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## **READING ASSIGNMENT FOR STUDENTS TO BE READ BEFORE MEETING FOR LESSON 1 SALVATION STORY**

Salvationist Handbook of Doctrine

### **CHAPTER ONE: Word of the living God** The source of Christian doctrine

#### **Related Doctrines**

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice. The source of Christian doctrine is the Bible. We hold a faith that finds its definition and defense in Scripture. For this reason, the First Article is a preliminary statement that establishes the Bible as the sourcebook for Christian doctrine. The Bible is a book written by many writers: it is a human document. But we believe that it is also God's written word. It carries God's authority and it also reveals truth and the guide for Christian living. In its pages we encounter the living God of history and we hear his voice. For this reason, we are people of the Book. n Matthew 19:3-6; Mark 12:26-27; John 5:37-47; Acts 17:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

#### **A word in time**

God's word has been given to us in the recorded experiences of men and women of faith over many centuries. The Bible is the fruit of a living relationship between God and his people in a particular historical context.

#### **The Canon**

The Canon is that body of literature accepted by the Church as Holy Scripture, the revealed word of God. It is comprised of both the Old and New Testaments. The first Christians accepted the Jewish sacred writings, the Old Testament, as authoritative and appealed to its content to support the claims they were making for the divine mission and authority of Jesus. At the same time, they began to communicate the gospel message by the written as well as the spoken word. Certain of these writings were recognized as possessing authority from very early in the Church's history. In the course of time they become our New Testament.

The Old Testament originated in the experience of the Jewish people over many centuries. It records the developing but still incomplete revelation of God prior to the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ. Christians have always loved and venerated the Old Testament while recognizing that the true interpretation of its meaning and the fulfillment of its promise are found only in Jesus. This is the central message of the New Testament. Without the New, the Old Testament remains incomplete. Conversely, the New Testament is incomplete without the Old. What the New Testament announces is the fulfillment of the yearnings and hopes of the Old Testament in Jesus Christ. The New Testament is the written testimony to the life, teaching and person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its books were written to instruct believers and bring others to faith in Christ. When the Canon was established in the fourth century, most of the books in our New Testament were universally acknowledged by the Christian community. Those about which some reservation was expressed were included or excluded on the basis of three guidelines: authentic books were to be of apostolic origin, conform to the accepted rule of faith, and be commonly used by the churches.

By this careful process, guided by the Holy Spirit, Christians reached a consensus about the books regarded as Scripture. In no case did a Church council attempt to declare a book canonical that had not already been broadly accepted by the Christian congregations. The authority of Scripture was not bestowed. It was recognized and, when recognized, affirmed.

#### **Testaments**

The 66 books which comprise the Bible are divided into Old and New Testaments, diverse writings united by a common theme. Testament means covenant. The Jewish Scriptures witness to the covenant established by God

with Israel. The New Testament testifies to the new covenant established through Jesus Christ for all people, effective for all who trust in him. These books, differing widely in literary form and cultural background, may be studied as individual expressions of historic cultures. Christians, however, regard them as one book – the Bible. There is one theme, the saving grace of God, and one story, God’s dealing with his people, culminating in the saving work of God in Christ. There are two testaments and one revelation. Thus these writings stand alone as a unique witness and possess unique authority deriving from their content, theme and divine origin. Exodus 31:18; 32:15-16; 2 Kings 22:8-10; 23:1-3; Nehemiah 8:1-8; Jeremiah 36:1-6; Habakkuk 2:2; Luke 1:1-4; 24:25-27, 44-48; John 20:30-31; Acts 1:1-2

### **How God Reveals himself to us.**

All generations have witnessed to an awareness of divine presence, or to a conviction that the beauty and order of the universe suggest an almighty Creator. But unaided we can make little progress in any quest to discover the saving truth about God. This is partly because God must always remain essentially a mystery to his creation. And since our perceptions have been affected by sin, our understanding of God is clouded and distorted.

We believe that God, through his actions, has made known to us what we could never discover for ourselves – his loving character, saving power and eternal purpose. He has ‘removed the veil’ that shrouded his mystery. This self-revelation of God is faithfully preserved and presented in the living record of holy Scripture. Revelation is a gift of grace, arising from God’s love for humanity and the divine intention that we should come to know, love, serve and enjoy God for ever. The Bible is the record and written expression of that revelation. The insights of non-Christian religions may indicate spiritual awareness and understanding, but they do not present Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh.

