

301: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY I

Week 1 - Bible: Reliability + Authority TEACHER NOTES

Welcome

[Now a quick heads up, this will feel a bit like drinking out of a firehose - but we have this recorded for you. I'll be sharing with you the teachers notes with all the extra links and footnotes that I can't get into. And at the end of our time we'll take questions.]

Systematic theology - What does the Bible teach us today on any given topic?

Before we get started I thought I'd share with you my experience of how became familiar with systematic theology.

Freshmen year of college. And like most freshmen in college who grew up in church, I questioned everything. "How do I know Jesus is real?" "How do I know the Bible is reliable?" "Do I really believe any of this?" My church back home, while not unhealthy or heretical, never really scratched the intellectual itch, it was not a place for me to feel like I could express doubts or bring up questions.

And then I was befriended by Chuck. Chuck was a senior - lanky dude with clothes too big for him who was always barefoot and wore a bandana on his head. And Chuck loved Jesus in a way I never encountered before. He read His Bible and he read people I never heard of like Lewis, Spurgeon, Piper. As we became friends I began feeling comfortable to ask my questions and he didn't wince at all. He calmly replied back, point me to a resource, or take me to the Bible.

Through that, I - a very young and naive Christian with lots of questions - began reading my Bible. I started reading these people he was reading. And through that intellectual curiosity, I found my faith for my own and I grew to love Jesus more. The more I read about my faith, the more it shattered categories for me. I found out the God I had been following for the last decade was too small and that the God of the Bible was incredibly huge.

Through the Bible I saw myself getting caught up in this larger story of what God was doing in the world.

The Good Life is Found in the Best Story of Beliefs + Desires

This is why you and I need theology. Because theology is connecting our story to The Story - informing us of who God is and what that means for us because it ultimately leads us to the good life.

We believe this story is truth - the bedrock of reality.

Jesus echoes this sentiment in John 8:31-32

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

According to Jesus, your set of beliefs, the story you buy into and operate your life under, will either set you free if its truth. (Not “freedom to” but “freedom from.” Freedom not to do whatever you want, but freedom from lies, sin, the world. Freedom from false stories so you can live in accordance with reality.)

Or conversely, if you operate your life under a wrong story, it’s going to imprison you.

And in that sense, everyone is a theologian.

Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, atheist, agnostic. Everyone believes in a reality or a story that is bigger than them that exists outside of themselves. And that system of belief shapes how you view yourself and you treat others.

Those set of beliefs that everyone buys into generally fall under these categories - what is the meaning of life? What’s my purpose in life? How should I live my life? Belief → Identity → Actions. Or put another way:

Theology → Anthropology → Sociology

Theology - what’s out there?

Is there a god? Is it/he/she personal? Are there multiple gods? Is there nothing?

Anthropology - who am I?

Where did we come from? Are we morally good, evil, neutral? What’s our purpose?

Sociology - what do I do?

How should I live my life? Who/what determines morality/the good life?

World religions for millennia to modern philosophies are focused around trying to answer these three questions.

And it all boils down to authority. What story are you going to believe? And where does that story come from? Can you articulate what you believe and why you believe it?

That’s our ground zero.

There are competing “authoritative” voices in the world and if we’re not careful we will become susceptible to whatever the loudest voice is or whatever seems the most palatable to our feelings.

What actually has authority though? Your feelings - which if yours are anything like mine - waver constantly depending on the moment? Or will you authority be in something that's objective and doesn't change?

For the Christian, our authority is grounded in the Bible.

So this morning we're going to spend some time covering why we should trust the Bible, and what authority it claims to have. Before we can dive into the building blocks of theology we need to set the foundation.

So if we want to be good theologians, we need to know about our Bibles.

But how can we be sure that the **Bible we have is trustworthy?**

Western secular culture has their opinion about the Bible, which has flooded everything. If you turn on the news or watch a sitcom, the validity of the Bible is mocked on both an academic and personal level.

And what's wild to me is, none of these people actually do their homework. (And if culture made fun of the Koran or other religious works they way they do the Bible, there would be major outcries. But for whatever reason, the Bible has become a punching bag.)

To give you just a glimpse of it:

Bart Ehrman just up the road a little bit in Chapel Hill, NC is one of the leading Bible skeptic-scholars in the country. He's written numerous best-sellers, traveled worldwide debating Christian thinkers and while a lot of what he says isn't anything new, he has a mass following of people. And his arguments have saturated our culture, to where this is the default that most people believe outside of the church. The arguments go something like this:

Bart Ehrman

the Bible is filled with discrepancies and contradictions...the Bible has books and claimed to be written by people who didn't really write them...the Bible shows that in fact some of the earliest teachings of Jesus aren't what became the standard doctrine of Christianity...Doctrines like the divinity of Christ and the Trinity, these were later formulations that weren't the teachings of Jesus.¹

This is what majority culture believes especially on many college campuses. If not explicitly, then implicitly.

