

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God

January 8, 2023 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

As many of you know, 'Langford Community Church' used to be 'Langford United Church.' Langford was actually originally a Methodist church planted by saddlebag preachers, but in back 1925, when the Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregational churches joined to become the United Church, Langford joined too. And as far as I know, Langford felt right at home in the United Church's fold.

In the late 80's though, many of you made the momentous decision to leave the United Church and to begin anew as a community church out here at Langford. Why?

There are specific reasons, I know, for that departure, but broadly speaking, what happened? The United Church changed what it believed about God, about people, about the Bible, and that change in *belief* brought about a change in *action*. The United Church's Statement of Faith back in 1925 is actually a pretty solid statement, but little by little, it became clear that that's not what they believed anymore and it was reflected in what they did.

And so, since 'what we believe' affects 'what we do,' when you realized that you no longer believed as the United Church did, it was time to do something. And so many of you took the bold but risky step of leaving the United Church to reincorporate as an independent, community church.

Which I'm sure got you thinking – 'What do we truly believe in here? What are the fundamental beliefs that shape our life and faith that we would go so far as to break with seventy years of precedent and leave the safety of a nationwide denomination to protect?'

Our statement of faith is the answer. These are not a dry list of doctrines; these statements represent the fundamental truths that shape our life and faith here at the church. These are the truths that we will defend no matter the cost and so we're going to spend the next few weeks looking at them together.

Now to be honest, the idea of doing this series is actually rooted in our kids' times about a year ago. Remember that? We looked together at the Apostles' Creed. It starts: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Just like our statement of faith, the Apostles' Creed lays out the foundational beliefs that shape our actions. But if you were to compare the Apostles' Creed and 'the Langford creed,' you'd notice a big difference, right off the bat.

The Apostles' Creed doesn't say anything about the Bible and yet here at Langford, it's the very first statement. Why? Why do we think it's so important that we would go beyond the Apostles' Creed and put the Bible at the very beginning of ours?

There are some historical reasons for that which we can talk about another time if you want to ask me, but in short, it's this: what we believe about the Bible shapes how we see everything else.

If the Bible is just a human book, irretrievably locked in the cultures of its day, then we can stand in judgment over it and pick and choose what we want to learn from and disregard the rest. We can treat it like it's just another ancient book of wisdom that we don't really HAVE to listen to if we don't like it.

If on the other hand, the Bible is a divine book, written by God Himself, that changes how we approach it. If this is in fact God's book, the one and only revelation of Himself that the all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful Creator of the Universe gave to us for our benefit, then we would do well to listen to it and live in light of it.

What we believe out the Bible determines what we believe about everything else.

So here's the question that we need to wrestle with today. What do we believe about the Bible? What do you believe about the Bible? And is what you do about it consistent with what you believe?

Let's look at our Statement of Faith here. And let's read the first point together.

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is the only divinely inspired and infallible revelation of God. It is our only written guide and final authority in matters pertaining to faith and life.

That's what we believe about the Bible here at Langford. Now let's walk through that and talk about what it means.

Let's start here: 'We believe that the Bible ... is the only divinely inspired ... revelation of God.'

In other words, we believe that the Bible is unlike any other book because it alone tells us who God is and what He's done in His own words. The Bible is in a sense God's autobiography.

Now the reason that we use the language of 'divinely inspired' is rooted in a very important passage of Scripture - 2 Timothy 3:16-17. We're going to look at a lot of Scripture today, but I'd encourage you to keep a finger or a little bookmark in 2 Timothy 3 because we're going to keep coming back to it.

So, 2 Timothy 3:16 says: 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for [a number of things]...

When we say that we believe that the Bible is divinely inspired, we don't mean that Paul was thinking about God and it *inspired* him to write down some interesting things. That's how we usually use the word 'inspired' today. For example, did you know that Velcro was inspired by

burrs that get stuck on your pants? A Swiss engineer named George de Mestral was walking with his dog and noticed how these burrs were sticking to his clothes and his dog's fur. He looked at them under a microscope and realized that they had hooks that hooked onto his clothes and thought 'hey, I could use that to fasten things' and that's how Velcro was invented. It was 'inspired' by burrs.')

