

# YOU BELIEVE WHAT???

## WEEK 5: 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?"<sup>1</sup>
  - 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.**<sup>2</sup>

### 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.**

---

<sup>1</sup> <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.

<sup>2</sup> <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.

## HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION (CON'T FROM LAST WEEK)

---

- 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 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries

- We can summarize the hermeneutical principles the third century Christians inherited as follows<sup>3</sup>:
  - 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 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> 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).

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://matthewroot.ca/2022/05/06/allegory-and-its-limits-reading-the-bible-in-alexandria-antioch/>

- 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.<sup>4</sup>
- In fact, many believe that Augustine (5<sup>th</sup> 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.

## 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.**

<sup>4</sup> <https://matthewroot.ca/2022/05/06/allegory-and-its-limits-reading-the-bible-in-alexandria-antioch/>

- 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?

## HOW SHOULD WE STUDY THE BIBLE?

---

- There are different methods which are promoted to help people read and understand the Bible.
- As we previously read, Matthew Barrett says “*Did you know that many of the reformers taught churchgoers the catechism for years prior to giving them unbridled access to the scripture?*”<sup>5</sup>
- In truth, this means that he believes that we should read what other people think about the Bible before we try to take on the task for ourselves.
- Can or does the Lord bring about the meaning of Scripture to a person who is reading the Bible without the help of anyone or anything else?
- What do we have to do or what tools do we have to understand the Bible?

### **The Mystical Approach**

---

- The RCC promotes what is called *Lectio Divina* (diving reading or holy reading).
- There are a series of 4 or 5 steps that are promoted to bring the person into a closer relationship with God.
- **Read the passage of Scripture that you desire.**
  - There really is nothing “mystical” about this step and it would also be something that we would encourage people to do...read their Bible.
  - But with this type of “study,” the adherent is encouraged to read the passage several times, very slowly and should be listening for the “still small voice” that points them to the passage that they need to really need to focus on.
- **Meditate on a part of the Scripture that you just read that really sticks out to you.**
  - Ask yourself, *What does this mean to me?*
  - Why is the “voice” telling me to meditate on this verse?
  - What feelings am I having about this verse?
- **Pray**
  - Speak to God about what we read and ask for His grace.
  - Open your heart and begin your conversation with God.
- **Contemplation**
  - Spend time gazing at God as He is gazing at us.

---

<sup>5</sup> <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.

- This is the time when the Lord (if He wills) takes the person to a whole different level of prayer and intimacy with Him.
- Take this time to simply rest in God’s presence and fully experience your union with Christ.
- **Action**
  - What kind of concrete action can I do from reading, meditating, praying and (maybe) contemplating with the Lord?
- **What are some issues with this?**
  - The origin of *lectio divina* is problematic. Anything that originated with monks, practiced by mystics, recommended by popes, and taught by Catholic teachers is suspect. Believers should be wary of any exercise identified as a traditional monastic practice.
  - The subjective, personal focus of lectio divina downplays objective, methodical Bible study. Proponents of lectio divina freely admit that the practice “does not treat scripture as texts to be studied. . . . In Lectio Divina we let go of more intellectual, studious, or effortful ways of reading the scripture. . . . Although Lectio Divina involves reading, it is less a practice of reading than one of listening to the inner message of the Scripture delivered through the Holy Spirit. Lectio Divina does not seek information or motivation.”<sup>6</sup>
- This type of reading has become popular within the Evangelical churches.
- Taken from a presumably likeminded church<sup>7</sup>:
  - We all hunger for a prayer-filled life, for a richer and fuller practice of the presence of God. Richard Foster (a Quaker) describes it as “a deepening love for God that feels more like a gift than an achievement; a peace that cannot be dissected, a quiet rest; a flaming passion; a transformation into the likeness of Christ, taking on his habits, feeling, hopes, faith and love.”
  - It is the contemplation of God that fuels our mission for God.
  - Whereas meditation is the active use of our mind to engage God through reading and praying Scripture (active and intentional reflection), contemplative prayer is our loving attentiveness and grateful gazing on God (experiential and savoring). It is the kind of intentional focus that builds on biblical convictions about God but goes beyond them in terms of the experience it generates. This contemplation has been a part of the response of many believers to God from early in the history of the church, **where a four-step process** led them to first *read*, then to *meditate*, then to *pray*, and finally to *contemplate*. This contemplation is not divorced from the life of the mind. It simply

---

<sup>6</sup> Archdiocese of St. Louis, [www.archstl.org/Portals/0/Documents/Worship/Divina%20Resources/Lectio%20Divina.pdf](http://www.archstl.org/Portals/0/Documents/Worship/Divina%20Resources/Lectio%20Divina.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fellowship.com/about/our-beliefs/family-discussions-cultural-issues/contemplative-prayer/#:~:text=Both%20in%20Scripture%20and%20throughout,behold%20in%20order%20to%20become.>

constitutes a capstone, as it gathers all these aspects into a response of affection, wonder, and delight.

- This is just one example of the RCC making inroads into a self-proclaimed Evangelical church.
- In an otherwise conservative book on hermeneutics, *Grasping God's Word*, the readers are encouraged to “sometimes be still and enter into the living presence of God where you can drink deeply of his Word and respond in heartfelt worship.”
  - How is one to do this? The authors promote *Lectio Divina* and its 5-phase approach.<sup>8</sup>
  - “Our spiritual maturity affects our ability to hear the voice of the Spirit (the divine Author) in the Scriptures.”
- While it is true that spiritually immature people are more prone to false interpretation, it does not automatically mean that the “mature” are going to be right because they *hear the voice of the Spirit*.
- How does one know what the *voice of the Spirit is*? It is a subjective experience based upon us.

