

# The Blueprint

**Christian Doctrine**



**TOPICAL**

**9 STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

# The Blueprint

---

**Christian Doctrine**

*by Phillip D. Jensen*  
&  
*Tony Payne*



matthiasmedia

*The Blueprint*

(First published as *The Leadership Papers*)

© Matthias Media 1988, 1995

Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd. ACN 067 558 365)

PO Box 225

Kingsford NSW 2032

Australia

Telephone: (02) 9663 1478; international: +61-2-9663-1478

Facsimile: (02) 9663 3265; international: +61-2-9663-3265

Email: [info@matthiasmedia.com.au](mailto:info@matthiasmedia.com.au)

Internet: [www.matthiasmedia.com.au](http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au)

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL  
VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.  
Used by permission of Zondervan Publishers.

ISBN 1 875245 32 4

All rights reserved. Except as may be permitted by the Copyright  
Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or  
by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design Pty Ltd.

---

# *Contents*

	Introduction . . . . .	5
<b>1</b>	Circles and tangents . . . . .	9
<b>2</b>	What makes Christians different? . . . . .	21
<b>3</b>	Visions on the road . . . . .	29
<b>4</b>	An unnecessary truth . . . . .	39
<b>5</b>	The importance of being obstreperous . . . . .	49
<b>6</b>	Pitiful Christians . . . . .	61
<b>7</b>	Bridging the chasm of history . . . . .	73
<b>8</b>	What—no controversy? . . . . .	83
<b>9</b>	Godly heresies . . . . .	93
	Conclusion: Who wants to be an ‘ism’? . . . . .	103
	Appendix: Who is in control? . . . . .	109
	Tips for group leaders . . . . .	121

---

# *Introduction*

The apostle Paul was nearing the end of his turbulent life, a life expended in serving the Christ he had met on the Damascus Road. As he writes to his young friend and co-worker Timothy, he urges him to continue the work which Christ had called them to, the work of teaching and preserving and modelling the gospel. They are moving words:

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. (2 Tim 1:8-14)

The pattern of sound teaching. The good deposit. This is the Word that Timothy was to preach, in season and out of season, in the face of those who would not put up with sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:1-5).

It is this same gospel that Timothy was to entrust to other reliable people, who in turn would be able to teach others (2 Tim 2:2; cf. Titus 1:9).

*The Blueprint* is all about this “pattern of sound teaching” that we are to believe, preserve, build our lives on, and pass on to others. In the studies that follow, we will look together at the great themes and truths which God reveals in the Scriptures—concerning God, mankind, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, resurrection and the life to come.

A firm grasp of this ‘sound doctrine’ is the basis of Christian growth and maturity, and one of the essential characteristics of the Christian leader. As Paul says to another of his co-workers, Titus: “He [the elder] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9).

But whether you are in leadership or not, we trust that studying the Scriptures in these studies will increase your spiritual knowledge and understanding of God, and that knowing him better, you will please him more in every way.

## **The format**

As a simple means of opening up these foundational biblical ideas, we have chosen a fairly standard doctrinal statement to use as a framework—the Doctrinal Basis of the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES). This statement is used throughout Australia as the doctrinal standard of evangelical\* student groups and, with minor variations, is also used by numerous other Christian organizations as a statement of their basic beliefs. Taken together, the nine sentences in the doctrinal statement form a clear and very helpful summary of what biblical Christianity believes. It reads:

- A The divine inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scripture, as originally given, and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

---

\*By ‘evangelicalism’ we mean plain biblical Christianity built around the gospel. We’ll refer to evangelicalism at different times in these studies, and return to it in more detail in our conclusion.

- B The unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.
- C The universal sinfulness and guilt of human nature since the fall, rendering man subject to God's wrath and condemnation.
- D The conception of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and his birth of the virgin Mary.
- E Redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin *only* through the sacrificial death (as our Representative and Substitute) of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God.
- F The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- G The necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to make the death of Christ effective to the individual sinner, granting him repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.
- H The indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.
- I The expectation of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is one study for each of the nine statements (as well as a conclusion and appendix). They are best read with an open Bible close at hand, both to look up the footnotes and to do the *Investigate* sections that are interspersed throughout. The *Think it through* questions that follow each paper are designed for personal reflection and then discussion. If you are not doing the studies in a group, make sure you discuss your thoughts with someone before proceeding to the next one, whether a friend, or your minister or Bible study leader.



