TEACHING THE MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST

CHURCH IN ROGERSVILLE, TENNESSEE, THE

DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN PURSUIT

OF INTERGENERATIONAL UNITY

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Presented to

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by

Michael Blayne Powell

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APPROVAL SHEET

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To my beloved wife, Marsha, and our daughter, Piper.

Thank you for your endless love and support through ministry, doctoral studies, and

everyday life. I pray that I will forever love, serve, and lead you well!

And to my small group. Gary and Jeni Bare, my grandparents who are always there.

Larry and Kathy Maysilles, my adoptive parents who have followed me every step of the

way. Jim and Terri Merrill, my dear brother and sister in the faith. Each of you give me

motivation and joy in ministry.

Marsha, Piper, Mimi, Papaw, Larry, Kathy, Jim, and Terri

may this project be to your honor and the Lord's glory.

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PREFACE

Apart from the ministry of the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, this project would not be possible. "Trusted for Truth" was a motto that drew me to this school for doctoral studies, and the faculty of the seminary has held fast to this conviction and charge. It is my hope and prayer that these pages reflect well upon those who have invested in me.

Thank you to all those who contributed to the development of this project. I treasure your feedback and guidance. A special thank you to Dr. Hershael W. York, my faculty advisor, who was instrumental to the success of this project. His guidance will serve not only me personally, but the congregation I serve, as I lead them in Christ. Also, to Dr. Kyle Claunch, who served as my second reader and provided me with invaluable feedback in the final phases of my project.

Lastly, to Dr. Trey Meek, my pastor and friend. His insight into the DMin writing process was vital to my success in the program and his friendship indescribably meaningful in ministry.

Blayne Powell

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are relational. Moreover, Christians are associated by the very blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their bond of unity transcends cultural and societal barriers. Under the cross every race, ethnicity, people group, and generation can worship the one true God together, through faith and repentance. In a terribly divided world, Christians can enjoy unadulterated fellowship and unity in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, the apostle Paul pleads with the saints in Corinth, saying, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and same judgment."[1]

In consideration of this command, and in striving for the heart of Jesus for His bride, the church requires teaching on the doctrine of Scripture, that the generations of the church might reach a common worldview, contributing to the unity of the body. A common worldview is possible, and necessary, only when the church collectively submits to Scripture as the lens through which they see life.

Context

First Baptist Church is a "mother church" of Southern Baptist congregations in the county seat town of Rogersville, in northeast Tennessee.[2] First Baptist Church Rogersville (RFBC) has many distinguishing characteristics that uniquely place the church in a position of leadership and gospel-progress in the community. While there are

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[1] All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

[2] Glenn A. Toomey, *Centennial History of the Holston Valley Baptist Association 1884-1983* (Rogersville, TN: Glenn A. Toomey, 1983).

fifty-four churches in the Holston Valley Baptist Association, RFBC is one of few known for its regular sequential exposition of Scripture.[3] This hallmark is foundational to the ethos of the church. Placing the Bible at the center of the pulpit ministry eliminates personality and pastoral-agenda as driving factors within the church and situates the church in a more Christocentric direction.

Another unique distinctive of RFBC is the generational diversity that the church accommodates. While most other Southern Baptist churches in the area are comprised exclusively of an aging population, RFBC has seen an influx of young families into the church. There are two major results of this development. First, RFBC is much healthier than it once was in nearly every perceivable area. Fresh perspective and vision have contributed to the vitality of the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit. While most of the deacons are of the baby-boomer generation, several younger servant-leaders have been selected by the church to join the body. Also, the totality of the pastoral staff are of the millennial generation. The leadership, thus, represents the generational diversity of the congregation.

The second effect is currently less obvious but must be given a great deal of attention to maintain the unity of the church. While the generational diversity of the congregation is a sign of health, it also reveals different worldview strengths and weaknesses among the generations. From a positive perspective, utilization of these variances will allow the church to arrive at the most biblical and effective path forward. At worst, such things contribute to disunity among the body, an issue that RFBC has experienced in the past.[4]

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[3] Mark Roberts, Holston Valley Baptist Association, Associational Missions Strategist, interview with author, March 2021.

[4] In recent history, RFBC experienced a season of conflict and hostility within the church, resulting in the departure of the senior pastor. As a result, the church began a search for a new senior pastor. In November 2019, Trey Meek was called to serve as Pastor of RFBC. Since that time, healing and unity has characterized the congregation. While there are issues still to be addressed, the morale of the church is such that progress is welcomed and expected by the congregation.

Unfortunately, the generations within the church at times have false assumptions and perceptions concerning one another. Rather than ongoing conflict, the issue is one of perception. The generations differ in terms of priority, perspective, and ministry methodology; however, until recently there has been no open forum to discuss these matters. The past has taught RFBC that unspoken assumptions lead to the most intense disputes within the body.

As a result of this understanding, the leadership of RFBC has developed a family ministry. Unique in its design—rather than being a ministry that simply focuses on families with young children and students in the home—RFBC's family ministry seeks to strengthen church unity and intergenerational cooperation among the membership. In other words, rather than focusing on the nuclear family, the emphasis is on the church family. The desire is to see the generations of RFBC of one mind and spirit in seeking to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Several strengths and weaknesses are identifiable in this context.

One area of strength for RFBC is the diversity of perspectives and priorities that contribute to a well-rounded church, addressing a variety of ministry needs. Every generation plays a crucial role in the life of the church. The older generation, or the Prime Generation (PG), has a wealth of biblical knowledge resulting from years of faithful Bible study. The younger generation, or the Rising Generation (RG), is principled in an era hostile to Christianity. The Bridge Generation (BG) exhibits characteristics of both the PG and the RG generations and acts as a mediating voice in achieving unified progress within the church. This generation is diverse and may exhibit both strengths and weaknesses of the other generations, depending on the individual.

The different generations tend to play complementary roles within the church. While the older generation has an admirable knowledge of Scripture, it seems that the younger lacks in this area. Extremely problematic, deficient biblical knowledge among younger generations produces blind spots in theology and worldview analysis. For

example, a lack of skills in biblical interpretation has led to acceptance of cohabitation without marriage, as younger individuals do not see an explicit command against this action in Scripture.

Conversely, while conviction to biblical principles are mostly maintained by the younger generation—amid hostility—it seems as though those who are older have failed to acknowledge and implement the wisdom of youth. As opposed to recognizing a passion for Christ—although at times misguided—older generations insist on the preservation of traditional ministry methodologies and other nonessential matters that have produced a stagnant spirit within the church. They have remained persistent on issues of prudence, and as a result the atmosphere of the church seems stale and lifeless to those who desire spiritual vitality.[5]

Each generation has a specific God-given skillset that contributes to the success of the local church and the building of Christ's kingdom. God has blessed RFBC with a multigenerational congregation, passionate about the local church. There must be intentional effort, however, to bring the generations together in the life of the church so that they may minister, fellowship, and worship together in unity. The family ministry of the church is designed to leverage the strengths, mitigate the weakness, and promote an orthodox doctrine of Scripture within the church that develops a distinctly biblical worldview among all.

Rationale

One of RFBC's greatest strengths is that the church is multigenerational. One could easily spot individuals from every age group in the Lord's Day worship service— from infants to those exceeding one hundred years of age. While this generational diversity is an incredible sign of health, it is also one of the church's greatest fault-lines.

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[5] Aaron Stewart and Michael Graham, student leaders CHOSEN|FBC student ministry, interview with author, June 2021.

Intentional effort is needed at RFBC to produce intergenerational unity in the life of the church. Four reasons demonstrate the necessity of this project. First, teaching on the doctrine of Scripture highlights the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice within the church. Second, RFBC members would be equipped to study and handle the Word of God, leading to a common worldview. Third, this project would help identify strengths and weaknesses of various generations, that the church may grow and become well-rounded in its ministries. Fourth, it would facilitate intergenerational participation and cooperation within the life of the church.

To begin, teaching on the doctrine of Scripture was needed at RFBC to rightly elevate Scripture to its preeminent position within the life of the church. Second Timothy 2:14-26 demonstrates that it is through Scripture that the saints are approved by God. Rather than debating opinions or preferences, the Bible was shown to regulate the local church. The saints must be consistently reminded that the church does not belong to any individual or group; rather, it is the bride of Christ bought by His own blood. The Bible, therefore, is to direct every aspect of the local church, and through the holy Scriptures the church thrives. Any agenda within the church that does not stem from Scripture is illegitimate and counterproductive to the purpose of God for His body. Like most churches, RFBC is in a season where an intentional and noticeable return to Scripture is needed.

Second, members needed equipping, to rightly understand the doctrine of Scripture (2 Tim 2:14-26). In Psalm 119:89-96, the psalmist rejoices in the Word of the Lord—most of all that it "firmly fixed in the heavens." Christians are to rejoice in the fact that the Bible is "firmly fixed." The meaning of Scripture is concrete and perspicuous. The assumption underlying this project was that there is only one correct interpretation of Scripture—in accordance with authorial intent—while there may be many appropriate applications. The problem all too often within RFBC, however, was that illegitimate interpretations led to unfitting applications. In a culture that denies objective truth—a fallacy all too destructive in the minds of younger generations—the church must stand

firm on the inerrancy and eternality of God's fixed Word. Teaching was needed as to the nature of Scripture, that the Saints might rightly understand their need for the Bible. The RG is often blind-sided by assaults on Scripture from secular ideologies (Rom 1:21-28). Similarly, the PG often lacks knowledge of such ideologies to provide a sufficient defense of the Scripture (1 Thess 5:21). Training in the doctrine of Scripture helps combat this problem among all generations by strengthening the convictions of the saints.

Thirdly, this project would aid church members in identifying strengths and weaknesses of various generations, that the church may grow and become well-rounded in its ministries. Those who rally around the Word grow closer through the Word. Not only would training in the doctrine of Scripture produce a common worldview among various generations, but through the Bible, intergenerational relationships would be built for the strengthening and unity of the church. Scripture is sufficient even to regulate and produce intergenerational relationships within the church. The apostle Paul instructed Timothy in this regard in 1 Timothy 4:11-5:2. When intergenerational relationships thrive within the local church, strengths and weaknesses can readily be identified by all. The strengths of one generation may be promoted, while weaknesses are mitigated. As a result, the ministries of the church are strengthened, and the kingdom of God is advanced.

Lastly, this project would produce growing Christians active in the life of the local church. Spiritual vitality is impossible without a proper understanding of the Bible; however, when the people of God hear from Him, through His Word, generational barriers fall. This is possible and very much desired at RFBC. Devoting themselves to the same infallible Bible helps all generations understand that they have the same mission: the Great Commission. While personal opinions and preferences on tertiary issues may remain, all generations can cooperate knowing that they are all of one mind around the Word.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to teach the members of First Baptist Church in Rogersville, Tennessee the doctrine of Scripture in pursuit of intergenerational unity.

Goals

The success of the project was determined by the achievement of four goals. Each of the goals focused on the development and implementation of a biblical worldview wrought by hermeneutical training, in pursuit of intergenerational cooperation and church unity.

1. The first goal was to assess participants' knowledge of the doctrine of Scripture.

2. The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum designed to teach the doctrine of Scripture to participants.

3. The third goal was to teach the six-session curriculum on the doctrine of Scripture to those members involved with the RFBC Family Ministry.

4. The fourth goal was to increase intergenerational unity within the church through instruction on the doctrine of Scripture.

Each of the previously outlined goals was measured in accordance with the research methodology laid out in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of four goals. The first goal was to assess participants' knowledge of the doctrine of Scripture. This goal was measured by administering the Survey on the Doctrine of Scripture (SDS) to participants prior to the curriculum being taught.[6] The SDS is an adaptation of the affirmations and denials of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*.[7] This metric

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[6] See appendix 1. All the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

[7] Richard C. Sproul and Normal L. Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy: The Chicago Statements on Biblical Inerrancy, Hermeneutics, and Application with Official ICBI Commentary* (Arlington, TX: Bastion, 2013).

was used to evaluate each individual's knowledge and beliefs regarding the doctrine of Scripture. This goal was considered successfully met when all participants completed the survey, prior to completion of the curriculum, and the survey had been analyzed, yielding a clearer picture as to how each generation understood the doctrine of Scripture.

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum designed to teach the doctrine of Scripture to participants. This goal was measured by a panel of four qualified and trustworthy ministry leaders, who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when 75 percent of the panel agreed that each criterion of the curriculum provided sufficient instruction and training in the doctrine of Scripture at a lay-level understanding.[8]

The third goal was to teach the six-session curriculum on the doctrine of Scripture to those members involved with the RFBC Family Ministry. This goal was measured by having at least four members of each generational group to participate in and complete the teaching series and surveys. This goal was considered successfully met when each participant had completed at least four of the six teaching sessions and both the pre- and post- surveys had been turned in for evaluation.

The fourth goal was to increase intergenerational unity within the church through instruction on the doctrine of Scripture. This goal was measured by readministering the SDS to determine how perceptions of differing generations had changed over the course of the project. This goal was considered successfully met when all participants had completed the survey and the results had been evaluated, determining

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[8] See appendix 2.

whether participant's knowledge had increased and more closely paralleled one another than before.[9] The instrument used to measure this goal was a *t*-test.[10]

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Generation. Generation is a term that is unusually difficult to define. By its very nature, change is a consistent factor in defining generation; however, continuity is also a major theme, especially as it relates to the biblical conception of familial generations. The *Concise Bible Dictionary* helpfully comments on the term *generation*: "A generation represents those who can gather for worship, so that the gathered worship community forms a generation. The generations of people change, but God has given His name Yahweh to be remembered through all generations. . . . The danger is that a generation would arise that does not know Yahweh."[11] This definition helpfully demonstrates both the continuity and discontinuity associated with the term *generation*. For the purpose of this project, *generations* are distinguished within the church by means of their common place in time and characteristics (utilizing the second aspect of the above definition). While not every individual within a generation has precisely the same characteristics and views on every issue, generalities are relied upon in distinguishing certain generations within the life of RFBC. Gary L. McIntosh writes, "Clearly, there is overlap between these…generations that makes it difficult to determine precisely when one begins and another ends."[12] The aim, by the end of the project, was for the congregation to be seen as a unified congregation existing as one body within the local church (better reflecting the

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[9] See appendix 1.

[10] See appendix 5.

[11] David Dockery, ed., *Concise Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 258.

[12] Gary L. McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 200.

first part of the above definition). The generational groups defined next are adaptations of those identified by Gary L. McIntosh.[13]

Prime generation (PG). The *prime generation* consists of individuals born in the year 1964 and prior. Most individuals in this category are empty nesters—that is, they do not have children in the home. At the time that this project was completed, participants in this age group were at least fifty-eight years of age. This category is a combination of McIntosh's *Builder* and *Boomer* generations.[14]

Bridge generation (BG). The *bridge generation* consists of individuals born between the years 1965-1999. These individuals are adults within the church who have surpassed the college/young adult category. Most individuals in this category are married and have children in the home, although this is not a requirement. At the time that this project was completed, participants in this category were between the ages of twenty-three and fifty-seven. This category is a combination of McIntosh's *Buster* and *Bridger* generations.[15]

Rising generation (RG). The *rising generation* consists of individuals born in the year 2000 or later. These members include high school and college students (or those within this peer group, regardless of participation in higher education).[16] Most individuals in this category are single, young adults who do not yet have children. This category encompasses both students and young adults—ages twenty-four and younger. McIntosh,

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[13] Due to the nature of generational studies, the categories provided by McIntosh have been adapted to reflect the modern church. Categories are determined by year of birth; however, attributes are also provided for each generation that will characterize most—though not all—of the individuals who belong to that generation. Demographic information was collected, as part of this project, to determine whether each individual accurately represented the expected characteristics of their generation. As McIntosh notes, only about three-fourths of each generation accurately represents the characteristics that typically define their generation as a whole. McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 214.

[14] McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 27-118.

[15] McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 121-94.

[16] While any church member born in the year 2000 or later would fall into this category, no one who has yet to enter high school is eligible for participation in the ministry project.

at the time of this study, had written little on these individuals. While he included them in the *Bridger* generation, they had not yet developed their own generational characteristics.[17] For this project, *rising generation* is identified as a distinct generation. To provide a minimal standard for evaluation, no individual who had yet to enter high school was surveyed.

Biblical worldview. George Barna defines *worldview* as "the multi-dimensional filter (i.e., intellectual, emotional, and spiritual) through which you make every decision."[18] As such, a *biblical worldview* may be defined as a worldview that makes the Bible the chief authoritative standard or "multi-dimensional filter" through which Christians analyze and make every decision, implementing the Reformation doctrine *sola Scriptura*.

Family ministry. In the context of RFBC, *family ministry* is a ministry of the church designed to promote intergenerational fellowship, Bible study, participation, and church unity. While it encompasses the nuclear family, and addresses issues regarding its health and strength, it is specifically designed to address the health of the church family. A strong church family will produce strong family units in the home.

There was one limitation to the project. Participation in the ministry project was limited to church members who were actively involved in the family ministry at Rogersville First Baptist Church. Participation could consist of attending any of the family ministry seminars or sponsored events in the past. Participation was open to members of sister Southern Baptists churches, provided that they had attended a past Family Ministry event at RFBC.

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[17] McIntosh, *One Church, Four Gener*ations, 161-233.

[18] George Barna, *American Worldview Inventory 2020-21* (Glendale, AZ: Arizona Christian University, 2021), 9.

Conclusion

A multigenerational church is a sign of health; however, in an increasingly secularized and polarized society, generational differences can produce divergent worldviews within a congregation. Since Christ's desire is the unity of his church, and since the Bible is the ultimate authority for faith and practice, RFBC members would benefit from training in the doctrine of Scripture in pursuit of intergenerational unity. This project sought to achieve this goal in accordance with a distinctly biblical and theological framework to be explored in the pages to come. Chapter 2 will provide an exegetical understanding of the doctrine of Scripture. Chapter 3 will then deal with the theological and historical issues relevant to the project. Finally, chapters 4 and 5 will provide an explanation of the project and end results for examination.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND EXEGETICAL REFLECTIONS
ON THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

This chapter provides the biblical and exegetical foundations upon which the
ministry project was built. The thesis for this chapter is that Scripture is sufficient to
produce intergenerational unity in the local church. To demonstrate this biblically, several
passages of Scripture will be examined. First, Psalm 119 will demonstrate the nature of
Scripture. Second, Hebrews 4:11-16 will reveal the invasive character of Scripture and
the work of the Word. Lastly, 1 Timothy 4:11-5:2 will exhibit the sufficiency of Scripture
in promoting intergenerational unity within the local church.

The Nature of God's Word: Psalm 119

Psalm 119, perhaps more than any other passage of Scripture, articulates the
nature of God's Word. It is the longest psalm in the psalter—indeed, the longest chapter
in the Bible—comprised of 22 stanzas and spanning 176 verses. An acrostic psalm,
exhausting the Hebrew alphabet—each line in each stanza beginning with the same letter—
it majestically proclaims the beauties of God's Word. Nearly every verse declares the
excellencies of divine revelation. God's heart for truth is visibly and lyrically manifest in
the psalm.

Psalm 119 is joyful and celebratory in tone. The psalmist feels the weight of
God's Word and at the same time it is his delight—to him the Word of God is personal. It
is here that one finds Scripture's most exhaustive revelation of its own nature. Daniel
Akin writes,

> At least eight different terms or synonyms are used in reference to the Word of God:
> "instruction" or "law" (*torah*) twenty-five times; "word" (*dabar*) twenty-four times;
> "judgments" or "ordinances" (*mispatim*) twenty-three times; "decrees" (*hedot*)

twenty-three times; "commands" (*mitswoth*) twenty-two times; "statutes" (*chuqqim*) twenty-one times; "precepts" (*piqqudim*) twenty-one times; "promise" or "word" ('*imra*) nineteen times.[1]

The author exhausts his vocabulary with verses seemingly synonymous that at the same time elegantly highlight the nuances of the Bible—the very nature of revelation.

Mark Dever writes that the Psalm 119 answers questions such as, "What is God's law? What is God's law like? What does God's law do? And what should we do in response to God's law?"[2] Indeed, these are some of life's most important questions, as they alone lead to the God of the Bible and to saving faith. These questions reveal the nature of Scripture. Dever notes, "To put it simply, Psalm 119 is not talking about just the Ten Commandments or the Pentateuch, but the totality of biblical revelation."[3] Thus, the Word of God is progressive in nature. To understand it, one must interpret it in light of itself. It is self-attesting and self-verifying. It is preeminent and absolute truth, woven together in such a manner that mankind may grasp and understand it, and yet, it is simultaneously transcendent—beyond the reach of finite man. "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" (Rom 11:34).

In this section, Dever's questions are utilized in coming to a biblical understanding of the nature of Scripture. What is God's Word, what is God's Word like, what does God's Word do, and how should human beings respond to God's Word?

What Is God's Word?

The question "what is God's Word?" may be answered at several different levels. First, it must be acknowledged that God's Word is distinct from mere human words. It is divine revelation. It belongs to God and is revealed in and through Him alone. In

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[1] Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalm 119*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman, 2021), 4.

[2] Mark Dever, "How to Know God: Mediate on His Word," in *The Inerrant Word*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 53.

[3] Dever, "How to Know God," 63.

Psalm 119, the Word of God is referenced explicitly 173 times, and no less than 20 other occasions implicitly refer to those things which God has revealed through His Word (i.e., your salvation (vv. 41, 81, 123, 166, 174), your name (vv. 55, 132), your favor (v. 58), your steadfast love (vv. 64, 76, 124, 149), your faithfulness (v. 90), your appointment (v. 91), the command of my God (v. 115), your judgments (v. 120), a pledge of good (v. 122), your righteous promise (v. 123), your righteousness (v. 142), your justice (v. 149); your hand (v. 173)). In fact, there is only one verse among the 176 that does not either explicitly or implicitly refer to God's Word or divine revelation—Psalm 119:84: "How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me?" Even in this verse there are allusions to God's Word. Scripture is both the reason for the psalmist's persecution and the standard by which his persecutors will be judged.

Every verse attests to the fact that God's Word belongs to Him alone. Because God is the source and standard of truth, His Word is true. God cannot lie; therefore, His Word is absolute truth (Heb 6:18). It is infallible. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 makes more explicit the spirit of Psalm 119—the Word of God is inspired. J. Ligon Duncan III articulates, "Regarding the nature of Scripture, in three Greek words, [Paul] articulates the doctrine of plenary, verbal inspiration: *pasa graphe theopneustos*, or 'All Scripture is breathed out by God.'"[4] The very language of Scripture is inspired by God in its totality, without any mixture of error—verbal, plenary inspiration. Duncan continues, "[Paul] makes it clear that no theory of partial or selective inspiration can measure up to what he is asserting about the Word of God."[5]

Thus, in defining what Scripture is, one must start with the doctrine of inspiration. Gregg Allison defines the inspiration of Scripture as

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[4] J. Ligon Duncan III, "The Nature, Benefits, and Results of Scripture," in MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word*, 95.

[5] Duncan, "The Nature, Benefits, and Results," 95.

the special work of the Holy Spirit by which he superintended the biblical authors as they composed their writings. While these authors employed their own personalities, theological perspectives, writings styles, and so forth, the Spirit ensured that what they wrote was what God wanted them to write: the Word of God, fully truthful and divinely authoritative. Inspiration is plenary (*all* Scripture is God-breathed; 2 Tim. 3:16), verbal (inspiration extends to the *words* of Scripture), and concursive (the Spirit and the human authors *wrote* together). Modes of inspiration include historical research, Spirit-assisted memory, miraculous revelation, and sound judgment.[6]

The exact language used in defining inspiration has been the source of much debate historically; however, Allison's definition does justice to the evangelical view and is an accurate representation of Scripture's own testimony concerning itself. It demonstrates that Scripture has both divine and human authors. The Holy Spirit superintended the human authors in such a way that the very words (verbal) and its sum total (plenary) are completely without error and inspired by God, yet not in such a way that undermined the personalities, writing styles, theologies, vocabularies, or any number of other features specific to each of the human authors. Indeed, the Bible is truly a work of the Holy Spirit and truly a work of human authors.

Being a work of God, it is free from any error. It is inerrant. Being a work of man, it is a product of human literary devices. It is a written Word, or inscripturated. It is complete, finished, and sealed—that is to say, special revelation ceased with the conclusion on the canon. For this reason, the apostle John wrote at the conclusion of the canon, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" (Rev 22:18-19). Thus, Scripture is perfect.

This is precisely the affirmation of the psalmist. In verse 96 he writes, "I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad." Had Scripture merely been a work of human authors, its perfection would be left wanting. From the

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[6] Gregg R. Allison, *Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 116.

perspective of the psalmist, even perfection is limited—in a human sense—since man is finite. He is creature, not Creator.[7] However, the Word of God goes beyond what man can ascertain. God's law breaks the scales of human perfection. It exceeds the psalmist's capacity. He is unable to fully encapsulate its divine essence, even in Spirit-inspired verse. Scripture is God's all-sufficient self-revelation, but even the Bible does not contain the limitless knowledge and wisdom of God's omniscience. Special revelation provides man with all that God would have Him to know regarding doctrine, faith, and salvation. Yet, even what can be known by Scripture goes beyond what will be known by man. For God's Word is "exceedingly broad" (Ps 119:96).

Thus, the Bible is sufficient. However, this affirmation of Scripture can be easily misunderstood. The reformation doctrine *sola Scriptura* teaches that Scripture is the ultimate and sufficient authority for Christian faith and practice. Jason Allen writes to this effect:

> *Sola Scriptura*. This truth, that Scripture alone is the sole authority for our beliefs and practices, abides at the center of Reformation theology. It should serve as the believer's guardrails for life, doctrine, and ministry. Scripture alone is to determine what we confess, how we live, and how we order and minister within our churches. For the faithful evangelical, Scripture alone is the authority.[8]

The Bible does not provide all knowledge—exhausting every realm in which human beings may achieve insight. No, its purpose is much more specific. Scripture reveals those truths that are essential for saving faith and Christian living. For this reason, the psalmist writes, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word" (v. 9). Furthermore, he petitions to the Lord, "I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts" (v. 94). The Word is thus sufficient to save and to sustain God's people.

Bearing in mind its sufficiency, the necessity of God's Word is clearly demonstrated. Not only is God's Word sufficient to achieve both salvation and

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[7] Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalm 119*, 81.

[8] Jason K. Allen, *Sola: How the Five Solas Are Still Reforming the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 19.

sanctification, but God accomplishes His will through the power of His Word. No one comes to faith apart from the Word, for "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). More so, God's people mature through the Word. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul writes, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Thus, God's Word accomplishes all that He purposes, and it never returns void (Isa 55:11).

