

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

There is no more important book in all the world than the Bible. In the Old Testament one of the holiest of objects was the Ark of the Covenant. It was a sacred object. Anyone who was not authorized to touch it would be instantly killed if they touched it. There were strict rules on how it was to be carried through the wilderness during the Exodus. Inside of the Ark were the two tablets, the very words of God given to Moses, handwritten by God Himself. No one knows for sure if the Ark has survived history. **Revelation 11:19(NIV)** *“¹⁹Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.”* It is quite possible the actual ark was caught up into heaven but that is speculation on my part. If the Ark of the Covenant is still here on this earth, hidden away, it would be a twin to the Ark of the Covenant that is in heaven; one day we will see that.

The most sacred of all objects that we have today is the Holy Bible, God’s gift to us that will last for all eternity. **Isaiah 40:8(NLT)** ⁸The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.” The Bible has outlived and will outlive all of its critics. Yes, the Bible is a sacred object. We do not worship the Bible. The Bible tells us that only God is worthy of our worship. If it were not for the Bible, we would not know the object of our worship, God Himself. This is the most important book ever for “all the words in the Bible are God’s words” (Wayne A Grudem, Edited by Elliot Grudem, “Christian Beliefs” pg. 13. I rely heavily on Dr. Grudem’s work for this Lenten sermon series).

Tonight, I have four main points. The Authority of the Bible, The Clarity of Scripture, The Necessity of Scripture, and the Sufficiency of Scripture (outline borrowed from Dr. Grudem, pgs. 13-20). **The Authority of the Bible** means we credit the words in the Bible to be God’s very words put into written form by men as inspired by the Holy Spirit. **2 Timothy 3:16(ESV)** ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for

training in righteousness.” The Living Bible states the same verse and paraphrases it this way.

2 Timothy 3:16(TLB) ¹⁶The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. When you do not believe what the Bible says and when you chose to disobey what it says, you are choosing not to believe God and you are choosing to disobey God (ibid. pg. 13). One day we will all be held accountable to God for how we handled His word. God’s Word is holy, true, right, accurate, and without error in the original form. In the Old Testament you read these words dozens of times, “Thus saith the Lord.” It is ours to obey and not challenge or question. From Genesis to Revelation, we read the very words of God. Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would bring to their memory all that Jesus said to them (John 14:26).

There were many ways the words of the Bible were written. I must say this from the outset. As a whole the Bible was not dictated to the authors like a boss dictating a letter to a secretary. There were times God spoke directly to the authors and they wrote what was heard. Other Scriptures came about through research and interviews (ibid pg. 14). And as I already said, the Holy Spirit brought to mind things Jesus taught. When you read the Bible the actual personality of the individual authors comes through loud and clear along with their talents, backgrounds, and training. For example, Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts was a physician. You can clearly see his medical expertise throughout his writings The Holy Spirit did not override the author’s background, intellect, or individual traits. It is God’s word put into written form by men as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

There is no higher authority than God. The authority of the Bible comes from God Himself for God is the ultimate authority. What the Bible says becomes our personal convictions through the personal work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds (ibid pg. 14).

God's word never changes but God's word does change the reader. The Holy Spirit takes what we read and convinces us that what we are reading is not like any other book. It is the very words of God. The Bible is historically accurate, internally consistent, predicts future events that always come true, and has influenced more people throughout history than any other book (ibid pg. 15). God's word is sacred.

The Bible reports historical events but not always in the order that they are presented. The authors speak of specific events to convey God's truth to meet the needs of specific people. Sometimes with numbers there are estimates. The Bible is not a science book, nor does it give to us every specific detail on every single subject that there is on the face of the earth (ibid pg 15). When the authors quoted other people, they took a certain amount of freedom to help make the point the author was trying to make, like doing their own paraphrase.

The authority of the Bible means when you disagree with the Bible you are disagreeing with God. When you disagree with the Bible you are placing yourself as an authority over the Bible. We are not to add to the Bible nor erase anything that is in the Bible no matter what the present culture says.

