

Fil-Am Community Church
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Key verse: 2 Tim 3:16

“The Bible”

Today we begin a series of studies into the foundations of our faith. Over the next three months we will be studying some of the foundational principles and teachings which guide our faith and practice. We’re going to answer fundamental questions like “Who is Jesus? Is the Bible really the Word of God? Can I lose my salvation? Is there a hell?” And we’re going to understand theological terms like justification, sanctification, trinity, and so on.

One of the things most lacking among Christians today is a firm grasp of the doctrinal truths. Now, I know, when someone mentions the word doctrine, many things come to mind. For some, doctrine should stay only in the classroom, not in church on Sunday morning, The very word conjures up images of stiff and serious-looking professors who drone on endlessly about teachings on theology. For others, doctrine is frightening because they feel that they don’t have the intelligence to grasp the complexities of theology. And for others doctrine is well and good but to them it seems far removed from their everyday experience where they struggle to live out their faith in practical ways. So, the \$64 million question is “How is doctrine relevant to my life?”

The answer is, “It is very relevant and practical.” Doctrine teaches us how to think and how we think always determines how we act and how we

live. It starts first in the mind then goes down to the heart and expresses itself through our actions. If we do not think right we cannot act right and we cannot live right. And so, doctrine is the foundation whereupon our practice is built.

In line with this concept, I'd like us to focus on the foundational truths of our faith this year.

I believe the way we conduct our lives, in fact, our behavior, our attitudes, our relationships to people and God are determined largely by what we believe. For example, there was a time when I thought that God didn't love me whenever I commit a sin. My view of God was that he was a cosmic cop who was waving his baton at all times and angrily whacked anyone who was not in line. That perception changed when I began to fully grasp the doctrine of God's grace and love. Now, I know that there are consequences to sin but God still loves me even if I sinned.

I'd like then to introduce our theme for the year which goes like this: "Think Right, Live Right." In short, if our thinking is right, then we're gonna be all right. Amen? If we hold to the correct beliefs, then we won't live defeated lives. The Scripture verse on which it is based is Matthew 7:24, *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."*

The Bible tells us that Jesus preached doctrinally. A few verses down in Matthew 7:28, it says that after Jesus finished preaching the Sermon on the Mount, the people were astonished at his teaching or doctrine as some versions of the Bible say.

In the original language the word translated "doctrine" literally means teaching, instruction or that which is taught. In the New Testament it also carries the idea of a more developed set of truths or practices which are to be learned and followed. This is the foundation of our understanding of what doctrine is.

We begin this morning where all good theological studies should begin, with Scripture itself. So, we're going to look at the Doctrine of Scripture. BTW, theology, which may sound Greek to you, is actually derived from two Greek words, Theo and Logos, which the English equivalent means, the study of faith or religion.

If one were to look over the course of Church history one would notice that the first few centuries of the Church were preoccupied with the question: Who is Jesus? It was the council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. which settled that question, affirming both the humanity and divinity of the Lord. For more than a thousand years after this the question became: What is Salvation? The Protestant Reformation came and in the early 16th century Martin Luther preached that we are saved by grace through faith and that our salvation could not be dependent upon anyone other than Jesus.

But since the Reformation the questions have shifted from the Son of God and the Salvation of God, to the Word of God. The raging battle during the last several centuries has been over the nature and authority of Scripture. What is Scripture? How can we know it is God's Word? Is it reliable? What evidence is there that Scripture is reliable and why did God give us His word?

Let's begin this morning by examining the nature of Scripture, what it is. Then we'll look at the witnesses to Scripture and finally we'll take a look at the purpose of Scripture.

I. The Nature of Scripture: The Word of God

As we seek to understand the nature of the Scripture, that is, what the Bible is, there are **three terms** we should understand. The first is the term, "revelation."

A. The Bible is Divine Revelation

Revelation is the direct divine influence which communicates truth from God to man.

