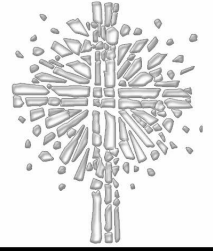




John 15:4 Abide in ME



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

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A Reasonable Faith: Believing in Scripture in a Post-Christian Culture Acts 17:24-31, I Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13, & II Timothy 3:16-17

THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT

Authority of the Bible: We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

Reflections of the great reformer and theologian, John Calvin (1509-1564), on the use of the Bible.

All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

All Scripture, or the whole of it; both phrases mean the same. He now continues with his praise of Scripture which had been much too brief. He commends first its authority, and then the usefulness which proceeds from it. He asserts its authority by teaching that it is inspired by God. If this is the case, men should receive it reverently and without further argument. Our religion is distinguished from all others in that the prophets have spoken not of themselves, but as instruments of the Holy Spirit; and what they have brought to us, they received by heavenly commission. Any man then who would profit by the Scriptures, must hold first of all and firmly that the teaching of the law and the prophets came to us not by the will of man, but as dictated by the Holy Spirit.

Somebody may object: But how do we know all this? I answer, the self-same Spirit revealed both to the disciples and to the teachers (*doctorem*) that the author of the Scriptures is God. Neither Moses nor the prophets brought to us by chance the things we have received at their hands; they spoke as moved by God, and testified with confidence and courage that God's very mouth had spoken. The same Spirit who made Moses and the prophets certain of their calling, has now testified to our own hearts that he used them as his servants for our instruction. It is not surprising that many have doubts as to the author of Scripture. For, even though the majesty of God is displayed by it, only those illumined by the Spirit have the eyes to see what should be evident to all men, but in fact is seen only by the elect. So, the first point is that we treat Scripture with the same reverence that we do God, because it is from God alone, and unmixed with anything human.

And is profitable. The second part of this praise of Scripture follows from the first; that it contains the perfect rule of a good and happy life. He means that Scripture is useful because it is free from the kind of corruption which comes with the abuse of God's Word by sinful men. Thus he indirectly rebukes those woolly-headed men who feed the people with empty speculations as with wind. For this reason, today, we ought to condemn all those who make it their business not to build up the people but to arouse them with questions which are as childish as they are clever. Whenever men come to us with such clever trifles, we must repel them with the principle that the Scripture is for upbuilding. Consequently, it is unlawful to handle it as a useless thing. God gave us Scripture for our good, and not to satisfy our curiosity, or to indulge our desire for showing off, or to give us material for babble and fable. Therefore, to use Scripture rightly is at all times to profit by it. . . .

*God gave us
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That the man of God may be whole. Whole means perfect, in the sense of un mutilated. He asserts simply that Scripture is adequate and sufficient for our perfecting. Therefore, anyone who is not satisfied with Scripture, hopes to know more than he needs or than is good for him. But now comes a serious objection. Since Paul means by Scripture the Old Testament, how are we to believe that it makes us perfect? If the Old Testament makes us perfect, then the apostolic additions are superfluous. I answer that, as to substance, the apostles added nothing. The writings of the apostles contain nothing that is not simply a natural explanation of the law and the prophets, together with a straightforward presentation of what they contain. Therefore, Paul's praise of the Old Testament was not wrong. And since its teaching is understood more fully and shines more brightly now that the gospel has been added to it, must we not hope that the value of Scripture, of which Paul speaks, shall be all the more displayed, if only we will try living by it and take hold of it? . . .

Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me. John 5:39. As we have pointed out, Christ's previous statement that the Father is his witness in heaven, applies also to Moses and the prophets. Now Christ explains the matter more clearly by saying that the Scripture itself is his witness. He again attacks the stupidity of those who declared loudly that the Scriptures gave them life, while they treated them as dead letter. He does not judge them because they sought life in the Scriptures; the Scriptures were given to be used for this purpose. But the Jews thought the Scriptures gave them life when they had no sense of their true meaning, and had even put out the light of life in them. How can the law make alive, when Christ alone gives it life?

Moreover, this passage teaches us that if we would know Christ, we must seek him in the Scriptures. Anyone who imagines Christ as he will, gets nothing but a mere blur. So, we must first hold that Christ is known rightly nowhere but in Scripture. If this be so, our chief purpose in reading the Scriptures must be to arrive at a right knowledge of Christ. Whoever turns aside from this aim, even though he wear himself out with learning all his life, will never arrive at truth; for what wisdom can we attain apart from the wisdom of God?

