

# ***This we believe.***

## **The Basis of the Open Bible Trust**

**Edited by Michael Penny**

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# Introduction

## Michael Penny

In 1984 a group of Christians from various denominations got together to form the Open Bible Trust. Their wish was:

... to help others come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and to further their faith by all means, including the provision of publications, courses, lectures, studies, tape recordings and meetings.

They also wanted:

... to promote a spirit of dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ and His written Word, whereby individuals are encouraged to satisfy themselves by prayer and diligent study of the Scriptures as to the truth of what is taught by men of whatever estate.

The above two quotations come directly from the Trust Deed of the Open Bible Trust and, in a nut-shell, state the aims of the Open Bible Trust and what it wants to achieve.

That document also contains “The Doctrinal Basis of the Open Bible Trust”, which stipulates the beliefs which the Open Bible Trust promotes, and which it cannot go against. These were expressed under three headings: evangelical, fundamental and dispensational. What do these three words mean? As the same words are used in different ways in different sections of Christendom, it was necessary to define what the Open Bible Trust meant by them, and the Trust Deed does just that. In this booklet we give these definitions together with explanatory short articles by a variety of authors.

On issues not contained in the Doctrinal Basis, differing views may be expressed by different writers or speakers. This is explained in our publishing policy, which is outlined towards the end of this booklet on page \*\*.

This publication has been produced to coincide with the 100<sup>th</sup> edition of *Search* magazine. We hope and pray that our readers will find it not only of interest, but also a blessing, as the majority of views expressed here not only form the basis of the Open Bible Trust, but also the basis of biblical Christianity.

# *Evangelical 1: The Deity of Christ*

**Vicky Wilkinson**

**The Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 20:28) that Jesus Christ was the Word and the Word was God (John 1:1) that He was God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16).**

## *God is spirit*

When we consider the wonder of God, His infinity, and the glory of His awesome majesty, we must ask ourselves the question, “How can we ever comprehend Him?” But this unfathomable God, whose ways are described as being past finding out, has provided a way by which we can come to know enough about Him that is life saving to our mortal sinful souls. He has shed His light and His love; and this is bound up in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

Essentially God is Spirit (John 4:24), but in the New Testament He makes Himself known as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and each are ascribed with true Deity and given equal glory as a consequence. These three expressions of Himself equal the one and only true God, or God absolute (Hebrew *Elohim*); “I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me” (Isaiah 45:5).

## *Christ manifests the Person of God*

Whilst the Son, Jesus, is said to be “begotten” of the Father, the Holy Spirit is described as “proceeding” from both Father and Son. Even so, both the Father and the Holy Spirit point to Christ as the way. Along with the close communion and co-operation of the Father and the Holy Spirit, Christ is the One who manifests the Person of God Himself and makes Him known to us. He reveals His attributes including His grace and His love. He accomplishes God’s will and purpose for the heavens and the earth. He carries out every aspect of God’s work, including creation and redemption, and He is the One who executes God’s justice. If therefore we want to know anything about God or about His will and purpose, then we can only do this through and by Christ who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

## *Christ has first place*

With this in view it therefore becomes very fitting that the Open Bible Trust gives Christ and His Deity first place in its doctrinal basis. As a Trust, we believe that in the beginning when the world came to be, or at creation, Christ as the eternal Word was already in existence. He was with God and was God, (John 1:1-3), and when He became man and dwelt among us, He manifested God in the flesh (v.14). He was “God with us”(Matthew 1:23).

The Apostle Paul adds his testimony of Christ by saying, “He is before all things” (Colossians 1:17), and Old Testament prophets add theirs by speaking of Him as being from everlasting (Micah 5:2). (See also Christ’s own words in John 17:5.)

As a consequence, we can associate Christ with infinity and ascribe to Him the attribute of eternalness, and in this refute Unitarian teaching which regards the beginning of Christ’s life as being at Bethlehem, as the babe Jesus, and also Arian teaching that sees Christ as God’s first created being.

Christ therefore is one with the God of infinity Who is Spirit and consequently invisible and intangible. No man has seen nor can see God absolutely as He is, because such a sighting would consume him, and it is here that Christ becomes the means or the way, so much so that Jacob could say, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” Who, then, did Jacob see? The Bible’s answer to this mystery is that Jacob saw Christ: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18).

### ***Christ, the image of God and the Creator***

Christ is described as being, “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), also “The brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3). The appearances of God in Old Testament days, whether as “*The angel of the Lord*”, “*The Angel of God’s presence*”, “*The Word of the Lord*”, “*The Captain of the Host of the Lord*”, or in any other form, all these manifestations were in and through Christ and we can do no other than be brought down to our knees in awe, when we encounter the everlasting invisible God in the Person of Jesus Christ our Lord.

However, before God showed Himself to any man, the creation of the heavens and the earth became visible evidence that the invisible God had stepped out into the realms of the manifest (Romans 1:20), and this He did in and through Christ. Christ, as God’s Eternal Word in action, became the means of creation. He became God’s hands that stretched out the heavens and who made the earth and created mankind upon it (Isaiah 45:12, John 1:3, Psalm 33:6, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2; 2:10). Christ was the initiator, the source, and He is the upholder and sustainer and the very reason for the creation, visible and invisible. He holds it all together because life is in Him. He is the fountainhead through whom all life flows.

### ***Christ! My Lord and my God.***

John’s Gospel brings to the fore Christ’s Deity. It records Christ’s claim to be the “I am”, the name of the eternal God (compare John 8:58 and Exodus 3:14), and tells us that we must honour the Son, even as we honour the Father (John 5:23).

