

Introduction...

We are in week 7 of our series on the doctrine of Scripture. In this study we have learned about the inerrancy, inspiration, sufficiency, clarity, and necessity of God's Word. A few weeks ago, Josh Wagner was here and he helped us understand the relationship between the Bible and Science, or the two books of God and how the book of revelation is what helps us interpret and understand the book of creation.

Today's sermon is an application of all principles we have seen thus far; if the Bible is true in all of its parts and without error, if the Bible has been given to us by the inspiration of God, if it is clear, necessary and sufficient, if it stands as the infallible foundation for how we interpret the natural world; then this Bible stands in a place of unique authority in our lives as believers.

Why do we go to Haiti? Why do we, as a church and as individuals, engage in the mission of going to the nations to preach the gospel and make disciples? **We are not *simply*** being driven by a human impulse of concern for the well-being of others. **It is not** because we believe that we are better than others and therefore we need to help them become more like ourselves, which is what one of our team members was accused of. **We are not** fueled by the religious belief that our going earns us some spiritual merit toward our entry into Heaven. **We are not *simply*** being guided by a burden for social justice.

We go because Christ commands us to go. We go because the one who commands us, the One who sends us, was Himself sent. Jesus obeyed the command of His Father. In obedience to His Father, Jesus came, lived, and died to set us free from our hopeless bondage to sin. We go because of our love for Jesus, our love for our neighbor, and we go in submission to the authority of God's Word.

It is in Scripture and from the lips of Jesus that we see the command to go into the world, preaching the gospel, in order to make disciples of Christ. It is in the Word of God that we hear the command of God to go. It is in Scripture that we come to realize that just as God the Father sent His Son, so the Son has sent us. We go in obedience to the authority of God's word.

The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.¹

Transition...

If you are a Christian, then you believe in the authority of Scripture; at least in some sense. But the question is how should we understand the Bible's authority? What is the source of the Bible's authority? Are there limits to the Bible's authority? Why do many people reject the Bible's authority? And then finally, how does the Bible's authority impact our lives as believers?

Let's look at some of these questions together.

Sermon Focus...**I. What is the Source of the Bible's Authority?**

¹ Grudem, Wayne A.; Grudem, Wayne A.. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (p. 73). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

The ultimate reason why the Scripture is authoritative is that it is God's Word. Divine authorship gives the Bible its inherent authority and we see this truth born out in the historical statements of faith.

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, chapter 1 article 4 reads,

The authority of the Holy Scriptures obligates belief in them. This authority does not depend on the testimony of any person or church but on God the author alone, who is truth itself.

Therefore, the Scriptures are to be received because they are the Word of God.²

The Scriptures have absolute authority because God has absolute authority, and scripture is His personal word to us. From the very beginning of the Bible we are told that it is God, our Creator, is speaking. He spoke to create the universe, to bring order and direction to His creation, and then He spoke to decisively establish His authority over mankind. He spoke to Adam, to Cain, to Noah, to Abraham and in each case the authority of His word is unquestionable.

As we move on in the Scriptures we see a recurring phrase letting us know that God is still speaking. "Thus says the Lord" appears hundreds of times and the cumulative force of these statements demonstrate that what we are reading is the written record of God's own words. When this phrase occurs God is speaking.

But what about those times when we don't see this phrase? What about those historical records, those poems and psalms, or those proverbs? How are we to understand the authority of the words that aren't directly related to those, "Thus says the Lord" passages.

Well, as we move on to the NT the apostles help us answer this question definitively. The burden of the Apostles was to preach the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus, the messiah of God and Savior of the world. They declared that, "There is no other name under heaven by which men can be saved (**Acts 4:12**). They proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God and the final and supreme authority.

Furthermore, they rested this message upon the authority of the OT Scriptures. In other words, they weren't simply declaring Christ as king on their own authority, they were declaring it based on the authority of the OT Scriptures. **AND** they understood their own apostolic writing/preaching to fall into the same category of being Spirit-Inspired Scripture (**2 Pet 3:16**).

The OT and the NT must be viewed as a whole and both of them together make up what the Bible calls Scripture.

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Pet 1:20 No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

² <https://founders.org/library/1689-confession/chapter-1-the-holy-scriptures/> (2 Peter 1:19–21; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:9.)

The ultimate source of every word in the Bible is God himself. Yes, the Bible was written down by human authors, but every word is from God. Since this is God's word from beginning to end, it carries His authority.

The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God (Grudem).

II. Are There Limits to the Bible's Authority?

There are a lot of voices in this world each claiming to be the final word on any number of subjects.

Sometimes the focus is history and the claim is made that Biblical history is inaccurate.

Sometimes the focus is science and the claim is made that Biblical teaching has been disproved by modern science. **Sometimes the focus is tradition** or human reason and from this standpoint people make the claim that the Bible cannot be trusted.

All of this brings up the question, "What is our ultimate authority?" Are there limits to the Bible's trustworthiness and therefore its authority?

Roman Catholic author, theologian and apologist, Peter Kreeft answers this question from the RC position.

The Church gives us her tradition like a mother giving a child hand-me-down clothing that has already been worn by many older brothers and sisters. But unlike any earthly clothing, this clothing is indestructible because it is made of...truth. It was invented by God, not man. Sacred Tradition must be distinguished from all human traditions...as part of "the deposit of faith", which also includes sacred Scripture.

Did you catch his answer? Scripture has authority in Roman Catholic life but not sole authority. Tradition reigns at its side. For the RC, the authority of Scripture is limited by Sacred Tradition.

Liberal theology has elevated human reason and experience over the Scriptures in terms of final authority. LT already undermines the accuracy, inerrancy and trustworthiness of Scripture; and in the realm of authority it simply continues that trend.