Moreover, since we are commanded to seek Christ in the Scriptures, he declares that our zeal in this matter shall not be in vain; for the Father himself testifies that in them he shall certainly reveal his Son to us. Many are deprived of this blessing, because they neglect reading the Scriptures, or do it cursorily and superficially. But it deserves utmost attention that Christ himself commands us to probe deeply into this hidden treasure. It was sheer apathy that led the Jews, who had the law in their very hands, to abhor Christ. The glory of God shone brightly in Moses, but they put up a veil and darkened it. In this place, Scripture means obviously the Old Testament. It is not true that Christ appears first in the gospel. It is rather that after the witness of the Law and the Prophets, he appeared in the gospel for everyone to see.

The people of Loudonville Community Church have long treasured the Scriptures. We pray that this will continue to be so and it is our hope that our Growth Groups will be a way for this to happen!

This Week's Complementary Passage

Nehemiah 8:1-8

¹ And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸ They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Marking Guide for Acts
(not all words occur in the passage)

- appointed
- baptized
- Caesar
- enemy/demons/Satan
- eternal life
- fathers & children [in one color different from Moses]
- Gentiles
- gospel
- grace
- Holy Spirit
- in the name of Jesus Christ
- Jesus
- Jews
- Law (of Moses)
- men of the council
- Moses [in different color from fathers & children]
- prayer
- repent (repentance)
- resurrection (raised up)
- salvation
- suffering
- the Way
- the promise of the Father
- witnesses
- word of God

STEP ONE . . .

READING what the passage says
(Read it at least three times)

Acts 17:24-31 (ESV)

²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.”

²⁹Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

I Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13 (ESV)

¹For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ²But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

¹³And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

II Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

STEP TWO . . .

OBSERVING how the passage moves

Return to the passage and **mark key words, phrases and movements:**

- Circle all of the words in these passages that speak of the Triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit, etc.).
- Underline the significant verbs/action words in these passages.
- Highlight Acts 17:24-25.
- In Acts 17:26, underline the phrase “he made from one man every nation of mankind.”
- In Acts 17:27, underline the phrase “they should seek God.”
- In Acts 17:28, underline the phrases “In him we live and move and have our being” and “For we are indeed his offspring.”
- Highlight Acts 17:30-31.
- In I Thessalonians 2:1, underline the phrase “our coming to you was not in vain.”
- In I Thessalonians 2:2, underline the phrase “we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.”
- Highlight I Thessalonians 2:3-4.
- Highlight I Thessalonians 2:7.
- In I Thessalonians 2:8, underline the phrase “we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.”
- Highlight II Timothy 3:16-17.

STEP THREE . . .

Ask the five “W” questions and the one “H” question:

1. **WHO** is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters? And, to **whom** is it speaking?
2. **WHAT** is the subject of the passage? What does the passage say about the subject?
3. **WHEN** do or will the events occur? When did something happen to a particular person, people, or nation?
4. **WHERE** did or will this happen?
5. **WHY** is something said or mentioned? Why would or will this happen? Why at this time? Why this person?
6. **HOW** will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

STEP FOUR . . .

UNDERSTANDING what the passage means

This commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

Commentary on Acts 17:24-31 (ESV)

17:24 - “The God who made the world and everything in it.”

Paul’s first theological point is God is creator. The Greeks believed that spirit and matter were both co-eternal. Paul asserts the biblical concept of creation where a personal, purposeful God creates both the heavens and the earth (this planet and the entire universe).

“Does not live in temples made by man.” This is a quote from the Old Testament (1 Kings 8:27 & Isaiah 66:1-2) or a Greek philosopher, Euripides. There are several quotes in this passage from Greek writers. Paul was also trained in Greek scholastics.

17:25 - “As though he needed anything.” This same thought is found in Euripides’ *Heracles*; Plato’s *Euthyphro*; (3) Aristobolus; and Psalm 50:9-12. The Greek temples were often seen as the place where the gods were fed and cared for.

