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Lesson 1:

The Bible

“There are a lot of things we want in life, but there are few things we really need. The word of God is one of those things. We cannot know the truth or know ourselves or know God’s ways or savingly know God himself unless God speaks to us. Every true Christian should feel deep in his bones an utter dependence on God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures. ‘Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD’ (Deuteronomy 8:3).”

(Kevin DeYoung)

Christianity unashamedly claims to be the custodian of God’s absolute, written authority. Having the word of God is essential to the Christian’s growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and essential to the local church’s maturity in

Christ. The standards by which Christians and churches are to govern life in every detail are found in the pages of the Bible. We must therefore understand the role that the Bible plays in the life of the Christian and of the church.

1. The Bible's Authority

“The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God” (Wayne Grudem).

1.1 Divine authorship

The Bible’s authority derives from its origin: It is the written word of God.

1.1.1 The Bible claims this authority for itself when it says that its words were **breathed out by God** (2 Timothy 3:16). Peter claims that the writers of Scripture **spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit** (2 Peter 1:16–21). Many passages in the Bible claim to be words directly from God.

1.1.2 God convinces his people of the truth of his word by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The truths of God must be **taught by the Spirit because the natural person does not accept**

the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:13–14).

1.1.3 Because the Bible is the very word of God, we do not seek to prove its claims by outside sources. The words of Scripture are self-attesting.

1.2 Divine authority

Because it is God-breathed, the Bible claims absolute authority in the life of the Christian and the Christian church.

1.2.1 The Bible's divine authority means that it tells us what to believe and how to behave.

1.2.2 Christians recognize the authority of the Bible, and therefore believe what it teaches (see Luke 24:25). This requires study, but once we have studied the text and understand it, we must believe it.

1.2.3 As Christians, we also recognize the authority of the Bible to tell us how to live (Joshua 1:8; 23:6; Matthew 5:17–19; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). It is to be both believed and obeyed.

1.2.4 The Bible does not claim EXCLUSIVE authority, but ULTIMATE authority, in the Christian's and in the church's life.

2. The Bible's Clarity

“The clarity of Scripture means that 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” (Wayne Grudem).

2.1 The Bible itself emphasizes that it is a book to be read and understood by every Christian.

2.1.1 Blessings are pronounced upon those who read and understand God's word (Psalm 1:2; Revelation 1:3).

2.1.2 The Bible is able to make wise those who are **simple** (Psalms 19:7; 119:130).

2.1.3 Parents are responsible to read, understand, and teach the Bible to their children (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

2.1.4 Jesus held people responsible for not reading and understanding the Scriptures (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:42; 22:29, 31; etc.).

- 2.1.5 This does not mean that every passage of Scripture is equally clear to understand (see 2 Peter 3:15–16), but as the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith states, “the things that must be known, believed, and obeyed for salvation are so clearly set forth and explained in one part of Scripture or another that both the educated and uneducated may achieve a sufficient understanding of them by properly using ordinary measures.”
- 2.2 Some passages of the Bible must be studied in greater detail to be understood with greater clarity (2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 5:14).
- 2.2.1 The hard work of Bible study must include proper observation (what does the text say?); interpretation (what does the text mean?); correlation (how does the text relate to other parts of the Bible); and application (how does the text apply to the church and the Christian today?).
- 2.2.2 As we study the Scriptures, we must do so prayerfully relying on the Holy Spirit to teach us God’s truth (1 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 3:14–17).
- 2.2.3 God will only reveal truth to the believer to the degree that he or she is willing to obey that truth (John 7:17).

- 2.3 The clarity of Scripture does not remove the responsibility of a Christian to be accountable to the teaching ministry of a local church. Nor does it remove the responsibility of pastors to instruct the churches they lead.

3. The Bible's Necessity

The Bible is necessary if we will know certain things about God and what he expects of his people. God has given two sources of revelation: general revelation in creation, and special revelation in his written word. Each source of revelation is sufficient for the purpose for which it was given.

