

Foundations of Faith: Revelation

Summary: *all church members should understand and agree with the following.*

Inspiration of the Bible: We believe the content of the Bible is inspired by God, which is to say that God inspired people to write what he would have them write; and though these writings took on the personalities of the writers in terms of form, their content was directly from God.

Inerrancy of the Bible: We believe the content of the Bible, as originally written, is inerrant, which is to say without any falsehood or error in what it affirms when properly interpreted. This belief recognizes that in the Bible there is accurate reporting of human and satanic falsehoods, there are literary styles such as metaphor and hyperbole, and there are cultural idiosyncrasies such as rounded numbers and paraphrasing. It also recognizes that there are some apparent contradictions within the text and with other sources of truth, but assumes solutions exist. We believe the current English translations of the Bible are close enough to the original writings to be wholly sufficient to God's purposes.

Authority of the Bible: We believe the Bible has authority in our lives. Because we believe in the authority of the Bible, we use it as the basis for all we believe and as a guide in all that we do.

Sufficiency of the Bible: We believe the content of the Bible to be sufficient for achieving God's purposes for it. The Bible's account of itself provides clear purposes: leading people to the salvation offered in grace through faith in Christ, instruction in Christian living and spiritual growth, encouragement and hope, effectiveness in ministry, and inspiration to worship.

Reliance on the Bible: Because of the sufficiency of the Bible, we rely on it for developing the theology of the church. While we see value in understanding historical views and in using reason to help understand God's revelation, the diversity of the views developed over time suggests it is wise to take all teachings from tradition and reason and check them against the Bible. Likewise, while we value personal experiences with God and personal inspirations from the Holy Spirit, the diversity of views which develop in groups of Spirit-led believers suggests it is wise to take all conclusions from personal experience and inspiration and check them against the Bible. Because the Bible is God's inspired word, we know that we should interpret all things by this revelation, and that no thoughts which conflict with the Bible can be from God.

Canonicity of the Bible: We believe the books of the Bible have been correctly gathered and preserved into the "canon" – the collection of authentic sacred books – we call the Bible, which is to say that there are no books in the Bible incorrectly included and no books outside the Bible incorrectly excluded.

Interpreting the Bible: Our understanding of the Bible depends on proper interpretation. While the application of a biblical passage might be unique to each person reading it, there is only one true meaning, only one thing the authors – both human and God – meant to communicate to the contemporary audience. Our goal is to understand that original meaning and then discern how it is applicable today.

Detail:¹ all teachers and leaders should understand and agree with the following.

Inspiration of the Bible

We believe that God has revealed himself to mankind. He has done this in a general way through his creation, but more specifically by direct inspired communication through those who wrote the content of the Bible. The Bible is a collection of what God wants us to know. The Bible includes some of the words and actions of Jesus, who came in part to reveal God to man [John 1.18; 14.7]. *John 1.18 NIV:* “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”

Christianity is based on the apostolic teachings and practices which were recorded in the New Testament. John 20.31 is one example that shows the importance of basing our faith on these teachings: they show us who Jesus is, what he accomplished, and therefore what we need to believe in order to be saved. *John 20.30-31 NET:* “Now Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

We believe the content of the Bible is inspired by God, which is to say that God inspired people to write what he would have them write; and though these writings took on the personalities of the writers in terms of form, their content was directly from God [2 Timothy 3.16; 2 Peter 1.19-21]. *2 Peter 1.21 NASB:* “for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

We believe in the inspiration of the Bible in part because of tradition. The people of God have throughout history believed certain works collected in the Bible were inspired by God, and those works proved useful in their renewal and transformation by the Holy Spirit [Clement of Rome, *1st Clement* 45.2-3; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.28.2; Caius of Rome, as quoted by Eusebius, *Church History* 5.28; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.2, 11; Origen, *First Principles* 1.3.1; Augustine, *City of God* 1.3].

We believe in the inspiration of the Bible in part because of experience. We have seen this usefulness bear out in the lives of the people who have devoted themselves to applying the content of the Bible: there is a power in the Bible that is evidently supernatural. Also, there is an inner testimony of the Holy Spirit which verifies to us that these words are from God [1 Corinthians 2.12; 1 John 2.27]. *1 John 2.27 NLT:* “But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true-- it is not a lie. So just as he has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ.”