“Since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” This may be an allusion to Isaiah 42:5. This is also Paul’s theological way of asserting God’s love and mercy for humanity and God’s gracious provision for humanity through His providence. A similar truth was made by Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, recorded in Clement of Alexandria. What a wonderful truth for Gentile pagans to hear and receive.

17:26 - “And he made from one man.” This likely refers to Adam. However, it may also be an allusion to Greek philosophy and reflects the unity of humanity from one stock. This phrase clearly asserts the solidarity of all humanity, and theologically it asserts that humans are made in God’s image. The rest of this verse may also allude to the Genesis account. Mankind is commanded to be fruitful and fill the earth. Humans were reluctant to separate and fill the earth. The Tower of Babel shows God’s mechanism to accomplish this.

“Having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.” Paul asserts that God not only created all things, but directs all things. This may be an allusion to several Old Testament passages: Deuteronomy 32:8; Job 12:23; Psalm 47:7-9; and Psalm 66:7.

17:27 - This verse may be another quote from the Greek poet, Aratus.

“They should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.” The verb means “to touch” or “to feel.” This context implies a groping due to darkness or confusion. They are trying to find God, but it is not easy. Paganism is a blinding force which characterizes the fall as does idolatry and superstition, but God is present.

“Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.” What a wonderful truth. God created us, God is for us, God is with us! Paul is forcibly asserting God’s love, care, and presence with all humans. This is the truth of the gospel.

17:28 - “In him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said.” This quotation may come from Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus*. He was the head of the Stoic school from 263-232 B.C. It may also come from Aratus’ *Phainomena*. Aratus was from Cilicia and lived from 315-240 B.C. This quote emphasizes God’s immanence and God’s creation of all humans. Paul was trained in Greek literature and rhetoric, probably at Tarsus, which was a major university town.

“For we are indeed his offspring.” This is another quote, possibly from Epimenides, quoted by Diogenes Laertius in the book entitled *Lives of the Philosophers*.

17:29 - This verse represents Paul’s conclusion and refutation of idolatry. The tragedy of fallen humanity is that they seek spiritual truth and fellowship from manmade things that cannot talk or help.

17:30 - “The times of ignorance God overlooked.” This is a surprising aspect of God’s mercy. But now they have heard the gospel and are spiritually responsible.

“But now he commands all people everywhere.” This statement asserts that God wants all humans everywhere to repent. It shows the universalism of God’s mercy and love. And yet, this is not universalism in the sense that all will be saved, but instead in the sense that God desires all humans to repent and trust Jesus for salvation. Jesus died for all! All can be saved! The mystery of evil is that not all will be saved.

“Repent.” The Hebrew term means “a change of action,” while the Greek term refers to a “change of mind.” Both are crucial. Both the Epicurean and Stoic schools of philosophy mentioned previously would have rejected the notion of repentance, but for different reasons.

17:31 - “He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world.” Paul’s message has clearly and repeatedly asserted God’s mercy and provision. But this is only half the message. The God of love and compassion is also the God of justice who desires righteousness. Humans made in His image will give an account of their stewardship of the gift of life. The New Testament theme that God will judge the world is recurrent.

“By a man whom he has appointed.” This concept of a Judgment Day based on our faith relationship to a resurrected man, Jesus of Nazareth, was unheard of and incredible to these Greek intellectuals, but is at the heart of the gospel witness.

Commentary on I Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13 (ESV)

2:1 - “For you yourselves know.” Paul appealed to the experience of the Thessalonian Christians so often that this phrase becomes a characteristic of this book.

“That our coming to you was not in vain.” This can either mean: not “fruitless” or (2) not “empty handed.” The church continues in spite of the aggressive Jewish opposition just

like the churches in Judea who also experienced Jewish wrath.

2:2 - “We had already suffered and been shamefully treated.” Paul begins to relate his own sufferings for the gospel, which included both physical and mental abuse.

“We had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God.” “Boldness” literally means “freedom to speak.” The believer’s confidence in Christ’s work on his behalf gives him courage to speak the truth of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel always caused problems. Paul prays for opportunities and boldness, not for tranquility.

“In the midst of much conflict.” This is an athletic or military term for rough, hand-to-hand fighting. This Greek term entered the English language as “agony.”

2:3 - “Appeal.” This word comes from the same root (*paracletos*) used of the Spirit and of Jesus where it is translated as “comforter,” “advocate” or “helper.”