- 3.1 General revelation is sufficient to:

3.1.1 Convince us of God's existence (Psalm 19:1–7; Acts 14:16–17; Romans 1:19–21).

3.1.2 Convince us of God's character and our accountability to him (Romans 1:32; 2:14–15).

By convincing us of these two things, general revelation is sufficient to condemn us before God, but insufficient to point to the way of salvation.

- 3.2 Special revelation (i.e. the Bible) is sufficient—indeed, necessary—to:

- 3.2.1 Know the gospel (Romans 10:13–17).
- 3.2.2 Know how to live before God (Deuteronomy 8:3 [cf. Matthew 4:4]; 1 Peter 2:2 [cf. 1:23–25]).
- 3.2.3 Know God’s will (Deuteronomy 29:29; Psalm 1:1–2; 1 John 5:3).

While general revelation points to God’s existence and the knowledge we have sinned against him, Scripture is necessary for us to learn how to get right with God and to live right before him.

4. The Bible’s Sufficiency

Scripture comprehensively addresses all of our fundamental (non-physical) relational needs (with God, others, the world and oneself). The Bible is enough to teach us about God’s character, God’s commands, and God’s promises.

4.1 Sufficient to teach God’s character

- 4.1.1 It is impossible for the finite, human mind to grasp the infinite realities about God. But what must be known about God is revealed in the Bible.
- 4.1.2 Those who want to know who God is, and

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what he is like, must find the answers in the Bible.

4.2 Sufficient to teach God's commands

4.2.1 God has not left us in the dark as to what he requires—as to what is right and wrong.

4.2.2 Second Timothy 3:16–17 tells us that Scripture is sufficient to show us what is right (**teaching**), what is not right (**reproof**), how to get right (**correction**) and how to stay right (**training in righteousness**).

4.2.3 There are three major purposes of God's law:

- First, God's law is given as a MIRROR to reflect the character of God and the character that God requires of humanity. In that way, it points us to our need for Christ.
- Second, God's law is given as a DETERRENT to curb human sinfulness.
- Third, God's law is given to GUIDE Christians as to what is pleasing and displeasing to the Lord.

4.3 Sufficient to teach God's promises

4.3.1 Scripture alone points us to the great promises of the gospel that are found in Christ.

- 4.3.2 All the Old Testament promises were fulfilled in Christ (e.g. Genesis 3:15; 2 Samuel 7:12–13; Isaiah 53; Ezekiel 36:25–27).
- 4.3.3 Since God was faithful to his Old Testament promises, we can be sure that he will be faithful to his new Testament promises (e.g. John 14:15–17; Hebrews 13:5).
- 4.3.4 These promises show us how we can be made right with God rather than remaining under judgment for breaking his law.

5. The Bible's Translation

We are privileged as English speakers to have an array of Bible translations in a language we can understand. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew/Aramaic (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament), and while not all translations are created equal, we are privileged to have several good, reliable translations in English.

The following translations are five which we recommend for personal reading and study. They are listed here roughly in order (from most difficult to simplest) of ease of readability for English speakers.

- 5.1 The King James Version (KJV) (originally published in 1611; updated last in 1769).

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- 5.2 The New American Standard Bible (NASB) (originally published in 1971; updated last in 1995).
- 5.3 The New King James Version (NKJV) (published in 1982).
- 5.4 The English Standard Version (ESV) (first published in 2001; constantly undergoing translation revision).
- 5.5 The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) (first published in 2017; constantly undergoing translation revision).

At BBC, the most common translation used for teaching and preaching purposes is the English Standard Version.

6. Recommended Resources

If you want to learn more about the Bible, we recommend the following resources.