During His earthly life Christ proved to be extraordinary. He performed miracles, healed the sick, raised the dead, forgave sins (compare Exodus 34:7); even the wind and the waves obeyed Him (compare Psalm 107:29). Titles given to God in Old Testament Scripture such as The only Saviour, The Redeemer, The King, The Shepherd, The Rock, The Judge and The Light, are unreservedly given to or claimed by Christ.

Christ was also the object of worship, which He accepted without rebuke (contrast Revelation 19:10), even though He Himself had said, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Matthew 4:10; see Colossians 3:24).

Christ came to us as the Holy One (Acts 3:14 - see Isaiah 43:3) and proved Himself to be so to the bitter end. Let us then bow down to The Holy One and join Thomas with the declaration “*My Lord and my God*” (*Ho Theos*); John 20:28.

### ***Christ! Both man and God.***

Christ was both man and God and whilst the immortal God could not die, He did in Christ Jesus the man. But God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to His own right hand to be one with Him again. He gave Him back the glory He had with Him before the world was. But even more so, Jesus Christ has been given the highest place and there will be a day when at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow (Philippians 2:9-10); even as God had said, “To *Me* every knee shall bow” (Isaiah 45:23, Romans 14:10-11).

At His resurrection God said to Him, “Today I have begotten You” (Acts 13:33). At incarnation Christ became the begotten of God in weakness, but now at His resurrection, He becomes the Son of God in power (Romans 1:4). As the firstborn from the dead, He becomes the initiator and source of a new spiritual creation for all who believe in Him, and He is made the Head of the Church, His body, the life source and hope for those called to an inheritance in the spiritual realms.

### ***Christ! First and Last.***

In the book of Revelation Christ is given the title of *The First and the Last, The Alpha and the Omega, The Beginning and the End* (Revelation 1:8,11; compare Isaiah 44:6), because Christ is to return to complete God’s will and purpose. He will come to judge and reign and bring all things under His feet, both that are in heaven and on the earth. He said, “Behold, I am coming quickly; and My reward is with Me” and “I am He who searches the minds and hearts” (Revelation 22:12; 2:23 compare Isaiah 40:10, 1 Chronicles 28:9). And when the new heavens and the new earth are established and the holy city comes down from God out of heaven, the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it and His servants shall see *His* face and they shall serve *Him* (Revelation 22:1-5). The Lamb is its light (21:23); the Lord God gives them light (22:5).

### ***Christ reveals the very person of God***

How then can we fail to ascribe Deity to the One ...

- Who is from infinity;
- Who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and also the new spiritual creation;
- Who reveals the very Person of God and His attributes and possesses such;
- Who claims the name of God;
- Who is called God;

Who is called the Lord (Jehovah);  
Who is unreservedly given every title of God;  
Who is the object of worship; even the angels are called to worship Him  
(Hebrews 1:6);  
Who forgives sins;  
Who calmed the sea;  
Who is the only Saviour;  
Who is *The Alpha and the Omega, The First and the Last, The Beginning and the End* of the purpose of God towards the heavens and the earth?

He is the One who is, who was and is to come, *the Almighty!* (Revelation 1:8). Indeed, “Christ is all and in all”, even as “God may be all in all” (Colossians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 15:28). How can we fail to ascribe Deity to Jesus?

### ***Further Reading***

More information on this subject may be obtained from the following Open Bible Trust publications:

*The Greatness of Christ* by W. M. Henry

*The Fullness of the Godhead* by Michael Phelan

*The Deity of Christ* by Vicky Wilkinson

*The Person of God in the Form of Man* by Vicky Wilkinson

## ***Evangelical 2: The all sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice***

**Brian Sherring**

**The all sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for sin (Acts 4:12; Hebrews 10:14) that salvation is by grace through faith in the completed work of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's Cross (Ephesians 2:8-9).**

A recognition of who Christ is and His essential Deity, leads naturally to why God became manifest in the flesh and the need for His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. We believe not only was that sacrifice absolutely *necessary*, but also that it was completely *sufficient* for our salvation. The essential facts are basically simple and logical.

### ***Man's need of Salvation.***

The first man Adam let sin into the world and with it came the punishment for sin, namely death. Both sin and death have been inherited by us through our relationship to Adam. "Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners"; "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 5:19; 6:23). Our need was for deliverance from this hopeless position and we see the grace of God at work in His provision of the One who was to pay for sin, satisfy the judgment of God and bring us from death into life. Christ was that One who paid the price and He offers us salvation from sin and death.

### ***God's Provision of Salvation in Christ for us.***

Sin could not be overlooked. God's righteousness requires that it must be paid for by the death of an innocent and perfect being. The sacrifice of Christ in our place, accepting the punishment due to us, did just that. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3); that penalty was paid. He was the perfect, spotless Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world by His death, but death must also be overcome. Without the resurrection of Christ from the dead, all would still be lost. "If Christ has not been raised .... you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). The resurrection of Christ is the *proof* that the penalty for sin had been fully paid for and it is also the *pledge* that new life is ours through our *relationship* to Him; "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Salvation is only possible through His resurrection; "Saved through His life" (Romans 5:10). What was lost in Adam has been regained in Christ and not only so, but that sacrifice was *completely sufficient*, necessary only once and without any good works on our part.

### ***The All Sufficiency of Christ's One Sacrifice.***

"Christ died for sins *once for all*"; "Christ was *sacrificed once* to take away the sins of many people" (1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 9:28). Unlike the Old Testament sacrifices, repeated again and again, the sacrifice of Christ for sins was necessary only "once for all". As such it accomplished what those Old Testament sacrifices could never do, namely "take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Neither is there any alternative to Christ's

sacrifice for deliverance from sin and its death penalty. “Salvation is found *in no-one else*, for there is *no other name* under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Further, that sacrifice stands alone; it requires no addition. No Law-keeping or good works on our part could save us from sin and death and none need be, or can be, added to Christ’s all sufficient sacrifice. “No one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the Law” (Romans 3:20). There is a place for works, but they come *after* faith in Him and His “once for all” sacrifice on our behalf. James wrote, “I will *show you* my faith by what I do” (2:18). Good works are the *evidence* of our new life in Christ, a life which was accepted from Him by faith.

