

Men of the Word

SESSION 7:

The Bible Is Authoritative

IT IS WRITTEN

Introduction

“What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? . . . Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord?”

—1 Samuel 15:14, 19

“Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.”

—1 Samuel 15:22–23



“Then Samuel said, ‘Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites.’ And Agag came to him cheerfully. And Agag said, ‘Surely the bitterness of death is past.’ But Samuel said, ‘As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.’ And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal.”

—1 Samuel 15:32–33

Review

- **“Revelation”** – the origin of the Bible’s message.
- **“Inspired”** – the transmission of the Bible’s message.
 - **“Clear”** – the accessibility of the Bible’s message.
 - **“True”** – the reliability of the Bible’s message.
- **“Sufficient”** – the adequacy of the Bible’s message.
- **“Necessary”** – the urgency of the Bible’s message.



I. The Nature of Authority

A. What is authority?

- **“Authority”** = “power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior” (Mirriam-Webster).
- Bernard Ramm: “Authority itself means that right or power to command action or compliance, or to determine belief or custom, expecting obedience from those under authority, and in turn giving responsible account for the claim to right or power” (*The Pattern of Religious Authority*, 10).
- **Authority is that which *binds the conscience***—either in an ultimate sense (a primary authority) or a derived sense (a secondary authority).

- Even though we live in an age that questions authority in all its forms, appealing to authority—even in spiritual matters—is unavoidable.
- Kevin DeYoung: “All religion rests on authority. In fact, every academic discipline and every sphere of human inquiry rests on authority. Whether we realize it or not, we all give someone or something the last word—our parents, our culture, our community, our feelings, the government, peer-reviewed journals, opinion polls, impressions, or a holy book. We all have someone or something that we turn to as the final arbiter of truth claims” (*Taking God At His Word*, 78).

A U T H O R I T Y

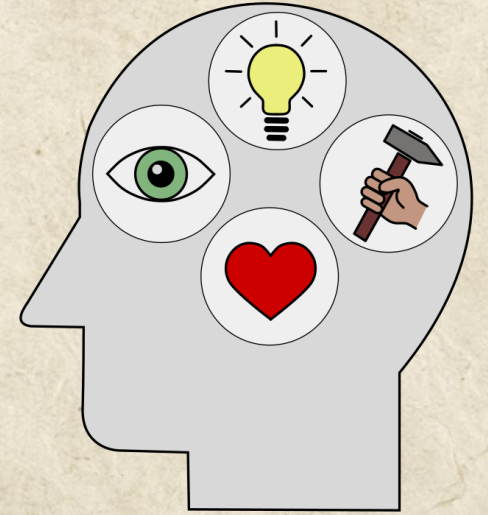
B. Where is ultimate authority found?

- Leon Morris: “In the whole of Christianity it seems that believers have been able to come up with no more than three ideas about the ultimate authority. Some see it in the Bible, some in the church (or a group within the church or outside it; the essence of this view is corporateness), and others in something personal, be it in the reason or spiritual experience. Of course in practice we all give some attention to these three. But in the last resort we all see one or another as what really matters” (*I Believe in Revelation*, 142).
- This could be expanded to include four options: (1) the Church; (2) the self; (3) the community; or (4) the Bible.

- Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, some Protestants.
- The Bible is authoritative, but neither *sufficient* to address all matters necessary for faith/life, nor *clear enough* to be interpreted on its own.
- An *insufficient* and *obscure* Bible requires another authority, one that practically rises above it, to provide what the Bible *lacks* and clarify what the Bible *obscures*.
- Christian Smith: “When disagreements must be decided on . . . the exercised authority of (what Catholics believe to be) a Christ-authorized teaching Magisterium provides clearly defined boundaries of doctrinal orthodoxy and established ecclesial processes for adjudicating difference” (*The Bible Made Impossible*, 192).