That's not what we mean though when we say that Scripture is divinely inspired. What we mean by that is that God Himself has breathed out these words and given them to us. They come directly from God Himself, flowing from His inner being the way that our breath flows from our lungs.

(And in case you're wondering, it literally says 'God'-'breathed' in Greek; when Bible translators took that into Latin, they used the words 'divinitus inspirata' and over time that became our English word inspire, albeit with a slightly different meaning). So when we say that all Scripture is divinely inspired, we're saying that God Himself has given us these words. He's breathed them out.

There's another passage though that helps us to understand what that and that's 2 Peter 1:20-21 –

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

That means that when Paul and Moses and Peter and Isaiah wrote down the things they did in the Bible, they weren't just writing down things that they thought sounded smart. Instead, they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit, God breathing out His message into their hearts and minds so that they would accurately record what it was that He wanted to reveal. When we say that the Bible is divinely inspired then, we mean that it is God's own word, written by people who were carried along by the Holy Spirit to record everything that God wanted said and nothing more.

Now, that's not to say that God simply dictated the Bible and all the authors wrote it down. It's not like He said – 'Hey Siri, take a note' – to Paul and Moses and Peter. Rather, these men were carried along by the Holy Spirit as they wrote.

Back in the 1910's there was a series of publications called 'The Fundamentals' that laid out the basics of a traditional, evangelical worldview and they put it like this: "Inspiration is not a mechanical, crass, bald compulsion of the sacred writers, but rather a dynamic, divine influence over their freely-acting faculties."ⁱ

Sometimes, God DID tell them exactly what to say – like 'thus saith the LORD' – but a lot of the time, God simply guided these men by the Holy Spirit as they used their culturally shaped intellects to write down what God intended to be said. Yes, there were people involved in

writing it and yes they used the cultural and artistic forms of their day, but it was ultimately God who was breathing out the message that He intended for us to see and He made sure that it was only what He intended us to see in the Bible.

Which means then that the Bible is not just divinely inspired; we believe that the Bible is also infallible, that is accurate and true. This is GOD's Word, with no human additions. If this is God's Word and God cannot lie, then it follows necessarily that what's written in the Bible contains no untruths.ⁱⁱ It is accurate and trustworthy in what it says. It may be written in a way that reflects the worldview of its authors, rather than the scientific outlook that we might have today – like the earth being the centre of the universe or being held up on pillars (1 Samuel 2:8) – but given the times and circumstances it was written in, it is accurate in its communication of God's truth. It will not lead us astray.

Which is why we believe that '... the Bible ... is the only divinely inspired and infallible revelation of God.' But... does that mean that ALL of the Bible of divinely inspired and infallible revelation?

From the very beginning of Christianity, people have argued that only parts of Scripture are divinely inspired. There's a very famous document from about a hundred years after Jesus' lifetime (the 140's AD) from a guy named Marcion who essentially cuts out the OT and anything supernatural in the New and calls that the Bible. He thought essentially only part of Luke and Paul's letters were divinely inspired. Thomas Jefferson did the same. He literally took a razor and cut out of the Bible anything that he deemed intellectually impossible and decided that only Jesus' moral teachings were divinely inspired.

That same attitude continues today. In 1992 there was a report on the Authority and Interpretation of Scripture published by the United Church; in it they wrote: "Our United Church tradition recognizes ... that the Bible is our sacred text, but not in the sense that the Bible was actually written by God.... Hence, the Basis of Union does not say that the Bible is the word of God, but that it contains it. In short, we are left to discern what is the word of God today."ⁱⁱⁱ By, as their 2006 'Song of Faith' says, "...wrestl[ing] a holy revelation for our time and place from the human experiences and cultural assumptions of another era."^{iv}

Is that true though? Are there parts of the Bible that are God's Word and parts that are not?

