

Friday Bible Study - Week Three

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[0 : 0 0] Hello, my name is Brian Hart. Welcome again to Friday Bible Study. We are in week three of this series trying to make the most of our time in quarantine during the shutdown.

And we've talked in the first two weeks of this study about some introduction to theology and doctrine and who God is. And all of that we rooted in Scripture. We made a big deal about that, that everything we know about God comes from Scripture. And so today we are going to look at the Scriptures themselves. We're going to look at the doctrine of the Scriptures, of the Bible. And we're going to try to answer some questions about what is the Bible and what are we supposed to believe about it? And what about all the contradictions that seem to be all through the Bible? I mean, how could you even trust it? So those are some of the things we are going to get into today. The word Bible just is a translation of a word that means book. It is a book of many books. There are 66 books in the Bible and together they form what we call the canon of Scripture.

The word canon comes from a Greek word that means rule. So what we're saying is those 66 books, they and only they are the books that will ever belong in the Bible. And they are the rule against which we measure our faith and our practice. Now, the word Bible and the word Scripture or Scriptures can be used interchangeably. I'm probably going to use the word Scripture more today because that is the word that we find most in the Bible that it uses to describe itself.

Now, when we talk about the Scriptures, when we approach them, it's vitally important that we understand how we should approach them. And so I'm going to give you five things that Christians believe or should believe about the Scriptures. And if you can hold all five of those together, I think it will help you to handle them in the right way. First, Scripture has the authority of being God's word. Now, that does not mean that all the words in the Bible were originally spoken by God.

The Bible quotes hundreds of people, men like King David or Moses. The Bible even quotes Satan. And what we mean is that everything in the Bible ultimately came from God, and he wants us to know it so that we can believe it and obey it. And so that's a way in which the Bible is different from other books which may be true. Your high school history book may have been true, but you did not have to believe it, and you certainly did not have to obey it. With Scripture, you have to do both.

[2 : 4 2] And one of the best verses in the Bible for understanding how we should think about Scripture comes from 2 Timothy 3, verse 16. It says that all Scripture, not some, not the parts that we like, all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. And so this idea of God breathing these words out, it's from that idea that theologians have drawn the idea of inspirations.

You'll commonly find theologians who will say that the words of the Bible were inspired by God, not in a sentimental sense, but in the sense that God breathes them out into the hearts of men. And the Bible was written by actual people. It's why you can see definite differences in writing style from one person to the next. But all of their words were ultimately inspired or breathed out by God into their hearts and minds. Jesus himself affirmed the authority of the Scriptures by the fact that he quoted from them all the time. He even said that the Scriptures can't be broken.

He had a very high view of the authority of the Scriptures. So we don't read the Bible merely to learn from it like we would from a history book. We go to it to receive God's authority for our lives.

The second thing that we believe about the Bible is that Scripture is clear. And you may kind of bristle at that a little bit because you might feel like, wow, there's actually huge parts of the Bible that don't seem clear. So I'm going to explain what we mean by this.

You don't have to be a PhD and you definitely don't have to be some kind of spiritual guru or spiritual giant to understand the teachings of the Bible. Anyone who seeks God and desires to obey Him can read Scripture and understand it. But I want to add some caveats here. It doesn't always happen right away.

[4 : 40] So sometimes when we read Scripture, we have to do a little bit of work to study it and understand it like we would of anything that's new to us. But the fact of the matter is you can do it.

It is not only for professionals like theologians and scholars or for pastors. It's for all of us. And secondly, the fact that the Bible is clear does not mean that it will never be confusing or that sometimes we won't disagree. When either of those things happen, the assumption that most people have is that the problem is with the Bible or the problem is with the Scriptures. We'll say like, well, this is why you can't trust the Bible because it's so confusing.

