

## Lesson 1

### INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY / THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD

#### PRAYER

How many have taken a Systematic Theology course before? How many have read a Systematic Theology book? How many know what Systematic Theology is?

#### **I. INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: THE 4 C'S** (*INSTRUCT STUDENTS TO WRITE THESE DOWN*)

The task of systematic theology is to be (1) *comprehensive*, that is, cover all of the standard teachings of the Scriptures, (2) *coherent*, as we show the order, the logic, and the clear, consistent message of the Bible over several topics, (3) *contextual*, that is, interpreting the sweep of doctrine in terms of current issues, and (4) *conversational*, engaging historical and contemporary points of view.

##### **A. What is Systematic Theology? (pg. 2)**

Theology is the study of God, and is derived from two Greek words, *Theos*, which means “God,” and *logos*, which means “word” or “a conveying of information.” So when we say “Systematic Theology,” we mean the orderly arrangement of the study of God.

Systematic Theology seeks to arrange the whole of Biblical teaching into logical, topical divisions. This, then, allows us to form doctrines and helps us to construct an overall view of the nature of God, as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, and the manner in which He interacts with His creation.

So for example, if you look at your table of contents on your first page, you will see that our last lesson will be on eschatology. We will be combing through all of scripture in order to collect and understand all of the relevant passages that consider the end times, such as Christ’s return and God’s final judgment.

##### **B. What Systematic Theology is not: (pg.2)**

So now that we’ve defined what systematic theology is, we need to define what it is not. First of all, it is not Biblical Theology. At this point, you’re probably thinking, “Now wait a second, Systematic Theology isn’t biblical?” Well, yes it is, and no it isn’t. Let me explain.

Systematic Theology is biblical in that it seeks to present what the Scriptures themselves teach. It is not considered biblical when it’s contrasted with other categories of theology. The term “Biblical Theology” refers to the study of God by tracing the historical development of doctrine through Scripture. Biblical Theology would also focus on understanding what the biblical authors and original hearers possessed about each doctrine.

In other words, Biblical Theology would answer questions like, “What does Isaiah teach about prayer?” or “What does the New Testament teach about prayer, and how has that teaching developed since the Old Testament?”

Systematic Theology is different in that it would not focus on individual sections of Scripture or the historical development of prayer but on the whole of biblical teaching about prayer, and then it would seek to summarize that teaching as it pertains to today.

Systematic Theology is also different from Historical Theology. Historical Theology is the study of Christian doctrine, as it has been considered by Christians in different periods of history.

### **C. Advantages of Studying Theology Systematically & a Caution (pg. 2) *(make notes on p. 58)***

So now that we have distinguished between the different studies of theology, what are the advantages of studying theology systematically? Well, there are several:

- 1) We are able to see what the whole of the Bible teaches on a given topic (e.g. creation)
- 2) We are able to explore the logical relationships between the various Biblical doctrines (e.g. We see how election, regeneration, conversion, justification, sanctification, and glorification are all part of God's redemption of man)
- 3) We are brought face to face with the fact that our knowledge is bounded by God's revelation, and are led to acknowledge the Bible as our source of knowledge about God
- 4) We see the harmony and consistency of the doctrines which teaches us about the unity of Scripture and proves to our hearts that Scripture has its origin in God
- 5) Systematic theology aims to change the way that we think about God and the way we think about ourselves. It's a good discipline in bringing together Biblical exegesis, Biblical theology, apologetics, and ethics. It produces creeds and statements of faith, and has great power to build up the church and encourage individual believers.

We must admit, though, that there are potential dangers of studying theology systematically. Please note that we do not think that a systematic theology textbook, creeds, or statements of faith take the authoritative place of Scripture. Those things are extracted from and are subject to Scripture. That said, there are two pitfalls of studying theology systematically that need to be mentioned and are somewhat related:

- 1) There is a danger of taking and understanding things out of context. It has been noted that **a text without a context becomes a pretext for a prooftext**. This can generate appeals to selective evidence that enable the interpreter to say what he or she wants to say, without really listening to what the Word of God says.
- 2) It's possible that the "system" in systematic theology may distort Biblical truth. D. A. Carson has noted that "even to choose topics, to hierarchialize them, is to impose a structure not transparently given in Scripture itself." So there is a danger that the choosing and ordering of topics can dictate the conclusions of those topics. For example, we could begin a study on the topic of the divine authorship of Scripture and conclude that the Bible is infallible. Likewise, we could begin a study on the topic of the human authorship of Scripture by looking at the people who physically wrote out Scripture and conclude that the Bible contains errors. In other words, our starting point could determine our conclusion.