To summarize, in answering the question "What is God's Word?" it has been maintained that the Bible is divine revelation. Its dual authorship involved both God and human beings as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The inspiration of Scripture is both verbal (language) and plenary (its sum total). It is inerrant and perfect, achieving all that God has purposed. It is sufficient, revealing to humanity all that is necessary for salvation and faithful living.

What Is God's Word Like?

The second question that must be asked when evaluating the nature of Scripture is, "What is God's Word like?" The tone of Psalm 119 does much in revealing the answer. Dever writes, "Psalm 119 becomes a solemnly joyful celebration as it reveals God's Word to be true, good, and everlasting. If we lose any one of these attributes, God's Word is greatly diminished, but with all three together, the future—which could otherwise be dark and foreboding—is flooded with light."[9] According to Dever, the second question is dependent upon an adequate answer to the first. The fact that God's Word is true, good, and everlasting gives hope for tomorrow, to those who put their faith in it.

The psalmist has reason to rejoice and does so repeatedly throughout Psalm 119. Numerous refrains throughout the text demonstrate the magnitude of God's Word in the life of a believer—it is true, good, and everlasting. This is reason for both celebration and

[9] Dever, "How to Know God," 64.

joy. More so, such refrains do not testify of a stagnant book, but a living Word. The Word is living because it proceeds from the mouth of a living God. Dever notes, "Throughout Psalm 119, the Word of God is identified very closely with God himself. God's Word is his emissary, his ambassador, a revelation of himself, and a revelation of his will and character."[10] Since God is the author of Scripture, and Scripture is how He reveals himself to His elect, the Bible is relational in nature. It facilitates relationship between God and man. It provokes personal and emotional responses—certainly not the type of emotionalism that plagues much of religious experience, but emotion that results from deep intimacy and personal relationship with God.

Throughout Psalm 119 are calls of longing and expectation. The only thing that will satisfy the psalmist's inward desires is to experience God—he does this by means of the Word: "I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me! My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times" (vv. 19-20). At other points the psalmist laments reflecting upon his depravity: "My soul melts for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word! Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law" (vv. 28-29). Again, one sees that the Word of God is the psalmist's sustaining grace: "Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life. The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law. When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord" (vv. 49-52). Furthermore, a desperate desire to be seen by the Lord— even more a desire to see Him—resonates throughout the psalm. This is especially the case in verses 81-82: "My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word. My eyes long for your promise; I ask, 'When will you comfort me?'"

The Word of God reveals who God is to His people. He is who He reveals Himself to be. The God of the Bible is the only true God, and His Word provides sufficient

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[10] Dever, "How to Know God," 65.

revelation of His person and nature. Likewise, it provokes responses of awe, glory, and praise (vv. 7, 62, 108, 161, 164, 171, 175). Dever writes, "The Bible is not God, but apart from the Bible, we could not know him as we do. To attack the Word of God is to attack God, and to honor the Word of God is to honor God."[11] The Bible is God's self-revelation to humanity. Psalm 119 is a testimony of blessedness because of God's self-revelation. J. Stephen Yuille says, "Blessedness flows not from changing circumstances but from an unchanging God."[12] This is the God of the Bible—the Bible celebrated in Psalm 119.

What Does God's Word Do?

The question of what the Word of God accomplishes will be dealt with at greater length in the following sections. Here it is sufficient to say that Scripture is living and active (Heb 4:12). It accomplishes all that God purposes (Isa 55:11); is the power of God to save (Rom 1:16); produces faith (Rom 10:17); sanctifies the believer (John 17:17); is God's sustaining grace—a means of perseverance (Ps 73:26); and teaches, reproves, corrects, rebukes, and trains for righteousness (2 Tim 3:16-17). It is through God's Word that He creates *ex nihilo* (Gen 1). It is embodied in the living and incarnate Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-2) and shines the glory of God in a dark and fallen world (John 1:5).

The Word is living and active. This does not suggest that it changes over time, but that it has forever been and will forever be how God accomplishes His purposes. It is for precisely this reason that it does not change. Rather the psalmist proclaims, "Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast" (Ps 119:89). While the generations change, the Word of God is immovable. Akin expounds on Luther's thoughts on verse 89: "The great Reformer Martin Luther is reported to have said of Holy Scripture,

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[11] Dever, "How to Know God," 65.

[12] J. Stephen Yuille, *Great Spoil: Thomas Manton's Spirituality of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 13.

'The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me. The Bible is not antique or modern. It is eternal.'"[13] Since its source is the unchanging, eternal, and immutable God of creation, it is unhindered by a changing society. It is a sure and steady anchor amid the seductions of liberalism. Cultural preferences, ideals and practices may change, but God's Word is immovable. It is fixed and it is active—accomplishing the same work from generation to generation. The Word saves.

Dever notes, "Since the Bible is the Word of the all-powerful God, we shouldn't be surprised to learn that it is active and accomplishes much."[14] He identifies five specific ways in which the Word of God is active: (1) God's Word inspires awe; (2) God's Word convicts of sin; (3) God's Word produces personal holiness; (4) God's Word promotes hopefulness; and (5) God's Word delivers or saves the elect.[15] Each of these tasks are personal and salvific in nature. While God's Word is available to all, it is effective in the lives of believers. Through the Holy Spirit applying and working God's Word into the human heart, God initiates personal and intimate relationships with His people. Allison writes, "[A]s propositional revelation, Scripture comes personally from the triune God with the intention of initiating and nurturing a personal relationship with his fallen human creatures in the human society called the church. Accordingly, revelation is both propositional and personal."[16] It is propositional in that God has said these things (i.e., "thus saith the Lord"). It is personal in that obedience to those commands allows for right relationship with Him. Specifically, this is accomplished through the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ—the living Word. Yet, it is through God's written Word that human

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[13] Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalm 119*, 78.

[14] Dever, "How to Know God," 66.

[15] Dever, "How to Know God," 66-68.

[16] Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 116.

beings can contribute to the divine-human relationship through personal holiness and obedience. Regeneration is monergistic—it is an act of God alone. However, sanctification is synergistic—mankind plays an active role in the process.

There is another notable aspect to Allison's point. While the psalmist focuses primarily on his love of the Word as an individual, the Word also brings together a covenant community. There are both individual and corporate aspects to the work of God's Word. The Bible gathers and orders His people into community with Himself and each other. This concept will be further unpacked in the discussion on 1 Timothy 4:11-5:2. In answering this question briefly—specifically as it relates to psalm 119—God's Word is lifegiving and it provokes a response.

How Should Human Beings Respond?

Yuille, in evaluation of Thomas Manton's work on Psalm 119, writes,

> For Manton, the soul is eternal; it cannot be satisfied by something that is not equal to its own duration—the temporal. In addition, the soul is spiritual; it cannot be satisfied by something that is not equal to its own nature—the material. Finally, the soul is exceptional; it cannot be satisfied by something that is not equal to its own quality—the trivial. The soul can find happiness only in that which is suited to it. This means that the soul can find happiness only in God.[17]

Psalm 119 is the testimony of a man who has found happiness, blessedness, and satisfaction in God. His contentment is prompted by God's all-sufficient Word. This is the appropriate response of a believer; however, rarely is it a reality. Yuille explains, "Our problem, however, is that—since the fall—we have sought happiness apart from God."[18] Satisfaction is so rarely acquired since it is sinfully sought after. Only God's Word is a sufficient source for human blessedness (or happiness). It points forwards to that which is eternal, spiritual, and exceptional in the words of Yuille.

For this reason, the only appropriate response to the Bible is submission.

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[17] Yuille, *Great Spoil*, 14.

[18] Yuille, *Great Spoil*, 12.

Because the psalmist submitted his life to the full weight, scrutiny, and force of God's Word, he found immense joy in it. Just as Paul leaves no room for partial inspiration, the Christian can leave no room for partial submission. Kevin DeYoung says, "The mature Christian disciple does not relax any of the commands of Scripture."[19] DeYoung exhorts believers to be "kingdom minded." What does this look like? He explains, "It can mean many things, but not reading your Bible, thinking you know better than your Bible, and provoking people to ignore parts of the Bible is not kingdom living."[20] Kingdom-mindedness is Bible-mindedness.

An appropriate response to Scripture includes submission to the Lordship of Christ, repentance of sins, and sanctified lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is folly to expect a work of the Holy Spirit apart from the Bible. Instead, faith in Christ results from the preached Word of God (Rom 10:17). Repentance of sin only occurs when someone knows what is pleasing and displeasing to God—by means of His Word—and commits himself to those things (1 Thess 2:4; Rom 12:2; Jas 1:22). The Holy Spirit sanctifies through application of the truth (John 17:17). The Christian is to experience continual spiritual growth by means of the Word. The believer cannot be divorced from the Bible; rather, he must be faithfully wedded to it. Through this deep commitment to God's Word, the believer finds joy and fulfillment.

Yuille again writes of Manton's commentary of Psalm 119:

> For Manton, the way [to enjoy God] lies in adherence to the followings six propositions: (1) God is over all, and above all, blessed enough in himself, and needs nothing from us to add to his happiness and perfection. (2) Though God stand in no need of us, yet he is willing to communicate his blessedness, and to make us happy in the enjoyment of himself. (3) The Word of God, especially the gospel part, does only reach us the way how we may be blessed in the enjoyment of God. (4) If we would profit by the word of God, we must go to God, and desire the light and strength of his grace. (5) The more we are brought to attend upon the word, and the more influence the word has upon us, the nearer the blessing, (6) It is not only an

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[19] Kevin DeYoung, "Christ, Christians, and the Word of God," in MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word*, 78.

[20] DeYoung, "Christ, Christians, and the Word of God," 78.

affront upon God, and the way he prescribes, and to seek blessedness in temporal things.[21]

For Yuille, and for Manton, enjoyment of God is found only in dedication to the Word of God. Spurgeon, likewise, in his catechism—an adaptation of the Westminster and Baptist catechisms—asks the question "What is the main reason a person exists?" The answer, "The main reason a person exists is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."[22] This was Spurgeon's means of perseverance amid crippling depression—a love and joy in God's Word.[23] For him, it was a sufficient and sustaining grace.

For John Piper, the psalmist is an example of a Christian Hedonist—one who finds ultimate pleasure in Christ. Piper famously captures the meaning of blessedness in his signature statement "God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him."[24] The psalmist was satisfied by God's Word because God was his greatest love and deepest affection. Expounded in Psalm 119 is the glory of God's Word. God is glorified through the psalmist's love for His Word. The psalmist clearly demonstrates that satisfaction, blessedness, and happiness can only come through the bread of life—the Word. He consumes it and thrives on it. So must the Christian.

Furthermore, it is because of the ultimate blessedness of God's Word that worship is continually provoked in the psalmist's heart. Piper writes, "Our ultimate goal in reading the Bible is that God's infinite worth and beauty would be exalted in the everlasting, white-hot worship of the blood-bought bride of Christ from every people,

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[21] Yuille, *Great Spoil*, 16.

[22] Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Catechism*, rev. and updated by Roger McReynolds (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2011), question 1.

[23] John Piper, *21 Servants of Sovereign Joy: Faithful, Flawed, and Fruitful* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 760.

[24] John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2017), 288.

language, tribe, and nation."[25] Through Scripture, the ultimate beauty—the very glory of God—is manifest to humanity. This leaves the believer with a sense of awe. The psalmist writes, "Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words" (v. 161). There is a sense in which the believer is incapable of a satisfactory response to the Bible. Can there truly be one? All one can do is stand in amazements of the wonders of God. Akin writes to this effect: "There is only one proper response to this love: to love him in return as we stand in awe of his Word (v. 161) and to praise him throughout the day (v. 164)."[26]

Since the Bible is God's self-revelation, and since He desires intimacy with His people, the Bible is sure to provoke a response from humanity. The question is, what is the appropriate response? The response of the psalmist is demonstrative of a true and mature Christian—one who is in intimate relation with God. Allison puts it this way: "[A]s propositional revelation, Scripture comes personally from the triune God with the intention of nurturing a personal relationship with his fallen human creatures in the human society called the church. Accordingly, revelation is both propositional and personal."[27] This is the understanding of the psalmist—that the Word of God is propositional and personal. It is by the commands of God's Word that the psalmist learns obedience (vv. 7, 71, 73), and through it that he loves God (vv. 47, 48, 97, 113, 119, 127, 132, 140, 159, 163, 165, 167) and experiences the love of God in return (vv. 41, 64, 76, 88, 124, 149). His response throughout Psalm 119 is one of love, adoration, submission, awe, and longing.

Not everyone, however, will respond to God's Word in this way. Awe-struck wonder at God's Word is only possible for the one who has been brought to life by it; yet such a perspective is not always the initial response of a new believer. One must grow to

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[25] John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 99.

[26] Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalm 119*, 137.

[27] Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 116.

love and appreciate the Word. The psalmist speaks as one who has matured beyond a superficial understanding of God's law. What then of the one who is new and immature in the faith? C. H. Spurgeon writes,

> Without question, the more complete our sanctification, the more intense our blessedness. Christ is our way, and we are not only alive in Christ, but we are also to live in Christ. Sadly, we blemish His holy way with our selfishness, self-exaltation, willfulness, and worldliness. As a result, we miss the full measure of blessedness which is in Him as our way. A believer who errs is still saved, but he does not experience the joy of his salvation. He is rescued, but not improved; greatly tolerated, but not greatly blessed.[28]

The full measure of blessedness is contingent upon an appropriate response to God's Word, and believers progress in blessedness as they mature in faith. Spurgeon's remarks are curious and must be understood in context. It is doubtful that he is endorsing a theological acceptance of nominal Christianity; however, he does make clear that the level of blessedness in the life of a believer is directly correspondent to the degree of his sanctification. Thus, "the full measure of blessedness" achieved by the psalmist did not occur instantaneously but through careful and consistent submission to the Bible. The Christian—the one who experiences true blessedness—is alive to Christ through the Word. The more alive to Christ's Word one is, the more blessing he can enjoy. This does not equate to a type of prosperity Christianity. Rather, it is the ability of a Christian to find joy in God amid any and all circumstances of life.

There are those then who experience "the full measure of blessedness" in this life; those who experience blessedness in part, as they undergo the process of sanctification; and those who experience no true and abiding measure of blessedness in response to God's Word. English Puritan Thomas Manton wrote that the essence of blessedness is found in the denial of self. That is, to find blessedness in God's Word—and thus joy and contentment in every circumstance—is to deny oneself in pursuit of Christ. He writes of the sinful condition of humanity: "Although the cross is a badge of

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[28] C. H. Spurgeon, *The Golden Alphabet: An Exposition of Psalm 119* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2020), 17.

Christianity, it is always displeasing to flesh and blood. We dislike heaven not for itself, but for the way we travel to the land of promise: through a howling wilderness. Carnality imagines a path strewn with lilies and roses; we are too tender-footed to think of briars and thorns."[29] God's Word does not beacon humanity to prosperity and worldly satisfaction, but to suffering for the sake of Christ. The cross is only beautiful to those are saved by it. For those who are too "tender-footed," cursed by sin and depraved at heart, the blessedness of God's Word cannot be truly perceived. "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18).

Where the elect love God's Word, the reprobate will despise it. Where adoration naturally flows from the heart of the believer, a nonbeliever will find it repulsive. The man of God will submit to it, but a sinner will surely rebel. The psalmist stands in awe of God's Word, but the rejector will not be able to tolerate its glory. God's people await Christ's return—they long for it through the testimony of the Word—yet the scoffer flees and clings to his temporal pleasures. The Word of God provokes a response in every heart. The psalmist exemplifies the heart of a true man of God.

God's Word is revealed to mankind to be good, glorious, beautiful, eternal, inerrant, infallible, awe-inspiring, authoritative, historical, timeless, sufficient, progressive, unchanging, life-giving, clear, understandable, profound, transcendent, and limitless; its accolades could go on without end. This is the nature of God's Word. What is perhaps most amazing is that it is revelation given with a purpose. The above attributes are true in and of themselves; however, their purpose is to lead sinners into right relationship with God. God's Word is divine revelation, and it demands a response. Spurgeon speaks of how humanity ought to respond to the Bible:

> True Christianity is always practical, for it doesn't allow us to delight in ourselves in a perfect rule without producing in us a longing to be conformed to that rule in

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[29] Thomas Manton, *A Treatise of Self-Denial* (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2014), 4.

our daily conduct. A blessing belongs to those who hear and read and understand the Word of the Lord; yet it is a far greater blessing to actually be obedient to it and to carry out in our daily walk and lives what we learn in our searching of the Scriptures. Purity in our way and walk is the truest blessedness.[30]

No man can be indifferent to God's Word. Everyone must take a stand. For the King of

King declares, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with

me scatters" (Matt 12:30). True blessing comes through obedience—gathering with Christ

through the ministry of the Word.

The Work of God's Word: Hebrews 4:11-16

Upon this foundation—the nature of God's Word—attention is now given to

the work of God's Word. Hebrew's 4:11-16 is perhaps one of the most vivid portrayals of

the invasiveness of the Bible:

> Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

It must be recognized from the onset that while the written Word may be distinguished

from the living Word, the two cannot be separated. The Bible is the revelation of Jesus

Christ, and it is right to conclude that the totality of the Old and New Testaments point to

Him. Jesus is both model and judge, and His example and standard is made evident

throughout the entirety of Scripture.

The first verse in this passage gives a command: "Let us strive to enter that rest,

so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience" (v. 11). Spiritual rest is found and

achieved only through God's Word. However, the context of the book of Hebrews must

be considered for full understanding. The author of the epistle is unknown, but there is little

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[30] Spurgeon, *The Golden Alphabet*, 15.

debate as to his audience. Hebrews is a sermon directed to Jewish Christians who were tempted to fall away by relying on the law for salvation. Thus, these individuals are in danger of straying from the gospel, to eternal ruin.[31]

The main point of Hebrews—while portions of the text are difficult to interpret—is quite clear: do not fall away. The author urges his audience to persevere in the faith. Thomas R. Schreiner writes, "The words of Jesus on the cross, 'It is finished!' (John 19:30), capture the theology of Hebrews."[32] Christ is the once-for-all sacrifice for His people (Heb 10:1-18). Salvation is accomplished in Christ alone. As such, those who have put their faith in Jesus for salvation may have assurance.

Hebrews 4:11-16 captures well the overall theme of perseverance and assurance in the book. Prior to verse 11, the Jewish Christians were exhorted to enter the rest of God by faith in His promises. The author—by means of illustration—draws attention to their Jewish ancestors\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\. Many of the Jewish fathers had failed to enter the rest of God since they did not rely upon His promises. R. Kent Hughes rightly identifies Numbers 14 as the instance to which the author of Hebrews is referring.[33] Joshua and Caleb believed the promised land could be taken with God's help; however, the remaining ten spies sent into the land were unfaithful and did not lend ear to the "good news" being preached. As a result of their faithlessness, they were not permitted by God to enter the promised land. Hebrews 4:2 reads, "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened." In the words of Hughes, "But now, faced with a new challenge, they simply did not trust God and so failed to enter their rest."[34]

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[31] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 6.

[32] Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 1.

[33] R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 1:108.

[34] Hughes, *Hebrews*, 1:108.

It is this contrast that the author has in mind when he pens verse 11: "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." In other words, rest is found in God's promises (i.e., his Word), so do not fall like your ancestors through disobedience. Upon this reminder he continues to explain the work of the Word in the lives of the faithful: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (v. 12). The point here, and in the verse to come, is clear—no human wisdom or cunning can supersede his inquisitive Word. God knows everything and his Word is sufficient in revealing all things concerning the human heart. It is A. W. Tozer that gives perhaps the cleverest summary of the wisdom of God and by extension his Word:

> God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and all pluralities, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.[35]

Knowing all things, God cuts to the depths of the soul by means of His Word. It exposes one's innermost being. Entering spiritual rest may be a painful process; however, all true Christians experience this reality, and it is to their benefit. It is the work of the Word in "piercing to the division of soul and of spirit" that the dead heart becomes a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26). The work of God's Word is invasive. It cuts the believer to the core of their being.

What exactly takes place in this invasive process? Simply put, the Word discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart (v. 12b). Dennis E. Johnson captures the essence of this verse:

> The exposition and application . . . warn against hearing God's voice with hardened hearts, draws to a fitting close in a description of God's word as living and effective,

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[35] A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God, Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (Natrona Heights, PA: General, 2019), 63.

sharp enough to cut to the hearts hidden depths, discerning our secret thoughts and intentions. Scripture elsewhere compares the word to a sharp sword wielded by the Lord's servant, the divine warrior whose very name is "the word of God" (Isa. 49:2; Eph. 6:17; cf. Rev. 1:16; 2:12; 19:13-15). As the speech of the living God (Heb. 3:12; Deut. 5:26), who binds himself by swearing an oath based on his endless life (Heb. 3:11; 6:13-18; Num. 14:21-23; Gen. 22:15-18), the word itself is alive. God knows everyone through and through, and no creature is hidden from his eyes, for all lie exposed and utterly vulnerable. Therefore his word cuts us to the core.[36]

No one can escape the Word of God. Verse 13 says, "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." Even the hidden secrets of the heart are exposed before God's Word. Vulnerability is really the idea being demonstrated in verse 12—the Word of God makes everyone vulnerable. The Bible places everyone on even ground. No one is exempt. All are brought before the invasive and piercing work of the Word. And it is precisely because this Word is living that it may discern the actions, even the intentions, of man's heart.

What may vary is the effects of Scripture on different individuals. To the unfaithful, the Word exposes guilt; to the faithful, it magnifies the mercy and grace of God. To the faithless it condemns, but to God's children it is a convicting gift. Through it, He removes the stain of sin by the blood of His Son, and by it Christians enter His rest. Here one sees the most glorious of biblical paradoxes. Through the Bible believers may experience the rest of God, but such a rest takes much effort and striving. Christ's work alone provides rest, but the believer must still persevere. R. Albert Mohler Jr. expresses this sentiment: "We must work at resting. This means we must work against all of our efforts to prove our righteousness. We must stive against all our efforts to justify ourselves."[37] It is Christ—and His Word—that works in believers, and they are to live in this reality daily. This is the essence of spiritual rest. Mohler continues,

The description of the Bible as a sword that can pierce and divide the soul demonstrates the invasive quality of the Word. When we approach Scripture with a

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[36] Dennis E. Johnson, *Hebrews*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews-Revelation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 70.

[37] R. Albert Mohler, *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews*, Christ-Centered Exposition Series (Nashville: Holman, 2017), 60.

humble hermeneutic of submission rather than a haughty hermeneutic of suspicion, then it is not we who read the Scripture, it is the Scripture that reads us. Scripture untangles the human heart and unearths sin like no other book can. No other book can discern the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Only God's Word can do that.[38]

Much can be said regarding this point. First, it is truly the Word of God that does a work in the life of a believer—a work that one is incapable of on his own. How well can someone truly know themselves? Yet, the Bible perfectly discerns every intention of the heart. Here again one must recognize that the Bible judges actions, but it is much more invasive than simply evaluating outward behavior. The Word of God so deeply searches the human heart that it even reveals the intentions behind actions. God saw the absolute wickedness of man in Noah's day. Scripture says, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). His Word continues to discern even today. It is invasive at the deepest levels, such levels that humans themselves cannot fully understand.

The apostle Paul understood this inner struggle when he said,

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Rom 7:15-20, 25-25)

Paul experienced the reality of agonizing and freeing conviction. His reliance was upon the Word, and he confessed its goodness, yet he could not understand his own inner self. The Word revealed his inward sin, but the work of the Word—through the indwelling Spirit—revealed the truth to him. He was to rely upon another's righteousness. As such, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" was the victory cry of the apostle Paul. He found victory and rest in Jesus.

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[38] Mohler, *Hebrews*, 61.

Notice, however, that while Paul did not understand his struggle with sin, he had a keen awareness of his sinfulness. What he was unable to understand was how one indwelt by the Spirit could struggle so intensely; although, it was precisely because of the work of the Spirit through the Word that he engaged in such a fierce battle. The Word exposed Paul's fallenness and was a constant means of sanctification and perseverance. While not absolute, Paul had spiritual insights that allowed him a certain level of discernment. How deeply Paul could discern his own heart is left unknown. What is made clear is that he could perceive his depravity in a way that the unregenerate cannot. Thus, believers should use the Word regularly to evaluate their own hearts and intentions, attempting to set their minds toward the things of God while rejecting worldliness (Col 3:2). Paul wrote in like fashion to the author of Hebrews: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). Faithfulness to God's Word distinguishes a believer from a nonbeliever. The Word of God is, therefore, eternally effective in the life of a Christian.

Schreiner points out that Hebrews 4:11-13 is contrasting the effects of faithfulness and disobedience. The Word is effective in either situation; however, the consequences are vastly different. He writes,

> Verses 12-13 explain why readers should strive to enter God's rest and why they should avoid unbelief and disobedience. Disobedience is fatal, for the word of God is powerful and effective, so that those who disobey it will not escape punishment. . . . Whether the focus is on judgement or salvation, God's word accomplishes what it intends. . . . In context the author highlights the efficacy of God's Word. Nothing can withstand its power.[39]

The Word is living and active to strike down and to build up. God through judgement will defeat all those who are opposed to Him and through redemption will atone for the sins of those who are His own. As a surgeon wounds with a scalpel, cutting away malignant and dead flesh, the Word of God removes sin from the life of a believer.

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[39] Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 146-47.

Mohler cleverly points out that when in right submission to the Word, it is the Bible that reads the Christian. Anyone can read the Bible, yet those who are regenerate are internally and eternally changed. Both salvation and sanctification are wrought by the Word. Mohler reaffirms, "Without the Word, we are as good as dead."[40] Christ, through His Word, brings his elect to spiritual life. As the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), He is the great high priest

Verse 14 transitions to speak of Jesus as the eternal and great high priest. While many Bible translations interject a subheading at this point—interrupting the flow of the passage—the thought process of the author is progressive, building upon the same idea. Schreiner comments, "The shift from the word of God to God himself confirms the close connection between God and his word so that the latter is an expression of the former."[41] For this very reason, the Bible should not be seen as an impersonable rule book, but how God establishes covenant relationship with his people. Through the Bible this relationship is maintained throughout the Christian life. Christ is both savior and mediator to his elect and Christians hold true to this faithful confession by the Word. "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (Heb 4:14).