- 6.1 *Why Trust the Bible?* by Greg Gilbert
- 6.2 *Taking God at His Word* by Kevin de Young
- 6.3 *Biblical Theology* by Nick Roark and Robert Cline
- 6.4 *Scripture Alone* by R. C. Sproul
- 6.5 *Knowing Scripture* by R. C. Sproul

Lesson 2:

The Gospel

“The gospel of Jesus Christ stands at the very center of Christianity, and we Christians claim to be about the gospel above all else. It’s what we intend to found our lives upon and build our churches around. It’s what we speak to others about and it’s what we pray they also will hear and believe.”

(Greg Gilbert)

The gospel is the good news of what God has done for believing sinners in Jesus Christ. It is the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, by which he fulfilled God’s law, atoned for sin, and gives life to all who believe in him. The gospel is

the beginning and end of the Christian life. It is imperative that disciples of Jesus Christ understand the gospel.

1. The Gospel of God

Discipleship begins with understanding the gospel. A scriptural understanding of the gospel points us to four essential categories of truth.

1.1 Truth 1: The Character of God

There is one true God. He is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is revealed to us in the 66 books of the Bible.

Finite human beings can never fully grasp the character of the infinite God, but the Bible reveals truths about God that are vital to understanding the gospel.

1.1.1 A creator God

- The Bible affirms that God is the creator of all that exists.
- Scripture opens with an affirmation of this truth, informing us that **in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth** (Genesis 1:1; cf. Romans 1:20).
- David affirmed that **the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above**

- **proclaims his handiwork** (Psalm 19:1).
- Because God created everything, everything is under his charge and therefore answerable to him.

1.1.2 A holy God

- The God of the Bible is **merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness**.
- While he is a God who is characterized as **keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, he is also a God who will by no means clear the guilty** (Exodus 34:6–7).
- As a holy and righteous God, who loves righteous deeds (Psalms 11:7; 33:5; 89:14; 97:2), God cannot simply ignore sin.

1.1.3 Summary

- The God of the Bible is our creator, to whom we are accountable, and who cannot ignore, but must punish, sin.

1.2 Truth 2: The Character of Humanity

The truth that God **will by no means clear the guilty** is bad news for humans, who all stand guilty before a holy God.

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1.2.1 The Goodness of Creation

- Humans were created good. When God created human beings, they were without sin. They were guiltless, innocent, righteous (Genesis 1:26–28, 31).
- In their innocence, God gave them a command which they both COULD and SHOULD keep (Genesis 2:15–17).
- Sadly, they disobeyed this command and, even though humanity retains something of the good image of God, guilt before God separates us from God.

1.2.2 The Guilt of Sin

- We are guilty of sin and accountable to God for our sin (Romans 3:9–20, 23).
- Our first parents—Adam and Eve—disobeyed God in the garden, and we inherit their sin nature, which condemns us before God (Romans 5:12).

1.2.3 The Definition of Sin

- Sin is any word, thought, deed, or motive that does not fully obey God and seek his glory as its highest end (see Romans 1:21; Ephesians 2:1–3; 1 John 3:4).
- We sin when we say, think, or do anything that God forbids.

- We sin when we fail to say, think, or do those things that God commands.

1.2.4 The Penalty for Sin

- The penalty for sin is death (Romans 5:12; 6:23).
- The death that we experience at the end of this life is only one part of that.
- Those who die in their sin face a second, eternal, irreversible death at the final judgment (Revelation 20:11–15).

1.2.5 Summary

- Sin is rebellion against God and his law, which expresses itself in doing what he prohibits and failing to do what he commands.
- We are all guilty of sin, and therefore incur the wrath of God, which is eternal destruction.

1.3 Truth 3: The Cross of Christ

In our sin, we are hopeless before God (Ephesians 2:11–12). But God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for sin so that those who repent and believe in him can be delivered from eternal death and given eternal life (John 3:16).

