

The Nature Of The Word of God

Introduction – When we say, “open your Bible to...”, what makes this stack of documents the Bible, and not another stack? How do you know that the Bible is the Word of God? And what do we really mean when we say it is the Word of God? Finally, if we come to an understanding of these questions, what implications does this have for us as the church and for each of us individually?

The Declaration of Scripture – In determining exactly what the Scriptures are, we must first turn and see what they declare themselves to be.

The Old Testament – Jesus quotes the OT frequently, beginning with ‘it is written’ (for example Matt 21:13), presupposing that because it is written, that settles it. He refers to the Jewish canon as received in His day as authentic (Luke 24:44f).

The Words of Christ – These are declared to be the words of God in the same way as the words of the prophets (and even greater) in Heb 1:1-2.

Apostolic Words – New Testament writings are treated by one another as scripture (2 Pet 3:16, 1 Tim 5:18). They believed that the promise given by Jesus of the Holy Spirit’s instruction (John 14:26) was being fulfilled in the writings of the apostles (1 Cor 2:13, 1 Thess 2:13).

Circular Reasoning – The Scriptures are the Word of God, then, because of the special place of the Lord Jesus Christ and how He handled the Word, and the commission that He gave His apostles. To some, this seems illogical because we have to turn to the Scriptures to prove the validity of the Scriptures. But circular reasoning always occurs when one is defending one’s ultimate source of authority. That is why we do not defend the Scriptures as the Word of God, we simply receive them as the Word of God.

Witness of the Spirit – For the Christian, these are foundational, and yet deep, truths. For the unbeliever, they are utter foolishness, which is why you find yourself in these types of arguments (1 Cor 2:10-16). Great testimonies and great arguments may be means God uses to open blind eyes, but if He does not open them, the Scriptures are like light to the blind. This is not to say that there is not abundant evidence to prove the Bible is the Word of God. It is to say that you can never argue a man into the kingdom of God. Persuasion only comes by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Sola Scriptura – One of the battle cries of the Reformation, this phrase translates ‘scripture alone’ and means that the Scriptures are our only ultimate and infallible authority for faith and practice. Not only are the scriptures the Word of God; they are also uniquely God’s Word and the only place of final appeal.

Scripture & Other Authorities – What is the relationship between Scripture and other legitimate authorities?

The Church – The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the official teachings and oral traditions of the Church share the same final authority as the Word. The argument comes from the divine institution of the church (Matt 16:18-20) and the existence of the church and the oral teachings of the apostles before the completion of the Scriptures. This fails to take into account the unique time of the apostolic church, when God spoke through these appointed men and laid the foundation of the church (Eph 2:19-20, 2 Pet 3:2). Signs, miracles, and wonders accompanied their ministry (2 Cor 12:12) authenticating them as apostles and their word as God’s Word.

Councils & Creeds – When they have been faithful to the Word of God, they should be subscribed to and submitted to, yet they must be understood as fallible documents. They have authority, but not final authority. Modern evangelicals, hating anything older than the ‘60’s, tend to dismiss these and all the teachings of their fathers. But we are not on more solid ground when we rely only on ‘me-n-my-Bible’. At the same time, we must consider everything we are taught with one eye on the text.

Sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17) – All we have done today is examine the blade, the sheath, the handle and determined that ‘yes, it is a sword’. But that is not what you do with a sword. And like a gun owner who never learns how to use it, the possession of the weapon can make life more dangerous than not having one around. You can either defend against false doctrine with the Word, or you can create false doctrine as you neglect or twist the Word. So let us consider a couple of initial implications.

We may not treat the Scriptures any differently than Jesus or the apostles did. They submitted to it, they did not reinterpret it. They remained constrained by its teaching, they did not add or subtract from it. But most of all, they loved the Word, they studied it, and they commended it to us for our study.

Zealously defend the handling of the Scriptures. Paul condemned the twisting of the gospel and those who did so (Gal 1:8). Today, the church is fighting many battles within her own ranks. The feminists want to make God a woman. The open-theology cranks want to make God a dope. The Pelagians want to make God a weakling and man his own savior. The best way to attack these false teachings is to know your Bible well.

Show yourself to be a true disciple. When true doctrine is truly understood, it does not produce stuffed-shirt theologians. It produces men and women who are ‘thoroughly equipped for every good work’ and are busy doing those good works all to the glory of the God they know and love.

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