Again, the context of Hebrews here is unforsakable. It must be seen that the written Word is inseparable from the living Word. The good confession believers make of Christ is also true of His Word. Christ accomplished what no one else in Scripture could.[42] Abraham, Moses, and even the holy angels could not accomplish the ultimate work of the Son. Christ is the object of faith, and the Word is the source. Jesus is the all-sufficient sacrifice, and His Word is the all-sufficient Scripture. Jesus is the one mediator

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[40] Mohler, *Hebrews*, 61.

[41] Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 148.

[42] Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 150.

between God and man; the Bible provides revelation of His current work on behalf of His saints. The Word is sufficient, necessary, and inseparable from the Son of God. In it, God's people find rest.

By holding to their confession, Christians persevere. Likewise, they hold on through Christ, their great high priest.[43] The Jewish audience of the book of Hebrews was tempted to go back to the sacrificial system under the law. This is not a serious threat for modern readers; however, some may be tempted to rely again on their own "good works" for justification. Roman Catholics rely upon priests to intercede for man before God. Cheap human substitutions are both unnecessary and a rejection of Christ's high priestly ministry. The Word provides assurance that those who belong to God have access to Him through Christ Jesus alone (i.e., *solus Christus*). Christians put their faith in His work alone. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). Believer's anchor their lives on this truth and have assurance of their right standing before God.[44]

Verse 16 concludes the passage by expressing the posture of a Christian who has found rest in God's Word—bold confidence. Thomas D. Lea writes, "The transcendence, sinlessness, and grace of Christ encourage us to claim his mercy with confidence."[45] Once again, an awe-inspiring paradox is presented in this verse. Believers— those who are weak and prone to wander—may have confidence in the presence of their holy God. This would not be possible apart from the mediatorial work of the Son. How does this relate to Scripture? Scripture brings believers to this glorious perspective. As the Word invades the life of believers, it purifies the heart, ridding them of all sin. Through the blood of Jesus, there remains no reason to fear or doubt. Mohler writes, "At his throne,

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[43] Hughes, *Hebrews*, 1:128-30.

[44] Mohler, *Hebrews*, 66.

[45] Thomas D. Lea, *Hebrews & James*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Holman, 1999), 73.

Christians find grace and help in their times of need. Even in our weaknesses, we can approach the throne of God with confidence because we know that God has fully and finally put away all sin in Christ Jesus, our great high priest."[46] This is spiritual rest—the persevering product of God's Holy Word.

Hebrews 4:11-16 attests to the invasive work of God's Word. Through the cutting of Scripture believers enter the rest of God. This rest is active, not passive. Every intention of the human heart is both realized and exposed in light of Scripture. Christians persevere in the faith through God's Word. It has, furthermore, been demonstrated that the written Word cannot be divorced from the living Word. It is a testimony to both the person and work of Jesus Christ, in whom Christians put their faith. The saints persevere as they are consistently pointed to Christ through the Scriptures. Finally, by means of God's Word, believers have bold confidence of their right standing before God. Jesus Christ is their mediator and their plea. The Bible is indispensable in the life of a believer. Christians find spiritual rest in the invasive Word of God and submit to it that it may transform their lives.

Unity in God's Word: 1 Timothy 4:11-5:2

The first section of this chapter was devoted to understanding the nature of God's Word (Ps 119), then attention was given to the work of the Word (Heb 4:11-16). In this final section, 1 Timothy 4:11-5:2 will be evaluated, demonstrating the sufficiency of Scripture in establishing and regulating intergenerational unity in the local church. The apostle Paul writes to his son-in-the-faith, whom he has sent to lead the church in Ephesus. The letters to Timothy are known as the pastoral epistles—providing pastoral instruction to establish ecclesial order throughout the generations. What becomes very clear is that Timothy carried a great deal of responsibility in maintaining intergenerational unity within the church.

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[46] Mohler, *Hebrews*, 68.

Most scholars argue that Timothy was sent to Ephesus as an apostolic delegate of sorts—distinguishable from the office of elder. It should be noted that, while possible, such a position would be unique and unparalleled in Scripture. There is no office of apostolic delegate mentioned in Scripture, nor are there any qualifications provided, unlike the offices of elder and deacon. The position, it is argued, is a temporary, quasi-apostolic office assuming many of the same responsibilities as the overseer. Andreas Köstenberger describes Timothy's position as one of "delegated apostolic authority."[47] Donald Guthrie identifies Timothy as a "timid representative" of Paul.[48] John Stott recognizes the seemingly unique nature of Timothy's position saying that Timothy "had been put into a position of considerable responsibility as the apostle Paul's representative in Ephesus."[49] Without question, Timothy was sent to Ephesus by the apostle Paul, and as an apostle, Paul had the authority to delegate responsibility to him apart from a formal call of the local church. However, what is more debatable is whether "apostolic delegate" is the best way to characterize his position within the church of Ephesus. This seems unlikely.

R. Kent Hugues and Brian Chapell recognize the pastoral nature of Timothy's assignment: "The transition to a new pastorate is difficult, even when the congregation has given you a solid call and you sense that the call is from God. And when you are young, the change to a new pastorate is especially difficult. . . . This helps me to understand young Timothy, the newly appointed leader of the church of Ephesus."[50] Hughes and Chapell point to the pastoral nature of Timothy's call in which he does not have apostolic

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[47] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 150.

[48] Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, vol. 14 (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2009), 110.

[49] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus: The Life of the Local Church*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021), 107.

[50] R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 121.

authority, but that of an elder. Ralph Earle agrees that all the responsibilities delegated to Timothy were pastoral duties, and he is rightly to be understood as pastor of the church.[51]

Congregationalists see the lack of a formal "call" by the church of Ephesus to be evidence that Timothy was not truly the pastor of the church but something altogether different. This is unpersuasive for several reasons. First, Paul's first epistle to Timothy is pastoral in nature.[52] Paul provided pastoral instruction to the one shepherding the church— Timothy. Timothy functioned as an elder. He was charged to (1) prevent and eradicate false teaching within the church; (2) clearly declare the gospel to believers and unbelievers; and (3) fight the good fight of the faith as an example to the Ephesian church.[53] For this reason, Paul gave explicit ecclesiological instructions, qualifications, and exhortations that Timothy was to apply to appropriately lead and order the church. As such, he had to rely upon Paul's instructions and meet the requirements himself. Timothy held no unilateral authority to impose his will upon the congregation, only that which was commanded.

Second, nowhere else is anyone but an elder or apostle recognized to be a ruling leader in a local congregation. There is, furthermore, no explicit indication that Paul saw Timothy as some sort of hybrid leader. Third, while the apostles certainly had authority in local churches, their office was distinct from that of the elder (Eph 4:11). Apostles could rightly be considered elders within the church (1 Pet 5:1-2); however, not every elder was an apostle, nor did they have the same degree of authority as the apostles. Fourth, Paul does not elsewhere send "apostolic delegates" to problematic congregations; although, it was common practice for elders to be established by apostolic authority in the early church (Acts 14:23).

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[51] Ralph Earle, *1, 2 Timothy*, in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, *Ephesians-Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 374.

[52] Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 53.

[53] Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 54.

On the other hand, Timothy may be seen as a unique representative of Paul for a few reasons. Lea and Griffin point out that throughout Paul's ministry he had assigned Timothy several different assignments (1 Thess 3:1-10; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10-11; Acts 19:22; Phil 2:19-24).[54] The apostle Paul himself told the church in Philippi, "I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare" (Phil 2:20). These various ministry assignments reveal that Paul had a great deal of confidence in Timothy and assigned him many responsibilities. While some argue that Timothy was an "apostolic delegate" and others see him as an elder, the two positions are not mutually exclusive. Timothy was indeed an apostolic representative, but this should be understood as an informal assignment. He was sent directly by Paul with clear instructions to prepare the church for the apostle's anticipated return. However, it also appears that in the context of Ephesus he was elevated to assume pastoral responsibility. Thus, both views accurately represent Timothy's position.

As the pastor of Ephesus, the responsibility to maintain church unity fell largely upon Timothy's shoulders, and Paul's writings presuppose that Timothy had the requisite authority to accomplish this task. Timothy was exceptionally well equipped, despite his youth. Guthrie writes, "The qualities in which Timothy is to excel are those in which youth [are] so often deficient. Yet for that reason they would stand out the more strikingly. It would become evident to the Christian believers that authority in the community is contingent on character, not on age."[55] His personality, however, was another subject altogether. Biblical evidence suggests that Timothy had a mild and meek demeanor. Guthrie's characterization of Timothy as "timid" is questionable if this quality carries negative connotations. Based upon Paul's warnings on rebuking an older church member, there seems to be some anticipation that Timothy may need to be less confrontational in

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[54] Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 54.

[55] Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 111.

such a situation.[56] In any case, it certainly appears that Timothy was mild-mannered, and without question delegated a large degree or authority and responsibility for one relatively young—perhaps in his mid-thirties.[57]

The significance of Timothy's youth, especially in 4:11-5:2, cannot be overstated. Generational distinctions are repeated numerous times in these few verses. Paul's point in drawing attention to Timothy's age is not to discourage his young apprentice; rather, the text is extremely reassuring. Paul encourages Timothy that while his age may be a factor to some, it is not an issue upon which he should either rely upon or be discouraged. Instead, the Word of God is the source of Timothy's authority. It was the very means by which he would teach and promote unity among the church. In other words, Scripture is sufficient to promote intergenerational unity within the local church.

While Timothy's age was not the foundation upon which he was to build his pastoral ministry, it was a factor. Stott explains, "[Timothy] was still a relatively young man, probably in his thirties, so that Paul had to add: Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young (12a). . . . Timothy had been called to Christian leadership beyond his years."[58] Exceptionally called and gifted, his age should not have been a reason for pause. However, Paul still felt it necessary to reinforce Timothy's confidence and provide counsel. Hughes argues that Timothy's age may have seemed to be a handicap to him, hindering his ability to pastor well.[59] However, Paul exhorts him to do the work of the Word.

Timothy was not to be discouraged by his youth; however, Paul did indicate that he would have a greater weight of responsibility in proving himself to his fellow

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[56] Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 110.

[57] Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 121.

[58] Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus*, 107.

[59] Hughes and Chapell, 1-*2 Timothy and Titus*, 122.

believers: "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim 4:12). Köstenberger writes, "Unlike the case of the false teachers, Timothy's life must not be divorced from his teaching."[60] In every way he must prove himself worthy of his calling. He could allow no room for any charge of hypocrisy—and he did not. In fact, Timothy was referred to by the apostle Paul as "a man of God" (6:11)—the highest of accolades in Scripture. He was to be above reproach, the chief quality of an overseer. He would accomplish this task by exemplifying Christ in five distinct ways: (1) speech, (2) conduct, (3) love, (4) faith, and (5) purity.

First, Timothy was to honor Christ in both word and deed.[61] He would do this by prioritizing the Word of God above all else. Timothy's speech and actions had to precisely mirror one another. This was his worship of God (John 4:24) and example to the church (1 Cor 11:1). Paul made a regular practice of exhorting believers to imitate him as he imitated Christ.[62] He had the same expectation of Timothy—to be an example to the flock. Hughes and Chapell write, "'Speech' and 'conduct' go together because they are both observable."[63] Timothy was to be an example not only in doctrine, but every aspect of life, and the congregation was to imitate him. Stott summarizes, "In those two spheres he was to be a model of Christian virtue, especially in love, the foremost Christian grace, to be shown to our neighbor and to all mankind; in faith, which could mean either trust in God and in Christ, or trustworthiness, or both; and in purity, which is Christian self-control."[64] Those attributes—obtained by the Word—that he had been taught since childhood were to be put on full display as pastor (2 Tim 3:15).

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[60] Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 151.

[61] Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus*, 108.

[62] Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus*, 108.

[63] Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 123.

[64] Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus*, 109.

Timothy's life of godliness would serve to legitimize his pastoral authority. Hughes and Chappell commentate, "Godly character creates moral authority."[65] It was upon this moral authority that Timothy was to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching (1 Tim 4:13). These are the ways pastoral authority is exercised—not under compulsion but through the Word of God. Hughes and Chapell again highlight the most important aspect of Timothy's ministry—Word-centeredness:

> Paul calls young Timothy to be radically Biblical in his preaching—expositional. He was to be the very opposite of the false teachers and their "irreverent, silly myths" (4:7) and "endless genealogies" (1:4). The truth is, without the centrality of the Word and its exposition, there is no proper worship. Paul cites Word-centeredness as the key to young, timid Timothy's success.[66]

Simply put, Timothy's ministry would be a success only if built upon God's Word. For the Word is sufficient to achieve intergenerational unity within the local church.

Though he was relatively timid, Paul encouraged Timothy: "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you" (1 Tim 4:14). Köstenberger affirms that this likely refers to Timothy's ordination.[67] Gordon Fee argues that this view is somewhat of an anachronism, but Timothy, without question, had received public recognition of his giftedness for ministry.[68] He had been affirmed by the elders, a reminder that would provide him assurance.

Paul continues, "Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:15-16). His Word-centered pastorate would demonstrate his progress. As a young man, he had opportunity for

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[65] Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 123.

[66] Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 124-25.

[67] Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 153.

[68] Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 69.

growth. This growth would become evident to all as he continued to preach and teach sound doctrine. He was ordered by Paul to continually evaluate himself with Scripture. It would be his judge and salvation for his congregation—both from false teachings and from their own sinfulness.

The conclusion of verse 16 gives way to a chapter break; however, this is unfortunate as Paul's thought process continues into the next chapter. Although Timothy's youth is given great attention in the latter part of chapter 4, it is the Word of God that alleviates these concerns and is the foundation upon which Timothy would build his ministry. In the mind of Paul, Scripture alone was sufficient in achieving intergenerational unity within the church. The first two verses in chapter 5 present Paul's treatise regulating intergenerational relationships within the church—a sure help for young Timothy. Paul wrote, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity."

Anticipating those struggles a young pastor might have, Paul provides fatherly advice to Timothy. Köstenberger explains,

> Crossing gender and generation lines in ministry calls for caution and care. Paul's instructions to Timothy on how to deal with various groups in the congregation are predicated upon the model of the church as a household (3:15; cf. 6:2; §4.1.2). Timothy is to treat older men as fathers, younger men as brothers—implying that Timothy himself belongs to this category (cf. 4:12)—older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters.[69]

Each category calls for a different types of interactions corresponding to its own circumstances. His first instructions direct Timothy's interactions with older men within the church. Having earned a certain degree of respect that accompanies age, Timothy was to approach them in a humble and understanding way.[70] Hughes helpfully expands on this thought: "Paul indicates that Timothy must not rebuke the elder from a posture of superiority or even of equality but of loving respect—'encouraging him as you would a

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[69] Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 157.

[70] Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 158.

father.'"[71] It may be that Timothy's knowledge of the Word, exegetical skills, pastoral wisdom, or any number of other attributes were superior to that of the older men, but that was not the point. Paul's exhortation to Timothy addressed his posture. While rebuke of elders may be necessary at times, the way Timothy was to carry out such an action was of the utmost importance. Hughes and Chapell explain, "Tone is so important in ministry, and with older people it must be that of affection and respect."[72] While an older man under Timothy's charge may have required rebuke, correction, or discipline, Timothy was to use pastoral wisdom in how he engaged such an individual.

The next categories addressed by Paul were those of Timothy's own generation and gender class. They were to be treated as brothers or equals to Timothy.[73] Such interactions may be as difficult to engage, as with older men in the church. While a young pastor may be eager and abrasive in confronting an older man, it may be altogether undesirable to rebuke one's own peers. Paul knows that this will, likewise, be necessary at some point in Timothy's ministry and again calls on him to be noncombative. Rather, Timothy was encouraged to treat the erring individuals as brothers and equals, not insulting their integrity or intelligence, but as one who was looking out for the wellbeing of their own kin.

The third and fourth categories addressed both cross the gender gap. How is a young pastor to engage older and younger women within the church? The family analogy remains consistent for these groups. Timothy was to cautiously treat those individuals as mothers and sisters in the faith. Köstenberger notes that these instructions are particularly important for young ministers as to not get "entangled in any potentially compromising

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[71] Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 130.

[72] Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 130.

[73] Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 130.

situations."[74] This is not to suggest that a pastor should avoid necessary interactions with female church members; instead, "he is charged to minister to them, which requires that he love rather than avoid them, but he must do so with absolute purity."[75] Köstenberger summarizes,

> The instruction to treat older brothers and sisters in Christ with respect, even when rebuke may occasionally be called for, is of timeless significance, as is the exhortation to treat younger sisters in Christ with absolute purity. . . . This speaks to a culture like ours where young men in leadership may at times be harsh, if not outright disrespectful, toward older people rather than valuing their wisdom and life experience, and where they may struggle with treating younger women in the church with all purity.[76]

The two sections spoken of above—Paul's pastoral exhortation to Timothy (4:11-16) and his generational instructions (5:1-2)—all offer one simple point: Scripture is sufficient in regulating unity within the church, specifically, intergenerational unity. Paul expressed to Timothy that Scripture was the foundation upon which he would build his ministry (4:12-13)—not himself. Timothy had pastoral authority(4:12); however, he could not ignore practical realities that would affect his interactions (i.e., his age). Timothy was to devote himself to the Word of God that he might be found acceptable among the congregation. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). His ministry would flourish in accordance with his faithfulness. As a result, he was to do the work of the Word, obey God's law, and trust the wisdom he had gained through it.

Paul understood that absolute submission to God's Word on Timothy's part would necessitate appropriate intergenerational relationships. Timothy was the pastor of the church in Ephesus and shouldered a great deal of responsibility in maintaining church unity. In context, Timothy's pastoral authority was the obvious occasion for Paul's instruction in chapter 5; although, the principles apply more broadly to all those within the

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[74] Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 159.

[75] Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 159.

[76] Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 159.

local church. Every Christian is responsible for the unity of Christ's church. Whether in a position of leadership or not, church members are to approach one another in accordance with the principles provided in 1 Timothy 4:11-5:2. The Bible must be the foundation upon which intergenerational relationships are built. If the generations arrive at a common view of Scripture (and of the Lordship of Christ), then unity within the church will by necessity increase. No longer giving themselves over to unbiblical conflict, they will understand and agree on first order issues and live in harmony with one another. The point is very simple: the Word of God is sufficient to produce intergenerational unity within the local church.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a biblical and exegetical foundation upon which the members of First Baptist Church in Rogersville, Tennessee will be taught the doctrine of Scripture in pursuit of intergenerational unity. It was argued that a common view of Scripture—as believers submit their lives to it—is sufficient in achieving intergenerational unity. First, the nature of Scripture was explored in Psalm 119. Then, the work of the Word of God was described in Hebrews 4:11-16. Lastly, 1 Timothy 4:11-5:2 demonstrated that God's Word is sufficient to produce intergeneration unity within the local church. When the people of God understand the meaning, purpose, and power of the Bible, and when it cuts to the depths of their souls, unity may be achieved among the generations.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS
ON THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

This chapter provides the historical and theological rationale upon which the ministry project was built. Michael Kruger explains that Scripture "can only be rightly understood (and defended) when both history and theology are taken into account."[1] This chapter surveys church history, tracing the development of the doctrine of Scripture over time. A theological and historical understanding of the doctrine of Scripture serves to increase intergenerational unity in the local church. Orthodox Christianity hinges on the doctrine of Scripture—the most consistently debated doctrine throughout church history.[2]

The first section of this chapter will focus on the Apostolic and Patristic eras, giving particular attention to the issues of inspiration and canon. The second section will evaluate the Medieval and Reformation eras in which *sola Scriptura* became a fierce battle cry for the authority of Scripture. The third section will glean insight from the post-Reformation era, focusing on English Puritanism and their reliance on the sufficiency of Scripture. The chapter will culminate with a discussion on the Modern and Postmodern eras. Inerrancy will be the focus of this section, and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy will be the occasion for the assessment.

History, Theology, and Methodology

Several preliminary considerations need to be made prior to evaluating the doctrine of Scripture through various historical periods. First, the doctrine of Scripture is

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[1] Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 22.

[2] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 16.

an inexhaustible topic. Two-thousand years of church history have provoked numerous debates and controversies over an orthodox view of Scripture. Accordingly, this section will not—indeed it cannot—cover every aspect of bibliology or provide a comprehensive historical theology. Furthermore, in surveying the time since the Apostolic period, some of the eras will be grouped together for evaluation. The goal of this project is to increase intergenerational unity in the local church through education on the doctrine of Scripture. Thus, the topics to be addressed include canon/inspiration, inerrancy, authority, sufficiency and necessity, and perspicuity.

The interconnectedness of thoughts throughout time will become evident throughout this chapter. While specific controversies in history give occasion for discussing the various attributes of Scripture, there is truly nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1:9). The concepts addressed will reveal overlap between eras demonstrating an unavoidable interconnectedness of thought throughout history. In other words, no single attribute of Scripture is limited to any one period. Circumstances regarding each attribute could very well be identified throughout history. However, for the sake of simplicity, the attributes of Scripture will be discussed in a systematic manner—particularly addressing issues that most significantly characterized each era.

Second, much of the scholarly work on the canon focuses merely on historical data at the expense of theology.[3] Since the development of the Christian canon is foundational to a doctrine of Scripture, this will not be the philosophy utilized in this chapter. Rather, Kruger provides a more appropriate framework for dealing with the issue: "The theology of canon is viewed not as an 'epilogue' to be addressed only after the formal investigation of the historical evidence is complete, but instead as the paradigm through which the historical evidence is investigated in the first place."[4] Put

[3] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 79.

[4] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 24.

another way, theology is primary—the lens through which historical evidence should be evaluated. An adverse approach to the doctrine of Scripture will lead to a merely human view of revelation that fails to capture its divine nature (i.e., critical scholarship).

Theology and history are inseparable, as the sovereign God of creation is the source of both. History is appropriately understood only through a heavenly perspective. Stephen B. Chapman writes,

> Theological concerns are deeply related to questions of historical reconstruction and cannot simply be avoided. Confessional categories are always present, even (or perhaps especially) when they go unacknowledged. It is a mistake therefore to pretend that differences in historical reconstruction turn solely on data and methodology or that historical proposals are unrelated to theological positions.[5]

Unfortunately, critical scholarship gives little credence to confessional categories. Instead, the focus is almost entirely on history, and theological categories are scorned as anti-intellectual distractions. Kruger points out, however, that it is impossible to separate one's worldview from their approach to Scripture.[6] Critical scholars—as much as they would like to be seen as the objective authority on Scripture—fail at maintaining their own philosophy and often approach the Bible with great hostility. No one approaches Scripture neutral. A conspiracy in the likeness of Babel, critical scholars have attempted to humanize Scripture, robbing it of its glory, and refuting its own self-attesting divine nature. Kevin Vanhoozer is correct when he says, "History alone cannot answer the question of what the canon finally is; theology alone can do that."[7]

Third, the historical-theological approach implemented in this chapter is helpful since the doctrine of Scripture has been the subject of fierce attack throughout human history. It was Satan in the garden of Eden that first manipulated God's Word (Gen 3:1).

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[5] Stephen B. Chapman, "The Old Testament Canon and Its Authority for the Christian Church," *Ex Auditu* 19 (2003): 126.

[6] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 79.

[7] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 146.

Thus, the question arises in different ways and in different seasons, "Did God really say?" Iain Murray articulates, "Attacks on the Word of God are as old as the history of fallen man."[8] This chapter responds to several of the major controversies that arose after the closing of the New Testament canon.[9] If heresy precedes orthodoxy, then each of these occasions allows the truth of Scripture to shine anew amidst tragic departures.

For the glories of Scripture to once again radiate, some must be willing to stake their lives upon it. True believers have consistently come under attack for faithfulness to the Word. Murray writes,

> Move on to the New Testament and the early church era. Why the three hundred years of persecution of Christians? John on Patmos tells us it was "on account of the word of God" (Rev. 1:9). Sufferers are described by Christ as those who "have kept my word" (3:8), and those put to death are said to be 'slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne' (6:9). . . . In the Reformation and Puritan periods, attacks on the Bible commonly took the form of physical persecution, and they came from false religion. . . . In the eighteenth century, the attacks came from the world and in the form of philosophy. Many of the attackers claimed to believe in God, but not the God of the Bible. They rejected revelation given from heaven.[10]

While believers throughout the centuries have experienced great persecution, the Bible has prevailed and held the church together amidst every battle. The Word of God is the unifying foundation upon which the church exists. New objections arise in each generation; however, fidelity to the Word must be maintained. Teaching various generations the doctrine of Scripture—with reference to the attacks of the past—will promote intergenerational unity and faithfulness in the local church.

Murray's testimony is timeless. It describes every generation. For this reason,

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[8] Iain H. Murray, "How Scotland Lost Her Hold on the Bible," in *The Inerrant Word*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 148-49.

[9] As will be discussed in the section on canonicity, the concept of a closed canon is even somewhat complex, as many scholars have different ideas as to what this term actually addresses. For some, the closing of the canon did not occur until the mid-fourth century, when the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were widely agreed upon. For others—and as will be argued in this chapter—the closure of the canon more accurately describes the moment in which the last canonical book was authored, and scriptural revelation ceased.

[10] Murray, "How Scotland Lost Her Hold," 148.

the church must remain steadfast. With attacks coming from every angle, the church must not compromise its faithful confession. Murray explains that perhaps the greatest and most deadly attack has not come from the opponents of Scripture; rather, it has come from within. He explains, "Prominent teachers come forward in the churches who argued that there was no need to defend every part of Scripture. Some concessions could be made to modern scholarship."[11] R. Albert Mohler Jr. likewise writes, "The great threat we face is not to the church's existence, but to its faithfulness."[12] This is exactly the issue at stake, and this section argues that no concession can be made. Every fight is worth having. Every hill is worth dying on in defense of God's Word.

The Doctrine of Scripture in the
Apostolic and Patristic Eras

When studying the doctrine of Scripture, one might begin with the question, how did we get the Bible? This question naturally leads to the Apostolic and Patristic eras. The Apostolic era spans from Pentecost to the death of the last apostle. The Patristic era encompasses the earliest centuries of the Christian church, extending from the death of the apostles to the beginning of the Middle Ages.[13] The New Testament canon began to take shape in these eras, although the narrative of its formation is somewhat complex. Kruger explains, "While it is clear that the church eventually achieved a remarkable degree of unanimity over the twenty-seven books, it was not always so in the early stages. The development of the canon was erratic at points, and there were periods of disagreement and dissent over a variety of books."[14]

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[11] Murray, "How Scotland Lost Her Hold," 150.

[12] R. Albert Mohler, *The Gathering Storm: Secularism, Culture, and the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2021), 21.

[13] Gregg R. Allison, *Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 159.

[14] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 292.