In order to guard against these dangers, we'll try to fill these classes with as much Scripture as possible. We want this class to be a faithful portrayal of what the Bible says. But it should be clear to you that you need to listen with discernment. We must be like the Bereans spoken of in Acts 17:11 who "**received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**" We must pray for discernment. Without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit we'll never know God as we should.

## D. Why Study Theology?

### 1. For God's Glory (blank) (pg. 2)

Ultimately, we study theology to glorify God. God is glorified when we seek to know Him (Philippians 1:9-11). The objective of studying theology is to come to know God better and to increasingly learn how to please Him. 1 John 2:3 says that **"we know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands."** There's a specific cognitive content to the Christian faith, and it's the responsibility of the local church to teach what the Apostle Paul calls "sound doctrine." (2 Tim 4:3)

### 2. Corporately Reflect Christ to Others (blank) (pg. 2)

As the body of Christ, we study theology so that the church can be an accurate reflection of God to the world. In a time when the very concept of truth is called into question, the church needs to be ready to "give a reason for the hope that it has."

### 3. Individual Sanctification and Growth (blank) (pg. 3)

Individually we must study theology so that we may be sanctified and grow in knowledge and faith. We don't just want to know *about* God, as though he can only be known at a distance. No, we actually want to know God personally and to have a relationship with Him. **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"** (Prov. 1:7). When we learn to despair of ourselves and humbly seek to know the God of the Bible, it's then that the study of God begins to be impressed upon our hearts and minds, and it becomes real to us, as we find life and all blessings in Him alone.

In many ways, evangelicals have abandoned deep doctrinal study for an emotional, subjective religion that places truth a distant second to how something "feels." As Christians, we believe in objective truth. We should be moved emotionally by our faith, but the source of that reaction should be the truth of who God is and what He has done, as it's addressed to the mind. Martyn Lloyd Jones said, *"What we have in the Bible is Truth; it is not an emotional stimulus, it is not something primarily concerned to give us a joyful experience. It is primarily Truth, and Truth is addressed to the mind, God's supreme gift to man; and it is as we apprehend and submit ourselves to the truth that the feelings follow. I must never ask myself in the first instance: What do I feel about this? The first question is, Do I believe it? Do I accept it?"* We must seek to understand God's truth revealed to us in Scripture if we're to ever understand God and ourselves, as we should. It's intellectual suicide to believe that absolute truth exists but not search for it in the Scriptures that claim this truth. To do otherwise is nothing more than spiritual folly.

### 4. Doctrine Matters (blank) (pg. 3)

Finally, we should study theology because doctrine matters. The cognitive content of the Christian faith is of vital importance. In John 8:31, Jesus said, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."** Biblical doctrine defines the boundaries of who God has revealed Himself to be. We can't just make up what we think God is like or imagine that He will approve this or that. If we did, too often He would look just like us. Perhaps this is why Paul warns Timothy that, **"the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them...teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear"** (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

A trend observable in many evangelical churches is to avoid doctrines that may be difficult to understand or which may be sources of controversy. So there is never any teaching on election, predestination, or God's wrath. In some instances, even speaking to the existence of sin and the necessity of conversion are

ignored. Instead, those sitting in the pew receive nothing but quick-fix, ankle-deep theology. But the Bible grants no Christian the right to pick and choose which Biblical doctrines he wants to believe. The Bible talks about hell, we need to know about hell. The Bible talks about election, we need to know all that Scripture says about election.

## **E. How Do We Study Theology? (pg. 3)**

### **1. The Need for an Authority (pg. 3)**

So how do we study theology? What should be our approach? If we agree that God has revealed Himself to us, how do we determine the content of that revelation?