### **Investigate**

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



### **Think it through**

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

## **Further reading**

There are a number of helpful books worth consulting in your study of the basic doctrines of Christianity. The best of them are:

*In Understanding Be Men* by TC Hammond (IVP)

*Know the Truth* by Bruce Milne (IVP)

*God's Words* by JI Packer (Hodder and Stoughton)

*The New Bible Dictionary* (IVP)

*Christian Theology* by Millard Erickson (Baker)

Consult the tables of contents and indexes in these books to find articles, Scripture references and detailed bibliographies on the subjects discussed in these studies.

For further information on using these studies in a small group, see 'Tips for group leaders' at the end of the book.

# 1

## *Circles & tangents*

The Bible has always been a battleground for Christians, both from without and within. Those who reject Christianity rightly see the Bible as their point of attack. Amongst those who profess to be Christians (but are not) we also find sustained attacks upon the Scriptures. The traditional divisions between the denominations are often divisions of attitudes towards the Bible.

Because the Scriptures are the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct, disagreements at this point lead to much wider disputes on a whole range of subjects. Those who take the Bible as the authoritative norm of life will obviously have different views from those who take other books, prophets or experiences as their standard. And there can be little hope of reconciliation when people disagree upon the basic supreme authority.

Most groups use the Bible. But using the Bible is not the same as believing the Bible. The Mormons frequently quote the Bible on our doorsteps yet believe that the Bible is full of errors. Roman Catholicism reads parts of the Bible in the Mass, yet sees the authority for faith and life as found in the traditions of Christ, only part of which is the Bible. Many Liberal Protestant preachers will refer to the Bible, and when the Bible agrees with them will quote it with authority, but in fact they sit in judgement over the Bible, thinking their own wisdom wiser than the wisdom of God. To trust in the Bible as the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct, requires one neither to add nor subtract from it. *Using* the Bible is very different from *believing* the Bible.

## The evangelical position on Scripture

The first statement of the AFES doctrinal basis is:

The divine inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scripture, as originally given, and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

This is frequently seen as *the* distinctive of evangelical belief. It certainly does mark evangelicals out from the crowd. However, it is only part of the matrix of truths found in the doctrinal basis of evangelicalism. Without a belief in the personal, sovereign God, the doctrine of Scripture would not stand. Similarly, without the doctrine of Scripture we would not come to know the personal, sovereign God.

### Clarifying terms

The statement of the AFES doctrinal basis uses clearly recognizable doctrinal jargon to express with accuracy its viewpoint. It is important that we master this jargon in order to avoid misunderstandings.

#### 1. The divine inspiration

This refers to the inspiration of the Scriptures by God. The use of the word ‘inspiration’ comes from 2 Timothy 3:16 and refers to God ‘breathing out’ the Scriptures. It means more than the Scriptures are ‘inspired’, or that they ‘inspire’ us. Shakespeare, Mozart and Rembrandt could all be described as ‘inspired’, by which we mean ‘way above average’. They may also have an ‘inspiring’ effect upon us, by which we mean ‘they lift us out of our normal, mundane lives’. However, theologically and biblically, the idea of inspiration is that the words are breathed out by God—the words of Scripture are God’s words.

This in no way implies the *method* by which God inspires. It does not commit us to any idea of mechanical dictation or automatic writing. The inspiration did not remove the personality or style of the human author. The Scriptures are treated as if there is a dual authorship: God and man, with the primary author being

God. Psalm 110:1 is said to have been written by David<sup>1</sup> and by God<sup>2</sup> and by David speaking by the Spirit.<sup>3</sup> This dual authorship can be seen throughout the Scriptures.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Infallibility**

The Scriptures can be relied upon completely. They will never fail us—this is what is meant by the traditional term ‘infallible’. The Bible is completely trustworthy because its author has made sure that it is without error.

At this point some evangelical Christians have differed with others by trying to claim too much for the infallibility of Scripture. The Bible is unique and can only be described, never defined. To say that it is infallible is a description of its character, not a definition by which we can determine the ways in which God is going to speak. Thus some parts of the Bible (the parables, for example) may be fiction and yet still be described as infallible. Other parts of the Scriptures may involve poetic licence and exaggeration, without losing their veracity.<sup>5</sup> While on one hand we must be wary of doubting the absolute trustworthiness and truthfulness of the Scriptures, on the other hand we must not claim too much for the Scriptures, thus squeezing them into an unbiblical strait-jacket. Infallible history must have incidental variations in the reporting of events, otherwise it is not history at all. Such minor variations do not effect the Scripture’s infallibility.

