

Declaring The Whole Counsel Of God

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The Concept of Scripture

The counsel of God is referred to in a variety of ways, e.g., the word of God, the Bible, the truth, the gospel, the faith, or simply as the scripture. The scripture is inspired. Literally “God-breathed.” The apostle Paul wrote, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (II Tim. 3:16a). He commended the Thessalonians for receiving the word of God from the apostles not as the word of men but “as it is in truth, the word of God” (I Thess. 2:13).

The scripture is complete. The apostle Peter assured his readers, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (II Pet. 1:3). The Lord’s brother emphasized this point when he said, “Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3, ASV). The punctuation of this point is presented in the closing statements of the scripture. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, wrote, “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18-19).

The scripture is all-sufficient. Again, looking at Paul’s statement in II Timothy 3:16-17, the proof of the point is presented, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Isaiah prophesied that God’s word would accomplish his purposes and not return unto him void (Isa. 55:11).

The scripture is authoritative. Titus received instruction from Paul, “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Titus 2:15).

The Content of Scripture

The Bible is divided into two major divisions, Old and New Testaments. It must be “rightly divided,” or “handled aright” (ASV), in order to present its readers acceptable to God (II Tim. 2:15). The Bible covers three historical periods of world history. The Patriarchal Age of approximately 2,500 years is presented in the books of Genesis and Job. The Mosaic Age consists of about 1,500 years and begins with the giving of the Law of Moses at Mt. Sinai and runs up to the crucifixion of Christ (Exodus through the gospel accounts, cf. Col. 2:14). The Christian Age begins with the establishment of the church of Christ on the first Pentecost following the resurrection and extending out in time until the return of Christ to judge the world, a period presently of some two thousand years (Acts through Revelation).

The Christ of Scripture

Jesus Christ is the chief character of all scripture. Christ is responsible for the creation of the world (Col. 1:16-17). Christ is crucified for the sins of the whole world in both Old and New Testament times (I John. 2:2; Heb. 9:15). And, Christ is coming again (John 14:3; Acts 1:11). Christ made clear that his life’s blood was shed to purchase the church of Christ (Matt. 16:18; 26:28; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25; Rom. 16:16). All whom the Lord saves he adds to his church (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23). All men are under the direction of heaven to learn and obey the gospel of Christ (John 6:44-45; II Thess. 1:7-9; II Pet. 3:9-14).

The Challenge of Scripture

The Bible must be read and studied (I Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:3; II Tim. 2:15). Seven times in the New Testament Christ asked the question, “Have ye not read?” (Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31; Mark 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3). The point being made is that understanding of God’s will comes through reading (Eph. 3:4).

The scripture must be preached and taught (Matt. 28:19-29; Mark 16:15-16). “Preach the word” is the familiar command from II Timothy 4:2. “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” is the apostolic command (II Tim. 2:2).

The scripture must be defended. Paul affirmed, “I am set for the defense of the gospel” (Phil. 1:17). The scripture must be defended from error from within the church (Acts 20:28-32). The scripture must be defended from error from without the church (Titus 1:9-11).

Questions for Discussion

1. How is the scripture inspired? (Discuss the view of thought inspiration versus word for word inspiration).
2. Discuss the implications of the scripture being complete relative to other religious writings, e.g., the Apocrypha, the Book of Mormon, the Koran, etc.
3. Discuss various views of authority in religion.
4. Which of the books of the Bible fall into each of the historical time periods of Bible history?
5. Recite the sixty-six books of the Bible.
6. Discuss how Christ is the chief character of the entire Bible.
7. Discuss the gospel as the divine system of man’s salvation from sin.
8. Discuss the relationship of Christ to the church.
9. Identify practical ways to devote more time and effort to reading and studying the scripture.
10. Who has been your most helpful Bible teacher?
11. What current errors in religion are the greatest sources of trouble for you?
12. What measures can be taken to prepare members of the church to be “set for the defense of the gospel” against specific religious errors?