Well, for starters, there must be a reliable, authoritative source of that content. In other words, we need to find a ‘final court of appeals’ by which we judge this content. If having a correct theology is as important as I have said it is, then we must have a principle, or a method, for discerning God’s words from mere human invention.

So what are some final court of appeals that people tend to go by and set up as the rule of life?

### **2. Three Positions for “Final Appeals” on Theological Questions: (pg. 3)**

J.I. Packer in his book *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* denotes three mutually exclusive positions on authority for theological questions: the evangelical position, the traditionalist position, and the subjectivist position.

- 1) ***The Evangelical Position*** – The basic principle of this position is that “the teaching of the written Scriptures is the Word which God spoke and speaks to His Church, and is finally authoritative for faith and life.” It is inerrant and inspired of God, it is complete (sufficient) and comprehensible...it contains all that the Church needs to know in this world for its guidance in the way of salvation and service, and it contains the principles for its own interpretation within itself.” This is the position of Emmanuel Baptist Church. (pg. 3)

Furthermore, this view recognizes that the Holy Spirit, who caused the Bible to be written, “has been given to the Church to cause believers to recognize it for the divine Word that it is, and to enable them to interpret it rightly and understand its meaning.”

Thus, “the proper ground for believing a thing is that God says it in His written Word, and a readiness to take God’s Word and accept what He asserts in the Bible is thus fundamental to faith.”

- 2) ***The Traditionalist Position*** – This position holds that the final authority for faith and life is the official teaching of the institutional church. In other words, what the Church says, God says. In this view, the Bible is neither complete nor comprehensible. It needs some help, some filling out, and is not self-interpreting. It must be supplemented by the teaching of the church to declare the Bible’s true meaning. And this teaching is considered to be on par with, if not above, the Bible as an authority. This is the position of the Roman Catholic Church. (pg. 3)
- 3) ***The Subjectivist Position*** – This position varies in form but essentially states that the final authority for faith and life is the verdict of one’s own reason. Scripture, if consulted at all, is to be examined “with an open mind,” and measured by knowledge from other philosophical,

religious, scientific and historical sources. Thus, “the proper ground for believing a thing is not that the Bible or tradition contain it, but that reason and conscience commend it.” (pg. 4)

## **Let’s Begin! Topic #1 – The Doctrine of the Word**

Let us turn now to our first topic of the class – the doctrine of the Word. Here we will see why Emmanuel Baptist Church is an evangelical church, and why we believe that the Bible alone is our ultimate authority when it comes to the Christian faith.

Throughout our course we will maintain two assumptions, or presuppositions: (1) that the Bible is true and that it is, in fact, our only absolute standard of truth; and (2) that the God who is spoken of in the Bible exists, and that he is who the Bible says He is: the Creator of heaven and earth and all things in them. We will, of course, examine these presuppositions and our reasons for asserting them in greater detail as we progress through this course, but these are the principles that underlie all that we will discuss.

Trusting in God’s Word is essential in our efforts to know God better. If we deny His revelation to us in His Word, then we ultimately deny Him. By contrast, to know and love God is to know and love His words.

John Dagg once said, *“The study of religious truth ought to be undertaken and prosecuted from a sense of duty, and with a view to the improvement of the heart. When learned, it ought not to be laid on the shelf, as an object of speculation; but it should be deposited deep in the heart, where its sanctifying power ought to be felt...As religious beings, let us seek to understand the truths of religion. As immortal beings, let us strive to make ourselves acquainted with the doctrine on which our everlasting happiness depends. And let us be careful that we do not merely receive it coldly into our understandings, but that its renewing power is ever operative in our hearts.”*

As an aside, I would recommend you consider purchasing a copy of Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. It is a fantastic text, readable, useful as a reference tool, has good discussions of every topic that we will cover in this course. They are available on Amazon in hardcover for \$35.00.

## **Comments or Questions?**

## **II. THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD (PG. 4)**

### **STATEMENT OF FAITH \***

*“We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.”*

### **A. The Case for the Bible as our Authority (pg. 4)**

Listen to this carefully to see if you can recognize it...

