

YOU BELIEVE WHAT???

WEEK 4: WHY SHOULD THE BIBLE BE OUR FIRM FOUNDATION?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The overall goal of this series is for us to find out *why we believe what we believe*.
- We should never believe a doctrine because a church teaches it, a person teaches it or because we think that it makes sense to believe it. We must be able to search the Scriptures for ourselves.
- Right now, the perspicuity of Scripture is under heavy attack. It is not coming from the usual suspects, liberal theologians, progressive Christians or social gospel warriors.
- What is being said is that the individual believer cannot understand what the Bible is *actually* saying without some sort of help.
- **What is the help that people need?** It's the creeds, confessions and teachings from men long ago.
- "Did you know that many of the reformers taught churchgoers the catechism for years prior to giving them unbridled access to the scripture?"¹
 - The attack is coming from men who are conservative, evangelical believers.
- It's becoming increasingly common for some theologians to **mock individual Bible study**. Picking up the word of God, reading it for yourself, and heeding what the Lord has said can be couched in language that makes the process sound like a fool's errand. **These theologians will claim that without the help of historical secondary sources, it's nigh impossible for an individual to understand the biblical text** in accordance with historic Christian orthodoxy.²

Schedule for Classes:

- 07/23: Creation Trip Presentation
- 07/30: Introduction and the Purpose of the class. Part I.
- 08/06: Introduction and the Purpose of the class. Part II.
- **08/13: Why should the Bible be our firm foundation? Part I (History of Perspicuity)**
- 08/20: Why should the Bible be our firm foundation? Part II (Perspicuity and Personal Illumination)
- 08/27: Where do we find our church doctrines?

The overall goal is to take some vital doctrines and learn how to exegete the text and defend the faith.

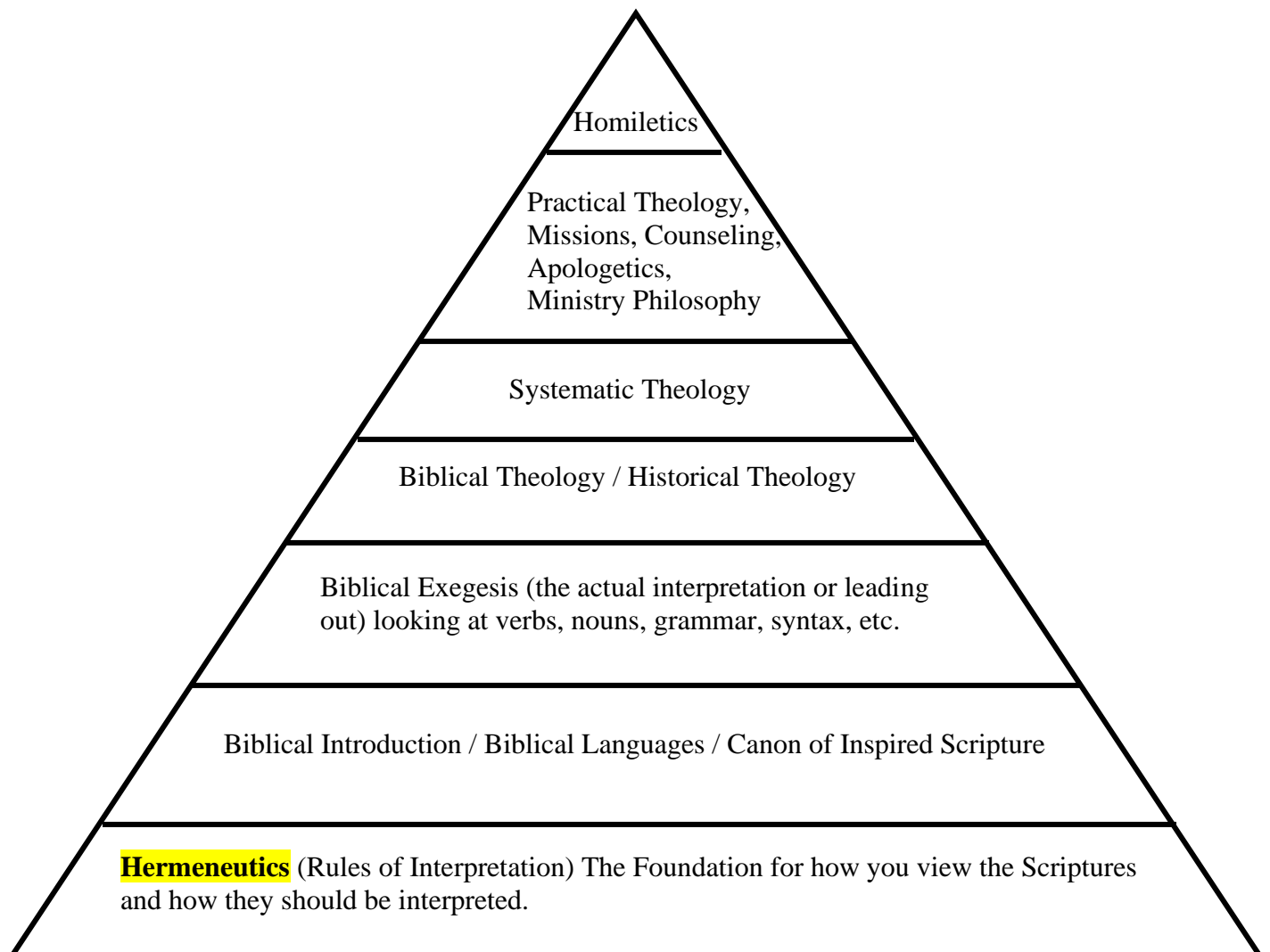
¹ <https://twitter.com/MattMBarrett/status/1516401230234456064> This quote is from Matthew Barrett, professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and author of multiple publications. He is a leading evangelical scholar who is seeking to bring Protestants back to their Roman Catholic faith.