We believe in the inspiration of the Bible in part because of reason. As one theologian put it, “If we do not assume that God has spoken clearly and given us an adequate means of learning what He has actually said, then the entire story of the Bible and its portrayal of the plan of God for man’s salvation makes no sense whatever.”² In other words, if the Bible is not inspired, then we have little basis for our faith. In support of our confidence in inspiration, we recognize that the Bible is an amazing document: though it was composed in pieces by dozens of human writers over about sixteen centuries, the Bible has consistent themes and teachings throughout, incredible foreshadowing and prophesying of events that happened many centuries later, and intricate coordination and cohesiveness of what is revealed. It is impossible to believe this book could come together as it has, without God’s inspiration.

¹ A good source of basic theology is Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* [Chicago: Moody Press; 1999].

² Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler, 151-193 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House; 1980], 185.

Our confidence in the Bible's inspiration is consistent with the scriptural account of itself. In the New Testament, the apostle Peter wrote of his witness to the life and ministry of Christ and the supernatural events surrounding him [1-2 Peter]. Peter also stated his confidence in the scriptures of the Old Testament and declared that the Holy Spirit inspired them [2 Peter 1.19-21]. *2 Peter 1.19-21 NET: "Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."* When facing his temptation, Jesus answered by quoting scripture from Deuteronomy, implying its inspiration [Matthew 4.4-10], and in many other instances Jesus used biblical scripture authoritatively.

The apostle Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy to continue in the things he had learned from Paul, which would have included the gospel, the early writings of the church, and Paul's other teachings [2 Timothy 3.14]. Paul then said the Old Testament writings were sacred and could lead one to salvation in Christ [2 Timothy 3.15], after which he said "*All scripture is inspired by God*" [2 Timothy 3.16; NASB]. The Greek word for "inspired" in that verse literally means "God-breathed." Thus, we know God initiated the writing. In fact, God inspired the very words of each scripture in the Bible [2 Peter 1.21; 1 Corinthians 2.13]. *1 Corinthians 2.13 NET: "And we speak about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom, but with those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people."*

Paul went on in his letter to Timothy to say that Timothy should preach "the word," meaning the apostolic message, which became the New Testament teachings and included the Old Testament teachings [2 Timothy 4.2]. Paul testified to the inspired writing of Luke by quoting him as scripture [1 Timothy 5.18], and Peter referred to Paul's writings as equal to scripture [2 Peter 3.15-16]. *2 Peter 3.15-16 NET: "And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as also our dear brother Paul wrote to you, according to the wisdom given to him, ¹⁶ speaking of these things in all his letters. Some things in these letters are hard to understand, things the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they also do to the rest of the scriptures."*

Inerrancy of the Bible

We believe the Bible, as originally written, is inerrant, which is to say without any falsehood or error in what it affirms when properly interpreted. This belief recognizes that in the Bible there is accurate reporting of human and satanic falsehoods, there are literary styles such as metaphor and hyperbole, and there are cultural idiosyncrasies such as rounded numbers and paraphrasing. It also recognizes that there are some apparent contradictions within the text and with other sources of truth, but assumes solutions exist.

We believe in this inerrancy because we believe God inspired the content of the Bible. We believe God to be without error or falsehood, which is consistent with the portrayal of God in the Bible [John 7.28; Titus 1.2]. Thus we believe God's word to be true, as was affirmed by Jesus [John 17.17] and elsewhere in the Bible [Psalm 119.160], and if God's word is true then his inspired words must be the same. *John 17.17 NASB: [Jesus praying to God the Father about his disciples:] "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."*

We support this belief in inerrancy with tradition. The early church held strongly to inerrancy [Clement of Rome, *1st Clement* 45.2-3; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.28.2; Tertullian, *Treatise on the Soul* 22; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.2, 11; Hippolytus, *Fragments on the Song of Songs* 2].

We support this belief in inerrancy with reason: As one theologian said, “To affirm faith in Jesus is to affirm faith in the narrative of his birth, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension – a continuous story, centering upon Jesus Christ, and casting light on his identity and his significance.”³ If you call yourself a Christian, by definition you are basing your salvation on your faith in who Christ is and what he did for you. To believe in who Christ is and what he did for you, you must ascribe truth to a narrative about it, and the only reliable contemporary narrative about who Christ is and what he did is the Bible, so you must trust in the accuracy of the Bible to support your Christian faith.

