

The Doctrine of Scripture

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- [0 : 0 0] So we're going to begin this new series thinking about the doctrine of Scripture. Let me begin with a question for us. Does what I believe about the Bible matter?
- Does what you believe about the Bible matter? Well, hopefully by the time we come to the end, we'll be clearer on that answer. But as people, we understand that we are people who think.
- We recognize, too, that the way that we think tends to shape our actions. How we think, our worldview tends to shape how we respond to our circumstances.
- And in our thoughts, we process and make sense of life past, present, and future. So then the question becomes, what place does the Bible, what place will the Bible have in shaping those thoughts?
- And the answer to that question will depend on a number of different factors. When we pick up our Bibles, do we pick it up believing it has authority or not?
- [1 : 1 0] Do we believe that it is revelation from God or not? Do we believe all of it is revelation from God or not? Do we consider it to be reliable and without error or not?
- Does this book contain a guide for all that we need for a life of faith? Can it guide us to live to the glory of God in our families, in our workplaces?
- How we think about our money when we think about eternity? Perhaps to put it another way, and I've been thinking about this a lot this week, imagine if you never had the Bible. You never had a chance to hear its truth. You never had a chance to read it for yourself. How different would your life be? How different would your view of the world and your life be without the Bible informing your thoughts and shaping your worldview?
- Of course, that's a reality for hundreds of millions of people today. That's a reality for thousands of people groups today. And so part of this is connected to our desire to be a church that cares about mission because people need to hear the Bible as our fundamental conviction.
- [2 : 2 8] I always liked what Spurgeon used to say, his desire for his church, that if the people of God were cut open, that they would bleed Bible, that we would absorb it, that it would shape our lives.
- It would help us to respond to circumstances, help us to know how to live. So our plan for this evening is going to be built around those texts that we read at the beginning, sharing the convictions of Peter, who believed that the writers of Scripture were carried along by the Spirit, that the whole Bible was superintended by the Spirit, so there's no error within it.
- Following the conviction of Paul, that the whole Bible is God-breathed, that the Word of God is God's Word, that it's inspired. And following the conviction of Jesus, who said heaven and earth will pass away, but my Word will never pass away, so God's Word is permanent and unbreakable.

So having those as our sort of bedrock convictions as we continue to think, we're going to briefly see four qualities of Scripture, and then identify five reasons we need the Bible for everyday life.

So we're going to cover a lot of Bible texts. I would suggest that some of these would be well worth noting, and perhaps returning to, but we will touch on each of these.

[3 : 52] The first quality of God's Word we're going to think about is sufficiency. This is the idea that God's Word is enough. So let's read from the book of Hebrews to see it.

All the texts will be up on our screens, but we're in Hebrews 1, verses 1 to 4, in our first text. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful Word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. So the book of Hebrews begins with this contrast.

In the past, God spoke to your ancestors, people in the Old Testament era, through the prophets, throughout time, in many times and in various ways.

[5 : 12] Sometimes speaking by a vision, sometimes speaking by a burning bush, a whole variety of ways that God spoke. But then he says, in these last days, speaking here of the final age of salvation, speaking of everyone living in between the first and the second comings of the Lord Jesus, so speaking of our day, how has God spoken?

God has spoken through his Son. And who is his Son? Hebrews 1, 1-4 gives us a catalogue of qualities about Jesus. Jesus has been, verse 2, appointed the heir of all things.

It is through Jesus that God made the universe. God is, Jesus is the agent of creation. The Son is the radiance of God's glory.

To read about Jesus in the Gospels is to be confronted with the glory of God. Jesus is the one who is sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Jesus is the one who has provided purification for sin. Jesus has come as that sacrifice, as the Savior, as our substitute, and now he sits at the right hand of the majesty in heaven, enthroned as King of kings and Lord of lords.

[6 : 30] And he is superior to the angels. He's superior to Moses. He is better than anyone and anything, as the book of Hebrews makes plain. And the conclusion there, when we think about Jesus being superior, the point is that Jesus is, for us, the final agent from God in terms of revelation and redemption.

God has spoken through Jesus. No further word needs to be said. God has saved through Jesus.

No further salvation need be expected. So the big idea here is that God's word contains all we need for salvation and godly living. The Bible is sufficient.

God's word is enough. Jesus is the climax of revelation and redemption. We're not waiting for some fresh word.