Now we move on to the **Clarity of Scripture**. In seminary my Hebrew professor once said. "Yes there are times when I am in the Bible, and the meaning is not clear at all." This was spoken from a man who was fluent in Hebrew and earned his doctorate in Old Testament Studies from Harvard University, no small task. On the other hand, I once heard a very famous pastor say these words when I was listening to Christian radio on the tractor. The pastor is a world-renowned scholar of the New Testament. He said, "An elderly woman in her 80's came up and spoke to be about a verse that I had struggled with for years. She did not know Greek and had not even attended high school. "Pastor, God showed me this week what this verse in the Bible means and it is so clear to me." The scholar was stumped by the verse for decades

and this elderly woman understood it clearly. Do not think you have to be highly educated to read and understand the Bible. You have God's Spirit inside of you that takes the word and applies it to you. "Scripture interprets Scripture," so says Martin Luther. The more difficult passages can be better understood by the passages that are so clear to understand. And if you have a new interpretation of the Bible that no one has ever thought of before, please keep that to yourself. Some people go wild in their interpretation. Their own sinful human nature can take the word and twist it into meaning something God never meant it to be. If the people touched the Ark of the Covenant inappropriately, God instantly disciplined them with death. No, if you misinterpret Scripture, you will not get struck with lightning. God's word is sacred. It is not ours to interpret any way we wish. There are specific guidelines and that will be spoken of in another sermon. To say the least, the Study Bible's notes and the Life Application notes are most helpful indeed. They give clarity.

The Necessity of Scripture could not be clearer. You and I hear the Good News found only in the Bible and faith is born inside of us (ibid pg. 17). The Holy Spirit takes the word of God and births faith and that is the reason you are a Christian. God gives us in the word everything necessary to be saved for eternity. The Bible contains what we need in order to become a Christian, live as a Christian and grow as a Christian. I think of Martin Luther and his testimony. He did everything he could to win the approval and acceptance of God. None of his works accomplished this. The harder he tried the more depressed he became. Roland Bainton calls this Luther's evangelical experience. These are Luther's own words:

"I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the righteousness of God." I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously with us by punishing us because we are not righteous. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit [my good works] would assuage [satisfy] him. Therefore I did not love a righteous and angry God, but rather hated and murmured [grumbled] against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the

righteousness of God and the statement that “the righteous shall live by faith.” Then I grasped that the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us [makes us right with God] through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and have gone through the open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on new meaning This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven. (Roland Bainton, Here I Stand A Life of Martin Luther, pgs. 49-50)

Yes, the Bible contains the words of eternal life. Dr. Grudem writes, “The necessity of Scripture means that it is necessary to read the Bible or have someone tell us what is in the Bible, if we are going to know God personally, have our sins forgiven, and know with certainty what God wants us to do” (Wayne A Grudem pg 17). “Faith comes from the hearing, the hearing of the word of Christ” (Romans 10:14). Paul writes, “The sacred writings ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 3:15).

As we take in the Scriptures our Christian lives thrive (Grudem pg. 17) **Matthew 4:4(NIV)**
⁴Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Friends to neglect the regular reading of the Bible is detrimental to your soul (Grudem, pg. 17). The Bible clearly reveals what God’s will is for us.

Deuteronomy 29:29(NIV) ²⁹The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. The word of God is God’s special revelation.

The Sufficiency of Scripture. God has given to us instructions that equip us for every good work that he wants us to do (2 Tim 3:16-17). Everything God wants to tell all his people for all time about certain issues and situations will be found in the pages of the Bible (Grudem pg. 19). Of course, the Bible does not address all things. The secret things belong to God. Where the Bible is silent, we need not make our particular decisions as on par with Scripture. Two Christians can come to differing conclusions where the Bible is silent, and they are both correct. The Bible does not forbid the drinking of alcohol. It does forbid drunkenness. Alcoholism runs in my family and it is very wise for me not to drink much. I do not put my

standard on others. My mother could not drink coffee for it set her heart racing and she would black out. I drank tons of coffee around her and did not feel one bit of guilt. The Bible does not tell us what time worship should be. It simply proclaims the necessity of worshipping God. We need not put our own personal rules for life on other people, especially where the Bible is silent.

I will not separate from believers who hold to believer's baptism and reject infant baptism. I will not separate from believers who have a differing view of Holy Communion. If a person rejects the supernatural miracles of the Bible, the reality of angels and demons, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Jesus' ascension into heaven and the 2nd coming of Jesus, I will be kind to those in unbelief. I will not reject them. I do not even consider myself better than them. But they are dead wrong. I have absolutely no respect for their wrong positions. On the other hand, they are created in God's image and they deserve to be treated as such. I dare not exude self-righteousness in any way. That is such a turn off.

The Scriptures are given to us for our encouragement and perseverance, so we need never lose hope. (Romans 15:4). Tonight we have covered **The Authority of the Bible, The Clarity of Scripture, The Necessity of Scripture, and the Sufficiency of Scripture**

Isaiah 40:31(ESV) ³¹but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Waiting on God is deliberately being still in God's Presence and taking in his sacred holy Word. The promises of the Bible will literally help you keep your sanity. Amen and Amen.