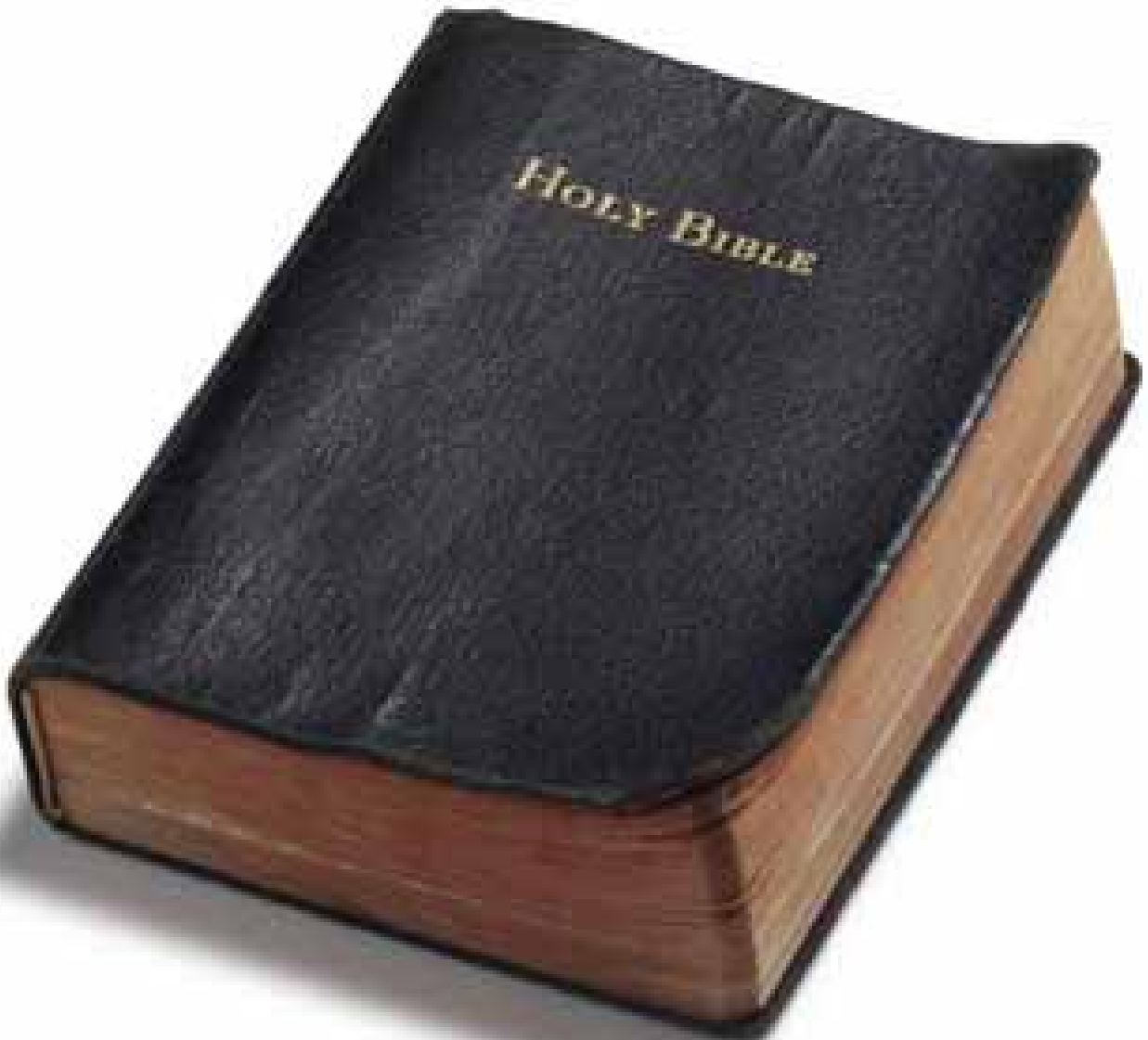


Bible 201

Session Four

February 2, 2011



How Does the Bible Have Authority?