We don't need later books. We don't need to listen to anyone claiming fresh words of prophecy. Rather, we're invited to have confidence that in Jesus and in the gospel, I have all I need to know about God, all I need to know about salvation, all I need to know for a life of godliness.

[7 : 45] It's here in the Bible. It's sufficient. It's enough. J.I. Packer put it this way. He said, There are no words of God spoken to us at all except the words of Scripture.

So first plank in the doctrine of the Bible is the sufficiency of Scripture. Second up, clarity. The idea that God's word is clear.

Now this time we're going to go Old Testament. We're going to go to the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter 30. Deuteronomy 30 from verse 11 to verse 14.

Now, this is God speaking through Moses to the redeemed people of God. Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.

It is not up in heaven so that you have to ask who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it. Nor is it beyond the sea so that you have to ask who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it.

[8 : 56] No. The word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it. So the big idea that the Bible says about itself is that the central message of the Bible is plainly taught so that it can be understood by all with ears to hear.

And especially for us in the era in which we live, the central saving message of Jesus is plainly taught so it can be understood by all who are ready to hear. So this text was spoken by Moses to the redeemed people of God.

They've been set free from slavery in Egypt. They've been brought to Mount Sinai. They've entered into covenant relationship with God. And now as he gives them his command, as there's this covenant renewal going on, his point is that God's word of command is clear.

It is not complicated. It is understandable. It is able to be obeyed. God is kind to them.

He doesn't intend to frustrate them by hiding the truth from them. He's not hidden up in heaven. He's not hidden it in the depths. No. It's there. It's close by them. And that fits with what Moses said to the people of God that they were to pass the law on to their children.

[10 : 21] The central message of the Bible is clear enough for children to understand. For us today, the central saving message of the Bible that God doesn't save us because of our works, because of our goodness, but saves us by his grace, that's clear.

That we don't save ourselves, but that we are saved by the Lord Jesus, who lives a life of perfect obedience in our place, who dies on the cross as a sacrifice or a universal substitute to take the penalty for our sin and to give us forgiveness in eternal life.

That is clear in the Word of God. The clarity of Scripture says that the essential points of truth that we need to know and believe and do are clearly seen in the Word of God.

Now, there are, of course, some qualifiers that we need to consider, as is true with any subject that we look to study, with any person that we want to get to know, there is a level of work and effort involved to get to know that person, that truth, better.

So, to say that Scripture is clear doesn't mean that we don't need to study to understand more of God and His Word.

[11 : 42] And it is also true to say, and Peter said it of Paul's writing, that not all parts of the Bible are equally clear. What is essential is very clear, but not all parts are equally clear.

And perhaps two principles beyond having to sort of work hard and try and study. One that requires us to be humble and to be asking the Spirit to help us and to guide us in our thoughts, in our understanding.

But also, at a practical level, we want to use what is clear and basic to help understand the complex. Sometimes groups of Christians or churches can go wrong because they pick an obscure text and try and build a whole theology around one passage.

It's really hard to understand when there's a lot more basic verses that would help to clarify. So, we use the clear help us towards understanding the more complex.

But just as was the case for the people in the days of Moses, when we think about our view on the clarity of the Bible, is the Bible clear?

[12 : 59] It's connected, in a sense, to our view of God's character. Do I believe God is able to speak clearly? Do I believe that God is wise enough to get down to our level to speak so that we can understand the central message of the Bible?

Calvin used to talk about God baby-talking to us. Is God's word for all? Or do we think he's made it so complicated that it's just for professionals who go to ETS or somewhere like that?

When we understand the character of God, then we understand that he wants to speak to us. He wants us to be clear on salvation. Wayne Grudem, I think, puts it well.

He says, The Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who read it, seeking God's help, there's humility, and being willing to follow it.

So, that's clarity. The next plank in our thinking about the doctrine of Scripture is the idea of authority. And for here, we're going to turn to the book of Acts.

[14 : 15] Acts chapter 17. Acts chapter 17, which is famous for Paul's sermon in Athens, but we're going before that to what happens in Berea.

And the idea of authority is the idea that God's word is final. That God's word gets the last word in every topic it addresses.

So, Acts 17, beginning at verse 10. As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea.

On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now, the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. But, when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

[15 : 33] If you have time to read the first half of Acts 17, you'll discover it's the story of two cities. And more than that, it's the story of two different responses to the word of God.

In Thessalonica, as Paul preaches that Christ is king, as he brings the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified, the Jews in particular are rejecting that message.

And what we have is this mob mentality that's established and where they're rioting against the truth. So, Paul leaves there with Silas and some others and they arrive in Berea.