There are two types of revelation: General revelation and special revelation. General revelation is where God reveals His nature and purpose through creation and through history. Psalm 19:1 says that the *"Heaven's declare the glory of God and the sky proclaims the work of His hands."*

Romans 1:20 assures us that, *"From the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, that is His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He made. As a result, people are without excuse."*

That's why the Scripture says that the fool has said in his heart that there is no God. One has but to look at the intricacies of nature or of the human body to realize that there is a Creator. Only a fool or a person with an atheistic agenda could come out and say that the universe was an accident. Accidents create chaos but the universe is organized and well-ordered.

You see, God has revealed Himself to all humanity through creation. But general revelation, by itself, is insufficient to tell us all God wanted us to

know about Himself and His plan for humanity. That's why He gave us Scripture. Scripture, at its core, is God's written revelation of Himself to us. It is the only source available to us of certain knowledge about God. Without Scripture, each of us would be left on our own to figure out Who He is, what He is like and how we can relate to Him. Scripture is God's written revelation of Himself to us.

The ancient Egyptians had no written revelation of their gods like we have from our God. They did not have the certain word we have about who God is and how we can relate to Him. That's why the ruins of their temples are filled with depictions of their gods as half animal and half man. In their fallen state they imagined God to be after their own image and after the image of created things. Because we have Scripture we are not left to wonder.

We don't have to grope in the darkness trying to imagine who God is and what He is like. Scripture tells us all these things. The Bible is God's written revelation of Himself to us.

The second term we need to understand is "Inspiration."

B. The Bible is Divinely Inspired

When the Bible says that all Scripture is inspired by God, it is speaking about a special kind of inspiration. It's not the kind of inspiration Mozart or Beethoven had when they composed musical masterpieces and it's not the kind of inspiration you have when you see a sunset or your loved one and are moved to write a poem. This is a different kind of inspiration; a unique type of inspiration.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 the Bible says that all Scripture is inspired by God. This word “inspired” comes from a Greek word that literally means, God-breathed, as the NIV says. The doctrine or teaching of the inspiration of Scripture simply tells us that the Scripture is an accurate transference of truth from God to man in language which we can understand.

We hold to an understanding of inspiration known as the **Verbal Plenary Theory**. That sounds Greek to you too? Let me illustrate it this way. Let's say Jonathan plays his sax. As he blows air through his musical instrument, the instrument creates a specific sound. And so, God is like Jonathan. God's Spirit blew through the instrumentation of humanity to produce a certain and perfect word. Every word of the Bible is fully inspired and is exactly what God intended it to be. Some people claim that the Bible contains the Word of God. No, it doesn't contain it, **IT IS THE WORD OF GOD**. From the first word to the last.

Can you imagine how much God had to dumb it down for us to be able to get it? And the thing is, even though there is much we can understand, we will never understand it all. God's word is like its author: We can know Him truly but we can never know Him fully.

Even when we get to heaven, when we are able to see more clearly and to understand more fully, we will ever be the creations and He will ever be the Creator. We will never fully understand all there is to know about God.

But there is a wonderful verse in Deuteronomy 29:29 which says, *"The hidden things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and our children forever, so that we may follow all the words of this law."*

The divine inspiration of Scripture assures us that it is the Word of God not merely the words of man. It is exactly what God wanted us to know, nothing more and nothing less. It is inspired, or breathed by His Spirit. This gives us a confidence and a certainty that we can rely upon.

The third term we need understand is the word "Canon."

C. The Bible is a Completed Canon

You may have heard people speak of the Canon of Scripture. What they are talking about is the completed record of God's Word. A canon is a list or a catalogue of books. As Christians we have inherited the Old Testament from the Jews and the New Testament from Jesus and his disciples.

One scholar describes the canon as, "the collection or list of Bible books that are recognized as genuine, inspired Holy Scripture. The collection is complete with thirty-nine Old testament books and twenty-seven New Testament books in the canon." (Swindoll, Growing Deep in the Christian Life, Pg. 413)

So Scripture is God's completed and inspired revelation of Himself to humanity. And through the providence and sovereign direction of God through the ages, God has preserved for us His inerrant and infallible word. The Bible we have is the complete canon or catalogue of books He wants us to have.

