

# Christian Ambassador Training

## How We Know God II - Scripture

### Review/Preview

Definition of an ambassador- One who stands between two parties with a message to communicate: the Sovereign being represented is God and the foreign subject is the world (*kosmos* -- order, the world--not just unbelieving “worldly”).

- We already are ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5)
  - We carry the Message of reconciliation (a.k.a. the *Gospel*)
  - Clear parallels to being a witness/defender of the faith (apologist)
- Three essentials for a good ambassador: **Knowledge, Wisdom, Character**

**Knowledge** – An Ambassador needs to know **his Sovereign**, his **Sovereign’s message**, and the **subjects to whom he’s called to represent the Sovereign** (their nature, culture, and language) so that he can communicate the Sovereign’s message to the people faithfully.

Last week we studied “How We Know God” and focused on how God has revealed Himself to us. In two ways: General Revelation and Special Revelation:

- **General Revelation** is Universal (not dependent on time or space and available to all people of all time)
  - **Creation** Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 1:19-20
    - This communication is wordless and inaudible, yet it is there and it is clear.
    - Creation reveals God’s existence, his glory, and the fact that he is a creator (much like this chair points to a chair maker)
  - **Providence** (protective care and creative order) (Acts 14:14-18; 17:26-29)
    - The regularity and order of creation testifies to God’s existence, creative power, and mercy and care (see this in seasons, water cycle, crops, fruit, ...)
  - **Moral Conscience** (God’s moral law, written on our hearts) Rom 1:29-32; 2:12-16
    - We have the requirements of the law written on our hearts
    - We often do, by nature, what is written in the law (we don’t kill, steal, lie, etc.) and are offended when others don’t.
    - We have a sense of right and wrong, which reflects God’s moral norm
    - All people have this revelation of divine law
    - We have broken it, suppressed it, and perverted it by trying to hold others to it, but excusing ourselves from it.
- **Special Revelation** is Particular (dependent on time and space, and available to a specific people) Any disclosure (or revealing) of God's person or will historically given to a particular person or group.
  - **Historical**
    - **Hebrews 1:1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.
  - **In Christ: The Word (essence, attributes, divine self expression) of God in bodily**

form.

- **Hebrews 1:2** - but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
- **John 1:1-5** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- **John 1:14-18** 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- **Scripture: The Word (essence, attributes, divine self expression) of God in Written form**
  - **1 Tim 3:16** - 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God be competent, equipped for every good work.

Group Discussion--

*Culturally speaking, where do we get what we know (or think we know) about God?*



- What I've always been taught (*tradition*)
- What I've always believed (*tradition*),
- God told me/showed me/ gave me this *experience*
- Personal *preference* (I like to think of God as...) [#1 idol today = *MOB*]
  - Domestication of God (no wrath, no judgment)
- Media (*preference*)



This week we'll dive more deeply into Scripture and discuss its sufficiency and clarity (perspicuity). And once we have a high view of Scripture, how do we interpret its meaning (hermeneutics). A very special bonus to this section is that in Scripture, we not only *learn about God from God, we learn about God's message from God and learn about ourselves from God.* These are all three of the key areas of a faithful and prepared ambassador's knowledge.

## The first thesis of the Cambridge Declaration

### **Sola Scriptura: The Erosion of Authority**

Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church's life, but the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is guided, far too often, by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the beat of the entertainment world often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God. Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of the music. As biblical authority has been abandoned in practice, as its truths have faded from Christian consciousness, and as its doctrines have lost their saliency, the church has been increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction.

Rather than adapting Christian faith to satisfy the felt needs of consumers, we must proclaim the law as the only measure of true righteousness and the gospel as the only announcement of saving truth. Biblical truth is indispensable to the church's understanding, nurture and discipline.

Scripture must take us beyond our perceived needs to our real needs and liberate us from seeing ourselves through the seductive images, cliches, promises and priorities of mass culture. It is only in the light of God's truth that we understand ourselves aright and see God's provision for our need. The Bible, therefore, must be taught and preached in the church. Sermons must be expositions of the Bible and its teachings, not expressions of the preacher's opinions or the ideas of the age. We must settle for nothing less than what God has given.