### **What is the role of the Holy Spirit when we read and study the Bible?**

- We would not teach that you must read someone else's theology *before* reading the Bible to start to learn theology.
- We also do not think that the Spirit speaks in a small voice to lead us deeper into the presence of the Lord.
- Both of these ideas of how to read and understand the Bible directly neglect the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.
- *I am convinced that a charismatic theology of the Holy Spirit has infected most of evangelicalism in ways we don't often recognize. Carl F. H. Henry was right when he observed, “The modern openness to charismatic emphases is directly traceable to the neglect by mainstream Christian denominations of an adequate doctrine of the Holy Spirit.”*<sup>9</sup>
- What we do believe in is the doctrine of **Divine Illumination**.
- What this is *not*.<sup>10</sup>
- The illumination that the Spirit gives is not a new meaning nor is there a new revelation.
  - “The Spirit illumines the truth, not by unveiling some hidden inner mystical content behind the revelation . . . , but by focusing on the truth of revelation as it is. The Spirit illumines and interprets by repeating the grammatical sense of Scripture; in doing so he in no way alters or expands the truth of revelation.”<sup>11</sup>
- The Spirit does not give us understanding.

---

<sup>8</sup> Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 231.

<sup>9</sup> <https://g3min.org/illumination-i-do-not-think-it-means-what-you-think-it-means/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 282.

- But neither does illumination mean that we are given a new understanding of the text.
- In other words, illumination does not eliminate the need for diligent study in order to understand Scripture—it does not give us understanding in an intellectual sense. We must still work to grasp the meaning of Scripture. As Paul tells Timothy, we must work diligently so that we might “rightly [handle] the Word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).
- Of course, the doctrine of illumination does not mean that believers can unlock every theological secret (Deuteronomy 29:29), or that we do not need godly teachers (Ephesians 4:11-12). It also does not preclude us from disciplining ourselves for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:8) or from doing the hard work of careful Bible study (2 Timothy 2:15). Yet we can approach our study of God’s Word with joy and eagerness—knowing that as we investigate the Scriptures with prayerfulness and diligence, the Holy Spirit will illuminate our hearts to comprehend, embrace, and apply the truths we are studying.<sup>12</sup>
- So, what is the **Doctrine of Illumination**?
- The Holy Spirit’s work always centers on the Word of God. We should not only focus on His role in the inspiration of Scripture, because His work did not end with the closing of the biblical canon.
- Today He works through His Word in the lives of His people.
- “Illumination removes man’s innate hostility toward God and Scripture and imparts intuitive certainty that Scripture is from God and is, therefore, truth and authoritative.”<sup>13</sup>
- Apart from the Holy Spirit, the most eloquent sermon is nothing but hot air, empty noise, and lifeless oratory; but when accompanied by the almighty Spirit of God, even the simplest message slices through calloused hearts of unbelief and transforms lives.<sup>14</sup>
- The word *illumination* is not found in the Bible. This does not mean the concept is not clearly taught.
- **Ephesians 1:16-18** “...do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, **may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation** in the knowledge of Him. **I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened,** so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...”
- **Philippians 3:15-16** “Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and *if in anything you have a different attitude,* **God will reveal that also to you;** however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.”
- **1 Corinthians 2:10-13** “For to us **God revealed them through the Spirit,** for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B160725/how-does-the-spirit-work-through-scripture>

<sup>13</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, I:56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, *so that we may know the things freely given to us by God*, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in *those taught by the Spirit*, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

- What is Paul saying that illumination does?
- In short, illumination does three things: It provides (1) an intuitive certainty that the Scriptures came from God and are truth and authoritative; (2) a removal of hostility toward Scripture caused by depravity; and (3) an ongoing capacity to understand the significance of Scripture.”<sup>15</sup>
- Let’s look at one of the verses referenced above:
- **Ephesians 1:16-18**...the purpose of *being enlightened* is to know the hope of God’s calling and to know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.
  - “In the NT it always has theological significance, referring to the unveiling of those things which were hidden in God and unknown to humans. It is ‘not the impartation of knowledge, but the actual unveiling of intrinsically hidden facts.’ Therefore, revelation is some hidden thing or mystery of God that is unveiled by God and cannot be discovered by human investigation.”<sup>16</sup>
  - The wisdom that Paul prays for is *in the knowledge of God*. It is to know God intimately, which no human knowledge can produce.
    - This is important to remember for next week. If no human knowledge can produce this type of intimate knowledge of God, what role does human knowledge play in our theology.
  - Therefore, Paul prays that God would give the Holy Spirit’s insight and disclosure in the sphere or area of the knowledge of God himself. This corresponds to 1 Cor 2:10–16 where the Holy Spirit searches the deep things of God and reveals them to the believer.<sup>17</sup>
  - To be enlightened here is a passive verb. In other words, something caused your understanding (the eyes of your heart) and thought to be about God. When one is saved, they have been enlightened by the Spirit of God to know the things of God.
- Paul’s prayer here is for the Lord to give them more understanding so that they would grow more and more in their knowledge of who He is and what they now have.

---

<sup>15</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, I:56.

<sup>16</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 256.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.