When we confess that the Bible is the Word of God, we refer to the Bible's unique capacity to speak God's word of judgment and grace to us. This word can bring life and salvation to individuals and communities.

The Bible is also information: it shows us what the essential content of the Christian faith was and still properly is.

The Bible's authority is derived from the authority of God to whom it witnesses. For those who do not confess that the Bible's God is their Lord, the Bible is just one book among many.

People will see that the Bible has authority only when they see that it "works" for them—that it speaks to their daily needs and contributes to their well-being as individuals and to the building up of their communities.

Bible passages do not have authority for our faith and life in isolation from one another. Individual texts must be interpreted in light of other biblical texts. We will never get to a point where we can say: "Now I've got it all straight."

Not every Bible passage has equal value for our faith and lives. In fact, sometimes we speak of a "canon within a canon" to refer to those parts of scripture that are especially helpful.

The Bible does not have answers to all of our questions. The biblical writers were unaware of many of today's issues (euthanasia, gambling, cloning).

Inspiration of Scripture

"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed" (2 Tim 3:16-17 TEV)

In the Bible, God inspires his people in a number of ways. For some examples of this, see:

Exodus 35:30-35 God inspires artists to create.

Proverbs 16:10 God inspires kings to make wise judgments.

Luke 2:27 God inspires Simeon to recognize Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

1 Corinthians 12:11 God inspires individuals to use their spiritual gifts to serve others.

Jews and Christians have shared a fundamental belief that the Scriptures were written under the special influence or inspiration of God's Spirit.

Question: What do you think it means to say the Bible is inspired by God?

For Martin Luther, the heart of the Bible is the good news of justification by faith in Jesus. While the Bible *contains* the gospel, it is not to be automatically *equated with* the gospel. The Bible is to be read at all times as a witness that “urges Christ.”

Starting with this premise, Luther could be quite critical of some elements within the Scripture. He questioned whether Esther should be in the Bible, since it does not mention God. He believed that Hebrews errs in denying the possibility of a second repentance (Heb. 6:4-6). He was critical of James, suspicious that it taught faith by works.

The gospel is essentially oral in character, a living voice. Luther insisted on not writing books on Christian doctrine (cf. Roman Catholics). “Rather in all places there should be fine, godly, learned, spiritual, diligent preachers...who extract the living word from the old scripture and unceasingly inculcate it into the people....”

This sense of the Word of God, coming out of the meaning of Scripture itself, protects Lutherans from the danger of frozen biblicism. God’s Word is “inspired” as it is proclaimed in every generation with a living voice.

In the 17th century, during a time of great insecurity, theologians began to insist that every written word of the Bible was supernaturally inspired. By such understanding, Christianity was made a religion of the book; whatever the book said was from God and was to be accepted as such.

The words “inerrant” and “infallible” began to be used to express the nature of scriptural authority. It was formally asserted that the Holy Spirit dictated all words and punctuation in the original manuscripts of the Bible.

What is the ELCA’s position on inerrancy and infallibility? ELCA Lutherans proclaim that the authority of the Bible rests in God. We believe that God inspired the Bible’s many writers, editors, and compilers. As they heard God speaking and discerned God’s activity in events around them, the Bible’s content took shape.

At the same time, we also find in the Bible human emotion, testimony, opinion, cultural limitation and bias. ELCA Lutherans recognize that human testimony and writing are related to and often limited by culture, customs, and worldview. Today we know that the earth is not flat and that rabbits do not chew their cud (Lev 11:6). These are examples of time-bound cultural understandings or practices. Because Biblical writers were limited by their times and worldviews, even as we are, the Bible contains material wedded to those times and places. It also means that writers sometimes provide differing and even contradictory views of God’s word, ways, and will.

By no means does that human presence in the Bible detract from its testimony to God. The Bible’s reliability lies not in reading it as history or science, but as humankind’s chief witness to God, reflecting on faith as it is to be lived. Again, ELCA Lutherans judge all Scripture through the window of God’s chief act—that of entering human flesh in Jesus of Nazareth—and they interpret Scripture by listening to the living Jesus in the context of the Church. Because Jesus’ person, life and witness become the lens through which we read and interpret all Scripture, we can judge slavery as “not of Jesus,” even though the Bible never condemns it.