Well, what does the Bible itself say? Luke 24:25-27 puts Jesus on the Emmaus Road with His disciples and He goes through the whole of the OT and shows them that 'all of the Scriptures' pointed to Him.^v Romans 15:4 says something quite similar: "For **everything** that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. And then of course there's 2 Timothy 3:16 again: "**ALL** Scripture is God-breathed" and it useful for believers.

That's why "We believe that the Bible, **consisting of the Old and New Testaments**, is the only divinely inspired and infallible revelation of God."

Now if that's true, what are the implications? What does it mean for us that the whole of the Bible is the divinely inspired and infallible revelation of God?

That's where the second line comes - It is our only written guide and final authority in matters pertaining to faith and life.

God is not like James Patterson or Jodi Picoult putting out a new book every few years; God wrote one book and since it is His one and only revelation of who He is, we give it first place in our lives. We let it have authority over us to determine how we see and act in the world.

Now just to compare and contrast a little, the United Church's statement on Scripture says that: "As *a* source of wisdom, personal prayer, and devotion, we believe that reading and studying the Bible can bring us closer to God" and "It remains **one** of our best ways of experiencing God's continuing work."^{vi}

If the Bible is the one and only revelation of the one God in His own words, doesn't that mean that it should have first place in our lives? Granted, there are many other helpful resources that I make use of in my life, but the Bible alone is my authority for life and faith.

We don't judge the Bible and pick and choose what it says; we do our best to shape our lives in light of what God has said within it. I remember someone asking me 'Do you read the Bible to make it say what you want it to say? Or do you read the Bible to hear what it has to say?' That's a good question for us all to consider.

The reason that we believe that the Bible is our final authority on life and faith, besides affirming that it is God's OWN Word to us, is found, once again, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2Tim 3:16-17 NIV).

Now you'll notice that there's a little sandwich there – what is Scripture useful for? It's good for teaching and training (it shaped and forms us) and rebuking and correcting (it brings us back when we go astray). We don't read Scripture and hold authority over it; we listen to Scripture and let it shape and reconfigure our lives in response.

It being just after Christmas, we have a bunch of LEGO in our house and we've been doing some building, flipping through the pages, following the instructions. Every so often, we say – 'wait, something's not right here. It doesn't fit right.' When that happens, we don't say 'the instructions, there must be something wrong with you, I'm just going to press ahead and do it myself;' we go back to the instructions to see where we've gone wrong, we submit to their authority and get ourselves back on track. That's a picture of 2 Timothy 3:16-17. We are shaped by the written word and let it correct us when we get off track, all so that we will be built up and equipped for doing good in the world.

Psalm 119:104-105 is really helpful here:

104 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Sure, I could go off on my own way or lay aside the light and go off into the darkness chasing a far off light; but why not let the Word of God, which we have, light our path?

We believe that the Bible is God's life-giving, path-lighting Word and so we allow it to shape and to mold us, to define for us what's right and wrong, and to be the final word in our life and faith.

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is the only divinely inspired and infallible revelation of God. It is our only written guide and final authority in matters pertaining to faith and life.

In other words, we believe that the whole Bible is God's Word and our guide.

The whole Bible, the OT and the NT, the stories, the letters, the poetry, even the genealogies are God's inspired Word, chosen by God to reveal Himself to us, and written down to show us how to live lives that thrive in relationship with God. We don't hold authority over the Bible; we do our due diligence and do our best to interpret it responsibly, but always with the conviction that it is God's Word to us to light our path and guide us in life.

We believe that the whole Bible is God's Word and our guide.

Given that, what do we do with it? What do these doctrines, these truths mean for us in our everyday lives? Let me give you three ideas:

1. See the Bible as God's Word. When I was young, the Bible just seemed like this stuffy old book to me. The King James Version, which I can appreciate now for its poetry, just seemed too hard to understand and then when I got my own children's Bible, all I wanted to do was read about the giants. But the more time I spend reading the Bible, the more time I spend listening to the Bible, the more time I spend reflecting on the fact that this ancient document has come down to us through persecution better attested than any other ancient document, lead me to the conclusion that this really is God's Word. Spend some time this week thinking about what you believe about the Bible. Is it just any old book? Or is it truly God-breathed, divinely inspired; your Creator and Redeemer speaking to you? 1. See the Bible as God's Word.

