What Christians Believe About the Bible

What do Christians believe? While the answer to that question may vary, depending on the religious affiliation of the person who answers it, the Bible reveals some core doctrines which all who profess Christianity must accept. This study will discuss some of these fundamental teachings.

The importance of one’s beliefs can hardly be overemphasized. Beliefs are influential; it has been said that nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come. The power of beliefs to shape one’s destiny (and to influence history) is evident in the willingness of extremists to kill others in the name of their faith. Their perverted beliefs dictate how they live and how they die.

How a person lives and what he does are largely determined by what he believes. One who believes that man is nothing more than an animal is likely to behave differently than those who believe man was made in the image of God. An individual who believes that the world came about by chance rather than being created by God lives differently than he would if he believed in creation. Belief in God, in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, or in heaven and hell affects a person’s everyday attitudes and actions. Christian beliefs define a lifestyle, a way of living so as to please God daily and enjoy the abundant life.

The purpose of this series is to present briefly what the Bible teaches on each topic, in order to help us all to understand some of Christianity’s basic beliefs more fully. Therefore, the first belief to be considered is this: Christians believe that the Bible is God’s Word. Faith in the Bible is not more important than faith in God or Christ. However, this faith is fundamental to every other topic included in this series. Since each of the following lessons will emphasize what the Bible teaches, the fact that the Bible is God’s Word must be established from the beginning.

Why Christians believe what the Bible teaches is not our current topic of discussion, just as why people need to believe in God or Christ will not be emphasized in later lessons. Rather than being concerned with “why,” we are interested in “what”—what the Bible has to say about itself.

Some believe that the Bible is a purely human document. To them it is a great book, but no more inspired by God than were the works of William Shakespeare. People who have this perception of the Bible may study it ardently, just as people diligently study Shakespeare’s plays. They may find in it guidelines for living, just as they see rules for living in the writings of great philosophers. However, they do not view it as providing divine guidance.

Others believe that the Bible is partially inspired. They may believe that what they see as the most important truths taught in the Bible were revealed by God, but that much of the rest of the Bible’s

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contents originated with man. From their viewpoint, what the Bible says is to be accepted as true only if the information can be verified by other sources or if it accords with common sense and human wisdom.

The traditional (conservative or evangelical) belief is that the Bible is fully inspired by God—that it is verbally inspired (that is, the words themselves are inspired) and inerrant (that is, it contains no errors).

Christians must have a scriptural view of the Scriptures! Why? Because the Bible reflects that the early church, the apostles, and our Lord Jesus Christ accepted the Scriptures as God’s Word! As Christians, we are followers of Jesus Christ. As followers of Jesus, we ought to have the same belief about the Scriptures that He had!

According to this view, the autographs of the Bible books—the manuscripts as they were originally written—were divinely inspired and inerrant. For hundreds of years those original copies of the divinely inspired books were copied by hand by uninspired men. During this process, some errors have crept into the text, but none of those errors affects any Bible doctrine.

THE SCRIPTURES ARE INSPIRED BY GOD

Liternlly hundreds of times in the Old Testament, the prophets declared, “Thus says the Lord.” In Amos 1 and 2, for example, Amos said, “Thus says the Lord” (or the equivalent) about nine times in thirty-one verses.

Likewise, the New Testament teaches that the Scriptures are inspired by God. Paul wrote to Timothy,

...from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God by profit for teaching; for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15–17).

According to this passage, “all Scripture” is . . .

(1) inspired by God. That is, it is “God-breathed”—God gave the message to men, and they wrote it down for us.

(2) profitable for every spiritual need.

(3) complete, since it makes the man of God “adequate” (or complete) and “equipped for every good work” (emphasis mine).

(4) necessary to salvation (it gives “wisdom that leads to salvation”).

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And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

Peter said that some were distorting Paul’s writings just as they did “the rest of the Scriptures” (emphasis mine). Peter regarded Paul’s writings as Scripture! Therefore, both the Old Testament and the New Testament are included in the term “Scripture.”

We read in 2 Peter 1:20, 21,

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

These verses reveal the origin of prophecy: Those who wrote the Scriptures did not give their own interpretation of events—that is, they were not just giving their opinions about what God wanted—so their writings were not a product of the
“human will.” Instead, they wrote what the Holy Spirit inspired them to say.

John recorded this statement made by Jesus:

“Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?” (John 10:34–36).

Jesus Himself was speaking of Scripture in this context as the “word of God,” and He added that “the Scripture cannot be broken.” God’s Word is final and absolute; it cannot be altered. Jesus believed the Scriptures to be inspired and authoritative!