And in Berea, it couldn't be any more different. Did you notice how they acted? Verse 11, they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

So, they have the Old Testament in front of them and they're listening to Paul's Gospel and they're listening and they're checking against Scripture and they're wondering, is what Paul says in line with the promises and the prophecies that we find in the Old Testament about what Messiah would be like, about who he is and how he would suffer and how he would die and how he would rise.

[16 : 56] So, they test Paul's Gospel and when they recognize it's in line with Scripture, they believe. Many of them believe. Because they believe the authority of God's Word.

and so they believe the authority of Paul's Gospel too. Their mindset as they hear this new message is that if Scripture says it, we will believe it.

Others may write about it, but we're going to trust it. And their attitude is wonderful because it's also very much, show us from the Bible. It's not based on Paul's reputation.

It's not based on his ability to argue. Show us from the Bible. That's a wonderful attitude for any church, any Christian to have.

When we think about the question of authority, we understand that every religious group, every system of belief, every belief that we have individually will always rest on a particular authority in the sense that someone or something will always have the last word.

[18 : 12] How am I going to react in this situation? How am I going to deal with this circumstance? There will be something that we will look to to guide us.

If that's not the Bible, that can be any number. That could be a scientific community. It could be contemporary culture. It could be what our parents taught us, what our peer group believes. It could be the teaching of some influential figure or a teacher in our life or online.

Something will always have the last word. The doctrine of scripture says, for the people of God, for the church, it should always be the word of God. One place where we might find that this particular aspect becomes important is if you're ever in conversation and someone asks the question, well, what about mistakes in the Bible?

What about perceived errors in the Bible where one part is seen to disagree with the other? How do we respond to that? Well, as Christians, our first instinct should be to trust the authority of God's inspired word.

That's why we need this solid foundation of the doctrine of scripture. So we're not going to be shaken when somebody comes with those kind of questions. We also have to have an attitude, a posture of humility because some of those perceived difficulties between passage of the Bible or perceived errors are easy to resolve.

[19 : 43] A little bit of reading and you can resolve those. Others will require hard work and others, particular questions, questions we might have about the word of God.

We may wrestle with for years and we may never come to resolution but will we have that humility and that trust in the authority of God's word as our foundation? I came across this from G.I.

Packer which I find helpful. He said our intellectual competence is not the test and measure of divine truth.

That's good news for us as Christians. measure is God's word. The last plank in this consideration of the doctrine of scripture is that God's word is necessary, the necessity of scripture.

We're just going to go one book forward. We're going to go to the book of Romans here. The necessity of scripture, the idea here is that we need more than the created world if we are to know God in a saving way.

[20 : 50] We need the Bible to tell us who Jesus is, how we are to be saved, and how to live. So, Romans chapter 1 verses 16 to 20 where we read, For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

So the word there in verse 18, there are those who suppress the truth. God is so what Paul is saying is that God has so created the world that his qualities, his glory, his power, his godness are clearly on show, but the wickedness of human hearts leads to that being suppressed.

[22 : 36] God says in his word, if we open our windows and open our eyes, we're being confronted with the glory of God day by day by day, whether we're looking in a telescope or looking in a microscope, we're seeing the glory of God in view, but it's a truth that people want to suppress.

It's where the talk of intelligent design becomes a really awkward one in classrooms, a reality that's often ignored. But even then, even if our eyes were open and we looked out our window and we saw the glory of God and we recognized there was a creator, there was an intelligent design behind it all, that would not be enough for us to be saved.

That's why the Bible is necessary. There is limits to what we can learn about God from creation. It can't tell us about sin. It can't tell us about salvation.

it can't tell us about the person and work of Jesus. It can tell us that there is a God, but we need to know God's word in order to know salvation.

Verse 16 is how God has responded to that need because he has given us the gospel, the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

[24 : 09] That in God's word and in the word of the gospel, this gift of a righteousness credited to us by faith is made plain.

The way of salvation through faith in Jesus is made plain. There was an article just this week by a chap called Brian Tabb who was saying that Jesus is like a great optician because what Jesus did with the disciples, he was focusing on the Emmaus road, Luke 24, but you can think more widely as he's helping his disciples with their focus.

All the time he's wanting them to see his identity and his saving purpose. And that's still Jesus' desire for us today that we would see and know that at the center of the Bible, at the center of God's plan for history and for the nations, is Jesus, the only Savior for sinners.

