

KEY BATTLES:

THE TRINITY, THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

CLASS 2

Why does God bother to speak to us? The truly staggering answer that the Bible gives to this question is that God's purpose in revelation is to make friends with us. It was to this end that he created us rational beings, bearing his image, able to think and hear and speak and love; he wanted there to be genuine personal affection and friendship, two-sided, between himself and us — a relation, not like that between a man and his dog, but like that of a father to his child, or a husband to his wife. Loving friendship between two persons has no ulterior motive; it is an end in itself. And this is God's end in revelation. He speaks to us simply to fulfill the purpose for which we were made; that is, to bring into being a relationship in which he is a friend to us, and we to him, he finding his joy in giving us gifts and we finding ours in giving him thanks.

— J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken*

Trinity Truths

1. In the godhead there are three persons, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three are the same in essence, equal in glory and power (*Genesis 1:1-3, 26; Luke 3:22; Matthew 28:19; Deity of the Holy Spirit-Acts 5:3-4*).
2. While there is equality in the trinity there is also subordination. The Son is voluntarily subordinate to the Father and the Holy Spirit to both Father and Son. Subordination does not imply, however, inequality (*Galations 4:4*).

Subordination and the Divine Dance

The gospel writer John describes the Son as living from all eternity in the “bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), an ancient metaphor for love and intimacy. Later in John’s gospel, Jesus, the Son, describes the Spirit as living to “glorify” him (*John 16:14*). In turn, the Son glorifies the Father (*17:4*) and the Father, the Son (*17:5*). This has been going on for all eternity (*17:5b*).

- a. What does it mean that they glorify one another?

“The Father...Son...and Holy Spirit glorify each other... At the center of the universe, self-giving love is the dynamic currency of the Trinitarian life of God. The persons within God exalt, commune with, and defer to one another ... When early Greek Christians spoke of perichoresis in God they meant that each divine person harbors the others at the center of his being. In constant movement of overture and acceptance each person envelops and encircles the others.” Cornelius Plantinga

In Christianity God is not an impersonal thing nor a static thing—not even just one person—but a dynamic pulsating activity, a life, a kind of drama, almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance.... The pattern of this three personal life is the great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality. C.S.Lewis

- b. God is love -
- c. Trinity and Salvation: Why did Jesus die for us?

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. *John 17:22-23*

- d. Trinity and Christian living: Ultimate reality is a community of persons who know and love one another. That is what the universe, God, history, and life is all about. If you favor money, power, and accomplishment over human relationships, you will dash yourself on the rocks of reality. When Jesus said you must lose yourself in service to find yourself (*Mark 8:35*), he was recounting what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been doing throughout eternity. You will, then, never get a sense of standing still, as it were, and making everything revolve around your needs and interests. Unless you are willing to experience the loss of options and the individual limitation that comes from being in committed relationships, you will remain out of touch with your own nature and the reality that holds the universe together.

You were made for mutually self-giving, others directed love. Self-centeredness destroys the fabric of what God has made.

Notes from Reason for God by Tim Keller

- 3. God is a spirit (*John 4:24*), and does not have a body like us. When Scripture speaks of his hand, arm, or face, these are anthropomorphisms, which is simply God's condescending to use our language to describe himself (*Exodus 3:20*).

“For who is so devoid of intellect as not to understand that God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children? Such modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of him to our feebleness. In doing so, he must, of course, stoop far below his proper height.” JOHN CALVIN

- 4. God has incommunicable attributes, or attributes that we cannot share. They are his aseity, eternality, omniscience, omnipresence, and his immutability. God also has attributes which are communicable; his power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

The Battle Rages on With Many Modern Day Aberrations

1. Mormonism - teaches that God has a physical body and fathered his son, Jesus, through sexual relations with Mary. They deny the unity of the Trinity, teaching that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate individuals, physically distinct from each other. They are three gods, not one.
2. Jehovah's Witnesses believe there is one God, God the Father. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not deity and are created beings. They are modern day Arians.