And if you're a Christian and you haven't been equipped on how to defend your faith against these arguments before, it sounds convincing. And we need to know what's at stake here - if someone can

¹ "Bart Ehrman" The Colbert Report. April 9, 2009. <<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/lywaay/the-colbert-report-bart-ehrman>>

discredit the reliability of the Bible, then it undermines the authority of the Bible. If someone throws doubt on the validity of how the Bible was written, then it throws doubt on to the truth claims that the Bible makes.

What I want to do is give you some sound arguments to show you that the Bible is incredibly reliable and that it actually takes more faith to believe the alternative.

I want to give you four tests we can give the Bible to show that it is, in fact, reliable.

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Test #1 – The Internal Test **Is the Bible contradictory?**

The Bible is remarkably consistent with itself. No one set of Scripture in all 66 books contradicts anything else. In fact, one person charted out there are about 63,779 cross-references² in the Bible. Amazing, complex web of literature.

Jesus

To me one of the biggest defenses for the Bible is Jesus. Jesus was a big fan of the Bible. He quotes the Old Testament directly some 78 times. He says in the Sermon on the Mount he came not to “abolish the law but fulfill them.” (The Law being the first five books of the Bible.) Luke 24, Jesus explains to his followers on the road to Emmaus everything about Him concerning the Law and all the Prophets - that’s a short-handed way of saying the whole Hebrew Bible.³

Also important to know that Jewish culture revolved around oral tradition, so suffice to say, Jesus probably had large chunks of the Old Testament memorized. And if Jesus is God, and He trusted the Bible and considered it reliable, then I’m convinced.

Apostles

The apostles who founded the church quoted the Old Testament some 209 times. So not only does Jesus find the Old Testament reliable, so do his followers who helped write or play a hand in the writing of the New Testament.

Eyewitnesses in the Bible

All but a few New Testament writers claim to be eyewitnesses.⁴

- Luke received his information from Paul (2 Tim. 4:11) and numerous eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1–4)
- Mark received his information from Peter (1 Peter 5:13)
- Paul claimed Jesus Christ was speaking through him (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Cor. 13:3).
- Paul quotes Luke as Scripture (1 Tim. 5:18 cf. Deut. 25:4; Luke 10:7).

² <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/gallery/2013/sep/05/holy-infographics-bible-visualised>

³ Kaiser, Walter. “Jesus in the Old Testament” Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. 2009.
<<https://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/Jesus-in-the-Old-Testament.cfm.html>>

⁴ Acts 1:1–3; John 20:30–31; Acts 10:39–42; 1 Pet. 5:1; Acts 1:9

1 Corinthians 15:6 - you have Paul citing eyewitnesses who witnessed Jesus resurrecting. His line of thinking is, "If you have doubts on the trustworthiness of what I'm talking about, go talk to these few hundred people and they'll all attest to this really happening."

Prophecies

There's also the hundreds of Old Testament prophecies later fulfilled through Jesus. We don't see this in other holy books. But in the Bible we see hundreds of fulfilled prophecies extending hundreds, and sometimes over a thousand years into the future. One scholar noted there's about 456 Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that Jesus fulfilled.⁵

Objection - The Bible says contradictory things.

well then how do you explain the things that seem to contradict each other like...Old Testament laws? New Testament believers didn't have to obey them? Or what about the difference in genealogies between Matthew 1 and Luke 3? To that we would say, the Bible is wonderfully complex and there's no contradictions at all. When you come across something that feels like a contradiction, study the context. Zoom out. What's the author trying to communicate? Where are we in redemptive history? Read a commentary. These questions have already been answered, do the homework.

Norman Geisler - Big Book of Bible Difficulties. ESV Study Bible. Literally tons of good resources out there explaining this stuff.

Objection - The Bible was created to look consistent

now someone could say, and in fact people have said, that the reason why the internal test works is because of **Constantine**. When he came into power, he wanted to unite the empire under one religion as a way to control people - so he made sure all of the Bible worked together. Jesus was a man, but He wasn't God, so they invented Him to be God and they had him fulfilling all these prophecies that He never really did. And the apostles, likewise, were invented to say things about Jesus that Jesus didn't really do.

The only way to really debunk that is if, somehow, we had manuscripts of the Bible that predated all of this. And we do. Enter Test #2.

Test #2 – The Bibliographical Test

We don't have the original copies.

The bibliographical test seeks to determine the quantity and quality of documents, as well as how far removed they are from the time of the originals. The quantity of New Testament manuscripts is unparalleled in ancient literature. There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, about 8,000 Latin manuscripts, and another 1,000 manuscripts in other languages (Syriac, Coptic, etc.) all within 100 years of the events of the New Testament.