While the canonical process requires much explanation, the substance itself does not. Recognizing canonical writings is possible because of the inspiration of Scripture.[15] That "All Scripture is breathed out by God" is without question and clearly proclaimed in the biblical text (2 Tim 3:16). For this reason, precisely, Christians understand the canon to be an objective standard. Ligon Duncan writes, "Paul is not saying that the Bible is inspired because it inspires us; that's a subjective theory of inspiration. He is saying that the Bible is objectively inspired—the words themselves are the product of inspiration."[16] Accordingly, the church has understood its role in the process of canon as one of recognition and affirmation, not decision. In other words, the biblical writings are canonical simply because they are inspired by God (although there is more to say about canonicity), not because the church selected them to be so. And although the canonical process is more complex, it may simply be affirmed that when God speaks truth, those words are divine revelation. Thus, the doctrine of inspiration and the concept of canon are intimately intertwined.

Criteria for Canonicity

Defining "canon" can be problematic. In one sense, it simply refers to a "standard" or "measure."[17] However, in a broader sense, in biblical and theological studies, it can refer to a much larger process by which the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were recognized. Gregg Allison defines canon as "the list of which writings belong in the Bible."[18] This is a helpful functional definition. He adds, "The church inherited a closed canon of the Old Testament from the Hebrew Bible and, guided by the

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[15] J. Ligon Duncan III, "The Nature, Benefits, and Results of Scripture," in MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word*, 96.

[16] Duncan, "The Nature, Benefits, and Results of Scripture," 96.

[17] Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021), 67.

[18] Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary*, 36.

Holy Spirit over the course of four centuries, acknowledged the writings belonging in the New Testament."[19] Robert L. Plummer helpfully elaborates,

> For Protestant Christians, the canon is not an authorized collection of writings (in that the church conferred its authority or approval upon a list of books). Rather, the canon is a collection of authoritative writings. The biblical writings have an inherent authority as works uniquely inspired by God. Canonization is the process of recognizing that inherent authority, not bestowing it from an outside source.[20]

Both insights clarify just what is meant by the term. Unfortunately—while consistent with the stance of this project—these definitions represent only one historical perspective.

To adequately understand the broader concept of canon, one must first recognize how the term has been used historically. This is no simple task, as "canon" has been used several different ways throughout church history. Kruger explains that prior to exploring the concept of "canon" as a term, one must first consider the "question of canon": "The problem of canon (at least as we are using the phrase here) refers to the fundamental question of how we, as Christians, can *know* that we have the right twenty-seven books in the New Testament."[21] Kruger argues that Christians can in fact *know* with a great deal of certainty what books are canonical, and emphasizes the fact that "the question of the canon . . . is at the very center of how biblical authority is established. Unless a coherent response can be offered to such questions . . . the canon issue could become the single thread that unravels the entire garment of the Christian faith."[22] Thus, the question of canon is the correct place to begin.

What does it mean that a book is *canonical*? What is meant by the term *canon*? Kruger identifies at least three different manners in which canon has been defined along with corresponding models for determining canonicity. First, in accordance with a

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[19] Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary*, 36.

[20] Plummer, *Interpreting the Bible*, 67.

[21] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 15, emphasis original.

[22] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 16.

community-determined model, canon is

> something that is, in some sense, established or constituted by the people—either individually or corporately—who have received these books as Scripture. Canonicity is viewed not as something inherent to any set of books, but as "something officially or authoritatively imposed upon certain literature." Thus, a "canon" does not exist until there is some sort of response from the community.[23]

The models associated with this view of canonicity include the (1) Historical-Critical Model, (2) Roman-Catholic Model, (3) Canonical-Criticism Model, and (4) Existential/ Neoorthodox Model.[24] Space does not permit a detailed look at each of these models of canonicity; however, they all share the same underlying problems. While they recognize the importance of community reception of canonical books, they discount the "intrinsic authority" and "internal attributes" of the books themselves.[25] Furthermore, these approaches do not adequately consider the historic and apostolic qualities of the canonical books that distinguish them from other early writings.[26]

The second approach to defining canon emphasizes the books of Scripture as historically-determined.[27] Kruger defines this model, saying, "These models deny that the Christian community's reception of the canon is definitive in establishing its authority and instead seek to establish it by critically investigating the historical merits of each of the canonical books."[28] Thus, historically determined models "put a premium on the historical *origins* of a book (or its component parts)."[29] Examples of this model include the Canon-

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[23] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 30.

[24] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 30-66.

[25] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 66.

[26] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 66.

[27] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 67.

[28] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 67.

[29] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 67, emphasis original.

within-the-Canon Model and Criteria-of-Canonicity model.[30] Interestingly enough—while Kruger does not argue for them—these models tend to be persuasive among some evangelicals.[31] While there are certainly strengths to the historically-determined models— namely, emphasis on the historical aspects of canonicity—they do not fully account for what makes a book canonical. The intrinsic nature and community reception of the books are not recognized as legitimate factors in these methods.[32]

Kruger argues for a third canonical model that encompasses all the aspects necessary in recognizing books as canonical. He titles this model the "Canon as Self-Authenticating" model.[33] This model of canonicity affirms and greatly relies upon the doctrine of inspiration. Kruger's chief critique of all other models is that "they all ground the authority of the canon in something outside the canon itself."[34] Rather, his model sees the Bible as its own self-authenticating standard. The books of the Bible are canonical because they are inspired by God. No external authority is thus imposed upon the canonical books; instead, they attest to their own truthfulness and canonical status.

One can quickly identify the most immediate objection to such a model—it is a circular argument. A self-authenticating standard is no standard at all, for there are no external measures by which to confirm the canonicity of the individual works. Two comments can be made in response. First, while circular argumentation is usually and naturally seen as a logical fallacy, in this circumstance it is logically coherent. Since God is the source of all truth—and since He cannot lie—the doctrine of inspiration validates such a view of Scripture (the self-attesting model) without external evidence. Since

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[30] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 67.

[31] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 75-87.

[32] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 87.

[33] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 88.

[34] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 88.

Scripture is an "ultimate authority," it is itself an end through which truth is derived.[35] In the words of Kruger, it is the "criterion of truth."[36] Circular arguments fail when greater authorities exist. In the case of the Bible, there is no greater authority.

While this first response is the greater of the two in weight, the second may prove more satisfying. Scripture is the ultimate authority, but Kruger's model does not assume that no other criteria must be met in establishing canonicity. Rather, his approach appreciates and utilizes aspects of the other models that are otherwise valid, while affirming that Scripture's self-attesting nature provides assurance based upon its own intrinsic qualities (i.e., apostolicity, internal marks of divinity).[37]

This canonical model is not unique to Kruger. Instead, it seems to be the only approach that sufficiently takes the Bible's own testimony into account. Consider, for example, Hebrews 6:13: "He swore by himself." What is the greatest authority upon which God swears? None other than Himself—for His own word is the source of truth. Again, Christ reaffirms the saint's ability to discern the self-attesting nature of His Word, saying, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). It should be no surprise that those who approach the Word with hostility would reject its authenticity. For Christ says, "But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep" (John 10:26). Since the Word of God is "firmly fixed in the heavens" (Ps 119:89), it is the sole source of truth and authority. Scripture is determined to be canonical upon God's own providential command, and it is self-attesting truth, as it is the very word of the one who cannot lie (Num 23:19; Heb 6:18; Titus 1:2).

Moreover, the self-attesting model for canonicity does not only find support in Scripture—though it needs no additional support. The reformers also held this view. John

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[35] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 90.

[36] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 91.

[37] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 90.

Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*, "God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word. . . . Scripture is indeed self-authenticated."[38] This is the essence of the reformation doctrine *sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone is the ultimate authority for faith and practice.

Based upon this reasoning, Kruger concludes that Christians have good reason to believe the canon can be known. His thesis and threefold marks of canonicity are explained when he says,

> When we do apply the Scripture to the question of which books belong in the canon, we shall see that it testifies to the fact that God has created the proper epistemic environment wherein belief in the New Testament canon can be reliably formed. The epistemic environment includes three components: (1) *Providential exposure*. In order for the church to be able to recognize the books of the canon, it must first be providentially exposed to these books. The church cannot recognize a book that it does not have. (2) *Attributes of canonicity*. These attributes are basically characteristics that distinguish canonical books from all other books. There are three attributes of canonicity: divine qualities (canonical books bear the "marks" of divinity); corporate reception (canonical books are reorganized by the church as a whole); and apostolic origins (canonical books are the result of the redemptive-historical activity of the apostles). (3) *Internal testimony* of the Holy Spirit. In order for believers to rightly recognize these attributes of canonicity, the Holy Spirit works to overcome the noetic effects of sin and produces belief that these books are from God.[39]

In Kruger's mind, all these aspects must be true for a book to be considered canonical. Thus, what may appear at first to be a circular argument is much more nuanced than might otherwise be realized.

Several criteria must be met, then, for a book to be canonical; however, the Scripture itself attests to canonicity. The early church did not check off each box in determining canonicity, nor was it the church or history that was the determining factor. Rather, each were intrinsically so of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The church did not establish canonicity. It recognized the twenty-seven books of the New Testament to be divinely inspired. Thus, the church can acknowledge the canonical books of the New Testament with a great deal of assurance and unify around them as the Word

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[38] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.7.4-5.

[39] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 94, emphasis added.

of God.

Canon and Covenant

At this point, one might ask why this discussion has only given attention to the New Testament. Christians affirm both the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God. Historical evidence suggests that during the Apostolic and Patristic periods there was little to no debate as to which of the Old Testament books were canonical; rather, the Old Testament canon was well agreed upon by the time of Christ's earthly ministry.[40]

However, this point brings forth another interesting concept—the relationship of canon to covenant. Kruger argues that the Scriptures are covenantal documents. Throughout redemptive history, God established covenantal relationships with humanity and outlined the terms of those relationships through Scripture. He explains, "In light of such a historical reality, it is clear that canon is inherent to and derives its function from the concept of covenant. The canonical writings are God's documentation, as it were, of his covenantal relationship with his people, laying out the nature of their relationship, the terms and conditions, and the blessings and curses."[41] Each of the biblical covenants are documented through special revelation. As such, it would have been both necessary and expected for the new covenant to be inscripturated.

Christians affirm the Old Testament writings because they affirm the legitimacy and importance of the old covenant. Indeed, as Plummer explains, "The word *testament* comes from the Latin word *testamentum*, meaning 'covenant' or 'agreement.'"[42] The Old Testament is the Spirit inspired document of the old covenant. Would it not make sense then, even be expected, that the new covenant too would involve covenantal documents?

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[40] Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 37.

[41] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 165.

[42] Plummer, *Interpreting the Bible*, 27.

Of course, the answer is yes. Plummer explains the early concept of the two "covenants" or "testaments": "Apparently the first person to use this term to describe the divisions of the Bible was the early Christian apologist Tertullian (A.D. 160-225). The idea of the Bible being organized around two covenants between God and humanity was not new to Tertullian, however, but is found explicitly in several biblical texts."[43] Here Plummer has in mind Jeremiah 31:31-33, which makes explicit reference to the new covenant that was yet to be initiated.

The books of the old covenant are not nearly as contested as the new. Early Jewish Christians accepted without controversy those books that had already been considered canonical. Thus, the Old Testament today consists of thirty-nine canonical books. These books are God's inspired revelation of the old covenant. Likewise, in inaugurating the new covenant in Christ's blood, there was anticipation of further revelation. Peter Gentry and Steven Wellum make this argument, explaining that Scripture is "progressive revelation."[44] That is to say, as God's plan for redemptive history unfolded, it was recorded through divinely inspired Scripture. Scripture is, thus, progressive in nature. Progressing from the old covenant to the new required covenantal documents to be produced and preserved by the agents of the new covenant—namely, the apostles.

Mark Noll writes of the necessity of these new covenant documents:

The church needed reading material for public and private devotion. The church needed a theological standard for responding to non-Christian critics and for adjudicating doctrinal disputes within its own ranks, and it needed a set text to translate as the gospel message moved out of the Hellenistic Mediterranean into the Latin west and then farther east towards Asia and north into Europe. For all these

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[43] Plummer, *Interpreting the Bible*, 27.

[44] Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 28.

purposes, an established list of authoritative writings about Christ and the meaning of his work rapidly became a pressing necessity.[45]

Noll is certainly correct that the need for the new covenant documents were pressing and necessary. I disagree with the implication that those texts resulted from that need. Instead, the reverse is true. God—knowing the needs of the infant church in advance and consistent with His covenantal revelation of old—providentially provided those texts that he had foreordained from all eternity to exist. In support of this point, Charles E. Hill writes, "The foundations for the New Testament canon lie not, as some would assert, in the needs or the practices of the church in the second, third, or fourth centuries AD, but in the gracious purpose of a self-revealing God whose word carries his own divine authority."[46] Thus, the New Testament is not primarily circumstantial, but relational—covenantal documentation written by way of Christ's atoning work.

It must however be acknowledged and conceded that the New Testament did not always exist, as Hill notes, with "firm, crisp boundaries marking it off from all other kinds of literature."[47] The new covenant established the need and expectation for corresponding Scripture, but the development and process by which it was recognized is another issue entirely.

Early Formation of the New Testament Canon

Consensus among the early church as to which writings constituted the Christian canon was not established for several centuries after the apostles. This is one of the most boisterous critiques of secular scholars against Scripture. Bart D. Ehrman, for example, argues that the New Testament canon could have included any number of writings; yet

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[45] Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 27.

[46] Charles E. Hill, "The Canon of the New Testament," in *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning*, ed. Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 81.

[47] Hill, "The Canon of the New Testament," 81.

those recognized today as canonical simply receive this status because they prevailed as the "proto-orthodoxy" of the early church.[48] Early church fathers such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Irenaeus prevailed against many of their contemporaries ratifying their version of Christianity. To disagree with these individuals, Erhman argues, was to subject oneself to personal attacks and ridicule.[49] While Ehrman's argument may seem persuasive to some, it does not account for the historical realties that led to recognition of the New Testament canon. Such an argument, as discussed previously, fails to consider the intrinsic characteristics, marks of divinity, and apostolic authorship of the canonical writings. These attributes were essential for canonical recognition. This section seeks to trace out the historical lineage of the New Testament canon.

First, it is important to understand that the New Testament did not include a divinely inspired table of contents. That is to say, the church did play a historical role in recognizing those apostolic documents that were canonical. As argued, recognition of canonical books is not the determinative factor in canonicity; rather, canonicity was of their essence, and this was later recognized and affirmed by the church, which means that the moment those books were authored, they were canon. Kruger explains, "They are not regarded as canon because the church receives them; the church receives them because they are *already* canon by virtue of their apostolic authority."[50] Thus, one must begin with the apostolic origins of the canon.

The apostolic office was essential in the development of the New Testament canon. Kruger writes, "God established the apostolic office to be the guardian, preserver, and transmitter of the message of redemption."[51] In fact, he argues that three factors

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[48] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University, 2005), 179.

[49] Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 178.

[50] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 161, emphasis original.

[51] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 174.

provide authentication for the New Testament: "When these three factors (covenant, redemption, and apostolicity) are viewed together, it will become clear that the idea of a canon was not an after-the-fact development with roots in church history, but rather a natural, early, and inevitable development with roots in redemptive history."[52] The apostles were, thus, ordained to be agents of revelation.

This concept of apostolicity should be clarified, however. For a book to be canonical, it must be apostolic. This did not necessarily mean that a canonical book must have an apostle as its author. A canonical book was either authored by an apostle or a close associate, and it had to bear apostolic tradition. Kruger elaborates, "This type of tradition was not passed down over long periods of time through anonymous communities but was passed down by those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus's redemptive activities and were given an authoritative commission by Christ to guard and preserve these traditions by the help of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13)."[53] This standard does provide some qualifications for canonicity. A book had to be connected to an apostle—an eyewitness of Jesus's redemptive activities—necessitating that the book was written in the first century. "Tradition" then would not be an appropriate category to qualify a writing as apostolic. This criterion alone would eliminate many writings.

One should note the necessity of the authoritative teachings being *written*. Kruger notes, "As the church continued to spread throughout the world into further geographic regions, it would have become evident that the apostolic tradition could only be effectively communicated and accurately maintained in written form."[54] It is important to note the permanence of the apostolic teachings. These writings were meant to be authoritative for all of church history. This was, in fact, the understanding of the apostolic

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[52] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 162.

[53] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 177.

[54] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 180.

authors. Kruger continues, "There seemed to be a degree of self-awareness among the New Testament authors that they are producing authoritative documents that would function as a rule for the church."[55] Thus, the apostolic authors—while not always understanding the full scope of the revelation they received—certainly would have understood their writings to be scriptural.

Now that attention has been given to the authors, what about the books themselves? After the conclusion of the apostolic era, debate as to which books were rightly considered canonical characterized the Patristic era. Entire volumes have been written to describe this process of *affirming* or *recognizing* the canon. Here it is sufficient to say that diversity among the early church does not indicate that the canon cannot be accurately known. Meaning, Christians can believe with a high degree of confidence that the books present in the New Testament canon—and those alone—should in fact be there.

It should not be surprising to see some debate in the early church as to which books should be included into the canon. The New Testament writings make very clear that in the first century there was already much false teaching within the church. Should it not be expected that false teachers would try to legitimize their documents in this way— moreover, that demonic forces would work for the advancement of false teaching? It is also significant that while the biblical authors wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—producing an infallible Word—the church does not read, understand, reflect, or even recognize the Bible with the same degree of inspiration. While believers are led and indwelt by the Spirit, this does not mean they are inerrant. There is a categorical difference between the apostles and those who followed them. For this reason, some level of disagreement in the early church is to be expected.[56]

It should also be noted that the level of disagreement as to which books were

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[55] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 184.

[56] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 198-200.

canonical is not as extensive as some would suggest. Kruger argues that "a 'core' collection of New Testament books was already well received before the end of the second century."[57] Likewise, Allison makes the case that the Gospels and the Pauline epistles were accepted as books that were "clearly invested with divine authority."[58] Thus, the majority of the New Testament was agreed upon very early on—perhaps as early as the beginning of the second century.

One of the indicators as to which books were considered canonical by the early church is how frequently they were cited. Kruger provides helpful reflection on this point:

> When it comes to *how often* books were cited, proportional to their size, it quickly becomes clear that the 'core' books of the New Testament, mainly the Gospels and Paul's epistles, stood out from all the others and were the authoritative source for Christians "astonishingly early." . . . Although the other New Testament books (e.g., some of the General Epistles, Revelation) were not cited as often as the core books, they were used quite often when compared to the apocryphal or noncanonical books, which were "scarcely cited at all." Thus, there appear to be three categories of books in the early stages: (1) core New Testament books (cited very frequently), (2) peripheral New Testament books (cited less frequently), and (3) apocryphal/ noncanonical books (cited hardly at all).[59]

Such considerations reveal a reliance on the canonical books very early on. Several early lists of canonical books show that a majority of the New Testament was accepted by the church, with only a few being questioned. None of the canonical books, however, appear to be categorized as "rejected" on any of the available lists.

By the end of the fourth century, nearly universal acceptance of the canon was established. Allison writes, "The first appearance of a list of New Testament writings that corresponds exactly with the canon as it is known today with Athanasius's *Thirty-ninth (Easter) Letter* in AD 367. . . . Athanasius's New Testament canon was officially endorsed by the Council of Hippo in AD 393."[60] Since that time, the New Testament canon has

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[57] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 203.

[58] Allison, *Historical Theology*, 41.

[59] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 224-25, emphasis original.

[60] Allison, *Historical Theology*, 45-46, emphasis original.

remained unchanged.

Final Considerations

First, a measure of continuity is demonstrated in the mode of the canon—the *written* Word. As mentioned, it was expected that the new covenant would yield corresponding revelation. What could not have been anticipated was the way these canonical writings were preserved. Thousands of early manuscripts and fragments still exist today, painting a reliable picture of the early New Testament.

Not only have individual books been preserved, but many were also bound together in single volumes—dating to the second and third centuries.[61] The fact that these books were collected into single volumes reveals that early believers understood the writings to be unified as Scripture. Bruce L. Shelley provides one example: "Jerome, the fourth-century translator, called them 'the Divine Library.' He wanted to stress that the many books were, in fact, one. Greek-speaking believers made the same point when they shifted form the early plural form *Biblia*, meaning *The Books*, to *The Bible*, meaning *The Book*."[62] This signifies the very early shift in understandings of the New Testament canonical books as one unified, covenantal work of God.

Not only is it fascinating to see multiple books bound together, but the way they were bound signifies a shift in cultural trends. Kruger writes, "The most notable feature of early Christian manuscripts was that they were almost always in the form of a codex."[63] The shift from scrolls to the codex took place around the same time as the formation of the New Testament canon. Notably, the culture did not follow this trend in noncanonical literature until several hundred years later. This seems to be a development unique to early

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[61] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 234.

[62] Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 65.

[63] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 247.

Christianity, specifically contributing to the preservation of the canon. Kruger expands,

> It is a sign that Christians were already linking some books together and excluding others. Thus, the widespread Christian use of the codex proves to be a substantial piece of historical evidence that the establishment of the New Testament canon was well under way by the turn of the century—long before Marcion, and long before most critical scholars have allowed.[64]

While canonical books were almost exclusively recorded in the codex, noncanonical books were often recorded on scrolls. Kruger suggest that the form in which the canonical books were recorded could indicate how they were viewed—as Scripture—as opposed to other noncanonical works.

The use of the codex also helps one understand why certain apostolic writings were preserved and others were lost. Kruger explains,

> Since Paul had already begun to use the codex to contain his letters, it is not difficult to imagine that early Christians would have retained that format when it became desirable to circulate a defined Pauline letter collection more broadly to the churches. Moreover, this scenario provides a compelling explanation for why some letters of Paul were preserved for the church and some letters were ultimately lost (1 Cor. 5:9). The answer appears to be that some letters were lost because Paul, for whatever reason, did not make a personal copy of them before sending them out. Thus, they were not available when Paul's completed letter collection was circulating more broadly to the churches.[65]

If this is the case, then the apostles were intentional in preserving their own writings and identifying what texts were to be in the canon. This would have made clear, even to the first century church, which books were canonical—demonstrating that canonicity was recognized, not determined by the church.

Furthermore, the use of the codex would have allowed for both personal and public use. While it may at times be neglected in an academic discussion of canonicity, a pastoral perspective provides the understanding that the New Testament was a gift from God to His covenant people. For both the sanctification of the individual and the worship of the gathered church, God preserved His Word—unifying the church. There is

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[64] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 250.

[65] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 253.

incredible unity around the canon today, as has been the case for over 1,500 years.

Kruger helpfully expresses,

> All these factors provide remarkable confirmation of the Patristic evidence surveyed. . . . They confirm, once again, that early Christians had a canon consciousness from a very early point as they read, copied, collected, and distributed those documents they viewed as central to their religious life and worship. They busied themselves not just with oral proclamation but also, and perhaps primarily, with the *written text*. At their core, they were people of the book.[66]

The Doctrine of Scripture in the Medieval and Reformation Eras

Moving on from inspiration and canonicity in the Apostolic and Patristic eras, attention is now given to the authority of Scripture in the Medieval and Reformation eras. What will be seen is that the authority of Scripture was severely diminished as the ultimate authority in the Medieval era and not restored as such until the Protestant Reformation—where *sola Scriptura* was a fierce battle-cry.

Jason K. Allen writes, "The doctrine [*sola Scriptura*] is displayed in a man: Martin Luther."[67] Luther's conviction that Scripture alone was the sole and sufficient authority for faith and practice developed over time. During the Medieval era, the church of Rome submitted to tradition and ecclesial authority over Scripture. Still so to this day *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "The Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.'"[68] For Catholics, the church alone is trusted to rightly handle God's Word—not laypeople—and the

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[66] Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, 259, emphasis original.

[67] Jason K. Allen, *Sola: How the Five Solas Are Still Reforming the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 25.

[68] *Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications from the Editio Typica* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 31.

traditions of the church have authority on par with Scripture.

This theology led to major abuses in the Roman Catholic Church in the Medieval era—and even more tragic, a radical departure from the gospel. Salvation was no longer viewed as a personal relationship with Christ, but a function of the church. As the *totus Christus,* the Roman church displaced Christ as the one mediator between God and man and assumed that role for itself. Laypeople could not be trusted to interpret the Word of God, but only through the mediation of the church could they reach proper understanding. Again, their Catechism states, "The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him."[69] Implied in such a statement is the belief that only the Pope and bishops are in communion with Christ—all other members of the church must go through that special class of priests to achieve right relationship with God. Thus, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is rejected.

In a very real sense, the protestant reformation recovered both the gospel and an orthodox understanding of the authority of Scripture. Shelley writes of Protestantism, "The four questions that Protestantism answered in a new way are, (1) How is a person saved? (2) Where does religious authority lie? (3) What is the church? and (4) What is the essence of Christian living?"[70] Each of these questions was important. However, the answer to each depended upon one's understandings of the doctrine of Scripture. Upon whose authority would these questions be answered? Both Catholics and Protestants have their own answers to these questions—as was the case in the day of Luther—but the authority from which they derived their answers were opposite.

Whereas Roman Catholics relied upon Scripture, tradition, and ecclesial authority—all equally authoritative—protestants understood Scripture alone to be the

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[69] *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, 35.

[70] Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 248.

ultimate authority for the church. For the Roman Catholic Church, although Scripture is

seen as authoritative, the magisterium alone is entrusted to rightly interpret Scripture. As

such, the magisterium in essence became the arbiter of Scripture, regulating and filtering

the truth. R. C. Sproul writes to this effect: "It has been a continuous assertion of the

Roman Catholic Church that since the church established the extent and scope of the New

Testament and Old Testament canon, there is a certain sense in which the authority of the

Bible is subordinate to and dependent upon the church's approval."[71] Of course, as was

demonstrated in the previous chapter, this argument is grounded upon a false premise.

Had the church established the canon, they would also have the right to adjudicate it.

However, since the Bible transcends the church, the Roman Catholic view that ecclesial

authority supersedes Scripture is illegitimate. Thus, the battle cry of the protestant

reformation was *sola Scriptura*.

Sproul attempts to illustrate the dilemma between the Catholic and Protestant

understandings of Scripture:

> The issue of Scriptures inspiration and infallibility boils down to the issue of its authority. A famous bumper-sticker reads as follows: "God says it. I believe it. That settles it." What is wrong with this statement? It adds an element that is unsound. It suggests that the matter of biblical authority is not settled until a person believes the Bible. The slogan should read: "God says it. That settles it." If God reveals something, that revelation carries the weight of his authority. There is no higher authority. Once God opens his holy mouth, the matter is settled. This is axiomatic for Reformed theology.[72]

From this perspective, the Roman Catholic church is correct in one sense. No individual

has the right to divulge independent and unique interpretations of Scripture. However,

this principle applies not only to the individual but also to the church. The church does

not have the authority to determine the meaning of Scripture. Rather, its meaning is fixed.