## **3. Holy Scripture, as originally given**

‘Holy Scripture’ refers to the whole Bible comprising the old and new covenants. These 66 books are the written words of God. However, the version that has been inspired and is entirely trustworthy is the original version. Not every copy or translation of the Bible is the divine, inspired, infallible word of God. God gave his revelation to mankind through his authors. On different occasions,

---

1 Acts 2:34, 35

2 Hebrews 1:13

3 Matthew 22:43-44

4 cf. Acts 3:21-22 and Hebrews 4:3-8; Acts 3:22 and 4:25.

5 Note, for example, Jesus’ striking language in Luke 14:26.

mankind in his neglect and sinfulness has tampered with and varied what was originally given.

Fortunately, none of the original copies have been kept, otherwise we would be tempted to venerate and worship them. However, it is important for us to study the manuscripts carefully that are available, to ascertain the original message of God. In God's great kindness, many thousands of copies of the Scriptures have been preserved, along with considerable knowledge of the means by which they have been transmitted to us. Thus we can be assured that what we have today is substantially what was originally given. The variations between manuscripts are so small that no doctrine can be said to hang on them.

#### **4. Supreme authority**

The phrase 'supreme authority' indicates that the doctrinal basis acknowledges the existence of other authorities. This is because the Scriptures themselves recognize other authorities.<sup>6</sup> Governments are put in authority over people just as fathers are put in authority over children. However, the supreme authority, the authority over all other authorities, is said to be Scripture. There is no authority equal to, or over, the Scriptures.

#### **5. Faith and conduct**

Notice too that the authority of Scripture is limited to matters of faith and conduct. The Scriptures do not claim to be an authority in calculus, nuclear physics, poetry or chess. There may be some aspects of these disciplines where the Scriptures have some relevance, but by and large, these topics are not addressed, and there is no claim to supreme authority here.

Rather, the Scriptures are God-breathed and useful for "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work".<sup>7</sup> It is in the area of faith and conduct that the Scriptures are speaking. 'Faith' refers to more than our trust in God; it includes the idea of *the* faith that was delivered once and for all to the saints.<sup>8</sup>

---

6 Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13

7 2 Timothy 3:16-17

8 Jude 3

## Why does the Bible have authority?

God is personal and revelatory. He reveals himself to be living and speaking and truthful. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe who rules the world by his word and reveals himself in his speech. What has this to do with the Bible's authority?

### 1. God's character

The Thessalonians turned from idols to serve the "living and true God".<sup>9</sup> This is characteristic of the description of God in the Scriptures. Psalm 115 points to God as being radically different from the idols who "have mouths, but cannot speak". Jeremiah scorns the following of such idols; he says, "Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak, they must be carried because they cannot walk".<sup>10</sup> The God of Israel, on the other hand, speaks: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth ... for he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm".<sup>11</sup>

However, God not only speaks; he speaks the *truth*. The "true and living God" is not only true in that he really exists, but is also true in his character and nature. Two of the things which are said to be impossible for God are telling lies<sup>12</sup> and disowning himself.<sup>13</sup> God is faithful to his word and consequently, God's word is right and true.<sup>14</sup> It is on this basis that we affirm that the Holy Scriptures are infallible.

### 2. Ruling, revealing, relating

God rules his universe by his word. By his powerful word he created the world<sup>15</sup> and by the same word he will destroy it.<sup>16</sup>

---

9 1 Thessalonians 1:9

10 Jeremiah 10:5

11 Psalm 33:6, 9; also see Isaiah 44-45 for the stark contrast between the dumb idols and the God who speaks.

12 Hebrews 6:18

13 2 Timothy 2:13

14 Hebrews 10:23; Psalms 33:4; 119:142, 151

15 Genesis 1; Psalm 33:6

16 2 Peter 3:7

God's word always achieves his purpose<sup>17</sup>—it is living and active, penetrating and judging.<sup>18</sup> So much is the word of God an expression of God himself and of his powerful rule in this world, that the *word* of God can be used to explain the incarnation.<sup>19</sup>

