

What Holy Scripture Says About Itself

The Bible is not God. The cross is not God. The Episcopal Church is not God. The Presiding Bishop is not God (and to the credit of all who have served in that post, they know that). Only God is God. So, what is the status of the Bible? Neither the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, nor Athanasius' Creed make reference to the Bible. What does God think about this? How do we know? Why should we care?

If there is no divine command, then there is no absolute "right" and "wrong"; we are stuck with relativism and utilitarianism. "Scandal" is only possible if there is a widely acknowledged sense of right and wrong. It has been reported that most Europeans had difficulty understanding why Americans were upset over President Bill Clinton's sexual morals.

If you accept that the Bible has any authority at all, then it is relevant to see what the Bible has to say about itself. The Bible does not have a long introduction to explain who wrote it, what it is, and why it is authoritative. It begins by asserting its own authority in Genesis to make the boldest statement ever made to mankind, "In the beginning, God", and closes at the end of Revelation with "Amen". The Baptists are well known for citing 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The Hebrews returned to Jerusalem from captivity to build the Second Temple in the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia, 538 BC. This is the setting in which Ezra reeducated the people of Israel about God's law, 48 years after the previous temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. This was necessary because two generations had grown up without hearing the Word of God in public. (Does this sound something like today?) This account clearly demonstrates that Holy Scripture was the authoritative reference of understanding God's law.

Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel.¹ All the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding.² And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose.³ The Levites helped the people to understand the law while the people remained in their places. And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.⁴

¹ Ezra 7:10

² Nehemiah 8:1-2

³ Nehemiah 8:3-4

⁴ Nehemiah 8:7-8

The first words of Jesus recorded in Matthew is Jesus expressing the requirement to fulfill all righteousness.⁵ The second quote of Jesus is of Jesus quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.⁶ The devil quoted Psalm 91:11-12 in rebuttal to Jesus' proof-text.⁷ Jesus' next recorded words are quoting Deuteronomy 6:16.⁸ His next words are quoting Deuteronomy 6:13.⁹ After that, the devil left Jesus. Clearly, Jesus considered Deuteronomy authoritative, as Satan considered Psalms, when it seemed to be to his advantage. Jesus opened his public ministry by reading Isaiah 61:1.¹⁰ Jesus said of the Old Testament, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me."¹¹ After his resurrection, Jesus met Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus. Jesus instructed them:

"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.¹²

Jesus later met the remaining 11 disciples. After convincing the disciples that it really was Jesus that was with them, Jesus taught them about the scriptures. Holy Scripture clearly was important to Jesus. He considered it authoritative, and he intends for it to be important to us. It is through the scriptures that we learn about him, and of him.

"These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.¹³

⁵ Matthew 3:15

⁶ Matthew 4:4

⁷ Matthew 4:6

⁸ Matthew 4:7

⁹ Matthew 4:10

¹⁰ Luke 4:18

¹¹ John 5:39

¹² Luke 24:26-27

¹³ Luke 24:44-51