⁵ <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/Jesus-in-the-Old-Testament.cfm.html>

<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>DATE WRITTEN</u>	<u>EARLIEST COPY</u>	<u>TIME SPAN</u>	<u>NUMBER OF COPIES</u>	<u>ACCURACY⁶</u>
Homer	Ca. 850 BC	–	–	643	95%
Herodotus	Ca. 450 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,350 years	8	Not enough copies to reconstruct the original.
Euripedes	Ca. 440 BC	ca. AD 1100	About 1,500 years	9	
Thucydides	Ca. 420 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,300 years	8	
Plato	Ca. 380 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,300 years	7	
Aristotle	Ca. 350 BC	ca. AD 1100	About 1,400 years	5	
Caesar	Ca. 60 BC	ca. AD 900	About 950 years	10	
Catullus	Ca. 50 BC	ca. AD 1500	About 1,600 years	3	
Livy	Ca. 10 BC	–	–	20	
Tacitus	Ca. AD 100	ca. AD 1100	About 1,000 years	20	
New Test.	Ca. AD 60	ca. AD 130	About 100 years	About 14,000	99.5%

Possibly the oldest manuscript is a scrap of papyrus (p52) containing John 18:31–33 and 37–38, dating from AD 125–130, no more than 40 years after John’s gospel was likely written. A non-Christian scholar, Carsten Peter Thiede even claims that he has dated fragments of Matthew - about the size of a few postage stamps - to about 60 AD.

By comparing the ancient biblical manuscripts we find that the vast majority of variations (that Bart Ehrman would call “contradictions” or “errors”) are minor elements of spelling, grammar, and style, or accidental omissions or duplications of words or phrases. Only about 400 (less than one page of an English translation) have any significant bearing on the meaning of a passage, and most are footnoted in Modern English translations.⁷ Overall, 97–99% of the New Testament can be reconstructed beyond any

⁶ *I’m Glad You Asked*, Ken Boa, p.78

⁷ The largest chunks in question are Mark 16 and John 7:53-8:11. Most English translations acknowledge that these are not in the earliest manuscripts but were later included in other manuscript copies. It’s important to note neither passages have anything of weighty theological

reasonable doubt, and no Christian doctrine is founded solely or even primarily on textually disputed passages.

Not only that, the Scripture quoted in the works of the early Christian writers (most 95–150 AD) are so extensive that virtually the entire New Testament can be reconstructed except for 11 verses, mostly from 2 and 3 John.

Regarding the Old Testament. The Dead Sea Scrolls, disc 1946-1947, dated early manuscripts of the OT as far back as 150 BC and considered one of the “Greatest discovery of the 20th century.”⁸

Simply, if someone seeks to eliminate the trustworthiness of the New Testament then to be consistent they would also have to dismiss virtually the entire canon of western literature and pull everything from Homer to Plato and Aristotle off of bookstore shelves and out of classroom discussions.

Objection - These manuscripts must have been forged and planted.

Not only that, if someone were really sticking to their guns and say that **Constantine** is the reason why we have the Bible, you have to take some pretty major leaps of faith to believe it. The thousands of manuscripts in different languages of the New Testament spreading across the Western world and early church writers talking about the Bible all predate Constantine by a couple hundred years. If you say that all those documents were either forged or rewritten by Constantine as a massive power play, you essentially have to posit that he somehow sent spies and ninjas to all parts of the Western world to plant these documents. (All while we have no historical evidence to support this ever happening.)

What takes more faith? To believe in thousands of secret church ninjas planting fake evidence or to believe that the Bible is reliable?

To which someone might object and say, “Well you’re using the Bible to argue for the Bible, and you can’t do that. That’s circular. That’s not fair. The Bible is bias and makes supernatural claims, so to really test it you have to remove it from the equation.”

significance that would add/subtract from the canon of Scripture. Most scholars are in agreement that these historical events that happened and were passed on through the oral tradition of the church only to be added in later copies.

⁸ Critics of the accuracy of the Bible routinely claimed that it was in fact a series of fables and legends that had developed over hundreds of years because there were not enough copies of ancient manuscripts to alleviate their skepticism. Then comes the Dead Sea Scroll discovery. A shepherd boy dealt a deathblow to their criticisms in 1946-7. He wandered into a cave in the Middle East and discovered large pottery jars filled with leather scrolls that had been wrapped in linen cloth. Amazingly, the ancient copies of the books of the Bible were in good condition despite their age and harsh climate because they had been well sealed for nearly 1,900 years. What is now known as The Dead Sea Scrolls are made up of some 40,000 inscribed ancient fragments. From these fragments more than 500 books have been reconstructed, including Old Testament books such as a complete copy of Isaiah.

