

Toward Doxology and Discipleship: Presuppositions and Principles for Trinitarian Reading of Scripture

Underlying Presupposition

The goal of biblical interpretation is to know and love the triune God, such that we reflect the glory of his Son in whose image we were made and are being reformed.

The God of the Word: Three Horizons in Communication

1. Author – The God Who Speaks
2. Text – The Word God Writes
3. Audience – The People Created by God's Word

The Word of God: Three Horizons in Scripture

1. Text – Literal, Grammatical, Historical Interpretation
2. Epoch – Biblical-Theological Interpretation
3. Canon – Christotelic Interpretation

Hearing God's Voice in God's Word

1. Old Testament Test Cases
2. New Testament Test Cases

Appendices

- A. Terms
- B. Law-Gospel GPS System

The Voice of God: The God Who Speaks

The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters.

⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

– Psalm 29:3–4 –

There is no book in the Western world that has sold more copies or had more influence than the Bible.

- **Laws have been shaped by its legal code.** Think about Moses who is sculpted on the outside of the Supreme Court building. And on the inside of the Supreme Court, images of Moses and the Decalogue can be seen. Moreover, passages from the Bible are etched throughout the nation's capitol. (Source: It Will Pass)
- **Literature has followed the Bible.** Western literature is deeply indebted to the Scripture. How many books would be less or non-existent were it not for the Bible? In 2011, Marilyn Robinson, writing in the New York Times, wrote,

The Bible is the model for and subject of more art and thought than those of us who live within its influence, consciously or unconsciously, will ever know. . . . Even when references to Scripture in contemporary fiction and poetry are no more than ornamental or rhetorical — indeed, even when they are unintentional — they are still a natural consequence of the persistence of a powerful literary tradition.

- **Language is inundated with biblical allusion.** This is especially true of the King James. How many cultural expressions find their source in the Bible? 200? 400?

Accordingly, the Bible has been an object of devotion and distrust, research and ridicule.

- Many unbelievers have read the Bible. Think of someone like science fiction writer and unbeliever, Isaac Asimov, who wrote a two volume *Asimov's Guide to the Bible*.
- Many are the sceptics who have started the Bible only to be converted in the process. Lee Strobel and J. Warner Wallace are two notable examples.

But what is the Bible? And what should we do with the Bible?

While hermeneutics has been defined as “the science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation” (Berkhof, 11), I want to suggest we need to know what we are dealing with before we can properly interpret it.

This is our apologetic task. In a fallen world of competing truth claims and religious pluralism, we must rightly understand what the Bible is and is not. And because we each come to the Bible with different experiences, traditions, and biases, we must ascertain what the Bible is before we can interpret what it says.

A Book Unlike Any Other

Christians believe Scripture is unlike any other book. And thus, confessions since the Reformation have affirmed the *divine inspiration* of God's Word *and* the absolute necessity for *divine illumination* by the Holy Spirit.

For instance, the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), which is followed almost verbatim by Second London Baptist Confession, says the Bible alone is the “sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience” (I.1). Likewise, “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God” (I.4).

In its explication of Scripture, the WCF repeatedly stresses the supernatural nature of the Bible—i.e., the triune God speaks to his people through his Word. Scripture comes from God, reveals God, and brings his elect to God. In this way, the Bible is a self-revelation of the triune God. God the Father is it's author; God the Son is it's principle revelation; and God the Spirit is one who enables humanity to understand and respond in faith.

Indeed, Scripture is God's Word breathed out, a point that the WCF codifies like this.

II. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testament, . . . **All which are given by inspiration of God** to be the rule of faith and life.^[7]

VI. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.^[12] Nevertheless, **we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God** to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word:^[13] and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.^[14]

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture.^[10] And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, **our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.**^[11]

X. The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but **the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.**^[24]

This approach to the Bible is no without opponents.

Richard Dawkins and the **New Atheists** flat out deny the divine inspiration of the Bible. In his *God Delusion*, he mocks at fundamentalists who cobbled together a view of divinely inspired Scripture (117–123), and he commends authors like Bart Ehrman who have liberated themselves from the dictates of the church.

Likewise, **postmoderns** question the validity of truth in any form. They deny transcendent authority and place authority in local communities from which it came from. Language and meaning is not something we must submit to; it is something by which we create meaning.

