

- Premature Conclusions of Contradictory Truth

- Sometimes “incontrovertible” facts of history or science seem to stand in contrast to or even directly contradict Scripture.
- One point to keep in mind is whether the conflict is over what the text says or over what others have interpreted it to say. (*Does the Bible really teach geo-centrism as some in Galileo’s day thought?*)
- Just as we must sometimes remain tentative in our interpretation of Scripture, we must also realize that our understanding of science has developed over time and is constantly adapting. (At one point, a steady-state universe seemed to contradict Genesis 1. Many scientists resisted the “Big Bang” theory because of the seeming plausibility it gave to the Biblical account.)

Paul Feinberg: “Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm....” ~ p. 152

- Be willing to study out difficult passages (commentaries or *Hard Sayings of the Bible* by Walter Kaiser Jr., F.F. Bruce, and others)
- Examples: Daniel 5 – Belshazzar was unknown to history until the Nabonidus Chronicle was discovered in the latter half of the 19th Century; Daniel 6 – Darius the Mede puzzled many until careful study revealed it may be an enthronement name for either Cyrus or Cyaxares II; Kingdom of David & Solomon – was called a myth but the Tel Dan inscription (“house of David”) found in 1993 and other recent discoveries speak otherwise.
- “*Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*” – archeology doesn’t have to “prove” the Bible but can speak to “plausibility.”
- Sometimes we need a better understanding of Scripture or even to change our views to agree with Scripture (see Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*).

A Look Ahead at Next Week

- Guest teacher next week, then no SS class July 2.

Goal: Grow in our understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, be equipped to answer objections, and to better learn how to read and understand the Bible.

Sources: Quotes indicated “TDOS” are from Mark Thompson, *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2022). Lesson 6 draws heavily from TDOS, chapter 4.

Scripture: Theology, Text & Transmission

Class 6: Scripture’s Character: Clarity & Truthfulness

Review

Last week we looked at the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture and at which books should be considered part of the “canon” of Scripture (in our Bibles). Since we have a God who speaks and wants his church to have his Word, we approached the canon question with a presumption that God would guide his Church into accepting the books He wants us to have. And we found that all sectors of the greater Church (Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Eastern/Syriac Orthodox, and Protestants) agree on the 66 books in our Bibles as being Scripture, even if differences of opinion remain re: a few additional OT books (Apocrypha).

The Character of Scripture

Now that we have settled “**what** Scripture is” (the written record of the speech of the living God), we can move on to “**how** Scripture is.” Focusing on Scripture’s character helps us to recognize its authority – especially in light of ways people can minimize Scripture:

- 1) Catholics and others diminish the Word in favor of the rule of their preferred church tradition
- 2) Charismatics can minimize the Word by their preference for individual applications and Spirit-encounters.
- 3) Contemporary people discount God’s Word by their predisposition to stay true to themselves and their feelings

We will spend time on four main characteristics of Scripture: clarity, truthfulness, sufficiency and efficacy. God is like this, and so Scripture is clear, truthful, sufficient, and powerfully effective.

I. The Clarity [or Perspicuity] of Scripture

A. Definition – the clarity of Scripture is:

“...that quality of the biblical text that, as God’s communicative act, ensures meaning is accessible to all who come to it in faith.” ~ TDOS, p. 125

- Deut. 30:11-14 (& 29:29); Ps. 19:7; Ps. 119:105, 130; 2 Tim. 3:16

- The Roman Catholic Church resisted the common reading of the Bible by layman. The Reformers insisted God’s Word did not need authoritative external interpreters and should be read by all.

Martin Luther: “[Holy Scripture is] in and of itself the most certain, the most accessible, the most clear of all, interpreting itself, approving, judging and illuminating all things.” ~ TDOS, p. 127

Westminster Confession of Faith 1.7: “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in due use of ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.” ~ TDOS, p. 129

- Clarity is tied up with the purpose for Scripture (2 Tim. 3:15).

“As Luther asked Erasmus: ‘If Scripture is obscure or ambiguous, what point is there in God giving it to us?’” ~ TDOS, p. 130

B. Clarifications

- Clarity is not the same as simplicity – 2 Pet. 3:16

“Gregory the Great likened Scripture to a river ‘both shallow and deep, in which the lamb may find a footing and the elephant swim.’” ~ TDOS, 132

- Clarity is not the same as illumination – 2 Cor. 4:4, 1 Cor. 2:14
- Clarity does not ensure everything is understood at once – 2 Pet. 3:18, Acts 8:30-35, Ps. 119:18
- Clarity does not make teaching/teachers or study superfluous – Eph. 4:11-12, 2 Tim. 2:15, 1 Tim. 4:13

“My propensity to read my own culture and preferences into the text or to champion my own idiosyncratic reading needs to be challenged...” ~ p. 138

- Clarity does not guarantee universal agreement about meaning – Matt. 25:11-12, Acts 20:30, 2 Tim. 4:2-4, Jude 3 but also Rom. 14:2-5, 1 Cor. 2:3-4, 21-23, Eph. 4:4, 13-14,

II. The Truthfulness [or Inerrancy] of Scripture

A. Terms

- Infallibility (does not fail) and Inerrancy (does not err) – were both used interchangeably for most of church history (until mid-

20th Century when some held to infallibility of Scripture for what God intends for it but would not hold that Scripture is free from error)

- Consistent Church affirmation of Truthfulness in Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions. Sample quotes:
 - Augustine of Hippo: “completely free from error”
 - John Wycliffe: “The authority of Holy Scripture is infallible... Scripture remains true in its totality.”
 - Zwingli: “The word of God is certain and can never fail. It is clear, and will never leave us in darkness. It teaches its own truth.”
 - Luther: “The Holy Spirit neither lies nor errs nor doubts.” ~ p. 142

B. Jesus & the Scripture’s Teaching

- Jesus’ word is truth (Jn. 8:31-32) as He is (14:6), and God’s Word is truth (Jn. 17:17, 19). (See also Jn. 10:35b.)
- God is not a man that he should lie (Num. 23:19), and his word is true (2 Sam. 7:28, Ps. 18:30, Tit. 1:2)

“The Bible must be both true and trustworthy if it is the word of the God we know as ‘the God of truth’ (Isa. 65:16). And this is exactly what Scripture testifies about itself (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17).” ~ TDOS, 148

C. Difficulties with Inerrancy (2 errors of method)

- Anachronistic or False Expectations of Precision
 - We forget that Scripture was written hundreds of years ago in a different culture with different conventions of language than ours.
 - Our modern quest for precision (with tape recorders and computers) creates an unreasonable expectation when applied to the Bible.
 - We must also be sensitive to the type of literature (genre) we are dealing with as our literary and even grammatical conventions are not universal to all types of literature and all eras.
 - Examples: use of round numbers, phenomenological language (sunrise, four corners of earth), eyewitness testimony differing in details (like different camera angles in a movie, parallel Gospel accounts will differ – yet even in a modern courtroom this is the norm) – no need for detailed harmonies leading to (6 denials of Jesus by Peter – as per Harold Lindsell), different emphases in doctrine (Romans 3:28 vs. James 2:24)