### ***The Means by which Salvation comes.***

While the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross is through God’s love and grace, it requires a response from us. “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that *whoever believes in Him* shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God’s gift to us is that through His grace He requires only our faith in Christ for salvation and life. It is a grace-by-faith-salvation that is the gift of God, quite apart from works. “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no-one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

The Scriptures teach the basic truth that we, through our relationship to Adam, are subject to sin and death. They also set forth the provision that God, by His grace, has made in Christ; namely to deliver us from this position. There is more than one aspect to this salvation, and these are dealt with in the Bible under such great words as:

<b><i>Redemption</i></b>	We are <i>freed</i> from being servants to sin (Romans 6:18);
<b><i>Reconciliation</i></b>	We are <i>no longer alienated</i> from God (Romans 5:10);
<b><i>Justification</i></b>	We are counted <i>as though we are righteous</i> (Romans 3:22);
<b><i>Forgiveness</i></b>	Our sins are forgiven - <i>our debt is paid</i> (Ephesians 1:7).

However, the basic position is simple. We believe in the all sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for sin. We believe that salvation is found only in Him, and it is by God’s grace. We believe salvation is through our faith in Christ and His completed work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

### ***Further Reading***

More information on this subject may be obtained from the following Open Bible Trust publications:

*The Seven Stages of a Believer’s Exaltation in Christ* by James Poole  
*God’s Work of Salvation* by Vicky Wilkinson  
*In Christ and with Christ* by Vicky Wilkinson

# ***Fundamental 1: The Inspiration of the Bible***

**David Tavender**

**The full inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16) that they were written by holy men of God who were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).**

## ***God-breathed***

2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God”. The word “inspiration” is the Greek word *theopneustos*, which may literally be translated “God-breathed”. So we see immediately that God Himself “breathed” the Scriptures.

This means that the Bible is God’s words and thoughts to us. The various books that make up the Bible were written via God’s chosen instruments who were moved, or literally “carried”, by God’s Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). The Bible does not consist of thoughts which are human in origin, even though its teaching is expressed in the language of humans for our understanding.

## ***The Canon***

Over the centuries questions have arisen over the validity of some books of the Bible. We believe that today’s Bible of 66 books, sometimes referred to as the “Protestant Bible”, is what God intended us to have. The entire New Testament canon has been discussed and reaffirmed many times since the 4th century A.D., when its 27 books were finally accepted as authoritative, true and inspired. It has remained the same ever since, mainly because those who compiled the canon agreed that the New Testament we now have was penned by people who had reliable accounts from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4). Also they saw that it is compatible with the Old Testament, and that it shows consistency with events that took place simultaneously in the secular world.

Likewise, the make-up of the Old Testament is frequently endorsed by the New Testament, and especially by the Lord Jesus who quoted and made reference to it regularly. Significantly, He never quoted from the many apocryphal books, such as 1 & 2 Maccabees, Judith, and others. Such apocryphal books may be helpful to us, but they are not God-breathed and should not be considered as part of the Word of God or to hold the same authority as the 66 books of the Bible.

## ***The words***

Further to this, we believe that each word of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is of God’s choosing. By this we mean that not only are the concepts and messages inspired, but literally every word is inspired. The importance of the very words themselves is an idea reinforced over and over in the Scriptures. For instance, the Lord indicated that not even the smallest part of a letter or word could be erased from the Law (Matthew 5:18); and we read that the words of the Lord are pure words (Psalm 12:6). In Galatians 3:16 Paul builds an argument around the difference between “seed” and “seeds”, and there are

warnings about adding to or subtracting from God's words in Revelation 22:18-19 and Jeremiah 26:2. Each word is vital to the whole.

### ***Translations***

The reader of OBT publications will notice that the contributing authors often refer to the original languages when examining a certain passage of Scripture. For example, an author might refer to *agapao* and *phileo* being two Greek words from which "love" are translated in our English Bibles. This is because we believe that the Bible is inspired and totally without error *as written in the original languages* - Hebrew and Aramaic for the Old Testament, and Greek for the New Testament. So it should be kept in mind that English translations are exactly that - translations of works first written in other languages. Such *translations* cannot be "inspired" or "God-breathed".

However, even though the Bible was first "God-breathed" in other languages, we cannot and do not say that English translations are of no use. After all, how else would most English speakers be able to read the Bible if it had not been translated into our own tongue?

It should also be noted that the Scriptures were originally written in a continuous form, without breaks between each word, and that punctuation, and chapter and verse divisions, were all added many years after the original manuscripts were God-breathed. Again, while these can be helpful to us, they are not strictly part of the inspired Word of God, and can even be misleading at times.

### ***Historical validation***

The external evidence of history reinforces the position that the Scriptures are accurate and were inspired by God. No other so-called Holy Book (such as the Book of Mormon or the Koran) comes anywhere near to being validated by so much external evidence. This is important because if we can find inaccuracies in one part of the Bible, then it becomes a mixture of both truth and error, becoming just another ordinary, uninspired book, subject to human error.

In reality we find the contrary. The Bible is totally accurate and is validated when the external evidence for the divine inspiration of Scripture is examined. For instance: the findings of archaeologists confirm the Bible is full of real events and real people; the Scriptures contain facts about the universe and other data which man was not able to confirm until centuries later; many prophecies made in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament long after they were first written, and so on.