This view has impacted some Christians as well (**postconservatives**). Some of these scholars read the Bible very well (e.g., Brevard Childs). But they deny its transcendent authority and hence reduce the Bible to a community rulebook.

So too, **Protestant Liberals** deny the inerrancy of Scripture. They may affirm the Red Letters or certain ethical teachings, but historically this kind of Christian (which is no Christian at all) denies the miracles in the Bible and hence the miraculous conception of the Bible. To them, the book is spiritual but not supernatural.

Finally, responding against these skeptics are two kinds of Christians who have sought to place confidence in Scripture through exterior means.

1. The first are **Pentecostals** and **Charismatics** and **Third Wave** evangelicals (i.e., Vineyard, Hillsong, etc.). Birthed on Azusa Street in 1909, with two other waves of spiritual enlightenment to follow, Holy Spirit Christians defend the faith with their own personal experiences. While skeptics may make rationale arguments against the Bible, Charismatics respond with personal testimonies of God's healing power and present miracles. The Bible is validated by their own experience. To be fair, even Calvin (hardly a charismatic) makes a similar point, but he grounds understanding in the Spirit's work.
2. The second group are **fundamentalists** who look for external evidence to prove the validity of the Bible. Like the charismatics, there is something right about this. We ought to see evidence that demands a verdict, but such evidence is best taken *a posteriori*. Evidence doesn't raise men from the grave or grant faith to the spiritually dead; rather, evidence bolsters the faith of those who have been made alive by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, evidence *is* necessary, but full assurance in the veracity of Scripture is ultimately, as the WCF puts it, "from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."

Against all the first three of these positions and in contradistinction from the last two, we want to approach Scripture as God's inspired, inerrant, authoritative word which is both sufficient and clear for our understanding, provided that the Holy Spirit is opening our eyes.

In this way, we come to the Bible not as disinterested observers (as your college religion class might teach you), we come as disciples seeking understanding. In short, we approach the Bible and the God of the Bible *from faith* and *for faith*. Faith in God impels us to believe the Bible and faith (working itself out in love) is the goal of reading the Bible.

To be sure, most Christians do not think about this fact. But it is the necessary starting place when we read Scripture—we come as believers seeking understanding.

The God Who Speaks

When Carl F. H. Henry penned his six-volume work, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, he spent the first two volumes unpacking 15 theses. The first is the most fundamental: “Revelation is a divinely initiated activity, God’s free communication by which he alone turns his personal privacy into a deliberate disclosure of his reality” (vol. 2, p. 8).

This is the foundation of everything we know about God. We will not know him, unless he makes himself known. Just as our love follows his love (1 John 4:19), our spiritual interest follows his antecedent pursuit (Romans 3:10–11; 10:20), our knowledge is also subsequent. He loves first, seeks first, and speaks first. In creation and canon he initiates communication, and thus we his creation depend absolutely on his revelation.

Accordingly, when we come to Scripture we must know there is a God *before* this book, a revealed *by this book*, and working to make himself known *through this book*. This the foundational presupposition we begin with: *God has spoken*.

And how has he spoken? Consider three 1:1 passages, plus one more.

Genesis 1:1–3 – God has spoken in creation.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴

John 1:1–3 – God has spoken because it is in his very nature to speak.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Hebrews 1:1–4 – God has spoken through his prophets and now in his Son.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but 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. ³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Hebrews 3:7, 4:12 – God is still speaking.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit says . . . “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Just as God the light of creation continues to shine, the light of his Word continues to pierce the darkness of human hearts. God is a speaking God and we must come to the Bible expecting to hear from him.

Hearing God

If God is speaking, we must ask: How can we hear him? This question divides into two:

1. *Where* is he speaking?
2. *How* can hear him (rightly)?

#1 – Where is God speaking?

1. In Creation

a. There are multiple ways God is speaking in creation.

- i. Creation Proper – Psalm 19:1–7; 147:12–20; cf. Job 12:7–9; Job 37:10–13; Psalm 65:9–13
- ii. Common Grace – Genesis 1:27; 2:24; 9:13
- iii. Conscience – Romans 2:14
- iv. Community – Isaiah 28:23–29

b. We call this general revelation. It is a valid body of information which reveals truth about God.