To which we would counter, there's some loaded assumptions in that argument⁹, but ignoring that let's just go with the next test - the historical test.

Test #3 – The Historical Test

Is there supporting evidence outside of the Bible?

The life of Jesus and the life of the early church didn't exist in a vacuum. You have non-Christian writers talking about the things that took place in the Bible.

The historicity of Jesus and events surrounding the time of his life has been well established by early Roman, Greek, and Jewish sources. Such ancient historians include Josephus¹⁰, Mara BarSerapion¹¹, Cornelius Tacitus¹², Suetonius^{13,14}, Pliny the Younger¹⁵, Lucian¹⁶, Rabbi Eliezer¹⁷ and the Jewish Talmud¹⁸. Simply, when the New Testament mentions such historical facts as rulers, nations, people groups, political events, and the existence of Jesus non-Christian historical sources confirm the accuracy of the New Testament accounts.

Objection - These works must have been rewritten.

To which someone might rebuttal and say that **Constantine**, once again doing his power play, **rewrote the history books** and included mentions of Jesus and the early church here and there.

⁹ First, there's no such thing as being completely unbiased. To be 100% unbiased is to have full knowledge of all things and place no subjective, moral value on anything - you must see all knowledge all at once and show no partiality whatsoever. But because human beings are finite and byproducts of our cultural environment, all of us approach information with our own predisposed assumptions, beliefs, and worldviews. So just because the Bible has its own viewpoint, doesn't mean we discard it, but we allow for it to speak for itself to see if its viewpoint is consistent with itself and matches up with reality. Take for example an autobiography. An autobiography has its own bias, it's own particular viewpoint. That doesn't mean we immediately discredit it. Rather, we read it from the viewpoint it's written from and then test it afterwards to see if it's reliable. Second, just because a work is theological in nature doesn't mean we discredit it. Much of Western literature (Beowulf, Plato, Kant) while not overt, is rooted in theological predispositions but we would never throw them away or question their reliability. Even books that discredit the mainstream theological assumptions, have a theological worldview (Freud, Nietzsche, Darwin). To say a book is unreliable because it holds a particular theological viewpoint would be to discredit most every work of literature.

¹⁰ "He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those who loved him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day" (*Antiquities*, XVIII, III).

¹¹ "What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given."

¹² Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also (*Annals*, XV, 44).

¹³ Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition (*Lives of the Caesars*, 26.2).

¹⁴ As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Christus [an alternative spelling of Christ] he expelled them from Rome (*Life of Claudius*, 25.4).

¹⁵ They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to the solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, and never to deny a truth when they should be called upon to deliver it up (Epistles, X, 96).

¹⁶ The man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world . . . Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshiping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws (*On the Death of Peregrine*).

¹⁷ Rabbi Eliezer said, Balaam looked forth and saw that there was a man, born of woman, who should rise up and seek to make himself God, and to cause the whole world to go astray. Therefore God gave the power to the voice of Balaam that all the peoples of the world might hear, and thus he spoke. Give heed that ye go not astray after that man; for it is written, God is not man that he should lie. And if he says that he is God he is a liar, and he will deceive and say that he depart and comes again at the end. He says and he shall not perform (Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, London: Collier-Macmillan, 1929, p. 34).

¹⁸ On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (of Nazareth) and the herald went before him for forty days saying (Yeshu of Nazareth) is going to be stoned in that he hath practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel. Let everyone know aught in his defense come and plead for him. But they found naught in his defense and hanged him on the eve of Passover (*The Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a, "Eve of Passover"*).

Which, once again, the problem is we have no major textual or archaeological evidence to give such theories credibility.

But let's entertain that notion for a second, this leads to one last test, the propaganda test.

Test #4 – The Propaganda Test

Does the Bible read like propaganda?

Let's assume the Constantine theory is true. That, as emperor, he wanted to unite the empire under one religion as a means to rule them so the government and The Church invented Jesus's divinity and the whole gospel story and most of the Bible.

Assuming this is true, if you were in power and could create a religion from scratch - how would you write up your characters? You would cast them as the heroes: bold, brave, fearless, able to take on the world. They wouldn't fall prey to mistakes like mere mortals. You would give these courageous examples as something to aspire to and romanticize.

And yet, the Bible never does that.

Thomas is a doubter.

Peter is a coward.

And that's just the New Testament.

Jacob is a liar.

Moses is a wimp.

David is an adulterer, and a murderer.

The Bible is full of narratives that, if the aim was to construct propaganda for a government superpower, this is not the story you would write.

When you look at these four tests, the only reason these anti-reliability arguments get any traction is this: the Bible is so complex, so reliable, and is such an incredible piece of literature that if you hold fast to the belief that God doesn't exist and that Jesus didn't raise from the dead - then you're left trying to explain it.

