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Bibliology: The Doctrine of Scripture

Introduction: In his book, *The God We Never Knew*, Marcus Borg wrote this about Scripture:

I let go of the notion that the Bible is a divine product. I learned that it is a human cultural product, the product of two ancient communities, biblical Israel and early Christianity. As such, it contained their understandings and affirmations, not statements **coming directly or somewhat directly from God.... I realized that whatever "divine revelation" and the "inspiration of the Bible" meant** (if they meant anything), they did not mean that the Bible was a divine product with divine authority.

Since this is the sentiment expressed by many so-called evangelicals, a thorough understanding about what the Bible has to say about itself is more important than ever.

A. Terminology

1. **"Bible" means a scroll or roll or book (Luke 4:17).**
2. **"Scripture" speaks of sacred books of the O.T. (2 Tim 3:16) of the N.T. (2 Pet 3:16).**
3. **"Word of God" (Matt 15:6 and John 10:35 and Heb 4:12) used in both the O.T. and N.T. The term "Word of God" or its equivalent is used for several different things.**
 - a. Jesus – In John 1:1; Rev 19:13 and 1 John 1:1 Jesus is called the Word. He is the member of the Trinity that has the role of most fully communicating the character of God to us.
 - b. **God's spoken Word (Ps 33:6; Ex 20:1-3).** At times God gave His spoken Word through humans. At such times it carried the full authority of God (Jere 1:9).

c. The written Word of God (the inscripturated Word of God).

- The Ten Commandments were written directly by God (Ex 31:18).
- Some of the Bible was dictated by God (Jere 30:2).
- Most of the Bible is written by humans under the inspiration of God (John 14:26; 1 Cor 14:37; 2 Pet 3:2, 15-16; 1 Thess 2:13).

B. Views toward the Scripture and sources of authority.

1. Rationalism – denies Divine revelation (man becomes the **authority**). **Borg's quote above is a typical example.**
2. Roman Catholicism – teaches that the Bible came from the Church and that the Roman Catholic Church is the final authority over the Bible. They also add the traditions of the Church; the Pope is the final and ultimate authority.
3. Mysticism – teaches that experiences are as authoritative as the written Scriptures.
4. Neo-orthodoxy – teaches that the Bible is a fallible (not totally reliable) witness to the revelation of God to the Word (Christ). The Bible becomes the Word of God through a crisis experience.
5. Cults – teach that the Bible may be authoritative but they add to the Bible the writings of their leaders.
6. Orthodoxy – teaches that the Bible alone is authoritative. This includes:

- a. The Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God.
- b. The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice (rules out experience).
- c. Human reason and knowledge must be subject to the Scriptures.
- d. There is no divine revelation beyond Scripture.

C. Uniqueness of the Bible

1. Its continuity – 66 books written by 40 authors over a period of 1500 years, yet it is one book without one contradiction. Its theme throughout is that God is a great and Holy God but man is separated from God due to his sin and rebelliousness. Man therefore needs a Savior, who has been provided through Jesus Christ, the only means of redemption.
2. Its survival – the Bible has been attacked in every possible way, yet it stands. Voltaire who died in 1778 said that the Bible would be obsolete within 100 years; obviously he was wrong.
3. Its influence – the Bible has had more influence on society, culture and literature than any other book.
4. Its similarity to the Living Word – **(1) "They are both** supernatural as to their origin, presenting as an inscrutable and impeccable blending of that which is Divine and that which is human. **(2)** They both exercise a transforming power over those who believe. The unstained, undiminished Divine perfection is embodied in each [Heb 4:12-13]. **(3)** The revelations which they disclose are at once as simple as the demands of a child, as complex as the infinite treasures of Divine wisdom and

knowledge, and as enduring as the God whom they **reveal.**" – Chafer

D. Comparison of terms

1. Revelation (God communicating to man what man otherwise would not know).
2. **Inspiration (the accurate recording of God's truth).**
3. Illumination (the ministry of the Holy Spirit making the truth of the Scriptures clear to men).
4. **Interpretation (the individual's understanding).**

I. REVELATION

A. Definition of revelation: disclosed to others what was **before unknown to them. Simply means "unveiling."** – Ryrie

B. Divisions of revelation

1. General revelation –includes all means apart from Christ and the Bible. Some things God has made known to men and all that is required is their observation to see something of the Divine and His truth.
 - a. Nature (Rom 1:20; Ps 19:1, 2).
 - b. Conscience (Rom 2:14, 15).
 - c. Providence (Gen 50:20; 1 Sam 2:6-10; Acts 2:22-23 – **God's dealing in history** – He is in control of history).
 - d. Preservation of the universe (Col 1:17).
 - e. Moral nature of mankind (Gen 1:26; Acts 17:29).

2. Special revelation – things God has made known to man which man would never have known through his own capacity.
 - a. **Nation of Israel (God's people – the Jews).**
 - b. Christ (the Living Word) –
 - 1) A personal revelation from God (Heb 1:1, 2).
 - 2) Christ gives revelation of God (John 1:14, 18).
 - c. **The church (God's people – Jews & Gentiles in one body) (Eph 3:3-6).**
 - d. Bible (the written Word of God) – (Rom 15:4) We learn of the above three in this one – **"General revelation is sufficient to alert a man to his need of God and to condemn him if he rejects what he can learn through nature, but only faith in Christ is sufficient to save" (Acts 4:12).** – Ryrie

II. INSPIRATION

A. Definition of inspiration

1. **"God's superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs."** – Ryrie
2. Note some special features of this definition:
 - a. God superintended but did not dictate the material.

- b. God used human authors and their own individual styles.
- c. Nevertheless the product was, in its original manuscripts, without error.

B. Extent of inspiration

- 1. To the very words of Scripture.
- 2. To every part of Scripture (Matt 5:18).
- 3. To the original autographs.
- 4. No error in the original.
- 5. Does not imply the infallibility in all they did and said but guarantees the accuracy of their recorded message (cp Job 1:8-11).

C. Nature of inspiration

- 1. A dual authorship – God and human authors both involved.
- 2. The Divine element must be in complete control. Yet the Divine element must be unconscious to the human author, or human authorship would be violated.
- 3. Portions of the Scriptures, however, are obviously dictated by God (e.g. the Law).

D. Scriptural evidence for verbal, plenary (complete) inspiration.

- 1. Source of inspiration – God (2 Tim 3:16).

2. Method of inspiration – (2 Pet 1:20-21).
 - a. Men were directed by the Holy Spirit but men spoke and wrote.
 - b. God could have used a different means but did not.
3. Specific commands to write the Word of the Lord (Ex 17:14; 34:27; Jer 30:2; 36:2, 28; 1 Cor 14:37; Rev 1:11).
4. Formula of quotation – (Acts 28:25). The Holy Spirit says something through the prophets (Acts 1:16; 4:25; Matt 1:22; 1 Cor 2:13; Deut 18:18).
5. Uses of Scripture by Jesus Christ:
 - a. Matt 5:17, 18 – Even the letters of the Hebrew text are important.
 - b. Matt 24:35 – Christ believed in the O.T. canon of Scripture.
 - c. Luke 24:27, 44 – Christ places His stamp of approval on the three sections of the Hebrew canon.
 - d. Matt 4:4, 7, 10 – Christ uses O.T. to rebuke Satan.
 - e. John 10:35 – Scripture cannot be broken.
6. **Writers of Scripture recognized other men's writings as Scripture:**
 - a. Dan 9:2, 11, 13 – **speaks of Jeremiah's works.**
 - b. Zech 7:12 – former prophets.

c. Matt 2:15 – the Lord speaking through a prophet.

d. 1 Tim 5:18 – **Luke's writing (10:7).**

e. 2 Pet 3:15, 16 – **Paul's writings.**

7. The writers were conscious that they were writing
God's Word (1 Cor 2:13).

E. Inerrancy and Infallibility.

1. Difference between infallible and inerrant.

a. Infallible includes the idea of trustworthiness.

b. Inerrant means truthfulness—that which is
recorded in Scripture is true to fact.

2. The proof of the doctrine.

a. It involves the witness of Scripture to its own
inerrancy.

1) Verses of Scripture that affirm the
truthfulness of God (John 3:33; 17:3, 8, 17;
Rom 3:4; 1 Thess 1:9).

2) Verses that emphasize the abiding character
of Scripture (Matt 5:17-19; John 10:33-36).

3) Verses of Scripture in which the argument
of the text is based upon a word or form of
a word (Matt 22:32; 22:43-45; John 8:58;
Gal 3).

b. It involves faith.