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1.3.1 Christ's life

- God's law demands perfect holiness, a standard that we all fail to meet because of our sin.
- Jesus came to earth as a human being (John 1:14), born of a virgin (Luke 1:34–35), and lived a human life for 33 years.
- In his life, he was **in every respect ... tempted as we are, yet without sin** (Hebrews 4:15).
- He lived a perfect life before God so that God could credit Christ's perfect righteousness to the sinners he came to save (2 Corinthians 5:21).

1.3.2 Christ's death

- Since death is the penalty for sin, and since Jesus never sinned, he did not deserve to die.
- He died a sinner's death on behalf of the sinners he came to save (Galatians 3:13).
- God accepted Jesus' sacrificial death as the full payment for the sins of those for whom he died (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).
- As God credits Christ's righteousness to those who believe in him, so he credits our sin to Jesus who died for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

1.3.3 Christ's burial

- Jesus' burial proved that he really died, despite the suspicions of some critics who have suggested that he merely passed out and later recovered.
- Jesus' burial fulfilled prophecy (Matthew 12:40; Isaiah 53:9).
- Jesus' burial carries theological significance: In the same way that burial removed Jesus' body from the society of the living, so baptism is symbolic of the believer's removal from sinful society (Romans 6:1–4).

1.3.4 Christ's resurrection

- Jesus' resurrection fulfilled prophecy (Psalm 16:10 [cf. Acts 2:22–28]; Psalm 2:7 [cf. Acts 13:32–34]) and therefore verified his claims to divinity (Romans 1:4).
- Jesus' resurrection proved that God accepted his payment for sin and that he did everything that needed to be done to achieve salvation.
- Jesus' resurrection is the down payment that secures the future resurrection of all who believe in him (1 Corinthians 15:12–34).

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1.4 Truth 4: The Call to Sinners

Since Jesus, in his life, death, burial, and resurrection, did all that was necessary to save sinners, there is now an urgent call that God extends to sinners to repent and believe the gospel.

1.4.1 Faith

- Faith is trusting in Jesus Christ and his complete work to save you from your sin.
- Faith is “a rock solid, truth-grounded, promise-founded trust in the risen Jesus to save you from your sin” (Greg Gilbert).
- Paul tells us that salvation is granted by grace through faith, completely apart from works (Ephesians 2:8–10).
- The historical facts of the gospel must be received in faith by those who would be saved from eternal death.

1.4.2 Repentance

- Repentance is turning from sin to a life of obedience to Jesus Christ.
- “Repentance is sorrow for sin, accompanied by a determination, with the help of God, to sin no more” (James P. Boyce).

- Repentance is marked by a life of sacrifice (Mark 8:34).
- Apart from repentance, we will perish in our sins (Luke 13:3).
- Repentance is necessary for eternal life (Acts 11:18).

2. The God of the Gospel

The biblical gospel is **the gospel of God** (Mark 1:14; Romans 1:1; 15:16; etc.) because God sovereignly works to save sinners. As we think about the God of the gospel, there are at least five truths¹ to reflect on.

2.1 God Condemns Justly

While all humans are created in God's image and therefore bear inherent dignity, every human being is born enslaved to sin.

2.1.1 Romans 3:10–18 teaches that humans are innately sinful, not inherently good.

- This does not mean that sinners are devoid of all goodness or civility, but that sin affects us to our very root.

¹ These five truths are found throughout the Bible and consistently in the writings of centuries of Reformed theology. The specific wording of each heading is borrowed from Joe Thorn's *The Heart of the Church: The Gospel's History, Message, and Meaning* (pp. 77–104).

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- Sin so radically affects us that we can rightly be said to be **dead in ... trespasses and sins** (Ephesians 2:1–3).
- “The depth of our depravity renders us spiritually dead. We are defiled and unbelieving, impure in mind and conscience (Titus 1:15). In fact, our sin goes so deep and our hearts are so corrupt that we are incapable of doing anything spiritually good and thus pleasing to God” (Joe Thorn).