God's word is necessary because if we didn't have the Bible and we wanted to know about God, what would we be left with? We'd be left with vague spirituality.

We'd be looking for answers, but we wouldn't find the answers until we find the word of God. Perhaps we, well, I think God is like this. I hope God will accept me because I'm like this, but we'd have no certainty, no sure knowledge.

[25 : 47] And so Kevin DeYoung says we need the revelation of God to know God. And the only sure, saving, final, perfect revelation of God is found in Scripture.

That's the doctrine of Scripture, very briefly. It is sufficient, it is clear, it has authority, and it is necessary.

Now let's pause for a moment. We've still got a little bit of work to do. But as we're catching our breath, let's ask the question, if that is true, what now?

If that is true, what does that mean for my attitude to making time to read the Bible, to coming to church and to being under God's Word?

If that's true, if it's sufficient and clear and has authority as necessary, shouldn't we treasure it as the people of God? Shouldn't we come to depend on it?

[26 : 59] Shouldn't we be committing to reading it and to giving it first place? Shouldn't we want to learn how to apply its truth to our life and to all of life and to the lives of others?

Shouldn't we want to share it with others? The doctrine of Scripture is so valuable because sometimes our view of the Word of God gets fuzzy, gets out of focus, and the doctrine of Scripture is like that lens that reminds us the Bible matters.

It's crucial to our life of faith. Sometimes our taste for the Word of God, if we're honest, gets weak. We'd rather spend our time reading, watching, doing something else.

So we need the doctrine of Scripture to remind us that God's Word should be, ought to be sweeter than honey to us as the people of God.

So I want to do, for the last of our time to show, is, I never use acronyms, but we're going to use an acronym, second acronym, we scan, if you want to think about the doctrine of Scripture, scan, but to think about the Bible for everyday life for a Christian, think about the word sweet.

[28 : 18] Okay, so five sweet truths about the Bible for everyday life, because Psalm 19 verse 10 says, they are sweeter, God's words are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

Okay, so our first letter is S, and S stands for sanctify, God's Word sanctifies, God's Word is what makes us holy and clean as we sit under it and allow it to change us.

Jesus said, John 17 17, he prayed to his father, sanctify them by the truth, your Word is truth.

So the truths of the Bible are what God uses to make us clean and holy for him. Perhaps an image would be helpful, the image of a doctor.

Say you go to a doctor because you've got an infection. Well, the doctor there discovers the infection, diagnoses the infection, gives medicine to cure.

[29 : 29] What does the Bible do? The Bible, when we allow it, exposes sin and error. It convicts us of where we go wrong and it shows and enables a new way of life if we allow it to.

It requires the work of the Spirit to shine the light of Scripture. to convict us. It requires the Spirit to give us the power to obey what we read, to say no to sin and yes to righteousness.

So if we want to grow in grace, if we want to grow to be more holy, to be more like Jesus, we need our Bibles.

And one of the things that the Bible will always do, if we allow it, it will remind us that God is worthy of worship and God alone and not us. Constantly be recalibrating our thinking.

It will constantly be reminding us that we are called to live for God's glory and not our own. And it will constantly be showing us the wonder of God and his love.

[30 : 38] So our hearts may be changed, so our lives may be changed. So God's word sanctifies. God's word also warns, and we have that also in Psalm 19 verse 11, by them, by those words of God is your servant warned.

In keeping them, there is great reward. The Bible is very realistic. It's very realistic about the dangers that God's people face, the danger of the devil, our adversary, the deceiver, the one who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

There is also, in the book of Hebrews, the danger of drift. The book of Revelation, the danger of becoming lukewarm in our faith. There's the danger of disobedience, there's the danger of disbelief.

And we need the Bible so that we keep hearing those warnings so that we can check ourselves and see where we need corrected, where we need rebuked.

an image perhaps to help us. Think of a parent. Why does a parent give warnings? Well, on our best days, parents give warnings out of love.

[31 : 55] Don't touch that, it's hot. Don't run on the road, it's busy, you'll get hurt. Why do we correct, why do we discipline, again, on our best days? Because of love.

We have a loving Father in heaven, and he uses the Bible to sound a loving warning for us, to warn us of sin, to warn us of judgment, to warn us of the reality of hell, to show us our need.

We have a loving Father who wants to correct us when we go wrong, when we get pulled towards idolatry, when we get pulled into rebellion, to return us onto the right path.