² <https://www.jeremyhoward.net/2022/07/biblicism-confessions-womanhood.html>

INTRODUCTION

- In these next two classes, we are going to be discussing why the Bible should be our firm foundation.
- We are going to start back in history and see what our early Christian brothers and sisters thought about the clarity of Scripture.
- If God determined that we should know about Him through His Word, then His Word should be accessible by all people at all times.

THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE



- The word *perspicuity* can sometimes be confusing...
- Perspicuous is based on Latin *perspicere*, meaning "to see through," so that which is perspicuous is clear and understandable. That is why it may be better to say *clarity of Scripture*.

- As you can see from the chart above, what we believe about the Bible is going to give us the direction for everything else that we do in our Christian life.
- As we saw last week, the attack on the perspicuity of Scripture and on the individual's ability to read and interpret Scripture is at an all-time high.
- If we must look to others for our understanding of the Bible, as we said last week, then we are now reliant on others for our authority.
- **Why is this such an important topic in our daily life?**
 - “That meaning, most especially in the case of the Bible, must be sufficiently clear and accessible to all who honestly read it. There is no other alternative. If the Scriptures are not clear, then every doctrine of the Scriptures is undefined. An inspired, authoritative, true word that is obscure offers no benefit to its reader. There can be no confidence in trials, no comfort in sorrow and no salvation in the gospel if it is impossible to come to a reasonable certainty as to what the Bible has to say. This doctrine is as important as ever and it needs to be restated and affirmed robustly and unequivocally. The Word of God is clear.”³
- If the average person does not believe they are able to sit down with their Bibles, read what has been written and understand it, they are without hope.
- If we are constantly looking towards someone else's notes or ideas, we are going to that person for our hope, not to the Lord.
- To be sure, the Lord has gifted men throughout the centuries who have been able to bring further clarity to texts which may have been harder to understand. That does not mean that we need these men to understand what God wants us to. It may mean that we simply need to study harder, not that the text is unclear.

What does perspicuity mean when reading the Bible?⁴

- Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person to live by.
 - Psalm 119:130 “The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.”
- Scripture is deep enough for the readers of the highest intellectual ability.
 - 2 Peter 3:15-16 “...and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”
- Scripture is clear in its essential matters.

³ <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/81840#:~:text=The%20Perspicuity%20of%20Scripture%20re,Bible%20may%20find%20in%20some>

⁴ <https://tms.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/tmsj15i.pdf>

- 2 Peter 1:3 “...seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”
- The obscurity that a reader of the Bible may find in some parts of Scripture is the fault of finite and sinful mankind.
 - Matthew 22:29 “But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.’”
- Interpreters of Scripture may use ordinary means.
 - 2 Peter 1:21 “...for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
- Even an unsaved person can understand the plain teachings of Scripture on an external level.
 - Acts 17:32 “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, ‘We shall hear you again concerning this.’”
- The Holy Spirit must illumine the mind of the reader or hearer of Scripture if he is to understand the significance of Scripture.
 - 1 Corinthians 2:14 “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”
- Every Christian has the right and is bound to read in interpret it for himself, so that his faith may rest on the testimony of the Scriptures, and not on that of the church.
 - 1 Peter 2:9 “But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...”
 - There are no church officers, class of officers, or Bible expositors to whose interpretation of the Scriptures the people are required to submit as a final authority.