**“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word...I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you...I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.”**

Can anyone guess where these verses are found? (*Bible – Psalm 119*) If you would like to know the importance of Scripture, I would encourage you to read this Psalm and examine if you approach God's Word like the Psalmist does.

## 1. Old Testament (pg. 4)

The Psalms, the Old Testament Scriptures and the faith of ancient Israel were based on the authority of the written word. The Biblical concept of written revelation seems to have been directly derived from God inscribing the Ten Commandments on the two stone tablets. The rest of Moses' writings and the later prophetic writings, written by either the prophets themselves or by their associates, were always regarded as no less divine, no less truly words of God, than the words which God had written with His very own finger. The fact that man penned the words never affected the reality that their authority and inspiration were divine (**Rom. 3:2**, "Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God"; **Acts 4:25**, "...who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit"; **Acts 28:25**, "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet"; **Heb. 3:7**, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says"; **Heb. 10:15**, "And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us").

Jesus Himself treated the OT Scriptures as absolutely authoritative. He referred to them constantly, and He endorsed them with the full weight of His authority. Jesus treated arguments from Scripture as having the final say. In John 10 Jesus states that "Scripture cannot be broken." When Jesus says, "it is written," the discussion is over. A good example of this is when Jesus quotes Deuteronomy to the devil when being tempted in the desert.

Jesus even attributes words spoken in the narrative of the Old Testament as being quotes from God. For example, in Matthew 19 when being tested by the Pharisees on divorce, Jesus ascribes the account written in Genesis 2:24 about man being united to his wife to being said by the Creator.

Jesus chastised the Jewish theologians for their neglect of Scripture. In Mark 12 we see that Jesus tells the Sadducees that they're in error because they do not know the Scriptures.

Further, Jesus Himself abided by the Scriptures. We're told that he lived a "perfect life" *according to the Old Testament Scriptures*. According to his own testimony, even his death on the cross happened because **"everything that was written about [Him] in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms [had to] be fulfilled."** (Lk. 24) So we see then that Jesus "ended a life of obedience to Scripture by dying in obedience to Scripture."

## 2. New Testament (pg. 4)

With respect to the New Testament, in Matthew 28, Jesus spoke to the disciples after his resurrection and seems to anoint them particularly to complete his teaching. In John 14:26, Jesus promises to send the disciples the Holy Spirit who will remind them of what He has taught them over the course of his ministry and lead them into all truth, including teaching that Jesus did not give during his earthly ministry because it was more than the disciples could bear. **"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."** (1 Cor. 2:13, "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual." John 16:12-15, **"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine**

and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.)

The disciples understood this as well. In II Peter 3:16 Peter says of Paul's writings that, **"There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."** The Apostle Paul's letters are equated with Scripture.

In I Timothy 5:18 Paul says, **"For the Scripture says..."** and then quotes Deuteronomy *and* the gospel of Luke, which was not written by an apostle but was clearly approved and affirmed by those apostles who were still alive.

Further support for the authority of scripture can be gleaned from the apostles' understanding of it. They shared Jesus' view of the OT, and understood themselves to be furthering that authoritative teaching. Paul commands that his letter to the Colossians was to be passed along and read by others (Col. 4:16), while Peter refers to his and the other apostles' preaching as inspired **"by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven"** (I Pet. 1:12). Paul even says in his letter to the church in Corinth that **"If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord."** <sup>38</sup> **If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."** (I Cor. 14:37-38).

### 3. Credibility of Scripture (pg. 4)

While Scripture attests to itself as authoritative, there are other reasons for believing it to be true. Obviously, our trust in Jesus and his view of Scripture as being authoritative is sufficient for us, but some may say that this is a circular argument – Scripture attests to itself as being authoritative. But all arguments for an absolute authority must ultimately appeal to that authority for proof. Yet, we can see how Scripture shows itself as authoritative from an apologetic standpoint.

Scripture's overall message of the gospel is unified throughout, even though it was written by a number of different authors from different walks of life in different languages on different continents over 1,500 different years! The prophecies made in Scripture from years past have come true, and it is also historically, archaeologically, and scientifically accurate. It never contradicts itself. It may express things in different ways from different viewpoints, but it never contradicts itself. It has effectively and drastically changed the hearts of men.