The term revelation means to ‘remove the veil’. In the Bible, revelation is seen to grow from the lesser to the greater and from the partial to the perfect. The self-revealing of God recorded in the Old Testament is gradual and necessarily partial, since it prepared the way for the coming of Christ, God’s full and final revelation. Isaiah 55:8-11; John 1:14-18; Acts 14:17; Romans 1:18-20; 2:14-16; Galatians 1:11-12; 1 Peter 1:10-12

God encounters human beings in many ways in the pages of Scripture. Through the events of their early history, the Jews were given a sense of the steadfast love of God. They recognized his hand in their formation as a people, and in their ongoing history. God gave the Law to provide a pattern for living in his company, and revealed the intensity and purity of his love through the prophets. In the Old Testament, history, law, prophecy and other writings contribute to a deepening understanding of God’s majesty, holiness and love. All of these various modes of revelation find their focus in Jesus Christ. God, active in history, acts uniquely in Jesus to bring his salvation. The one of whom the prophets spoke is also the fulfillment of the Law.

The New Testament describes Jesus’ personal history and proclaims the gospel message which the Church has preached ever since. So the Bible offers what no other book can offer in the same way – the word of Life. It is a saving revelation centered upon Jesus Christ, God’s living Word. Psalm 96; 106; Isaiah 53:1-6; Hosea 11:1-4; Amos 5:21-24; Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 Peter 1:23-25.

### **Given by inspiration**

Like the salvation to which it testifies, the Bible is God’s gift not man’s achievement. The Bible, too, results from the interplay of divine power and human response, God’s enabling initiative and the free obedience of human agents. The precious treasure of revealed truth is communicated and preserved in the earthen vessel of written human language. This miracle of divine grace is described in the term, ‘divinely inspired’, or ‘given by inspiration of God’. The writers of the Bible, who often used many different literary sources, were so enlightened and directed by the Holy Spirit that they produced a wholly trustworthy and enduring witness to God’s saving work for humanity, centered upon the life and person of Jesus Christ.

The writers enjoyed something more than the natural inspiration of an artist or author. At the same time, most Christians recognize that inspiration is not dictation, and there is nothing in Scripture to indicate that God obliterated the human personalities of the authors and turned them into copyists. Their own styles of writing, habits of thinking, cultural background and human limitations appear in the Bible’s pages. Their thinking and writing were free and spontaneous, retaining style and individuality. It is evident, however, that what resulted cannot be explained only in human terms. What the authors wrote was not their own work only, but also the work and word of God. An investigation into the message and claims of the Bible shows them to exceed conventional human wisdom, logic and goodness. God’s revelation does not originate with us. Jeremiah 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21

### **Authority**

Because the Bible is given by inspiration and contains the saving revelation of God, the authority of Scripture overshadows all other authority. The Jewish people accepted the authority of their sacred writings. Jesus concurred. Following the example of its Lord, the Early Church, from its inception, recognized and appealed to the Jewish Canon and saw in it the foundations of the gospel. However, it also came very quickly to recognize the inspiration and authority of writings which together came to form the New Testament. These writings are also foundational because through their message we encounter Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

In recognizing the inspiration of Scripture, the Church accepted the authority of the Bible as the ultimate deciding factor on issues of true Christian belief and discipleship. It did not bestow authority but recognized it and placed itself in submission to 'God's word written'. History provides many examples of the Church searching the Scriptures for guidance when dealing with crises and heresies. It also records numerous occasions when the Christian community has been recalled to faith and discipleship by the Spirit through the biblical message.

The content of Scripture has provided a court of appeal and a bar of judgement before which believers have stood, and continue to stand, individually and as the people of God. For countless people, the Bible has proved its value as the reliable guidebook of both Christian faith and practice. John 10:35b; 21:24; Acts 28:25b; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4.

### **Scripture and other authorities**

#### Scripture, Spirit and Church

The Bible, then, is the major authority for the Christian. However, the Bible itself teaches that there are three pillars which provide a secure foundation for Christian faith and practice. These three are: the teaching of Scripture, the direct illumination of the Holy Spirit and the consensus of the Christian community. The Bible is not safely used without reference to the general understanding of the Christian community throughout history, any more than it is understood without the help of the Spirit. Jesus himself bore witness to the threefold foundation of our faith and in so doing, he instituted a guide and safeguard for his followers.

Each of these three foundational sources requires the authentication of the other two to ensure that gospel truth is maintained. In the New Testament, we possess a precious portrayal of Jesus and a witness to his transforming impact upon the lives of his first followers. Their words remain the measuring rod for Christian experience, orthodox belief and ethical conduct, but to read them correctly we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He breathes through the word and brings its truth to light, interpreting God's eternal message to our contemporary situation.