People outside the faith sometimes like to point out that the Bible contains discrepancies and errors. When they do, we can choose to either defend the accuracy of the Bible at all costs, or to simply agree with them. In fact, there are a number of examples of discrepancies in the Bible. To name a few:

Gen 6:19-22; 7:1-5

Gen 15:13; Ex 12:41

2 Sam 24:1-2; 1 Chron 21:1-2

Acts 9:3-9; 22:6-11

We believe these discrepancies stem from the fact that people were involved in writing the Bible. They do not affect the heart of the scriptural message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Many Lutherans claim that the Bible is *inerrant* in the truth of the gospel and *infallible* as a norm for faith and life.

“15 Minutes with God”

1. (1 minute) relax and invite_____.

Be still and quiet. Slow down. Prepare your heart. Take a few deep breaths and wait on God.

2. (4 minutes) read from the Bible_____.

Begin reading where you left off the day before. Read until you feel God has told you something. Then stop and think about it.

3. (4 minutes) reflect on God’s word_____.

Think about what the passage means to your life. Write down your thoughts. Part of reflecting is memorizing verses that speak to you in a special way.

4. (2 minutes) write application_____.

Write out a personal application statement that is practical, possible and measurable.

Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass through the lips and the fingertips. Dawson Troutman

5. (4 minutes) respond in prayer_____.

Conclude your quiet time by talking to God about what he has shown you and making your requests from your prayer list.

Some Thoughts on Daily Bible Reading

We say that the Bible is the word of God, but it is not a magic book. It is just paper and ink. It won't bring you good luck to have a Bible in your home. The word of God is what has power. The word must be received and believed to have power. A book that sits unopened on a coffee table is not the word of God. The word of God is an active force (Isa. 55:10-11). It goes forth from God's mouth and accomplishes things. Most importantly, it has the power to transform human lives.

When developing a devotional reading of the Bible, the important thing is to find a way that works for you. If you read the Bible regularly, you will grow spiritually and come closer to God. The key to approaching scripture is having the belief that you will encounter God there.

A few practical ideas for getting started:

1) *Have a plan*

It takes discipline; be intentional
Decide when and where you will read it.
Decide which parts you will read; don't just start at the beginning.
Sample different types of literature; if it's pure drudgery, give it up. Don't be afraid to skim.

2) *Pray*

"Jesus Freaks" used to write on their Bibles, "Pray before Opening."
God helps us understand scripture.
Pray for God to give you a hunger for the word.

Here's a good prayer to use: "Blessed Lord God, you have caused the holy scriptures to be written for the nourishment of your people. Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, comforted by your promises, we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope of eternal life, which you have given us in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen (ELW, p. 72).

3) *Reflect on what you read*

One approach is to reach several chapters in one sitting.
Another approach is to read only a few verses.
The key is to reflect on what you read and take it to heart.
If you're a writer, you might do a little journaling to along with your reading.

4) *Respond to God*

Be in dialog with God on what you read.
You might respond any number of ways: confession, prayer, praise, even argument.

You might wonder: a) what if I don't understand it? Or b) what if I don't believe it? That's okay. Maybe someday God will lead you to a greater understanding of what you are reading. For now, just continue to read.

If you begin reading the Bible regularly, what can you expect?

you will learn a lot of content
you will be bored and frustrated at times
you will experience searing moments when the Bible speaks straight to your heart
you will hear words of comfort and healing and blessing that surpass the words of any human friend.

5) *You'll be drawn closer to God.*

An old Scottish preacher once said: "Do not expect to master the Bible in a day or a month or a year. Rather, expect often to be puzzled by its content. Do not expect to always get an emotional charge or a feeling of great peace every time you read the Bible, but let the word break over your heart and mind again and again as the years go by, and there will come great changes in your attitude and outlook and conduct. Go on reading it until you can read no longer. And then you will not need the Bible anymore, because when your eyes close for the last time in death, and never again read the word of God in scripture, you will open them to see the word of God in the flesh standing before you, that same Jesus whom you have known for so long.