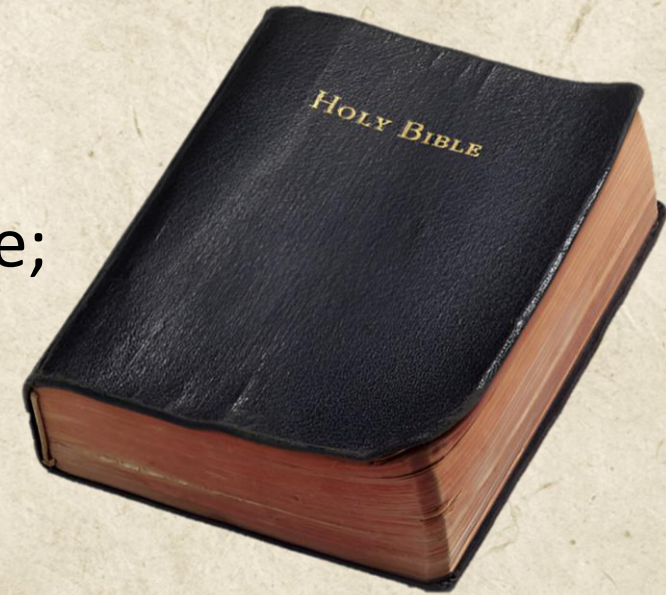
- Protestant Liberalism and progressive Christianity.
- The Bible is authoritative but must still be submitted either to the dictates of *reason* (what I *think* is right) or *experience* (what I *feel* is right).
- Gary Dorrien: “The essential idea of liberal theology is that all claims to truth, in theology as in other disciplines, must be made on the basis of reason and experience, not by appeal to external authority. Christian scripture may be recognized as spiritually authoritative within Christian experience, but its word does not settle or establish truth claims about matters of fact” (*The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 1).



- Postmodern Christianity and woke Christianity.
- The Bible is authoritative but does not contain objective truth. Interpretation is based upon *the shared experiences* of each community.
- John Franke: “The ongoing guidance of the Spirit always comes as a specific community of believers, in a specific setting, listens for and hears the voice of the Spirit speaking in and to the particularity of its social and historical context” (*Manifold Witness*, 81).
- Franke: “No single community, tradition, or perspective can speak for the whole church,” for theology is always “situational and contextual” (*Manifold Witness*, 116).



- Biblical Christianity.
- The Bible is the ultimate authority for faith and life; it is never improved, clarified, validated, or augmented by any other authority; it presides as judge over all other authorities.
- Kevin DeYoung: “For Christians, this authority is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Of course, we can misunderstand and misapply the word of God. But when interpreted correctly—paying attention to the original context, considering the literary genre, thinking through authorial intent—the Bible is never wrong in what it affirms and must never be marginalized as anything less than the last word on everything it teaches” (*Taking God At His Word*, 78).



“We need only read church history to discover that when another source of authority is placed alongside Scripture as of equal importance, Scripture eventually becomes relegated to the background. Whether that other source is reason, emotion, or tradition, the inevitable result is that it supplants Scripture and causes it gradually to fade away. If that other source be reason, we get rationalism. If it is emotion, we get mysticism. And if it is tradition, we get ecclesiastical dictation or clericalism. In each case the Bible, while still given lip service, is effectually superseded.”

— Lorraine Boettner

- Recognition of the Bible as the *ultimate authority* in life is inseparably attached to the recognition of the authority of God:

Major Premise: God is the ultimate authority.

Minor Premise: God exercises His authority through His word.

Conclusion: God's word is His authority.

- Carl F. Henry: "Whoever would speak of God as authoritative over human life, yet clouds the authority of the Bible, in effect obscures an authoritative God" ("The Authority and Inspiration of Scripture," 11).

“As the word of God it stands on a level high above all human authority in state and society, science and art. Before it, all else must yield. For people must obey God rather than other people. All other authority is restricted to its own circle and applies only to its own area. But the authority of Scripture extends to the whole person and over all humankind. It is above the intellect and the will, the heart and the conscience, and cannot be compared with any other authority. Its authority, being divine, is absolute. It is entitled to be believed and obeyed by everyone at all times. In majesty it far transcends all other powers. . . .



“But, in order to gain recognition and dominion, it asks for no one’s assistance. It does not need the strong arm of the government. It does not need the support of the church and does not conscript anyone’s sword and inquisition. It does not desire to rule by coercion and violence, but seeks free and willing recognition. For that reason it brings its own recognition by the working of the Holy Spirit. Scripture guards its own authority.”

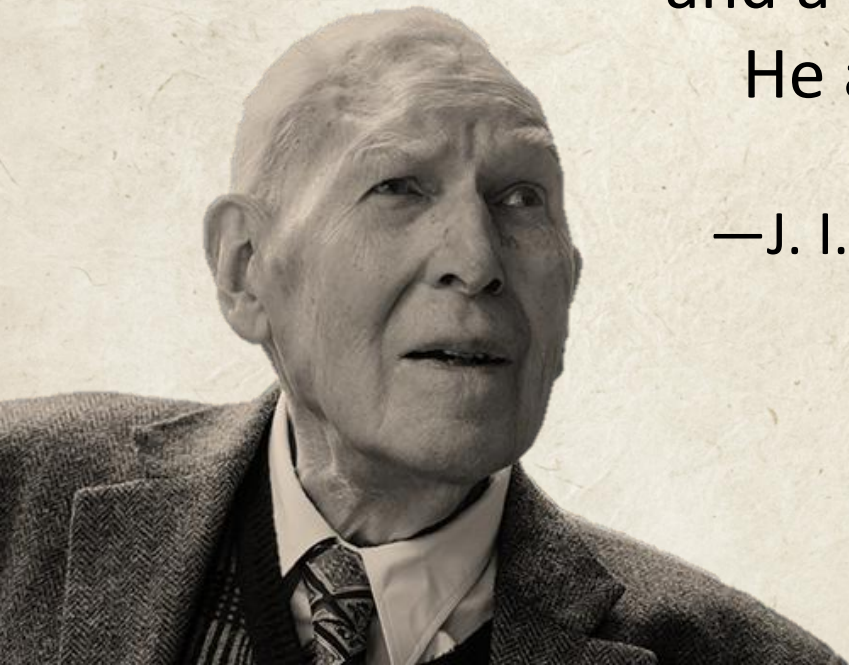


—Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.465

- Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.4: “The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.”
- Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.10 - “The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”

“On this view, then, the proper ground for believing a thing is not that the Church or reason says it. Both of these authorities may err, and in any case it is not to them that God has told us to go for authoritative indications of His mind. The proper ground for believing a thing is that God says it in His written Word, and a readiness to take God’s word and accept what He asserts in the Bible is fundamental to faith.”

—J. I. Packer, *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God*, 49



II. The Testimony to Authority

A. Scripture's Self-Witness

- **2 Timothy 3:16** – “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”
 - God Himself has brought the Scriptures into being.
 - His inspiration of the Scriptures establishes its authority.
- **2 Peter 1:20–21** – “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

- How biblical writers refer to Scripture:
 - **“It is written”** – γέγραπται (*gegraptai*); a perfect passive verb indicating that something was recorded at a moment in history but remains binding to this day.
 - By this phrase the biblical writers imply: “Here is the permanent, unchangeable witness of the Eternal God, committed to writing for our instruction” (John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 28).
 - **“Scripture says,” “it says,” or “God says”** – the present tense verb indicates that the words of Scripture quoted are *living words of God*; they indicate unquestioned submission.
 - **“The oracles of God”** – “the authoritative words of God”; Acts 7:38; Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11.

B. Christ's Own Testimony

- **John 10:35** – “The Scripture cannot be broken.”
- “What we have here is, therefore, the strongest possible assertion of the indefectible authority of Scripture. Precisely what is true of Scripture is that it ‘cannot be broken.’ Now, what is the particular thing in Scripture, for the confirmation of which the indefectible authority of Scripture is thus invoked? It is one of its most casual clauses—more than that, the very form of its expression in one of its most casual clauses. This means, of course, that in the Savior’s view the indefectible authority of Scripture attaches to the very form of expression of its most casual clauses. It belongs to Scripture through and through, down to its most minute particulars” (B. B. Warfield, “The Biblical Idea of Inspiration”).

