And we can read it freely, no man making us afraid."

### Discussion Questions

1. What “authorities” does our culture look to as alternatives to Scripture? How do these alternatives fail?
2. Should our commitment to Scripture prevent us from consulting non-biblical sources/books?
3. What convinced you that the Bible is the Word of God?
4. How can you develop a greater love for Scripture?
5. Are there some ways in which you can improve your study of the Bible?

### Optional Reading:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-christians-view-of-scripture/>