Or people disagree about some things. In Jesus' day, when people misunderstood Scripture, He said the problem was with them, not the Scriptures. And so that's a helpful thing to remember that when we don't understand or when we disagree, well, we have hearts that are troubled by many things. We're sinful people and we have all kind of wrong assumptions about God, many of which that we don't even know we have. And so our disagreements, insofar as we have them about what Scripture actually says, those disagreements will say more about us than they do about God and His Word.

The other thing to keep in mind is that sometimes we get so focused on what we disagree about that we miss the fact that there is far more that we agree on when it comes to the Scriptures.

Most of the Bible is overwhelmingly clear in what it teaches as it regards to its central truths. The Bible is very clear that God created the world and humanity sinned and God chose a covenant people for Himself. And then Jesus came as a man and died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead and we are awaiting His return. Those things, on top of many other things, are very, very clear.

[6 : 30] Psalm 119 is a very long psalm which praises the words and the laws of God. And in verses 129 and 130, it says, Your testimonies are wonderful, therefore my soul keeps them. The unfolding of your words gives light.

It imparts understanding to the simple. And so the simple one is not necessarily someone who lives a simple life. The simple person in the Bible is the one who lacks judgment, who is easily led astray.

God's words are so easy to understand that even that kind of person is helped by them. The third thing that we believe is that Scripture is necessary. We said in week one that you can know some things about God. You can know He exists just from the world around you. There's general knowledge or general revelation found all around us. But there are many more things about God and the purpose He has for your life that you can only know if you go to discover them in the Scriptures.

Deuteronomy 8 verse 3 says that God's words are so necessary for us that they are like food. Jesus tempts that, sorry, Jesus quotes that verse when He is tempted by the devil. In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus answered the devil, it's written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

And so without God's words, there's a sense in which we starve. You cannot and you will not live the way that you are meant to if you do not know what the Scriptures have to say. They are necessary.

[8 : 04] Fourth, Scripture is sufficient in its scope. Now bear with me. I am probably going to say something here that might be unsettling for some of you. There's a very sort of common pithy little acrostic saying, you know, for the word Bible, basic instructions before leaving earth, which sounds very nice. I think that one of the reasons some people struggle with the Bible is because they have approached it like that, as if it is some kind of manual for their life. But that is not what the Bible is. That is not the scope of the Bible. There are principles in the Bible which apply directly to many areas of our life and indirectly to other areas of our life. But there are many other areas of life that the Bible is remarkably silent. The Bible will not tell you how to change the oil in your car.

And I appreciate that that one is a little obvious. But there's other areas that are less obvious. And I think Christians get frustrated when they have the expectation that the Bible will address all these really important decisions they have to make. And it doesn't seem to do that. For instance, if you want to know what the Bible says about 21st century modern dating relationships, that is going to be difficult because the Bible doesn't say anything directly about those kind of relationships. That's not how relationships worked in the day the Bible was written. If you want to know what the Bible says about politics, that also will be difficult because the Bible was not written with a constitutional republic in mind. The New Testament talks about how to submit to your government leaders. It is silent on how we should participate in the government as leaders. That is all outside the scope of Scripture.

So what is the scope of Scripture? The theologian Michael Horton says this helpfully, the scope of Scripture is God's commands and promises, the law and the gospel, centering on the unfolding plan of redemption in Jesus Christ. So the Bible does not have an answer for every question that you might have, but it is totally sufficient. It has everything you need for salvation, for knowing the love of God and loving him in return. We have already read from 2nd Timothy chapter 3 about God's words being breathed out by God. I want to read to you what stands on either side of that passage. Paul writes to a young man, Timothy, and he says, But as for you, Timothy, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. The Bible gives you everything you need to be complete in Jesus. There's a lot of gray in the everyday decisions of everyday life, but when it comes to being a Christian and living for the Lord, the Bible has made it very clear what that looks like and gives you what you need. The last thing I will talk about today that we believe about Scripture is that Scripture is inerrant. In other words, we believe that when the Bible was originally written, it was not contrary to anything that is true. We've already considered that these are words from the mouth of God himself.

