

Doctrine, Passions, and Practices

What is the Bible and why is it so Important?

Doctrine

1. As human beings we face questions of huge importance: Who are we? Why are we here? How should we live? There are three typical ways of answering these questions: empiricism (starting with what we can see and touch), rationalism (starting with ideas in our minds), mysticism (starting with spiritual experiences). None of these approaches answer our deepest questions (1 Cor 1:21). But there's good news
2. God has revealed Himself to us through Creation, His actions in history, and His Son Jesus Christ — and explains the meaning of all these in the Bible. So we don't need to search for God; God has revealed Himself to us. And He has given this revelation to us in the Bible.
3. The Bible is made up of 66 separate books:
39 Old Testament books (books written before Jesus came to earth)

Genesis thru Esther: History of Israel
Job thru Song of Solomon: Literary Works
Isaiah thru Malachi: Prophets

and 27 New Testament books (books written after Jesus came to earth).

Matthew thru John: Gospels
Acts: history of the early church
Romans thru Jude: letters to churches
Revelation: John's vision of church history and Jesus' return
4. The Old Testament books were written by Prophets (Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc); the New Testament books were written by Apostles or their close associates (Matthew, Paul, Peter, etc.). Both the Old Testament Prophets and the New Testament Apostles were specially gifted by the Holy Spirit to speak and write perfect truth from God. 2 Peter 1:20-21 teaches this about Prophets; John 14:26 about Apostles.
5. Why do our Bibles contain these 66 books? At Jesus' time the Old Testament contained the same Old Testament books found in today's Bibles; Jesus affirmed this collection of books as the Word of God and written by God's chosen Prophets (Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24:44).
6. So what about the New Testament? It was not because the church gave authority to these books. It was because the church recognized the authority that these books already had by virtue of their being written by Apostles (2 Peter 3:15-16 – note that Paul's letters are called "Scripture").
7. We do not have the original Hebrew or Greek manuscripts of any of the books of the Bible. But we do have hundreds of copies of these original manuscripts (see diagram on the next page).

	Number of Manuscripts	How many years after the original was our earliest copy written
Tacitus' "Annals of Imperial Rome"	2	700+
Josephus' "The Jewish War"	9	900
Homer's "Iliad"	650	1,000
New Testament	24,000 manuscripts divided by 27 books = 888 manuscripts per book on average.	100+

The vast majority of these manuscripts agree with each other in everything, except for minor spelling or word-order issues. There is no basis for saying that the church has corrupted the original documents; this can be verified by studying the thousands of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. Most Bibles have footnotes showing places where manuscripts differ from each other (see John 7:53 – 8:11).

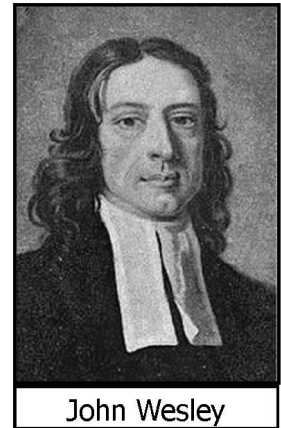


New Testament Manuscript

8. There's lots of historical, archaeological, and prophetic evidence showing that the Bible is the Word of God. But the main way we know the Bible is God's Word is because, when God frees us from our pride, we are able to see God as He is revealed in the Bible. It's because the God who is described in the Bible is God – and when you behold Him in the words of the Bible, you know it's God. When we behold God in the truth of Scripture, we know it's God, because it *is* God (Luke 24:32; John 8:47).
9. All Scripture is "breathed out by God", which means it is the very words of God Himself (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Each book was written by a human author, reflecting his time, culture, language, and background. But God worked in such a way that what each human author wrote was perfect truth from God Himself (2 Peter 1:20-21).
10. God's Word is not limited to those places in the Bible where God is actually quoted; God's Word is every word in every book of the Bible. You can see this in I Cor 14:37 (Paul's command is "a command of the Lord"); Matt 1:22 (Matthew says that Isaiah's words in Isa 7:14 are words spoken by the Lord God); Matt 19:5 (the words of Moses in Gen 2:24 are words that God "said").
11. The message of the Bible has to do with God's existence, Creation, the Fall, sin's spread through the world, God's promise to work through the lineage of Abraham to save people from every ethnic group, the history of Israel, the coming of Jesus to live and die and rise again so all who trust Him will be forgiven and transformed, the early history of the church, the call for Jesus' followers to pursue Christ-centered community and advance His mission in their families, neighborhoods, cities, world, the second coming of Christ, the final judgment, and eternal heaven and hell. This is the meaning of history. This is the story of your life.