The Watchtower not only rejects the Trinity but ridicules this biblical truth, stating, "Sincere persons who want to know the true God and serve Him find it a bit difficult to love and worship a complicated freakish-looking three headed God...The obvious conclusion is that Satan is the originator of the Trinity doctrine." August 1, 1981, Watchtower

3. Modern faith teachers who are generally considered to be in the Christian family, in fact do not espouse orthodox views of the Trinity.

"Many people conclude that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all one and the same. Actually, they are not. These people take IJohn 5:7 to mean one in number, when this is not what is meant at all. They evidently have not studied this in the original Greek language to get its actual meaning. The word "one" in this passage means one in unity. When Genesis says that God made man in His own image, I am convinced that it meant not only in the spiritual image, but also in the physical image. I realize many Bible scholars would chuckle at this statement, but this is the way I see it. I believe that God has a spirit body...I believe His body is in one place at one time, wherever that may be." JIMMY SWAGGERT, THE AGONY OF DECEIT

"Even many in the great body of Full Gospel people do not know that the new birth is a real incarnation, they do not know that they are as much sons and daughters of God as Jesus. They only have a hazy concept of what God has done, or what He is to them, and of what they are to God. Jesus was first divine, and then He was human. So he was in the flesh a divine-human being. I was first human, and so were you, but I was born of God, and so I became a human-divine being!" KENNETH HAGIN, THE AGONY OF DECEIT

"Do you know what else has settled in tonight? This hue and cry and controversy that has been spawned by the devil to try to bring dissension within the body of Christ that we are gods. I am a little god. I have His name. I am one with Him. I'm in covenant relation. I am a little god. Critics be gone!" KENNETH COPELAND, THE AGONY OF DECEIT

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

A. The Canon

1. God's word consists of 66 books. The Old Testament was originally grouped in three categories (*Luke 24:44*):
 - a. The Torah (the law): Genesis-Deuteronomy.
 - b. The Prophets:
Former - Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings.
Latter - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve.
 - c. The Writings:
Poetry - Psalms, Proverb, Job.
Five Rolls - Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes.
Historical Books - Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles.

Our organization of the O.T. books is according to the Septuagint (or LXX), the first Greek translation of the O.T. in the third century B.C. and has four categories: law, history, poets, and prophets.

2. The O.T. is written in Hebrew and the N.T. is written in Greek with many quotations in Aramaic.
3. You should be aware that the earliest Bibles have no chapter and verse divisions, but they were added around 1100 A.D.
4. The Apocryphal books, which are included in the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, are not inspired and are not a part of God's word. These books have historical inaccuracies and theological heresies which caused them to be denied canonical recognition.
5. The books which were inspired were granted canonicity. The word canon means measuring rod. It is important to say that God gives a book its authority and the church merely discovers it. The church applied these basic criteria:
 - a. Is it authoritative? - Does it claim to be God's word?
 - b. Is it prophetic? - Was it written by a prophet or apostle? (*Galatians 1:1*)
 - c. Is it authentic? - Does it contain doctrinal or factual errors?
 - d. Is it dynamic? - Is it life-transforming? (*Hebrews 4:12*)
 - e. Is it accepted by the people of God?

The O.T. canon was complete by the fourth century B.C. The N.T. canon was compiled by the second century, questioned in the third and closed as complete with the decision of the councils of Hippo and Carthage in the third century.

B. Inspiration and Authority

1. God has chosen to reveal himself to men in two ways. His revelation through his creation we call natural revelation and through extraordinary or supernatural means we call special revelation. The first leaves man without excuse (*Romans 1:19-20*) but is insufficient to lead men to salvation.
2. The revelation of God inscripturated by men is “inspired” or God breathed (*II Peter 1:21*). This inspiration was not by dictation or the product of “inspired” men but was organic. The personalities of the authors of God’s word were not violated by supernatural intrusion, but God used their literary style, vocabulary, gifts, education, and culture to convey His word. God so influenced their minds, guided their writing and repressed the effect of their fallen nature that we can say that their words are God’s words and are without error and are our *only* guide for faith and life. This inspiration extends to the whole Bible and even to the very words chosen by the authors.
3. There is strong internal and external evidence to support the doctrine of Biblical inspiration.
 - a. External:
 1. No archeological find has ever invalidated a Biblical teaching, but archeology has authenticated countless Biblical facts.
 2. The Bible is the best documented book of the ancient world. There are thousands of manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments which validate their accuracy.
 - b. Internal:
 1. The Bible itself claims to be God’s word. What the prophets constantly said was “Thus saith the Lord.”
 2. The N.T. authors accepted O.T. scriptures as God’s word (*Matthew 5:18*) and historically accurate (*Matthew 16:4; Romans 5:14*). They also treated each others’ writings as God’s word (*II Peter 3:15, 16*).
 3. The Bible contains information which could only have come from God, such as the creation and the future.