Our confidence in the inerrancy of the Bible is consistent with the Bible’s account of itself. Jesus referred to historical biblical accounts as being true, affirming as factual some details of even the more incredible stories, such as those of Adam [Matthew 19.3-5; Mark 10.6-8], Noah [Matthew 24.38-39; Luke 17.26-27], Moses [Matthew 8.4; John 5.46], and Jonah [Matthew 12.40]. He even said that he had come to fulfill all that was in the Law and the Prophets [Matthew 5.17-18]. *Matthew 5.18 NET: “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass from the law until everything takes place.”* Jesus often quoted scripture from the Old Testament, and in the process affirmed even the minutest details of it [Matthew 22.41-46; John 10.31-38].

Another way the text verifies itself is in its documentation of the several hundred eye witness accounts to fulfilled prophecy. The Messianic prophecies about Christ’s first coming were written down centuries before Christ came and then were fulfilled by him, about which eye witnesses testified. For example, the Jews knew Jesus would be born of a virgin [Isaiah 7.14], would be born in Bethlehem [Micah 5.2], would be heir to the throne of David [Isaiah 9.6-7; 11.1], would enter Jerusalem on a donkey [Zechariah 9.9], and would be pierced for our transgressions [Isaiah 53.5-6]. *Micah 5.2 ESV: “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”*

This belief in inerrancy is supported by the manuscript record. One of the greatest archaeological finds of the last century was the “Dead Sea Scrolls,” near Qumran. Until that time, our oldest Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts were from about the eleventh century, more than a thousand years after Christ’s ascension. At Qumran, they found scrolls of books of the Old Testament dating to the first century, the time of Christ, and those scrolls showed incredible likeness with the Hebrew texts we already had, proving the accuracy of transmission over many centuries, and tying our Hebrew Old Testament text to the one in use during Jesus’ day.

Our confidence in the New Testament is based on consistency of the text in the great number of manuscripts that have been preserved from the earliest days of the church.⁴ We have over 5700 ancient manuscripts containing parts of the Greek New Testament and about 8000 of other language versions, some of which date to just a few decades after they were first written. This is an incredible body of evidence compared to what is known of other ancient texts: for many other ancient texts, which are considered to represent their originals fairly, we have only one to a few hundred copies, most dating to many centuries after they were first written. We have over 100 manuscripts of the New Testament dating to within 300 years of the originals, compared to zero for most other Greco-Roman authors. For example, the best attested of the Greek tragedies, the works of Euripides, are preserved in only 330 ancient manuscripts, almost all of which date to many centuries after they were written. The famous and trusted history of Rome by Velleius Paterculus came to us in a single incomplete manuscript, which was lost in

³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* [Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing; 2001], 169.

⁴ For the facts in this paragraph, I have relied on teachings of Daniel Wallace of Dallas Theological Seminary; see also D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan; 2005], 26.

the seventeenth century [fortunately, after a copy had been made]. Without doubt, the New Testament is the text most attested to by the evidence compared to any other ancient text!

For most ancient texts, there is a need to conjecture some content because of inadequate manuscript evidence, but this is not so for the New Testament: we can be sure that the original content is available in the manuscript data. While there are variants in the different ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, less than 1% of the variants are both meaningful and viable, and there is not one major Christian doctrine that is threatened by any of these variants.

This belief in inerrancy is supported by archaeological finds, which increasingly prove the truth of Bible stories. There are many major finds from other ancient near east cultures which support the biblical frame of history, including items like Israel's occupation of the land while being a politically unorganized state at the time of the Judges, how powerful the northern kingdom was at the time of Ahab, and the existence of the Davidic dynasty in Judah [e.g., Merenptah Stele; Kurkh Monolith; Mesha Stele; Tel Dan Inscription; Black Obelisk; Tiglah Pileser III's annals and Summary Inscription; Annals of Sennacherib; Babylonian Chronicle; Cyrus Cylinder]. Details in these extra-biblical accounts match the Bible with the names of kings, dates of battles, types and amounts of tribute, and details about the exiles and their eventual freedom to return. There is also archaeological evidence that supports the biblical description of life in the ancient near east at the time of Moses and the patriarchs, which thus supports the accuracy and Mosaic authorship of the source material for the Pentateuch [e.g., Late Bronze Age Egyptian military journals; Hittite treaty and law forms of the late second millennium; Ancient Near East poetry forms].