12. What benefits come to us from prayerfully studying, trusting, and living God's Word?
- We read the very words of God Himself (2 Tim 3:16)
 - We learn perfect, flawless truth about God, the world, us (Psalm 19:7)
 - We become wise for salvation through faith in Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15)
 - We receive faith (Romans 10:17)
 - We are progressively freed from sin (John 8:31-32)
 - We find encouragement and hope in Jesus (Romans 15:4)
 - We receive more of the Holy Spirit – God's very presence (Galatians 3:5)
 - Our souls are transformed (Psalm 19:7)
 - Our hearts rejoice in God (Psalm 19:8)

John Wesley -- "I have thought I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit ... just hovering over the great gulf, till a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing—the way to heaven, how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He has written it down in a book. O give me that Book at any price, give me the Book of God."



John Wesley

Passions

When we rightly understand the doctrine of God's Word --

We will desire and love God's Word – Psalm 19:10; Psalm 119:72, 97

We will earnestly read and study God's Word — Psalm 1; John 15:7

We will tremble at God's Word – Isaiah 66:1-2

We will feel dependent on God's Word – Psa 119:105

We will delight in God's Word – Psa 1:2; 119:77; Romans 7:22

Practices

Repent and confess any neglect of God's Word (I John 1:9). Rely on Jesus' work on the Cross to forgive, cleanse, and change you.

Pray that God inclines your heart to His Word (Psalm 119:18).

Pray that God opens your eyes to see the reality and glory of the truths of His Word (Psalm 119:36).

For your study and memorization, use a version that tells you what the original languages said – not what someone thinks they meant. I use the ESV for study, memorization, and preaching.

Make time every day to prayerfully study God's Word (Psalm 1:1; Joshua 1:8; Ezra 7:10). (Use a Bible reading schedule.) Don't get legalistic about this; don't let it become a ritual. If you don't feel like reading, confess that, ask for Jesus' help, and do it with reliance on Jesus to change your heart.

How to read the Bible:

Pray and ask God to teach you something you specially need that day

Read slowly and thoughtfully

Ask: what is the author saying?

Notice truth about God, promises, doctrines, warnings, commands

Think and pray deeply over particular truths, verses, passages

Ask: how would this change my thinking, feeling, living?

The main goal is to behold, worship, trust, and obey God the Father and Jesus the Son.

If you are having a hard time being motivated, spend time praying over what God promises to do in you through His Word, until your heart changes. Use promises such as Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1; Psalm 19:7-11; Psalm 119:25, 28, 105; Matthew 7:24-27; John 8:31-32; John 17:13; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:15.

Obey the specific words of God – not as a way to earn acceptance from God, not as a way to impress others, but because this is the way to receive more of the Spirit and Life of Jesus (John 6:63), this is the way to experience more of God's nearness (2 Cor 6:16-7:1).

Lead your family in regular Bible reading and prayer (Deut 6:7).

Share the Word of God with people in your home group (Eph 4:15). Encourage them with the Word. Wrestle together with tough passages and truths. Learn and grow together.

Share the Word of God with people who don't yet know Jesus (Mark 4: 14; Col 4:6).

Start memorizing crucial verses and passages. Psalm 119:11

To memorize, say the reference and first phrase over and over until you've got it. Then add the second phrase, and say the reference and first phrase and second phrase over and over until you've got it. Add phrases until you're done. Review regularly. The aim is to help you meet Jesus in His Word throughout the day.

Listen carefully and prayerfully to the preaching of God's Word (Mark 4:24; 2Tim 4:1-5).