The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture we would never have known of God's grace in Christ. The biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience, is the test of truth.

### **Thesis One: Sola Scriptura**

We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

We deny that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian's conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Cambridge Declaration (<http://www.reformed.org/documents/cambridge.html>)

So, are we saying there are No personal or (subjective) experiences?!

Again, we are not saying that there are no personal or subjective experiences involved here. We believe God's Spirit often enlightens us to the truths in Scripture or to new applications of those truths in our lives (the light goes on, exciting, ...).

This is different from determining meaning of the text. To claim that a verse has one meaning for you and another for someone else is **relativism**, a product of the postmodern culture. A passage may certainly apply differently (admonitions to husbands are applied differently by men and women, etc.), but it cannot have a different correct meaning.

**The key** to remember here is that meaning is one and application can be many. So be careful not to mistake meaning for application.

(love your neighbor means self denial, service, affection. For me, that may mean that I watch less sports in order to serve my wife, for my wife, it may be applied differently, but the principle behind it, or its meaning, is the same for us both)...

Our source of God's Special Revelation of Himself = **The Bible + NOTHING**

Whenever you have the **The Bible + Something**, the **Bible** *always* loses out.  
 [something = ecclesiastical structure, tradition, experience, ...]

Example of college students singing "speak to us" over and over, while their Bibles sat idle on their chairs behind them.

Anytime we are tempted to seek a 'new' or 'unique' communication by God, and worse, elevate this 'new' or 'unique' revelation above that which we have in Scripture, we should stop and remember that God has already spoken to us, in a very clear, and authoritative, and sufficient way.

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Peter 1:16-21** 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. **And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,**<sup>20</sup> **knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.**<sup>21</sup> **For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. [emphasis added]**

### Discussion 1 -- *Sola Scriptura*

1. What are some popular other sources<sup>2</sup> within the professing Church? [what about those on the board? -- The world or the church or both? -- *Examples: Where do we get our views on the supremacy of free will? Our views on end times? Our views on how a person gets "saved"? Or even what they need to be saved from? Our views on hell? Our views on God's nature?*]
2. Do you ever find yourself looking for a special, authoritative word from God outside of Scripture? [*a sign, a special feeling, a "peace about it" ...*]
3. Discuss the dangers of allowing preference or intuition determine your theology. [Isaiah 55:9; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 9:13-21]
4. Is "tradition" always wrong? If not, by what standard is it to be measured? --*Scripture*. How willing are you to have your traditions shaken or crushed by God's Word? Does this contradict the authority of Church leadership (elders, etc.)? [*Just me and my Bible...*]

### *The Bible is God's Authoritative Word -- Now what?*

Granted that Scripture is the sole source of faith and practice, how do we approach it for understanding? How does God intend for us to use His Word?

There are many diverse groups of religious people who point to the Bible as God's Word and their ultimate authority. ***How can this be?***

