
BASIS OF SCRIPTURE

Scripture is the basis of our understanding in determining belief and practice according to the truth of God.¹ The one God is revealed in continuity as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the God and Father of Jesus Christ our Lord. The Bible inseparably consists of both the Hebrew scriptures of the Jews the apostolic writings which testify to the Gospel of God in Christ Jesus.

Cannon of Scripture

The *Bible* pertains both to the Hebrew scriptures of the Jews, referred to as the *Old Testament*, and the apostolic Greek texts collectively called the *New Testament*. The Scriptures of the *Old Testament* (Jewish TANAKH) consists of the five books of Moses (TORAH), the prophets (NEVI'IM), and the writings (KETHUVIM). The *New Testament* includes the *Gospels*², the *Acts of the Apostles*, the Pauline epistles, other apostolic epistles, and the *Revelation of Christ*.

While, we accept no apostolic writings outside the 27 books of the traditional New Testament canon to be authoritative, we understand that the books canonized in the 4th Century by the Church of Rome under Constantine are not all equal in their degree of divine inspiration and in their efficacy for teaching and preaching the things concerning the Gospel. While most of the minor epistles were not initially considered canonical³, we accept these as authorities – yet as supplemental to the more undisputed apostolic writings. Of the other books disputed early in Christianity, we hold the *Revelation* to be truly the revelation of Christ and the book of *Hebrews* to truly reflect the testimony of Christ and the Gospel.

The most significant distinction that should be made regarding the NT canon is the authority of the synoptic gospels Mark and Luke over the gospel attributed to Matthew. While Matthew has traditionally been the most endeared on account of its language, style and presentation of Jesus, it is the least creditable of the synoptic gospels. We reject Matthew as a primary authority due to the numerous contradictions, discrepancies⁴, and additions compared to the other more creditable testimonies of Mark and Luke. Matthew was written latter than Mark and Luke and can be demonstrated to embellish the accounts of Jesus and to expand upon his words. For these reasons we associate Matthew with the belief and practice of later Christians rather than of Christ's Apostles.

¹ 2 Tim. 3:15-17

² Mark, Luke, and John as primary, the gospel attributed to Matthew as secondary

³ II Peter, II John, III John, James, and Jude were not originally considered canonical.

⁴ For example, the phrase "kingdom of heaven" occurs 31 times in Matt but nowhere else in the NT. "Kingdom of God" is the standard phraseology occurring 61 times throughout other books of the NT.

Earliest texts as primary authorities

Popular English translations of Scripture follow a bias according to conventions, dogmas, and creeds that were not held by Christ or by the apostles. Therefore we consider only in the most original text as Scripture inspired and authoritative in the revelation of God and his truth. The Bible consists of the writings inspired by God in its original language and content. The most original texts are of authority over any translation and are infallible as divine Scripture to the extent that the text is free from corruption. Modern scholarship has done much in producing restored texts that are much more accurate than those widely accepted centuries ago.

Our official Old Testament source is the Hebrew Text of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS, 2nd ed., 1983). The BHS is a scientific, printed edition of the Leningrad Codex-the oldest complete masoretic manuscript of the Bible. Various edited forms of the BHS are to be primary sources, especially the Hebrew text based on the MCW⁵ version of the BHS by The Jewish Publication Society (JPS, 2nd ed. 1999).⁶ The official New Testament Greek texts are the 1993 editions of the *Greek New Testament* (4th ed.), published by the United Bible Societies (UBS), and *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed.) edited by Nestle and Aland.⁷ The texts of these two sources are identical, differing only in their lists of variant readings and documentation.

Translations of Scripture

We assert that that popular English translations of Scripture follow a bias according to conventions, dogmas, and creeds that were not held by Christ or by the apostles. Because of the express shift of Christianity from its original roots in Judaism to the influence of paganism toward false doctrines, we understand that even the early writings and creeds of the 2nd through 4th century “church fathers” cannot be taken as truly reflecting the belief and practice of the apostles. Yet, all popular Christian translations of the Bible are in accordance with a presupposition toward the unbiblical doctrines of the later “orthodox” tradition . For example, the doctrine of the Trinity wasn’t widely accepted until the 5th century, yet this doctrinal influence has dominated every major English translation of the Bible since the beginning of English translations during the 16th century.

All translation is interpretation. Since there is no way to perfectly equate one language to another, translators make a vast number of interpretations in the translation process. For this reason “original” sources must be considered the primary authority over any translation into English or another language. Even the most literal translations of the Bible contain within them a substantial amount of interpretation. While it is necessary to use translations of the Bible, we believe a translation should accurately maintain both the content and meaning of the earliest most creditable manuscripts. Accuracy is best ensured by a literal word for word translation, as opposed to a “though for thought” paraphrase.

⁵ The *Michigan-Claremont-Westminster* (MCW, 1987) is an electronic version of the BHS developed to produce optimal accuracy and good documentation.

⁶ The *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, 2nd ed., is a suggested reference for the Old Testament language study and translation of Hebrew to English.

⁷ The Nestle-Aland *Greek-English New Testament*, 2nd ed., is a suggested reference for the New Testament language study and translation of Greek to English.

Since the heritage of current popular translations is a predisposition toward “orthodox” tradition, only the most literal of the popular translations should be used in study and discourse of the Holy Scripture. The English Standard Version (ESV), 2001, by Crossway Bibles is one of the most acceptable translations widely available. Despite the traditional “orthodox” heritage of ESV, it is an “essentially literal” translation and doesn’t exhibit the degree of bias in editing and formatting as other literal editions. The New American Standard Bible (NASB), is probably the most “literal” of the widely available translations but uses misleading and interpretive section headings while also departing from correct English in the subjective capitalization of common nouns and pronouns “pertaining to Deity”. Editorial choices like these, as well as phrasing, punctuation and even indicating the words of Jesus in red⁸, reflect a significant degree of subjectivity although words themselves may be quite literal.

The most universal bias in translations of the New Testament is the identifying both the Greek *pneuma* (spirit) and *logos* (word) of God as persons rather than qualities or aspects of God. The consequence of non-biblical Trinity dogma has thus resulted in rendering pronouns attributed to these qualities of God as “he”, “him”, and “himself” rather than the pronouns “it” and “itself” that would result from abstract nouns. Of the misleading use of pronouns and personification of abstract nouns, the most widespread deception in the New Testament occurs in the prologue to the Gospel of John, wherein the logos, God’s reason by which he created all things, is construed to be a pre-incarnate person of a triune God, being “with” God and being “God”. For a more proper translation of John’s prologue, refer to William Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament.

⁸ John 3:16-21 and 3:31-36 are more correctly monologues of John rather than direct quotations of Jesus and John (the Baptist) respectively.