



“According to the Scriptures”

I was once scheduled to deliver a weekend seminar at a local church, but my appearance was canceled at the last moment because the interim pastor wanted to know why my church’s doctrinal statement didn’t include anything affirming the inspiration, infallibility or inerrancy of the Bible. I explained that we confessed the Nicene Creed and didn’t feel the need for more. Indeed, his own confession of faith seemed questionable to me because it was self-written and exclusionary of most other Christians. Why would we want to make the same mistake? And that was that.

But we both overlooked an obvious fact. The Bible *does* figure in the creed and does so by citing Scripture directly:

“... He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

That phrase is a direct quotation from Paul: *“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve”* (1 Corinthians 15:3-5).

In other words, there is a historical dogma of the faith regarding the Bible. But it is not about what the Bible *IS*—it is about what it *DOES*.

The Scriptures witness to the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Period.

We may hold many and various views about the Bible, but when it comes to non-negotiable doctrine, the apostolic gospel affirmed in Christian baptism was never about what the Scriptures *ARE* but what they *DO*. And what they *DO* is confess the gospel of Jesus Christ. The rest was and is open for debate. To distort Scripture with a crass dictation theory or discard it as no longer necessary is to forget this gospel affirmation: Christ came, died and rose again—we know this *“according to the Scriptures.”*

Over the first four centuries, “according to the Scriptures” would never expand beyond the testimony of Christ and his gospel. But it did specify that Christ “was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, became man, was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures.” *This testimony was their doctrine of inspiration.* Not the nature of the Bible, but of the One to whom it points.

Note too that initially, for Paul and the other apostles, these Scriptures were specifically the Hebrew Scriptures—our Old Testament—since the New Testament was still being composed.

Remember Christ’s words to the disciples on the road to Emmaus? *“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”* And beginning with **Moses and all the Prophets**, he explained to them what was said in **all the Scriptures concerning himself**” (Luke 21:25-27).

This is why Christ, the apostles and the early church recognized our Lord’s birth, death and resurrection in the Exodus Passover, the stone that gave water, the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness, David’s near-death experiences in the Psalms, Daniel’s “Son of God” in the fiery furnace and Jonah’s three days in the belly of the fish.

Everywhere they looked—in the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets—early Christians saw and confessed that Christ would come, die and rise again “according to the Scriptures.”

What is our doctrine of Scripture? Yes, we believe the Scriptures are Spirit-inspired revelation (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). But for what purpose? Just this: to proclaim the faith once delivered: the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, *according to the Scriptures.* □

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