Gary Dorrien writes,

The essential idea of liberal theology is that all claims to truth must be made on the basis of reason and experience, not by appeal to external authority (ie. The bible). 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.

What this means is that the Scriptures can speak with authority on matters of faith, so long as we want them to; but in their system there is a difference between faith and truth. For the liberal theologian, who has supplanted God and replaced Him with man, final authority comes down to man's reason and experience, not Scripture.

As your pastor and an elder in this church, we absolutely reject both of these views. We believe that Bible is the final and only authority. It stands in judgment of human reason. It reigns over all tradition. We learned a few weeks ago from Psalm 19 that God has given us two books; the book of nature and the book of Scripture. Nature reveals much but Scripture reigns as the authoritative book of God.

From the Cornerstone Statement of Faith...

God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. God has also inspired the words of the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. These writings alone constitute the Word of God, which is authoritative and without error in the original writings, and is complete, sufficient, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks.

This paragraph makes clear our position on the authority of God's Word.

III. Why Do So Many People Reject the Bible's Authority?

We really have to answer this question in a couple of ways: biblically and then practically. Biblically, men and women suppress the truth and authority of God's Word because of their sin (**Rom 1:18**). All of mankind has some innate knowledge of the truth of God because God has written it on our hearts, but we suppress that truth. We know it is true, but we choose to believe the lie of sin rather than the truth of God.

But practically there are several reasons why people reject the authority of Scripture. Some reject it because they have legitimate intellectual concerns. Some reject it because they prefer the wisdom of man to that of God. Atheists reject it for obvious reasons; if there is no God then the Bible has no authority for them. **Some reject it because they don't fully understand it, but others reject it because it gets in the way of their sinful desires, and on the rare occasion you can find people who are willing to admit it.**

Aldous Huxley, the author of *Brave New World*, once wrote,

"For myself, as for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom..."³

Huxley, like so many, rejected the truth and authority of Scripture because it interfered with his sexual freedom. He, like so many, rejected the Words of eternal life for the fleeting pleasures of a few years of sexual sin. **He didn't reject it because he studied it and found it to be untrue in some empirical way. He didn't reject it because of deep intellectual convictions. He rejected it because it confronted him over his immorality.**

This notion is alive and thriving in our culture today. Many people aren't interested in a reasonable consideration of Christian faith because they have already made up their mind that their chosen lifestyle, which the Bible addresses as sinful, is more valuable than anything the Bible might teach them. They haven't studied the Scriptures for themselves, they've simply decided that the Bible is antiscience, antipleasure, anti (fill in the blank) without ever bothering to investigate the Bible with an open mind.

Christians have long been accused of being closed-minded and in some cases that may be true, but the same is also true of many unbelievers only they aren't willing to acknowledge their own inconsistency.

This is nothing new, in fact this has been happening since the time of the early church. **Jesus was rejected because** the authority of His word threatened the authority of the Pharisees and Scribes.

³ Aldous Huxley, in Robert S. Baker and James Sexton, eds., *Aldous Huxley: Complete Essays Volume 4* (Pg 369).

The apostles and the Word they preached were rejected because they threatened to undermine the status quo in Jerusalem. **Paul and His band of early missionaries** went throughout the Roman Empire preaching the Word of God. The authority of his message was rejected in many towns because the Jews were *filled with jealousy* (Acts 5, 13, 17).

The gospel was rejected in Philippi and Ephesus because it interrupted the revenue stream of idolatrous men. In these cases and many others, the authority of God's word was rejected simply on the basis of sin. But we do have a Biblical example where the authority of the Word was not rejected but nobly considered.

Acts 17:10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

IV. How Does the Bible's Authority Impact our Lives?

These men and women were eager to examine the Scriptures in order to check the accuracy of Paul's message. They didn't simply take Paul's word for it nor did they reject it based on their own sinful presuppositions; instead they relied upon the authority of Scripture to help them decide if the good news was true. This passage demonstrates what it means to affirm the authority of Scripture.

If Paul's message could be supported from Scripture they wanted to accept it. They were willing to hear the gospel and believe the gospel so long as it was consistent with the Scriptures. Their submission to the authority of God's Word led to them embracing Jesus as Messiah and following Him as Lord. If the Bible said it, they would believe it and obey it.

Conclusion...

The Scriptures have the last word, the final word and our posture is to understand it, believe it and submit to it. So, let me ask the obvious question, how are we doing in our application of the Authority of Scripture? Fox News does not have the final say in how we are to live our lives. Nor does CNN. Hollywood is not our final authority. The current moral (or amoral) climate of our culture does not have the final word in our lives as Christians. That position belongs to God's Word.

Is your life continually being shaped by God's Word? Are you growing in your understanding and application of it? Are you progressing in your struggle against sin by repenting, confessing and battling according to Scripture?

Are you growing in your love for Jesus and in your love for your neighbors? Are you serving in ways that are consistent with the Word? Are you praying, giving, and going? Are you allowing the Scriptures to be the final authority in your life or are you simply giving lip-service to this doctrine?

These are tough questions, hard hitting questions, but they must be asked. **Theology must not simply remain in the pages of our books, it must jump from those pages and impact our lives.**

When the Word of God tells us who God is we believe it. When the Word of God tells us who we are we accept it. When the Word of God tells us of our need we trust it and when the Word of God tells us of the Savior we need, we receive Him. When He commands us to repent we repent, when He commands us to love we love, when He commands us to go we go.

Scripture's authority functions in our lives to guide, sustain, convict, compel, save and sustain us until Christ comes again.