Now, how can we prove that the Bible is truly inerrant or without errors? What witnesses do we have to the veracity of Scripture?

If we were in a court of law and were required to call witness to the stand to testify that the Scripture is what we claim it to be, who would we call upon?

II. Witnesses to Scripture

A. Historical Witness

The first witness I would call to the stand would be the historical witness to Scripture. History itself has proven that God's Word is true and can be trusted.

Many skeptics say that the Bible is not accurate when describing historical events. But at least one Bible scholar (G. Frederick Owen, the Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible, Archaeological Supplement) says that archaeological investigations uphold the truthfulness of Biblical accounts. For example, it used to be claimed that the Hittites, mentioned over fifty times in the Old Testament, were an invention of biblical writers. There were no historical records of them. It used to be that only the Bible mentions the Hittites. Then, in the late 19th century, several excavations unearthed a number of Hittite cities and many of their written records were recovered. These demolished every one of the critic's arguments. That map shows the Hittite Empire as determined by archaeologists.

Another example is the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was assumed that they were just figments of the imagination of the biblical writers. But then archaeologists found the ruins of the ancient cities southeast of the Dead Sea in modern day Jordan.

These two pictures show the devastation brought about by God on these two cities. The Bible says in **Gen. 19:24-25**, "*Then the Lord rained*

down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.”

The first picture show an archaeologist pointing to a layer of ash in an archaeological site called Bab edh-Dhra.

This second picture shows that five excavation sites reveal that houses were destroyed by fire at the same time the city was destroyed.

Now, we haven't time to list all the discoveries but they are numerous and all of them speak to the accuracy and veracity of Scripture.

The second witness I would call forth would be Scripture itself.

B. Scriptural Witness

Scripture clearly claims to be the timeless word of God and to be true without any mixture of fault or error.

1. In the Old Testament

Psalm 19:7-9 says, *"The instruction of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise. The precepts of the Lord are right, making the heart glad; the commandment of the Lord is radiant, making the eyes light up. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the lord are reliable and altogether righteous..."*

Psalm 119:160, *"The entirety of Your word is truth, and all Your righteous judgments endure forever."*

And the prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 40:8, *"The grass withers; the flower fades, but the word of our God remains forever."*

2. The New Testament

2 Timothy 2:16, *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correction, for training in righteousness;"*

2 Peter 1:21 says, *"Because no prophecy ever came by the will of man, instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God."*

And Jesus Himself said in Matthew 24:35, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away."*

Friends, the Bible is not ambiguous, it does not leave us wondering about what it claims to be. It clearly claims to be God's inerrant and infallible word. It clearly claims to have God as its Author.

C. Human Experience

But there is a third witness I would call to the stand, and that would be the witness of human experience.

While all human experience must be measured by biblical truth, we have but to look behind us, around us and within us to see that God's word is true and can be trusted. What have some of the great men of our country said of the Bible?

George Washington, the first president of the United States said, "It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible. Of all the dispositions and habits that lead to political prosperity, our religion and morality are indispensable supporters."

John Quincy Adams, the sixth president of the United States said, "So great is my veneration of the Bible, that the earlier my children begin to read it the more confident will be my hope that they will prove useful citizens of their country and respectable members of society."

Abraham Lincoln said of the Bible, "In regard to this great book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Savior gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it."

Clearly, our great country was chartered and founded by men who understood the Bible to be the Word of God and to be true. But your own experience should tell you that the Scripture is trustworthy.

It contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Were it not for Scripture you would not know Jesus and if you did not know Jesus you would be hopelessly lost in your sin.

If I were to call upon each of you this morning, to stand and give witness to the Scripture, to its trustworthiness, to its impact on your life and to the way God has used it to bring you to Himself and make you who you are, we would be here all day, for each of you who have been born again would surely give witness to the power of the Word.

So we have studied the nature of Scripture, that it is God's inspired revelation of Himself to humanity.