Hebrews chapter 6 verse 18 tells us that it is impossible for God to tell a lie. But this idea of inerrancy is maybe one of the more controversial things that Christians believe about the Bible, partly because that idea has come under a lot of criticism in the last several centuries, and different Christians mean different things now when they use the word inerrancy. We do not mean that every word of Scripture should be taken literally. For instance, there are many types of literature in the Bible which use imaginative, metaphorical, or allegorical language. Jesus often would use hyperbole to emphasize this point. He would say, if your eye causes you to sin, cut it out.

But we just kind of know not to take that literally because no one in 2,000 years of church history has insisted that we all cut our eyes out. So there are different kinds of literature in the Bible.

[12 : 21] There is debate, for instance, about how Christians should read and understand Genesis 1. Is Genesis 1 meant to be a kind of a series that give you a series of facts about how God created the world in a literal six-day, 24-hour creation cycle? Or is Genesis 1 meant to be read more like a poem that's giving you some theological truths? Well, there are Christians who take opposing views on how to answer that question and still both claim to hold the doctrine of inerrancy. So one way of thinking about inerrancy is that all of Scripture is true in the way that God meant for it to be true.

For instance, when Jesus taught parables, they were true in what they taught despite the fact that they were fictional stories that never took place. In the same way, Scripture gives us other stories in some places, such as the life of Job, that are true even though we think that it's likely Job was not a historical person or may not have been a historical person. On the other hand, there are other places in the Bible where the truth of the passage depends entirely on the historic authenticity of the actual event. The virgin birth of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus are two examples where what we believe hinges on those things actually happening in time and space.

So inerrancy is about seeing God's truth in all of Scripture, not taking all of Scripture in a one-dimensional literal sense. Now, many of the contradictions that people think are in Scripture are actually a result of a failure to properly interpret one or both of the passages they're comparing. Maybe because they don't understand the type of literature involved, or maybe there's an area of doctrine or theology that's not being properly understood in that context. For example, there's a story told two different times where King David took a census, something he should not have done for reasons we won't get into today. But in 2 Samuel 24, it says that God provoked David to taking the census. But then in 1 Chronicles 21, it says that Satan incited David to take the census.

And so people will say, oh, this is a great example of a contradiction that proves why you can't trust the Bible and it's full of errors. Well, that is actually missing something very important that's being reflected in both of these passages. Those two books, 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, were written at different times to different audiences, and they were making and emphasizing different points. Chronicles is emphasizing Satan's role in tempting David, but Samuel is emphasizing God's sovereign role over all things to include Satan, and he's going to use this for his purposes. And so that idea of God using what other people do for his purposes is actually found all through the Bible. It's the doctrine of his sovereignty. We see it in the story of Job. Satan gets permission from God to tempt Job.

And so there's a sense in which Satan is tempting Job, and there's a sense in which God takes responsibility for the whole thing. We also see in Acts chapter 2, Peter says that Jesus was delivered according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, but he was killed at the hands of lawless men.

[15 : 30] So who's responsible? Well, the doctrine of God's sovereignty helps us understand that both are true at the same time, and that's how we would make sense of this seeming contradiction in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles.

And if you don't understand God's sovereignty, you would miss that. Another common mistake is to misunderstand that in the days the Bible was written, it was considered acceptable for a storyteller to modify the chronology of a sequence of events in a story to illustrate a point. And if you don't understand that, then you can read two different stories that give two different sequences of the facts in the story, and you can think there's a contradiction. Really, one or both of the authors is arranging the contents of the story thematically. So we can affirm the inerrancy of the Bible while also affirming we need to be careful about how we interpret it. Now, before we get into the practicals of how we might do that, I want to address something that I think a lot of people might say at this point.

Man, Brian, you've given five things we're supposed to believe about the Bible, and in every case, you used a circular argument. You're using the Bible to tell us why we should believe the Bible, to which I would say, yes, I certainly did, and it is a form of circular reasoning.

