

Introduction

As Pastors and Elders at The Tree Church, we are sometimes asked questions about our understanding of what Scripture has to say to the church. Without a denominational body to dictate what we teach and why we teach it, the leadership of The Tree Church wishes to clarify the official positions of our church body.

In creating an official position, we acknowledge the varying opinions held by brothers and sisters in Christ who disagree with the positions held within these pages. The Tree Church holds to these convictions with humility, but also with confidence that our interpretation is based on the best evidence for understanding the included passages.

We hope these papers clarify our position, but we also invite discussion. If you disagree, or have questions about our position, we hope this paper will lead to a conversation, where we can grow together in our understanding of God's words to us.

Overview

Since the end of the first century, the Christian community has been dependent on a group of writings believed to carry on the faithful witness of the Apostles. This witness is what is commonly known as the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, the word of God. The Christian writings, combined with the Jewish Scriptures, have sat at the very heart of the Christian faith community throughout the 2000 years of its existence, informing and directing its members' beliefs, theology, and practices. Despite the vast amount of work and interpretive diversity throughout its history, it has been central to every denomination and form of Christian community to varying degrees. Without the Scriptures, their witness to the person and work of Jesus, and their claim to authoritatively speak for God, the people of God would have had to rely on the oral traditions passed down generation to generation. However, God saw fit to use these ancient texts to record for us the way of Jesus, and how life, hope, and love can be found in Him.

At The Tree Church, we see Jesus as the ultimate Word of God (*logos*, John 1:1), fully revealing who God is, and the Bible as the faithful witness to the Word, who is written on every single one of its pages. The Bible is central and primary at The Tree Church. We see it as the inspired, authoritative, useful, and sufficient witness that God has given to His people to reveal who He is, what He has done, and how He calls His people to walk in relationship with Him.

Scripture As Revelation

The Tree Church's view of Scripture begins with the idea that God speaks. He has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity and share who He is, what He is like, and how we can relate to Him. The anonymous writer of Hebrews testifies to the fact that God has spoken through prophets and ultimately Jesus:

*¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
- Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV)*

God wants His creatures to know Him, and so He condescends to give them what He wants them to know of Himself. We believe Scripture is the way He has chosen to preserve this revelation from the time it was written, all the way through the ages.

Jesus Himself stands as the ultimate revelation of the nature and character of God, and according to Karl Barth, He is the true Word of God¹. Colossians says of Jesus, “He is the image of the invisible God...” (Colossians 1:15 ESV). Scripture then testifies, or bears witness² to the true Word, Jesus Christ. If we want to know who God is and what He desires from humanity, we need to look to Jesus as found in the pages of Scripture.

What is Considered Scripture?

There are many references to the word “scripture(s)” in the New Testament. Because the Christian New Testament was not written at this time, we can safely assert the authors were referencing the Hebrew Scriptures. This gives us a glimpse into how the early church viewed and used the writings of Scripture.

Each of the authors was grounded in a knowledge of the texts found in the Hebrew Scriptures. They saw in Jesus the fulfillment of these writings. Their testimony was that He was the long-awaited Messiah, God’s promise of rescue, redemption, and the ultimate blessing for His people. As Paul, Luke, Peter, and the various other authors began to write out their narratives and letters, they relied heavily on God speaking through the Old Testament scriptural tradition. The witness of the Gospels attests that Jesus saw His life, public ministry, death, and resurrection as the fulfillment of Yahweh’s plans, and Himself as the ultimate revelation of Yahweh.³

The New Testament was quick to develop, with all the writings taking place some 40 to 60 years after Jesus’s death and resurrection.⁴ Early on, these writings of Paul, Luke, Peter, and various others were recognized as having a “unique authority” by the early church, and many began to see these writings as Scripture. Even as early as the letter to Second Peter, Paul’s writings were seen on par with the other “Scriptures” (Old Testament).

¹ Karl Barth, *God Here and Now*, Routledge Classics. (London: Routledge, 2003) <https://search-ebscohost-com.fuller.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=93033&site=ehost-live&scope=site> , 14.

² Karl Barth, *God Here and Now*, 22.

³ John 5:16-30, 8:39-59, 10:22-42

⁴ Paul Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 4.

¹⁵ “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.”

- 2 Peter 3:15-17 (ESV)

The Tree Church holds that both “testaments,” the Old (a reordering of the Hebrew Bible) and the New, bear witness to and reveal the nature and workings of the same triune God—Yahweh, His Son Jesus, and the Spirit—throughout the history of His people.⁵

The Purpose of Scripture

When the Apostle Paul, in writing to his protégé Timothy, a young pastor and missionary, describes how Timothy should lead and work in the church, he points him to Scripture. In doing so, we get a glimpse into how Paul viewed these texts and how he thought the Christian community should use them. He tells Timothy:

¹⁶ “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NRSV)

He points Timothy toward the word of God to support and carry out all that God had in store for the community of faith. This passage is a framework for how The Tree Church views the use and purpose of Scripture in our community. At The Tree Church, we believe:

Scripture is Inspired

The Bible is a collection of various pieces of literature that were collected and arranged over thousands of years. Certain people of God, at certain times, for certain occasions, within certain contexts, used their God-given gifts, abilities, and intellect to capture the heart, intentions, and words of God in written form. As God has done throughout the history of time, He uses human faculty to carry out His purposes. In the Bible, we have a unique product of the Spirit’s work through human hands. Second Peter testifies that it is not simply human imagination that births these writings.