We believe the current English translations of the Bible are close enough to the original writings to be wholly sufficient to God's purposes [which are discussed later, below]. Examples of reliable translations include NASB [1995 edition], NIV [2011 edition], NET, ESV, NLT.

Authority of the Bible

We believe the Bible has authority in our lives. Because we believe the Bible is inspired from God, it has authority in our lives, since we have submitted to God. Also, there is an inner testimony of the Holy Spirit which prompts us to obey what we have learned in the Bible. We understand there are interpretive issues regarding which commands and promises apply to the modern believer, but our belief on authority assumes accurate interpretation.

This view on the authority of the Bible is consistent with the Bible's account of itself [2 Chronicles 34.21]. Jesus referred to the biblical scriptures having authority, calling for obedience to, and dissemination of, their content [Matthew 5.17-20]. Jesus also set an example of obedience to biblical commands [Hebrews 10.5-7] and used scripture in his arguments [Matthew 4.1-11; 22.29-46].

† *Matthew 5.19 NET: "So anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys them and teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."*

Because we believe in the authority of the Bible, we use it as the basis for all we believe religiously and for a guide in all that we do. Religious traditions and spiritual experiences can be valuable, but we must consider them subordinate to the Bible, and go to the Bible for their affirmation and interpretation. Any teaching or thought that contradicts the Bible is not from God.

Sufficiency of the Bible

We believe the Bible to be sufficient for achieving God's purposes for it. Because we believe the Bible is inspired from God, who cannot make an error, we believe the Bible is sufficient for his purposes of it.

The Bible's account of itself provides clear purposes: knowing God, leading people to the salvation offered in grace through faith in Christ, instruction in Christian living and spiritual growth, encouragement and hope, effectiveness in ministry, and inspiration to worship [praise psalms; Luke 24.27; Romans 11.33-36; 15.4; 2 Timothy 3.14-17; 2 Peter 1.4-8].

- † *Romans 15.4 NET: "For everything that was written in former times was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope."*

This is not to say there is no truth outside the Bible or that the Bible is sufficient to accomplish everything, just that it is sufficient to accomplish God's purposes for it. All truth is from God, including that discovered through science and history [though not all of what purports to be scientific or historical truth is accurate]. What God wants us to know for the purposes given above, however, he has inspired to be written down in the Bible. We cannot humanly comprehend everything about God, for he is perfect, infinite, and beyond our imagination; if he were not beyond our comprehension, then he would not be God! However, while mysteries still exist in our minds about God, we can trust that all of what he has revealed for us to know about himself is in the Bible.

Because of the sufficiency of the Bible, we rely on it for developing the theology of the church and our life philosophy. While we see value in understanding historical views and in using reason to help understand God's revelation, the diversity of the views developed over time suggests it is wise to take all teachings from tradition and reason and check them against the Bible. We will find that the defining doctrines of the early church and what became the orthodox church agree with the Bible, but there are many traditions and ideas that conflict with the Bible, and in those cases we need to be willing to rely on God's revelation alone.

Also, while we value personal experiences with God and personal inspirations from the Holy Spirit, the diversity of views which develop in groups of Spirit-led believers suggests it is wise to take all conclusions from personal experience and inspiration and check them against the Bible. Because the Bible is God's inspired word, we know that we should interpret all things by this revelation, and that no thoughts which conflict with the Bible can be from God.

Canonicity of the Bible⁵

We believe the books of the Bible have been correctly gathered and preserved into the "canon" we call the Bible, which is to say that there are no books in the Bible incorrectly included and no books outside the Bible incorrectly excluded.

We believe in canonicity because the Bible is inspired. We believe that, since God cared enough to inspire the content of the Bible, he would care enough to distinguish it from other writings so it could be recognized.