### B. Attributes of Scripture (pg. 5)

It will be appropriate for us to spend some time considering certain attributes of Scripture. As we go through each one, be thinking about how we can apply each attribute to our lives.

#### 1. Divine Inspiration (pg. 5)

First, we see that Scripture is divinely inspired. In 2 Timothy 3:16, we read that, **"all Scripture is God-breathed"**, literally breathed out by God. However, "it is customary to use the term "inspiration" to refer to the divine origin of Scripture." Inspiration, then, may be "defined as a supernatural, providential influence of God's Holy Spirit upon the human authors, which caused them to write what He wished to be written for the communication of revealed truth to others."

In the Pentateuch alone, the words "the Lord said" occur almost 800 times, and the words, "Thus saith the Lord" are a recurring theme throughout the prophets.

**“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.” (II Pet. 1:21).** Here we understand that prophecy of Scripture was not finally rooted in the prophet’s own interpretation or ideas, but rather the will of God. This does not mean that God obliterated the personality or will of the prophet, nor does this require us to take a ‘dictation’ view of the Bible. Rather, it means that the end result of God’s providential and supernatural activity is a word-for-word, God-given revelation of propositional truths. The Bible is not fundamentally a record of other people’s experience of God, nor is it creatively inspired religious literature. Rather, it is the revelation of saving truth.

## **2. Biblical Inerrancy (pg. 5)**

Second, we find that Scripture is inerrant. The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the *original* manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. In other words, the Bible always tells the truth regarding everything it talks about. **“It is impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18).** So it would naturally fit that, as Proverbs 30:5 states, **“Every word of God proves true.”**

Making absolute claims of truth in this postmodern age comes across as arrogant to others, but if we give up any ground here, then every claim that Scripture makes is open to dispute, and we will know the power of God’s word less and less.

## **3. Biblical Infallibility (pg. 5)**

Third, we see that Scripture is infallible, which is closely related to inerrancy. ‘Infallible’ denotes the quality of never deceiving or misleading, and so means ‘wholly trustworthy and reliable’. Inerrant means ‘wholly true’.

So for example, we believe in an inerrant Bible and so we believe that there was actually a man named Jonah who was actually swallowed by a great fish and was inside the fish for three days. If we are also to say that the Bible is infallible, then we are agreeing that this event is reliable and profitable for us in faith and practice. We are commanded not to add or take away from any of God’s Words (Rev. 22:18-19). Everything that is stated in Scripture is there for a purpose. God does not say anything unintentionally.

## **4. The Clarity of Scripture (pg. 5)**

Fourth, we see that Scripture is clear. It is rational. The clarity of Scripture means ordinary people are able to read and rightly understand the Bible. While we know that some Scripture can be difficult to understand (II Pet. 3:16), the reason for this is generally placed on spiritual discernment (I Cor. 2:14) rather than the Scriptures being unclear or contradictory.

In Psalm 19:7, David writes that, **“The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”** Failure to understand what the Bible is saying is not placed on Scripture but on those who misunderstand or reject what is written. It was the recognition of this principle that led Luther to work on a German translation of the Bible because he believed that everyone can know the truths of Scripture.

## **5. The Necessity of Scripture (pg. 5)**

Fifth, we see that Scripture is necessary. The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God’s will. But it is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God’s character and moral laws. These can be seen from general revelations of nature itself (Rom. 1:19) or one’s own conscience (Rom. 2:14).



## 6. The Sufficiency of Scripture (pg. 6)

Finally, we see that Scripture is sufficient. The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God that God intended His people to have at each stage of redemption history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting Him perfectly, and for obeying Him perfectly. As Paul writes in II Timothy 3:16-17, “**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.**”

So why is it important for us to understand each of these attributes?