Rather, Scripture interprets itself, and there is but one correct interpretation—in

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[71] R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 122-23.

[72] R. C. Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 51-52.

accordance with authorial intent. The authority of the church, the individual, and every other group is subordinate and subject to the Bible. It alone is infallible and absolute truth.

Sola Scriptura is the heart, though only one, of the five reformation *solas*—the others being *sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone), and *soli Deo gloria* (for the glory of God alone). While it does not stand alone, it is the foundation upon which the others are affirmed. Allen argues for the primacy of *sola Scriptura*:

> *Sola fide* is known as the "material principle." This means that justification by faith alone is the central truth of the Protestant Reformation. It is the central component of our biblical teaching, and the center of the gospel itself. Yet we call *sola Scriptura* the "formal principle" of the Reformation, because Scripture alone is the singular, authoritative source from which our theology—including *sola fide*—is developed. As the formal principle, sola Scriptura is the doctrinal foundation upon which we erect the entirety of Christian belief, including our understanding of the gospel itself.[73]

The Roman Catholic church was able to disregard the doctrine of justification by faith alone only because it had already abandoned the authority of Scripture alone. Furthermore, one can intimately see the connection between *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*. In abandoning the Scriptures, the church naturally rejected the true gospel.

All the Reformation *solas* were byproducts of the movement itself. There is no record of these phrases being used during the Reformation; however, they have sense been used to summarize the theological convictions rising from that time. The Reformation did not take place in a vacuum. Hundreds of years of abuse under Roman Catholicism resulted in over a century of reformation. A debate that continues to this day is whether the reformation ever ended. Shelley dates the period of the reformation from AD 1517-1648.[74] Most other scholars do not provide so definitive a timeframe. Instead, the argument can be made that the reformation is, by necessity, perpetual. Since false doctrine and practice

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[73] Allen, *Sola*, 21, emphasis original.

[74] Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 245.

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are continual realities, the church must constantly be in a state of reform—*ecclesia reformata*, *semper reformanda* (the church reformed, always reforming).

The historical occasion that sparked the Reformation was none other than Martin Luther's Ninety-five theses. Though the theses would eventually lead to profound divisions within the church, this was not Luther's goal. Rather, his intent was to bring debate before the church that it might be purified. The primary issue of concern—indulgences. Robert Clouse, Richard Pierard, and Edwin Yamauchi explain, "The theses questioned the validity of indulgences, a practice that the medieval church had developed to assist in the salvation of souls."[75] Herein lay the epicenter of Roman abuse. The Roman Catholic church felt as though it could improve upon Christ's atoning work. As if their extrabiblical formulation of the doctrine of Purgatory was not enough, the work of Christ was insufficient, in their view, to save sinners and needed to be improved upon—a rejection of *solus Christus*.[76] Faith alone was not sufficient for salvation.[77] Thus, the practice of selling indulgences was adopted, that atonement might be purchased monetarily—a rejection of *sola fide*.[78] Moreover, Scripture alone was not sufficient in providing a means for salvation; the Roman Catholic church had to develop their own—a rejection of *sola Scriptura*.[79]

Why did the church need to improve upon the doctrines of Scripture? As it turns out, it was not only due to their theological deficiencies—although a theological system was devised to support the selling of indulgences. Rather, the church used the practice to increase their bottom-line. Clouse, Pierard, and Yamauchi write,

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[75] Robert G. Clouse, Richard V. Pierard, and Edwin M. Yamauchi, *The Essential Bible: The Story of the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2002), 150.

[76] *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, 291.

[77] *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, 244.

[78] *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, 411.

[79] *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, 244.

[Indulgences] were based on the belief that Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints had accumulated an excess of good deeds that the church through the pope could draw upon to forgive the amount of temporal punishment (in purgatory) for sin that ordinary persons would have to suffer. For all practical purposes, dispensing of indulgences had become an industry employing quasi-professional salesmen.[80]

Thus, the famous Roman Catholic sales pitch became, as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs. The problem was that the doctrine of indulgence selling was absent from and anti-Scripture, along with all rationale for it. The church had become so corrupt in its departure from Scripture that it preyed upon those who feared the consequences of sin and death.

Luther's public objections to the Roman church came amid personal crisis. Clouse, Pierard, and Yamauchi explain,

The early theological lectures that Luther gave were on the Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. The notes for these indicate that he abandoned the traditional medieval form of textual analysis. Concentrating on questions of sin, grace, and righteousness, he followed the teaching of Augustine of Hippo, thereby rejecting the scholastic approach. What led Luther to rethink theology was the state of despair he found himself in before the presence of God. He wanted assurance of divine acceptance, but, conscious of the enormity of sin, he saw in God only an unrelenting justice that condemned all human efforts to seek forgiveness. His desire to satisfy the penalty for sin by the various works prescribed by the church and the Augustinian order only increased his sense of frustration…Finally, the solution to Luther's spiritual crisis came from this sense of total helplessness before God and from the writings of the apostle Paul. His "evangelistic discovery" was that a person is not justified by works but rather by faith in the finished work of Christ.[81]

Thus, unwittingly, *sola Scriptura* led Luther to the rediscovery of *sola fide*. Luther's newfound convictions were not without consequence. In affirming *sola fide* he was rejecting the magisterium as the sole authoritative interpreter of Scripture, and the traditional and ecclesial authority of the Roman church that had gone almost entirely unchecked up until that moment. In rejecting the authority of the church, he accepted the sole authority of Scripture. As Allen puts it, "For Luther—and for us—Scripture is the

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[80] Clouse, Pierard, and Yamauchi, *The Essential Bible*, 150.

[81] Clouse, Pierard, and Yamauchi, *The Essential Bible*, 150-52.

norma normans, the determining norm by which everything else is measured."[82]

Perhaps at the time of Luther's discovery of *sola fide*, he did not yet understand that he had also submitted to the authority of Scripture over the magisterium. Whereas the Scriptures were the sole means of Luther's discovery of *sola fide*, according to Shelley, he was not conscious of his rejection of papal authority until after he was confronted. Thus, Shelley writes, "Luther had moved from his first conviction—that salvation was by faith in Christ alone—to a second: that the Scriptures, not popes or councils, are the standard for Christian faith and behavior."[83] Whatever the order, Luther was the first of many reformers that would return to a faithful understanding of the role of Scripture. Scripture alone is the sole authority for faith and Christian living—*sola Scriptura*.

In defending the doctrines of justification by faith alone and the authority of Scripture alone, Luther was charged with heresy against the Roman church. Given an opportunity to recant, Luther's convictions were only solidified under pressure. "In January of 1521 the pope declared him a heretic and expelled him from the 'one holy, catholic and apostolic church."[84] Luther responded to his accusers when confronted with the threat of arrest and death, saying, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither honest nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."[85] Shelley explains the effects of Luther's efforts. He was rescued from persecution by the prince of Saxony, Duke Fredrick the Wise, and "revolt began to spread; in town after town priests and town councils removed statues from the churches and abandoned the mass. New reformers, many of them far more radical than Luther, appeared on the scene. Most important, princes, dukes, and electors defied the

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[82] Allen, *Sola*, 20.

[83] Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 251.

[84] Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 253.

[85] Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 254.

condemnation of Luther by giving support to the new movement."[86] While Luther was the first reformer, he was certainly not the last in the fight for the authority of Scripture. No battle was too small in defense of God's Word, so too must the conviction remain today, that the Word of God alone is authoritative in the lives of those who seek to glorify God—*soli Deo gloria*.

The Doctrine of Scripture in the Post-Reformation Eras

Whereas, the Apostolic and Patristic eras focus on the issues of inspiration and canon, and the Medieval and Reformation eras point toward the authority of Scripture, the Post-Reformation era highlights the sufficiency of Scripture—particularly evidenced in the theology and spirituality of the English Puritans. The Puritans are commendable in this section, as their spirituality was distinctly biblical. The sufficiency of Scripture was demonstrated in every perceivable area of their lives. As such, it would seem that Puritanism as a movement would be easy to define. However, as Joel Beeke and Mark Jones point out, providing a definition is a task to which many have endeavored, resulting in little consensus.[87] While this may be the case, it seems that the term *Puritanism* has been used in two primary ways—historically and theologically. This section will give attention to the historical era of the Puritans (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), but greater focus will be directed towards Puritanism's theology of the Bible.

What characterizes Puritanism more broadly as a movement? Beeke and Jones helpfully summarize Tom Webster in providing an answer:

> In understanding the Puritans, we should note what Tom Webster says about the three distinctives of a Puritan. He says, first, Puritans had a dynamic fellowship with God that shaped their minds, affected their emotions, and penetrated their souls. They were grounded in something and someone outside themselves: the triune God of the Scriptures. Second, Puritans embraced a shared system of beliefs grounded in the Scriptures. Today we refer to this system as Reformed orthodoxy. Third, on the

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[86] Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 254.

[87] Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 1-4.

basis of their common spiritual experience and unity in the faith, the Puritans established a network of relationships among believers and ministers.[88]

Simply put, the Puritans were those who relied comprehensively upon the sufficiency of Scripture for Christian faithfulness. They understood the Word of God to affect their intellect, emotions, and spirituality. In their understanding of God, the Word was sufficient in producing intimate relationship with the Trinity. In their relationships with each other, the Bible was sufficient to produce abiding and meaningful friendships and unity. The Puritans, at every level, were people of the Book.

In a sense, Puritanism was the natural overflow of the Reformation. The doctrine of *sola Scriptura* was recovered in the Reformation; however, the practical implications of the doctrine were more fully developed by the Puritans. Whereas the Reformation period tends to be characterized by the recovery of dogma, the Puritan era focuses on the development and application of biblical theology. Biblical spirituality—that is theology for life—characterized the Puritans. *Sola Scriptura* affirmed that Scripture alone was authoritative in all things faith and practice. Though, it went further to implicitly recognize the sufficiency of Scripture. An authority that is insufficient may be disregarded at any moment for any reason—as was evidenced in the Roman Catholic Church. The authority of Scripture coupled with the sufficiency of Scripture produce a comprehensively biblical worldview. John Owen wrote to this extent, "The Holy Spirit of God has prepared and disposed of the Scripture so as it might be a most sufficient and absolutely perfect way and means of communicating unto our minds that saving knowledge of God and his will that is needful which we may live unto him, and come unto the enjoyment of him in his glory."[89] Thus, the sufficiency of Scripture also testifies to the necessity of the Bible for Christian piety.

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[88] Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 4-5.

[89] John Owen, *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein* (London, 1687), in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 187.

Unfortunately, the Puritan's robust spirituality, devoutness to God, and serious outlook on sin led many to view the group as legalistic and prudish. These negative connotations led to false presumptions that the Puritans were individuals who had a nagging worry that someone, somewhere, was enjoying themselves. There could not be a more inaccurate understanding of the Puritans. J. I. Packer writes, "'Puritan' as a name was, in fact, mud from the start. Coined in the 1560s, it was always a satirical smear word implying peevishness, censoriousness, conceit, and a measure of hypocrisy, over and above its basic implications of religiously motivated discontent."[90] Curt Daniel paints a more accurate picture of the Puritan condition: "All those opinions are wrong. In truth, the Puritans were among the leading intellectuals and godliest Christians in England from 1570 to 1700. They had various ecclesiastical views and differed on other issues. But they were all evangelical, Bible-believing Calvinists and as such are worthy of our study, respect, and imitation."[91] Daniel is without question correct. The Puritans had a robustly Calvinistic theology, which contributed to their high view of Scripture. They affirmed the five *solas* of the Reformation—including *sola Scriptura*. The Puritans were a joyous people, delighting in the Scriptures above all else, for through it they could encounter Almighty God. As evidenced in the Puritans, robust theology does not necessitate dead religion.

Furthermore, the Puritans had a sense of joy in life that stemmed from their godward perspective. J. Steven Yuille defends the Puritan disposition. Refuting those false assumptions, he says,

> "They were opposed to fun." They most certainly were not! "They wore drab clothes." On the contrary. They were often criticized for their colorful and flamboyant dress. "They were opposed to sports." No, they loved sports. They were against playing sports on the Lord's Day, that's true. "They were prudish." Not true. "They

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[90] J. I. Packer, *Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 21.

[91] Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP, 2020), 76.

were workaholics." No, they worked hard, but they were not money-grubby workaholics. "They were self-loathing." Not true. They took sin very seriously. They were concerned with the radical depravity of the human heart, and the seriousness with which they viewed sin seems so extreme given the flippancy with which most of us view sin today. . . . "They were hostile to the arts." Not true. "They denigrated reason." I can only assume that those who levy that accusation at the Puritans have never read a Puritan work, because they were most definitely not against reason. "They appealed to old people." No, most of them were actually young men, young women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. "They were intolerant." Not intolerant, but they were men and women of great conviction. "They were excessively strict." Well, that is in the eyes of the beholder. "They suppressed human feelings." Absolutely, not![92]

Yuille demonstrates that popular and over simplistic presumptions of the Puritan disposition do not conform to reality. In fact, in many cases, such notions contribute to a revisionist history in which the treasures of Puritan thought are often lost. Fortunately, as of late, Puritanism has received a renewal of scholarly attention—recovering its breadth of orthodox theology and piety. While secular revisionist historians attempt to frame Puritanism's devout piety as supreme religiosity, it would be beneficial for such spirituality to characterize the church more comprehensively today.

The bedrock of such estimable theology and spirituality was the Puritan view of Scripture. The Puritans had such an understanding of life because they believed the Scriptures to be sufficient. In doctrine and devotion, they conducted their lives in accordance with their high view of God's Word—obediently submitting to its commands. The extent to which they relied upon the sufficiency of Scripture cannot be overstated. Every realm of life was addressed, and even regulated, by Scripture to achieve human flourishing. Personal discipline, family worship, and covenant fellowship were all essential realms of Puritan spirituality.

Puritan theology and spirituality—especially as it regards the doctrine of Scripture—is plainly evident in their awe-inspiring writings. An examination of Puritan literature demonstrates the fallacies of secular revisionists. The Puritans were a joyful people, yet their joy was not grounded in worldly ambitions and pleasures. Yuille address

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[92] J. Stephen Yuille, "The Fear of God in Puritan Theology and Spirituality" (lecture, Heritage Seminary, Cambridge, ON, June 3, 2020).

the issue with modern notions of happiness and satisfaction: "Our problem, however, is that—since the fall—we have sought happiness apart from God."[93] Conversely, for the Puritans, happiness was rooted especially in God's Word. One example of this reality is Thomas Manton's reflections on Scripture: "The word of God, especially the gospel part, does only teach us the way how we may be blessed in the enjoyment of God."[94] He further elaborates, "There is a double desire in man . . . to know the truth, and to enjoy the chiefest good; the happiness . . . of understanding, that lies in the contemplation of truth; and the happiness of the will in the enjoyment of good."[95]

Manton is but one example of rejoicing and enjoying the goodness of God in His Word. John Bunyan, likewise, testifies to happiness in God:

> God is the chief good—good so as nothing is but Himself. He is in Himself most happy. Yea, all good and all true happiness are only to be found in God, as that which is essential to His nature, nor is there any good or any happiness in or with any creature or thing but what is communicated to it by God. God is the only desirable good; nothing without Him is worthy of our hearts. Right thoughts of God are able to ravish the heart. How much more happy is the man that has interest in God. God alone is able by Himself to put the soul into a more blessed, comfortable, and happy condition than can the whole world—yea, and more than if all the created happiness of all the angels of heaven did dwell in one man's bosom. I cannot tell what to say. I am drowned. The life, the glory, the blessedness, the soul satisfying goodness that is in God are beyond all expression.[96]

Bunyan's soul was overwhelmed with enjoyment of God, and this joy stemmed from deep and continual meditation on His Word. An important realization—the Puritans could not achieve such satisfaction in God through a superficial skimming of the Word. Abiding fellowship required deep meditation on the Bible. For the Puritans, the Word of God was the lifeblood of all true devotion and the stream from which all blessing flowed. As Yuille writes, for the Puritans, "this life is chiefly maintained and cultivated by means of

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[93] J. Stephen Yuille, *Great Spoil* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 12.

[94] Thomas Manton, *Psalm 119* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 6:112, Kindle.

[95] Manton, *Psalm 119*, 7:466.

[96] John Bunyan, *The Riches of John Bunyan: Selected from His Works*, comp. Jeremiah Chaplin (New York: American Tract Society, 1850), 23.

meditation on God's word."[97] The more they experienced it, the more they desired—true sanctification. Thus, the Bible was a drug to their soul. It was addictive and they had an unquenchable thirst for it. It alone was sufficient to meet their deepest longings. Donald Whitney describes the addictive nature of God's Word as a work of the Holy Spirit:

> The presence of the *Holy* Spirit causes all those in whom He resides to have new *holy* hungers they didn't have before. They hunger…for the Word of God—the Bible— that they used to find boring and irrelevant. They have new holy longings, such as the longing to live in a body without sin and to have a mind no longer tempted by sin. They yearn to live in a holy and perfect world with holy and perfect people, and to see at last the One the angels perpetually praise as "holy, holy, holy" (Revelation 4:8). These are some of the holy heartbeats in all those in whom the Holy Spirit resides.[98]

Holiness was a high to the Puritans. A high with no hangover; it was more addictive than any drug. While the world detested it as hyper-holiness, the Puritans valued it as essential. They understood the Christian calling to holiness, for God is Holy (1 Pet 1:16). Yet in striving to become ever more holy they could never reach the ultimate pinnacle of their endeavors, for it could only be realized in glory. It was to that end did they strive.

John Piper is famously known for his concept of *Christian hedonism*: that human beings should find their greatest sense of enjoyment in God.[99] He argues that hedonism is sinful when enjoyment is found in sinful pleasures; however, human beings should find great joy and satisfaction in God. While the phrase "Christian hedonism" may be attributed to Piper, the concept of finding joy in God is not unique. It simply provides a title to the reality in which the Puritans lived. The Puritans became Christian hedonists because they read the Bible supernaturally. Piper makes a proposal for exactly how Christians should read the Bible, which was precisely the perspective of the Puritans:

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[97] J. Stephen Yuille, "The Great Fuel of Faith," in *The Spirit of Holiness: Reflections on Biblical Spirituality,* ed. Terry Delaney and Roger D. Duke (Bellingham, WA: Lexham), 21, emphasis original.

[98] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 3-4.

[99] John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2017), 288.

When we say that the ultimate goal of reading the Bible is that God's infinite worth and beauty would be exalted in the everlasting, white-hot worship of the blood-bought bride of Christ from every people, language, tribe, and nation, we imply that: 1. the infinite worth and beauty of God are the ultimate value and excellence of the universe; 2. that the supremely authentic and intense worship of God's worth and beauty is the ultimate aim of all his work and word; 3. that we should always read his word in order to see this supreme worth and beauty; 4. that we should aim in all our seeing to savor his excellence above all things; 5. that we should aim to be transformed by this seeing and savoring into the likeness of his beauty; 6. so that more and more people would be drawn into the worshipping family of god until the bride of Christ—across all centuries and cultures—is complete in number and beauty.[100]

This conclusion is not novel to Piper but existed long before in the lives of the Puritans. The Word of God was sufficient to make the Puritans glad in Christ.

The Doctrine of Scripture in the
Modern and Postmodern Eras

In the Modern and Postmodern eras, the question asked was and is "what is truth?" This question is not new. Satan sinisterly recapitulates the same question throughout the ages, only disguised differently. In the beginning, with Adam and Eve, the question was phrased "Did God really say?" (Gen 3:1). At the temptation of Jesus, Satan repackaged the enquiry, "Is it not written?" (Luke 4). At the crucifixion it was Pilot who voiced the question, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Many formulations ask the same questions, does truth exist and has God made it known? Behind each of these affronts to Scripture is Satan's ploy to plant doubt in the trustworthiness of God and His means of revelation.

This section focuses on the doctrines of inerrancy and perspicuity in the Modern and Postmodern eras. These doctrines affirm that Scripture is absolute truth and meant to be understood. In a culture that vehemently denies the possibility of truth, the clear testimony of Scripture is that God's Word is inerrant. Inerrancy is the pinnacle attribute of Scripture—the peak of the mountain to which all other attributes climb. Since all of God's Word is inspired—His sovereignly preserved canon—and authoritative over His

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[100] John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 39.

people, it is sufficient to meet every spiritual need and clear in communicating God's

divine revelation; it is the inerrant Word of God. God is incapable of declaring falsehood,

and His Word is absolute truth. What holiness is to God, inerrancy is to His Word.

Inerrancy is the backbone of the doctrine of Scripture. If inerrancy fails, then no

other attribute is viable. Yet, it is credible not on its own accord but because of who God

is. Inerrancy is a perfectly reasonable attribute because it is firmly grounded in the person

and nature of God. Christians affirm the inerrancy of the Bible because it is God's Word,

and God is Truth. John MacArthur explains, "To deny the veracity of the Bible's claims

is to call God a liar. To reject the inerrancy of Scripture is to offend the Spirit of truth

who inspired it."[101]

It is famously said that heresy precedes orthodoxy. Such is the case with

Scripture. The doctrine has been developed throughout church history—responding to the

various heretical attacks. Inerrancy is a more recently articulated doctrine; however, it is

not created. Like the canon, it has been recognized.

R. Albert Mohler Jr. explains that the doctrine of inerrancy is as old as Scripture

itself. It has always been an issue and will continue to be *the* issue that defines the church.

He writes,

> An affirmation of the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible has stood at the
> center of evangelical faith as long as there have been Christians known as
> evangelicals. The Reformation itself was born out of a declaration of the supreme
> authority if the Bible and absolute confidence in its truthfulness. . . . Without
> inerrancy, the evangelical movement will inevitable become dissolute and indistinct
> in its faith and doctrines and increasingly confused about the very nature and
> authority of its message.[102]

Confusion and eventual rejection of truth stems from a misunderstanding of the necessity

and inevitability of truth—its very nature and source. Truth is a paramount issue for

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[101] John MacArthur, introduction to *The Inerrant Word*, 12.

[102] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of
Biblical Inerrancy," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. James R. Merrick and Stephen F. Garrett,
Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 29-30.

evangelicalism. Mohler makes this point clear: "I do not believe that evangelicalism can survive without the explicit and complete assertion of biblical inerrancy."[103]

Others argue that inerrancy is an American issue, but such a dismissal does not take into account the gravity of what is at stake.[104] Scripture is either inerrant or not. It must be either affirmed or rejected. If Scripture is indeed inerrant, then Christians can have complete confidence in its truth claims. If not, then there is no legitimate reason to have confidence in anything that it attests.

Inerrancy is an ongoing issue facing Scripture and has been since the 1970s. Seeing the influence of humanistic ideologies and philosophies, the *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy* (ICBI) was founded in 1977.[105] The council was organized to address three specific issues: inerrancy, hermeneutics, and application. The stance of the council was clear: the Bible is inerrant. It is meant to be understood and rightly interpreted and should be consistently applied in accordance with authorial intent. The ICBI determined that the doctrine of inerrancy was so crucial an issue that they produced a statement defending the evangelical view—the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (CSBI).

Those first defenders of inerrancy understood that the doctrine was indispensable and must be defended. Among those first council members was R. C. Sproul, who wrote in his commentary on the CSBI,

> The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, adopted at a meeting of more than two hundred evangelical leaders in October 1978, rightly affirms that "the authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian church in this and every age." But authority cannot stand alone in isolation, as the Statement shows. The authority of the Bible is based on its being written Word of God, and because the Bible is the Word of God and the God of the Bible is Truth and speaks truthfully, authority is linked to

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[103] Mohler, "When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks," 31.

[104] See Michael F. Bird, "Inerrancy Is Not Necessary for Evangelicalism Outside the USA," in Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 145-73.

[105] Roger Nicole, "Foreword to the Commentary on the Biblical Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy: The Chicago Statements on Biblical Inerrancy, Hermeneutics, and Application with Official ICBI Commentary*, ed. R. C. Sproul and Norman L. Geisler (Arlington, TX: Bastion Books, 2013), 79.

inerrancy. If the Bible is the Word of God and if God is a god of truth, then the Bible must be inerrant—not merely in some of its parts, as some modern theologians are saying, but totally, as the church for the most part has said down through the ages of its history.[106]

Sproul sought to make a few points in his commentary. First, the doctrine of inerrancy was—and still is—necessary. It is logically necessary since God is the source of truth and incapable of falsehood. It is also theologically necessary since the gospel is the product of special revelation—not merely general revelation. Since every other essential doctrine of the faith is revealed especially through Scripture, the Bible must be inerrant for Christian truth claims to be credible. A Bible prone to error would be fatal to the Christian faith. Furthermore, inerrancy is historically necessary. Every instance throughout church history in which God's people have looked elsewhere for truth—rejecting Scripture as the sole and inerrant source of truth—it has drifted into heresy. The doctrine of inerrancy is essential.

Understanding the weight of this truth, the ICBI wrote in the opening paragraph of the introduction of the Chicago Statement,

> The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyal to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.[107]

For the ICBI, the inerrancy of Scripture was inseparable from issues of lordship, discipleship, authority, trustworthiness, and even the gospel itself. In their words, to not affirm the inerrancy of Scripture was to be "disloyal to our Master." To some, these assertions may seem to be an overstatement; however, Mohler makes the case persuasively: "To be a Christian is to accept the gift of divine revelation and to come to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Salvation comes to those who hear the Word of Christ

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[106] R. C. Sproul, "Commentary on the Biblical Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 83.

[107] International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, "Introduction to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in Sproul and Geisler *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 2013), 3.

and believe, who repent of their sins and follow Christ in obedience to the pattern of sound words revealed within the Holy Scripture."[108] Reliance upon Scripture is necessary for salvation. It would make little sense that a believer would need less confidence in the Bible to live faithfully post-conversion.

