Doctrine of Scripture

- The nature of Scripture
- The authentication of Scripture
- The inspiration of Scripture
- The truthfulness of Scripture
- Hermeneutics

The Nature of Scripture

- The Bible isn’t identical with revelation.
  - Revelation is God’s self-disclosure.
  - Special revelation: historical events, interpreted by words, climaxing in Christ.
  - The Bible records and testifies to this revelation.
- Progressive revelation: God discloses his nature and will gradually; it’s understood better over time; later Scripture is clearer than earlier Scripture.

- Inspiration - Spirit’s guidance of authors.
  - Produce writings that convey God’s intention.
  - Writers and compilers of Scripture (2 Pet. 1:21).
  - Also applies to finished product (2 Tim 3:16).
- Illumination - Spirit’s guidance of audience.
  - Understand it and apply it to their lives.
  - Needed because sin has darkened our minds (Rom. 1:18-23).
  - Spirit guides into truth (John 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:14).
The Nature of Scripture

• Relationship between inspiration and illumination?
  – You can’t strictly separate them.
  – The NT was developed partly as result of Spirit’s illumination of OT to early church.
  – Canonical process involved community’s recognition of inspiration through illumination.
  – Church continues to affirm inspiration of Bible because Spirit continues to illuminate it to them.

• Has a constitutional role for the church.
  – Foundation for community life.
  – Sets community boundaries.
  – Establishes community practices.

• Provides an interpretive framework for church.
  – Forms the identity of community and individuals.
  – Gives concepts and story for self-understanding.

Authentication of Scripture

• Question: What guarantees the truthfulness and reliability of Scripture?
• Roman Catholics: the church (magisterium)
• Orthodox: Holy Tradition, lives in church
• Reformers: self-authenticating
  – Sola scriptura (final authority)
  – Includes inner witness of the Holy Spirit
Authentication of Scripture

- Anabaptists: obedience

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\begin{align*}
\text{Inner Word} & \quad \text{Living Word} \\
(\text{Holy Spirit}) & \quad (\text{Jesus Christ}) \\
\text{Outer Word} & \quad \\
(\text{Scripture}) & \quad \\
\end{align*}
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- Protestant Scholastic Orthodoxy: inerrancy
  - 17th century response to rationalism.
  - Authority in the Bible alone; downplay Spirit.
  - Demonstrate authority of Scripture by rational proofs.
  - Very influential on evangelicalism.
  - Catholic writer: evangicals have created a sacramental Bible that has intrinsic efficacy; works *ex opere operato* (by the work done).

- Natural theology: reason alone could prove the authority of the Bible (evidences).
- Pietism: reformation of life.
- Neoorthodoxy (Barth): experience (personal encounter).
- Grenz: both Word and Spirit.
- Both study and prayer are necessary to understand God’s revelation in Scripture.
Authentication of Scripture

• Biblical authority is based on that of Christ.
  – He is the living Word of God (John 1:1-14).
  – A high view of Scripture isn’t enough (John 5:39-40).
  – Biblical authority is personal.
  – It’s that of a relationship (with Christ).
  – It’s lived out in community (body of Christ).
  – It demands a response of obedience (to Christ).

Inspiration of Scripture

• Theories of inspiration
  – Intuition: High degree of religious insight.
  – Illumination: Spirit heightened normal powers to discern truth.
  – Dynamic: Human and divine come together.
    • Spirit directs authors to thoughts/concepts.
    • Writers express them in characteristic ways.
  – Verbal: Spirit directs writers to the very words.
  – Dictation: God dictated Bible to the writers.

• Plenary inspiration = whole of Scripture.
  – No genre is more inspired than another.
  – Doesn’t mean all parts are equally edifying.

• Verbal inspiration = extends to the words.
  – Words are the “primary carriers of meaning.”
  – Not simple dictation.

• These ideas are contested.
Inspiration of Scripture

- How did inspiration work (Grenz)?
  - Not always in the same way.
  - Divine dictation; people passive (Ex. 19:3-6)
  - People as active agents (Mark 12:36)
  - Personal encounters with God (Ex. 3:1-12)
  - Direct words or visions from God (Jer. 2:1ff)
  - Research, oral traditions, written sources (Luke 1:1-4)

- Need not be dogmatic about the mechanics of inspiration.
  - G. E. Ladd: the Bible is the word of God in the words of human beings in history.
  - See 2 Peter 3:15-16.
  - Inspiration is relational: part of the human author’s relationship with God.

Truthfulness of Scripture

- Full or absolute inerrancy
  - No errors on any subject, even incidental details: faith, history, geography, science, etc.
  - Deductive approach that starts with doctrine of verbal inspiration:
    - God gave the words of the Bible.
    - God cannot err.
    - Therefore the Bible contains no errors.
  - Applies to original manuscripts.
Truthfulness of Scripture

• Full or absolute inerrancy
• Moderate, partial, or limited inerrancy
  – Inerrancy applies to issues of faith and practice.
  – In scientific and historical matters, writers subject to limitations of their times.
  – Inductive approach; build doctrine of Scripture from observing features of biblical documents.
  – Not necessary to limit inerrancy to original documents.

• Inerrancy of purpose
  – Fully adequate to achieve the purposes for which it was written (e.g., salvation).
  – Might have errors in various matters.

• Errancy
  – The Bible is a human document that reflects the limitations of its authors and times.
  – If revelation is non-propositional, these errors are less important.
Truthfulness of Scripture

- Full or absolute inerrancy
- Moderate, partial, or limited inerrancy
- Inerrancy of purpose
- Errancy
- Infallibility
  - Bible is fully truthful and trustworthy.
  - It will not mislead on theological issues.
  - Inerrancy concept is unhelpful.

Truthfulness of Scripture

- What is at stake in this discussion?
  - Truthfulness and authority of Scripture.
  - Must have a doctrine of truthfulness that takes the phenomena of the Bible into account.
  - Inerrancy is a negative term.
  - The debate has generated a great deal of heat that can distract us from ministry.
  - It may focus too narrowly on the propositional content of Scripture rather than on the Lord.

Truthfulness of Scripture

- M. Erickson: “The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms.”
- Lausanne Covenant: Scripture is “without error in all that it affirms.”
Hermeneutics

- Hermeneutics: methods of interpretation.
  - Grammatical/historical method
  - Medieval fourfold method:
    The letter shows us what God and our fathers did.
    The allegory shows us where our faith is hid.
    The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life.
    The anagogy shows us where we end our strife.
  - Importance of studying contexts

Hermeneutics

- Types of biblical criticism:
  - Textual (establish original words)
  - Source (discern literary sources used)
  - Form (identify literary forms)
  - Sociological (identify social context)
  - Redaction (editing material to make a point)
  - Canonical (development and context of canon)
  - Literary (study literary techniques of final form)

Case Study
You are on staff at a large Protestant church. Growing tension over small group ministry, overseen by Pastor of Discipleship. They meet in homes, choose own study materials. They are the church’s discipleship ministry. A small group leader is focusing her group on new teachings she received directly from God in her personal devotions. Some members like this; others complained to staff because they want teaching only from the Bible. Pastor of Discipleship has ordered that all small group lessons must be submitted to him for review prior to teaching them. He’ll ensure that they reflect church doctrine. Now complaints are coming to you about the Pastor of Discipleship. How will theology guide you?