

The Nature and Function of Scripture

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In my local ministry I work with drug addicts, alcoholics, the broken, the abused and the rejected of society. When I find individuals that I know either passed out on the street or locked up in jail because of some crime that they committed, I see lives that are empty and void of any hope. Coinciding with this lack of hope is a general distrust of religion. Can Scripture provide answers to their questions and provide a way out of their despair? As believers in Christ, we proclaim that Jesus is the hope of the world and that Scripture contains the greatest meta-narrative of that hope. In this context, we must find ways to present the Scripture as total truth and as the source of hope for their destitute lives. How does the nature and function of Scripture apply to their lives?

Scripture exists for many reasons, but the main reason is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Revelation is the process by which God made himself known to humanity.¹ According to many evangelical theologians, God has made himself known to mankind in two ways: general revelation and special revelation.² Thomas Oden states that “revelation refers to the disclosure of God in the person and work of Christ. Christ himself is God’s own revelation, God’s Word. Through Christ, all the other moments of divine disclosure become more understandable. All of God’s other manifestations, past and future, become better received, remembered, and clarified.”³ Christ made himself known to humanity. He is living and active. He revealed himself for the purpose of

¹ Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 52.

² Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Introduction and Bible: Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 64.

³ Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 20.

redeeming humanity that was lost in sin. There is still hope for the broken and the hurting.

God is absolute truth. The meta-narrative of truth begins as described by John, who wrote in John 1:1-3, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” If Christ is where we can find absolute truth, what does He say about the Scriptures? Jesus taught that He was the purpose of Scripture. In Matthew 5:17 Jesus said that “I have not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them.” Jesus reaffirms this in Luke 24:27 when He says “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

Scripture was inspired by God. As far as the Old Testament is concerned, both the Law and the writings of the prophets claim to be from God.⁴ In 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:19-21, we read that Scripture was given by inspiration of God. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, that Scripture was the actual words of God and in James 1:21 that Scripture was given as a seed for salvation that was planted in us. The inspiration of Scripture is genuinely the work of the sovereign Spirit.⁵ In the article about the inspiration of Scriptures in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, the editor states that “the operation of the Spirit cannot be subjected to human analysis, repudiation, or control, but remains the internal Master of that which He Himself has

⁴ G. W. Bromiley, “History of the Doctrine of Inspiration” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 2:849.

⁵ Kenneth Miller, “Scripture and Revelation, Part 2” (lecture, Evangelical Theological Seminary, Myerstown, PA, November 5, 2009).

given, guaranteeing the authenticity of the Scriptures.”⁶ That same power is made available to us to bring about the transformation that we need in our lives.

So if God inspired Scripture to be written, how do we know it is accurate and applicable for today? The transmission of Scripture occurred when the original manuscripts were copied by trained scribes so that God’s Word could be read and heard by all. Paul Feinberg, who was a scholar who was part of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, defines inerrancy this way. “Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences.”⁷ Opponents of inerrancy have attacked Scripture, claiming that it isn’t trustworthy and that copies of the originals were transmitted incorrectly. Authors like *New York Times* best-selling author Bart Ehrman suggest that the Bible is merely an uninspired, error-filled human book. “Given the circumstance that God didn’t preserve the words, the conclusion seemed inescapable to me that he hadn’t gone to the trouble of inspiring them.”⁸ Even some evangelical scholars are doubting the accuracy of Scriptures.⁹ But in reality, Scripture was inspired by God and the copies that we have today are accurate. Kenneth Boa in his book *I’m Glad You Asked*, compares the number of manuscripts and their proximity to the original autographa and found that they are unparalleled in

⁶ ISBE, 2:853.

⁷ Paul Feinberg. “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 265-304.

⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 211.

⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 20.

history.¹⁰ Jesus Himself taught from copies of the Scriptures and the early church examined teachings against the scrolls that existed (Acts 17:11).

How can Scripture function in the lives of those that are broken? Once we establish that God is absolute truth and that Scripture is His word and He is living and active among us, we must interpret and apply the Scriptures to our individual lives. Interpretation, or hermeneutics, occurs when one reads the Scriptures and determines the meaning by the enabling of the Holy Spirit. We need to ask ourselves several questions as we read the Scriptures. The first question that we need to ask is “what is Scripture saying to me and what does it mean?” As we read the Scriptures, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth of His Word to us. This is where we must distinguish between exegesis and eisegesis. Exegesis is using the proper principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) in attempting to arrive at a correct understanding of Scripture rather than reading our meaning into the text (eisegesis).¹¹ As we attempt to understand the Scriptures with the aid of the Holy Spirit, the second question we need to ask ourselves is “am I resisting the truth?” As the Holy Spirit shines the light on Scriptures and then on our lives, often there is a struggle between knowing what we should do and actually doing it. The interpretation and application of Scripture in our personal lives is of utmost importance as it teaches us how to live this life and how to be prepared to die. Thomas Oden puts it this way: “Each Scripture text is to be understood, received, and interpreted in the light of its relation to the Bible as a whole. Each believer has his or her own distinctive meeting with Scripture. Scripture does not speak in a

¹⁰ Kenneth Boa and Larry Moody, *I'm Glad You Asked*, (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishing, 1982), 78.

¹¹ Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 18.

monotonous voice or in a flat, uniform, rigid sense to every believer alike, without recognition that a distinctive dialogue emerges between the Spirit and each believer whenever and wherever one reads Scripture.”¹²

Scripture is alive and active. Christ is the hero of the meta-narrative of Scripture. It is all about Him. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we need to read the Scriptures, apply them directly to our lives and obey them. As I minister to those who are crushed by sin and broken by their choices, I am thrilled that I can offer them the hope of Jesus Christ. The true hope of the broken and destitute is realizing that the Christ of the Scriptures is ready to intercede on their behalf and bring them real hope in a hurting world.

¹² Oden, 336.

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