Yet another reason one must rely upon the Scriptures is that the Lord did. Christians can be confident in the Scriptures because Christ was. Charles Spurgeon helpfully comments,

> I am sure, brethren, we cannot be wrong in imitating the example of our divine Lord in our reverence for that Scripture, which cannot be broken. If He, the anointed of the Spirit and able to speak Himself as God's mouth, yet quoted the sacred writings and used the holy Book in His teachings, how much more should we, who have no spirit of prophecy resting upon us and are not able to speak new revelations, come back to the law and to the testimony and value every since word that "the mouth of the LORD has spoken"?[109]

Jesus believed in the inerrancy of Scripture. Those faithful saints of the recent past have defended it, and it is still as crucial an issue as ever. Mohler reaffirms the council's original burden: "I believe that any loss of confidence in the inerrancy of the Scriptures and any attempt to marginalize or subvert the affirmation of inerrancy will spell disaster for the evangelical movement."[110]

Christians must hear and obey the Scriptures to live faithful lives. For this reason, the ICBI not only addressed inerrancy but hermeneutics as well. Not only is Scripture inerrant, but it is also perspicuous or understandable. Faithfulness is dependent not only on affirming the truthfulness of Scripture, but on being able to rightly interpret those truths. "Thus," Mohler writes, "the faithful Christian seeks to be a faithful interpreter of the Bible, knowing that the Bible is nothing less than the Word of God, inerrant,

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[108] R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth," in MacArthur, *The Inerrant Word*, 195.

[109] Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon on the Power of Scripture*, comp. Jason K. Allen (Chicago: Moody, 2021), 54.

[110] Mohler, "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth," 199.

infallible, and inspired. There is no escaping the hermeneutical task, but the Christian comes to that task armed with a knowledge of what the Bible is in order to faithfully understand what it says."[111]

Wayne Grudem explains that the perspicuity of Scripture leads one to believe that the Bible has definite meaning, meaning that can be understood, and definite meaning precludes the possibility of alternative meanings.[112] Simplified, the Scripture has a single coherent and intended meaning, and God means for it to be understood. As such, the all-too-common question "What does this mean to you?" is an illegitimate question in Bible study.

The perspicuity of Scripture instructs and encourages believers to find out what God meant by His inspired writings, not what unique interpretations may be contrived. This is encouraging, as normal believers can have access to their omniscient God. Grudem elaborates, "The clarity of Scripture tells me that its doctrines can be taught in a way that ordinary people are able to understand."[113] While pastors and theologians may at times express biblical doctrines in ways that seem unattainable for ordinary Christians, God has given Scripture in such a manner that all may understand. This does not mean that every theological doctrine is simplistic, but that God intends truth to be attainable. Study of Scripture may require intense spiritual and mental labor; however, the treasures of His Word are worth mining.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the theological and historical themes associated with the doctrine of Scripture as they relate to this ministry project. A historical theological methodology was utilized to demonstrate that the doctrine of Scripture has developed

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[111] Mohler, "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth," 199.

[112] Wayne Grudem, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *Themelios* 34, no. 3 (2009): 289.

[113] Grudem, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," 290.

over time in response to several theological battles. Christians today can be confident that Scripture has stood the test of time. The gates of Hell have not prevailed against the church—amid every battle—precisely because God is faithful to His Word (Matt 16:18). In the Apostolic and Patristic eras, the church recognized the canon of Scripture as the inspired Word of God. In the Medieval and Reformation eras, the authority of Scripture was abandoned and subsequently recovered. In the Post-Reformation era, the sufficiency of Scripture was the testimony of the English Puritans. Finally in the Modern and Postmodern eras, the inerrancy of Scripture was defended as the pinnacle attribute of God's Word. Thus, the Bible is understandable and to be applied in the Christian life. When each of these attributes are appropriately understood, affirmed, and applied in the lives of believers, the church is unified—one people with one timeless and eternal Word.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter provides the details and description of the ministry project. In doing so, the chapter is divided into three sections. First, the preparation phase of the project will be described. The preparation phase establishes the context, determines the target audience, and identifies the need for teaching on the doctrine of Scripture. The second section provides a detailed explanation of the implementation phase. This phase of the project addresses the teaching seminar conducted at Rogersville First Baptist Church. Those topics addressed in this section include the pre-assessment, format of the project, an in-depth description of each of the teaching sessions, post-assessment, and resources provided to participants. Finally, the content section will provide a detailed description of the material covered in the project curriculum.

Preparation Phase

The preparation phase of the ministry project included evaluating the context, identifying and categorizing target groups within the church, selection of a teaching topic to facilitate intergeneration unity, preparation and evaluation of the curriculum, and promotion/recruitment of participants.

Ministry Context

The project was implemented through the Family Ministry at First Baptist Church in Rogersville, Tennessee (RFBC). While the members of RFBC were the intended audience, high levels of interest from individuals outside of RFBC prompted the decision to open the seminar to members of sister Southern Baptist churches as well. Reflecting upon past family ministry events at RFBC, it was evident that it would be difficult to

accommodate all generations if the project were to be implemented over the course of six to eight weeks. As a result, the project was changed to a one-day seminar style event. The seminar took place on a Saturday—allowing families with children in the home to participate—between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. All six sessions of the project were completed in this timeframe. As a family ministry event, parents were encouraged to bring their children, even if they were not eligible to participate.[1] Participation was limited—for ethical and research purposes—to those who were in high school or beyond.

Target Groups

As this project desired to achieve intergenerational unity, three generation groups were identified and targeted for participation. The prime generation was the designation given to those born in the year 1964 and prior. The bridge generation were individuals born between the years 1965-1999. Lastly, the rising generation were individuals born in the year 2000 and later.

While year of birth was the determinative characteristic in classifying generational groups, certain generalities applied broadly to each group. For example, in most cases those in the rising generation were single, young adults. It was likely that such individuals were either in high school or college, although this was not necessary for someone to be enrolled in higher education to participate. Similarly, those in the bridge generation were young to middle aged adults, many of which had children in the home. These generalities are important since the goal was not to organize participants in arbitrary groups but according to their various stages of life.

Accordingly, the generational distinctions were not meant to be arbitrary categories; rather, they were representative of different stages of life. While not every

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[1] For research purposes, only those who were in high school or beyond were allowed to take the surveys and be counted in the results; however, those who were not eligible to participate in the evaluations were still permitted to attend the seminar. Families were, furthermore, encouraged to bring their children to the seminar in keeping with the family ministry context.

individual shared all things in common with their peers, such groupings provided a general framework from which intergenerational unity and participation could be measured. In order to have a fair sample size of each generation, a minimum of four participants in each category was needed. It was not necessary to have even numbers of participants in each category, simply that each generation had adequate representation.

Teaching Topic

The topic for the seminar was the doctrine of Scripture. While several topics may have been selected to achieve intergenerational unity, the doctrine of Scripture served as a natural and needed foundation upon which future seminars may build. For intergenerational unity to become a reality within the local church, the generations must have a common view of Scripture. Generational distinctions serve as one of the greatest fault lines within churches. While many evangelical Christians would claim to believe the Bible and submit to its teachings, few can effectively articulate—nor have they truly evaluated—what they believe about the Bible. This topic was selected so that the various generations could arrive at a common understanding of what they believe concerning God's Word. Since Scripture provides revelation of all other doctrine, it must be the starting place in achieving unity.

Curriculum Preparation

Preparation of the teaching curriculum took place over the course of several months. The curriculum was a study on the doctrine of Scripture. While many technical aspects were covered in the study, the material was meant to introduce church members— at a lay level—to the doctrine of Scripture. The curriculum included six sessions, five of which were devoted to the attributes of Scripture (i.e., inspiration and canonicity, authority, sufficiency, perspicuity, and inerrancy) and the last a question and answer session that facilitated discussion among the various generational groups. Each session had nine aspects of teaching that were meant to advance intergenerational unity, including key terms;

Scripture references; main themes and questions; theological objectives; a brief historical-theological reflection; summary points; discussion questions; an application for intergenerational unity; and recommended readings.

A collection of resources was relied upon in preparing the seminar curriculum. Among those most valuable and highly referenced were Gregg R. Allison's *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith* and *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms*.[2] Also, a work edited by John MacArthur entitled *The Inerrant Word*, of which each participant received a free copy for further reading.[3]

Once the curriculum was written, four trusted ministry leaders were tasked with evaluating and providing feedback. The curriculum was ready to be taught once each of the four evaluators had scored the curriculum as proficient in every measurable category.

Promotion and Recruitment

The project's participants were strategically targeted and recruited. While the seminar was open to anyone who wished to attend, individuals who had been involved in RFBC's Family Ministry in the past were encouraged to participate. A minimum of four individuals from each generation group were needed to acquire meaningful results. Participants from other churches were permitted to participate in the seminar; however, only those who were members in good standing of sister Southern Baptist churches could be included in the research evaluations.

In hopes of increasing participation from those who otherwise might not be interested—particularly those of a younger audience—a prize drawing was utilized. The prizes included a ESV Study Bible, a MacArthur Study Bible, an NASB Grace and Truth

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[2] Gregg R. Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018); *Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016).

[3] John MacArthur, ed., *The Inerrant Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

Study Bible, a one-hundred-dollar Amazon gift card, and several children's resources given to parents who brought their children. Each participant was given two tickets upon entry to the seminar. The first ticket allowed them one entry into the drawings. The second ticket they were instructed to hold until the end of the class, at which point they were to choose another participant who actively participated and demonstrated growth throughout the course of the day. That person would then receive an additional entry into the drawing. Each participant, therefore, based on participation was able to have multiple entries into the prize drawings.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Implementation Phase</h3>

The implementation phase of the project required participants to take the pre-SDS prior to the seminar; attend a one-day, six-session seminar on the doctrine of Scripture and intergenerational unity; engage with the material and with each other throughout each of the six sessions; take the post-SDS, evaluating learning and growth; and receive additional resources for further study, including a free book giveaway.

**Pre-Survey on the Doctrine
of Scripture (SDS)**

The pre-seminar survey was entitled Survey on the Doctrine of Scripture.[4] The purpose of the survey was to determine participant knowledge and views on the doctrine of Scripture prior to the seminar. Before the seminar began, each participant was instructed to complete the survey on their own—without assistance from fellow classmates or the instructor. The survey was an adaptation of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*.[5] Each of the affirmations and denials in the *Chicago Statement* were adapted into survey questions and the order randomized. The technical language of the CSBI was maintained; only slight modifications were made to pose questions rather than

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[4] See appendix 1.

[5] See appendix 6.

make statements. This was a strategic decision, as much of the more technical language would be taught in the *Key Terms* sections of the curriculum. The survey consisted of two parts. Part 1 asked questions to ascertain demographic information, eligibility, and generational groupings. Part 2 of the survey tested the knowledge and views of participants through statements posed in a Likert scale format.

Seminar Format

The project was implemented in a one-day, seminar style format. The seminar lasted from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with intermittent breaks and a fellowship lunch provided for participants. Each session was approximately one hour in length and was divided into two equal portions. The first portion was committed to teaching the various attributes of Scripture. The second portion was devoted to intergenerational dialogue. A study guide was provided to each participant that followed the sections described above. Additionally, each received a copy of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* and a copy of the book *The Inerrant Word*.

Although the second half of each session was reserved for discussion, the implementation was informal and relaxed. Participants were encouraged to interrupt the instructor, ask questions, make comments, and engage classmates—and they did so throughout the course of the day. The informal atmosphere allowed for increased participation and fellowship among the group. While there were significantly more participants than expected, the small group atmosphere was successfully maintained. The success of the project can, to a large degree, be attributed to this format and atmosphere.

Upon arriving at the seminar, participants were instructed to sit at one of the five tables, in the room, with anyone they desired. Each table constituted a discussion group. During the second half of each session, participants went over the discussion questions provided in the study guides with their small groups. After each discussion group had been given sufficient time to address the questions, they then shared their insights with the whole group. Further discussion ensued as a result.

The lunch break marked the half-way point of the implementation period. After the lunch break, participants were instructed to change discussion groups. Whereas, they had been allowed to sit with anyone prior to lunch, each group was required to have at least one representative from each generation after the break. Furthermore, participants were asked not to sit with those whom they were with prior and encouraged to sit with those whom they were not well acquainted with before the seminar. This modification forced a greater deal of intergenerational discussion, and, surprisingly, did not hinder the level of engagement from participants. If anything, participants were more engaged after the lunch break than prior.

In the last session of the seminar, the *Chicago Statement* was addressed, and participants were allowed to ask any lingering questions. Discussion began among the table groups and then spread to the larger group. While participants were not provided the post-assessment until after the last session, many participants recognized the similarity in the two documents and asked questions stemming from the pre-assessment. Thus, issues regarding technical language were addressed and alleviated in this session.

Teaching Curriculum

The teaching curriculum was designed to be understandable for all age, though not simplistic. The material was challenging for every participant, yet not so technical that any member—from the youngest to the oldest—could not provide meaningful insight. Each session was designed to teach an attribute of Scripture. None of the sessions were designed to specifically address intergenerational unity, yet each session included a section devoted to showing how that attribute promoted intergenerational unity.

The topics for the six sessions were as follows: (1) inspiration and canon of Scripture, (2) the authority of Scripture, (3) the sufficiency of Scripture (4) the perspicuity of Scripture, (5) the inerrancy of Scripture, and (6) Q & A and discussion concerning the *Chicago Statement* and the Bible. A detailed description of each of these sessions will be provided in the following section.

Additionally, a PowerPoint presentation was utilized that provided fill-in-the-blank answers to the student study guides that were provided to all participants at the beginning of the seminar. The study guides were identical to the instructor guide, with the exception that the student guides did not contain the additional commentary available in the instructor guide.

Post-SDS

Upon completion of the seminar, each participant was asked to take the post-SDS, to determine growth. While participants were still instructed to complete the survey on their own, discussion on the *Chicago Statement* immediately preceded the post-SDS.

One additional section was added to the post-SDS asking participants to provide qualitative feedback on the seminar. This section was not required to be completed, but participants were encouraged to do so and to provide as much detail as possible in their responses.

Class Resources

Throughout the seminar, several resources were provided to all participants. First, a student study guide was provided that had fill-in-the-blank portions, allowing students to keep pace and have a resource to remember the material taught throughout the seminar.

Second, each participant received a copy of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*.[6] This was the topic of discussion for the class in the last session. As the language in the *Chicago Statement* is at times very technical, this resource provided students with definite answers to the somewhat difficult survey they took earlier in the seminar. Students were asked not to refer to the Chicago Statement when taking the post-

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[6] See appendix 6.

SDS, though they were permitted to discuss and ask any questions of the instructor prior to being given the post-SDS.

Lastly, each participant was given a copy of John MacArthur's edited work, *The Inerrant Word*. Each session of the seminar—as indicated in the student study guide—had several recommended readings that addressed the topic at issue. Each of those recommended reading were chapters from this book, making additional and trustworthy information easily available for all participants.

Content Overview

This section will provide a detailed description of each session of the seminar. The six sessions covered five attributes of Scripture, and while not an exhaustive course on the doctrine of Scripture, it provided participants with a foundational knowledge of what Christians should believe about the Bible. The six sessions were entitled (1) "The Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture," (2) "The Authority of Scripture," (3) "The Sufficiency of Scripture," (4) "The Perspicuity of Scripture," (5) "The Inerrancy of Scripture," and (6) "Q&A: The Chicago Statement and the Bible." Each of these sessions were divided into nine subsections: (1) "Key Terms," (2) "Scripture Reference(s)," (3) Main Themes and Questions," (4) "Theological Objectives," (5) "Historical Relevance," (6) "Summary Points," (7) "Discussion Questions," (8) "Intergenerational Unity," and (9) "Recommended Readings."

In terms of time allotment, each session was divided into two, roughly thirty-minute portions. The first half of each session was devoted to teaching the various attributes of Scripture. The second half was committed to group discussion, allowing for a time of intergenerational participation and fellowship, along with an opportunity to reflect upon the covered material and ask questions. I was actively involved in each portion—teaching the material in the first half and engaging participants as they had questions.

Three resources were heavily relied upon in development of the presentation. First, the key terms in each session were direct quotations from Allison's *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Second, many of the theological objectives derived from—though were at times modified—MacArthur's *The Inerrant Word* and Allison's *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith*.

Session 1: "The Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture"

The first session of the ministry project covered the doctrines of inspiration and canonicity. Scripture references for this session included John 16:12-15 and 1 John 4:1-6. It was necessary to begin with these topics so that participants could understand the proper source and foundation of Scripture—the Holy Spirit. The inspiration of Scripture was taught to be verbal, plenary, and concursive.[7] Once the primacy of the Holy Spirit—in His work of superintending the biblical authors—was established, the discussion moved on to the concept of canon. Teaching focused on the role of the church in recognizing and affirming—though not decisively—what books were truly inspired of God. Criteria for canonicity were provided, detailing the standards used by the church in recognizing canonical books.[8] Furthermore, it was affirmed that the sixty-six books that make up the Old and New Testaments constitute the Christian Bible, definitively closing the canon of Scripture. Thus, the work of the Holy Spirit, the human authors, and the corporate role of the church in the reception of Holy Scripture were addressed in detail.

Session 2: "The Authority of Scripture"

Session 2 covered the authority of Scripture. The Scripture reference for this session was 2 John 4-11. The authority of Scripture is that attribute of Scripture that

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[7] Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith*, 10-11.

[8] Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 94.

expresses the Bible's prerogative to command what Christians are to do, be, and believe and forbid what they are not to do, be, and believe.[9] As the authority of Scripture is derivative of its inspiration, each session was seen to be progressive. The authority of Scripture may be summarized in the Reformation doctrine *sola Scriptura*. Scripture alone is divinely authoritative and the inspired rule of God. Though the officers and traditions of the church have a certain degree of authority, only Scripture is divinely inspired and ultimately authoritative.

Two other teachings fell under this section. First, some discussion was given as to who Scripture is authoritative over—Christians, nonbelievers, everyone? This project took the position that the authority of Scripture extends to all creation but is relationally effective in the lives of the redeemed. That is to say, since God—as sovereign creator and Lord—has authority over all creation, His moral law binds the consciences of all men. Therefore, by virtue of the *imago Dei*, the law of God is written on the heart. It may even be a product of general revelation and extends to all creatures with moral faculties. However, only those whom he has redeemed receive the relational effect (effectual calling) of the law. Obedience is not only commanded, but believers are made able—by the power of the Holy Spirit—to loving and willingly obey.

Second, this session addressed the necessity of obedience in the Christian life. While obedience to the law does not save, it is the result of salvation. Thus, Christians should not rely upon their obedience for salvation—only faith in Christ is sufficient to save, but it is proper to evaluate the genuineness of one's salvation by means of obedience. Obedience is a necessary and essential part of the Christian life. It affirms the genuineness of an individual's faith. Belief without obedience is, thus, an indication of counterfeit faith.

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[9] Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith*, 23.

Session 3: "The Sufficiency of Scripture"

Session 3 covered the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Scripture reference for this session was 2 Timothy 3:10-17. The doctrine of sufficiency teaches that the Bible contains all human beings need to be saved and to please God fully. To avoid confusion, it was clarified that the Bible does not answer every question; rather, it only answers those questions God meant for it to address. It reveals exactly as much as God meant to reveal and no more. It always accomplishes the purposes of God. It does not provide exhaustive knowledge about God, nor does it make human beings omniscient, as God is. Instead, it provides all which God meant for it to address. It makes clear the exclusivity of the gospel and the ways in which man may please and glorify God. Furthermore, it was affirmed that where the Bible does not explicitly address every matter, it does provide principles and morals implicitly by which believers may exercise discernment in addressing various circumstances in life.

Session 4: "The Perspicuity of Scripture"

Session 4 of the project addressed the perspicuity of Scripture. The Scripture reference for this session was 2 Peter 1:16-21. The doctrine of perspicuity teaches that the Bible is understandable to all who possess a normal capacity for communication; however, this does not mean that the Bible is simplistic or necessarily easy to understand in all its parts. Rather, Scripture is to be understood in light of appropriate hermeneutics and within the context of the local church and reliant upon the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, believers should not expect to understand the Bible well in isolation, although they should devote some time to personal reading and study.

This session also served as a brief treatment on hermeneutics. Foundational to this discussion was the principle that there is only one correct interpretation of Scripture, while there may be many applications. While time did not permit for a thorough treatment of the topic, general principles and guidelines of interpretation were provided. Concepts encompassed in this discussion included: (1) consideration of genre and context, (2) use

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of commentaries, various translations, and other aids, (3) Bible study groups and assistance

from pastors and teachers, (4) prayer for illumination from the Holy Spirit, and

(5) increased reading and awareness of biblical themes, and several other topics.

Session 5: "The Inerrancy of Scripture"

The fifth session addressed the doctrine of inerrancy. The Scripture reference

for this session was Psalm 119, with particular attention given to verses 89-96. "Forever,

O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens" (v. 89). The attribute of inerrancy speaks

to the internal consistency of the Bible—its very nature as God's Word. It teaches that

everything the Bible says is true—without error or contradiction. The doctrine of inerrancy

extends to the whole of Scripture and is derivative of inspiration. It is consistent with the

phenomena of Scripture (i.e., the various writing techniques—loose quotations, parallel

accounts, translations of different languages, etc.). Inerrancy teaches that the Bible

corresponds to reality and is dependent upon the holiness and sovereignty of God. It is,

therefore, trustworthy and produces faith.

A secondary purpose of this session was to set up the doctrine of inerrancy as

the pinnacle attribute of Scripture, meaning that all the other attributes of Scripture together

work to affirm its inerrancy. Thus, it may be said that inerrancy is to Scripture what

holiness is to God. The latter is not dependent upon the former, but if Scripture is what it

claims to be, then it must be inerrant. Likewise, if God is who He claims to be, then He is

necessarily holy. To aid in understanding the doctrine of inerrancy, the *Chicago Statement

on Biblical Inerrancy* was presented to each participant during this session and briefly

discussed. This was a helpful resource to participants as the Survey on the Doctrine of

Scripture was adapted directly from the Chicago Statement.

**Session 6: "Q & A: *The Chicago
Statement* and the Bible"**

The last session of the project was devoted entirely to questions and discussion.

It served as a debrief for the seminar, where intergenerational fellowship and conversation

was encouraged, while allowing any lingering questions to be resolved for participants. The *Chicago Statement* was utilized to prompt discussion and questions when and if conversation became stale. As the goal of the project was to arrive at a more consistent doctrine of Scripture among the various generations, this time of conversation allowed those various generations to discuss their views and attempt to become more biblical in their thinking within an informal intergenerational setting.

Conclusion

The purpose of the ministry project was to teach the doctrine of Scripture in pursuit of intergenerational unity. To accomplish this goal, the doctrine of Scripture had to be taught in an intergenerational format with ample opportunity for discussion and participation from members of various generational groups. Three generations were identified and distinguished for research purposes: the prime generation (born prior-1964), the bridge generation (born 1965-1999), and the rising generation (born 2000-after). Each of these generations was surveyed on their various convictions and opinions regarding Scripture both prior to and after the seminar. Half of the seminar was devoted to teaching the curriculum and half to discussion, fellowship, and intergenerational participation. The project served the desired end, and the results will be evaluated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter will evaluate and reflect upon the results of the ministry project. First, the project's purpose and goals will be evaluated, followed by the strengths and weaknesses that revealed themselves after the implementation of the project. Next, those things that would be done differently will be addressed. Lastly, final reflections, both theological and personal, will be considered.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of the project was to teach the members of First Baptist Church in Rogersville, Tennessee, the doctrine of Scripture in pursuit of intergenerational unity. This purpose was accomplished, and expectations were exceeded.

Some of the greatest faultlines within the church—both local and global—are generational. This was certainly the case at Rogersville First Baptist. While the church has members from every generation, there was little intergenerational fellowship and ministry opportunities. Age graded ministry models ensured that those of various generation groups, while being members of the same church, rarely had meaningful interaction. Virtually the only time one would see all generations together was for Sunday morning worship. Even this is a modern development, as children's ministry activities were suspended during the Lord's Day service to bring families back together for worship. Even so, from the vantage point of the pulpit, generational barriers were evident.

From a pastoral perspective, it felt as though different congregations existed within the same church. Problems ranged from members simply not knowing each other to feelings of hostility toward those of different generations. Older generations within the

church would insist upon antiquated ministry methodologies that would result in little to no participation from younger members of the congregation; nevertheless, the expectation remained that younger church members would maintain a high level of participation. Conversely, younger generations both desired and enacted changes—albeit not doctrinal—that drew disapproval from the elder members of the church. Naturally, these tensions led to different expectations among the congregation as to the overall direction of the church. For church leadership, it was impossible to please anyone when everyone held a different position.

The congregation, likewise, felt the effects of the intergenerational fellowship deficiency. Many lifetime church members did not know a single student in the youth group, despite having been part of the same church community for over a decade. To put this into context, RFBC has approximately 150 active church members, 30 of those members are in the student ministry (middle school to college aged students). That equates to 20 percent of the membership being unknown to the largest generational group in the church. So, although the intergenerational membership of the church is a tremendous blessing to RFBC, lack of fellowship and cooperation posed an obvious opportunity for growth.

This being said, RFBC is a generally loving and healthy church. These concerns are not characteristic of RFBC alone but express a broader problem in evangelicalism. Most members of Rogersville First have a true and earnest desire to know one another and are not openly hostile to fellow church members. The real issue was one of perception caused by the lack of opportunity for intergenerational fellowship. While this project could not address everything necessary in achieving long-term intergenerational unity, it sought to lay the foundation for alleviating the problem.

This ministry project provided a common foundation—namely, the Bible—which all generations may rely upon for direction and doctrine. While all the intergenerational issues could not be solved in a single class/seminar, a first step needed

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to be taken. This project constituted that first step. For the church to experience intergenerational unity, all members must submit to the Scripture as the ultimate authority within the church. As a congregational church, First Baptist understands the membership to hold significant authority in decision making; however, what did they understand to be the basis for the decisions that they made—personal preference or something more transcendent? This project sought to provide the generations with the same foundation upon which to build—a shared doctrine of the Bible. Thus, the Bible was shown to be inspired by God; authoritative in the lives of his people; sufficient in showing believers how to please him; understandable, that every generation might agree on the most important issues that face the church; and inerrant, promoting confidence among believers in its every teaching. While this project was a mere starting point, the work has begun and the foundation has been laid.

Put another way, the purpose of this ministry project was twofold. There was both a theological and a pragmatic aspect to the project. The theological purpose was to teach members the doctrine of Scripture so that they would not only claim to believe the Bible but know in detail what it was they believed about the Bible. And then upon that theological foundation, the practical—to agree intergenerationally that the Bible is the basis for their unity in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The purpose of the ministry project was measured in accordance with four goals. These goals were to (1) assess participants' knowledge on the doctrine of Scripture; (2) develop a six-session curriculum designed to teach the doctrine of Scripture; (3) teach the curriculum in the context of the RFBC Family Ministry; and (4) increase intergenerational unity through instruction on the doctrine of Scripture. This section will evaluate whether each of these goals were achieved in the implementation of the ministry project.