WHAT ABOUT CHURCH HISTORY?

- What most churchgoers don’t know is that the clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture was fought for throughout church history, but especially around the time of the Reformation (1517 AD).
- “From John Wycliffe (d. 1384) and his Lollard followers, to William Tyndale (d. 1536) and his ploughboy, to Martin Luther and the German people, the Reformers and their predecessors were well-known for their zeal to put the Bible in the hands of the people in their own language. They were convinced that the reading of the Bible by the common people would do far more good than damage to the true church. They were also certain that all people, whether ploughboy or king, could understand the message of God’s Word. Motivated by their belief that the Scriptures are clear or perspicuous, they labored, suffered persecution, and some even

gave their lives to accomplish the noble task of translating the Scriptures into the various languages of the countries of Europe.”⁵

- William Tyndale was the first person to translate and print the New Testament in English. His motivation was clear; he once said to a priest: “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy who drives a plough to know more of the scriptures than you do.” For this, he was killed.⁶
- The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) believed they had the *exclusive right* to determine the meaning and application of the Scriptures for the people.
- Just like in Tyndale’s day, the RCC believes in three sources of authority⁷:
 - **The Scriptures**
 - So, what is the problem with using the Word of God as our only source of authority if it is so revered? The problem is us. Man is so fallible, that when left to his own devices, he will eventually lose sight of, or even destroy, the intended message contained within Scripture. You’ve seen it before, where someone misuses or twists a scripture passage, or you’ve seen things taken out of context while other pieces are deliberately left out or ignored because it does not fit within the argument. Knowing how fallible we are, God built in two other forms of authority into His Church in order to safeguard His Word.
 - **Their Traditions**
 - Another point highly worthy of note regarding the relationship between Scripture and Tradition is that Tradition actually preceded Scripture. The Gospels and the epistles did not magically appear the second Jesus was resurrected. It took years for things to be written down and compiled, and the official canon of the Bible was not established until 382 AD at the Council of Rome. Therefore, the Apostles did not have New Testament Scripture from which to quote, interpret, and preach. They had their memories and their experiences to use as reference. Thus, in order to begin the work of the Church, namely to evangelize and convert others, it was necessary that they start from the authority of Tradition. So, if Christianity began with the handing down of Tradition before Scripture, how can others now say that “sola scriptura” is the only way?
 - **The Magisterium**
 - Our final source of authority is the Magisterium, which is the teaching authority of the Church as an institution created by Jesus Christ and protected by the Holy Spirit.

⁵ <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/81840#:~:text=The%20Perspicuity%20of%20Scripture%2D%20re.Bible%20may%20find%20in%20some>

⁶ <https://tyndalesploughboy.com/>

⁷ <https://www.corpuschristiphx.org/blog?month=202008&id=1012135831&cat=931661708#:~:text=Today%2C%20we'll%20take%20a.passing%20on%20of%20the%20Faith.&text=Catholics%20absolutely%20believe%20in%20and%20respect%20the%20authority%20of%20Sacred%20Scripture.>

- Then decrees are drafted and then promulgated by the Pope, enabling believers to know the official teaching on the issue. This is how the doctrine and dogmas have been developed and revealed to us over the years. Believing that the Magisterium (the teaching authority and not simply the men themselves) is protected by the Holy Spirit, believers are called to give their assent to the Church teaching, whether we fully understand it or not, because it has been determined to be true and God's will.
- The Reformation had many facets, we sometimes just think about it in terms of justification by faith alone and the 5 Solas.
- While that was important, Luther and those before him fought so hard for...the people being able to read the Bible in their own language without someone telling them what to believe.

How did this happen?

- I think the question that needs to be asked is *how did the church go from having the Bible in the common language of the people (Koine Greek) so that they could all read and understand it to only a select few having the opportunity to read it?*
- The fall of Rome in 476 AD would split the language of the church forever.
- In 400 AD (and perhaps Latin was used as early as 200 AD) the Latin Vulgate was produced by Jerome at the request of Pope Damasus I.
- **This was done for two reasons**...the churches in North Africa were not Greek speakers but spoke Latin.
 - For them to have the Bible in their language, they needed one in Latin.
 - The second reason was for the church to have a standard version so that their doctrinal beliefs and practices would all be the same.
- The Vulgate translation would become the standard Bible in Western Churches for the next 1000 years.
 - The Western Church had its center in Rome and was primarily Latin speaking by the 2nd – 4th centuries.
 - The Eastern Church had their center in Constantinople and was primarily Greek speaking.
- These two sects of Christianity never really got along and struggled for power for roughly 500 years. It was in 1054 that they split when the Eastern churches called for all Latin speaking churches that resided in the Eastern area to be closed.
- The Latin language died around 600-750 AD, but not in the RCC. It was at this time that, while the people no longer could understand it, the church continued to operate in Latin.
- This was done for many reasons but chiefly among them was to maintain unity among different language groups regarding their doctrine and practice.
- It is important to point out that this was not done for the people but for the priests in the church.

