

Essentials Series Preface

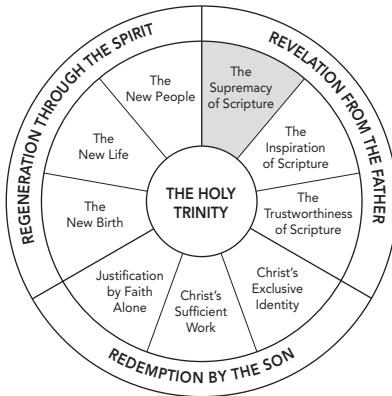
Very simply, this series introduces the essential, non-negotiable truths of the gospel.

And what are they? This is how the apostle Paul speaks of the gospel in the opening sentence of his letter to the Romans:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 1:1–4 ESV)

SCRIPTURE IS SUPREME

For Paul, the gospel is a God-centred message: it is “the gospel of God.” It is a Trinitarian message: the Father revealing his Son in the power of the Spirit. It is a biblical message: proclaimed “in the holy Scriptures.” It concerns Christ, the Son of God, and his work of redemption. And it is a message made effective in the regenerating power of the Spirit. In other words, the Christian gospel is good news concerning the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, in revelation, redemption, and regeneration.¹




1 This diagram was first used and explained in Michael Reeves, *Gospel People: A Call for Evangelical Integrity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 20, 119.




ESSENTIALS SERIES PREFACE

These truths are all interconnected, and together they make up our beautiful, biblical, Trinitarian, Christ-centred, and Spirit-effected good news. This series will introduce, and refresh readers in, this gospel. Ten short books cover the most basic subject areas of the gospel, as shown in the two inner circles of this diagram.



Each book will address its own subject area, and yet the aim of this series is not merely to communicate content. The gospel, after all, is not merely revelation. It is a revelation that *redeems* and *regenerates*. And so, may you be renewed as you read, and brought to worship and enjoy “the glory of the blessed God” (1 Tim. 1:11 ESV).



Michael Reeves
Series Editor



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Whose Voice Matters Most?

A Supreme Authority

I was a slow convert to satnavs. Some friends gave me their cast-off, but I rarely used it. If I followed a paper map (remember those?), then I found that I could remember the route the next time. But a satnav somehow put the navigational bit of my brain into sleep mode. So, if I used one, I couldn't replicate the journey from memory next time I travelled that way.

But gradually, my resistance weakened. Laziness kicked in, I guess. It was easier to follow the satnav than to work out a route of my own, especially when I didn't have a friend in the passenger seat holding the road atlas.



Now I use a satnav all the time. I happily obey its ever-calm voice.

Most of the time. Last week, I ignored its instruction to take a right turn. I'd put it on because I was travelling back from an unfamiliar location. We were nearly home and back in familiar territory. The satnav was still in, and suddenly it told me to take a road I'd never taken before.

I ignored it. A few moments later, I found myself stuck in a traffic jam. My estimated time of arrival jumped by thirty minutes. I thought I knew better than the satnav, and now I was paying the price.

We like to think of ourselves as free agents who can choose what we want to do. But in fact, we live much of our lives under authority. We do what our mothers tell us (some of the time). We adhere to the laws of the road. We take orders from the boss. We follow the instruction manual. We obey the voice of the satnav.

Sometimes we might resent that authority. After all, who likes being bossed about? We moan about government regulations or

unreasonable work demands. But we would moan even more if there were no government at all. Yes, there are laws we resent, but we still recognise the need for law and order. In one sense, I am free to drive on the wrong side of the road; there's nothing to prevent me steering across the lanes. But making that choice would literally put me on a road to disaster.

Driving to a new town requires both the authority of a satnav to tell me where to go and obedience to the highway code to get me there safely.

But what about the journey of life? How do we navigate it? Or what if I want to get to God? What map do I follow? What satnav will give me the right directions?

The answer is quite simple: the only reliable guide to the journey of life is the Bible. When Christians say that Scripture is supreme, we are saying that the Bible is the authoritative guide to God. The Bible is the satnav that gives us directions for life. It's the highway code that shows us what God requires.

An authority to speak

Scripture is supreme. This means that the Bible has authority, and so it's important to listen carefully to what it says. That's because what the Bible says is true. It has authority because it is reliable.

Does Wikipedia have authority? Yes, in one sense. It certainly can be a source of true information. Suppose you and a friend are arguing about who won the football World Cup in 2014. You say it was Brazil, and your friend says it was Germany. The debate is easily resolved. One of you takes out your phone and looks it up on Wikipedia. It turns out that your friend was right: it was Germany. (Guess how I know this?)

Wikipedia has the authority to settle arguments between friends. But Wikipedia is famously *not* 100 percent reliable. It's only as good as its contributors. Plus, sometimes people deliberately insert false information as a prank. So, as a conscientious faculty member of Crosslands Training, I warn my students

against using it. If we had to score its reliability, we might give it a mark of 80 percent.


What about a university textbook? Is that an authority we can trust? One would hope that it had been written by an expert, carefully edited, and perhaps peer reviewed. It's presumably much more reliable than Wikipedia. But in many books, the odd typo or wrong date will get missed. Moreover, scholarship is always changing. New discoveries are made, and new theories advanced. So, while our textbook is going to score higher on our reliability scale, we can't give it 100 percent. It has more authority than Wikipedia, but its authority is still limited.

But the Bible is 100 percent true and therefore 100 percent authoritative. William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536), who was martyred for translating the Bible into English, described it as “the touchstone” that enables us to distinguish between false doctrine and true doctrine.¹


1 William Tyndale, “Prologue to the Book of Genesis,” in *Works of William Tyndale*, ed. Henry Walter (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 1:398.

The word “Scripture” in the phrase “Scripture is supreme” refers to the written Word of God that we have in the Bible. The word that is supreme can also include the proclamation of the gospel and the preaching of the Bible, but only to the extent that these faithfully reflect what is taught in Scripture. Scripture is the yardstick by which we measure the truth of everything else.

An authority to rule



The authority of the Bible goes even further, for the Bible is more than a reliable source of information. It doesn't just tell us *what*—what is, what is true, and so on. It also tells us *how*—how we can know God and how we can live life as it is meant to be lived. The Bible is a book with *implications*. You can't read it and say, “How interesting!” in a disinterested kind of way. You can't remain detached. You've got to do something with the Bible once you've read it: either love it or hate it, accept it or reject it, obey it or disobey it. What's not an option is neutrality.



Yes, the Bible is a book containing statements of fact. But it's also much more than that. It's a book with commands and invitations. Its words *do* something. Even when what Scripture says is not technically an imperative, its words carry big implications.

One of the Bible's central claims is that Jesus has risen from the dead as the Lord of all (Rom. 1:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:3–4). On the face of it, that is simply a statement of fact. But it's a statement that demands a response. If you've merely responded by saying, "That's interesting," then you've not really understood what the resurrection of Jesus involves. That resurrection is the confirmation that he is God's King. It calls you to submit to Christ's lordship and entrust your life to his care.

On my recent journey home, my satnav told me to turn right. When I ignored that command, I added thirty minutes to my journey. But that's not a big deal in the grand scheme of things. Usually, it makes sense to recognise the authority of a satnav, but in the end, not much is at stake. However, to be told