Or to put it another way, in modern academia, there is no place for the supernatural, so you're left trying to give a natural explanation to a supernatural document.

Do you see how backwards that is?

It's saying - the supernatural does not exist, therefore, it cannot exist.

And if you go with that, then you're left taking big leaps of faith, ignoring the evidence and holding onto conspiracy theories and passing it off as scientific and rational.

Now all that to say, when you put the Bible through those tests we see that it's reliable and trustworthy. The different translations that exist out there are all based off of the earliest and most reliable copies of the Bible. It's like if you were to Venn Diagram all the earliest copies of the Bible and put them over top of each other - we see that we have 97-99% verification as to what the biblical authors actually wrote.

Side note:

There's a variation of these theories when it comes to the Old Testament that you should know about, the most prevalent is the Documentation Hypothesis - also known as JEDP.

The JEDP Theory essentially has a low view of Scripture but applies it mostly to the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. And this view has a lot of traction in the liberal academic field, to where if you're deeply studying theology and theories, you will inevitably come across this.

JEDP Theory says that Moses didn't mostly (if at all) write the Torah, but rather it was four large Jewish groups over four time periods, and then an editor essentially stitched all of these writings together, thus all the discrepancies and contradictions. (This theory carries over into other parts of the Old Testament as well - multiple authors over multiple time periods within the same book haphazardly being stitched together.)

So you have one group called the Jehovah group (J), one called the Elohim group (E), one called the Deuteronomic group (D), and the other called the Priestly (P). Why are these groups called this? Because according to this theory, there are big discrepancies in the Torah. Sometimes God is called Jehovah, sometimes God is called Elohim. Which is it? It must be two different groups. According to this theory, the narratives in the Torah - like Genesis and the first half of Exodus - sound a lot different than the laws in Deuteronomy or the rules in Leviticus. How do you explain that? Again, it must be written by different groups of people.¹⁹²⁰²¹

Now that's just skimming the surface but you get the idea. Why is this seen as such a dominant view in most liberal academic circles? Because once again, the bent is toward an anti-supernatural worldview. The Bible is itself a supernatural document, but if I deny the Bible's very premise that it is supernatural then I'm left trying to give an anti-supernatural explanation for it. So JEDP is founded on the idea that the Torah is very complex but the supernatural doesn't exist. This is essentially what's known as critical theory.

¹⁹ <https://drmsb.com/mosaic-authorship-torah-problems-documentary-hypothesis-jedp-part-1/>

²⁰ <https://drmsb.com/mosaic-authorship-torah-problems-documentary-hypothesis-jedp-part-2/>

²¹ <https://drmsb.com/mosaic-authorship-torah-problems-documentary-hypothesis-jedp-part-3/>

Critical theory: The Bible is not a supernatural document, it's a natural document only. Therefore it has errors.

Now the alternative (and evangelical) response to the JEDP Theory is what you call the Supplemental Theory. This takes the JEDP view but softens it a lot. It basically says Moses wrote most of the Torah, and someone after him (maybe Joshua, maybe another prophet or scribe endowed by the Spirit) came in after him and made editorial additions to clarify or update or create transitions for the current Jewish audience. The Supplemental Theory still holds the authority of the Bible and says it's God's Word and makes some caveats behind authorship.

And when it comes to these theories - JEDP and Supplemental Theories - you can hold to the Supplemental view and still be a faithful follower of Jesus. Eugene Peterson, for example, faithful follower of Jesus held to this view - and while I think there's some shakiness to it, that view seeks to harmonize God's authority with issues in human authorship. As for the JEDP theory you can't be a faithful follower of Jesus and hold to that view since it's very premise undermines the authority of the Bible.

And once you've established the Bible's reliability you can step back and see that this is an incredible document to have been put together.

- 66 books
- 1,500 years
- 3 languages
- Across different parts of the world
- All telling the same unifying story

Even if you're not a Christian, you have to admit, the Bible is an amazing piece of literature unlike any other.

So now, after establishing that what the Bible says is trustworthy and not fabricated or forged, what does the Bible actually say about itself?

This is important to know for a few reasons:

1 - We naturally have a low-view of Scripture culturally:

We are indoctrinated to the authority of culture

People who don't like it, we'll say it's culturally regressive

--examples - Bill Maher mocking levitical law in *Religulous*

People will say it's good myths and stories, whatever works for you

2 - We naturally have a low-view of Scripture even in the Christian world

--it's very in-vogue right now to both be a Christian and mock or dismiss parts of the Bible that feel off to you. Which again, since when were your feelings the authority?

3 - We naturally have a low-view of Scripture personally

But if we just read the Bible, listen to what it has to say, and put it up against what those other voices say, we see that the Bible is uniquely in a category all its own. It is a supernatural document that accurately describes the human condition and the answer for it far better than any other authority on the planet can say.