3. Attitude toward difficulties in the text.
 - a. From the very nature (size, time frame, number of authors) of the Bible we should expect problems.
 - b. A difficulty in a doctrine does not in any way prove that the doctrine is untrue.
 - c. There are more problems in a strictly human authorship than a dual authorship of the Bible (e.g. prophecy).
 - d. Because an individual cannot solve a problem does not mean it cannot be solved.
 - e. The seeming defects of the Bible are insignificant compared to the excellencies of the Bible.
 - f. The difficulties have far more weight with superficial readers than with profound students.
 - g. The difficulties rapidly disappear upon careful and prayerful study (*Difficulties in the Bible* by R.A. Torrey).

F. Sufficiency of Scripture (See Appendix)

1. There are three possible sources of truth (It should be recognized that some within existentialism and postmodernism reject all universal and absolute truth claims).
 - a. Humans (options)
 - 1) Rationalism (truth can be discovered through reason alone).
 - 2) Empiricism (truth can be discovered through experimentation and observation).

3) Mysticism (truth is discovered through extrarational experiences).

- Each of these makes the individual the final arbiter of truth.

b. Religion

1) Final authority rests with a religious body or individual.

2) Within Christianity the Roman Catholic Church would be the best representative.

c. Revelation

1) Final authority rests in the revelation of God.

2. **Liberalism's** view of Scripture.

a. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) (the father of modern liberalism).

b. Old Liberalism—denied or greatly compromised the divine element of biblical authorship.

c. New Liberalism: The Emergent Church—repackaged old liberalism's view of Scripture.

3. Typical evangelical view of Scripture.

a. **It is one of God's specific revelations to us today.**

b. Others include: modern prophecy, words of knowledge, dreams and visions, inner voices, hunches, feelings and promptings.

- c. **Since “All truth is God’s truth” the Bible may be** inerrant and infallible but other things such as psychology and science have equal say.

4. Reasons for rejection of biblical sufficiency.

- a. Temptation to give people what they want.
- b. Centrality of Scripture has been substituted.
- c. Compromise with worldly thought.

5. Scripture claims to be the final authority (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3; Psalm 19).

G. Inadequate theories of inspiration.

- 1. **NATURAL** inspiration – there is no supernatural element in the text. The Scriptures are the product of human authorship.
- 2. **DYNAMIC** or mystical – writers of Scripture were Spirit-filled like Christians are today. This denies that inspiration is a special work of God.
- 3. **DICTION** or mechanical.
- 4. **PARTIAL** – certain parts of the Bible are supernaturally inspired, namely, portions which would otherwise have been unknowable (accounts of creation, prophecy, etc.).
- 5. **CONCEPTUAL** – God gave concepts but not words. Allows for a measure of authority without the necessity of the words being completely accurate.

6. **DEGREES** of inspiration – extension of partial. The Bible was inspired in degrees, i.e. Jesus' words are more inspired than Paul's.

Luther and Calvin, we know, looked to the Book of Romans in the Bible for their primary inspiration. Were they, unknowingly, possessed more by the spirit of St. Paul than by the Spirit of Jesus Christ? **Are we not on safer grounds if we look to our Lord's** words to launch our reformation (Robert Schuller, *Self Esteem*, p. 39)?

7. **NEO-ORTHODOX** – human writers could only produce a record that has errors in it. But it can *become* the Word of God when it inspires us (*confuses inspiration with illumination*).

8. **ENDORSEMENT** – busy executive theory. Men wrote Scripture but God put His stamp of approval on it.

9. **INSPIRED PURPOSE** – The Bible is infallible and inerrant in all areas of faith and practice but not in historical or scientific matters (but who can separate history from doctrine).

III. ILLUMINATION – A proper understanding of the Bible depends on two things: (1) The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, and (2) The interpreting work of the reader (more on this in the next section).

A. Definition – the ministry of the Holy Spirit promised to men which:

1. Enables the unregenerate man to see the truth of the gospel.
2. Enables those believers who meet certain conditions to understand spiritual truth (Eph 1:18, 19 and Col 1:9, 10).

B. Agent – the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:15-16; 1 John 2:20-27).

C. Need for illumination – man is unable to understand the things of God because of:

1. His depraved nature (1 Cor 2:14; John 1:5; Rom 3:11-12).
2. Satanic blindness (2 Cor 4:3, 4).
3. His fleshly immaturity (1 Cor 3:1-3a; Heb 5:11-14).

D. Nature.

1. The unsaved cannot experience the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit because they are blinded to the truth (1 Cor 2:14). This does not mean they cannot learn anything of the facts of the Bible, but they consider what they **do know about God's truth as foolishness** (1 Cor 1:23). However, the Holy Spirit can open the **unsaved person's heart. The Holy Spirit has a three-fold** ministry to the unbeliever. He convicts the unbeliever of:

- a. His own sin.
- b. **God's righteousness.**
- c. His condemnation before God (John 16:7-11).

2. The Christian has been promised this illumination (2 Cor 3:12-18; 4:3-6; 1 John 2:26-27). Taking these three passages together, we find:

- a. That the Holy Spirit Himself is the Teacher, in that He opens our eyes to truth.
- b. That the Holy Spirit teaches us through the avenue of the reading and instruction of the Scriptures (Rom 10:17; 2 Tim 2:2; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Peter 2:2).

3. The Holy Spirit also bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom 8:15-16; 1 John 3:24; 4:13).

IV. HERMENEUTICS (Interpretation).

DEFINITION: The science that teaches the principles, laws and methods of interpretation. In reference to Scripture, hermeneutics seeks to answer two basic questions: what does the Bible say and what does the Bible mean?

A. Approaches to hermeneutics:

1. Allegorical (spiritual):

- a. In an allegory the author intends a secondary meaning. But in allegorizing a secondary meaning is not intended but wrongly read into the passage.
- b. It is an attempt to find hidden, secondary meaning in Scripture. This leads to arbitrary and fanciful interpretations.
 - Example: **Rahab's scarlet cord in her** window shows that redemption would flow by the blood of the Lord to all who believe in God (Joshua 2:17, 18, 21).
 - Example: References in the Song of Solomon are taken as descriptions of Jesus (1:2; 2:1). One third of all devotionals in **Spurgeon's famous devotional** *Morning and Evening* are drawn from the Song of Solomon.
- c. Some, such as Clement of Alexandria, taught at least five possible meanings in any given passage:

- The historical sense – actual, literal.
- The doctrinal sense – moral, religious and theological.
- The prophetic sense – typological.
- The philosophical sense – finding meaning in natural objects and historical persons.
- The mystical sense – the symbolism of deeper truths.
- With the rise of the Ancient-Future Movement there has returned an interest in this method (*Christianity Today*, 2/2008, p. 23).

2. Devotional:

- a. Adding a devotional flavor to normal interpretation in a misguided attempt at application. It is a milder form of allegorizing.
- b. It is seeking to apply deeper truths than were intended by God.
- c. Examples:
 - The walls of Jerusalem (*Hand Me Another Brick*, p. 37).
 - Psalm 2:8 has been used as a promise from God concerning missionary endeavors or evangelism. But it is a reference to the reign of Christ who will judge the nations.

- Ruth 1:14 has been used of two kinds of Christians, those who give lip service and those who cling to the Lord.

3. Liberal:

- Anything which is not in harmony with educated mentality is to be rejected.
- Rejects the inspiration of Scripture. Inspiration is the power to inspire religious experience. Liberals may use the same words but redefine them.
- Rejects supernaturalism. Such events were nothing but fables and myths used to illustrate principles. For example, the fall of Adam and Eve was not a historical event but is used to teach a principle.
- For example, Robert Schuller says, "I am convinced that the deepest of all human needs is salvation from sin and hell." Then almost immediately he warned, "We come now to the problem of semantics," followed by "What do I mean by sin? Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem." And what about hell? "A person is in hell when he has lost his self-esteem." (*Self Esteem*, p. 14)**

The gospel, as a matter of fact, is the good news **that we are to "tell people everywhere that God wants all of us to feel good about ourselves!"** It **"means that we must be changed from our negative to a positive self-image – from inferiority to self-esteem, from fear to love, from doubt to trust"** (Robert Schuller, *Self Esteem, The New Reformation*, p. 58, 68).

4. Neo-orthodoxy:

- a. The Scriptures are viewed as a record or a witness to Divine revelation and not the very revelation or Word of God. God is encountered in or through the Scriptures in a crisis experience.
- b. Our ideas about God do not really matter; what **does matter is God's word to us and this may come** in the Bible, or a sermon, or a novel or in things.

