

My Weekly Community with God's People

LESSON

Introduction

In our statement of faith, we say this about the Bible:

We believe God has spoken to us through the Bible, the collection of sixty-six books received by the historic Christian church. The Holy Spirit inspired human authors to write these books, and consequently, we hold the entire Bible to be true, not just parts of it; we hold the words to be true, not just the ideas they convey. We submit to the authority of the Bible.

This statement is written in contemporary non-specialized language so it does not need much explanation. However, it is highly contracted. To flesh this out, I use the Westminster Confession of Faith as a template for our study on the Bible.

1. The Bible as Revelation

God reveals himself to humankind in two ways: (1) General Revelation and (2) Special Revelation.

General Revelation is when God reveals himself through his creation.¹ We can see God's goodness, wisdom and power through creation. So we are without excuse if we reject God who has revealed himself through his creation.² This is God's visual display. When we look at a piece of art, we understand it much better when we see the title. A picture is vivid but we need words to convey the thought of the artist. Similarly, God gives us a verbal explanation in addition to the visual display. We call this verbal communication: Special Revelation.

Special Revelation is God speaking to and through the prophets before Jesus Christ came and God speaking to and through the apostles after Jesus Christ came.³ God selected the Special Revelation we need and put these in writing.⁴ While the Bible is a

¹ **Psalm 19**¹ The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ² Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. ³ They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. ⁴ Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

² **Romans 1**¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ 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. **Rom 2**¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)

³ **Hebrews 1**¹ In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

⁴ **2 Timothy 3**¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **Rom 15**⁴ For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

record of revelation, it is also God's selected revelation for us. ⁵So when we say "Special Revelation" or simply "God's Revelation" we usually refer to special written revelation – Bible. The written word of God, the Scripture, is essential because it is an objective reference to God's revelation. Without this objective reference point, any person can come along and claim they have a revelation from God even when they contradict what God has already said. The written word prevents spurious claims to revelation. ⁶

2. The composition of the Bible

The Holy Scriptures comprise a collection of 66 books of the Old Testament (written before Jesus) and the New Testament (written after Jesus). This is commonly called the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church included the Apocrypha a collection of disputed books as having secondary authority to their Bible. This was done only in the sixteenth century through very dubious motives. ⁷We reject these as having no place in the Bible. Even Catholics know it is at best "secondary," and most do not use these books because they are obviously inferior. We also do not accept church tradition as authoritative, and we do not recognize the pronouncement of the pope in Rome as any authority. "*Sola Scriptura*" (By Scripture Alone) is the term Christian theologians use to indicate clearly that we submit to the authority of Scripture for doctrine and practice, and nothing else: not the Apocrypha, not the pope, and not any religious tradition. Non-Christian religions may have their scriptures. ⁸While religious groups hold these sacred and we should be sensitive to their beliefs, we make no provision to accept these as from the true God, the Creator of all things.

3. Why we believe the Bible

The Holy Scriptures commend themselves to us in part because so many accept its authority; ⁹ and it has a message that surpasses all other religions; it has prophecies that prove it is from a God who directs the future; and other similar excellences. Notwithstanding the truth of all these wonderful attributes of the Bible, it is the Holy

⁵ [2 Timothy 3¹⁶](#) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

⁶ [2 Peter 1¹⁹](#) We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

⁷ The Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1546 declared seven books (and other additions) and part of the Bible to support their teaching of purgatory (temporary hell for believers). This teaching was used to sell indulgences (certificates for reducing the time in purgatory). When the Catholic Church could not find support in the Bible for this teaching, they added the Apocrypha into the Bible because purgatory is mentioned in the Apocrypha.

⁸ Not all religions consider their scriptures the same way we regard ours. We must not place our theology of Scripture on how other religions think.

⁹ Christianity is the largest religion in the world today.

Spirit of God who illumines the Word of God, so our minds can perceive, our hearts can receive, and our hands can perform the things written therein.¹⁰

4. We embrace all of the Bible

God desires for us to understand and receive his whole will. We are not to select the parts we like to hear and ignore those parts that we do not like to hear.¹¹ We are to determine right and wrong, good and bad from what God has revealed to us, regardless of whether or not our society agrees with it.¹²

5. The Bible can be understood by ordinary people

Holy Scripture is simple and clear so that all persons of normal intellect are able to understand its essential teaching on God's salvation for us. Some parts of Scripture are more difficult to understand than other parts,¹³ but there is no obscurity that would keep a person from God's salvation.¹⁴

6. Translations of the Bible

The original Scriptures are God-breathed therefore infallible.¹⁵ It was written mainly in Hebrew in the Old Testament¹⁶ and Greek in the New Testament. To help us gain access to them, they have been translated into the common language of people. The dominance of the English language in our day has resulted in many excellent translations of Holy Scripture. Poor translations fall into disuse naturally over time.¹⁷

7. Authority of the Bible

The supreme authority of all doctrine, whether controversial or not, is the Holy Scripture. Christian doctrines are teachings that arise from the careful study of Holy Scripture. It is the database from which Christians determine our faith and practice. Where Scripture is silent, there is liberty for personal preferences. - PE

¹⁰ [1 John 5⁹](#) We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son.

¹¹ [The Apostle Paul to the Ephesians – Acts 20²⁷](#) For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

¹² [God does not budge; we have to change to conform to him. Romans 3⁴](#) Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar.

¹³ [2 Peter 3¹⁶](#) He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

¹⁴ [Psalm 119¹⁰⁵](#) Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

¹⁵ [2 Timothy 3¹⁶](#) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

¹⁶ The other language is Aramaic found in [Daniel 2:4-7:28](#); [Ezra 4:8-6:18](#); [Genesis 31:47](#); [Jeremiah 10:11](#).

¹⁷ We reject the view that any translation is inspired by God or divinely preserved in any way. This was the claim made by the Roman Catholic Church on the Latin Vulgate translation, and more recently by some Christians on the English King James Version.

