

What is the Bible? The Basics

1. **The Bible's Content:** The resurrected Jesus speaks to his disciples: *“These are my words that I spoke to you while with you: It is necessary that all that's been written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, “Thus it stands written that the Christ suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and the forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in his name to all the nations. Beginning at Jerusalem, you are witnesses of these things. And behold, I myself am sending you what my Father has promised you. As for you, stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:44-49)

- a) Who is the central figure in the Bible?
- b) How does Jesus refer to the Old Testament, affirming it with his divine authority?
- c) How does Jesus indicate what we call the New Testament and also affirms it with his divine authority, even though it had not yet been written?
- d) What are the two main messages of the Bible (John 1:17; Romans 1:16; 6:23)? How are they stated in the passage from Luke 24? Which one predominates (John 6:63, 68, 69)? What do we mean when we say it predominates (John 3:17, 18)?
- e) Therefore, what is the Bible's purpose? (John 20:31)
- f) Agree/disagree. Before the Holy Spirit can bring someone to faith in Jesus, you must first convince them that the Bible is God's inerrant, infallible, inspired Word.

2. The following passages show that the Bible is God's inspired Word and what that means. Unbelievers will accuse us of circular reasoning: “How can you prove the truthfulness of the Bible by quoting the Bible? You prove it by assuming its true to begin with!” How would you respond?

3. **The Bible is God's Word.** *For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* (2 Peter 1:21)
Explain: The Bible has many writers but only one author.

4. **The Bible is inspired.** *All Scripture is inspired [God-breathed].* (2 Timothy 3:16)
What's the difference between saying, “The Bible is inspired,” and “The Bible is inspiring.”

5. **The Bible is verbally inspired.** *This is what we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.* (1 Corinthians 2:13 NIV).

a) Verbal inspiration is a miracle that has no exact parallel in our earthly life. Any earthly illustration will fall short. Here are some comparisons that have been used to illustrate verbal inspiration. How do they fall short?

① As a tape recorder records your voice, so the Bible writers recorded God's words.

② As a musician blows into his instrument to make music, so God breathed into the writers.

- b) What are some methods God used so that the Biblical writers wrote word for word what he wanted them to write? Why don't the methods that involve human activity contradict verbal inspiration?
- c) Watch out for those who say the Bible came to us through JEPD or Q.
- d) Respond: As long as we agree that the thoughts of the Bible were inspired by God, we don't need to bother with whether the original words were inspired?
6. **The Bible is the only authority for our faith and life** (and therefore applies to our day-to-day living in the most practical ways). The Berean Christians *received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.* (Acts 17:11 NIV)
- Therefore, the Bible is the only rule and norm for our faith and life. It's the *canon*.
- a) Although many other churches say that the Bible is the authority they let reason, tradition, church hierarchy, communal or personal experience have equal or greater authority. Which of these do you see as the greatest danger in our times and why?
- b) Agree/Disagree: As confessional Lutheran we clearly confess the authority of God's Word as the only rule and norm for our faith and life, but we fall far short in putting it into practice. Support your answer.
7. **The Bible is sufficient.** *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* (2 Timothy 3:16, 17 NIV).
- Respond: Just as blind men touching only one part of an elephant fail to know what they are really touching, so also we cannot know God without taking into account all the truths the various religions teach about him.
8. **The Bible is efficacious (powerful)** (and therefore useful, practical). *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword ..."* (Hebrews 4:12 NIV)
- When we truly trust the power of God's Word, how do we show it in our actions as a church body, as a congregation, and as individuals?
9. **The Bible is clear.** *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.* (Psalm 119:105 NIV). Unless God's word is clear in matters of faith and life, it can't be a light or make us wise for salvation from little on up (2 Timothy 3:15).
- a) Respond: How can you say the Bible is clear when there are so many different interpretations out there with all the different denominations!
- b) Thoughts to ponder:
 Scripture is a stream an elephant can swim in and a lamb can wade across. What is clear gives nourishment; what is obscure, exercise; the former staves off hunger; the latter boredom. (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 108, Num. 1 (Winter 2011) p. 15.)

For further reading: *Bible: God's Inspired Word* by Pastor Brian R. Keller. Northwestern Publishing House, 2002. Series: People's Bible Teachings.