2. Let the Bible shape your worldview. That's what it means I think to make the Bible the final authority in life and faith. We let the Bible shape how we see and act in the world.

Stanley Grenz puts it like this:

“...To confess that the Bible is authoritative for ‘faith and practice’ means that Scripture must saturate all of life. Placing ourselves under the teaching of the Bible commits us to confessing a biblical worldview. A biblically informed outlook, in turn, will eventually permeate our attitudes and actions in every part of life... Our acknowledgement that the Bible is authoritative for faith and practice demands, therefore, that we apply to every area of life what the Spirit is speaking through the Scriptures.”^{vii}

That means that we don’t base our judgments of right and wrong on what’s culturally acceptable or widely popular at any given time; we make every effort to see the world from God’s point of view, using His Word to shape our perspective.

That’s why I love doing Q’s from the Pews and why those messages are so Scripture heavy – I’m trying to model taking a real world idea, looking at it in light of Scripture and then working out how to faithfully apply God’s Word, in the world where we find ourselves. That’s how you develop a Bible-shaped worldview.

Again, just by way of contrast, there’s a United Church document on the authority and interpretation of Scripture that says:

In conclusion then, the authority of the Bible is found: - in the interrelationship of the individual and the community; - in the interrelationship of past and present with a shared vision of the future; - in the struggle to understand God’s word for us today; - in the act of engaging, which confirms or denies that authority; - in the conviction, liberation, and transformation that it brings to our personal and community lives.^{viii} (That was 1992! What they are today as an institution has grown out of this belief.)

The authority of the Bible is found in the fact that it is GOD speaking to us. Know that when you read Scripture, GOD Himself speaks; listen to Him and let His Word shape your worldview.

So, see the Bible as God’s Word; let the Bible shape your worldview; and 3. Here it comes –

3. Spend time reading God’s Word so that it will shape your worldview. The only way that Scripture will shape you, for your benefit, is if you read it and engage with it. Last week I mentioned an article my preaching prof had written; in it he quoted a study that found that only one in seven Canadians read the Bible at least once a week. How are we going to be faithful followers of Jesus if we’re not listening to what He has to say? Now I’m willing to bet that we’re higher than that on average, but all the same:

If we are going to see the world from God’s point of view and act out of those convictions, then we need Scripture to shape our perspective. We need to spend time reading the Bible so that it will teach us and train us in righteousness, so that it will admonish us and correct us and call us back to faithfulness when we get off track. You don’t just suddenly ‘have’ a Christian worldview; you need to make the effort to construct it and the truths you read in the Bible are

the building blocks you use to put it together. Make reading the Bible a priority so that it will shape your beliefs, because what you believe will inform how you act. Spend time reading God's Word so that it will shape your worldview.

There are a handful of times when my grandmas and parents have written me little notes or cards; I have those stored away and when I get them out, it is a real joy to hear what they have said to me. How much more then should we delight in the words that our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer has given to us?

If you believe that the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is the only divinely inspired and infallible revelation of God, then let it be your only written guide and final authority in faith and life.

BENEDICTION

Colossians 3:16-17 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

ⁱ Wayland Hoyt, quoted in James M. Gray, "The Inspiration of the Bible – Definition, Extent and Proof," *The Fundamentals*, Volume 2, 126.

ⁱⁱ Douglas Blount, "What does it mean that the Bible is true?," *In Defense of the Bible*, 56.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture*, prepared by the Theology and Faith Committee for the General Council of the United Church of Canada, 1992. pg. 37-38.

https://ecumenism.net/archive/docu/1992_ucc_authority_interpretation_scripture.pdf,

^{iv} <https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/what-we-believe/faith-and-bible>

^v 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27 NIV).

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- ^{vi} <https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/what-we-believe/faith-and-bible>
- ^{vii} Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the community of God*, 404.
- ^{viii} https://ecumenism.net/archive/docu/1992_ucc_authority_interpretation_scripture.pdf