We also need the confirmation of the Christian community. Throughout the centuries, the gospel of Jesus has been preached by his followers and their witness provides a key to understanding the Bible. So the Christian has three authorities for understanding God's word and applying it: Scripture, Spirit and Church. Each authority confirms and sanctions the other two. John 15:26-27; Acts 15:22-29; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22; 1 Timothy 4:6.

### **The primary authority**

Within these three, however, the Bible remains the primary authority. Certainly the Spirit must breathe through the word and bring its truth to light, as it must resonate with the authentic witness of the historic Church. History teaches that both the claimed illumination of the Spirit and the traditions of the Church, when unchallenged, can be open to abuse. Historically, the teaching of the Church has sometimes been distorted by corrupt institutional structures. At times the guidance of the Spirit has been misapprehended, counterfeited or falsely claimed as a new private illumination. Scripture, however, contains the experience of the Church as well as that of individual prophets and apostles.

There is an inner coherence in the message, which affirms its authenticity. By comparing Scripture with Scripture an agreement may be discerned so that the will of God is clarified. Interpretation can never be concluded, for as we search the Scriptures, we enter into dialogue with them and experience the transforming power of the message, which speaks with encouragement and correction to our own situation. Scripture is its own interpreter. Scripture as a whole provides the final court of appeal for the Christian. Its authority supersedes all other claims, and its teaching authenticates all other spiritual truth. It is the underlying foundation upon which Christian consensus must rest, and it is the measure by which claimed illumination by the Spirit must be tested. To be accounted Christian, all other sources must conform to its essential, central teaching. In this sense, the Scriptures alone, 'they only constitute the divine rule of Christian faith and practice.' Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39-40; 12:47-50; Acts 2:22-36

### **Pluralism**

Many of us live in pluralistic societies, where other sacred writings, an amalgamation of religious ideas and humanist philosophies compete for the hearts and minds of our communities. In this setting, we continue to maintain that for the Christian the Bible is the only authority to define belief and direct conduct. The sacred writings of other religions may possess insights helpful to spiritual questing, but the Bible contains the record of God's mission in Christ to save humanity, and the nature and scope of the salvation made available. It stands alone. Human philosophies and popular schools of thought are to be judged in the light of the timeless truths expressed in Scripture.

Therefore the saving truth in the Bible is not to be reduced or revised to conform to popular attitudes or current ideologies that deny or undermine the faith. Scripture remains the only divine rule of Christian faith and practice because it presents and preserves God's unique and unrepeatable revelation of himself in Jesus Christ, who at one particular moment in history, came as his living Word. Because we accept the lordship of Je-

sus to whom the Bible bears witness, we accept the Scripture as an enduring authority with continuing relevance. To accept Jesus is to recognize the authority of the written word within which he is encountered. Jesus himself is Lord of the Scripture, and the Bible is invaluable essentially because it introduces us to him. Luke 4:16-21; 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:13

### **A word for all time**

In all matters relating to faith in Christ and the life lived by faith, in this world and the next, the Bible is utterly trustworthy and reliable. All that is necessary to knowledge of saving truth is found within its pages. It spells hope for the future for all those who need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. It was called into being by the living Word of God inspiring the minds of men and women, and from its pages God's living Word continues to address us with authority and power.

### **A summary**

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God and that they are the only divine rule of Christian faith and practice.

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**READ:** 'The Call to Salvationists', page 7,  
Called to be God's People.

The Founders of the Salvation Army declared their belief that God raised up our Movement to enter partnership with him in his 'great business' of saving the world. We call upon Salvationists worldwide to reaffirm our shared calling to this great purpose, signified in our name. Salvation begins with conversion to Christ, but it does not end there. The transformation of an individual leads to a transformation of relationships, of families, of communities, of nations. We long for and anticipate with joy the new creation of all things in Christ. Our mission is God's mission.

God in love reaches out through his people to a suffering and needy world, a world that he loves. In mission we express in word and deed and through the totality of our lives the compassion of God for the lost. Our identification with God in this outward movement of love for the world requires a corresponding inward movement from ourselves towards God. Christ says 'Come to me' before he says 'Go into the world'. These two movements are in relation to each other, like breathing in and breathing out. To engage in one movement to the exclusion of the other is the way of death. To engage in both is the way of life. The vitality of our spiritual life as a Movement will be seen and tested in our turning to the world in evangelism and service, but the springs of our spiritual life are to be found in our turning to God in worship, in the disciplines of life in the Spirit, and in the study of God's word.