Differing *theological grids* and differing *methods of interpretation*

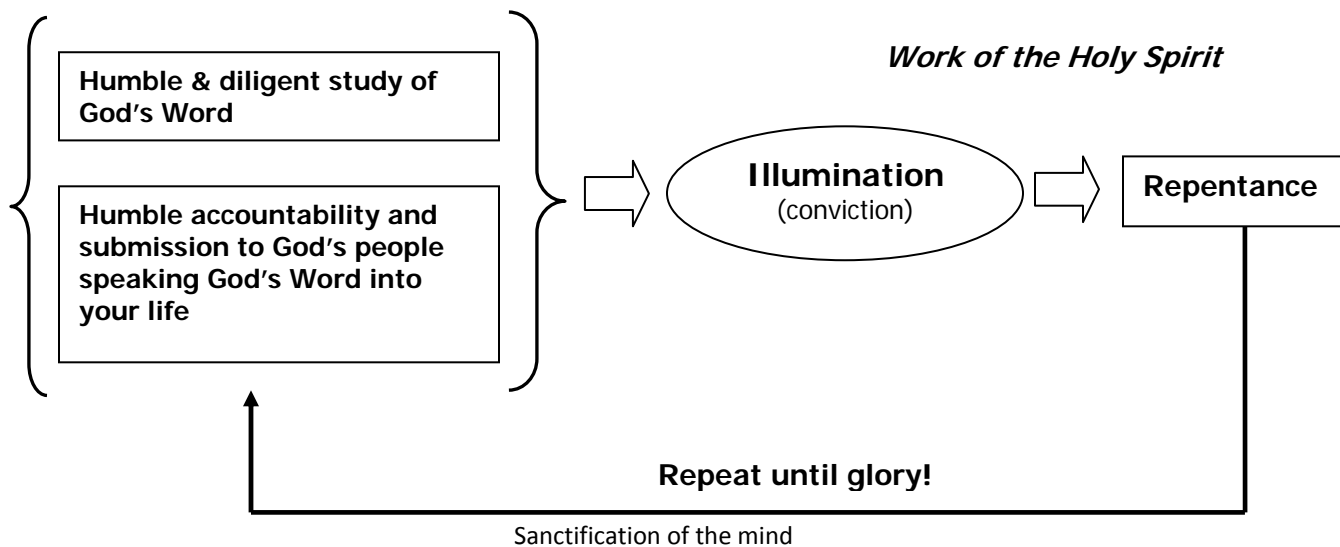
Your *theological grid* is your current doctrinal understanding--the filter through which you process everything you read or hear about all things theological.

- We all have one.
- No one's this side of glory is totally accurate.

Question: How was yours formed?

***Better question: How is yours forming? Are you teachable?***

<sup>2</sup> We have a 3 week short course on "Decision Making and the Will of God" that covers this in greater detail. Find all the notes here: <http://www.objectivegospel.org/equip/decisionmaking>



- Do you believe *exactly* the same as you did a year ago? *Ten years ago? Is that a good thing?*
- Are you teachable?
- Are you pursuing truth?
- Is change always positive? *Can you drift further from the truth? With a healthy cycle?*

Your *method of interpretation* (hermeneutics) is critical to the health of your mental sanctification. Here is a fascinating history lesson:

**The Reformers’ Hermeneutic<sup>3</sup>: Grammatical, Historical, and Christ-Centered**

It is widely recognized that the formal principle underlying the Reformation was nothing other than *sola scriptura*: the reformers’ diehard commitment to the other great *solas* was an effect arising from their desire to be guided by scriptures alone. The exegesis and interpretation of the bible was the one great means by which the war against Roman corruption was waged; which is almost the same thing as saying that ***the battle was basically a hermeneutical struggle***. In light of these observations, one could say that the key event marking the beginning of the Reformation occurred, not in 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his theses to the church door in Wittenberg; but two years prior to that, when ***he rejected Origin’s four-layered hermeneutic in favor of what he called the grammatical-historical sense***.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hermeneutics is the study of the correct methods of interpretation. Grudem’s Systematic Theology p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Pitchford on the Reformation Theology web site: (*emphasis added*)

[http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/03/the\\_reformers\\_hermeneutic\\_gram.php](http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/03/the_reformers_hermeneutic_gram.php)

Does your interpretative method:

- Take into account the historical/cultural context?
- Take into account the genre of the text (historical narrative, poetic, apocalyptic)?
- All interpreters take some biblical language to be metaphoric/figurative. How do you know when that is appropriate?

### Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

Exegesis and eisegesis are two conflicting approaches in Bible study. Exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis. The word **exegesis** literally means “to lead out of.” That means that ***the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text.***

The opposite approach to Scripture is **eisegesis**, which is the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective, non-analytical reading. The word eisegesis literally means “to lead into,” which means ***the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text***, making it mean whatever he wants.

Obviously, only exegesis does justice to the text. Eisegesis is a mishandling of the text and often leads to a misinterpretation. Exegesis is concerned with discovering the true meaning of the text, respecting its grammar, syntax, and setting. Eisegesis is concerned only with making a point, even at the expense of the meaning of words.<sup>5</sup>

### Discussion 2 -- Interpretation/Exegesis

1. **The Cults** -- Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that their ultimate authority is the Bible. Yet they deny the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, his bodily resurrection, the personhood of the Holy Spirit, justification by faith, ... How can this be? *Speak in terms of theological grid and authority.*
2. **Conforming to the World (Cultural Surrender)** --The Church has a “rich” history of people attempting to rescue it from irrelevance by reshaping it in the image of the prevailing culture. We’ll have a “history of worldliness” lesson later in this class.