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

- Not only was the Bible nearly impossible for people to read for roughly 1000 years, but the schools of interpretation made understanding the Bible just as hard.

From the 1st – 3rd Centuries

- We can summarize the hermeneutical principles the third century Christians inherited as follows⁸:
 - The interpretation of any passage of Scripture must be guided by the overall message of the Bible.
 - That overall message conforms to the Rule of Faith, received from the Apostles and preserved by the Bishops.
 - The Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore expected to speak and continue speaking; therefore, interpretation must begin, but not end, with what is plainly stated in the text.
- The two main schools that taught Bible interpretation were The Alexandrian and The Antioch school.
- The 3rd – 5th centuries were very formative for both of these schools and for Christianity as a whole.
- There were four main councils during this time because out of these two schools came two (or more) different interpretations of the Biblical doctrine.
- While the Christian intellectuals of Alexandria emphasized the allegorical interpretation of Scriptures and tended toward a Christology that emphasized the union of the human and the divine, those in Antioch held to a more literal and occasionally typological exegesis and a Christology that emphasized the distinction between the human and the divine in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Alexandrian School

- The Council of Constantinople, assembled in 381, a little while after the death of Athanasius of Alexandria. After declaring the primacy of the Bishop of Rome at the expense of Alexandrian authority, riots destroyed the school. Church history says the school was founded by Mark, disciple of Christ.
- The interpreter which made the largest mark on Christianity then, and today, was Origen (185-253 AD).
- Texts were treated like cryptograms or puzzles needing to be deciphered, or akin to dreams in the symbolic nature of the signs within them. For Origen, Scripture contained different levels of meaning, which could be discerned according to one's spiritual maturity.⁹
- In fact, many believe that Augustine (5th Century) was so heavily influenced by Origen's allegorical interpretations, that he was a forerunner to modern day amillennialism.
- In many reformed circles, this type of interpretation is widely used as the standard for exegesis.

⁸ <https://matthewroot.ca/2022/05/06/allegory-and-its-limits-reading-the-bible-in-alexandria-antioch/>

⁹ <https://matthewroot.ca/2022/05/06/allegory-and-its-limits-reading-the-bible-in-alexandria-antioch/>

The School at Antioch

- Christian theological institution in Syria, traditionally founded in about 200 AD, that stressed the literal interpretation of the Bible and the completeness of Christ's humanity. It would be in operation until around 430 AD.
- The Antiochene school rejected the approach of Origen and allegory, requiring that the legitimate interpretation and application of texts be grounded not just in the words of Scripture, but in the stories those words combine to tell...meaning that context was king.
- They were concerned with the passage of Scripture and what it meant to the original audience and how they would be able to apply that to their own time.
- Most believe this was the forerunner to what we call literal, grammatical hermeneutics.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- As the early church was trying to find the Bible in a common language and also trying to figure out how to interpret it, there were many...many poor doctrines which were being taught.
- Do you remember that the Latin Vulgate came out about the same time these schools closed? The point was to have one Bible and that Bible be interpreted by one group and then distill the information down to the people. To have the Bible in the hands of everyone would be disastrous.
- So, for roughly 1000 years, the RCC claimed the exclusive rights of Bible interpretation so that they would be able to control what was true and what was heresy.
- One of the major ideas which came from the early church and is still around today is that the literal interpretation is never 'enough' when it comes to Scripture. Since it is sacred Scripture, a text has to mean something for us today and not just for the original audience.
- While we would agree with much of what was stated throughout church history, some of it is so far out there that it should not even be entertained within the church.
- This all comes down to hermeneutics and proper Biblical exegesis. Do we believe that God's Word is accessible for us today or do we need to look to others and / or beyond the plain meaning of the text?

NEXT WEEK

- Finish with the importance of the doctrine of perspicuity and talk about the sufficiency of Scripture and how the Holy Spirit illuminates the believer so that they can understand the Bible.