We have heard from witnesses to Scripture, who have spoken to its power and its impact, but the final thing I would have you consider this morning is the purpose of Scripture. What is the purpose of Scripture?

III. Purpose of Scripture: Revelation toward application

It is true that the Bible is the bestselling book in America and yet remains one of the least read books. Some polls estimate that only ten

percent of Americans read their Bible every day. I hope we all belong to that 10 percent. Remember that God did not give us His word to fill our heads; He gave us His word to change our hearts. We must understand that God gave us the Bible so that we can apply it, so that we can practice what it instructs us to do.

Consider three things then which will help as we seek to apply the Scripture to our everyday lives.

A. Know it

God expects for us, as His children, to know His word. The man who will not read his Bible is no better off than the man who has no Bible to read. How can a person claim to be born again, to be filled with the Spirit of God who inspired the very words of Scripture and have no appetite for the word of God?

How can a person claim to have Jesus on the throne of their heart and have no desire to receive instruction from the One they claim is their Master? It doesn't add up. If you have no desire for the word of God, you need to take a long hard look to see if you are a child of God.

If we are truly in love with God, if we have really been born again, then we will say with the Psalmist who says in Psalm 119, *"I have treasured Your word with all my heart; don't let me wander from Your commands. I delight in Your commands, which I love...Instruction from your lips is better for me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. How I love Your teaching! It is my meditation all day long. Your word is completely pure and Your servant loves it."* (Psalm 119:11,47,72,97, &140)

Colossians 3:16 says, *"Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching admonishing one another in all wisdom and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God."*

Know it. But secondly, understand it.

C. Understand it

Many people read the Scripture like literature, but fail to understand the spiritual significance of what they read. But such should not be the case for Christians.

Jesus promises us in John 14:26 that the Holy Spirit will, *"...teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you."*

In 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 says, *"But the natural man does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually. The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, yet for himself, cannot be evaluated by anyone. For: who has know the Lord's mind that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ."*

So as Christians who have the Holy Spirit, we should be able to see clearly into the spiritual truths of Scripture.

But you see here's the problem. Our ability to understand the Scripture will ever be dependent upon the degree to which our hearts and lives are surrendered to the influence and control of the Spirit of God. The more control He has, the more illumination or insight we have. The less control He has of our hearts and lives, the more opaque and obscure the Scriptures will become.

I believe one of the reasons many Christians have difficulty understanding Scripture is because they need to get things right with God in their lives. If you are walking with Him, he will give you light;

He will give you understanding so that you can obey. But if you are not walking in fellowship, then you will find little joy in reading Scripture and its depth and meaning will be hidden from you.

To understand it you must be right with God. But not only are we to know it and understand it. The ultimate goal of Scripture is for us to put it into practice.

D. Practice it

Somewhere along the way we got the idea that all we had to do with the Bible was to study it and understand it. We substituted knowing for doing, illumination for application. But the purpose of Scripture, at the end of the day, is action oriented. It was given so that we can do it.

James 1:22 says, *"But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."*

Our problem is not that we don't understand what it says; our problem is that we don't want to do what we understand.

Jesus puts it about as plainly as it can be stated in Matthew 7:24-27,
"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish

man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Folks, I grew up reading the Bible and loving the Bible because my parents instilled in me a love for God and his word.

I was doing well as a young man and wanted to become a minister. Then, doubts about the Bible entered my mind because of some personal setbacks and worldly literature that attacked the trustworthiness of the Bible.

This went on for some time until it came to the point that I put away the Bible altogether, concluding that it was just man's invention. That's when my life took a turn for the worse. Without the Bible to guide me, I lost my moral mooring. I drifted in life like a ship lost in the sea. I'll forever be doomed if not for the grace of God. He restored my love for his Word and with the Bible as my guide once more, my life began to have meaning again.

What about you this morning? Will you believe in the Bible as the Word of God and let it change your life? Will you be like the wise man who built his house on the rock? Or will you be like the foolish man who built his house on sand? This morning, the choice is yours.

Let us pray....