- i. Romans 1:18–20. All people “know” God but do not honor God or give him thanks.
- ii. Job 12:7–9. Creation is meant to teach us about God.
- iii. Matthew 13. A basic knowledge of the world is necessary for understanding the Scripture. Why? “The universe and everything in it symbolizes God.”¹

Everything in creation bears some analogy to God. All the world has been made with God’s stamp on it, revealing Him. Creation is His temple, heaven His throne, earth His footstool. Thus Scripture finds analogies to God in every area of creation: inanimate objects (God the ‘rock of Israel,’ Christ the ‘door of the sheep,’ the Spirit as ‘wind,’ ‘breath,’ ‘fire’), plant life (God’s strength like the ‘cedars of Lebanon,’ Christ the ‘bread of life’), animals (Christ the ‘Lion of Judah,’ the ‘lamb of God’), human beings (God as king, landowner, lover; Christ as prophet, priest, king, servant, son, friend), abstract ideas (God as spirit, love, light; Christ as way, word, truth, life, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption). Even wicked people reveal their likeness to God, with, of course, much irony—see Luke 18:1–8 [or Psalm 78:65; Luke 16:1–9].²

¹ James Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Eugene, OR: W&S, 1999), 23.

² John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), 230.

2. In Covenant

- a. The other place where God speaks is in Scripture, or what we might call God's covenant. (We'll touch on this next month when we answer: *What is the Bible?*) For now, consider:

- i. Scripture is a Covenant Document

1. In creation – God created Adam to be in covenant with him
 2. In the fall – God judged Adam based upon his broken covenant
 3. In redemption – God established a series of covenants
 4. In revelation – the Bible is divided into 2 testaments (=covenants)
 5. In new creation – the new covenant will bring the new creation

- ii. Scriptures various genres reflect the major covenants of ANE³

1. 14th C Hittite Covenant

- a. Prologue / History
 - b. Stipulations
 - c. Blessings and Curses

2. Old Testament

- a. Historical Narrative
 - b. Laws
 - c. Prophets / Writings

3. New Testament

- a. Gospels and Acts
 - b. Letters
 - c. Revelation

- b. Scripture reveals the triune God and his covenant with his people

So this is where we find God speaking – in creation and covenant.

And more specifically, it is the latter (covenant) where we understand who God is, how we should interpret all other speech (general revelation), and most importantly how we can be reconciled to God.

Scripture is the enduring testimony of God whereby he communicates himself to his redeemed. Thus, the people of God are a “bookish” people. Psalm 111:2 says, “Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.” Repeatedly the Bible champions the place of the Word, such that only by knowing it can we know God.

This is God's economic choice. In accordance with his divine nature, he has revealed himself through (written) speech. Thus, to know him is to know his word.

³ Scott Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and its Interpretation* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 58–60.

#2 – How can we rightly hear him?

There are two ways to answer this.

1. **Spiritual Knowledge via Natural Theology** – We can hear God by applying ourselves to understanding to his Word.
 - a. This sounds good and right, but it assumes we have his word and the natural ability to understand and apply it. This is the error of natural theology.
 - b. Natural Theology – “Natural theology maintains that humans can attain particular knowledge about God through human reason by observing the created order as one locus of divine revelation.” (*Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 82)
 - c. While natural theology affirms ability to move from creation to Creator without a mediator and without a message (i.e., the Bible), there is a way to read the Bible naturally – as a subject (examiner) studying an object (specimen). The problem with this is that it denies the personal, active role God plays in speaking to us through his word.
 - d. Scripture is not like any other book and thus it cannot be treated like any other book. This is the error of the Enlightenment—
 - i. That man has the cognitive ability to discern God’s Word.
 - ii. That general hermeneutics are sufficient for reading the Bible.
 - iii. That Scripture is a specimen to be examined, pulled apart, and put back together.
 - e. General Hermeneutics – Principles of interpretation that are gathered from the discipline of linguistics. Some of which can apply to the Bible, but not in exactly the same way.
 - f. Historical Critical – After the Enlightenment, many students of the Bible called for treating Scripture like any other book. The result was a lifeless study of Scripture which dissected the Bible into pieces. Sometimes these studies resulted in denying the veracity and divine origin of the Bible; sometimes evangelical Christians (with orthodox beliefs) employed the same principles of interpretation leading to a strange mixture of orthodox doctrine and critical methods.
 - g. Our goal in reading the Scripture must be to seek the living God, to trust that he is speaking in Scripture, and to learn how he is speaking in God’s Word.

2. **Spiritual Knowledge via Spiritual Theology** – We can hear God by (1) responding in *faith* to the gospel, (2) *praying* for illumination, and (3) employing hermeneutic *principles* gleaned from Scripture itself.

a. Three key ideas

i. Responding in **faith** to the gospel.

1. We do not take first steps, but we respond in faith to God bringing the gospel to us.
2. We don't naturally understand Scripture. Our minds have been corrupted by the fall and thus we need spiritual resurrection to enable us to rightly understand and apply

** This doesn't deny the excellent work of unbelievers; it simply affirms that the work of unbelievers can never fully grasp the message of the Bible.

ii. **Praying** for Illumination –fruit is only born with prayer (John 15:7–8)

The 'work' of theological reflection can only be done through prayer. There is an intimate connection between the revelation of the identity of Christ—seeing him as the fulfillment of the Scriptures—and moments of prayerful quiet.

Luke makes this connection on a number of occasions. When Peter responds to Jesus's question, "But who do you say that I am?" with "the Christ of God," the readers had just been told that Jesus was praying alone (Luke 9:18–20). In other words, Luke wants his readers to know that Jesus was revealed to Peter in the context of prayer. The transfiguration, when Jesus was revealed in his glory as the Son, the Chosen One, follows Jesus taking Peter, James, and John to go to the mountain and pray (Luke 9:28–36). Back in the beginning of the Gospel, aged Simeon and Anna are both identified as pious people of prayer—statements that immediately precede God's revealing Jesus to them (Luke 2:27, 37; cf. Luke 28–32, 38). Even when God reveals the identity of Jesus at his baptism, Luke records that the heavens were opened and the God spoke, claiming Jesus as his Son. Luke records that the heavens opened just as Jesus was praying (Luke 3:21–22). (David Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 68)

iii. Employing **biblical principles** for Scripture.

1. Seeking the Lord for help – Proverbs 2:1–7; 1 Corinthians 2:10–16; 2 Timothy 2:1–7
2. Learning from the prophets and apostles – Hebrews 1:1–3

b. Special Hermeneutics

- i. Special hermeneutics employs many principles from the larger discipline of hermeneutics, but treats Scripture as a special class of Scripture, never forgetting the role of the inspiration of the text, the illumination of the Spirit, and the aim of doxology and disciple.
- ii. Some (e.g., Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 8) distinguish special from sacred hermeneutics, the former relating "to the explanation of particular books and classes of writings," the latter focusing on Scripture alone.

The Speaking God

1. Before Time and Throughout Scripture

- a. Before trekking through the whole Bible, it is worth noting a few things.
 - i. **The Bible is spoken word** . . . the medium by which God has chosen to communicate himself is verbal (and more than verbal).
 - ii. **The Bible regularly speaks of God speaking** . . . hence there is a powerful revelation that the Word of God is the perfect analogue to God the Word

The Bible presents God as the preeminent speaker. Much of what he does take the form of speech: promising, forgiving, commanding, and so on. The God of the Christian Scriptures is a God who relates to human beings largely through verbal communication. Of course, God can embody his Word with a completeness that humans cannot: God's Word was made flesh. *God's Word is thus something that God says, something that God does, and something God is.* (Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text?*, 205)

- b. God outside of space and time
 - i. **Hidden** – On one hand, it is not possible to know God apart from his creation and self-revelation. Therefore, we must be cautious is speculation about God *ad intra*.

He made darkness his covering,
his canopy around him,
thick clouds dark with water. (Psalm 18:11)

Truly, you are a God who hides himself,
O God of Israel, the Savior. (Isaiah 45:11)

- ii. **Revealed** – On the other hand, God's Word is meant to disclose himself to us. And his Word even speaks about the inner relations of the Triune God.

And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the **glory that I had with you before the world existed**. . . . Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because **you loved me before the foundation of the world**. (John 17:5, 24)

- iii. **Mystery** – God who is hidden from his creation (because of sin) has revealed himself to us. This is the biblical category of mystery, and it reveals much to us about God that

- 1. He hides himself from sinners . . . because of his holy character.
- 2. He reveals himself to sinners . . . because of his gracious will.