Goal 1: Pre-Survey on the Doctrine
of Scripture (SDS)

The first goal of the project was to assess participants' knowledge of the

doctrine of Scripture. The Survey on the Doctrine of Scripture (SDS) was used to

evaluate participants' knowledge of Scripture, thereby accomplishing this goal.[1] Each

participant completed the survey prior to the implementation of the project. The survey

was an adaptation of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* consisting of thirty-

eight Likert-scale items. Twenty-two pre-seminar surveys were completed—eight

participants from the prime generation, eight from the bridge generation, and six from the

rising generation—and the results were analyzed.

This goal was successfully met when the surveys were scored and evaluated.

The results indicated that most participants had a foundational understanding of Scripture;

however, many were unaware of how to best articulate their beliefs. While every

participant would generally affirm the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, they were

unaware of more technical language and how to express their beliefs in a meaningful way.

This made the pre-SDS a real challenge for participants. The precise language of the

Chicago Statement was maintained in the survey in order to determine growth at the end

of the course. However, much of the more technical language (i.e., inerrancy, perspicuity,

hermeneutics, infallibility, etc.) made the pre-survey difficult for participants.

Participants were significantly less confident in their answers when more

technical language appeared. For example, the first item sought to determine whether

participants believed that the New Testament Scriptures corrected errors and

contradictions in the Old Testament. Throughout the course of the seminar, it became

evident that no participant believed there to be errors or contradictions in the Bible;

however, due to the technical language used in the question, participants were not

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[1] See appendix 1.

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confident in their responses. Several other items proved this same pattern. The more simplistic the language, the more confident participants were in their response.

Specifically, as the project related to intergenerational participation, responses were measured with respect to both the group as a whole and the distinctive generational groups. The average pre-SDS score for the entire group was 76.76 percent. When broken down by generational groups, the scores were as follows: prime generation—78.23 percent; bridge generation—78.02 percent; rising generation 74.05 percent. While the rising generation scored slightly lower on the survey than the two older generations, results were relatively close among the generations. This revealed a somewhat consistent knowledge-level among the various groups at the beginning of the survey.

Goal 2: Curriculum Development

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum, teaching the doctrine of Scripture to participants. The curriculum detailed various attributes of Scripture including: (1) inspiration and canon of Scripture, (2) authority of Scripture, (3) sufficiency of Scripture, (4) perspicuity of Scripture, (5) inerrancy of Scripture, and (6) questions and answers session on the *Chicago Statement*.

Each lesson was further divided into nine sections. Those sections were as follows: (1) key terms, (2) Scripture reference(s), (3) main themes and questions, (4) theological objectives, (5) historical relevance, (6) summary points, (7) discussion questions, (8) intergenerational unity, and (9) recommended readings. Each of these sections had a strategic purpose that advanced the overall goal of the project.

Key terms were defined to address the issue of technical language in the *Chicago Statement* and more broadly in theological writing. The terms that made the pre-survey difficult for participants were defined at the beginning of each session. Scripture references were included to maintain consistency and establish the Scripture as the chief authoritative standard for the church. As the authority and sufficiency of Scripture were taught to be essential for believers and for the testimony of the church, the Bible was the

foundation upon which each attribute of Scripture was derived and taught. Furthermore, main themes and questions were utilized to indicate to participants what was most important to learn and understand about Scripture in each lesson. The various theological objectives expounded upon the main themes and questions and provided theological nuance and clarity. The brief historical relevance section demonstrated how the various attributes of Scripture had developed over time with regard to historical theology—demonstrating the fact that heresy precedes orthodoxy. The summary points drew each teaching portion to a close, as the main themes were reinforced. Finally, discussion questions were provided to promote intergenerational dialogue. The intergenerational unity section addressed how the various attributes and the immediately preceding discussions contributed to the intergenerational unity of the church. Lastly, recommended readings from John MacArthur's the *Inerrant Word* were provided.

As previously stated, the curriculum had a twofold design. The first was to teach the various attributes of Scripture. The second was to promote intergenerational dialogue, unity, and participation. Once the development of the curriculum was complete, a panel of four trusted ministry leaders was tasked with evaluating the curriculum. This goal was successfully met when the curriculum was finished, and all four evaluators provided it with sufficient marks in each measurable area according to the rubric provided to them.[2]

Goal 3: Project Implementation

The third goal of the project was to teach the six-session curriculum on the doctrine of Scripture to participants. Participants were distinguished in accordance with their generational groups. The prime generation consisted of those born in the year 1964 and prior. The bridge generation were those born between 1965 and 1999. Lastly, the rising generation were those born in the year 2000 and later.

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[2] See appendix 4.

For this goal to be successfully met, a minimum of four individuals from each generation needed to participate in the implementation phase and be evaluated. There were a total of twenty-nine individuals present for the seminar and twenty-two were eligible and counted in the evaluation process. Approximately half the participants were RFBC members and half were members of another sister Southern Baptist church. This goal was successfully met, as eight members of the prime, eight members of the bridge, and six members of the rising generation participated and were evaluated.[3] Six participants were ineligible to be considered in the results: two were disqualified from evaluation for lack of church membership, one was disqualified for insufficient attendance, and an additional three were disqualified for not meeting the age requirement.

Thus, the third goal of the project was accomplished when the seminar had concluded, and a sufficient number of participants completed the course and post-seminar survey.[4]

Goal 4: Evaluation of Intergenerational Unity

The last goal was to increase intergenerational unity within the church through instruction on the doctrine of Scripture. This goal was measured by evaluating the pre- and post-seminar surveys (SDS). For the goal to be successfully met, the various generations' knowledge must have increased and been more consistent with an orthodox view of Scripture than before. The results of the survey were encouraging and demonstrated success in the project. The goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre and post-seminar survey scores: $t_{(21)} = -9.886$, $p < 0.0001$.

Every participant showed significant growth and learning throughout the seminar, and each generation demonstrated greater unity and alignment on the doctrine of

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[3] See appendix 5.

[4] See appendix 5.

Scripture. Still yet, the results of the project should not be overestimated. The results reveal a great deal of progress, but the SDS is a short-term tool that is insufficient in determining lasting progress. This project simply lays the foundation for continual work that must be done. Put another way, while intergenerational unity was strengthened through this ministry project, one course will not achieve long-term and lasting success. Rather, this project, while achieving its stated goals, only lays the foundation for further growth and opportunity. Intergenerational unity and participation in the church must be a consistent effort and cannot be accomplished all at once. While statistically speaking the project achieved its goals, it would be a mistake to assume that the work is done. Church unity—particularly intergenerational unity—must constantly be nurtured and maintained.

Project Strengths

The project had several commendable strengths—some were anticipated and others were more organic. Each of the listed goals were accomplished in the ministry project, and as a result, the project was a success. However, some of the most notable strengths of the project cannot to be evaluated by metrics or analytical tools. The immediate results were measured; however, I anticipate the unmeasurable, long-term achievements to be much more commendable.

One church member, for example, commented that she had never been part of a Bible study or class that had such an age diversity. Another participant commented on the post-survey, "The audience was clearly multi-generational, from preschool to senior adults." This was one of the main goals and greatest strengths of the project—having every generation of the church gathered under the Word for meaningful fellowship and study. More than any metric, these sentiments—shared and mentioned by several participants—are themselves a testimony of the project's success. What may have once been seen as unthinkable—a multigenerational Bible study that people would actually attend at RFBC—now has a proven model of success. It is entirely possible, and desirable,

that all generations would participate in a deeply theological, yet immensely practical study together.

Another comment—in which I took pride—came from a member of the student ministry. She frankly expressed that she expected the content to be dull and uninteresting. Explaining that she attended the seminar as little more than a personal favor, she was intrigued at how interesting and engaging the teachings on the doctrine of Scripture were. This attests a great truth often underrealized in the church: theology is practical not merely intellectual. Biblical doctrine is for every saint, not simply pastors and theologians. Elders should therefore make every effort to make theology accessible to the average believer. Perhaps the most intimidating aspect of the seminar—the technical language in the pre-survey—proved undaunting to participants by the end of the event. One of the greatest strengths of the project was that deep theological truths were made understandable for every individual, every generation.

The level of participation and conversation was beyond what could have been anticipated, especially in an intergenerational format so foreign to RFBC. Every individual had insight to share, questions to unashamedly ask, and encouraging words for those of different generations. Although only a first step, some of the very individuals who did not know a member of the youth group were able to meaningfully engage with them in an unintimidating environment. Perhaps more than the long-term success of the project itself in producing intergenerational fellowship and unity, it will serve as a model for continuing progress. The doctrine of Scripture was the starting point, and perhaps the generations could next study theology proper, Christology, Pneumatology, or ecclesiology. The topics are endless and the practicality of each area of theology for life is inexhaustible.

A final strength that at first might seem insignificant, was perhaps one of the most significant pastorally. After two years of virtually no meaningful fellowship (resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic), seeing RFBC members sit down for an intergenerational meal was awesome, in the fullest and deepest sense of the word.

Though not a one-for-one comparison, such a meal is reminiscent of the early church. "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47). It is my estimate that the meal shared as part of this ministry project was one of the most precious times of fellowship I have experienced as a pastor—a moment that causes me to long for our fellowship in heaven even more. Praise be to God!

Project Weaknesses

For all the strengths, there were a few weaknesses to the project that should be addressed, and at times weaknesses are most evident on the flip side of strengths. Although every generation was present for the project implementation, only one set of parents attended this Family Ministry event. While parents were invited to participate with their students in this event, sadly there was little success here.

This weakness led to another unfortunate circumstance. To meet the ethical requirements of the project, participants under the age of eighteen were required to receive parental approval to participate. Permission forms were thus attached to the pre-survey for the course, requiring a parent's signature. On two separate occasions, parents were significantly troubled by the survey, as the technical language was beyond their ability to understand. As a result, they were not eager to sign the form allowing their children to participate in the project. This circumstance was unexpected. In each of these cases, once the various questions on the survey were explained, and the purpose for the technical language, the parents were happy to have their child participate.

In one sense, these misunderstandings served as an opportunity to invite parents to participate in the seminar. Unfortunately, after extended conversations that relieved the parents of their concerns, they allowed their children to participate in the seminar but declined to attend themselves. Upon reflection, this weakness has led to a future goal for the RFBC Family Ministry—increased parental involvement, specifically among high

school parents. This has been one of the biggest struggles with the Student Ministry in the past several years. Perhaps only a third of the students who are active in the student ministry have parents that are active church members, and those who are rarely attend events with their children. As a result, family ministry in the traditional sense has been extraordinarily difficult at RFBC. However, future events with a similar format to this ministry project, if successful, may address this weakness.

What I Would Do Differently

Prior to the implementation of the project there were significant concerns as to whether the subject would achieve its desired end. Should the topic have been something other than the doctrine of Scripture, something more immediately relevant to the target audience? After implementation, I am convinced that there was no better place to start than the doctrine of Scripture. This is the case for a few reasons. First, Christians must understand why they believe what they believe. This cannot happen without first knowing what one believes about the Bible. It is divine revelation inspired by the Spirit of God and authoritative. It is sufficient in revealing the gospel and how one might glorify God. It is understandable to those who seek the Lord, specifically in the context of His church; and it is without error, completely trustworthy in everything it teaches. For younger generations, these truths are constantly scrutinized by the culture. For older generations, rarely are they able to provide a reasonable and convincing defense of Scripture. This project addressed these issues.

In hindsight, parental involvement would be the first area for increased attention. I would make a more asserted effort to recruit and encourage parents to attend the seminar with their students. While the students certainly seemed to benefit from the project, I can only imagine that this would have been dramatically amplified if parents were able to discuss the various concepts with their children. A holistic ministry philosophy where parents are actively engaged with their children within the church is preferable. While this

seminar allowed a prime opportunity for such parental involvement, it was an opportunity missed.

Another aspect of the ministry project that may have been done differently was the Survey on the Doctrine of Scripture. It is questionable whether the language of the *Chicago Statement* should have been altered to make the survey more understandable for the target audience. Certainly, several participants provided feedback indicating this to be the case. If changed, I fear that the results may have been less meaningful, as participants would have indicated what they thought to be the "right" answer rather than sharing their honest feedback. In any case, the decision to maintain the technical language of the *Chicago Statement* was a strategic choice. Perhaps it was the wrong choice. It would be interesting in hindsight to see what the differences may have been with respect to the results.

Also, the material covered in the curriculum was a brief survey of the attributes of Scripture. Had I the opportunity to expand the material, and increased time with participants, I would have expanded the section on canonicity to include a more detailed account of the formation of the Christian canon. Also, the addition of hermeneutical training would have been beneficial for participants. The attributes of Scripture were covered exceptionally well in the project; however, participants would have benefitted from being taught how to rightly interpret the Bible. Within the time constraints and format of the project, it was not practical to address these topics in length.

Lastly, and perhaps the most significant change I would make, would be to increase the amount of qualitative data and feedback acquired from participants. The SDS was helpful for the purpose of research and in gathering quantitative data, but pastorally I would have benefited more from eliciting qualitative feedback from participants. While part 3 of the survey asked for such feedback, it would have been better to ask targeted questions requiring more detailed written responses. Furthermore, the demographics of the discussion group tables before and after lunch should have been recorded. While it

was ensured that each table had at least one participant from each generation after the lunch break, it would have been helpful to see the spread of generations prior to lunch and reflect upon that information in assessing participation before and after.

Theological Reflections

No aspect of this project was atheological. The very purpose of the project was to encourage the different generations within the church to critically evaluate their theology of the Bible, and moreover how their shared view of Scripture should contribute to the unity of the church. In doing so, it has been demonstrated that theology is not reserved for the ivory towers of the academy; rather, theology is for the church.

For some time the church's attention has been short-circuited with regard to theology, in favor of pragmatism. Pragmatism within the church has contributed to disunity, as ministry methodology and philosophy have revolved around personal preference. This can no longer be the case. The grounds for every practice and every action in the church must be fidelity to Scripture. Thus, the unity of the church depends on a common reliance upon the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

The scriptural underpinning for intergenerational unity is 1 Timothy 4:11-5:2. Timothy, in committing himself to the ministry of the Word, interreacts with the generations under his pastoral care in a Christ exalting manner. So too the church must resolve to unify around God's Word in relating to one another as children of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17). Scripture is sufficient in regulating intergenerational relationships. Those who rightly honor God in word and deed will also honor one another. This is the essence of Christ's royal law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37-39).

The gospel—as revealed in Scripture—is not abstract; rather, it is necessary for all of life. Love one another, and in doing so love Christ. Scripture also reminds Christians

of the necessity of submission and repentance. Only through submission to the Lordship of Christ, in faith, can one be saved. And to be of the Lord is to be of His people. Thus, submission to Christ requires mutual submission to the brotherhood of believers in the context of the local church (i.e., covenant membership).. Church unity is derivative of regenerate church membership. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

The unity of the church should be nurtured but cannot be sustained by pastors alone. Each member must resolve that the unity of the church is of the utmost importance, and of greater importance than personal preference or agenda. Christians must further understand that the church is the bride of Christ—her purity is in sound theology—not a country club for the saints. Entertainment is not its vocation, but service and suffering that the church might be glorified in her groom (Rom 8:17). Church unity—intergenerational unity—is the byproduct of sound doctrine. The sum of submission to sound doctrine and unity in the Spirit is the glory of God, to which the church must be committed.

Personal Reflections

Reflecting upon this project is bittersweet, and these last words I find hard to come by. How do I condense into a few paragraphs the sentimentality of two years' work, of late nights, time sacrificed with family, and countless hours of reading and studying the Bible and the things of God? I resonate with the apostle Paul when he writes, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom 8:26). One can persevere through a dissertation on their own accord; however, he cannot flourish in gospel ministry apart from the interceding work of the Christ. I confess, with complete dependence, that I have relied upon the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit for this task. My weaknesses as a student, pastor, husband, and father have been revealed numerous times throughout this project, I am sure. I have felt my own insignificance,

which has only caused me to rely upon the Spirit more, and amid it all God has been faithful.

Again, with the apostle Paul, I feel the grace and mercy of God in this heavenly vocation: "'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor 12:9). When I have not known how to continue, what to write, or where to turn in the rigors of doctoral studies, God has remained faithful. I therefore boast in my weakness that Christ might be exalted in me.

You would not have to search long in this project to discover imperfections and weaknesses. Praise be to God that His mercy is magnified in such circumstances! My reliance is not upon my own intellect or strength—how folly this would be—but upon Christ who brings every good work to completion (Phil 1:6). While I have put a great deal of effort into this assignment, more so, Christ has done a great work in me.

The Doctor of Ministry degree has been a thoroughly edifying experience. Whereas most academic degrees serve the interest of the student—and this degree certainly has—the DMin project has eternal significance that can only be measured in heaven. I have benefited, but my hope is that my people, God's people, will flourish in their dependence upon the Bible. The beauty of such a project is that the work is not mine alone. I owe a great deal to everyone who contributed to this project—in particular, my family and my church. Without the love and support of my wife, I would not be who I am. I find deeper joy and learn more of Christ's love each day as I strive to lead her in the Lord. And our daughter, as I reflect upon my love for her, I marvel at the depths of God's love for His children. My church, Rogersville First Baptist Church, and prior to her Cinema Church, has imparted within me a love for God's people that I could not have known otherwise. It is for all these that I have endeavored to complete this task.

For some, the goal of such a program may be to earn the designation "doctor." Lord forgive me if I have ever had such glimpses of spiritual arrogance in my heart. At

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this moment—so far as I can reflect upon and understand my own heart—the greatest honor is to be called "pastor." My greatest desire is to be as prepared as possible for pastoral ministry. To pastor my wife and daughter is the greatest honor of my life. To pastor my church, I know God could find someone more talented and qualified, but for some reason He chose me. I am brought to my knees in praise.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to teach the members of First Baptist Church in Rogersville, Tennessee the doctrine of Scripture in pursuit of intergenerational unity. Underneath this task is the assumption—the conviction—that Scripture is sufficient to produce unity among the generations. Psalm 145:4 reads, "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." The church exists in Christ exalting unity, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Father, when they submit themselves to the Scripture—when one generation commends His work to another. May this be the testimony of Rogersville First Baptist. May the generations of RFBC come together on earth as a picture of heaven. To God be the glory. Amen!

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY ON THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

This instrument serves to demonstrate the views and knowledge of differing generations as to the doctrine of Scripture. It served as a tool to measure intergeneration unity. Unity was demonstrated if the various generation's results more closely reflect one another at the end of the project than was evident at the beginning. This tool is an adaptation of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. It was taken prior to the beginning of the project and again after its conclusion.

<p style="text-align:center">Survey on the Doctrine of Scripture</p>

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to survey your views and knowledge concerning the doctrine of Scripture. This research is being conducted by Michael Blayne Powell for purposes of collecting data for a DMin ministry project. In this research, you will be asked to answer a series of questions before the project, and you will be asked to answer the same questions after the project has concluded. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this Survey on the Doctrine of Scripture (SDS) and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

[ ] I agree to participate

[ ] I do not agree to participate

Agreement to Participate (for minors, if applicable)
You are being requested to give permission for a minor or member of a vulnerable population under your legal supervision to participate in a study designed to survey their views and knowledge concerning the doctrine of Scripture. This research is being conducted by Michael Blayne Powell for purposes of collecting data for a D.Min. ministry project. In this research, a person will be asked to answer a series of questions before the project and be asked to answer the same questions after the project has concluded. Any information provided will be held *strictly confidential,* and at no time will a person's name be reported, or a person's name identified with his or her responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and the person you are giving approval to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By signing your name below, you are giving informed consent for the designated minor or member of a vulnerable population to participate in this research if he or she desires.

Participant Name _____

Parent/Guardian Name _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Participant Identification Number: __ __ __ __ (last 4 digits of phone number)

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

Part 1

1. Have you trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation and believed the gospel message?
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No

2. Do you consider yourself to be a mature and/or growing Christian?
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No

3. Are you a member in good standing of Rogersville First Baptist Church or a sister SBC church?
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No

4. Have you previously participated in a family ministry event at RFBC?
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No

5. Are you married?
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No

6. Are you 18 years of age or older?
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No

7. Do you have children (age 18 or younger) living in the home?
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No

8. To which generation do you belong?
   _____ A. Prime Generation (born Prior-1964)
   _____ B. Bridge Generation (born 1965-1999)
   _____ B. Rising Generation (born 2000-After)

9. Did you complete four or more of the class sessions? (This question is only applicable once the seminar has concluded. Please leave blank for the pre-assessment.)
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No

Directions: The below statements ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:
SD = strongly disagree,
D = disagree,
DS = disagree somewhat,
AS = agree somewhat,
A = agree,
SA = strongly agree.

Please circle the answer that best represents your view on each question.

Part 2

1. The Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

2. The Scriptures receive their authority from the church, traditions, and other human sources.
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

3. The Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the consciences, and that the authority of the church is subordinate to that of Scripture.
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

4. Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

5. The written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

6. The Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

7. The God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

8. Human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation, and the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

9. God's revelation in Holy Scripture was progressive (it built upon itself to completeness).
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

10. Later and normative revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, may correct, or contradict it, and normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.
    SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

11. The whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine revelation.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

12. The inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

13. Inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine, while the mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

14. Inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

15. God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

16. God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

17. Inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

18. The finitude or fallenness of the biblical authors, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

19. Inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy, and that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

20. Essential elements of the Christian faith are affected by the absence of the autographs, and this absence renders the assertion of biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

21. Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

22. It is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be separated.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

23. Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.
             SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

24. Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science, and scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

25. Inerrancy, as a theological term, should be used with propriety with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

26. It is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose, and inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

27. Scripture is unified and internally consistent.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

28. Alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

29. The doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

30. Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

31. The doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the church's faith throughout its history.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

32. Inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

33. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

34. The witness of the Holy Spirit, at times may operates in isolation from and against Scripture.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

35. The text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and Scripture is to interpret Scripture.
                  SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

36. It is appropriate and legitimate to treat the text of Scripture in such a way that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

                    SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

37. A confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith, and such confessions should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

                    SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

38. Affirming the infallibility and inspiration of the Scripture is necessary for salvation, and inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences both to individuals and to the church.

                    SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

Part 3

(This question is only to be completed at the conclusion of the seminar.)

Please leave any comments that you might have about the content, delivery, what you learned, what you would like to have heard more about, lingering questions, etc. (positive or negative). Thank you for your participation in the seminar!

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APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

This rubric was used to assess the effectiveness of the hermeneutics curriculum associated with the project. The material was judged in accordance with the guidelines listed within. Before the material was taught it had to receive a sufficient score in all criteria, by all evaluators. A council of four trusted pastors or ministry leaders evaluated the curriculum.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers all topics necessary for developing proper hermeneutics.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly demonstrates appropriate biblical hermeneutics.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better interpret and apply the Bible.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

CURRICULUM MASTER OUTLINE

The following figures provide the master outline for the ministry project. The master outline contained all materials that would be provided to students with additional commentary to supplement the theological objectives and discussion question sections. The master outline addresses the first five sessions of the project, the last being a Q & A discussion facilitated by the instructor with participation among participants Each lesson was composed of nine unique items: definitions of key terms, Scripture references with regard to the content to be taught, main themes and questions to be addressed, theological objectives, historical relevance, summary points, discussion questions, a section highlighting how each teaching contributed to intergenerational unity in the church, and recommended readings.

INTERGENERATIONAL UNITY AND THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

INSTRUCTOR OUTLINE AND CURICULUM

BY

MICHAEL BLAYNE POWELL

Session 1: The Inspiration and Canon of Scripture

Key Terms

<u>INSPIRATION</u> of Scripture: The special work of the Holy Spirit by which he superintends the biblical authors as they composed their writings. While these authors employed their own personalities, theological perspectives, writing styles, and so forth, the Spirit ensured that what they wrote was what God wanted them to write: the Word of God, fully truthful and divinely authoritative. Inspiration is plenary (all Scripture is God-breathed; 2 Tim. 3:16), verbal (inspiration extends to the words of Scripture), and concursive (the Spirit and the human authors wrote together). Modes of inspiration include historical research, Spirit-assisted memory, miraculous revelation, and sound judgement.

<u>CANON</u> of Scripture: The list of which writings belong in the Bible. The Protestant canon is sixty-six books—thirty-nine Old Testament writings and twenty-seven New Testament writings. The church inherited a closed canon of the Old Testament from the Hebrew Bible and, guided by the Holy Spirit over the course of four centuries, acknowledge the writings belonging to its New Testament. For Protestant Christians, the canon is not an authorized collection of writings (in that the church conferred its authority or approval upon a list of books). Rather, the canon is a collection of authoritative writings. The biblical writings have an inherent authority as works uniquely inspired by God. Canonization is the process of recognizing that inherent authority, not bestowing it from an outside source.

Scripture References

<u>John 16:12-15</u>: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

<u>1 John 4:1-6</u>: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

Main Themes and Questions

    I.   The role of the <u>HOLY</u> <u>SPIRIT</u> in the doctrine of Scripture—<u>INSPIRATION</u>.

    II.   How did we get the Scriptures? How can we be sure we have the right books? What role does the Holy Spirit play?

Theological Objectives

    I.   Scripture has both <u>GOD</u> and <u>MAN</u> as its author.

    II.   The Holy Spirit <u>SUPERINTENDED</u> the human authors as they wrote Scripture.

    III.   All Scripture is <u>INSPIRED</u> by God. Inspiration is <u>VERBAL</u>, <u>PLENARY</u>, and <u>CONCURSIVE</u>.

    IV.   <u>CANONICITY</u> refers to those books that belong in the Christian Bible: <u>SIXTY-SIX</u> books—thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament.

    V.   The church does not <u>DETERMINE</u> which books are canonical. The church <u>RECOGNIZES</u> canonical books based on their <u>TRUTHFULNESS</u> and <u>INSPIRATION</u>.

    VI.   The canon of Scripture is <u>CLOSED</u>; therefore, no more revelation should be expected or accepted.

Historical Relevance

The doctrines of inspiration and canonicity touch the earliest centuries of the Christian church, beginning in the apostolic era. The formation of the New Testament canon took place exclusively in the first century; however, recognition of the canon took several hundred more years. It was not until the fourth century that near-universal agreement was achieved as to which books composed the New Testament (Protestants affirm the 66 books of the Bible to be canonical. Catholics include the apocryphal literature, and the Greek Orthodox add even more books). While the New Testament was not collected as a single volume prior to the fourth century, the works of the early church fathers (patristic era) demonstrate a remarkable degree of agreement as to which books were canonical, even prior to that time. The issues of inspiration and canonicity, thus, give insight to the development of the doctrine of Scripture from the earliest periods of church history.