Great Biblical Books to Read:

Genesis	Exodus
Ruth	Judges
1 & 2 Samuel	Psalms
Isaiah	Amos
Jonah	Micah
Mark	Luke – Acts
1 Corinthians	Galatians
Ephesians	Philippians
I Thessalonians	I Peter

Study Helps:

1. *enterthebible.org*
2. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart – an extended introduction to each book of the Bible
3. *The Essential Bible: A Summary of the Major Stories* by Bradley Jenson and Jill Jenson (*see page 8*)

Forum:

Sunday, March 20, 9:45am

“Should We Read the Bible Literally or Selectively?”

One of our members once went on a mission trip with a group of people from the Churches of Christ. During that trip, a very nice lady told him that one distinguishing feature of this denomination is that “We take the Bible very literally.” Presumably, however, they would not interpret “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:24) to mean that people are sodium chloride molecules! How should we as Lutherans, interpret the Bible? What does it mean when we say that the Bible has authority in our lives or that it is inspired? Why do we take some parts of the Bible more literally than others? Pastor Vern will lead us in a discussion of these and other critical issues.



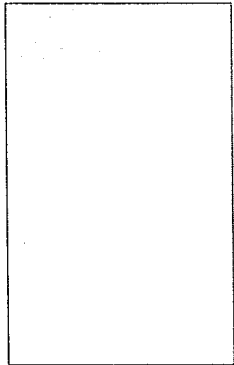
IN THE BEGINNING	
1	Creation Genesis 1:1-2:25
2	The Fall Genesis 3:1-3:24
3	The Flood Genesis 6:5-7:24
4	God's Covenant with Noah Genesis 8:1-9:17
5	Tower of Babel Genesis 11:1-11:9

ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB	
6	The Call of Abram Genesis 12:1-12:20
7	God's Covenant with Abram Genesis 15:1-15:21
8	Isaac's Birth and "Sacrifice" Genesis 21:1-22:19
9	Jacob and Esau Compete Genesis 27:1-28:22
10	Jacob and Esau Reconcile Genesis 32:1-33:20

THE STORY OF JOSEPH	
11	Sold Into Slavery Genesis 37:1-37:36
12	Prison and a Promotion Genesis 39:1-41:57
13	Ten Brothers Go to Egypt Genesis 42:1-42:38
14	The Brothers Return Genesis 43:1-44:34
15	Joseph Reveals His Identity Genesis 45:1-46:7

MOSES AND THE EXODUS	
16	Birth of Moses Exodus 1:1-2:25
17	The Burning Bush Exodus 3:1-4:17
18	The Ten Plagues Exodus 6:28-11:10
19	Passover and Exodus Exodus 12:1-12:42
20	Crossing the Red Sea Exodus 13:17-14:31

THE LAW AND THE LAND	
21	The Ten Commandments Exodus 19:1-20:21
22	The Golden Calf Exodus 32:1-34:35
23	Joshua Succeeds Moses Joshua 1:1-1:18
24	Crossing the Jordan Joshua 3:1-4:24
25	The Fall of Jericho Joshua 5:13-6:27



THE JUDGES	
26	Israel's Disobedience Judges 2:6-3:6
27	Deborah Leads Israel Judges 4:1-5:31
28	Gideon Defeats the Midianites Judges 6:1-7:25
29	Sampson Deals the Philistines Judges 13:1-16:31
30	The Story of Ruth Ruth 1:1-4:22

THE RISE OF ISRAEL	
31	Samuel Listens to God 1 Samuel 1:1-3:21
32	King Saul 1 Samuel 8:1-10:27
33	David and Goliath 1 Samuel 16:1-18:16
34	David and Saul 1 Samuel 23:7-24:22
35	King David 2 Samuel 5:1-7:29

THE FALL OF ISRAEL	
36	David and Bathsheba 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25
37	King Solomon 1 Kings 2:1-3:28
38	Solomon's Temple 1 Kings 6:1-9:9
39	Elijah and the Prophets of Baal 1 Kings 16:29-19:18
40	The Fall of Jerusalem 2 Kings 25:1-25:30