So with that I want to give us two theological definitions that shape how we view the Bible:

The first is:

The doctrine of inspiration: God carried along human authors by the Holy Spirit to write the Bible

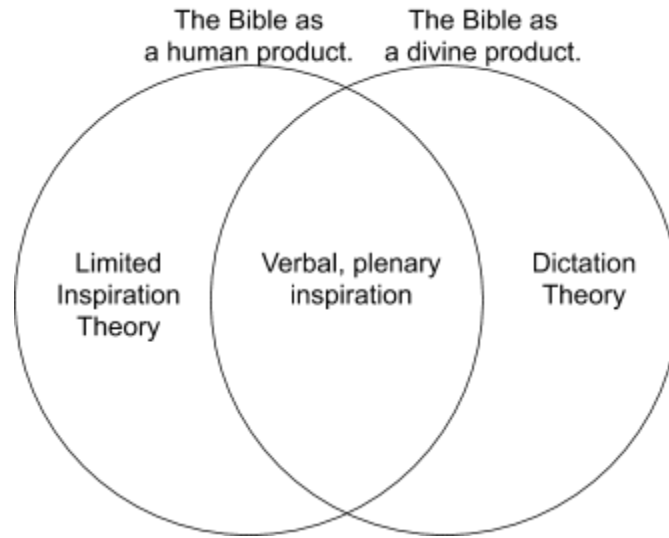
It's the idea that the Bible is 100% produced by people. And 100% produced by God. Both co-existing together in one. While that may be hard to wrap your mind around, we actually have precedent for this elsewhere in our faith - Jesus. Ever heard of em?

But this is important because depending on your background or tradition you might err on either side. Both are non-biblical views, the latter being a dangerous position to believe.

- **Divine agency, little human agency** - This is **Dictation Theory** - Human authors wrote exactly the words that God told them to write. That the human authors were simply secretaries that typed down whatever the boss told them to say.²² Now there are some examples of this happening in the Bible, this is not the dominant way in which the Bible was written.
- **Human agency, little divine agency** - This is **Limited Inspiration** - God inspired the ideas of the Bible, but gave human authors free reign to do whatever they wanted with specific details. Thus the Bible can have errors, contradict itself, or be off theologically because it is a byproduct of the culture. This view has a lot of dominance in popular culture but undermines the authority of the Bible.

The graph below summarizes this.

²² Another variation of this is Automatic Theory. The idea that prophets/apostles were zapped by God, went into a trance-like state and out came Scripture.



So let's break down what inspiration (also called verbal, plenary inspiration) really means. Two parts:

1. God inspired the writing of Scripture....

We get this in part from 2 Timothy 3:16

2 Timothy 3:16

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.²³

Paul here actually invents a Greek word to try to get the nature of inspiration across. This idea of being “God-breathed”. Interestingly enough, this word picture of God breathing we first see back in Genesis, God breathes life into the first human beings. His breath or spirit, brings about life. And Paul, who was well saturated in the Torah has this in the back of his mind as he speaks about God’s Word. God-breathed, Theo-nuema, is the idea of his breath/Spirit breathing into the writing of Scripture (not only the authors which is limited inspiration) to bring about spiritual life.

And Paul being a Torah-reading scholar, knows that this isn’t a unique idea to him. He didn’t “discover” this doctrine. This was always how the community of faith understood their Scriptures. There was a divine element of God speaking throughout all of it.

And the other side of the coin is ...

2. ...by human authors

²³ Verse 17 reads “so that the man of God may be complete.” Why can’t a “prophet” write a new book of the Bible today? For one, the dominant criteria to write a New Testament book was to be an apostle of Jesus or partners with an apostle. Second, Scripture is clear that the “canon” is closed. We have everything we need to be complete in God’s revelation of Himself. Jesus also makes it clear in Revelation 22:18-19: “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.” Additional warnings against adding to or taking away from Scripture are found in Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32, and Proverbs 30:5-6

In other words God inspired the writings as Scripture and he did it through human beings using their unique voice, tone, perspective and cultural background.

God didn't utter things to human authors and they simply transcribed what God said. That happens at times but that's not the dominant method.

God uses a human being known as a prophet or apostle, with their unique personality, filled with the Spirit, to perfectly encapsulate what He wants to say.

We see this clearly throughout the Bible. Lots of first-person narrators moments. Look at how Luke opens his letter:

Luke 1:1-4

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

And while God used human authors to write Scripture, it's important to note that none of what they wrote in Scripture deviated from what God wanted them to say:

2 Peter 1:21

Prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

So again, reinforcing the biblical idea of inspiration. Peter in this verse says human authors are "carried along" and it has this connotation of a sail on a boat. That it's being moved and sailed in a particular direction. And this is true of all of Scripture. When the human authors were putting pen to paper, the Holy Spirit "carried them along" so that what they wrote were the "breathed-out" words of God. So, while the writings retain the personality of the individual authors, the words themselves are exactly what God wanted written.