**Theological Liberalism** (early 20<sup>th</sup> century movement) --With the enlightenment came modernism’s promise that science would answer all of our questions. There was a strong movement towards ***naturalism*** as the reigning philosophy of science. Belief in miracles was no longer culturally acceptable. ***How has this affected the Church?***<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> From the gotquestions.org web site--I cannot vouch for other material on this site (it may be excellent), but this is a helpful description of this distinction. <http://www.gotquestions.org/exegesis-eisegesis.html>

<sup>6</sup> See *Christianity and Liberalism* by J. Gresham Machen. I can’t recommend this book highly enough.

**Pop-Agnosticism** (late 20<sup>th</sup> early 21<sup>st</sup> century movement) --With the realization that science wouldn't answer every question (though we make impressive strides, we only run into more and greater questions!) modernism gave way to post-modernism and its grotesque "if we can't know everything, we can't know anything for sure" over-reaction to the failures of modernism. *How has this affected the Church?*

3. **Compare these Cases** -- After you groan, see if you can discern what's going on here.

Case 1: A woman in the Church is unhappy in her marriage and is (mutually) attracted to another man. Seeking a word from God she opens her Bible and comes across "put on the new man" (Colossians 3:10)... so she does.

Case 2: There was a single guy in the Church who was attracted to a single young lady in the Church. He opened his Bible looking for a word from God and came across "Grace be with you" (2 Tim 4:22) ... and since her name is Grace, this is his confirmation.

- What are the difference between these? The similarities?
- Are you offended by the application or are you offended by the method?
- As Christ's ambassador, can you discern the problem? How might you counsel them?

I know this last exercise may have seemed silly to some of you, but this kind of abuse of the Word of God is not only common, but popular. Our Decision Making and the Will of God class covers this in more detail. In Amb III (Chracter of an Ambassador) we also discuss the underlying lack of fear of the LORD and pride behind it.

- Ouija Bible - some people treat their Bibles like a Ouija Board – scan through it looking for personal private messages in the text.
- This method has no regard for original intent of the author, the occasion it is being written for, or the audience it was intended for, in other words, no regard for context.

For some, the Bible is primarily a book that magically supplies guidance for personal problems, or a sourcebook for ethics or politics, or a mysterious or poetic guide to meaningful personal experience.<sup>7</sup>

Dan McCartney, *Let the Reader Understand* p. 44

<sup>7</sup> McCartney, Dan, *Let the Reader Understand*, P & R Publishing; 2 edition (August 1, 2002) , p. 44.

*A Common Cop out to seeking meaning from Scripture, in context is = “The Holy Spirit is my teacher”*

The most often heard justification for Ouija Bible interpretation is that they just pray and ask God to teach them the meaning of the text—and cite John 14:26.

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 14:26** But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

This is unbiblical and slothful. In 2 Timothy 2:15 we are commanded to be diligent (“study” KJV) to be able to rightly handle the Word of God. Yes, the Holy Spirit teaches us the meaning of the text, but that meaning is the meaning intended by the original author in the original context as he was “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21), and the means by which God intended for us to learn his message is by diligent preparation, not “drive by” interpretation or pagan divination.

If you took Ron’s leadership seminar, you know the answer to this: When it comes to discovering meaning of the Bible, Context is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Disciplines through which you can Know God better, as He has revealed himself in the Scriptures:**

1. Personal Bible reading
  - a. Remember, Context is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Find out the author, occasion, and purpose of each book (ESV Study Bible is a great place to start)
2. Meditation (not mystical mindlessness, but focused concentration on God and His Word and quietness--Pray the Scriptures)
3. Studying
4. Memorization
5. Listening to it (in your car, while you work, while you fold laundry, work out, do dishes..)
6. Weekly preaching of God’s word in a local church
  - a. Pay close attention, pray as you listen, and take good notes.

**Verses to pray when you approach God’s Word:**

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 119:36** Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 119:18** Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 90:14** Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 16:11** You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore