

Baptist DNA: Biblical Authority (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13)

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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/baptist-dna-biblical-authority/

Prayer is one very significant way in which we can connect with God, obviously. And of course the Bible is also a very significant – many people argue the MOST significant way – to connect with God. The Bible is what we'll focus on today.

Today is the final sermon in our series on Baptist DNA – What makes us a Baptist church, and why that is important. Today's subject is Biblical Authority, or in other words: the importance of the Bible in our lives, as individual followers of Jesus, and as a church body. Traditionally, Baptists have been known as "People of the Book." The book alluded to is the Bible, of course, and the significance of this title means that we have traditionally looked first and foremost to the Bible to speak into our lives about everything related to God, and our relationship to God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

That first phrase is very important, and it's what at the heart of why Baptists have called themselves "People of the Book" – "All scripture is inspired by God..." Some versions say, "All scripture is God-breathed" – and that phrase is the most literal translation... that the words written in this holy book have been "breathed by God" and written down by humans. That gets at the heart of what you and I think about the Bible, and the authority – or lack of authority – we give it in our lives.

Do you or do you not believe that God's hand was involved in the constructing of this book? And perhaps more importantly, do you believe that God speaks to you through the words in this book?

This is going to be a weird sermon today. It definitely won't have three points and a poem. Instead, we're going to take a quick dive into three areas and end with a very practical tool that we can all use to help strengthen our faith:

- History of the Bible – how did it come to be?
- Interpretation of the Bible – some tips and cautions when it comes to us reading this special book.
- Application of the Bible – a practical way that we can move forward and perhaps make the Bible (or most importantly, God's voice that speaks to us through the Bible) an important part of our faith journeys.

History of the Bible

First, it's important to remember that the books of the Bible developed during a time in history when stories were told – verbally – over and over again. So what we have in the Bible started as oral traditions... the spoken stories that were passed on from one generation to another.

Second, the vast majority of people in ancient times were unable to read or write. Thus, the oral tradition – we can get a sense of as we read about how Jesus taught the crowds – was crucial in passing on what was to eventually become the Bible.

Third, we have no original documents of the Old Testament or New Testament. Instead, we have copies of copies. But thankfully, we have so many copies that we can reliably trust that Bible as it stands today.

Fourth, the printing press wasn't developed until the mid 1400s, which meant that written copies of the scriptures before that time were handwritten. Over the centuries, as monks and scribes rewrote scripture passages, it would have been nearly impossible for them to do it perfectly. If you ever tried to copy off someone else's school work before, you know that it's not uncommon for mistakes to be made in the copying process.

This leads to a few cases in our Holy Bible like we find with Mark 16:9-20...

- “[The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have verses 9–20.]”

The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek. In later centuries, they were translated to other languages, and eventually we came to the King James Version – which was commissioned in 1604 and printed in 1611.

Jesus was crucified around 30 to 33 AD, but the Gospel books – Matthew, Mark, Luke & John – weren't written until at least 40 years later, the earliest probably being written in the 70s AD.

First epistles (letters) in the New Testament were written in the 50s AD.

A series of letters and councils (meetings) in the 4th century (300s AD) led to a formal decision of what we refer to as the “biblical canon” – the list of books that are included in our Holy Bible. Some of the considerations that church leaders thought about when deciding what to include and exclude in the canon of the Bible...

- Was the passage widely used and taught in several churches by that time?
- Was the passage supported by one or more of the Apostles, or leaders of the church?

Interpretation of the Bible

Last week we focused on the important concept of Priesthood of the Believer, which means that every one of us that follows Jesus has the privilege of having direct access, direct contact

with God. That connection with God plays out in the fact that each of us can read and interpret the Bible for ourselves. But that also creates some problems.

What happens if you and I both read the same passage but come to different conclusions?

- 1 Corinthians 14:34 – *“Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.”*
- Philippians 4:13 – *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*

With those examples in mind, it’s important to understand that there are different types of literary genres within the Bible, and that impacts how you should – and shouldn’t interpret various passages...

1. Narrative – Exodus, Acts, etc
 - a. Gospels – much of which is narrative, but also contains various literary styles
2. Poetry (expressive and full of emotion) – Psalms
3. Wisdom - Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes
4. Prophecy – Daniel, Revelation
5. Epistles/New Testament letters – Romans, etc.

And this is my personal rule of thumb when it comes to interpreting scripture: Who was the target audience at that time, and what was the circumstances when that passage was written? In other words, context is extremely important.

Application of the Bible

For me, this is the most important aspect of Biblical Authority. To say it a bit differently: What difference can the Bible make in my life, day in and day out?

1 Thessalonians 2:13

We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

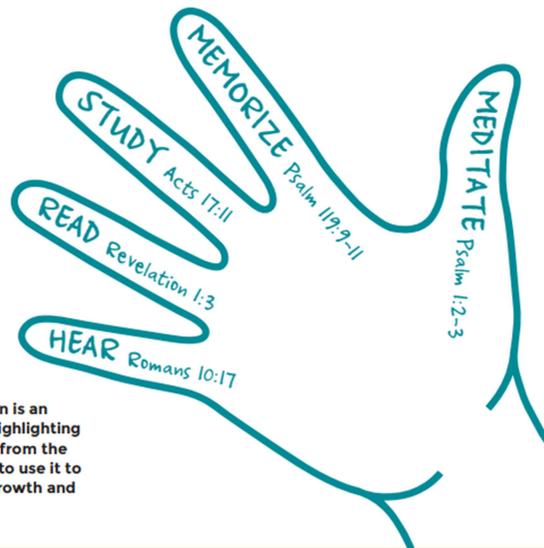
How is the Bible, “God’s word,” “at work in you” as someone who is following God?

For me, in my life, the seasons when I’ve been the most connected to God, and had the best sense of direction and guidance, when I’ve felt like God was giving me wisdom and speaking into my life – in all of those times, the common thread was that I was spending time interacting with the Bible. God’s voice speaks to me most clearly when I seek it out in the Bible every day.

I’m going to share with you an old illustration that is a part of the Navigator’s college ministry program. It’s called the Hand illustration.



Navigators Discipleship Tool



The Word Hand illustration is an easy-to-remember tool highlighting five methods of learning from the Bible. We encourage you to use it to spur your own spiritual growth and to inspire others.