This is how the people of God always understood Scripture - it was God working through specific people to reveal Himself - 100% divine and 100% human. To give you another verse that builds on this idea, Hebrews 3 and 4 use the same OT verse but cite different authors - the Holy Spirit and David.

Hebrews 3:7

Therefore, as the **Holy Spirit** says, "Today, if you hear his voice

Hebrews 4:7

again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying **through David** so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice...”

Two authors behind all Scripture - God and human beings.

The community of faith always understood it like this, even the New Testament writers affirm this of one another. Here’s what Peter has to say about his contemporary Paul:

2 Peter 3:16

count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, **16** as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

All that to say, there was a clear consensus in the early community of faith - both for the Jews in forming the Hebrew Bible and the early church forming the New Testament.

This is how we got the 66 books we have in the Bible - 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament - there was a clear consensus from the community of faith - that the writings had inherent, sacred authority, written by people who were carried along by God through the Spirit.

And the two criteria that God’s people were able to filter writings through were this:²⁴

- writings were verified as being written by a prophet/apostle

²⁴ **Objection - What about the Apocrypha?**

The Apocrypha is a collection of books in the traditional Roman Catholic Bible with books like - 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, etc - that are not in our modern day Protestant Bibles. And if you’re not familiar with how the Bible was formed this argument can be used to throw doubt on the formation of the Bible. However this isn’t a real problem when you consider the two criteria we just shared.

- There’s theological inconsistencies in there - salvation by works, praying for the dead, the preexistence of the soul, purgatory.
- And they weren’t verified as written by a prophet.

Thus, the overwhelming consensus was the Jewish people never saw these books on equal status with their Hebrew Bibles. Nevertheless, it was seen as helpful and historical, but not meant to be taken as authoritative. Even early church fathers recognized these in the formation of the church. [They are] not included in the canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish instruction in the world of godliness.

-Athanasius

Apocrypha was originally written in Greek, so when Gentile/Greek believers became Christians - they latched onto the New Testament (originally written in Greek), the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint), and the Apocrypha because it was lumped into the Septuagint. However, the early church did not take these books as authoritative either. When Luther in the 1500s was reforming the church, he took the apocryphal books out because his line of thinking was, “If these books aren’t in the Jewish Bible, why’s it in ours? If they’re not authoritative like the others let’s not have it with the rest of them.”

Objection #2 - What about the extra NT books that didn’t make the cut?

Maybe you’ve seen a National Geographic documentary and they’ll take about “The Missing Books of the Bible They Don’t Want You to Know About” or something like that. Again if you’re a skeptic or new to Christianity and you hear about this you’re left wondering about how we really get our Bible. Once again, fails on these two criteria. 1) New Testament books, because they were written by prophets, were verified as being written within the lifetime of Jesus, the Gospel of Thomas is dated 140 AD. 2) Also theologically inconsistent. To give you one example, the Gospel of Thomas is extremely repressive towards women:

Simon Peter said to them: Let Mariham go out from among us, for women are not worthy of the life. Jesus said: Look, I will lead her that I may make her male, in order that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter into the kingdom of heaven.

- Someone with divine authority
- writings were recognized as being theologically consistent
 - Elaborating on what they already know to be true about God based on what He's previously revealed. No contradictions whatsoever. This makes sense if we recognize God was behind the Bible in the first place. There might be differences in tone and audience and context and genre based off the human author, but God is also the author and His personhood is consistent so He would never reveal anything contrary to His nature and character

Now back to how we got the books we did:

Notice, the community of faith did not give the books authority, they simply recognized the authority already inherent in the Bible.

Or to say it a different way ... God's people did not give authority to the Bible. The Bible had inherent authority and God's people simply recognized it.

Think about it like this, Isaac Newton is most famous for? Discovering the laws of physics, he didn't invent physics. Those laws existed before he got there, he was simply the guy that recognized what was there all along.

Likewise, with the Bible - it's inherent authority is there and God's people said, "Yup!"

Now here's why this is important: The church is under the authority of the Bible and not the other way around. Likewise the church is not on equal status with the Bible. Because God's Word has inherent authority, the church is called to submit under the authority of it.

This leads us to our second theological word: Sola Scriptura.

This is Latin phrase coined by Luther in the Reformation meaning "Scripture alone" but it's intent comes straight from the Bible.

Sola Scriptura: Scripture is the ultimate authority regarding faith and practice.

All doctrine, the Christian life, how we interact with governments and culture - for believers, Scripture gives ultimate authority to speak into those things.

