

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Christian Belief

Topic: Scripture

Spring 2024

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. Last week was an introduction to theology. This week's session will focus on the doctrine of Scripture.

What is the Big Idea?

God chooses to specially reveal Himself through a variety of means, including His mighty acts and His words. The latter includes both audible and written words. The most important of God's words are the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. While the Bible is God's words to all people, it is especially His words to believers.

First, the Bible is inspired. The Bible is literally God's words in written form, even though it was written by dozens of different authors over a period of about a thousand years. Second, the Bible is authoritative. Because these words are God's words, they carry with them God's authority. Third, the Bible is trustworthy. Because God is holy and doesn't lie, His words reflect His holy character. Finally, the Bible is sufficient. Though the Bible doesn't tell us everything there is to know, it tells us everything we need to know to become Christians and grow as follower of Jesus Christ.

What do the Scriptures Say?

Sometimes the words and writings of people are also called God's words. The New Testament identifies the words of Old Testament prophets with God's words (Matt 1:22-23). It also argues that the entire Old Testament is God's words that He has breathed out into written form (2 Tim 3:15-16). The Old Testament is alive with God's power and changes people's lives (Heb 4:12). The New Testament also identifies itself with God's words, implying that the New Testament is inspired in the same way as the Old Testament (Col. 4:16; 2 Pet 3:15-16).

“inspired” in the sense that Shakespeare or Bach might be considered inspired, but Scripture is not God-breathed because fallible humans wrote it. They questioned the Bible’s supernatural origins and rejected its factual accuracy, especially in matters of history and science. Theologically liberal Protestants and Catholics embraced the Enlightenment view of Scripture, which was reinforced by two trends that became popular in the 19th century: (1) higher criticism of the Bible and (2) Darwinian evolution.

In response to skeptical and liberal views, conservative Protestants argued for plenary-verbal inspiration and biblical inerrancy in the 19th century. Both concepts speak to the original manuscripts of the Scriptures as they were first written in Hebrew and Greek. Plenary-verbal inspiration means that every word of Scripture is inspired, and every part of Scripture is equally inspired. Inerrancy means that the Bible doesn’t err in matters of fact. These weren’t new ideas but were restatements of historical beliefs about biblical inspiration and trustworthiness. As conservative theologians made their case, they often appealed to the incarnation as an analogy to help explain how the Bible can be genuinely divine and genuinely human at the same time.

Many Christian traditions experienced controversy over Scripture in the 20th century. In the 1920s and 1930s, the major northern denominations split between fundamentalists and modernists, with the former affirming inerrancy and the latter rejecting the doctrine. In the 1960s and 1970s, southern Presbyterians and midwestern Lutherans divided between inerrantists and non-inerrantists. Between 1979 and 2000, Southern Baptists endured a significant controversy over biblical inerrancy, with inerrantists gaining control of the SBC’s agencies and boards.

Because of the inerrancy debates, in 1978 over one hundred evangelical scholars drafted the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, a document that rearticulated the historic Christian view of biblical truthfulness in a way that speaks to the contemporary world. The Chicago Statement argued the following about inerrancy:

- ⇒ The original autographs (or initial manuscripts) are totally free from factual errors because the God who inspired them is completely trustworthy and never lies.

How Should We Then Live?

Scripture plays a central role in our spiritual formation as believers. Evangelical spirituality has always been strongly shaped by reading, memorizing, and meditating on Scripture.

Scripture plays a central role in the health of local churches. Protestants appeal to the Bible as our ultimate authority in church life, even as we disagree among ourselves about how best to interpret and apply the Scriptures.

Scripture plays a central role in evangelism and discipleship. The plan of salvation is communicated through the Scripture, which tells us "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17).

We must be willing to defend the doctrine of Scripture, even as we seek to understand the Bible's teachings and pass them on to others.

Recommended Resources

The Gospel Coalition theological essays about the Bible

Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me* (Crossway, 2017).

Mark Thompson, *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2022).

David Dockery and Malcolm Yarnell, *Special Revelation and Scripture* (B&H Academic, 2024).

D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Eerdmans, 2016).