- c. Thus, the context of hidden-revealed produces in his us humility, dependence, prayer, that we might seek his face and not just (the writing of his) hand.

2. Creation

- a. Scripture testifies to us about a God who made the world by divine fiat.
 - i. Genesis 1 – He spoke and it was . . .
 - ii. Psalm 33:5–6 – All that we see has come via his words (cf. Hebrews 11:3)
 - iii. John 1:3 – the world came into being via the Word (cf. Hebrews 1:3)

- b. Creation precedes and confirms this testimony.
 - i. At the macro-level, the heavens speak – Psalm 19:1–7
 - ii. At the micro-level, the cell speaks – DNA
 - iii. At the mental-level, we find a voice that speaks to us – Romans 2:14

- c. Speech marks out everything in the world, yet in the cacophony of sound, the Bible has a special place. Why?
 - i. **The Bible explains the actions of God** – in history, there is a pattern. God speaks (foretelling his action), he acts, he explains.
 1. Abraham – you will have a son (Genesis 12, 15, 17), God visits Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18), they have a son (Genesis 21)
 2. Moses – you will redeem this people and come to this mountain (Exodus 3), he leads Moses to deliver Israel (Exodus 4 – 18), he completes this salvation by making a covenant (Exodus 19 – 24)
 3. Christ – I will go to the cross and die (Matthew 16ff), Christ dies and rises again (Matthew 26 – 27), he rises and explains (Matthew 28)

 - ii. **The Bible effects the actions of God** – God’s words are more than informative, they are performative.
 1. Psalm 29:3–9 – the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars
 2. Isaiah 55:10–11 – the word of God does not return void
 3. Ezekiel 12:25 – For I am the Lord; I will speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord God.”
 4. Mark 4:14, 26–29 – the kingdom will be built by the Word of God

iii. God has chosen to limit himself to his word.

Timothy Ward (*Words of Life*) has provides many rich observations on the relationship between God and his word. They are worth pondering in detail.

1. God acting and God speaking are one and the same.

In biblical language and theology, *God speaking and God acting are often one and the same thing.* (26)

There is, then, a complex but real relationship between God and his actions, expressed and performed, as they are, through God's words. In philosophical terms, there is an ontological relationship between God and his words. It seems that *God's actions including his verbal actions, are a kind of extension of him.* (31)

2. Words are the natural and chosen means by which God relates to his world. They are natural, because he is Speaking God. The Word reveals who God is. They are chosen because creation does not compel him to speak. Within the Godhead, there is an eternal communication. God speaking reflects something of his internal character.

God has *invested* himself in his words, or we could say that God has so *identified* himself with his words that whatever someone does to God's words (whether it is to obey or to disobey) they do directly to God. (27)

God chooses to use words as a fundamental means or relating to us, we must presume, because the kind of relationship he chooses to establish cannot be established without them. (31)

3. Words are necessary for creation to commune with God.

More mystically minded people sometimes suppose that words by their very nature are an obstruction to the goal of a deep communion with God, but that is just not so. Instead words are the necessary medium of a relationship with God. To put your trust in the words of the covenant promise God makes to you is itself to put your trust in God: the two are the same thing. *Communication from God* is therefore *communion with God*, when met with a response of trust from us. (31–32)

4. Words in creation established a covenant, a covenant which when broken brought disaster.

What happens when God's image-bearers reject his words?

3. Fall

- a. How did the Fall happen?
 - i. Satan twisted God's Word – Genesis 3:1b, 4
 - ii. Eve was deceived – Genesis 3:6; 1 Timothy 2:14
 - iii. Adam rebelled against God's Word – Genesis 3:6; Romans 5:12, 18–19
 - iv. *All parties rebelled against God's Word*
- b. Humanity still feels the effects of this original disobedience
 - i. **Romans 5:12, 18–19** – Adam who was to guard the garden and keep the word, led humanity into disobedience
 - ii. **Romans 8** – creation groans under the curse of God (cf. Genesis 3:14–19)
 - iii. **1 Corinthians 2:14** – Man is naturally blind to the things of God