4. The accuracy of prophecies fulfilled hundreds of years after they were uttered (*Genesis 49:8; Micah 5:2; II Samuel 7:12-16; Zechariah 9:9; Isaiah 53*).
5. The lack of any internal contradiction.
6. The inclusion of a plan of salvation and system of ethics so far transcending any of the best efforts of man.

Even the existence of this proof though will not persuade men to believe God's word. This is only possible through the inward work of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:14).

4. The inspiration and authority of the Bible does not automatically extend to every copy and translation of the Bible, but by God's care and providence His word has been accurately transmitted to us. In fact, advances in linguistics, lexicology, and archeology have given the church today a much more accurate translation than ever before. Translations like the NIV and NASV are not only more readable but more accurate than the KJV (*I John 5:8*).
5. The Bible is very clear that it represents God's last word to man. God revealed his word through prophets and apostles and with the end of the apostolic age revelation ceased and the canon was closed (*Acts 20:27; II Timothy 3:16, 17; Revelation 22:18, 19; Hebrews 1:1,2*).
6. When we speak of the perspicuity of the Bible we do not mean that everything in the Bible is plain and clear to our understanding. However, that which is necessary to be believed for salvation is so clearly taught that even the unlearned can comprehend it.
7. When difficulty arises as to the meaning of any Biblical passage, the first rule of Biblical interpretation used is "Scriptura interprets es" which means scripture is its own best interpreter.

Modern Attacks of the Authority of God's Word

1. Modernism - The Bible contains the word of God. Certain parts of the Bible are true and divine, others are clearly human and in error. There are many myths, legends, and false beliefs about science incorporated in the Bible and they must be rejected by enlightened men as remnants of a primitive mentality. The task of the interpreter is to separate the ancient ignorance from the truly inspired portions.
2. Neo-orthodoxy - The Bible becomes the word of God. In this marriage of existentialism and theology, the Bible becomes God's word to us when we personally encounter God in it. The task of the interpreter is to strip away the mythology and find the core truths taught. These truths are not historical and propositional, but purely subjective.

3. Charismatic Movement - Though they are quick to deny it, charismatic views on speaking in tongues and prophetic utterance undermine the authority of the Bible. New revelations, dreams, visions, and “words of wisdom” are accepted to be as binding on believers consciences and behavior as is God’s word.

Conclusion: Endemic to the weakness of the church today is the paucity of study on the Bible, doctrine and theology and the glut of books about people’s personal experiences. The desire of many church goers is not to learn of God from his word but to engage in new-orthodox subjectivism. Not only do modern churches fail to advance from milk to meat, but all too often quickly substitute “soft drinks” for any real nutrition. The Reformers saved Christianity behind their rallying cry, “sola et tota Scriptura” (The Scripture alone, all the scripture). We would be wise to follow their lead.

Assignment

1. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith (Sproul), sections 10-18
2. Read the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 1 & 2.

ALL QUESTIONS AT THE END OF EACH LESSON ARE OPTIONAL

CHAPTER I - OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

1. Why do you think the Westminster Assembly when writing the Confession selected the subject of the Holy Scriptures to be first, before God, Man, Sin, Salvation, and others?
2. In what two distinct ways does God reveal Himself to man? How do they differ and why were the Scriptures needed? (*Paragraph 1*)
3. How do we know that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God? (*Paragraph 4, 5*)
4. What do we mean when we say "revelation has ceased"? Give Scriptural support. (*Paragraph 6*)
5. What languages were the Bible written in? (*Paragraph 8*)