5. Postmodern hermeneutics (or hermeneutics of suspicion):

- a. Postmodernism is laced throughout with deconstructionism which teaches that we cannot know the meaning of words; therefore, we cannot really understand Scripture.
- b. Brian McLaren explains it well, "The Bible requires human interpretation, which was [is] a **problem...How do "I" know the Bible is always right? And if "I" am sophisticated enough to realize that I know nothing of the Bible without my own involvement via interpretation....What good is it, liberals would ask conservatives, to have an inerrant Bible if you have no inerrant interpretations."**

6. Rhetorical hermeneutics:

- a. **"An approach** to Scripture that among other things tells us that we normally pay too much attention to what the writers are saying and not enough to what they are doing. Rhetorical interpretation **would ask, 'What is Jesus trying to do by using the language of hell?'"** (Brian McLaren)

- b. McLaren's interpretation is that Jesus does not believe in hell but he is using the Pharisees' bully club against them.

7. Redemptive hermeneutics:

- a. This teaches that we are to move beyond the written words to the spirit of the words that will allow accommodation for the views and attitudes of our age.
- b. While Scripture had a positive influence in its time, we should take that redemptive spirit and move to a better, more fully-realized ethic today. Why is **this important? Because, "Christians have to re-evaluate their beliefs due to changing attitudes toward women and toward homosexuals."** (William Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*, p. 25).
- c. McLaren uses this hermeneutic to teach that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead us to new truth **beyond the written word, "I can't see church history in any other way, except this: *semper reformanda*, continually being lead and taught and guided by the Spirit into new truth."** Bell uses the same hermeneutic to make this comment on **Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, "[Jesus] is giving his followers the authority to make new interpretations of the Bible" (emphasis his).**

8. Grammatical-Historical:

- a. Interpretation is controlled by the rules of grammar and the facts of history. It is a common-sense interpretation.
- b. It seeks no spiritual or hidden meaning unless necessary in the normal figurative, symbolic,

idiomatic or typical expression of the given language, culture, or historical context of a given passage. It presupposes that God has given His revelation in an intelligent and understandable form.

c. Examples: From newspaper

- President Ford was buried today. What does that mean? How do you know?
- The White House said...What does that mean?
- The Bears were victorious. What does that mean? How do you know? Was this headline on:
 - a. Sports page
 - b. Financial page
 - c. Story about zoo

Difference is context:

- Other metaphors! e.g. **"in the dumps"**
- Biblical examples: Hosea 4:6, cp. 6:4; Rev 12:3-4.

B. Principles of Scriptural interpretation.

1. General principles of interpretation.

- a. Work from the assumption that the Bible is authoritative.
- b. The Bible interprets itself; Scripture best explains **Scripture. Scripture, being God's Word**, cannot contradict itself.

- c. More obscure passages are to be interpreted in light of clearer passages (Eph 2:8, 9, cp. James 2:14, 24; Acts 2:38).
- d. Interpret personal experience in the light of Scripture and not Scripture in light of personal experience. **Someone may say, "I don't see any need to be involved with a local church," but Hebrews 10:24-25 would correct that.**
- e. Biblical examples are authoritative only when supported by a command.
 - Are we to cast out demons because Jesus did?
 - Are we to give away all our possessions (Acts 2:45)?
 - Are we to leave our home and wander in an unknown land (Gen 12:1)?
- f. The Bible has only one meaning in any given passage.

2. Grammatical principles of interpretation

- a. Scripture has only one meaning and should be taken literally.

"What does it mean to you?" is not the question; the question is, "what did the author mean?"
- b. Interpret words in harmony with their meanings in the times of the author (John 10:10). In NT times **"life" would** refer to union with God; today we might equate it with happiness.
- c. Interpret a passage in harmony with its context (Rom 8:14; Gal 3:28; 1 Tim 2:12).

- d. When an expression is out of character with the thing described, the statement may be considered figurative (John 10:9; 6:35, 48, 51, 53-56).
- e. Interpret the words of the prophets in their usual, literal and historical sense, unless they clearly have symbolic meanings. (Rev 20:1-3). It is symbolic if the literal meaning is ridiculous, impossible or obscene. For example, when Jesus said that we are to eat His flesh, He was not speaking literally (John 6:53). Another would be the beast who has ten horns and seven heads (Rev 13:1).

3. Historical principles of interpretation

- a. Since Scripture originated in a historical context, it can be understood only in light of biblical history (Pharisees – Matt 15:3-9).
- b. **Though God's revelation in the Scriptures is** progressive, both Old and New Testaments are essential parts of this revelation and form a unit (Deut 6:4 teaches one God and Matt 28:19-20 teaches Trinity).
- c. Historical facts or events become symbols of spiritual truths only if the Scriptures so designate them (John 6:31-35).

4. Theological principles of interpretation.

- a. When two doctrines taught in the Bible appear to be contradictory, accept both as scriptural in the confident belief they will resolve themselves in a higher unity (Rom 9:14-16, 18-19 cp. Rom 10:13; Acts 2:23).

- b. In those areas of life not directly addressed by the Scriptures, we must develop personal convictions to govern our behavior based on biblical principles (1 Cor 6:12; 8:9; 10:31).

V. CANONICITY

A. Fundamentals (Deut 4:2).

1. **Canon means “rule” or “measuring rod” or standard by** which the books were measured and found to be authentic and authoritative.
2. The Bible is self-authenticating. **It claims to be God’s Word and passes the test for being God’s Word.**
3. The books of Scripture **were already God’s** Word; men merely recognized them as such.
4. Faith must be expressed. If God exists it ought to be expected that He would communicate to mankind.

B. The canon of the Old Testament.

1. Some believe that all the OT books were gathered by Ezra in the 5th century B.C. The last book written was Malachi around 435 B.C. By grouping the books differently the Hebrew Old Testament contained 24 books instead of 39.
2. Christ attested to the OT canon (Luke 11:51).
2 Chronicles was the last book in the Hebrew Bible so it was as if Christ was saying **to His audience**, “from Genesis to Malachi.” Jesus and the NT writers quote from the OT Scriptures as divinely authoritative over 295 times. We have no record of any disagreement between Jesus and the Jews over the OT canon.

3. Neither the Jews nor Jesus accepted the Apocrypha. The Apocryphal books were accepted by the Roman Catholic Church in 1548 A.D. at the Council of Trent.
4. While neither Jesus nor the NT writers quote the Apocrypha as authoritative Scripture, the Apocrypha became more accepted throughout the early church. Jerome included it in his Latin Vulgate translation (A.D. 404) even though he rejected its canonicity.
5. The Apocrypha contained support for some Roman Catholic doctrines rejected by the Reformers such as praying for the dead, justification by works plus faith, and purgatory.
6. But the Apocrypha should not be regarded as Scripture because:
 - a. It does not claim scriptural authority.
 - b. The Jews did not regard it as Scripture.
 - c. Jesus and the NT authors did not regard it as Scripture.
 - d. It contains teaching inconsistencies with the rest of the Bible. (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*)

C. The principles for canonicity of the New Testament books.

1. Jesus promised to empower His disciples to give His truth to the church (John 14:26; 16:13-14).
2. That He gave them His authority is evident in the NT (Heb 1:1-2; 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:2; Jude 17; 1 Cor 3:13; 14:37; 2 Cor 13:3; Rom 2:16; Gal 1:8-9; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:8, 15; 5:27; 2 Thess 3:6, 14).

3. Criterion for acceptance:

- a. **Writer's authority** – It had to be written or backed by an apostle in order to be recognized. Peter was the backer of Mark, and Paul of Luke. Only Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews and Jude (possibly James) were not written by an apostle.
- b. Content – It has to contain some internal evidence that the book was unique in character, inspired and authoritative.
- c. Acceptance by the churches – **"There was a surprising unanimity among the early churches as to which books belonged in the inspired number. Although it is true that a few books were temporarily doubted by a minority. No book whose authenticity was doubted by any large number of churches was later accepted."** Ryrie

D. The formation of the New Testament Canon.

1. The first time a list containing the exact 27 books of the NT was given by Athanasius in A.D. 367.
2. **"The first church council to list all 27 books of the New Testament was the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397. Individual books of the New Testament were acknowledged as Scripture before this time (2 Peter 3:16; 1 Tim 5:18) and most were accepted in the era just after the apostles (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Jude were debated for some time). The selection of the canon was a process that went on until each book proved its own worth by passing the tests for canonicity."** – Ryrie
3. The New Testament closes with a warning that no other words are to be added to the Scriptures (Rev 22:18-19).