4. Redemption (Promise)

- a. In the curse, God makes a redemptive promise – Genesis 3:16
- b. Redemptive history turns on the Word of God
 - i. God's Word animates redemptive history
 - 1. Law
 - 2. Prophets
 - ii. God's Word (the Incarnation) will fulfill redemptive history

5. Redemption (Fulfillment)

- a. The Incarnation
 - i. John 1:14 – The Word Tabernacles with his people
 - ii. John 10:17 – 18 – The Word Incarnate lays down his life
- b. The Cross (and resurrection) – the greatest act of revelation
- c. The Church is created by the Word
 - i. Matthew 16:18; 28:19 – The church is born by the Word
 - ii. Ephesians 2:17 – Christ himself preaches
 - iii. James 1:18 – The word of God creates new life

So What?

What does this do? Why this starting place? It secures a biblical approach to Scripture and exposes false ones.

1. We mentioned a variety of errant ways to approach the Bible.
 - a. As a collection of manmade myths – new atheists
 - b. As a community record of faith – postmodernity
 - c. As an errant document with mixed message – protestant liberal
 - d. As an optional part of the Christian faith – experiential Christian
 - e. As a rigid law code / manual for how to live life – legalist Christian

2. We must come with a general understanding of who God is and what he is doing
 - a. Triune God
 - i. Father who is speaking to his creatures
 - ii. Son who is being revealed
 - iii. Spirit who inspired prophets and apostles and is now illuminating our minds
 - b. Gracious God
 - i. He has disclosed himself
 - ii. He centers his message on the cross
 - iii. He empowers his saints to hear his voice
 - c. Holy God
 - i. He reveals his expectations in history, law, prophets, gospels, letters
 - ii. He gives his son to . . .
 1. Model those expectations
 2. Atonement for our violations
 3. Ratify a covenant whereby we can do what he says
 - iii. He gives us his Spirit to do what he commands

3. Take Away – God’s Word is a Living Word from a Personal, Holy, Gracious God

Ten Axioms About God's Authorship

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."
– Proverbs 1:7 –

"The fear of the Author is the beginning of literary understanding"
– Kevin Vanhoozer⁴ –

1. The Author generates, creates, and upholds the Word of God. This is the doctrine of **verbal, plenary inspiration**. The nature of the Word is, therefore, defined by its author.
2. The (nature of the) Author secures **authority** for the Word of God; without (knowledge of) the Author there is no resting place for God's authority.
3. **Authorial intent** depends on the existence and reliability of the Divine Author. If there is no Author, there is no use in searching for and defending Authorial Intent.
4. The Author gives **meaning** to the text; without the Author words have no extrinsic meaning. Intent requires a personal author – sentences chosen at random from a bag of words don't have meaning; words must have an author to have meaning.
5. The Author unites words to the world; without the author there is only text. This is what Kevin Vanhoozer calls the "reality principle," and thus Scripture is not solipsistic, but is *the* interpreter of **reality**. Rather, it speaks authoritatively about the world God has made.
6. Made in the Author's image, we have the **ability** to communicate with him and others; we also have the **responsibility** to communicate for him. Vanhoozer again: "It is therefore no little part of our Christian vocation to bear witness to the trustworthiness of the institution of language by being responsible authors and responsible readers."⁵
7. The Author decides the **content** of the Word. Hence, like the *imago dei*, the Word of God images who God is. In fact, the fixed referent of God's Word is the Divine Son.
8. Authors communicate however they chooses. In the Bible, the Spirit spoke through men to his community of faith. Hence, the Bible always possesses **dual authorship**. As Warfield famously said, "The Bible is the Word of God in such a way that when the Bible speaks, God speaks." We discern God's voice, as we rightly understand his prophets and apostles.
9. The Author decides what is **necessary** and **sufficient** for those whom he is speaking. Finite humans make this decision whenever they write, but with varying degrees of perception. Therefore, the clarity and effectiveness of one's speech depends on the wisdom, knowledge, understanding of the Author.
10. The Author guarantees the **power** of the Word – in reality, all words work, but they do not all work the same or with the same power. God's Word is given in time to accomplish his word (i.e., his decree) spoken in eternity.

⁴ *Is There Meaning in this Text?*, 201

⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.