Sadly, no matter what the evidence shows, if someone does not have an open mind and heart, he will never believe the evidence. If a person chooses not to, he will never accept the truth about the Scriptures. But we, who believe in the God-breathed (inspired) complete Bible, have confidence in both its message and the One of whom it testifies, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ***Further Reading***

More information on this subject may be obtained by reading the following book which is available from the Open Bible Trust:

*The Bible: Myth or Message?* by Michael Penny

## ***Fundamental 2: Living a life worthy of the Lord***

**Sylvia Penny**

**The responsibility of each believer to live a life worthy of the Lord pleasing Him in every way by bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10; Ephesians 2:10).**

### ***Faith and deeds***

To live a life worthy of the Lord we need, first and foremost, to be obedient to His will in our lives. In a nutshell this requires us to show evidence of our faith in the form of good works. If we were put on trial for our Christian faith, would there be enough evidence to convict us? That is a salutary question we need to ask ourselves.

In Ephesians 2:8 Paul writes that “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith”, but Ephesians 2:10 tells us that having been saved, “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”, and those good works are clearly set out for us in Ephesians chapters 4-6, and elsewhere. The result of putting our faith in Christ Jesus and being saved is that we do good deeds. In Scripture, faith and deeds are inextricably linked together, one with the other.

John 6:28-29 says, “Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’” However, James 2:14 adds, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” A saving faith, then, is one that manifests itself in good deeds. James 2:22, referring to Abraham, says, “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”

If we are to live a life pleasing to the Lord, then it is of utmost importance that there is evidence of our faith in the form of good works. Titus 3:8 expresses this clearly, “And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”

### ***The will of God***

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18 is very practical, and it spells out for us what the will of God is for our lives. The will of God consists of many things such as respecting those in authority over us, living in peace with one another, encouraging, helping and being patient with others, not taking revenge, being kind to everyone and remaining joyful, prayerful and thankful. Verse 18 then concludes “for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”. God is most concerned about the way we treat others, the way we conduct ourselves, and the way in which we choose to use our money and our time. In other words, the will of God is that we should display good works in our lives.

Colossians 1:10 says “We pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.” Again, this verse spells out very clearly how we may please the Lord

in our lives. We should bear fruit in *every* good work. The fruit of the Spirit is described in Galatians 5:22 as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”. Many of these qualities are mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18 quoted above, and showing such qualities in a practical way forms part of our good works.

The second part of Colossians 1:10 mentions growing in the knowledge of God. Although this includes learning about God from the Scriptures, and getting to know Him as a Person, the word for ‘knowledge’ in the Greek does not stop there. The word used is *epignosis* which can take the meaning ‘acknowledgement’. Not only does this mean ‘knowing’ God, it also means putting that knowledge into practice. What good is knowledge if it is not used in a worthwhile way? As 1 Corinthians 8:1 says, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” A practical demonstration of love for others should be the natural outcome of our greater knowledge of God and His will.

### ***What good deeds should we be doing?***

1 Timothy is a very practical letter written by Paul, and in it he gives a number of examples of the sort of good deeds people should be doing as evidence of their faith. 1 Timothy 5:10 is addressed to widows who were to do such things as bring up children, show hospitality, wash the feet of the saints, help those in trouble and so on. 1 Timothy 6:18 is addressed to those who are rich, telling them to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and willing to share. It is clear that whatever our talents or resources may be, we should use them for the Lord. If we have time, we should use it to help others. If we have money, we should use it to help others. There are many examples throughout Scripture of the sort of things we should be doing as a practical outworking of our faith. However, if ever we feel we haven’t the strength to do these things, then we are wrong. We can always call on the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen and enable us to do such good deeds (Ephesians 1:19; 3:16-17).

None of us should be unsure of what the good works are, for they are clearly spelled out in the Scriptures. 1 Timothy 5:25 says “good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.”

We are not to hide our good deeds. This is mistaken humility. The main reason for our good deeds is to “*love* our neighbours as ourselves”, and one of the results of our active love is that it is a witness of our faith in Christ. It is evidence of and a testimony to Christ who cannot be seen.

### ***Deeds are a witness***

Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” 2 Corinthians 8:21 says, “We are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.” Romans 12:17 says, “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.”

It is important that in living lives to please the Lord we should also take into account the appearance of our lives to other people. After all, it is our lives and our deeds that will have a far greater impact on unbelievers than anything we can say. 1 Peter 2:12 says, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing

wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God.” Verse 15 of the same chapter continues; “For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.” Deeds are evidence of faith. God Himself tells us in the Scriptures that the best way of witnessing about Him is by putting our faith into practice.

### ***Encouraging one another***

It is so important that we put our faith into practice that we are exhorted to encourage one another to do so. Hebrews 10:24 says, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.” This is another way in which we can please the Lord in our lives. Not only should we put our own faith into practice, we can also encourage one another to do so, and in this way we will be a positive influence on one another. This is one important reason for getting together with other believers and having fellowship with each other. We should uplift one another, help one another, pray for one another, and encourage one another to do good. In this way we will please the Lord.