4. There has been no viable candidate for inclusion in the canon for hundreds of years, and there is none today.

E. Reliability of present text (taken from Ryrie).

1. The original copies of the OT were written on leather or papyrus from the time of Moses (1450 B.C.) to the time of Malachi (400 B.C.). Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 we did not possess copies of the OT earlier than A.D. 895.
2. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, they gave us a Hebrew text from the second to first century B.C. of all but one of the books (Esther) of the OT. This proved the accuracy of the previous texts.
3. Other means of checking word accuracy have been translations such as the Septuagint (complete Greek OT translation dated 200 B.C.). Also include the Aramaic Targums (paraphrases and quotes of the OT), quotations in early Christian writers, and the Latin Vulgate by Jerome (A.D. 400). All of these give us the data for being assured of having an accurate text of the OT.
4. More than 5000 manuscripts of the New Testament exist today which makes it the best attested document in all ancient writings.
5. Many of these copies are early. Approximately 75 papyri fragments date from A.D. 135 to the 8th century.
6. Codex Sinaiticus (4th century), Codex Vaticanus (4th century), Codex Alexandrinus (5th century) are virtually complete manuscripts of the New Testament.

F. Biblical criticism.

1. **"Biblical/textual criticism examines internal and external evidence in order to arrive at such conclusions as the dates and authorship of books and the legitimacy of textual readings." Cone**
2. There are two types of textual criticism.
 - a. Higher criticism (or liberal criticism which seeks to destroy the authority of Scripture).
 - 1) Address authorship and setting, etc.
 - 2) Challenges dates and authorship of the Torah, Isaiah and Daniel, etc.
 - 3) Challenges the sources for the Gospels, introducing Q, for which we have no historical or biblical evidence (Q is an assumed manuscript from which the Gospel writers borrow much information. Q is not known to exist and, therefore, is complete conjecture.).
 - 4) This leads to an undermining of the authority and inspiration of Scripture.
 - b. Lower criticism.
 - 1) Lower textual criticism attempts to reconstruct the original wording of the original biblical text.
 - 2) Some disagreement exists over the most reliable manuscripts to use. Some favor the Majority or Byzantine texts because of their number, or the *Textus Receptus* (received texts) which is based on a small number or the Majority texts compiled by Erasmus (1516), with later editions. Others look to the Alexandrian manuscripts which are far fewer in number but are much earlier.

- 3) Older English translations, such as the KJV and the NKJV are based on the *Textus Receptus*; while most new translations (NASB, NIV, ESV) are based on the Alexandrian texts. However, all texts are considered.
 - 4) Textual criticism has affirmed that we possess a biblical text that is highly accurate and reliable.
3. Ultimately we base our confidence in the Canon of Scripture on the faithfulness of God who we believe not only communicated to us through His Word but made certain His Word was preserved and presented to His people.

G. Gnosticism

1. The first major theological challenge to Christianity was the heresy of Gnosticism. The Gnostics had their own Scriptures which challenged the Bible. The Gnostic writings would eventually require for a New Testament Canon accepted by the church.
2. Early Gnostics combined elements of Greek philosophy, Jewish speculation and Christian belief into a complex network of movements. They believed they possessed secret knowledge.
3. The various schools of thought seemed to have taken shape somewhere around 150 AD, although Gnostic roots run back into apostolic times. Until recent discoveries of ancient Gnostic texts, all we knew about Gnosticism came from the early Church Fathers who wrote against Gnostic views. Irenaneus (2nd century) first called them Gnostics (gnosis is the Greek word for knowledge). The term Gnosticism was first used in 1669 to describe those holding to some Gnostic belief. The

Gnostics described themselves with phrases like “offspring of Seth,” “the elect,” “enlightened ones,” “immovable race,” and “the perfect.” Two early leaders were Basilides and Valentinus.

4. In 1945 the Nag Hammadi texts were discovered which were numerous books including 40 Gnostic writings never seen before, often challenging the canonical NT writings. Some of the best known titles are: The Gospel of Judas, The Gospel of Philip, The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Truth. These do not chronicle the life of Jesus but are primarily concerned with explanations of the Gnostic view of the cosmos.
5. In *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown states through his **fictional character Teabing** “More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament and yet only a **relatively few were chosen for inclusion.**” While an exaggeration, it is true that by the mid-second century there were other gospels in existence. These other gospels were rejected because they were neither written by apostles nor during the time of the apostles, and they were not in agreement with what the apostles taught.
6. What did the Gnostic scriptures teach?
 - a. Dualism—all matter is evil and has its source in an evil creator who fell from and betrayed the true God.
 - b. Salvation—humanity is trapped in the material/human body. The creator seeks to mislead humans by keeping them blind to the spiritual reality of the ultimate Father of all. In some texts Seth is the redeemer.
 - c. Christ—Christ only appeared to be human. They divided Christ from Jesus. He provides salvation by delivering secret revelations/discourses to the true

followers. The saved are a special spiritual group of **humanity (the pneumastics) who “know” the folly of the material world/body and understand that in a “spiritual resurrection” they will be united with the Father of all. Those “elect” have a divine spark (or spirit) of the ultimate God inside them, which is rescued through the secret revelation given by the redeemer.**

d. God—Gnostics identify the evil god/creator with the God of the OT (the arrogant demiurge), who was inferior to the true God.

e. World—because this imposter created the physical universe, including human bodies, it too is inferior and must perish. Therefore, the human body could not be immortal, Christ could not have been truly human, and no bodily resurrection could have taken place. Salvation is escape from this world. (See *Christian History and Biography*, Issue #96)

- The *Gospel of Thomas*, which for a time was held by some to belong to the canon, ends with the following absurd statement (par.114):

Simon Peter said to them: “Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life.”

Jesus said: “Lo, I shall lead her, so that I may make her a male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

H. Ultimately we base our confidence in the Canon of Scripture on the faithfulness of God who we believe not only communicated to us through His Word but made certain His Word was preserved and presented to His people.

VI. ANIMATION

A. Definition of animation:

1. The idea of giving life.
2. Theological animation: the vitality of life that is found in the Bible.

B. Scriptural Proof

1. Hebrews 4:12.
2. Psalm 119.

VII. PRESERVATION

A. Scripture: Psalm 119:152, Matt 24:35; 1 Peter 1:23-25; John 10:35, Isaiah 40:8.

B. Theological presuppositions.

1. Since God has delivered to us an inerrant word, it makes sense that this word has to be preserved, to have any meaning to us.
2. God sets forth the truth so that it always tests our faith.

C. Problems

1. The evidence does not prove that God has perfectly preserved His Word by miraculous, supernatural means in any one manuscript or version.
2. Most passages used to prove biblical preservation are **speaking of God's Word in general, not Scripture itself** (1 Peter 1:23-25; Matt 5:17-18; Matt 24:35; Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 119:89). These texts speak of the authority and

truthfulness of God's Word, not that we have a perfect copy of the original Bible.

3. **Summary: the truth and authority of God's Word**, written or otherwise, is preserved and certain. But no particular manuscript or version (e.g. KJV of 1611) contains the wording in perfect form of the original Scripture.
4. However, passages such as Isaiah 46:5; 8-11 show that God is providential in control and we can trust that He has preserved His Word for us; the evidence is found in the manuscripts available to us.

VIII. CLARITY (Perspicuity)

- A. Definition: "The Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it **seeking God's help and being willing to follow it.**" Grudem
- B. This does not mean that portions of Scripture are not difficult to understand (e.g. 2 Peter 3:15-16), but that the problem always lies with us, not Scripture.
- C. **Throughout the Bible it is expected that God's people will be** able to understand, apply and teach it (e.g. Deut 6:6-7).
- D. Neither Jesus or Paul or any other spokesman for God in the Bible blames the sins and failures of the people on the difficulty of biblical interpretation. And it should be remembered that Scripture was written to the normal person, not to scholars (e.g. 1 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:2; Phip 1:1).
- E. This does not eliminate the need for proper exegesis (the process of interpreting) and correct hermeneutics, and the need for study (2 Tim 2:15).

F. In summary, Larry Pettegrew identifies eight aspects of perspicuity (*The Master's Seminary Journal*, Vol. 15/2, pp 209-225 and Vol 17/2, pp 155-157).

1. Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person to live by (Psalm 19:7b).
2. The Bible is deep enough for readers of the highest intellectual ability.
3. Scripture is clear in essential matters (e.g. John 3:16).
4. Any obscurity in the Bible is the fault of finite and sinful mankind.
5. Interpreters of Scripture are to use normal means (hermeneutics) (2 Tim 2:14-16).
6. Even an unsaved person can understand the plain teaching of Scripture on an external level.
7. The Holy Spirit must illumine the mind of the reader or hearer of Scripture if he is to understand the significance of Scripture (1 Cor 2:14).
8. Every Christian has both the privilege and responsibility to read and interpret the Bible for himself, so that his faith rests on the authority of Scripture and not the authority of the church or any other institution.

