

Steve Whitacre

SESSION 1: WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

Class Overview

“Now these Jews [in Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.” (Acts 17:11–12).

"Raking is easy, but you get only leaves; digging is hard, but you might find diamonds." John Piper, *Future Grace*, 387.

Theologian Grant Osborne (*The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 21-22) says that bible interpretation is:

- Science:
- Art:
- Spiritual act:

Class Schedule

- January 17: What is the Bible?
 - January 24: Genre Matters
 - January 31: Context is Key
 - February 7: Find Christ
 - February 14: Interpretation Lab 1: Old Testament
 - February 21: Interpretation Lab 2: Old Testament
 - February 28: Interpretation Lab 3: New Testament
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I. What Is the Bible

Today we are going to talk about: What is the Bible? Our goal for today is to stir up confidence in our hearts that when we come to this book, God will meet us. One way for us to do that is to answer the question, "What is the Bible?"

There are a lot of different ways people have answered this question.

- Literature
- Myth
- Propaganda
- Word of God

God's Word = God's speech, God's truth, God's Word to us, including his controlling power, his authority, and his personal presence (John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 519–531)

The Bible is God's revelation of himself and the history of his saving actions toward his people, which culminate in Jesus Christ.

"The Bible's message is God's work of salvation through Jesus Christ, and its purpose is actually to bring that salvation to individuals who receive that message and believe." Richard Phillips, *Hebrews*, 137.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16).

- All Scripture...
- ...is breathed out by God...
- ...and is profitable...

"By reading other books the heart may be warmed, but by reading this book it is transformed." Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 29.

"One bit of Bible prayed over, and bedewed with the Spirit, and made alive, though it be only a short sentence of six words, will profit you more than a hundred chapters without the Spirit." Charles Spurgeon, in David Powlison, "Think Globally, Act Locally", *JBC*, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 3.

It's important for us to remember that this is ONE BOOK.

II. What We Believe About the Bible

SCAN [quoted from Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word*, 44. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chapters 4-8.]

- **Sufficiency:** The Scriptures contain everything we need for knowledge of salvation and godly living. We don't need any new revelation from heaven.
- **Clarity:** The saving message of Jesus Christ is plainly taught in the Scriptures and can be understood by all who have ears to hear it. We don't need an official magisterium to tell us why the Bible means.
 - "Scripture is like a river again, broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim." Gregory the Great (540-604).
- **Authority:** The last word always goes to the word of God. We must never allow the teachings of science, or human experience, or of church councils to the precedence over Scripture.
 - "Let the man who would hear God speak read Holy Scripture." Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, comp. Ewald Plass, 61.
- **Necessity:** general revelation is not enough to save us. We cannot know God savingly by means of personal experience and human reason. We need God's word to tell us how to live, who Christ is, and how to be saved.
- + **Inerrancy:** The Bible is "free from error or untruth." (John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 597).

"[Christians] are everywhere assumed to be competent to understand what is written, and are everywhere required to believe and obey what thus came from the inspired messengers of Christ. They were not referred to any other authority from which they were to learn the true import of these inspired instructions." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*, 185.

III. Progressive Revelation

The Bible is progressive revelation of God's saving acts in Christ Jesus.

IV. Where Do We Go From Here?

A quick reference guide for interpreting the Bible:

1. What is the genre? (What kind of writing is this?)
2. What is the context? (What is the author trying to communicate?)
3. How does this text point to Christ?

V. Recommended Reading

- Rob Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*
 - R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*
 - Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word*
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