- ***Divinely Inspired*** – It is the primary source of our revelation about God. If it is of human origin, it can always be replicated and improved upon (“to err is human”). It therefore stands over us as our judge, and not the other way around. We need to repent of our tendency to obey Scripture only when it seems reasonable.
- ***Inerrant & Infallible*** – We can use it for direction and guidance in life; Helps us to see ourselves and God correctly since we are inclined to try to wrongly justify ourselves and fit God into our own mold
- ***Clarity*** – Studying Scripture is not a fruitless venture, and we can grow in our study of it with the Holy Spirit’s aid. Also, we should approach it assuming its unity and coherence. Our own intellectual competence is not the test and measure of divine truth. It is not for us to stop believing because we lack understanding, or to postpone believing until we can get understanding, but to believe in order that we may understand...Faith first, sight afterwards, is God’s order, not *vice versa*; and the proof of the sincerity of our faith is our willingness to have it so.
- ***Necessity*** – It is through Scripture that we know salvation
- ***Sufficiency*** – God did not leave us lacking in his revelation and so we do not need to be afraid of “new” revelations being proposed. We should also repent of our spiritual pragmatism, that substitutes ‘what works’ for what God has said. This applies to everything from the way we approach evangelism and corporate worship, to the means we pursue for spiritual growth, to the way we think about marriage, or work, or parenting, etc.

### Instruct student to write this question!

So why do you think God’s Word in written form is a benefit for us today who live in-between the cross and the second-coming?

(1) *RELIABILITY* - It accurately preserves God’s words for subsequent generations; 2) *PERMANENCE* - It permits repeated and careful study of God’s words; 3) *ACCESSABILITY* - It is accessible to more people than oral communication)

## C. Experience v. Scripture (pg. 6)

To conclude then, though tradition and reason are important, in that they help us in understanding what Scripture teaches, in the end they are both servants of the Word, and not judges over it, or peers beside it. Both tradition and reason are known to err – Scripture does not.

To place tradition and man’s reason as the grounds for determining whether something is the Word of God or not is as futile as trying to shine a flashlight at the sun. It places man’s thoughts and ways over

God's and seeks to usurp the authority God has established in his Word which is testified to and illumined by the Spirit. Only the Spirit can finally convince us of the right rule of God's Word. The same Spirit that spoke through the mouths of the prophets also convinces us of God's exalted Word.

We cannot say that the Bible merely "contains" the Word of God. Meaning that we are to attempt to discern by our reason and experience what that word is. No, as evangelicals, we must insist that the Bible, in its united entirety, **is** the Word of God.

The truth of Scripture is not malleable. It is not unique to each person. It is not determined by personal experience or personal opinion. Our experiences are only valuable to the extent that they are Scriptural. We are to evaluate our experience by the truth of Scripture; not evaluate the truth of Scripture by our experiences.

When God told Abraham that he was to have a child at his old age, reason would tell us that this was an absurd statement. How could Sarah, his wife, conceive at 90 years old? Yet, Abraham believed God's words and it was credited to him as righteousness. He knew God's words would prove true, even over and against human reason.

### **Comments or Questions?**

#### **APPENDIX (pg. 6)**

**Question:** How are we to understand the variant texts in our Bibles, such as John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16:9-20?

Answer: These texts are noted in most Bibles as not being part of the most reliable early manuscripts. They are not Scripture, but they are tradition – very early and possibly very good tradition. Other smaller variants, such as Luke 23:34, are included in some of the best manuscripts and omitted from others.

**Question:** How are we to understand quotes in Scripture taken from non-canon literature, such as the Book of Enoch (Jude) or secular Greek authors (Paul)?

Answer: Because a writer of canon quotes from a secular source, it does not mean that they hold that source to be elevated to Scripture. We must also hold that a writer of canon can use quotes outside of Scripture, as long as he does not unequivocally quote them as Scripture. For example, in Jude 14 the Book of Enoch is quoted likely because it was a writing well known among his audience and it got the point across that God will judge the ungodly. We often use non-canonical writings to get a truly Biblical point across to others in our own conversations.

**Question:** If Scripture is clear, then why do we have different interpretations of what various passages mean?

Answer: While God's Word is perfect, the people He gave it to aren't. The clarity of Scripture does not mean that all believers agree on every teaching of Scripture. Generally, Evangelical Christians are largely in agreement on the essential matters (e.g. the gospel) and differ on the non-essentials (millennium).