“Does not spring from error.” The Greek word used here may also be used for “planet,” which referred to heavenly lights (planets, comets, shooting stars) that did not follow the usual pattern of the constellations. Thus, they were called “wanderers,” which developed metaphorically into error.

“Impurity” This term implies a sexual looseness. It must be remembered that pagan worship often employed sexual acts. Paul may have been accused of advocating moral looseness by Jewish legalists who misunderstood justification by faith.

“Or any attempt to deceive.” The other two terms in this verse speak of Paul’s motives, but this phrase indicates an atmosphere of trickery. “Deceit” originally meant “to catch with bait” but later evolved into a metaphor for trickery for profit. Paul was often accused of greed.

2:4 - “We have been approved by God.” This phrase has the connotation of testing, with a view toward approval. “Approve” in this sense commonly meant testing the genuineness of coins. The missionary team had been and continued to be tested and approved by God.

“Entrusted with the gospel.” The basic idea is to trust something to another. Believers are stewards of the gospel.

“To please God who tests our hearts.” This reflects the Hebrew usage of “heart,” in the sense of the entire personality. God knows our motives.

2:5 - “We never came with words of flattery.” This term implies manipulation for false motives. Opponents, especially at Corinth, often accused Paul of false motives as did the Jews here.

“Nor with a pretext for greed.” Paul was often accused of greed or opportunism, possibly because it was characteristic of Greek itinerant teachers. This is why he would not regularly receive money from churches. However, he did later receive help from Philippi and Thessalonica.

“God is witness.” Paul was swearing an oath using God as a witness.

2:6 - “Though we could have made demands.” Literally, translated this phrase means “with weight.” The intended meaning could be demands in terms of apostolic authority; apostolic honor; or financial compensation.

“As apostles of Christ.” This includes Silas and Timothy. This illustrates the wider use of the term apostles. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11, “apostles” are mentioned as an ongoing spiritual gift in the church. Some examples are: Barnabas; Andronicus and Junias; Apollos; and James the Just. It is uncertain to what aspect of ministry this ongoing gift relates: church planting; evangelism; area leadership; or it may be linked to prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers in Ephesians 4:11, all of whom proclaim the gospel with differing emphases.

2:7 - “But we were gentle among you.” Some commentators believe Paul spoke to the Thessalonians in baby language so they could understand. Paul uses parental language in verses. He saw himself as their spiritual parent.

“Like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.” This phrase literally means “to warm” and was commonly used of mother birds “warming” their young. It was a metaphor for breast feeding. Paul, like Jesus (Matthew 23:37), describes his love for them in nurturing terms.

2:8 - “Being affectionately desirous of you.” This word appears nowhere else in the entire New Testament. A strong term of affection related to babies, it was used in Greek literature for parents longing for their dead children.

“We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” This shows the costliness of the ministry as well as the love of the Apostle. Ministry is not something we do - it is who we are.

2:13 - “We also thank God constantly.” This phrase reflects Paul’s ongoing prayer life.

“When you received.” This phrase shows the necessity of our personal response to the gospel. Here, it refers to the message. The gospel focuses around three emphases: personal relationship, doctrinal truth, and a lifestyle of Christ-likeness. The believer must respond to all three for maturity.

“You accepted it.” This phrase also describes the need for a human response to the divine gospel. Fallen mankind must repent and believe the gospel, and continue to repent and believe the gospel.

“The word of God, which is at work in you believers.” Paul’s preaching (the gospel’s message) was revelation inspired by God. Here this does not refer to the Bible, but apostolic proclamation and teaching. The New Testament only records a selected portion of the Apostle’s message. “Work” was a favorite word for Paul, related to the English cognate “energy.” Paul personified the gospel as continuing to energize believers! This probably reflects the Old Testament understanding of the power of the spoken word. Again, continuing belief is the key! The gospel is not a product (a ticket to heaven, an insurance policy), but a personal,

growing relationship with the Father through the Son made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Commentary on II Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

3:16 - "All Scripture." This phrase could be translated "every Scripture" but this may imply to some that they are isolated truths (propositions). The plague of modern Bible study is the "proof-text" method of interpretation which destroys the literary context and the intent of the inspired author.

"Breathed out by God." This phrase can be literally translated "God exhaled." The *how* is not stated, but the *who* and the *why* are very specific!