### ***Further Reading***

More information on this subject may be obtained from the following Open Bible Trust publications:

*Be Likeminded* by Daniel Andersen  
*Christ’s Commandment* by Bryan Conway  
*Imitating Christ* by W. M. Henry  
*Love in the Bible* by Michael Penny  
*Forgiveness* by Sylvia Penny  
*Lying* by Sylvia Penny  
*Practical Christianity* by James Poole  
*Ten Command Words* by Tom Smith

## ***Fundamental 3: Faith comes by hearing the word of God***

**W. M. Henry**

**The study of the Scriptures as enlightened by the Holy Spirit, Who bears testimony through them to the Lord Jesus Christ, is the sure foundation for the continual growth in faith which is a necessity for every believer; for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16)**

### ***Authority***

One of the most fundamental issues for Christians is the question of authority. Where can believers find authoritative teaching which tells them what they should believe and how they should behave from day to day? To what extent does that authority lie with the traditions of a particular church, or does understanding come by direct revelation from God to the individual? Although the traditions and practices of particular denominations can be helpful to the growth of a Christian's faith, and the emergence of the fruit of the Spirit in his life comes through the work of that Spirit, both of these means of Christian development must be rooted firmly in and tested by Scripture. The Word of God is the touchstone by which the teachings and traditions of men are assessed and measured, and the genuineness, or otherwise, of spiritual experiences is judged.

The Trustees of the Open Bible Trust, therefore, affirm that Scripture is the sole arbiter in matters of Christian doctrine and practice, and that, for this reason, the study of Scripture, as enlightened by the Holy Spirit, is the sure foundation for continual growth in faith for each individual Christian.

The Psalmist states that the way for a young man to keep his way pure is to live according to God's word (Psalm 119:9). He goes on to say that he has hidden God's word in his heart, so "that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). It is only by *knowing the Scriptures and putting into practice what we find there*, that we can hope to please God. His Word is a lamp to our feet and a guide for our path (Psalm 119:105), and will keep us from straying from the truth.

The Lord Jesus also stressed the importance of understanding Scripture. When debating with the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, He said, "Are you not in error *because you do not know the Scriptures* or the power of God" (Mark 12:24). Failure to know and understand Scripture will also lead us into error.

### ***God-breathed***

The Scriptures are unique in that they are God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16). They are not merely the words of men, but the expression of the mind and will of God. In consequence, they are useful for giving authoritative guidance to build up Christians in matters of both doctrine and practice. The Word of God gives believers true doctrine and enables us to steer clear of error. The Scriptures testify to Christ and the eternal life that can be found only in Him (John 5:39-40). The Bible also serves to correct wrong conduct and to help in the training process towards greater Christlikeness in our behaviour. By

obtaining a systematic understanding of its teaching we, like Timothy, the man of God, can be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17).

But there are no easy routes to this equipping. It requires diligent study. James warns of the dangers of a casual approach to the Word by comparing it to a man who looks at his reflection in a mirror and goes away, immediately forgetting what he looks like (James 1:23-24). In contrast, the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, *and continues to do so, not forgetting what he has heard*, will be blessed (James 1:25). This blessing comes from a steady dedication to learning, understanding, and applying the teaching of Scripture to our lives on a daily basis.

### ***The Holy Spirit***

It is also important to remember the work of the Holy Spirit in helping us interpret and apply the Scriptures to us. There is nothing mysterious about the Bible. However intellect alone cannot understand its meaning or see its relevance. Sadly some scholars have dedicated their lives to the study of Scripture, but appear to have little or no understanding of the way of salvation. It is only through the work of the Spirit that we can hope to understand the Lord's purposes and how they should be worked out in our lives.

Simon Peter's recognition of the true identity of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:16-17 was attributed by the Lord, not to Peter's perception but to a revelation from God. Paul confirmed this as a universal truth in 1 Corinthians 12:3 by declaring that no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. We need to come humbly before the Lord and ask for His illumination as we open His Word. He expects diligence and openness, on our part, but we require the Spirit to breathe on the Word and bring the truth to light.

### ***Further Reading***

More information on this subject may be obtained from the following Open Bible Trust publications:

*Bible Study – A Personal Quest* by Daniel Andersen  
*Reading the Bible Yourself* by David Tavender

## ***Fundamental 4: Scripture is the sole arbiter***

**David Tavender**

**Whilst acknowledging the Lord's gift of teachers to His people (Ephesians 4:11) we maintain that Scripture is the sole arbiter in matters of Christian doctrine and practice and that received traditions and opinions, however widespread or ancient and however vigorously supported by men of whatever eminence, learning and godliness, are of no binding authority except in so far as they are clearly demonstrable from the Word of God (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:24-25).**

### ***The final authority***

As our name suggests, we encourage all readers of Open Bible Trust publications to read the articles and booklets with an "open Bible" and compare what the contributing authors say with what is written in the Bible. This is because we view the Bible as the final authority on Christian matters.

In this, we uphold the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:10-12. These verses tell us that many of the people of Berea examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul was preaching was true, and for this action the Word commends them. There are two main lessons that may be gleaned from this short passage.

### ***The sole arbiter***

The first is that we should treat the Bible as the sole arbiter of what is correct in matters of Christian doctrine and practice. The Bereans compared the words of Paul to the words of Scripture, and were then able to better assess the validity of what he was preaching to them.

The second lesson is that those who teach in our churches and Bible study groups should not be offended when someone asks them to support a certain viewpoint from Scripture. None of us are infallible, no matter how many degrees in theology we might have or how many years we have studied the Scriptures.

### ***The measure***

The Bible is the very thoughts and words of God Himself, who cannot lie. The Scriptures are therefore the instrument by which all beliefs and doctrines should be measured. However, there is a trend among some Christians today to acknowledge the Bible's authority by word of mouth alone. That is, lip service is given to the high place of Scripture, but in reality many of us can be swept along by the personal opinion of others and the moral viewpoints of the day. Sadly, this can be combined with a tendency *not* to look carefully at the words of the Scriptures themselves. In this way we gain Bible knowledge "second-hand", from church leaders and friends, from hymns and Christian songs, from books and cassettes. Such a method of "learning" can be helpful, and may be necessary when we first become a Christian, but it can also take us further and further

away from the truth that is written in the Word of God. The Bible must be always consulted to see if what is being taught is so. It must be used for verification, for it is the sole arbiter and ultimate authority.