Turn to God's Word whenever your heart has slipped away from joy and peace in Jesus (Rom 15:13). Find promises and truths that apply to your fears, worries, angers, and boredom. Pray over them until your faith in Jesus is strengthened. See the list of promises below.

Meditate on God's Word day and night – meeting Jesus in His Word (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1).



David Brainerd: [He was feeling low because of recent sinfulness] "I was in some measure relieved by a comfortable meditation on God's eternity, that He never had a beginning [Psalm 90:2?]. I was led to admire His greatness and power in such a manner that I stood still and praised the Lord for His own glories and perfections."

Promises to Pray

Fear / worry	Philippians 4:6-7; Isaiah 41:10; Isaiah 43:1-7; Mark 4:18-19; Romans 15:13; Romans 8:31-39; Psalm 50:15; Psalm 57:1-3; Psalm 55:22; Psalm 56:3-4; Psalm 46:1-3; Psalm 34:19
Love of money	Matthew 6:19-21; Malachi 3:9-11; Luke 12:13-21; Luke 16:1-13; Luke 16:19-31; I Timothy 6:9-10; Hebrews 13:5-6
Envy of others	Psalm 37; John 21:22
Preoccupation with some new gizmo; materialism	Psalm 119:37; I John 3:15-17; James 4:3-10
Discouragement or depression	Psalm 86:1-13; Psalms 42 & 43; II Corinthians 1:8-11; Psalm 145:14; Psalm 42:5,11; Psalm 40:1-3; Psa 34:18: Psa 86:4-5
Desire for praise from people	John 5:44; Philippians 2:3-11; Isaiah 2:10-12; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Preoccupation with my work; inability to focus on Jesus	Luke 10:38-42; Isaiah 30:15; 10:31
Real guilt over recent sin	I John 1:9; Psalm 145:8; Psalm 51; Psalm 32:1-2
False guilt; being harassed by my past	I John 1:9; Luke 18:9-14; Luke 15:3-32
Boredom	Eph 5:15-17; Jer 32:40-41; Psalm 46:4-7; Psalm 34:8-9
Fear for finances	Matthew 6:19-34; Mark 4:18-19; Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 13:5-6; Psalm 145:15-16; Psalm 34:10
Worry about the future	Romans 8:31-39; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Psalm 50:15
Uncertainty about a decision	Isaiah 30:19-22; Psalm 25:4-12; James 1:5; Psalm 31:3
Unrighteous anger	James 1:19-20; 4:1-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:31
Unforgiveness	Matthew 18:21-35; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-14
Temptation to sin	I Corinthians 10:13; James 4:7; Psalm 16:11; John 6:35

For further discussion

Read Psalm 119:36. How often do you pray this sort of prayer? Why would the psalmist pray it? Why should we pray it? Will there ever be a time that God won't answer this prayer with a "yes"?

Read Psalm 119:18. How often do you pray this sort of prayer? Why would the psalmist pray it? Why should we pray it? How is "eyes-closed Bible reading" different from "eyes-opened Bible reading"?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Have you had doubts about whether every word in the Bible is actually God's Word? Why? Did this material help? Why or why not?

Read Psalm 119:81-82, and Romans 15:13. Where do you turn when your heart has slipped from joy and peace in Jesus? Is it really helpful to think you should turn to God's Word – or is this just a cliché? Why or why not?

Which of the above-listed passions do you feel towards the Bible? Which do you not feel? What can you conclude from this?

Which of the above-listed practices do you want to work on?

For further reading

Evangelical Textual Criticism blog — This is a forum for people to discuss its manuscripts and textual history from the perspective of historic evangelical theology.
<http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/>

Fee, Gordon. How to Read the Bible for all It's Worth.

Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, Zondervan. Chapters 2-8.

Harris, R. Laird. Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures.

Piper, John. Biblical Exegesis, online at
<http://www.desiringgod.org/media/pdf/booklets/BTBX.pdf>

Piper, John. When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy, Crossway.

Ryken, Leland. The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation, Crossway.