IX. BIBLICAL COVENANTS

A. Definition of a covenant: an arrangement or agreement.

"A covenant is an unchangeable divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the conditions of their relationship." Grudem

B. Two classifications.

1. Conditional covenants.

"One in which God's action is made to be contingent upon some action on the part of those to whom the covenant is addressed."—Chafer

2. Unconditional covenants.

"A declaration on the part of God as to what He is going to do and is made without reference to human action, purpose, or merit."—Chafer

C. Major Covenants in Scripture.

1. **ADAMIC** Covenant (Gen 1:26-31; 2:16, 17). This was a **conditional covenant "with Adam in which life and blessing or death and cursing were made to depend on the faithfulness of Adam. Human failure followed and the terms of the covenant were executed in righteousness."**—Chafer
2. Covenant with **FALLEN MAN** (Gen 3:16-19) – **"This is an unconditional covenant in which God declared to man what his lot in life will be because of his sin."** –Chafer
3. **NOAHIC** Covenant (Gen 9:1-18 –esp. v. 9-11). This is an unconditional covenant that promised mankind that the world would never again be destroyed by water.
4. **ABRAHAMIC** Covenant (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8).
 - a. Provision:

- Individual promise made to Abraham that he would become a great nation. Emphasis is on his seed.
- **National promise to Abraham's seed.** Emphasis is on the land.
- Universal promise – blessing for all nations.

b. Character: an unconditional, eternal covenant (Gen 13:15; 17:7-8).

5. **MOSAIC** Covenant (Exodus 20:1-31; 18) – A conditional covenant where God is saying to Israel that if they keep His commandments He would bless them and if they do not keep His commandments, He would curse them (see Deut 28:1-62, esp. vv. 63-68).

The Mosaic Covenant is called the old covenant in **2 Corinthians 3:14. It revealed God's righteous demands** but gave no power to keep them and provided no power to give people life (Gal 3:21).

6. PALESTINIAN Covenant (Deut 28-30; esp. 30:1-10).

a. Importance:

- Reaffirms to Israel the title deed to Palestine (Israel had been out of the land for over 400 years.).
- This covenant addresses the question of whether the Mosaic Covenant **set aside God's** promises to Abraham concerning the land. The answer is that it does not.
- It confirms and expands the provisions of the Abrahamic covenant.

- “On the basis of literal fulfillment, Israel must be converted as a nation, must be regathered from world-wide dispersion, must be installed in her land...must witness the judgment of her enemies... Since these things have never been fulfilled” [we must expect fulfillment in the future] (D. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp 98-99).

b. Provisions of this covenant (Deut 30:1-10).

- The nation will be removed from the land for unfaithfulness (Deut 30:1).
- There will be a repentance of the nation (30:2).
- Israel will be restored to the land (Deut 30:3-5).
- Israel will be converted as a nation (30:6, 8).
- Enemies of Israel will be judged (30:7).
- Israel will receive her full blessing (30:9).

c. Character of this covenant:

- Unconditional (Ezek 16:60).
- Eternal (Ezek 16:60).
- Conditional blessings (Deut 30:10).
- Amplification of Abrahamic covenant.

7. **DAVIDIC** Covenant (2 Sam 7:4-17).

- a. Importance: guarantees to Israel a King and a kingdom.
- b. Provisions:
 - David is promised an unending royal lineage, a throne, and a kingdom – all of which are to endure forever (2 Sam 7:8-17).
 - Jehovah reserved the right to interrupt the reign of **David's sons if chastisement is required** (2 Sam 7:14, 15; Ps 89:20-37).
 - But the perpetuity of the covenant cannot be broken (2 Sam 7:16).
 - Christ will yet sit on this throne (Luke 1:31-33). This is an eternal, unconditional covenant (Psalm 89; Isaiah 55:3; Ezek 37:25; Luke 1:31-33).

8. **NEW** Covenant.

- a. Guarantees Israel that God is going to yet work with them. God is going to give them a new heart – based on blood – and the death of Christ (Jeremiah 30-33).
- b. Provisions (Jeremiah 31:31-34):
 - God is going to give Israel a new heart (31:33).
 - Indwelling of the Holy Spirit (31:33, see 2 Cor 3:3, 6).
 - Restoration to the favor and blessings of God (Hosea 2:18-20).
 - Unique knowledge of God (31:34).

- Forgiveness of sin (31:34).
- Restoration to the land (32:41; Ezek 37:25).
- Sanctuary will be rebuilt in Jerusalem (Ezek 37:26-28).
- War will cease, peace will reign (Isaiah 2:4).

c. Character.

- Eternal (Jer 31:36).
- Depends on God – not man (Jer 31:33).
- Unconditional covenant (Jer 31:33).

d. Five views of New Covenant.

- The church has replaced Israel.
- It is with the nation of Israel only.
- There are 2 NC's, one with Israel and one with the church.
- The church is fulfilling some aspects of the NC in this age but complete fulfillment will be Israel in the future.
- There is one NC to be fulfilled eschatologically (physically) with Israel, but it is participated in soteriologically (spiritually) by the church today.

e. Problems with the church participation in NC today.

- Physical (land) promises.

- Cessation of teaching.
- NC made specifically with Israel.
- NC for Kingdom Age.
- Lack of revelation tying the church with Israel.
- New Covenant is a covenant of law.

X. DISPENSATIONALISM

A. Definition: a distinguishable economy in the outworking of **God's purpose**.

B. Distinctions of each economy:

1. A different governing relationship with God.
2. **Man's responsibility.**
3. **Man's failure.**
4. **God's judgment.**

"Each dispensation, therefore, begins with man divinely placed in a new position of privilege and responsibility, and closes with the failure of man resulting in righteous judgments from God." – Chafer

C. Particulars or *sine qua non* of dispensationalism.

1. Keep Israel and the church separate.

Distinctions Between the Church and Israel		
Point of Difference	Israel	Church
Ministry	Guardian of Truth	Disseminator of Truth
Plan	Worldwide Kingdom	Worldwide Witness
Rule of Life	Mosaic Law	Grace-Faith-Holy Spirit
Relation to the Spirit	Sovereign, Selective	Universal Permanent
Relation to the Son of God	King	Head
Relation to the Kingdom	Ruling Servant	Ruling Consort Bride
Expectation	Second Coming	Rapture

2. Normal hermeneutics (grammatical-historical).

3. **God's purpose: glorify Himself.**

D. Seven Dispensations: (dispensationalists differ on the number of dispensations from as few as three to as many as twelve).

1. INNOCENCE (Gen 1:28 – 3:22).

- a. Responsibility: to abstain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and to tend the garden.
- b. Failure: original sin.
- c. Judgment: God drove them out of the garden and they died spiritually and began to die physically.

2. CONSCIENCE (Gen 3:22 – 7:23).

- a. Responsibility: to respond to God through the promptings of his conscience and bring blood sacrifices to God (Gen 4:4).
- b. Failure: widespread evil desire (Gen 6:5).
- c. Judgment: the flood.

3. CIVIL or HUMAN GOVERNMENT (Gen 8:20 – 11:9).

- a. Responsibility: to scatter and fill the earth (9:6, 7).
- b. Failure: stayed together and built the Tower of Babel to show their independence from God.
- c. Judgment: confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel.

4. PROMISE (Gen 12:1 – Ex 19:8).

- a. Responsibility: to believe and serve God.
 - The Promised Land was theirs and blessing was theirs as long as they remained in the land.
- b. Failure: Jacob led the people to Egypt and they stayed.
- c. Judgment: slavery.

5. LAW (Ex 19:8 – Acts 1:26).

- a. Responsibility: obedience to the Law.
- b. Failure: disobedience (Rom 10:1-5).
- c. Judgment: captivity and later dispersion (70 A.D.) and also the tribulation period.

6. GRACE (Church age) (Acts 2:1 – Rapture).

NOTE: Salvation has always been and will always be by grace alone through faith alone. In the OT men were

saved by faith on the basis of the work of Christ which was still in the future. Today, we are saved by faith on the basis of the work of Christ which took place in the past.

E. History of Dispensationalism.

In the second half of the 1800s, German higher criticism was making inroads to evangelicalism. Evangelicalism by this time had a definite belief system: the final authority of Scripture, the substitutionary death of Christ, salvation by faith alone and the importance of spreading the gospel throughout the world. Each of these beliefs was under attack by liberalism. Fundamentalism arose because of the concern to preserve this belief system and to emphasize both piety and correct belief. These two characteristics had been common to American Calvinist tradition since the first Great Awakening (1734-1745).