### ***The God of the Bible***

Among other things, the Bible is a collection of books about God, and His dealings with mankind. There is much we can learn, and many things we may never know, but how can we expect to know the things of God apart from what He, as the Author of the Book, chooses to reveal to us about Himself? If we do not examine the Bible for these things, then we are only guessing or making things up. The revelation of His will and plans have been made by Himself, and we have it written for us in the Scriptures - God's words and thoughts (2 Timothy 3:15-16).

It is therefore significant that the Lord Jesus, as part of the Godhead, is often recorded quoting the Old Testament (e.g. at His temptations, Luke 4:1-12; see also Matthew 11:10; 21:13, etc). He clearly treated the Scriptures as a source of authority. Likewise, the writers of the New Testament commonly use the phrase "it is written" in their epistles in reference to the Old Testament books (Romans 1:17; 1 Peter 1:16, etc). Even though they mostly lived in times when God was not silent as to further revelation, it was the Scriptures that formed the basis of their teaching. Of course, they only had the Old Testament, but they treated the only Bible they had with great respect and care, and it was the guide-post by which all doctrine was measured.

### ***Things not in the Bible***

Conversely, there are many things that are *not* revealed in the Bible. For instance, many prophecies await fulfillment. Also there are many details in prophecy which we will not know until they come to pass, for the written Word does not reveal everything, but reveals those things people need to know, and what God in His grace would have us know (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Some things we just cannot be sure of, and while we may hold certain beliefs or develop theories about this or that, if they are not clearly set out before us in the Scriptures, we must take care not to be too dogmatic about them, and be prepared to change our minds if someone challenges our beliefs and theories with Scriptural evidence.

One only needs to look at the many examples in history where often very learned and faithful people have tried to predict the date of the Lord's return, only to leave many innocent believers devastated. In many of these cases, there is a dispensational aspect that has been ignored. However, even more often, something has been read into a verse of Scripture that was not really there. The perpetrator has not been able to see the possibility that he could be mistaken, for the Biblical support for that date was scant, or even non-existent.

### ***Visions and the Bible***

In times past, God often spoke through prophets and gave them visions. Mostly they were linked with Israel while they were still God's chosen nation; that is before Acts 28.

Today, it is not impossible for the Lord to speak to us via some supernatural medium, but it is certainly not normal in this current age. In the end, such divine experiences, if they are indeed that, must be compared with the Scriptures and must be consistent with them.

All that aside, it is more appropriate for us today to ask the Lord for His spirit of revelation to guide our study and understanding of the Bible. God is its author, and it is therefore to be believed, to be handled with care, to be taken to heart, to be acted upon, and to be the final authority on topics related to our faith (2 Timothy 3:16).

### ***Further Reading***

More information on this subject may be obtained from the following Open Bible Trust publications:

*Bible Study – A Personal Quest* by Daniel Andersen

*Reading the Bible Yourself* by David Tavender

## *Dispensational 1: The correct handling of Scripture*

**W. M. Henry**

**The correct handling of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15) that in the interpretation of Scripture it is important to take account not only of what is written but of whom, to whom, with what words, at what time, to what intent, with what circumstances, and considering what goes before and what comes after.**

### *Twisting the Scriptures*

How should Scripture be interpreted? There are almost as many views of this as there are interpreters. The Scriptures can be made to prove almost anything. Particular passages have been used, for example, to support slavery and apartheid, and also the doctrines and teachings of strange religious cults and sects. The apostle Peter, speaking about Paul's writings, warned that these, in common with other Scriptures, were being distorted by ignorant and unstable people, with disastrous consequences (2 Peter 3:16). This distortion has continued ever since.

It is all too easy for us to twist Scripture to arrive at a meaning that we find convenient to our way of thinking, which is why Paul sets out a fundamental principle for Timothy, his son in the faith, who was leader of the church at Ephesus. Timothy was to do his best to present himself to God as someone who *correctly handles the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15). The Greek term translated "correctly handles" occur in a number of places in Scripture; e.g. Proverbs 3:6 ("he will *make your paths straight*") and 11:5 ("The righteousness of the blameless *makes a straight way* for them").

### *Cutting a straight path*

These passages suggest the cutting out of a straight road across uncharted territory, and the idea of cutting straight indicates an accurate and straightforward interpretation, exposition and application, in contrast to the devious distortions spoken of by Peter. The correct way to interpret Scripture is *in a straightforward manner*.

This straightforward approach means that the words in a passage should be given their normal sense, unless there is evidence that other meanings should be applied. In much of the Old Testament, and in some places in the New, poetic and symbolic language is used, and this must obviously be taken into account when interpreting such passages. However, in the absence of these, we should assume that the writer means exactly what he says, and what he has written should be interpreted literally in every detail.

### *Attention to detail*

The attention to detail is important. The Lord Jesus stated that "not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18). We are required to look at exactly what Scripture says,

as we seek to interpret it. To determine this, it is important for us to look beyond our English translations, which are sometimes an interpretation rather than a strict translation, in order to arrive at the original meaning.

### ***Bishop Miles Coverdale***

Miles Coverdale, writing in the sixteenth century, set out the principle that in interpreting Scripture one should “take account not only of what is written but of whom, to whom, with what words, at what time, to what intent, with what circumstances, and considering what goes before and what comes after.” It is therefore important to take note of the *context* within which particular statements in Scripture are made. This means that individual verses should not be considered on their own. Rather a decision on their interpretation can be made only in the light of the section, the chapter and even the book in which they are contained. Many errors in doctrine and practice stem from looking at verses in isolation.