We see evidence that the Old Testament canon was recognized by the time of Christ [Josephus]. Though there were other respected writings, there had been no further additions to the Old Testament canon in

⁵ Verification of facts in this section is from Michael Svigel's RS102 class slides.

over four hundred years by the time of Christ. The Old Testament writings were recognized as they were produced, because of the authority of the prophets and leaders who wrote them.

The earliest canon is in the Bible itself [Deuteronomy 31.24-26 NIV]. The Talmud [2nd century] included the Old Testament as we have it today. The dead sea scrolls found in Qumran [1st century] had all these writings except for Esther, and they had others in their library. The church sometime in the first few centuries, started including several apocryphal books as “useful” though not “scriptural.” Some of these probably are accurate history – like 1 Maccabees – though not inspired. They were never declared scriptural, until the Roman church declared them so at the Council of Trent in AD 1546.

† *Deuteronomy 31.24-26 NIV: “After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD: Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you.”*

We see evidence that the New Testament canon proved its worthiness and thus was recognized by the church. The New Testament books were written by the end of the first century. Church leaders copied and widely distributed these New Testament writings by the early second century. Most New Testament documents were explicitly regarded as scripture by the end of the second century, though a few New Testament documents were at first doubted as canonical, and a few non-New Testament, but orthodox, writings were sometimes considered canonical by certain individuals. There is no evidence that non-orthodox writings were ever regarded as canonical.

In the early church, there was a recognition of apostolic authority and thus of the authority of the apostolic writings [Ephesians 2.20; Clement of Rome, *1 Clement* 42.1-3; 47.1-3; Ignatius, *Magnesians* 13.1; *Romans* 4.3; Polycarp, *Philippians* 3.2]. The local churches preserved the apostolic writings, copied them, and collected those that were distributed [Colossians 4.16; 2 Thessalonians 2.15; 2 Peter 3.15-16; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.5]. They also were careful to discern what was genuine and what was not [Cyprian, *Epistles* 3.2; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.5]. The early church writers even specifically said that what they wrote was not inspired scripture as was what the apostles had written.

There is ample evidence that the early church considered and rejected texts which did not prove trustworthy, either because of inconsistencies with acknowledged biblical scripture or because they were produced centuries later by people not on a first-hand basis with what Jesus taught. These rejected texts include such supposed gospels as those of Thomas, Judas, and Mary Magdalene. These texts generally put forth a theology called Gnosticism, which took aspects of Christian thought but twisted them with Greek pagan concepts, and were written later than biblical scripture. Such theology was consistently rebuked and rejected by empire-wide gatherings of church leaders in the first few centuries after Christ [Council of Laodicea, Council of Rome, Synod of Hippo, etc.].

By the fourth century, church historian Eusebius could include all the correct books except Revelation, with no incorrect books, though he admitted some had questions still about five of the smaller epistles. The same century, the Council of Laodicea had it all correct except for omitting Revelation. The council of Rome had it all correct, as did the synod of Hippo. Also, respected theologian Athanasius had it all correct, including Revelation, but wondered about three other orthodox works which we understand are not inspired: Shepherd of Hermes, Didache, Wisdom of Solomon.

The necessity of faith and thought for understanding God’s revelation

We believe that a person must have faith to fully understand God’s revelation. Only the Christian believer has enlightenment from the Holy Spirit as to the meaning of biblical scripture and the deep things of God [1 Corinthians 2.10-16; John 16:12-15].

† *1 Corinthians 2.14 NET: “The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

We do not believe that faith need be blind. Ultimately, a person has to decide whether to believe in God’s revelation, especially whether to believe in God’s offer of salvation through Jesus, but that faith can and should be supported by intelligent investigation into the Bible, the witness of the Holy Spirit to the believer, and evidence in life, both historically and personally, of the truth in the Bible. However, as our thoughts, feelings, and even conscience are from ourselves, they must be submitted to what we discover in God’s revelation. Sometimes what God reveals seems counterintuitive or difficult to understand, but if we choose to believe and act on it in faith, we will eventually see the truth born out in life.

Our understanding of the Bible depends on proper interpretation. While the application of a biblical passage might be unique to each person reading it, there is only one true meaning, only one thing the authors – both human and God – meant to communicate to the contemporary audience. Our goal is to understand that original meaning and then discern how it is applicable today.