Summary Points

"All Scripture is God-breathed, because the Holy Spirit superintended the biblical authors as they composed their writings, the Word of God." -Gregg R. Allison

"The canon of Scripture, or list of which writings belong in the inspired Word of God, consists of sixty-six books." -Gregg R. Allison

Discussion Questions

    I.   How can we have confidence that we have the right books of the Bible?

    II.   What are the criteria for canonicity?

    III.   What does the doctrine of inspiration teach?

    IV.   How does inspiration underscore the authority and truthfulness of the Bible?

    V.   Did the church decide what books should be in the Bible, or did we get the books some other way?

Intergenerational Unity

The Bible is the source of unity among the generations of the church. For the generations to be unified around Scripture, there must be one uniform set of writings in which they can all agree upon. Furthermore, there must be some outstanding reason why they can affirm those specific books and not others. The doctrines of inspiration and canonicity allow the church—throughout the ages—to recognize, with confidence, those books that belong in the Bible. The church can know with great certainty that the Bible that we have today is the Bible that God meant for His church to have for all time. Unfortunately, amid a postmodern world, renewed attacks on Scripture target young and unexpecting generations that may not have readily available answers to criticisms. Younger generations must not assume that, since they do not know the answer to critical attacks, there must not be any answer at all. For the older generations of the church, it is essential to be prepared with these answers, and they must not be anti-intellectual. The Christian faith is not simplistic, and it is not illogical. Christians should search the mind of God—through the Bible—to understand the most convincing arguments in defense of the Christian Scriptures.

Recommended Readings

Duncan, Ligon J., III. "The Nature, Benefits, and Results of Scripture." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 91-100. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Kruger, Michael. "Do We Have a Trustworthy Text? Inerrancy and Canonicity, Preservation, and Textual Criticism." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 304-316. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Waymeyer, Matt. "Words of God and Words of Man: Inerrancy and Dual Authorship." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 288-303. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Ferguson, Sinclair B. "The Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures: Inerrancy and Pneumatology." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 255-274. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Session 2: The Authority of Scripture

Key Terms

AUTHORITY of Scripture: A property of Scripture whereby it possesses the right to command what believers are to do and prohibit what they are not to do. Such authority is a corollary of inspiration: because God is its author, Scripture possesses divine authority. Evidences of biblical authority include the prophets' messages ("Thus says the LORD"), Jesus's attitude toward the Bible ("Scripture cannot be broken"; John 10:35), and Paul's consciousness of writing from divine imperative (1 Thess. 4:1-2). Reformed theology emphasizes Scripture's self-attesting authority and the role of the Holy Spirit in witnessing to Scripture as the authoritative Word of God.

Scripture References

2 John 4-11: "It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work."

Main Themes and Questions

I. Scripture is authoritative to COMMAND what we must do, be, and believe and to FORBID what we must not do, be, and believe.

II. What authority does the Scripture have over the believer?

III. What is the role of the law in the New Covenant?

Theological Objectives

I. The AUTHORITY of Scripture is derived from the INSPIRATION of Scripture.

II. The authority of the Bible has to do with its prerogative to COMMAND what Christians are to do (axiology), be (ontology), and believe (epistemology) and to FORBID what they are not to do, be, and believe.

III.   The doctrine <u>SOLA</u> <u>SCRIPTURA</u> was a key doctrine of the Protestant Reformation, and one of the foundational doctrines of Reformed theology. Scripture alone is <u>DIVINELY</u> <u>AUTHORITATIVE</u> in the life of a believer—not <u>TRADITION</u> or the <u>CHURCH</u>.

IV.   The authority of Scripture extends to <u>ALL</u> <u>CREATION</u> but is <u>RELATIONALLY</u> <u>EFFECTIVE</u> in the lives of God's elect.

V.   The law does not <u>SAVE</u> but is still an <u>ESSENTIAL</u> <u>ELEMENT</u> in the Christian life.

Historical Relevance

The authority of Scripture was the controversy that marked the Medieval era and led to the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. The Roman Catholic church had assumed for itself the authority of Christ as the totus Christus. Since the church, they believed, was the body of Christ it had the authority of Christ. Such a concept is not itself heretical if properly defined. However, the church of Rome extended this theology to say that the traditions and magisterium of the church had authority equal to that of the Bible, and since in their tradition only the officers of the church could legitimately interpret Scripture, the authority of the clergy—particularly the Pope—soon superseded that of Scripture itself. Thus, tradition and the magisterium were ultimately authoritative in the church. Salvation was not offered through Christ as mediator, but through His continuing body—the church. These issues led to very serious errors in doctrine and eventually resulted in the Protestant Reformation.

The Protestant Reformation championed the five solas or reformation solas as we recognize them today. Jason Allen writes, "[W]e call sola Scriptura the 'formal principle' of the Reformation because Scripture alone is the singular, authoritative source from which our theology—including sola fide—is developed. As the formal principle, sola Scriptura is the doctrinal foundation upon which we erect the entirety of Christian belief, including our understanding of the gospel itself…For the Reformers specifically, Scripture alone meant the Bible held authority over all church tradition, popes, and councils…all these were subordinate to, and thus subject to, the Word of God. In other words, the Word of God regulates them; they don't regulate the Word of God."

Summary Points

"The authority of Scripture is the property by which it, as the inspired Word of the sovereign God, possesses the right to command what Christians are to believe, do, and be, and to prohibit what they are not to believe, do, and be." -Gregg R. Allison

Discussion Questions

I.   Because authority can be, and often is, abused, isn't it dangerous to talk about biblical authority?

II.   Are there other holy books or traditions that carry the same weight and authority as the Bible?

III.   Does God speak to Christians personally? Does personal revelation carry the same authority as Scripture?

IV.   How do the concepts of authority and submission relate to biblical authority?

Intergenerational Unity

Amid a culture that rejects both truth and authority, it is essential that all generations within the church submit to the absolute truth of the Bible. Scripture is authoritative over all Christians and is the bedrock of church unity. Apart from the authority of Scripture, one is prone to develop their own version of Christianity and only submit to those things they understand to be important. In doing so, individuals proclaim personal autonomy, and become an authority in and to themselves. They will refuse to submit to the discipline and accountability of the church, placing themselves in a spiritually vulnerable and unhealthy position. It is essential that every generation understand that the Bible has the right to command what Christians must do, be, and believe and forbit what they must not do, be, and believe. Since the Bible is God's Word, and since He is Lord, He has authority over believers as both individuals and as a covenant community.

Recommended Readings

Hamilton, Ian. "Jesus's Submission to Holy Scripture: John 10:35-36." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 80-90. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Lawson, Steven J. "The Invincible Word: Inerrancy and the Power of Scripture." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 319-333. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

MacArthur, John. "The Mandate and the Motivations: Inerrancy and Expository Preaching." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 334-345. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Begg, Alistair. "Let the Lion Out: 2 Timothy 4:1-5." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 101-112. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Session 3: The Sufficiency of Scripture

Key Terms

SUFFICIENCY of Scripture: An attribute of Scripture (in written form or orally transmitted) whereby it provides everything that people need to be saved, and everything that Christians need to please God fully. However, Scripture is not [exhaustively] sufficient; indeed, there is much about God that he chose not to reveal (Deut. 29:29). Rather, the sufficiency of Scripture is restricted to its purpose, which is instructing nonbelievers about salvation and training believers to be "equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Scripture's sufficiency and the principle of sola Scriptura—"Scripture alone"—are intimately connected and contradict the need for the Catholic Tradition.

Scripture References

2 Timothy 3:10-17: "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Main Themes and Questions

I. The Scripture provides everything we need to be SAVED and to grow in GODLINESS.

II. The sufficiency of Scripture does not mean that the Bible answers EVERY QUESTION.

Theological Objectives

I. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture regards God's PROVISION of ALL the REVELATION that he wants his human creatures to have.

II. The Bible does not provide EXHAUSTIVE KNOWLEDGE. Some things are hidden from human understanding; however, those things which are revealed are given to be UNDERSTOOD.

III. Where the Bible does not directly answer questions of life and morality, it does indirectly provide BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES to believers, and the Holy Spirit aids believers in DISCERNMENT and APPLICATION.

IV.   Sufficiency and the Protestant doctrine of <u>SOLA</u> <u>SCRIPTURA</u> (Scripture alone) are connected.

V.   The sufficiency and necessity of Scripture speaks specifically of those issues concerning <u>SALVATION</u>, growth in <u>HOLINESS</u>, and knowledge of God's <u>WILL</u>.

VI.   As a result of the doctrines of sufficiency and necessity, Scripture completely <u>EQUIPS</u> the people of God to <u>PLEASE</u> him fully.

Historical Relevance

The English Puritans are exemplary in their reliance upon the sufficiency of Scripture. Understanding sufficiency to be an extension of Scripture's authority, they believed that the Bible contained all that was necessary for an individual to be saved and live a life that was pleasing and glorifying to God. They had a high view of God, a high view of Scripture, and endeavored to live holy lives. Because they took sin seriously—understanding its consequence to be spiritual and physical death—some mistook the Puritans to be strict and prudish. J. Stephen Yuille reflects upon this mischaracterization of the Puritans, saying, "[That some said,] 'They were opposed to fun.' They most certainly were not! 'They wore drab clothes.' On the contrary. They were often criticized for their colorful and flamboyant dress. 'They were opposed to sports.' No, they loved sports. They were against playing sports on the Lord's Day, that's true. 'They were prudish.' Not true. 'They were workaholics.' No, they worked hard, but they were not money-grubby workaholics. 'They were self-loathing.' Not true. They took sin very seriously. They were concerned with the radical depravity of the human heart, and the seriousness with which they viewed sin seems so extreme given the flippancy with which most of us view sin today. . . 'They were hostile to the arts.' Not true. 'They denigrated reason.' I can only assume that those who levy that accusation at the puritans have never read a puritan work, because they were most definitely not against reason. 'They appealed to old people.' No, most of them were actually young men, young women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. 'They were intolerant.' Not intolerant, but they were men and women of great conviction. 'They were excessively strict.' Well, that is in the eyes of the beholder. 'They suppressed human feelings.' Absolutely, not!" While the Puritans were often misunderstood, what is notable about them was their reliance upon the sufficiency of God's Word for life. Their spirituality was robustly biblical, as opposed to the mystical and synchronistic spirituality of the day. They were biblical Christians, not cultural Christians, precisely because of their reliance upon the sufficiency of God's Word.

Summary Point

"Sufficiency is an attribute of Scripture whereby it provides everything that people need to be saved and everything that Christians need to please God fully. Necessity is an

attribute of Scripture whereby it is essential for knowing the way of salvation, for progressing in holiness, and for discerning God's will." -Gregg R. Allison

Discussion Questions

    I.   Why is the doctrine of sufficiency so foundational for the Christian faith?

    II.   If contains everything Christians need to know to please God fully, what is the role of the following in discerning God's will: the counsel of others, sermons, the human conscience, feelings, the leading of the Holy Spirit, changes in circumstances, and others?

    III.   What does the sufficiency of Scripture have to say about my friends and/or church (or even me) imposing some belief, rule, or prohibition on me that is not found in Scripture?

    IV.   What does the sufficiency of Scripture say about my friends and/or my church (or even me) emphasizing matters not given much attention in Scripture?

    V.   Why is it important to read, memorize, and study the Bible? Are these essential elements of the Christian faith?

Intergenerational Unity

Reliance upon the sufficiency of Scripture is essential for biblical Christianity. That the Bible is sufficient to provide the means of salvation and personal holiness, is a conviction to which Christians of all generations must return. Salvation is possible only through the gospel, as revealed in God's Word. Furthermore, Christians learn how they might please God and are sanctified through the Holy Spirit applying the Word to their lives. Every generation must rely upon the sufficiency of Scripture and distinguish themselves from the culture. Only biblical Christianity is true Christianity. Cultural Christianity is but a cheap counterfeit and does not lead to true saving faith. Like the Puritans relied upon the sufficiency of Scripture, so too must all the generations of the church that they might be molded into the image of Christ anew. The Word saves and the Word sanctifies. Christians must rely upon the Bible.

Recommended Readings

Duncan, Ligon J., III. "The Nature, Benefits, and Results of Scripture." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 91-100. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

MacArthur, John. "The Sufficiency of Scripture: Psalm 19." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 25-39. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Trueman, Carl R. "The Power of the Word in the Present: Inerrancy and the Reformation." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 134-146. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Session 4: The Perspicuity of Scripture

Key Terms

PERSPICUITY (understandability) of Scripture: A property of Scripture whereby it is clear and thus comprehensible to all Christians who possess the normal acquired ability to read texts and understand oral communication (when Scripture is read to them). This clarity is true regardless of their gender, age, education, language, or cultural background, though it does not mean Scripture is necessarily easy to understand. This doctrine affirmed in the context of the church, to which God has given pastors and teachers to assist members in better understanding Scripture. Moreover, its clarity means that unbelievers can gain some cognition of Scripture in general.

Scripture References

2 Peter 1:16-21: "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Main Themes and Questions

I.   The perspicuity of Scripture refers to the fact that Scripture is UNDERSTANDABLE.

II.   The perspicuity of Scripture does not necessarily mean that Scripture is SIMPLISTIC and always EASY to understand.

III. What does the perspicuity of Scripture require of believers?

Theological Objectives

I.   The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture focuses on its INTELLIGIBILITY.

II.   Understanding Scripture does not depend on GENDER, AGE, EXPERIENCE, EDUCATION, or CULTURAL BACKGROUND.

III. The clarity of Scripture is consistent with and relies upon the ILLUMINATION of the Holy Spirit.

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IV.   The perspicuity of Scripture does not mean that it is <u>EASY</u> to understand. Thus, the Bible is understandable but not <u>SIMPLISTIC</u>.

V.   The doctrine of perspicuity is affirmed in the context of the <u>LOCAL</u> <u>CHURCH</u>.

VI.   Since Scripture is understandable, God expects and commands that it be <u>RIGHTLY</u> <u>APPLIED</u>.

Historical Relevance

The modern era asked the question, can truth be known? And if it is possible to know truth, ought that truth not adapt to meet the modern culture? Furthermore, even if there is objective truth that can be known, can that truth not be interpreted differently to mean diverse things to various individuals? While modernistic philosophy is not an outright denial of truth—although it certainly paved the way for the denial of truth in postmodernism—it does challenge the notion that truth is concrete. Rather, modernism allowed for a degree of fluidity in truth, leaving it liable to personal interpretation and application. Such notions have greatly—and dangerously—influenced Christianity, specifically as it relates to the ways in which believers read and interpret Scripture. As modernism's influence spread in the 19th century, faithful pastors such as C.H. Spurgeon preached with faithfulness the Word of God. And through faithful preaching, pastors demonstrated to believers how one must interpret, study, and understand the Bible. The perspicuity of Scripture teaches that the Bible is understandable, and that truth can be known and communicated in such a way that it is not elusive but clear. As modernism prompted questions such as, what does this mean to you? Faithful study of Scripture seeks to understand what God meant by what was written. Thus, truth—specifically that truth which is revealed in Scripture— is not personally subjective. Rather, it is eternally fixed and objective.

Summary Point

"Scripture is written in such a way that it can be understood by God's people." -Gregg R. Allison

Discussion Questions

I.   If this doctrine is true, why are there so many different interpretations of Scripture?

II.   Is it legitimate to ask when studying the Bible, "What does this mean to you?"

III.   Can there be more than one legitimate interpretation of Scripture?

IV.   If Scripture is clear, shouldn't it be easier to understand?

V. It seems easier to listen for God to speak to me personally, than to go to the Bible. What's wrong with this philosophy?

VI. Do/should disagreements in interpretation cause less confidence in the Bible and being able to determine its meaning?

Intergenerational Unity

Intergenerational unity is unlikely in the church if everyone is able to interpret the Bible according to their own subjective feelings and opinions. The Bible is authoritative and sufficient—it is also clear and understandable. Not only are subjective interpretations of Scripture illegitimate, but they are also unnecessary. Most often, the natural reading of the biblical text clearly reveals its meanings. The perspicuity of Scripture attests to the fact that the Bible is not an encoded message that one needs special tools and secrets to interpret. Rather, the Bible is God's clear and understandable self-revelation. The Bible, thus, means what it clearly says. The doctrine of perspicuity does not mean, however, that all of Scripture is equally easy to understand. The gospel is made clear, as is God's expectation for believers to live holy lives; however, there is much in Scripture that requires careful study to fully comprehend. Indeed, there are even concepts that go beyond man's ability to fully grasp. For this reason, Christians must study the Bible within the context of the local church—not in isolation. The generations need each other, as they seek to faithfully interpret and apply God's Word. Understanding Scripture does not depend upon age, gender, generation, education, experience, cultural background, or any other secondary factors; however, it does depend upon God's people approaching the text with like minds and hearts, seeking to understand and submit to the author's intended meaning. Thus, believers can and should rely upon one another's gifts and wisdom as they seek to understand God's Word.

Recommended Readings

Mohler, R. Albert Jr. "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Inerrancy and Hermeneutics." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 197-209. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Dever, Mark. "How to Know God: Meditate on His Word, Psalm 119." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 52-72. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

DeYoung, Kevin. "Christ, Christians, and the Word of God, Matthew 5:17-20." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 73-79. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Klassen, Brad. "How the Perfect Light of Scripture Allows Us to See Everything Else: Inerrancy and Clarity." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 275-287. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Session 5: The Inerrancy of Scripture

Key Terms

INERRANCY of Scripture: An attribute of Scripture whereby everything that it affirms is true. Inerrancy is characteristic of all of Scripture, not just the parts concerning salvation, faith, and doctrine. It also means that Scripture never contradicts itself. Inerrancy is consistent with the varied writing techniques employed by its authors, including ordinary speech rather than technical language; loose quotations of the Old Testament by the New Testament writers; translations of Jesus's sayings (from the Aramaic that he spoke into Greek); and divergent parallel accounts, which relate the same event but present it with significant differences (e.g., Judas's death; Matt. 27:1-10; Acts 1:15-19).

CHICAGO STATEMENT on Biblical Inerrancy: The written outcome of a consultation of leading evangelicals (Chicago, 1978) that addressed the truthfulness of Scripture. It affirmed both the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture, stood against a limited view of Scripture's truthfulness (restricted to matters of faith and salvation), linked inspiration and inerrancy, addressed some current challenges, and affirmed the doctrine of inerrancy as the church's historical view of Scripture. The Chicago Statement also denied that inerrancy is defeated by lack of precise language, grammatical irregularities, the use of figurative language, chronological problems, variant accounts, or citations that are not word for word.

Scripture References

Psalm 119:89-96: "Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants. If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life. I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts. The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your testimonies. I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad."

Main Themes and Questions

I.   The Word of God is INERRANT—without error.

II. The inerrancy of Scripture is dependent upon the HOLINESS and SOVEREIGNTY of God.

III. What does the inerrancy of Scripture require of believers?

Theological Objectives

I.   The inerrancy of Scripture affirms that the whole of Scripture CORRESPONDS to REALITY.

II. Inerrancy concerns Scripture's absence of <u>ERROR</u>.

III. Inerrancy is dependent upon the <u>HOLINESS</u> and <u>SOVEREIGNTY</u> of God.

IV. As a result of inerrancy, the Bible is <u>TRUSTWORTHY</u> and produces <u>FAITH</u>.

V. Inerrancy is consistent with the <u>PHENOMENA</u> of Scripture—that is, the varied writing techniques employed by the human authors.

Historical Relevance

To this point in history, the development of an orthodox doctrine of Scripture has culminated in the inerrancy controversy. Whereas modernism questioned whether truth could truly be known, the postmodern era outrightly rejects the possibility of truth. As such, critical and postmodern scholars have denied the truthfulness of the Bible. One who affirms biblical inerrancy commits intellectual suicide, according to the academic elites. Faithful pastors and theologians in the 20th and 21st centuries, however, were willing to do exactly that in defense of God's Word. In 1978, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was formed, as 300 scholars and church leaders gathered, pushing back the cultural elites and defending the Word of God. Among those original defenders of Scripture in the ICBI were Robert Preus, James Montgomery Boice, Kenneth Kantzer, J. I. Packer, Francis Schaeffer, R. C. Sproul, and John F. MacArthur. Resulting from their assembly was the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy—a statement that unequivocally affirmed the truthfulness of the Bible. The Chicago Statement remains an influential statement to this day, clearly outlining the evangelical doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Truth is objective and it is absolute. The Bible is the revelation of truth and is without error—the very Word of God.

Summary Point

"Truthfulness (inerrancy) is an attribute of Scripture by which whatever it affirms corresponds to reality, and it never affirms anything that is contrary to fact. It also means that Scripture never contradicts itself." -Dr. Gregg R. Allison

Discussion Questions

I. Why is the doctrine of inerrancy so foundational/essential to the Christian faith?

II. How can we affirm the complete truthfulness of Scripture in the midst of a world that claims it is full of errors?

III. If to err is human, and human beings wrote the Bible, then how can it be free from error?

IV.   What is the most convincing evidence that the Bible is without error? Why should Christians believe in the inerrancy of Scripture?

Intergenerational Unity

As the world continues to deny truth, and reject the very notion of truth, the generations within the church must stand steadfast in defense of the absolute inerrancy of the Bible. Christ believed in the inerrancy of Scripture, and since He is Lord, so too must His church. The inerrancy of Scripture defends the church—and the generations within the church—against the moral erosions of the culture. As society denies the truth of God's Word, the doctrine of inerrancy allows Christians to defend the Bible with bold assurance. The inerrancy of Scripture is derivative of the very holiness and sovereignty of God. Because God cannot lie, neither can His Word. Christians believe the Bible precisely because it is God's Word. God's Word is true, though every man a liar (Rom. 3:4). Let the generations be glad in God's perfect and holy Word.

Recommended Readings

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (Required Reading)

Sproul, R.C. and John MacArthur. "Foreword and Introduction: Why a Book on Biblical Inerrancy is Necessary." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 11-21. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Nichols, Stephen J. "How Did it Come to This: Modernism's Challenges to Inerrancy." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 170-182. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

Frame, John. "Foundations of Biblical Inerrancy: Definition and Prolegomena." In The Inerrant Word, edited by John MacArthur, 185-195. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016.

APPENDIX 4

RESULTS FROM CURRICULUM EVALUATION

The curriculum for this ministry project was evaluated by four ministry leaders. Table A2 includes the results of the evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation was to ensure that each of the sessions of the curriculum effectively and proficiently articulated a biblical doctrine of Scripture. The evaluation was designed to measure biblical faithfulness, scope, pedagogy, and practicality. Each evaluator had to score each of the various categories as sufficient (minimum score of 3 out of 4) before the ministry project could be implemented.

Table A1. Evaluator scores for each criterion on the curriculum evaluation rubric

Evaluator	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
E1	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4
E2	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4
E3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	4
E4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary								

APPENDIX 5

RESULTS AND STATISTICS FROM PRE- AND POST-
SURVEY ON THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

The tables in this appendix show the results of the pre- and post-survey on the
doctrine of Scripture (SDS). Table A2 presents the before and after scores of each
participant. Table A3 presents the statistical by generational group, and table A4 provides
statistical data.

Table A2. Comparison of pre- and post-survey results

__	Participant Identification Number	Pre-Survey Score (Total Possible 228)	Pre-Survey Score (Total Possible 228)	Change
1	PRIME 1010	151	223	+72
2	PRIME 4892	160	219	+59
3	PRIME 8781	144	183	+39
4	PRIME 4491	170	194	+24
5	PRIME 7674	206	228	+22
6	PRIME 8675	180	221	+41
7	PRIME 4973	206	224	+18
8	PRIME 1916	201	225	+24
9	BRIDGE 3194	154	170	+16
10	BRIDGE 3226	174	188	+14
11	BRIDGE 1676	191	213	+22
12	BRIDGE 4530	173	211	+38
13	BRIDGE 2436	188	202	+14
14	BRIDGE 8348	188	228	+40
15	BRIDGE 2352	177	204	+27
16	BRIDGE 2437	178	207	+29
17	RISING 7099	181	228	+47
18	RISING 2444	129	173	+44
19	RISING 6781	185	196	+11
20	RISING 7170	176	215	+39
21	RISING 6069	162	210	+48
22	RISING 6189	180	222	+42

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Table A3. Mean pre- and post-scores by generation

Generation	Average Pre-Score	Average Post Score	Average Pre as Percentage	Average Post as Percentage
Prime Generation	178.375	214.625	78.23%	94.13%
Bridge Generation	177.875	202.875	78.02%	88.98%
Rising Generation	168.833	207.333	74.05%	90.94%
Total	175.028	208.278	76.76%	91.35%

Table A4. Statistical results for ministry project

	Pre-Survey Totals	Post-Survey Totals
Mean	175.18181812	208.3636364
Variance	376.6320346	315.5757576
Observations	22	22
df	21	--
T Stat	-9.885517803	--
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0	--
t Critical one-tail	1.720742903	--

APPENDIX 6

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI) was provided to each participant and was the model for the Survey on the Doctrine of Scripture.

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

1978

Preface

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstanding of this doctrine in the world at large.

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition*. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful.

* The Exposition is not printed here but can be obtained by contacting: ICBI / P.O. Box 13261 / Oakland, CA 94661 / (415)-339-1064.

A SHORT STATEMENT

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL

Article I

We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

Article II

We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.

We deny that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

Article III

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

Article IV

We affirm that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

Article V

We affirm that God' s revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

Article VI

We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

Article VII

We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Article VIII

We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

Article IX

We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Article X

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

Article XI

We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

Article XII

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

Article XIII

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of

grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Article XIV

We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

Article XV

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

We deny that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

Article XVI

We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

Article XVII

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

Article XVIII

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

Article XIX

We affirm that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

We deny that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences both to the individual and to the Church.

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING THE MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH IN ROGERSVILLE, TENNESSEE, THE
DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN PURSUIT
OF INTERGENERATIONAL UNITY

Michael Blayne Powell, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Hershael W. York

This project sought to teach the members of First Baptist Church in Rogersville, Tennessee, the doctrine of Scripture in pursuit of intergenerational unity. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and roadmap for the project. Chapter 2 offers an exegetical analysis of the doctrine of Scripture, demonstrating Scripture's sufficiency in developing integrational unity within the church. Chapter 3 deals with the historical and theological issues related to the doctrine of Scripture. Chapter 4 lays out the details concerning the ministry project in which members were taught the doctrine of Scripture. Chapter 5 serves as an evaluation of the project through which generational views and knowledge of the doctrine of Scripture was assessed to determine whether greater intergeneration unity was achieved.

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