- Jesus uses Scripture as the best defense against His greatest foe.
- **Matthew 4:1–11** – “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. . . . And the tempter came and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ But He answered and said, **‘It is written**’ “MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.” Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, “HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU”; and “ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.”’ Jesus said to him, ‘On the other hand, **it is written**’ “YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.” . . .

- **Matthew 4:1–11 (cont'd)** – “. . . Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go, Satan! **For it is written**, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’” Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and *began* to minister to Him.”
- “This is amazing because Jesus is God, and could have—as he often did—dispatched Satan with one word of *his own*. But in this case, Jesus is modeling this human reliance on the Father’s word” (John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory*, 104).

- Jesus consistently cites Scripture as the final say in controversies.
- **Matthew 15:1–9** – “Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ‘Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’ And He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?’ **For God said, “HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,”** and, “HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.” But you say, “Whoever says to *his* father or mother, ‘Whatever I have that would help you has been given *to God*,’ he is not to honor his father or his mother.” And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites, **rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you** “THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.””

- **John 5:45–47** – “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”
- **Luke 16:19–31** – “. . . And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

“Quoting Scripture to make a point, refute an argument, correct a misunderstanding is always seen as the ‘final word.’ . . . [Jesus] expects his audience to recognize the allusion or quotation from the OT and to agree.”

—John Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 152

“His whole ministry, as recorded in the Gospels, may justly be described as a prolonged and many-sided affirmation of the authority of the Old Testament.”

—J. I. Packer, “Fundamentalism” and the Word of God,
56–57



C. The Witness of the New Testament Writers



- The NT writers' use of the OT demonstrates that they believed it was binding.
- The NT writers believed their own writings were also ultimately authoritative (e.g., 1 Cor 14:37; Titus 2:15).
- The NT writers' references to each others' writings indicate they believed those writings were binding (e.g., Paul's use of Deut 25:4 with Luke 10:7 in 1 Tim 5:18; Peter's reference to Paul's letters as "Scripture" in 2 Peter 3:16).

III. The Implications of Authority

“Authority is the crucial issue of our times. Perhaps it is the crucial issue of any time. And biblical authority is the crucial issue in Christianity. Center in the issue of biblical authority is the question of error in Scripture. We do well to focus our attention, therefore, on the doctrine of inspiration. But what we gain for the authority of Scripture in the on-going debate concerning inspiration may well be lost through hermeneutical leakage. It is very well to affirm a Bible without error, but to treat it in interpretation as culturally relative will undermine its independent authority just as certainly as affirming error in Scripture. Against this subtle yet fatal erosion from within, we must hold that all of Scripture is normative for contemporary faith and life except that which Scripture itself limits to other people or times” (Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 239–40).

A. Acknowledge the Bible for what it is.

- The Bible exercises God's sovereignty over our lives, so when the Bible speaks, we must realize that it is God who speaks.
- **Isaiah 66:2** – “‘For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,’ declares the LORD. ‘But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.’”

B. Respond with comprehensive submission.

- Faith recognizes that if God said it, that seals it; no other verification is needed.
- **1 Samuel 15:22–23** – “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.”

C. Study the Scriptures diligently.

- A biblical text wrongly understood will lead to a conscience wrongly bound. Accurate interpretation is needed for accurate submission.
- **2 Timothy 2:15** – “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

D. Speak the Scriptures with conviction.

- Don't succumb to the pressure to “prove” Scripture. Assert it!
- Spurgeon: “There is no need for you to defend a lion when he is being attacked.”
- **Colossians 3:16** – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another.”

“My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”

—Martin Luther



Men *of the* Word
2024–2025

IT IS WRITTEN

A Study of
the Doctrine
of Scripture