However, the word of God not only rules the world, but also reveals God to the world. In the past God spoke through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.<sup>20</sup> The word of truth, the gospel of salvation, has been spoken to us to reveal the great plan of God in redemption.<sup>21</sup> Even to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ have been made plain.<sup>22</sup>

God relates to us through this revelation. He makes himself known by it, and through it he regenerates us. The preaching of Jesus Christ as Lord is used by God to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.<sup>23</sup> The gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.<sup>24</sup> By the message of the cross we come to know the power of God and the wisdom of God and God himself.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the reason that the Bible has authority is because of its author—God. The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth has spoken through the prophets and in his Son. To reject the word of God is to reject God himself.

## **What authority has the Bible?**

The Scripture has authority over all matters on which it speaks. It is not exhaustive—it does not cover all matters—but because of its authorship its authority extends over everything it covers.

---

17 Isaiah 55:11

18 Hebrews 4:12-13

19 John 1:1-18

20 Hebrews 1:1-3

21 Ephesians 1:13

22 Ephesians 3:1-13

23 2 Corinthians 4:5-6

24 Romans 1:16

25 1 Corinthians 10:11; cf. Romans 15:4

## 1. Contemporary

The Bible is not imprisoned in a particular historical context. It was delivered at a point, or more accurately a phase, of history and to understand it correctly we need to read it in its original context. However, the Bible is a contemporary word which does not need to be ‘made relevant’. It is permanently relevant because God is speaking his word to *us*.

Jesus attacked the Sadducees for ignorance of the Scriptures saying, “Have you not read what God said to *you?*”<sup>26</sup> A similar argument is used in Hebrews 3 and 4, where the temptation in the wilderness speaks a word of God to us *today*. In fact, referring to the Exodus, Paul goes so far as to say that “those things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come”.<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Sufficient

It is important to understand that the Scriptures are sufficient for Christian living. God’s revelation of himself is not partial, but final. In the past it was a partial revelation, when he “spoke through the prophets in many and various ways”.<sup>28</sup> In the past, angels as well as prophets wondered what they were speaking about when they spoke of the salvation that was to come and predicted the sufferings of the Christ. In the gospel these things have now been completely revealed.<sup>29</sup>

Christ opened the minds of his disciples to understand that he had come to fulfil the Scriptures by his suffering and resurrection.<sup>30</sup> He brings the Scriptures to their close. All the prophets find their “yes and amen” in him.<sup>31</sup> Now the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.<sup>32</sup>

---

26 Matthew 22:31

27 1 Corinthians 10:11; cf. Romans 15:4

28 Hebrews 1:1

29 1 Peter 1:10-12

30 Luke 24:27, 44-46

31 2 Corinthians 1:20

32 Revelation 1:2-3, 19:10



## How do we know?

The arguments so far seem to be circular. The Bible claims that the Bible is authoritative. If you believe the Bible, you will believe that it is authoritative.

What happens if you don't believe the Bible? How can you ever get onto the circle? What happens if you believe the book of Mormon, or the Koran? These books also claim to be the authoritative word of God. Their authority seems every bit as circular as the Bible's.

On one level, we should expect that the authority of the Bible will be found within the Bible itself. If it were found elsewhere, then there would be a rival claim to authority in matters of faith and conduct. If, for example, it was by reason that we concluded that the Scriptures were authoritative, then reason would become the supreme authority. The question remains: How can we ever get onto the circle?

### 1. The work of the Spirit

Why do we believe in Scripture? Because of God's Spirit at work in us. It is God who opens our eyes to see the glory of God in the face of Christ.<sup>33</sup> Paul thanked *God* that the Thessalonians received the word of Paul not as the word of man, but as the word of God.<sup>34</sup> It is because we are his sheep that we know the voice of Jesus.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the Scriptures are Spirit-authenticated.