So he needs our Bibles, so that we are hearing those warnings, to avoid being burned, to enjoy the Father's smile, and not the Father's frown.

So God's word warns. But it also encourages us, there's a wonderful text in Romans 15, Romans 15 and verse 4, where it says, everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the scriptures and the encouragement the scriptures provide, we might have hope.

[33 : 17] Scripture encourages us, Scripture gives hope, God's word calls us to have hope in a God who will not disappoint. As people we're always looking for hope.

In just a few weeks time we're going to be doing Hope Explored, inviting family and friends to think about hope, meaning and purpose that's found in Jesus. So God's word encourages us by pointing us to the hope that we have in Jesus.

So here perhaps the image is that of a coach, I think, in the world of sports. Those words that keep you going when you'd rather quit.

Words that help you persevere and that renew motivation. And the Bible is full of encouragements. full of beautiful truths about our God.

God is our refuge. God is a strong rock. God's mercies are new every morning. Our God is a God of steadfast love. Jesus is a Savior who will never leave us or abandon us.

[34 : 21] In Jesus there is no condemnation. There is resurrection hope. There is a new heaven and earth. God's word is constantly looking to encourage us to keep on going.

And so we need the Bible because we need that fresh encouragement day by day. The next E to think about. The Bible enlightens us.

Again this is Psalm 19 verse 8 where we read the commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes. in the midst of moral darkness and confusion.

What does the Bible do for us? It shines a clear light for us on how we are to live in our families, in our society, in our workplaces, in our church.

Perhaps an image that's helpful to think of a guide leading people on a difficult mountain pass. Perhaps the conditions become dark but that guide is up ahead and he's got the torch and he's got the ropes and he knows the way and there's safety in following that path.

[35 : 38] There is safety in following the guidance of God's Word. We need the Bible to hear that voice of true wisdom. We know that we're surrounded by all kinds of other voices and views that disagree sometimes fundamentally with what God's Word teaches.

And so we need the wisdom principles that we find in the Bible. Now we're not going to find specifics and sometimes we can go wrong because we come with very specific questions.

Should I take this job? Should I move to this place? Should I marry this person? That's not what the Bible is concerned with in the first instance. It's principles for how to live a holy life, how to live for the glory of God day by day and there are wisdom principles to enlighten us that we need to be listening to.

And then the last thing, God's Word does many things more than this, but here's the last thing for every life God's Word teaches us. Psalm 119, that great love song to the Bible, verse 68, you are good and what you do is good.

teach me your decrees. The Bible teaches us, the Bible trains us to come with an open heart, to come with a willing heart, to come ready to listen to God speaking by his Spirit through the Word.

[37 : 05] It means the Spirit is able to teach us, the Spirit is able to transform us. God's Word is like a teacher who brings old and new truths to life for us.

And so we are called to treasure the Bible, recognizing that there's always so much more for us to discover.

Our God is infinite and eternal, so we're never done understanding the character of God, the nature of God, the promises of God. We'll never grow tired of discovering the wonder of the gospel.

we're always going to need to hear about fighting against sin, about pursuing holiness, about living for future hope.

And so God's Word teaches us. So it sanctifies us, it warns us, it encourages us, it enlightens us, and it teaches us.

[38 : 10] all that's left, again, to borrow the language of the Bible, taste and see that God is good.

I hope that as we see the importance of believing the Bible is God's Word, as we come to see that God teaches us that it's reliable, it has authority, it's true, it's life giving, that we'll be encouraged to pick it up and to read it, to recognize how necessary, how vital and life giving it is for us.

Two quotes to finish, one from Spurgeon, again, to give us confidence in the Word of God and its power to work in our life and in the lives of others. Scripture is like a lion.

Whoever heard of defending a lion, turn it loose, it will defend itself. And then Calvin, Scripture is like a pair of spectacles, which dispels the darkness and gives us a clear view of God.

And may that be the case for each one of us. Let's pray briefly. Lord, we thank you so much for your Word. We thank you for what it says about itself and what it reveals about your character and about your salvation.

[39 : 31] Lord, we pray that you would give us an increasing desire to be people shaped by your Word. Give us time to spend with you. Give us that discipline to make the time.

Give us open hearts to receive from you that increasingly we be conformed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus as we are shaped by your Word.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So we're going to close the formal part of the evening singing Psalm 19. And then after that, if you want to stick around, you'll be very welcome for a time of discussion.

And after this, we'll stick our discussion questions up. But let's stand for Psalm 19, verses 7 to 11. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19.

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