

ROOTED

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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Doctrinal Study Guide: The Scriptures

This edition of the Rooted newsletter marks the start of a series that will connect with themes from the Doctrinal Questionnaire. I begin it after working with folks across the conference and encountering a familiar theme: completing a Doctrinal Questionnaire involves responding to questions that assume familiarity with theological terms and concepts that some folks have not previously encountered. This resource series will act as an introduction to those terms and concepts.

My goal in focusing the Rooted newsletters in this way is simple: to provide basic overviews of key ideas and connections to helpful resources for further reflection. With reference to the DQ, I do not want to provide answers. The purpose of the DQ is for ministers to demonstrate their own theological reflection. Rather, [these issues will provide orientation to theological concepts and themes that are present in the DQ questions](#). In this resource, **bolded** terms refer to words and concepts that are asked about in the DQ, introduced in the order in which they occur in the DQ packet. This resource is about Part 1: The Scriptures. Future sections will come in future issues. It is my hope that by providing such orientation, our people might benefit theologically.

WHAT IS THE DOCTRINAL QUESTIONNAIRE?: A series of roughly 40 doctrinal and ministry questions designed to assess areas of ministry compatibility with BIC U.S.

“The Scriptures” is the first sub-section of the Doctrine portion of the DQ. This section includes five questions that ask for your understanding of the nature of the Scriptures, how they were developed, how they are best interpreted, and how they guide your life and ministry.



HOW GOD SHOWS HIMSELF

When Christians speak of **Divine Revelation** they are getting at the question of how God chooses to reveal his character. While we may never know God in his entirety, he has also chosen not to remain a complete mystery. There are attributes, emotions, and even history about himself (in relation to his people) that he wishes for us to know, so that we might have stronger relationships with him.

In this age where so many good resources are available we often take for granted that God has chosen to reveal himself to us, and that he does so through specific means. One of these means is the Bible, which itself testifies to other ways that God reveals himself to his people. But how exactly does God reveal himself through the Bible and through other means? In asking this question we do not need to understand all the mechanics behind that process, but how we understand God's self-revelation through the Bible shapes how we interpret the Bible for God's people. Here are a few verses that you might consider:

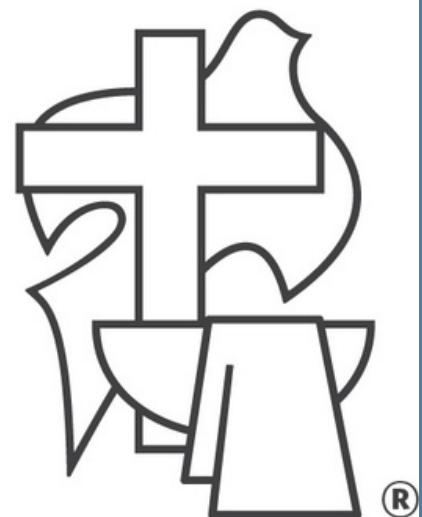
- Psalm 19
- John 1:1-18
- John 16:7-15
- Romans 1:20
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-8
- Hebrews 1:1-4

Recommended Read:

Articles of Faith & Doctrine: Revelation and Scripture
Brethren in Christ U.S.

Our doctrinal statements contain rich, yet easily read, descriptions of how our denomination understand God's self-revelation. This resource also provides scripture references for your own reflection on the themes.

Available at: <https://bicus.org/about/beliefs/articles-of-faith-and-doctrine/revelation-and-scripture>





HOW WE READ THE BIBLE

Most of us assume that the Bible holds some sort of **Authority** in our lives, but we may have never written down how it does. What Scriptural statements come to mind when you think about the Bible's authority for believers? Why do we follow the teachings of Jesus, Paul, and others in the Scriptures rather than other authorities that may exist in our lives? On what grounds can we trust the Scriptures as a source for God's desires for our lives?

Whether we recognize it or not, each of us is guided by certain **Principles for Interpretation** of the Bible. These may be a set of formal rules you learned in a class, or practices that you've seen others use when preaching, or habits that you've formed when studying the Bible on your own. The tools that we use when interpreting the Scriptures change how we teach others about them. And so, it is helpful for us to recognize (and name) the sort of tools that we keep in our tool chest. At this level in the DQ you should be thinking broadly about major tools and principles that guide your interpretation of the Bible.