"Training in righteousness." Righteousness is a characteristic of God, freely given to sinful mankind through Christ. But it is also a process of becoming righteous that must be

vigorously and steadfastly pursued, which will one day be consummated at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Fellowship with God is restored at salvation, but progresses throughout life to become a face-to-face encounter at death or at Christ's return!

3:17 - "The man of God may be complete." This term is only found here in the New Testament and means adequate (in the best sense of the word), capable, proficient or entirely suited.

"Equipped for every good work." This verb speaks of gifted, functioning maturity which is brought by the Spirit through the Scripture. What God calls us to do, He also prepares us for!

Resource for Commentary: Robert James Utley's *Study Guide Commentary Series* from Logos software

STEP FIVE . . .

SUMMARIZING the message

- God is the ultimate authority.
- The Bible comes from God.
- Since the Bible comes from God, it is the ultimate authority.

If you are a loyal follower of Christ, the above syllogism forms the foundational structure of your faith. You believe that the Bible is a unique book. It is a book like many others but you also believe that the Bible claims to be much more than any ordinary book for it claims to be the Word of God. We believe the Bible speaks with the authority of God Himself. What the Bible says, God says. What God says, the Bible says. It is written, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

When Paul wrote a letter to the church in Thessalonica, he commended them for receiving the Word of God as binding and authoritative. "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). He uses two words in verse 13 to clarify what he meant. First of all, he said they *received* the word of God, which you heard from us. That refers to the physical act of hearing the Word preached. Secondly, they also *accepted* what they heard preached as the word of God. This refers to the hearing of the heart.

They heard the message preached by Paul and recognized that it came from God. Since it came from God, they believed it was completely authoritative. Since God has spoken to us in the Bible, what He says has the final claim on our lives. As Christians, we are to spend our days receiving, accepting and taking the Bible seriously.

There was a time, however, when we could quote the Bible and the issue under discussion would be settled. I remember a bumper sticker from my youth, "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it." We no longer live in that kind of world. For many people, the Bible may still retain some sentimental value but it is no longer taken seriously.

We are living in an interesting cultural moment, when most people do not share the same assumptions that we do about God, the Bible, and authority. The right response to this drastic shift is not to jettison our commitment to the Bible out of embarrassment - that would indicate a lack of courage and fidelity to God. But the way we engage those outside the faith with God's Word needs to change because for many, the Bible is no longer the answer but the problem.

In Acts 17 Paul preached his famous sermon before the philosophers of Athens, Greece. Among the many things he did on this extraordinary occasion, he questioned their answers and answered their questions. People today are asking hard questions about the Bible. We need to be ready to respond with answers. How can we be prepared to do that?

First of all, we need to give to others the permission to ask their toughest questions about the Bible. On one hand, that may feel scary. On the other hand, I've got great news for you: The Bible can withstand the most stringent scrutiny. Our aim in this series is to address the major objections many people have toward the Bible today. Here are the first two:

1. They believe the Bible is fiction (i.e. filled with legends and myths).
2. They believe the God of the Bible is unethical (i.e. genocide of the Canaanites and Amalekites).

Many people believe the Bible is fictitious. The prevailing opinion today is that the books of the Bible weren't selected until the fourth century, hundreds of years after the death of Jesus. It is technically true that the first list containing all 27 books of the Bible didn't appear until Athanasius compiled his list in AD 367. How can we be confident that the core message of Christianity wasn't deliberately distorted along the way? What you want to establish is that the core beliefs of Christianity were established from the beginning in the deity, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This core of authentic Christianity was passed down from generation to generation. The books that were approved and finalized were the ones written by eyewitnesses authorized by Jesus and accepted as Scripture. There was nothing about the process that was arbitrary or political.

We also need to affirm that the acceptance of these books as authoritative required a normal historical process. Writing and distributing books in the first century took time. The great question the early church leaders had to wrestle with after the death of the Apostles was which books bore their stamp of authority because they had been received and established from the beginning. It is fascinating to note that by AD 180 (less than one hundred years after the death of the last Apostle) twenty-two of the twenty-seven books of the NT were already recognized as Scripture.