The converse is also true. Those who reject the authority of the Bible usually wish to do so on 'rational' grounds. Their intellect cannot stomach what they read (to mix metaphors). We need to remember, however, that the decision to reject God is fundamentally spiritual, not rational. The man who says in his heart "There is no God" is a fool, not a member of the intelligentsia.<sup>36</sup>

### 2. The example of Christ

If we are to be followers of Christ, then we should imitate Christ's attitude to the Scriptures. Jesus consistently quoted and referred to the Scriptures as having authority. He considered the Old Testament

---

33 2 Corinthians 4:5-6

34 1 Thessalonians 2:13

35 John 10:27

36 Psalm 14:1; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14

as a ‘court of final appeal’ in matters of controversy.<sup>37</sup> He insisted that prophecy would find its fulfilment in his actions.<sup>38</sup> He attacked the Sadducees for their failure to know the Scriptures.<sup>39</sup>

As if this wasn’t enough, the rest of the New Testament demonstrates the same acceptance of the authority of Scripture.<sup>40</sup> The New Testament even quotes itself as having such authority.<sup>41</sup>

### **3. The reasonableness of belief**

If we are Christians, and have the Holy Spirit within us and are seeking to follow the example of Christ and his apostles, it can be seen that accepting the authority of the Scriptures is thoroughly reasonable. In fact, denial of the Scriptures is a genuine symptom of unbelief. But what of those outside of Christ? Can this reasonableness ever be demonstrated to them?

The reasonableness of belief can certainly be demonstrated, if not proven. If the Scriptures are true, they must be consistent with what we know of the world. If there was a major inconsistency between our knowledge of the world and our knowledge in Scripture, then it would be hard for people ever to climb onto the circle of belief. Another way of saying this is that the circle of belief touches on the world that we know. These points of contact are like tangents onto the circle. One chief point of contact is history.

We cannot *prove* the truth of the gospel through history. However, history can help us onto the circle. From a purely historical standpoint, we can learn something of the person of Jesus, who he claimed to be and whether those claims measure up to the facts as we have them. This knowledge may lead us to think seriously about his claims over our lives and the meaning he gives to our existence. Such an approach can lead us to accept that belief in Jesus is quite ‘reasonable’.

The same point can be made negatively. The Bible speaks about the nature of the world and humanity. Its perception of man as being universally sinful is a reasonable assessment of the state of the world.

---

37 Matthew 22:29-32; Mark 7:6-13

38 Matthew 26:52-56

39 Mark 12:24-27

40 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 3-4; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 10:6-11

41 1 Timothy 5:18; 2 Peter 3:15-17; 1 Corinthians 7:40, 14:36-37

If it was *un*reasonable it would be hard to commend to outsiders.

It is at this point that the controversy between science and revelation begins. Is the Bible's view of the world 'unreasonable' in the light of our empirical knowledge? It would be hard to maintain belief in the Scriptures if it taught authoritatively that the world was flat or that the moon was a crescent. However, the description of man and the world in the Scriptures is sufficiently consistent with our empirical knowledge of the world for there to be no real conflict.

These tangents onto the circle of faith have limited apologetic and evangelistic usefulness. They must not be given authority over the Scriptures. Nor must they be seen as an alternative to hearing the Scriptures read and taught, for faith comes from hearing the word of God.<sup>42</sup> It is the gospel word which is the power of God for salvation.<sup>43</sup> It is the miracle of God's Spirit regenerating us through his word that enables people to come to faith in the gospel.

## **The correct response to Scripture**

When the people of God gathered around Mt Sinai, they heard the voice of God and they trembled.<sup>44</sup> In the presence of God man is afraid, and this fear is the beginning of wisdom.<sup>45</sup> The appropriate response to the word of God is the same as our response to God himself.

We must not merely be hearers of the word, but doers, humbly accepting what God says and earnestly seeking by his strength to put it into operation. We must be people who search out what God is saying.<sup>46</sup> God calls upon us to have his word on our hearts and in our minds, as we get up in the morning and go to bed at night, as we go in and out of our house, and as we teach our children.<sup>47</sup> We are to meditate (that is, to *think* not to 'mystically meditate') upon his word day and night.<sup>48</sup>

---

42 Romans 10:17

43 Romans 1:16

44 Exodus 19:16

45 Psalm 111:10

46 Like the Bereans of Acts 17:10-11; cf. James 1:21-22.

47 Deuteronomy 6:4-8

48 Joshua 1:8

If we have God's word, then we have life, for "man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God".<sup>49</sup>



### Think it through

1. Is the authority of Scripture being undermined in your own situation? Are there ways in which it is being 'used' rather than 'believed'? What might you do about it?
2. Does God still speak today? If so, how?
3. How will the doctrine of Scripture affect the way in which we minister?

---

49 Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3