⁵ Referenced here is the Protestant Canon. For discussion on the Apocrypha and its inclusion in the Catholic Bible, see “[The Apocrypha](#)” by Michael J. Kruger.

²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

– 2 Peter 1:20-21 (ESV)

The Bible would not exist without the human medium, and it would not exist without the Divine inspiration. The neglect of either of these aspects comes at the detriment to our view of Scripture and what it has to say to the church. If we neglect the Spirit's inspiration, the Bible is strictly a human history of the people of Israel and an off-branch sect who found hope in a crucified rabbi. If we neglect the human aspect of these documents, we fail to recognize the reality of the process with which God chose to reveal Himself in these writings. It can lead to tragic misunderstandings of God's intent found within these texts, and lead to potential error as a body of believers. At The Tree Church, we strive to walk in both realities, recognizing the need to study the uniquely human aspects such as genre, history, language, context, and tradition of compilation, while also recognizing the supernatural leading of the Spirit in the writing and collection of the Scriptures.

Scripture is Authoritative

Because the Scriptures carry with them a unique stamp of the Spirit's inspiration, it also gives these writings a unique authority within the people of God. The Christian church has traditionally used many modes of "authority" through its history to guide and direct its beliefs and practices, such as: church tradition, experience, philosophy, and Scripture. In practicality, all of these have a level of influence, but the Scriptures stand apart as the "norming norm"⁶ – meaning that Scripture acts as the foundation upon which the others are built, and the underlying standard that these other forms should be measured against. This places Scripture as the primary and most prominent authority for The Tree Church. All theology and practices of The Tree Church will be rooted in the unique authority of the Canon (66 books) of Scripture. Through these writings, God speaks to His church, revealing His personality, design, and direction, so the people of God at The Tree Church (with the illumination of the Spirit of God) have everything they need to be saved, live faithfully, and fulfill the mission God has given them.

Scripture is Useful

While the Scriptures set the foundation for the overall vision and function of The Tree Church, they also are regarded as the main influence in the lives of its people. The Tree Church will instruct the people of God to look to the Scriptures as a place to find guidance, hope, wisdom, encouragement, and conviction for their everyday lives. It is the primary way in which the Spirit speaks to His people. Regular reading and study are encouraged, not just for the leaders of the church, but for all who attend.

⁶ Stanley Grenz, "How Do We Know What to Believe, Revelation and Authority," *Essentials of Christian Theology*, by William Placher, Louisville (KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2003, Accessed August 17, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central), 20.

Scripture is Sufficient

The Tree Church recognizes the completeness and uniqueness of the Protestant canon⁷ and believes that its witness is sufficient for the church. The writings of the Christian Scriptures are unique in that no further revelation can or will be added to these current writings. The Tree Church does believe that the Spirit continues to reveal truth to God's people. Through prophetic words and the ideas expositied from the Scriptures, God continues to speak uniquely to His people. However, these revelations are to be supported by Scripture and measured against Scripture, not added to it. Hebrews best expresses this principle when it says:

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
-Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

The witness of Scripture did not end with its original first century audience but continued (and will continue) throughout the life of the church. Through the Spirit's leading, the Scriptures become applicable to the lives of the church and every individual believer today, teaching, correcting, and providing witness to God's saving work.

Which Translation Do We Use?

There are many good English translations of the Bible, and while we recommend that you become familiar with multiple translations, we primarily teach from the English Standard Version. This is considered a "word-for-word"⁸ or more literal translation that focuses on keeping the word and sentence structure found in the original language.

Tree Church Kids uses the NIV (New International Readers Version). It is a dynamic-equivalent translation that is easier for children to understand.

Conclusion

The Tree Church affirms that the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is the witness to the true Word of God, Jesus, and is alone the only inspired and authoritative revelation of God. Its authority is ultimate, final, and eternal. It should not be added to, subtracted from, or superseded in any regard. The Bible is the church's source for doctrine, instruction, correction, and reproof. It is through the Spirit-led reading and interpretation of Scripture that God speaks to His people and leads them on the path to full and everlasting life.

⁷ See Appendix 1 for a full list of biblical books.

⁸ Michael Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis, Rev. and Exp. Ed.*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2009), 42.

Appendix 1: Protestant Canon

Old Testament

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy
6. Joshua
7. Judges
8. Ruth
9. 1 Samuel
10. 2 Samuel
11. 1 Kings
12. 2 Kings
13. 1 Chronicles
14. 2 Chronicles
15. Ezra
16. Nehemiah
17. Esther
18. Job
19. Psalms
20. Proverbs
21. Ecclesiastes
22. Song of Solomon
23. Isaiah
24. Jeremiah
25. Lamentations
26. Ezekiel
27. Daniel
28. Hosea
29. Joel
30. Amos
31. Obadiah
32. Jonah
33. Micah
34. Nahum
35. Habakkuk
36. Zephaniah
37. Haggai
38. Zechariah
39. Malachi

The Tree Church Position Papers: Scripture

The New Testament

1. Matthew
2. Mark
3. Luke
4. John
5. Acts (of the Apostles)
6. Romans
7. 1 Corinthians
8. 2 Corinthians
9. Galatians
10. Ephesians
11. Philippians
12. Colossians
13. 1 Thessalonians
14. 2 Thessalonians
15. 1 Timothy
16. 2 Timothy
17. Titus
18. Philemon
19. Hebrews
20. James
21. 1 Peter
22. 2 Peter
23. 1 John
24. 2 John
25. 3 John
26. Jude
27. Revelation