I would only point out that all appeals to ultimate authority. So if you don't think ultimate authority or truth is found in the Bible, if you think it's found elsewhere, it's always going to be a kind of circular reasoning you have to use to defend yourself. If you say reason is your ultimate authority, well, it's because that seems reasonable to you, and you will use reason to defend reason.

If you say human experience is the ultimate authority, then you end up disavowing anything that your human experience hasn't discovered, and you believe that to be true because your human experience tells you that principle is true. So what I want you to understand is that any claim for ultimate authority and truth will require faith in things that cannot be empirically proved.

[17 : 26] Whether you believe in Scripture or reason or experience or nothing, there will always be faith. And so we are, as Christians, we are not embarrassed, not embarrassed that we also have faith in God and His Word. So how then should we interpret Scripture? Well, we said it is clear, but we need to always interpret Scripture with humility and help, which is to say that we don't come to Scripture and assume that the first thing that comes to mind when we read it is always right. We acknowledge the fact that sometimes we can be wrong, and so that's why we get help, first and foremost, from the Holy Spirit. We ask Him to help us read Scripture, and then He also helps us through the community of the church, which is why preaching is so important in the local church. Even those of us who are preachers, it's important for us to regularly sit under the preaching of the Word so we can better understand it and apply it to our lives. There are other ways you can grow in your study of God's Word. There are all kinds of resources, study Bibles, commentaries, things that can help you grow in your understanding of God's Word. A great introduction to studying the Bible and the basic guidelines that will help you approach the various types of literature found in the Bible is a book called *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart.

I just love this book. It has helped me. This is not for the person who, you know, you're like brand new to the Bible, but it's also not for academics. This is for the everyday Christian who is serious about understanding the Scriptures. Now, something I wish we had time to discuss is the question of how can we trust the Bible? Isn't it ancient? Hasn't it been copied thousands of times? How can we know that what we're reading today is the same thing that was written thousands of years ago? If you have those questions, I recommend you go to our website, go to the sermons page, and search for a series called *Hard to Believe*. We filmed that back in 2015. There's a sermon titled, *Isn't the Bible an outdated book of myths* that answers those questions and demonstrates that actually there is more reason to trust the historical authenticity of the Bible than any other ancient document that is still in existence today, period, by a long shot. And so you can find out why that is there. I'd like to close by giving brief consideration to what believing in the doctrine of the Scriptures can mean for your life practically. If you actually believe the Bible has authority and that it's clear and necessary and sufficient and inerrant, it frees you from so many burdens under which people today often suffer.

First, believing in the Scriptures means that you do not have to be the judge of right and wrong. It's very common today for people to say, do what seems right to you, do what feels right to you, and that always sounds good, but it puts a huge amount of pressure on you to figure out what right and wrong is. And what if it turns out later that you're wrong or that what you felt like was right today is considered very unethical in 20 years time? Will you be embarrassed about the kind of lifestyle that you've chosen? Will you be ashamed about the kind of ethics that you embrace today?

While the culture undergoes tremor after tremor of seismic shifts in the moral and ethical landscape, Christians have very sure footing. We do not have to choose what is right and wrong based on the tastes of the current cultural mood. We trust the words of the Lord. And then secondly and lastly, believing in the Scripture means that you do not have to discover or invent the meaning or purpose of your life. Lots of people spend their whole lives stressing out or freaking out about what their meaning is and what their purpose is and what they're meant to be doing. A Christian knows the answer to that question. Ultimately, the job you have, where you live, even whom you marry, as important as those things are, they are incidental or secondary to the much greater purpose that God has for your life.

A purpose which has been made explicitly clear for you in Scripture. And if you know how to harness that purpose, it means you can live in circumstances which would cause other people to despair, but you can live in them and even endure them and not freaking out trying to discover or rediscover the meaning for your life.

[21 : 44] And if you're not sure what that meaning and purpose is, well, that is exactly what we are going to talk about next Friday when we consider the doctrine of humanity. We'll see you then.