In fact, dispensationalism had strong Calvinistic ties in its British and American origins. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), the progenitor of the movement, found that enthusiasm for dispensational views came largely from clergymen with strong Calvinistic views, principally Presbyterian and Baptist. Darby himself was a strong Calvinist, and the other organizers of the movement were predominately Calvinists.

Postmillennialism was the prevalent view among American evangelicals between the Revolution and the Civil War and was championed by Jonathan Edwards. Postmillennialists taught that the prophecies in the book of Revelation were being fulfilled in the present era. The Antichrist (i.e. the Pope and other false teachers) was being defeated to prepare the way for a golden age (the millennium) during

which the Holy Spirit would be poured out and the gospel spread around the world. Christ would return after this millennial age. Postmillennialists typically were optimistic about the spiritual progress of the culture, with the defeat of the satanic forces imminent.

As German rationalism began to infiltrate Christianity during the 19th century, liberals retained the postmillennial model but removed the supernatural element. The Kingdom of God was presented on earth but was a secularized version in which its advance could be measured by social improvements on the planet. Simultaneous with the rise of liberalism was the resurgence of the ancient Christian theology of premillennialism. The Dispensational form of **premillennialism responded to liberalism's destruction of the** roots of evangelicalism by shoring up the foundation of the faith. They drew a line in the sand at precisely the places liberalism was attempting to undermine: the Bible, the cross, the atonement and conversion. Dispensationalism opposed the liberal trends at almost every point. These teachers held that the Bible was absolutely reliable and precise, that its meanings were plain, and that whenever possible it should be taken literally. What separated dispensational thought from other forms of premillennialism was the view that the kingdom age was in the future and of divine initiative not human effort. The present era, the **"church age," therefore could not be dignified as a time of the advance of God's kingdom.**

Ironically, Dispensationalists were responding to some of the same issues in biblical interpretation that the liberals were, and for whom taking many biblical statements at face value was problematic. Liberals chose to deny, spiritualize or demystify many biblical truths. Dispensationalists did the

opposite, holding more strictly than ever to literal interpretation. The Dispensationalists took the clear facts of Scripture then arranged and classified them to discover the principles and patterns which Scripture revealed.

Dispensationalists insisted that the only proper way to **interpret Scripture was in “the literal sense,” unless the text** or the context absolutely demanded otherwise. The Puritans too had assumed that biblical interpretation was an exact **science with precise conclusions: “There is only one** meaning for every place in Scripture” (*Fundamentalism and American Culture*, George Marsden, p. 60). The literalistic approach was simply that of common sense because it was based on laws of language and meaning which were common to all people. R. A. Torrey would say that in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases the meaning that the plain man gets out of the Bible is the correct one.

Although roots of dispensational thought can be traced throughout church history, Dispensationalism as a system was not developed until after the Reformation. Because it is of relatively recent development does not mean that the system is untrue (Covenant Theology as a system was not developed until the Reformation). Many doctrines, such as baptismal regeneration, are of early origin but are not biblical. Only what passes the test of Scripture is true. Therefore Dispensationalism, like all doctrines, must be examined in the light of the Word.

French philosopher Pierre Poiret in 1687 introduced the first dispensation scheme. John Edwards, a Calvinistic minister in England published *A Complete History or Survey of All the Dispensations* in 1699. Famous hymn writer Isaac Watts (1674-1748) came up with a dispensationist outline which is

almost identical to what is found in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Darby developed a somewhat modified dispensational system and is often credited with originating the system. He did not, but he did much to promote it throughout the nineteenth century; however his plan was not the one Scofield followed. Dispensationalism was already immensely popular when C. I. Scofield published his *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909, but there is no doubt the Scofield notes were extremely influential in the spread of Dispensational thought in the 20th century. Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary (founded by Lewis Sperry Chafer in 1924), have taught dispensational theology to pastors and Christian leaders for decades. John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost and Charles Ryrie led the Dispensational cause throughout the latter half of the 20th century.

XI. COVENANT THEOLOGY

A. Definition – A system of theology which unites all the dispensations and all biblical covenants as phases of the covenant of grace. Sometimes called Federal Theology.

1. **Michael Horton writes, "Reformed theology is simply covenant **theology**"** (*God of Promise*, p. 11).
2. R. C. Sproul calls covenant theology a nickname for Reformed theology (*What Is Reformed Theology*, p. 99).
3. According to Louis Berkof, Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587) was the founder of covenant theology. In 1647 the Westminster Confession became the first confession of faith to refer to covenant theology. In the early Church Fathers the covenant idea is not found at all (Berkhof, *Systemic Theology*, p. 211). It was apparently Johannes Cocceius who

systemized covenant theology when he published a work in 1648 (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 186).

4. Definition expanded:

- a. All of human history is covered by one to three covenants:
 - ✓ Works: Between God and Adam.
 - ✓ Grace: Between God and sinful man.
 - ✓ Redemption: Between the Father and the Son.
- b. There is no discontinuity between Israel and the church, i.e. the church is spiritual Israel.
- c. The promises made to Israel are applicable to the church in spiritual form only. That is, the physical and land promises have either been **renounced because of Israel's disobedience** or have taken on a spiritual form.
- d. The Christian is still under the Law of Moses (not usually under the civil or ceremonial but under the moral law).
- e. Mixed hermeneutics: grammatical-historical hermeneutics is used for most of Scripture but an allegorical hermeneutic is used for parts, especially future prophetic sections.

B. Covenants.

1. ***The Covenant of Works***: An agreement between God and Adam promising life to Adam for perfect obedience and including death as the penalty for failure. Adam sinned and thus man failed to meet the requirements of the covenant of

works. Therefore a second covenant, the covenant of grace, was brought into operation. Not all contemporary Reformed theologians agree. **"If the covenant of redemption remains controversial, the so-called ...covenant of works is more still, especially in contemporary Reformed theology."** (Horton, p. 83).

Horton admits that a covenant of works cannot be **found explicitly in Scripture, but is implied, "These elements appear to be present, albeit implicitly, in the creation narrative"** (Horton, p. 89). Hosea 6:7 is used as support.

2. ***The Covenant of Grace***. The gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience.
3. ***The Covenant of Redemption*** (this is held by some, but not all, Reformed theologians): Made in eternity past and became the basis for the covenant of grace. This covenant of redemption is the agreement between the Father, who would give His Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, who voluntarily would take the place of those whom the Father had given Him (see Heb 13:20).

Many modern Reformed theologians have challenged the covenant of redemption on the basis of exegesis. O. Palmer Robertson writes, **"Scripture simply does not say much on the pre-creation shape of the decrees of God. [To speak of such] is to extend the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety"** (Horton pp. 80-81).

C. Key distinctions.

1. Covenant theology is not based upon direct revelation but upon reason and logic. The existence of the covenants is not found by an inductive examination of passages; it is a conclusion deduced from certain scriptural evidences. Nowhere does Scripture speak of these covenants directly.
2. Covenant theologians see little distinction between biblical living in the OT and NT, or between Israel and the church.
3. Covenant theologians do not use literal hermeneutics in areas of prophecy; rather they spiritualize many of the prophetic Scriptures. The Covenant theologian sees most prophecies as already fulfilled allegorically or symbolically. They believe that the church, not literal Israel, is the recipient of the covenant promises. Thus, the church is spiritual Israel.

"The picture is of an Israel that despite its national judgment as a covenant-breaker, is nevertheless kept alive by extensive pruning and grafting at the level of *individual* salvation through Christ. After bringing in the full number of elect Gentiles, God will pour out His Spirit on the Jewish people 'en masse' (Rom 11:25-32)" (Horton, p. 132). In this view God is through with Israel as a distinct nation but not with individual Jews in the area of salvation.

4. Covenant theology rejects the land promise given to Abraham (Horton, p. 47).

5. Under Covenant theology the distinction between law and grace as a rule of life is blurred. For **example, Horton states, "While the Scriptures uphold the moral Law as the abiding way of life for God's redeemed people, it can never be a way to life" (Horton, p. 76).**

An individual is brought into the covenant of grace at baptism (Horton, pp. 152-153) but is not saved **at that point and can fall away (p. 183).** Also, "The New Testament lays before us a vast array of conditions for final salvation: repentance, faith, perseverance demonstrated in love toward God and neighbor" (p. 182).