This means the Bible, because it's written by God for us and is therefore without error (inerrant), is the ultimate authority and final word on all matters regarding faith and life.

Inerrancy: The Bible is without error

This means -

How we operate as a church, whether it be our ministry philosophy behind LifeGroups, how we choose pastors, how we are to be on mission, we follow the outline prescribed in the Bible.

After all we're putting our all of our faith and trust on the same thing Jesus did - God's Word. It is powerful, life-giving, life-sustaining, able to shape lives and cultures because there is an inherent power in it.

All that to say, Sola Scriptura does not mean "Solo Scriptura." In other words, we are given the freedom to read other works of literature outside of the Bible and glean what it might say, and when it comes to faith and practice, the Bible is still my sole authority and my compass.

This means I can read other books and take them as authoritative where the Bible is silent and has no bearing on my theology or how I live as a Christian.

- I can read a People magazine and take it as authority concerning what its talking about because the Bible is not primarily concerned with it
- I can read a car manual and take it as authoritative because the Bible doesn't talk about it

At the same time, the Bible is my compass. Other works of authority for the Christian are helpful, but they don't take ultimate authority for our faith.

This means -

- Leadership books by non-Christians are helpful. We like reading books by leaders who may or may not be Christian. It helps us examine how we do things. And that's fine. But it never takes the place of the Bible and the Bible still operates as my true north.
- This also means, personality tests are helpful, they can be redeemed, but they're not ultimate. You are not first and foremost an ENTJ and an 8. Now that's heretical. You are first and foremost a child of God. And with the Bible as central authority over your life, we can view personality tests as helpful tools.
- Some methods of counseling are helpful. Counseling can give us helpful language and insight into the human condition but counseling theories and practices - because they speak into the things the Bible talks about, namely the human condition, our greatest problem, our greatest need - would fall under ultimate authority to God's Word, and when they don't, they can be rejected.
- This means even in our preaching and teaching we will use non-Christian authors and thinkers to get across main ideas in the Bible. We are not saying they're on the same level as the Bible, it's that we believe God has ultimate authority and that's the lens by which we view and understand everything else.

In fact, the Bible would agree with this too. Acts 17 - Paul is in front of a crowd of philosophers, and Paul begins tells them about Jesus but he doesn't open with a passage out of the Bible to make his point, he opens with citing non-Christian, pagan philosophers to prove his point.

So because of Sola Scripture the Bible is the ultimate authority when it comes to faith and practice and we actually have permission to cite and reference things outside of the Bible so long as it falls in line with biblical thought because the Bible does that too.

Conclusion

In conclusion, here's what this means for us. Two things:

When it comes to parts of the Bible we are confused about we let Scripture interpret Scripture²⁵. This is what's called the **analogy of faith**. When we come across confusing tough passages we allow the clearer passages to help interpret them.

If it's the ultimate authority in our lives then we can't come at Scripture with our opinions or feelings dictating what we think a passage means. If I let my feelings or opinions influence my reading, then I'm actually saying my feelings have the ultimate authority and not the Bible. How many of you have ever been in a Bible study and the leader asks, "What do you think this means?" The response should be, "Who cares what I think this means, what does the Bible say this means?"

Second, when we come to a part of the Bible we don't like we need to have the humility to recognize that because the Bible is reliable and authoritative, the problem ultimately doesn't have to do with the Bible, it has to do with you. When it comes to how you are living your life, you don't ultimately know the best way to live your life, neither does your peer group or your favorite philosopher or anyone else. They don't have that inherent authority. Only the Bible does.

And if that's true, that ought to influence how we view the Bible - not as a list of rules to follow - but as an invitation to follow God and experience Him.

So we take the Bible seriously. If it's our ultimate authority, we need to be meditating like the Psalmist says in Psalm 1. Like Jesus says in John 15. Daily meditating/abiding is how we continually familiarize and remember the story we've been given. If we don't take meditating seriously, we're subconsciously abiding to another authority source. We're allowing other stories to compete for our attention and affection.

Whereas when we root ourselves in God's Word - recognizing it's our authority, it's reliable, we can bet our lives on it - we become a people marked by love, peace, hope, joy. We become a people who can persevere for the long haul.

That's our ultimate goal for this class - that you don't walk away with big heads but big hearts that are empowered to love Jesus and others more.

²⁵ "If the Scriptures be what they claim to be, the word of God, they are the work of one mind, and that mind divine. From this it follows that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. God cannot teach in one place anything which is inconsistent with what He teaches in another. **Hence Scripture must explain Scripture.** If a passage admits of different interpretations, that only can be the true one which agrees with what the Bible teaches elsewhere on the same subject." Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology

Pray

Question and Response time

Discussion Questions + Case Studies