### ***Consistency and Differences***

However, it is not only the immediate context that requires to be observed. We must also consider the *consistency* of our interpretation with the rest of Scripture. The Word of God is consistent within itself and does not contain contradictory messages. If we find ourselves interpreting a passage in such a way that it is incompatible with other teaching in Scripture, this must be recognised and our interpretation of both passages must be reconsidered before we proceed. However, it is not appropriate to force agreement between passages by twisting individual verses or changing their meanings, to make them compatible with other passages elsewhere so that they fit our views. Differences must be identified and investigated. We can sometimes learn more by considering differences between passages than by looking at similarities.

In order for us to understand individual passages of Scripture we have to have an appreciation of the wider picture of God’s purposes, as revealed to us in His Word, so that we can identify the context within which the information is set. Only in this way can each one of us hope to be presented before Him as an unashamed workman, who correctly handles the word of truth.

### ***Further Reading***

More information on this subject may be obtained from the following Open Bible Trust publications:

*Approaching the Bible* by Michael Penny  
*40 Problem Passages* by Michael Penny  
*Paul’s Three Ministries* by Michael Penny

## *Dispensational 2: God's different dealings with mankind*

**Charles Ozanne**

**The need to take note in Scripture of God's different dealings with men at different times and places and in particular the change recorded in Acts 28:17-31 with the resulting ministry of the Apostle Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1-9).**

### *Who and How?*

All those whose desire is to understand the Bible should take note of the fact that God's dealings with mankind have not followed a uniform pattern. Both His human agents (His stewards) and His mode of operation have changed from time to time. In all God's ways His ultimate aim has been the same - the restoration and salvation of mankind. But to achieve this end He has employed a number of strategies. These strategies we call dispensations (properly stewardships). If we are "to rightly divide the word of God" (*KJV*), or "correctly handle the word of truth" (*NIV*), with respect to dispensations, we need to ask the questions "Who?" and "How?". That is, "Who are His stewards at any particular time?" and "How is He acting?" or "What is His mode of operation?" For our purposes it is convenient to give pride of place to the human agents He has been pleased to use since the fall of Adam.

### *1. From Adam to Abraham.*

During this long period of more than 2,000 years God was dealing with mankind as a whole. His stewards were those who trusted in Him, a tenuous line of families and individuals through whom His primitive revelation was passed down and proclaimed to those who would listen. Among these were Enoch, who was a prophet of impending judgment (Jude 14,15), and Noah who was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). This period was divided at the Flood, but the two halves were not significantly different. God's mode of operation after the Flood was much the same as before.

### *2. A new dispensation began with the call of Abraham.*

From this point onwards God's stewards in the world were Abraham and his descendants, the nation of Israel. They were called to be God's messengers and to be a witness to all other nations, declaring here on earth God's glory. They remained God's stewards throughout the Old Testament and into the New.

To begin with His mode of operation was chiefly one of promise (to which faith or belief was all that was required), but after the Exodus His strategy changed to one of Law. The Law of Moses laid down in detail how every Jew should behave. Rewards were held out to all who obeyed and summary punishment to those who disobeyed. Later on He spoke to them through the prophets, at many times and in various ways (Hebrews 1:1). The prophets exposed the apostasy of the nation and spelt out the consequences of their disobedience. But they also expanded on God's wonderful promises, depicting the

glorious age to come when they would all know the Lord from the least of them to the greatest (Jeremiah 31:34), and when the earth would be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

With the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, God spoke to them by His Son (Hebrews 1:2). It was however the same people as before, the descendants of Abraham, the nation of Israel. There was therefore no change of dispensation so far as God's stewards were concerned. The regime of Law also remained unchanged, but added to this was an urgent call to repent and the invitation to receive the Lord Jesus as their Messiah (the Christ). As we know, they declined the invitation and crucified their Messiah.

Many would say that they were given up at this juncture and that something entirely new began at Pentecost. But the book of Acts tells a different story. Beginning at Jerusalem, and in ever widening circles, the same gospel message was preached to the same stubborn people. During this period they were given a second chance to repent and to receive the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. This was in answer to His prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

However, soon after Pentecost, the Jerusalem mob confirmed their rejection by stoning the martyr Stephen. Even after the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius the message was still preached to the Jew first, for it was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken to them first (Acts 13:46). It was intended that the conversion of the Gentiles would have a boomerang effect on the Jews - that out of jealousy they would wish to be converted themselves (Romans 10:19; 11:13-14). But the majority of the Jews, and especially their leaders, though jealous and angry, still refused to believe.

The climax is reached in the last chapter of Acts when Paul addressed the Jewish leaders in Rome. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets (Acts 28:23). Some were convinced, but most, it seems, would not believe. This provoked Paul's final word to the Jewish nation, which he did in the chilling words from Isaiah 6, which Jesus Himself had quoted after being rejected by the Jewish leaders of His day (Matthew 13:14-15). "Go to this people and say, 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.' For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them" (Acts 28:26-27).

### ***3. The present dispensation***

This ended, for the time being, the dispensation which had begun with the call of Abraham. The Jews ceased to be God's stewards and became instead *Lo Ammi*, Hebrew for "Not My (God's) People", in fulfilment of Hosea 1:9. Soon after something entirely new was revealed to the imprisoned Apostle Paul. It is called a mystery or revealed secret and is found especially in Ephesians and Colossians. This includes the following new features:

- 1) God has chosen a people to be blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

- 2) These were chosen before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight (1:4).
- 3) This people has not only died with Christ (as in Romans), but has been raised and seated with Him in the heavenly realms (2:6).
- 4) The people addressed are specifically Gentiles who were once far away (without hope and without God in the world), but have now been brought near through the blood of Christ (2:11-13).
- 5) With believing Jews they now enjoy peace, that is harmony and union, the divisive and offensive Law having been abolished (2:14-15).
- 6) They are now created one new man in Christ (2:15) - that is, a new humanity in which the categories of Jew and Gentile no longer exist.
- 7) The result is that the Gentile Christians are heirs together (with Christian Israelites), members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (3:6).