We believe God uses our languages to communicate with us. God provided language to facilitate understanding in communication, and spoke to people in the past [Genesis 1.28-30; 3.8-13].

† *Genesis 1.28 NLT: “Then God blessed them [Adam and Eve] and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.’”*

Thus, we believe the proper way to interpret the Bible is to read it as normal communication. This means understanding what each biblical passage would have meant to the contemporary reader. It also means understanding the word usage and grammar, understanding the context of each sentence in the whole of its passage, story, or book, understanding the historical and cultural situation, and using clear scriptural passages to interpret confusing ones. The Bible does include symbols, foreshadowing, and other literary techniques, so understanding how to interpret them and how to interpret various kinds of literature – such as historical narrative, parables, poetry, prophecy, purposeful letters – is also necessary in order to come to a true understanding of the meaning of a biblical passage and what God wants to reveal through it.

A believer’s understanding of the Bible will grow in time. As a person learns how to study, interpret, and meditate on biblical scripture, and as that person grows spiritually, that person will gain in understanding of the Bible. God reveals himself progressively to each believer, in his own timing.

We understand that God’s revelation in the Bible has been progressive: God revealed himself to mankind more and more as time went on, culminating in the words and actions of Jesus [Hebrews 1.1-2]. Thus, while the Old Testament provides the context for understanding the New Testament, the New Testament takes priority in understanding God, and even helps explain what he revealed before, in the Old Testament. Even during Jesus’ time on Earth, he revealed God’s will progressively [e.g. Matthew 10.5-7 compared to Matthew 28.18-20].

The concept of progressive revelation does *not* imply God is *inconsistent*: God is *consistent* and his plan – crafted before time even began – also remains consistent; but his plan unfolds over time, so what he reveals of it and what is being enacted of it does change over time. A good analogy is that of raising a

child: what you reveal to the child about life and how you interact with that child changes as the child grows, even if your character and your plan for raising that child remain the same.

Because of the progressive nature of God's plan and revelation, we must understand the different covenants God made with mankind if we are to understand the Bible as a whole. Some of these covenants remain in effect today, some have ended, and some are partially active but will be fully fulfilled at a later time. Also, some issues in the Bible were specific toward certain individuals or groups. As a result of these things, not everything in the Bible applies the same today as it did at the time it was written.

Creation and other forms of revelation

God's creation reveals aspects of God's nature. The existence of all we see implies a cause, and the intelligence we have implies a more intelligent creator, as does the intricacy, harmony, and immensity of creation. We can infer God's eternal power, divine glory, and other attributes from his creation [Romans 1.20; Psalm 19.1-6].

† *Romans 1.20 NIV: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."*

What people can discern from creation is limited. While we can discern God's existence and some of his attributes from creation, what creation cannot explain to us are the details about how to come to salvation, how to be in right relationship with God, how to live the Christian life, and how to properly worship and serve God. It was for these reasons that God chose to reveal himself more fully through the Bible.

We know that God has revealed himself to people in many other ways, including dreams and visions [Genesis 15.1; Acts 9.11-12], angels [Luke 1.19; 24.22-23], prophets [Matthew 3.1-3], intervention in history [Joshua 6.1-5], the Holy Spirit [John 16.13-14], and the words and actions of Jesus when he was on Earth [Hebrews 1.1-3].

We see in the Bible that God did not include all of these events in the Bible [John 21.25]. *John 21.25 NASB: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written."* Thus, while all communication from God is authoritative, only the Bible is what God inspired to be written and collected for all people to know, and thus to be universally applicable and known with certainty.

Therefore, we believe God desires for everyone to invest heavily in understanding the Bible. In the Bible itself, God indicated how important biblical knowledge is for people [Joshua 1.8; Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3.16-17].

We believe the Holy Spirit continues to prompt our hearts on specific opportunities, but most of the Holy Spirit's promptings involve clarifying, teaching, or convicting a person with regard to God's revelation in the Bible. Any promptings from God which do not directly involve biblical principles – for example, a call to enter full-time ministry – will avoid any inconsistency with the Bible [God does not contradict himself!] and are not considered "new revelation" in that they are not universally applied [as are the biblical scriptures] and they are not revealing of anything new about God, salvation, or the Christian life, just of God's specific will for that individual.