6. Reformed Christians are represented in all three major eschatological camps (premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism). Most Covenant theologians are apparently amillennial, **believing that we are "living in a period described symbolically in Revelation 20 as a thousand-year reign of Christ, to be followed by Christ's return...The millennium is not denied but is in fact a current reality" (Horton, p. 120).**

D. Contrasts between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism.

1. There is much in which Dispensationalism and covenant theology agrees, including most areas of major theology.
2. Even with regard to dispensations, covenant theologian Louis Berkhof recognizes two major dispensations: that of the Old Testament and New Testament (*Systematic Theology*, pp. 293-300). Under the Old Testament dispensation, Berkhof lists four other dispensations (which he calls

covenants) in the Garden, with Noah, with Abraham, and with Israel, although he sees all of these unified under the covenant of grace.

3. Difference between the two systems can be traced largely to different hermeneutical approaches to Scripture. Whereas the Dispensationalists use grammatical-historical hermeneutics consistently throughout the Bible, covenantal Bible students switch to an allegorical or symbolic method in certain places in Scripture. It is at the points in which they believe Scripture should not be interpreted normally that they shift to the allegorical method. For example, the Song of Solomon is not to be seen as a literal love song between a husband and wife, but is spiritualized **into God's relationship with His bride, the church.** However, the majority use of allegoricalization is in the future prophetic passages such as the book of Revelation.

- Covenant believers recognize this. Strong critic of Dispensationalism John Gerstner writes, **"On points where we differ, there is a tendency for the dispensationalist to be literalistic where the non-dispensationalist tends to interpret the Bible figuratively** (*Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, p. 93).
- Louis Berkhof, in his objections to **premillennialism states, "The theory is based on a literal interpretation of the prophetic delineations of the future of Israel and the kingdom of God, which is entirely untenable."** (*Systematic Theology*, p. 712).

4. Covenant and Dispensational theology differ in every area even though in most cases just slightly. Points of difference as per the Covenantal view:

1) Christology – Christ sits presently on **David's throne, signifying that the** kingdom age has begun.

2) Pneumatology – **Holy Spirit's ministry is** the same in OT and NT. This would mean, among other things, that the Holy Spirit indwelt and empowered believers the same way in the OT as He does today.

3) Angelology – Satan and demons are chained at this time, and therefore, limited in their influence in the world.

4) Soteriology – Salvation of humans is the overriding theme of human existence and the entire Bible. This is because the covenant of grace is central to the covenantal scheme.

5) Ecclesiology – Origin of the church: Covenantal Christians differ among themselves with most seeing the church beginning with Adam. Grudem writes, **"The church is the community of all believers for all time"** (*Systematic Theology*, p. 853). While Berkhof agrees **he also believes the "establishment of the covenant with Abraham marked the beginning of an institutional church"** (*Systematic Theology*, p. 295).

a. Members of the church.

- Baptized infants become members of the covenant and community.

b. Church and Israel.

- There is some disagreement among covenant theologians:
"Covenant premillennialism
 believes in both a national salvation and a national restoration of Israel.
 Postmillennialism believes in a national salvation, but not a national restoration of Israel.
Amillennialism rejects both"
 (Arnold Fruchtenbaum;
Dispensationalism Tomorrow and Beyond, p. 53).

c. The church and the kingdom.

- Sees little difference between the church and Israel because the church is the new Israel. Most covenantals agree with Grudem, **"The church has now become the true Israel of God and will receive all the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament"** (*Systematic Theology*, p. 863).
- Covenant theology gets around the physical promises to Israel in one of two ways. First, and most commonly, it rejects a literal understanding of some texts of Scripture and substitutes a symbolical

one. For example, on Ezekiel 37:21 Keil and Delitzsch believe this passage **"is not to be taken literally, but symbolically or typically."**

- **"The literal interpretation of the** OT prophecies relative to the restoration of Israel and the future kingdom of Christ, cannot possibly be carried out" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 809).
- A second way around kingdom promises is to assert that Israel forfeited her promises due to disobedience. They would see the covenantal promises as conditional **on Israel's obedience.**

6) Eschatology – Amillennialists believe the millennium of Revelation 20 is now in process of realization. Postmillennialists teach that the church age will eventually become the kingdom through the preaching of the gospel.

7) Bibliology – A mix of grammatical-historical and allegorical hermeneutics, as demonstrated earlier.

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PRINCIPLES OF SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION

General Principles of Interpretation

1. Work from the assumption that the Bible is authoritative.
2. The Bible interprets itself; Scripture best explains Scripture.
3. Saving faith and the Holy Spirit are necessary for us to understand and properly interpret the Scriptures.
4. Interpret personal experience in the light of Scripture and not Scripture in light of personal experience.
5. Biblical examples are authoritative only when supported by a command.
6. The primary purpose of the Bible is to change our lives, not increase our knowledge.
7. Each Christian has the right and responsibility to investigate and interpret the Word of God himself.
8. Church history is important but not decisive in the interpretation of Scripture.
9. The promises of God throughout the Bible are available to the Holy Spirit for the believers of every generation.

Grammatical Principles of Interpretation

1. Scripture has only one meaning and should be taken literally.
2. Interpret words in harmony with their meanings in the times of the author.
3. Interpret a word in relation to its sentence and context.

4. Interpret a passage in harmony with its context.
5. When an inanimate object is used to describe a living being, the statement may be considered figurative.
6. When an expression is out of character with the thing described, the statement may be considered figurative.
7. The principal parts and figures of a parable represent certain realities. Consider only these principal parts and figures when drawing conclusions.
8. Interpret the words of the prophets in their usual literal and historical sense, unless the context or manner in which they are fulfilled clearly indicates that they have a symbolic meaning. Their fulfillment may be in installments, each fulfillment being a pledge of that which is to follow.

Historical Principles of Interpretation

1. Since Scripture originated in a historical context, it can be understood only in light of biblical history.
2. Though **God's revelation in the Scriptures is progressive**, both Old and New Testaments are essential parts of this revelation and form a unit.
3. Historical facts or events become symbols of spiritual truths only if the Scriptures so designate them.

Theological Principles of Interpretation

1. You must understand the Bible grammatically before you can understand it theologically.
2. A doctrine cannot be considered biblical unless it sums up and includes all that the Scriptures say about it.

3. When two doctrines taught in the Bible appear to be contradictory, accept both as Scriptural in the confident belief they will resolve themselves into a higher unity.
4. A teaching merely implied in Scripture may be considered biblical when a comparison of related passages supports it.

Taken from *Studying, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* by Walter Henrichsen and Gayle Jackson, published by Lamplighter Books, Grand Rapids Michigan – Zondervan Publishing House

THE AUTHORITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

Perhaps the most important issue facing the church today is the matter of authority. Who or what has the right, the authority, to determine what we believe and how we are to live? The answer to that question, not so very long ago, was quite uncomplicated—at least to evangelical Christians. The Word of God was the final authority over all areas of faith and practice. One of the battle cries of the Reformation was *sola Scriptura*—Scripture alone. This simply meant that the ultimate basis of authority and truth was Scripture. Scripture had the final say over all we believed and how we lived out those beliefs. More than that, the Bible was seen as sufficient. That is, what the Word had to say was adequate to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). No one claimed that Scripture exhausted every subject—or even addressed some (e.g., mathematics). But where it did not give direct teaching it gave principles by which we could examine and evaluate all things “pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). That Scripture claims for itself such authority and sufficiency was widely accepted based upon numerous passages (e.g., John 17:17; Mark 12:24; Luke 11:25; 16:27-31; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:25; 1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:20-32; Psalm 19, 119; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3; Matthew 5:17-20; 12:18-27; 26:52-54; Luke 10:25-26; 16:17). But, the evangelical church today does not believe this. The authority and sufficiency of God’s Word are being supplanted at every turn. However, before we observe the modern church, let’s back up and look at the recent past. What is transpiring today has a familiar ring to it. This has all happened before—and not that long ago.