Many people believe the God of the Bible is unethical. There is a lot recorded in the Old Testament that is shocking to the modern reader. Strong, emotional accusations are made against God Himself. For instance, how do we reconcile the love of God with His command to the Israelites in the days of Joshua to commit “genocide”? It is important to understand that God had warned the Canaanites over 400 years before to change their ways (cf. Exodus 15:6). When they failed to change, God used the Israelites as the human agency of divine judgment. God is the Creator of life and He has the authority to take life. But He never exercises His authority in a capricious or willy-nilly way. While the Israelites carried out His judgment against a specific people group, it was not motivated by hatred or racial superiority but idolatry. Sinful idolatry is the basis of God’s judgment against them, not genocide or ethnic cleansing.

Everyone around us has questions about the Bible. It is important that we give people permission to ask their questions and then, like Paul in Athens, be prepared to give a reasonable defense of our faith. In the end, the Bible and Christianity has nothing to fear from deep scrutiny and honest investigation. God has spoken and His answers to life’s greatest challenges are found in the Bible, if we are willing to take it seriously.

STEP SIX . . .

EXPLORING the passage through discussion

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. What does it mean to say that the Bible is divinely inspired?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:4-8, 13. What is the difference between *receiving* the Word and *accepting* the Word in this passage?
3. Review the syllogism in the previous section (at the beginning of Step 5). How confident are you in affirming it? How would those you know who are not believers respond to it?
4. Many people today claim that the Bible can be used to say anything you want, and so, it really doesn’t say anything at all. How would you answer the charge that the Bible is ambiguous?
5. How would you answer a friend who is skeptical about the reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible? For instance, the Bible was composed for political reasons hundreds of years after the death of Jesus?
6. Many people today argue that the Bible is outdated and that some of God’s acts are downright malevolent and evil? For instance, how would you answer the charge that God is guilty of ethnic cleansing or that many of His punishments are too violent to be accepted?

This Week’s Memory Verse

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

II Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

The Godhead *2 Corinthians 13:14*

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

The Sufficient Atonement of Christ *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*

We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

The Resurrection and Return of Christ *Acts 1:3, 9-11*

We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit *John 14:16*

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

Unity in Christ *Ephesians 2:14-17*

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternity *Revelation 21:22-27*

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

Undiluted Worship *Matthew 22:37-40*

Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor and, my neighbor as myself.

Constant Abiding *John 15:1-11*

Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

Desperate Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him and, finding direction for daily life.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives and, in the world.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Total Forgiveness *Ephesians 4:30*

Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

Tangible Compassion *Matthew 25:31-46*

Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

Generous Giving *2 Corinthians 8:7*

Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

God Space *Ephesians 6:19-20*

Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

10 CORE VIRTUES OF A DISCIPLE

Love - a sincere affection for others *1 John 4:10-12*

Love is acting in someone else's interest no matter who they may be, no matter how you feel, and no matter what it costs.

Joy - a delight unaffected by circumstances *John 15:11*

An inner delight in God that is sustained in spite of the changing seasons of life.

Peace - an abiding sense of harmony *Philippians 4:6-7*

Relationships are free from friction. Positively, it describes harmonious relations with others in the church.

Patience - a willingness to stick with things *Proverbs 3:3-4*

Being willing to live with a difficult situation for a long time—even if things are slow to change or never change.

Kindness - a sense of compassion in the heart *Job 6:14*

An inner disposition that puts others at ease and out of which kind actions flow.

Goodness - a goodness that flows outwardly *1 Thess. 5:15*

Choosing to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Faithfulness - an unwavering loyalty *Psalm 26:3*

Being the kind of people who keep our word to one another.

Gentleness/Humility - an attitude of humility without any entitlement; a lack of self-awareness *Philippians 4:5; 2:3-4*

Gentleness is power and strength under God's control.

Humility is considering others above myself, if I consider myself at all.

Self-Control - an ability to direct your energy wisely

Titus 2:11-13

The strength to restrain our desires, emotions, and actions has to come from within rather than from some outside source.

Hope - a certainty of what is to come *Hebrews 6:19-20*

Coping with the hardships of life and with death because of hope in Christ.

Each week this Bible Study will feature either a core belief, practice or virtue vital for growing disciples.

OT in 52
(52 weeks through the Old Testament)

OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE READING IN A YEAR

Monday, April 24 thru Saturday, April 30
1 Samuel 8-10, 11-13, 14-15, 16-17, 18-19, 20-22

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