Some who agree with the message of the passages above insist that the individual words of the text are not inspired; they deny that the Bible is “verbally inspired.” However, Galatians 3:16 indicates otherwise. Paul wrote, “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ.” In this verse Paul was making an argument based on the spelling of a single word in the Old Testament text. He obviously believed that the individual words of a Scripture are inspired.

Further evidence is seen in Hebrews 1:1, 2. “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.” “God . . . spoke”! The Almighty God who made the world revealed His will to man, His creature! The writer added that God, in the past, spoke “in the prophets.” Therefore, what the Old Testament contains is the word that God spoke through His prophets. He then said that God today, in the church age, speaks through His Son, Jesus Christ. What Jesus said, and what He inspired His apostles and evangelists to say and write, should also be regarded as God-inspired.

Should the writings of the apostles in the New Testament be thought of as divinely inspired? Paul wrote,

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

If what Paul said was to be thought of as the “word of God,” then what he wrote should be accepted as the “word of God.” Likewise, the other writings of the New Testament were recognized as part of the “word of God.”

The part of the Bible that contains commandments which apply directly to us today is the New Testament.

All of these passages reinforce the traditional view that the Bible is indeed the inspired Word of God! True followers of Christ will gladly accept this basic doctrine; they will have a scriptural view of the Scriptures.

Something else the Bible teaches about the Scriptures is that, while all of the Bible is inspired by God, the part that contains commandments which apply directly to us today is the New Testament. The old law—the Old Testament—has been taken away; it is no longer directly applicable to us. Paul said that the Law was “our tutor to lead us to Christ” and then added, “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:24, 25). God’s people are no longer obligated to live by the Law (see also Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:15; Hebrews 8:6–13; 10:9). However, to say that Christians are not under the Old Testament does not mean that it has no value for us. While its laws do not govern us, the study of the Old Testament is still profitable (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; see especially Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11).

THE BIBLE IS HOLY, PRECIOUS, & POWERFUL

Those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God likewise accept the following truths:

The Bible is holy; it is, as often titled, the “Holy Bible.” It is God’s book. Since it is holy, it is indestructible (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:23–25). Further, since it is God’s Word, it is to be re-
spected and revered. People have no right to alter its teachings to suit themselves (Galatians 1:8, 9; Revelation 22:18, 19; 2 John 9).

The Bible is precious. Since the Bible is the Word of God, we should love it (Psalm 119:113). It must be to us what it was to the psalmist, who said that God’s precepts were “more desirable than gold” and “sweeter... than honey” (Psalm 19:10).

The Bible is powerful. It is “living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). It has power:

- to grow the kingdom when it is taught (Luke 8:11).
- to save people who obey it (1 Peter 1:22-25; James 1:21).
- to build up Christians, enabling God’s children to receive the promised inheritance (Acts 20:32).
- to help Christ’s followers overcome temptation (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).
- to serve as the Christian’s weapon in the battle against the forces of evil (Ephesians 6:17).
- to convert unbelievers (Mark 16:15, 16; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 1:16).

CONCLUSION

Christians must believe that the Bible is inspired by God. However, it does no good to believe the truth without acting upon that truth. James wrote, “Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers”; “... one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22, 25; see 2:20).

If we truly believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, what will we do? First, we will strive to make sure that we teach only the Word of God, and we will reject any teaching which is not from His Word!

Second, we will resolve to do—to the best of our ability—the will of God as revealed in the Bible. The Bible contains the commands of God. Those commands are not just suggestions, nor can we pick and choose which of God’s commands we want to obey. God has always required people to comply with all of His requirements! We must, therefore, read the Bible submissively, with an attitude like Samuel’s: “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth” (1 Samuel 3:9; see v. 10; KJV). What we read in God’s Word, we must then determine to do.

A small church where I preached gave each high school graduate a Bible as a graduation present. Inside each Bible given to these young people was written something like the following:

Congratulations on your graduation from high school! To commemorate that occasion, this Bible is being presented to you. May you accept it as the Word of God, read it regularly, study it diligently, love it fervently, and obey it completely. May it guide your steps for the rest of your life.

A Note from the Author

Obviously, with all that the Bible teaches, this series cannot provide a comprehensive view of everything that the Christian is to believe. It is not a systematic theology or a “catechism.” Instead, the lessons offer an overview of the major biblical doctrines that Christians should believe.

I wanted to include as many Scripture references as possible—plus a few recommendations for further study—so that anyone who studies this material will be able to “give a reason” for what he believes. As I wrote, I prayerfully kept my grandchildren in mind. These are the basic biblical truths I want them always to remember and to live by, so their lives and their worship will be pleasing to God.

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