The goal of this hard work in understanding, studying, and interpreting the Bible is **Practical Application**. Why does the Bible matter to our everyday life rather than just our doctrine? How does it inform your approach to ministry with those the Lord has called you to serve?



Resource Spotlight

How to Read the Bible video series

This multi-part video series offers guidance on how to read the Bible with sensitivity to the historical, cultural, and textual contexts that informed the authors of Scripture.

Highlights include:

- Literary Styles, Biblical Law, The Parables of Jesus, and Apocalyptic Literature

Available at:

bibleproject.com/videos/collections/how-to-read-the-bible



As you reflect on how God reveals himself through the Scriptures, it is also helpful to think about how the Scriptures came to be. We call the Holy Spirit's involvement in this process **Inspiration**. There was a time before God's people had access to any sort of Bible. Yet eventually there was a need for a written collection of stories, teachings, and ideas that communicate to human beings, and so scribes wrote these down in the books of our Bible. Christians of many traditions believe that somewhere in that process the Holy Spirit was involved. There are many different theories about what form(s) this involvement took. Some significant theories include:

- **Verbal Plenary** – The Bible preserves the precise words of God, who sovereignly guided the life circumstances and thoughts of the human authors to ensure that their writings reflected his intended message in every word.
- **Verbal Dictation** – The Bible preserves the precise words of God that were dictated by the Holy Spirit to the human authors, thereby ensuring that their personalities, viewpoints, and cultural beliefs did not influence the text. (Think of this like someone dictating a letter to a secretary)
- **Dynamic Inspiration** – The Bible preserves the intended meaning of God, delivered through the personal reflections of the human authors. In this theory the words of the Scriptures need not be precisely God's words, though they accurately deliver his message.
- **Partial Inspiration** – The Bible preserves the intended meaning of God and is truthful specifically in matters pertaining to salvation. There exists space for factual inaccuracies in history and worldview on the part of the human authors without violating the truthfulness of the Bible's core message.
- **Intuition** – The Bible reflects human wisdom that draws readers closer to God.

In describing your understanding of the Spirit's work, you may choose to consider these theories or to express your opinion in your own words. As you think about these matters, include some Bible verses that teach you about the Holy Spirit's role in the writing of the Scriptures, and what you understand those verses to mean. You may wish to start with the following: 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 4:12-13.

The Holy Spirit's work does not end with the writing of the last book of the Bible. He continues to guide followers of Jesus in the **Interpretation** of the Scriptures. How do you perceive the Spirit's involvement in how you, your church, the Brethren in Christ, or the broader Christian family read the Bible?



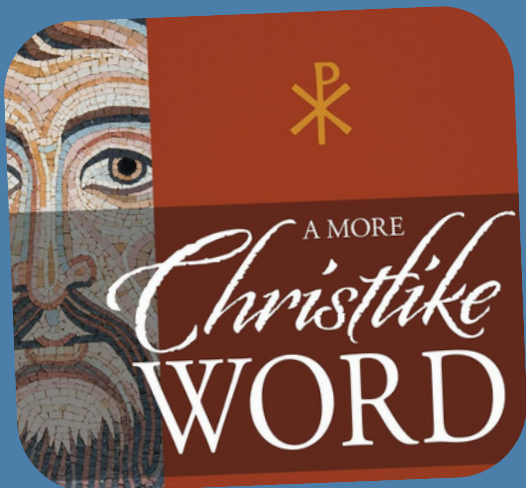
CONNECTING THE DOTS...

Our Bible includes two testaments: the Old Testament and the New Testament. That we have two major sections of our Bible rather than just one book is no accident. How we understand the **Relationship Between the Testaments** will inform how we read the books that make up the Old and the New. Some theories about this relationship include:

- That the Bible is flat and that both Testaments remain entirely in force.
- That the Old Testament is the only true revelation of God.
- That the New Testament is the only true revelation of God.
- That both Testaments are true revelations of God, but that the Bible is a progressive revelation that shows a fuller picture in the New Testament.

In describing your understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, you may choose to consider these theories or to express your opinion in your own words. Whatever approach you take, be sure to indicate how your understanding is shaped by the Scriptures themselves and how you have observed them read in your church community.