PSALMS AND PROVERBS	
41	The Lord Is My Shepherd Psalm 23:1-23:6
42	Have Mercy on Me Psalm 51:1-5:19
43	Praise the Lord Psalm 103:1-103:22
44	Godly Wisdom Proverbs 1:1-4:27
45	Proverbs of Solomon Proverbs 16:1-18:24

THE PROPHETS	
46	The Suffering Servant Isaiah 51:1-53:12
47	Jeremiah's Call and Message Jeremiah 1:1-3:5
48	Daniel in the Lion's Den Daniel 6:1-6:28
49	The Story of Jonah Jonah 1:1-4:11
50	The Day of Judgment Malachi 1:1-4:6



THE LIVING WORD	
51	The Word Became Flesh John 1:1-1:18
52	Gabriel's Message Luke 1:1-1:80
53	The Birth of Jesus Luke 2:1-2:40
54	John the Baptist Luke 3:1-3:20
55	Baptism and Temptation Matthew 3:13-4:17

THE TEACHING OF JESUS	
56	Sermon on the Mount - Part 1 Matthew 5:1-6:4
57	Sermon on the Mount - Part 2 Matthew 6:5-7:29
58	The Kingdom of Heaven Matthew 13:1-13:58
59	The Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-10:37
60	Lost and Found Luke 15:1-15:32

THE MIRACLE OF JESUS	
61	Feeding the Five Thousand Luke 9:1-9:36
62	Walking on Water Matthew 14:22-14:36
63	Healing a Blind Man John 9:1-9:41
64	Healing a Demon-Possessed Man Mark 5:1-20
65	Raising Lazarus from the Dead John 11:1-11:57

THE CROSS OF CHRIST	
66	The Last Supper Luke 22:1-22:46
67	Arrest and Trial John 18:1-18:40
68	The Crucifixion John 19:1-19:42
69	The Resurrection John 20:1-21:25
70	The Ascension Acts 1:1-1:11

THE CHURCH IS BORN	
71	The Day of Pentecost Acts 2:1-2:47
72	Growth and Persecution Acts 3:1-4:37
73	The First Martyr Acts 6:8-8:8
74	Sharing the Word Acts 8:26-8:40
75	Good News for All Acts 10:1-11:18

THE TRAVELS OF PAUL	
76	The Road to Damascus Acts 9:1-9:31
77	The First Missionary Journey Acts 13:1-14:28
78	The Council at Jerusalem Acts 15:1-15:41
79	More Missionary Journeys Acts 16:1-20:38
80	The Trip to Rome Acts 25:1-28:31

PAUL TO THE CHURCHES	
81	More than Conquerors Romans 8:1-8:39
82	The Fruit of the Spirit Galatians 5:16-6:10
83	The Armor of God Ephesians 6:10-6:20
84	Rejoice in the Lord Philippians 4:2-4:9
85	The Supremacy of Christ Colossians 1:1-1:23

PAUL TO THE LEADERS	
86	Elders and Deacons 1 Timothy 3:1-3:16
87	The Love of Money 1 Timothy 6:9-6:21
88	Good Soldiers of Christ 2 Timothy 2:1-2:26
89	All Scripture is God-breathed 2 Timothy 3:10-4:8
90	The Coming of the Lord 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

THE APOSTLES' TEACHING	
91	The Most Excellent Way 1 Corinthians 13:1-13:13
92	A New Creation in Christ 2 Corinthians 4:1-6:2
93	A Living Hope 1 Peter 1:1-2:12
94	Faith and Works James 1:1-2:26
95	Love One Another 1 John 3:11-4:21

THE REVELATION	
96	A Voice and a Vision Revelation 1:1-1:20
97	Messages to the Churches Revelation 2:1-3:22
98	The Throne of Heaven Revelation 4:1-7:17
99	Hallelujah! Revelation 19:1-20:15
100	The New Jerusalem Revelation 21:1-22:21