2.1.2 We cannot come to God apart from his initiating work (John 6:44)

2.1.3 All of this means that God is perfectly just in condemning all sinners to eternal death.

2.2 God Saves Sovereignly

The depth of our sin is such that we cannot and will not turn to God apart from his initiating grace.

2.2.1 Salvation is the sovereign work of God on every level.

- God sovereignly chooses those whom he saves (Ephesians 1:3–6).
- God sovereignly accomplishes the salvation of those he chooses (Romans 8:30; cf. Acts 13:48).

- God sovereignly sustains those whom he saves (see Point E below).

2.2.2 The truth of God's sovereign work in salvation encourages us that those whom he intends to save WILL be saved.

2.3 God Atones Effectively

In Jesus Christ, God did not provide potential salvation for those who would choose to believe, but actual salvation for those he chose to save.

2.3.1 Jesus came to **save his people from their sins** (Matthew 1:21), and he will not fail.

2.3.2 His people are those whom the Father gave to him (John 17:6–10).

2.3.3 “The mission of Christ was not to save as many people as possible, but to save a particular people: those the Father had given him” (Joe Thorn).

2.4 God Calls Irresistibly

The depth of our sin renders us incapable of and unwilling to turn to Christ in repentance and faith, until God calls us to himself.

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- 2.4.1 Jesus spoke of those whom the Father gave to him coming to him (John 6:35–37; 17:9–10).
- 2.4.2 The agency by which the Father draws sinners to the Son is the Holy Spirit, who births us again spiritually so that we believe the gospel (John 3:5–8).
- 2.4.3 Lydia is a good example of this: **The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul** (Acts 16:14).

2.5 God Sustains Faithfully

When God sovereignly saves a sinner, he sovereignly preserves the sinner so that he will never fall away.

- 2.5.1 Jesus said that sinners whom he saves are eternally secure in his hands (John 10:28–29).
- 2.5.2 Paul said that there is nothing that can separate God's people from God's love (Romans 8:35–39).
- 2.5.3 There are people who profess faith, but who never truly believe and therefore fall away (1 John 2:19). Yet those whom God truly saves he faithfully sustains.
- 2.5.4 Christians continue to sin, but God remains

present with his people, granting them repentance and leading them back to him (2 Timothy 2:25).

3. Important Gospel Truths

Note the following practical truths that apply to those who have repented of sin and believed the gospel.

- 3.1** Christians still sin after they are saved (Romans 7:14–25).
- 3.2** God disciplines his children when they sin (Hebrews 12:5–11).
- 3.3** Christians are characterized as people of repentance (1 John 1:6–10).
- 3.4** Christians take responsibility for their sin, realizing that they have been delivered from slavery to sin and so do not have to sin, even though they sometimes choose to sin (Romans 6:1–2).
- 3.5** God produces fruit of salvation in all those whom he saves. This fruit includes (but is not limited to):
 - 3.5.1** Conviction of, and increasing victory over, sin (1 John 1:8–10; 2:4, 9; 3:4, 6–8).

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- 3.5.2 Love for God (1 John 2:15–16; cf. James 4:4).
- 3.5.3 Love for other Christians (John 13:35; 1 John 4:20–21; cf. Matthew 5:21–23).
- 3.5.4 Prioritizing the things of God (Matthew 6:19–24).
- 3.5.5 Good (Christlike) works (James 2:14–26; Matthew 7:21–23).
- 3.5.6 An appetite for, and increasing understanding of, truth (Job 23:12; Isaiah 55:1–2; Psalm 63:1).

4. Recommended Resources

If you want to learn more about the gospel, we recommend the following resources.

- 4.1 *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert
- 4.2 *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* by Raymond Ortlund
- 4.3 *Getting the Gospel Right* by R. C. Sproul
- 4.4 *The Gospel's Power and Message* by Paul Washer
- 4.5 *The Gospel Call and True Conversion* by Paul Washer
- 4.6 *Ultimate Questions* by John Blanchard