As Christians, our faith and our understanding of the Bible center around the person and work of **Jesus Christ**, who is called the Word of God. But what does it mean for us as a faith community to follow the Word (Jesus) who we learn about in the “Word” (Scripture)? How do we see Jesus interpreting the Bible of his day (the Old Testament)? How, based on his way of reading the Bible, should we read our Bibles today? Here are a few texts you may wish to consider as you explore such questions: Matthew 5–7; John 1; Acts 2:14–41; Hebrews 1–3; etc.



Recommended Read

A More Christlike Word (Bradley Jersak)

This book presents a thesis that Jesus, as the most perfect self-revelation of God, should be the key to how we interpret the Scriptures. Readers will find Jersak's engagement with difficult and controversial texts through the lens of the person & work of Jesus to be an interesting approach to the Bible.



A SOURCE FOR TRUTH?

Many of us assume that the Scriptures are a source of **Truth for Ministry**, but what exactly does that mean? By now you have likely given some thought to the Bible's authority and its status as one way that God reveals himself. Now you get to share how the Bible shapes your Faith and Conduct as both a follower of Jesus and as a minister of the gospel. This is where you can provide a personal answer rather than a doctrinal one, where you can (briefly) share stories about how you live in response to the matters described above.

When we speak of **Contemporary Issues** with regard to the interpretation of the Scriptures, we are talking about the sorts of mistakes that people make in their understanding of how God reveals himself through the Bible. Perhaps you have encountered these in your ministry or in books or conversations with others. When problematic teachings, doctrines, and practices guide how we read the Bible, the results can include skewed pictures of God and of the sort of lives he calls us to. In response to this question, you should share some of those skewed pictures, noting how they resulted from the ways and tools that people use when interpreting the Bible. Here is an example from history:

A Historical "Issue" with Interpreting the Bible

The early church was forced to address the teachings of Marcion of Sinope (85-160 CE), a theologian whose very literalistic interpretation of the Old Testament led him to conclude that the God of the Old Testament was a lesser being than the God of the New Testament, who was the Father of Jesus Christ. Marcion's interpretation of the Scriptures available to him at the time led him to create a list of approved books that centered around the letters of Paul and did not include our Gospels. It was in response to controversial figures like Marcion that the early church began to codify a New Testament canon of respected books.

Resource Spotlight

How Do We Know the Bible is True?

In this conversation between two theologians, listeners (including younger listeners) learn about how we can trust the Bible and how to faithfully interpret it today.

Available at: <https://www.holypost.com/post/how-do-we-know-the-bible-is-true>





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources may further aid your thinking about The Scriptures:

Brethren in Christ U.S. Statements

- [Articles of Faith & Doctrine: Revelation and Scripture](#)
- [What We Believe About the Bible](#)

Divine Revelation

- [How Do We Know God is Talking to Us?](#) (Curiously Kaitlyn, Holy Post Media)

Authority (of the Bible)

- Luke L. Keefer, Jr., "'Inerrancy' and the Brethren in Christ View of Scripture" in *Reflections on a Heritage* (Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1999)

Principles for Interpretation

- [How to Read the Bible series](#) (The Bible Project)
- Christina Bosserman, "Believing the Bible" in *Compelling Convictions* (Herald Press, 2024)
- Gordon Fee, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 2014)
- Martin Schrag, "A Historical Survey of Brethren in Christ Hermeneutics" in *Reflections on a Heritage* (Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1999)

Inspiration (of Scripture)

- [How Did God Inspire the Bible?](#) (Curiously Kaitlyn, Holy Post Media)
- [Who Wrote the Bible?](#) (The Bible Project podcast)

Relationship Between the Testaments

- Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Baylor University Press, 2014)
- Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Darrell L. Bock, Peter Enns, *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 2008)

Jesus Christ (and Scripture)

- [Sermon on the Mount series](#) (The Bible Project)
- [Why are Jesus and Scripture both called the Word of God?](#) (Curiously Kaitlyn, Holy Post Media)
- Bradley Jersak, *A More Christlike Word: Reading Scripture the Emmaus Way* (Whitaker House, 2021)
- Michael W. Pahl, *The Word Fulfilled: Reading the Bible with Jesus* (Herald Press, 2024)

(The Bible as) Truth for Ministry

- [How Do We Know the Bible is True?](#) (Curiously Kaitlyn, Holy Post Media)
- [Is the Bible Trustworthy?](#) (The Bible Project podcast)