EPISTEMOLOGY

The issue of authority largely deals with epistemology, that is, how we discover and determine truth. Without racing down philosophical rabbit trails of which there are many, the answer is that our knowledge of truth must come from a source. When reduced to “basic” possibilities the sources of truth are limited to three:

Humans

If one believes that humans are the final source of truth we are still left with the epistemological question of how we discover this truth. James Draper and Kenneth Keathley give this helpful overview:

The person holding to human reason (or rationalism) believes he is his own final authority. The question then is which method that individual will use in testing truth

claims. The options available to him can be grouped under three headings: *rationalism*, *empiricism*, and *mysticism*. The rationalist believes he or she can determine what is true by reason alone, because of innate or natural abilities within the human mind. The empiricist places confidence in experimentation and in the observation of sense phenomena, affirming as true only that which can be physically demonstrated. Finally, there is the mystic, who rejects rationalism and empiricism because he recognizes that the individual is not capable of arriving at ultimate truth either by reason or observation. The mystic, however, believes that the individual does possess extrarational abilities that enable him to intuit truth. Truth, the mystic contends, cannot be known objectively; it can be encountered only subjectively. No matter which of the three approaches are employed by human reason, they all have this in common: They make the individual the final arbiter of truth.¹

Religion

Within the Christian tradition this is best represented by the Roman Church. According to Catholic theology, it is the Church that has given us the Bible and, therefore, final authority rests with the Church. The Roman Church would technically not claim to hold views contrary to Scripture, but it is the Church which interprets Scripture and is free to add to it. Therefore any apparent contradiction say, for example, praying to Mary or the saints, is resolved by Rome's claim to authority.

Revelation

If God exists, it is not difficult to believe that He has communicated to mankind. The Bible claims to be that revelation. Conservative Christians throughout the ages, and especially since the Reformation, have recognized the exclusive claim of Scripture to be the complete and final Word of God for this age. This is not to say that there have not been many usurpers to this claim.

Yesterday and Today

One of the great challenges faced by Christians in the not too distant past drew from a number of sources: German rationalism, higher criticism, Enlightenment thought, etc., ultimately evolving into what we call Christian liberalism today. The father of liberalism is usually recognized as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), professor of theology at the University of Berlin. Joining many popular philosophical systems with Christianity, Schleiermacher came to distrust any form of authority. But he did not want to reject Christianity, believing that mankind needs religion. He reasoned that propositional revelation about God may be faulty or even nonexistent but, since man needs religious experience, the outer shell of Christianity must be retained. The Bible may be untrustworthy, shot through with error, unreliable for developing a living framework, but it is still possible to experience God through religious expressions. The foundation may be gone, but somehow the walls are still standing. Such people are convinced that they encounter God as they connect with the "divine spark" found in every human, or through mystical practices, or through subjective experiences. They are unconcerned with the

authority of Scripture—to them the Bible is riddled with errors, but that does not matter as long as they can have an existential relationship with God—or at least, so they think. William James, certainly no evangelical Christian, made an astute observation over one hundred years ago about the encroachment of liberal thought within Christianity:

The advance of liberalism, so-called, in Christianity, during the past fifty years, may fairly be called a victory of healthy-mindedness within the church over the morbidness with which the old hell-fire theology was more harmoniously related. We have now whole congregations whose preachers, far from magnifying our consciousness of sin, seem devoted rather to making little of it. They ignore, or even deny, eternal punishment, and insist on the dignity rather than on the depravity of man. They look at the continual preoccupation of the old-fashioned Christian with the salvation of his soul as something sickly and reprehensible rather than admirable; and a sanguine and ‘muscular’ attitude, which to our forefathers would have seemed purely heathen, has become in their eyes an ideal element of Christian character. I am not asking whether or not they are right, I am only pointing out the change.²

James’ assessment has a modern ring to it. Old liberalism has been waning in the last few decades, but certainly has not gone away. Rather, it has combined with other errant theological threads and morphed into a number of forms. Take for example the recent comments syndicated columnist and liberal Episcopal priest, Tom Ehrich, wrote:

Picture a prosperous suburban congregation, set among big houses and private schools, populated by professionals and young families, once known for its intellectual vitality, now caught up in stick-to-the-Bible orthodoxy.... Preaching there, says a member, rarely strays from a word-by-word explication of assigned texts. Adult education classes tend to be “led by people who regard the Bible as ‘inerrant’ and allow no questioning. We never hear an open, honest exploration of what it means to live as a Christian in today’s world.”... Clearly, some sort of retreat is under way. Like all retreats, it claims the moral high ground. But what I see in the “land of the free and home of the brave” is dogmatic conformity (fear of freedom) and intolerance (fear of the other).... What concerns me is the emergence of a religious leadership cadre who don’t hesitate to turn fearfulness into rage, hatred and scapegoating. They, of all people, should know better. They should know that the answer to fear is faith, not hatred. **They should know that Jesus didn’t name enemies, launch moral crusades or wage culture wars. He didn’t exercise thought-control with his disciples. He didn’t insist on one way of thinking or believing, He wasn’t legalistic or rigid or conformist** (emphasis mine).³

This sounds like the rantings of old-fashioned liberalism—but wait! Many within evangelicalism are echoing the same tune. Taking a stand for the truth is long since out of vogue. John MacArthur makes the point, “It is no longer deemed necessary to fight for the truth. In fact, many evangelicals now consider it ill-mannered and uncharitable to argue about any point of doctrine.”⁴

Liberalism has joined forces with postmodernism to challenge the teachings of the Bible. Meanwhile, many in evangelicalism are sitting on the sidelines wanting to be tolerant and attempting to bully and intimidate any who advocate discernment. It is little wonder then that a new wave of liberalism is sweeping over Christianity. The seeker-sensitive church has been seen by many as just old liberalism in disguise, but that is not altogether true. The seeker-sensitive church has fudged on many biblical truths,⁵ but it still embraces most of the cardinal doctrines and still seeks to proclaim the gospel, even if its message is often out of balance with the New Testament. But the seeker-sensitive church has given birth to a new movement being called the emergent church. The emergent church is taking to logical conclusion what the seeker-sensitive church began. All dressed up in post-modern religious garb the emergent church is rapidly rejecting and undermining almost all biblical theology. In other words the emergent church is the new liberalism. Evangelicalism is reaping what it has sown.

But what about all the spiritual interest that is evident? Christian books and music top the charts. Megachurches are bursting at the seams. Some are proclaiming that we may be in the midst of the greatest revival since Pentecost. In response, I agree with a Gallup poll evaluation from a few years ago. "We are having a revival of feelings, but not of the knowledge of God. The church today is more guided by feeling than by convictions. We value enthusiasm more than informed commitment."⁶

If this is true why are so few noticing it? Let me make a few suggestions:

1. Because the marketers of this approach to Christianity have become adept at giving people what they want. Michael Horton writes, "Throughout the prophetic literature, we notice a common theme—the false prophets tell the people what they want to hear, baptize it with God's name, and serve it up as God's latest word to His people."⁷
2. Because the centrality of the Word of God has been subtly replaced with inferior but pleasing substitutes. Systematic preaching and teaching of the Bible have been displaced in many churches with entertainment, drama, concerts, comic acts, and the like. For a number of decades psychological theory has been usurping the authority of Scripture. The purpose of many churches is no longer salvation and sanctification but therapy. And, increasingly, mysticism and extrabiblical revelations are superseding the Bible.
3. Because so many within evangelicalism are drifting with the tide of worldly thought and opinion. Pascal said, "When everything is moving at once, nothing appears to be moving, as on board ship. When everyone is moving towards depravity, no one seems to be moving, but if someone stops, he shows up the others who are rushing on by acting as a fixed point."⁸ Commenting on this statement Douglas Groothuis wrote, "The fixed point in a shifting world is biblical truth and all that agrees with it."⁹ Preceding Pascal's quote Groothuis had this to say, "We are told that Christians must shift their emphasis from objective truth to communal experience, from rational argument to subjective appeal, from doctrinal orthodoxy to relevant practices. I have reasoned...that this move is nothing less than fatal to Christian integrity and biblical witness. It is also illogical philosophically. We have something far better to offer."¹⁰

Peter informs us, “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3a). How is this life and godliness found? “Through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (1:3b). And where is the knowledge of Christ found? In the precious Word of God. No wonder Peter encouraged us to be “like newborn babes, [who] long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Peter 2:2). Why feed at the trough of worldly wisdom or mystical experience when we have the final, complete, infallible revelation from God that is able to “make us wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15), “and equip us for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17)? I agree with Groothuis, we Bible-believing Christians do have something better to offer.

¹ James T. Draper Jr. & Kenneth Keathley, *Biblical Authority* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001) pp. 2-3.

² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1922) p. 91.

³ Tom Ehrich, “Fear-based Faith Helps No One,” (Springfield, IL: *The State Journal Register*, May 22, 2005) p. 15.

⁴ John MacArthur, *Why One Way?* (Word Publishing Group, 2002) pp. 47-48.

⁵ See my book, *This Little Church Went to Market*.

⁶ J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997) p. 19.

⁷ Don Kistler, General Editor, *Sola Scriptura!* Michael Horton, Forward (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000) P. XV.

⁸ Quoted by Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) p. 265.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.