#### ***4. The future***

God's stewards are now the body of Christ, the Church of this interim period. Ultimately however the Jews will be restored, and a new, millennial dispensation of 1,000 years will commence with Israel, once again, as God's stewards in the world.

#### ***Further Reading***

More information on this subject may be obtained from the following Open Bible Trust publications:

*Isaiah 6 – its Old and New Testament Fulfillments* by Michael Penny

*Israel in the New Testament* by Michael Penny

*Think on These Things* by Ernest Streets

*The Dividing Line – Acts 28* by David Tavender

## *Publishing Policy*

**Michael Penny**

**Publications must be in accordance with the evangelical, fundamental and dispensational basis of the Trust. However, beyond this minimum, writers are free to express whatever beliefs they may have as their own personal understanding, providing that the aim in so doing is to further the object of The Open Bible Trust.**

One of the problems in Christendom has been that churches, denominations and organisations, have had a *creed* that members must conform to. If an individual does not subscribe to it fully, then often that person is not allowed to participate in any meaningful way in that church, denomination or organisation. The Open Bible Trust wanted to get away from such a position while, at the same time, preserving the biblical teachings that it deemed important. How could this be done?

The Trustees devised the above Publishing Policy that was meant to ensure that nothing the Open Bible Trust produced could go against its Doctrinal Basis. However, it did not prevent someone who, for example, did not agree with the dispensational doctrine, from writing and having published a booklet on Salvation, the Deity of Christ, Genesis, or whatever. In this way the Open Bible Trust could be open to and embrace Christians with whom they may not completely agree, while preserving and protecting teaching which it considered important. It also allowed those Christians to participate in an important and meaningful way in the work of the Open Bible Trust.

Also on the teachings which it did not consider of primary importance, i.e. those not contained in the Doctrinal Basis, the Open Bible Trust was willing to let writers express their beliefs as their own “personal understanding”. In other words, apart from the doctrines contained in the Doctrinal Basis, the Open Bible Trust does not have an *official view* or an *agreed position* on any other doctrine. This does not mean that the Trustees as individuals do not have personal beliefs on a wide variety of subjects, but as a body of Trustees their position is to guard the Trust; i.e. guard those doctrines expressed in the Doctrinal Basis.

Although the openness of this position is appealing to some, it can be confusing. One person wrote and, at the beginning of his letter, stated how delighted he was to find the Open Bible Trust open to different views. However, towards the end of his letter he said he was confused. What was the Open Bible Trust’s teaching on John’s Gospel, as the two booklets it had published contained different teaching? Thus you will find within our publications and cassettes divergent views expressed by different writers and speakers, but not on issues contained within the Doctrinal Basis.

Because of this we have tried to encourage authors to disagree agreeably. Within some Christian circles discussions of views differing from a writer’s own have sometimes become judgements upon another’s Christianity, their commitment to Christ, their belief in the authority of the Scriptures, etc. We have tried to remove such judgemental comments from our publications. We may be right to disagree in love with another’s views, but we have no right to judge that person and should never look down upon him or her quite simply because some of their doctrines may differ from ours; judgement belongs to Christ.

## ***Conclusion: Priorities***

### **Michael Penny**

In concluding I would like to use just one word: *priorities!* All Christian denominations, churches, organisations, etc., have something that makes them different and distinctive. There is nothing wrong with that, unless that distinctive doctrine or practice, or whatever it may be, is elevated to too high a priority. The Open Bible Trust wanted to avoid this and that was why, in its Doctrinal Basis, the doctrines were numbered and listed in that specific order.

The “something” that makes the Open Bible Trust different and distinctive is not the most important part of its work. The most important teaching concerns that of the Lord Jesus Christ: who He is and what He did. In other words, the most important part of the work of the Open Bible Trust is proclaiming that salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who, as God manifest in the flesh, died for our sins and rose again on the third day. I cannot emphasise this enough. The moment we lose sight of the fact that Christ and the gospel of salvation have number one priority, we lose everything.

Closely connected with this is the life we lead for that life is what we have been saved for. As Ephesians 2:8-10 puts it:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

In other words, once we have been saved, we need to recognise that the life we live is of utmost importance to our God. He has prepared good works for us to do, and we find those good works in the pages of the Bible, and that is why the Bible must be considered as reliable, authoritative and inspired. It must be considered the final and ultimate authority, not the teachings of any leader, church, denomination, or tradition.

And it is the Christian’s responsibility to read the Bible to find out what those good works are. At one level the Bible is easy to read. We can open the pages of the New Testament and read about God’s love and forgiveness. We can read about salvation by grace through faith. We learn about Christ’s sacrifice for sin, His resurrection and ascension. The teachings about right and wrong are clear and straightforward. The good works are plainly stated so that anyone can understand what they are. Thus when it comes to our sin and salvation, and about what is right and wrong, we are without excuse, for the Bible states these things clearly.

However, there are some things that are not so clear and this is where systematic study of the Bible comes in. Here is where we come to the third and final part of the Open Bible Trust’s Doctrinal Basis. However, we recognise that the Dispensational part, and sorting out the things in the Bible which are not so clear and easy to understand, is of less importance than believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and living a life that is worthy of Him.