

Bibliology Lesson 4 – “The Authority of Scripture: Should Anyone Obey the Bible, and if so, Why?”¹ 2/20/22

1. What is authority?

Definition: “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.”²

A. Different kinds of authority:

- Everyone operates under some kind authority, and multiple levels of authority. Civil authority, authority at our jobs, God’s authority, and others who we choose as authorities in various spheres of life. It’s inescapable.
- Ask yourself: What are the loudest voices in my life? What are the greatest influences on my decision making? When it comes to making decisions; doing this or not doing this; staying faithful to my wife or committing adultery; going to work or not; choosing a church to plug into; allocating time, etc., what authority influences those decisions? A family member? CNN? Fox News? A celebrity? My own feelings and opinions? Sub-cultural tradition? God’s word, rightly interpreted? What is the final arbiter of truth, understanding, and life?

[When it comes to spiritual matters,] 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... We all have someone or something that we turn to as the final arbiter of truth.³

Various authority structures:

- **Oligarchical**⁴—authority exercised by a powerful few.
- **Democratic**—authority exercised by a people group. This can also take on the subtleties of cultural authority or “group think.”
- **Heredity**—authority exercised by a particular family group.
- **Despotic**—authority exercised by one or more in an evil/tyrannical fashion.
- **Personal**—authority exercised by the personal choice, conscience, will, feelings, inner subjectivity. Closely akin to the “existential” practice of ethics/value judgments.

¹ I am indebted to Paul Lamey of GCC Huntsville, Andy Snider (former professor at the Master’s Seminary), and the broader Master’s Seminary for assistance with these notes.

² Bernard Ramm, cited in Richard Mayhue, *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, Vol. 15, 2, Fall 2004, 228.

³ Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 78.

⁴ ὀλίγος (*oligos*)= “few”

Example of experience based authority:

[A]ll 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.⁵

- **Scientific authority—**

Paul Lamey: “There is no universal authority called science. There is methodology, but there is not some foundational scientific truth which is a final authority. Even the scientific method is theory laden. To view science as a final authority is not actually science but what is often called ‘scientism.’”

“We can accept as scientific facts only the actual observed data. Once we step beyond the observations we are set adrift in a sea of subjective speculation.”⁶

e.g., The big-bang theory rests on three pillars of observational evidence: 1) galactic red shifts, 2) elemental abundances, 3) background radiation. Each of these can be interpreted through a variety of theoretical models.

We also cannot make the argument that science answers ‘how’ and ‘when’ questions and the Bible answers ‘who’ and ‘why’ concerns. The Bible does not suggest that its authority is limited to theological questions alone. It also speaks to matters such as the physical origins of the universe and all that it contains and its ongoing function.

“The goal of science is clear—it is nothing short of the complete interpretation of the universe...[S]cience does much more than demand that it shall be left in undisturbed possession of what the theologian and metaphysician please to term its ‘legitimate field.’ It claims that the whole range of phenomena, mental as well as physical—the entire universe—is its field. It asserts that the scientific method is the sole gateway to the whole region of knowledge.”⁷

Gordon Clark rightly responds: “Do scientists never revise their conclusions? [I]s the scientific method the sole gateway to the region of knowledge? [If so,] What experiment or what evidence is sufficient to prove that science is the sole gateway to all knowledge?”⁸

⁵ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900–1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 1.

⁶ John Byl, *God and Cosmos: A Christian View of Time, Space, and the Universe* (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth, 2001), 9.

⁷ Karl Pearson, quoted in Gordon Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things* (Unicoi, Tenn.: The Trinity Foundation, 2005) 144.

⁸ Clark, 144.

In other words, if, as some individuals claim (who refer to themselves as scientists) science is the authority on knowledge; on what is true and what is not; then, how was the scientific method used to demonstrate that science is the absolute and final authority on matters? For example, that Darwinian evolution—gradualism—actually happened? That earth is 4.5 billion years old? That modern-day human beings evolved from an ancient chimpanzee-like creature? That conception does not begin life? If those claims are absolute truth—as some individuals claim—then what prior experiment or evidence exists to demonstrate that science is the final authority on such matters? This is not to say that science is useless. Certainly, science “works” at times. In other words, proper use of science has produced technologies (Heart-lung machine, computers, smart phones) and medical procedures (surgeries, medications) which “work,” where “work” is defined as, “achieve a desired result.” However, it does not follow that this thing which “works” is now given unquestioned authority on matters of truth and morality. That a thing is useful does not authorize it to interpret or govern the universe; to give final say on what should and should not be done by humanity.

“Observation [as practiced in science] can at best describe what is and cannot decide what ought to be.”⁹

Thus, science requires a superior authority to which it is subject for the absolute determination of knowledge and ethics; what *is* and what *should* and *should not* be.

And this all raises the question: What is the purpose of science?

- **Ecclesial/church**—an authority that makes a church body or her leaders the final arbiter of truth.

[One Roman Catholic source says:] “Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”¹⁰

Rome claims that all of the books of the Old and New Testaments be honored:

“...and together with them the Traditions relating to faith as well as manners, as having been dictated by the mouth of Jesus Christ or the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by continual succession. If anyone receive not the whole of the said books, with all their parts, as holy and canonical...or knowingly despises the said traditions, let him be anathema.”¹¹

“The Holy Scriptures do not contain all that is necessary to salvation and are not sufficient...They are obscure...It is not for the people to read the Holy Scriptures.

⁹ Clark, 159.

¹⁰ *Dei Verbum*, 9.

¹¹ Council of Trent, 1st decree, session 4, cited in Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 320.

We must receive with obedience of faith many things that are not in the Scriptures.”¹²

“The authenticity, integrity, inspiration, canonicity, and authority of scripture are all established as certain by the [Roman] church.”¹³

Luther argued against ecclesial authority before the Diet of Worms in April 1521, when asked to recant of his teaching on justification:

Since your majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason--I do not accept the authority of popes and councils for they have contradicted each other--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. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen.¹⁴

“‘Thus says the Lord’ is the only authority in God’s Church...Brethren, how careful should we be that we do not set up in God’s church anything in opposition to his Word, that we do not permit the teachings of a creature to usurp the honor due to the Lord alone.

‘Thus says antiquity.’

‘Thus says authority.’

‘Thus says learning.’

‘Thus says experience.’

These are but idol-gods which defile the church of God.”¹⁵

- Paul Lamey: “History functions best as a tour guide not a slave master.”
- Paul Lamey: “The problem of ‘circular’ reasoning: all reasoning is circular and must point back to itself to justify itself. This is just a fact of basic logic (*principium* or fundamental principles cannot be proved but only recognized. A first principle is believed on its own account, not something else). In this vein, the Scripture teaches that it is trustworthy in and of itself without verification or additional evidence.”

B. What is the authority of Scripture?

- “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.”¹⁶

¹² Bellarmine, *De Verbo Dei*, Vol. II, chap. 19 and Vol. IV, chap. 3, cited in Pache, 320.

¹³ Herman Bavink, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:455.

¹⁴ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Mentor, 1955), 144.

¹⁵ Charles Spurgeon, Sermon, “Thus Says the Lord,” on Ezekiel 11:5.

¹⁶ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids: IVP; Zondervan, 2004), 73.

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.¹⁷

“The Scriptures of God are my only foundation and substance in all matters of weight and importance.”¹⁸

“The Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing necessary and useful to be known is omitted, so nothing is taught which it is not beneficial to know.”¹⁹

“Up until the eighteenth century, that authority of Scripture was firmly established in all the churches and among all Christians.”²⁰

- In short, it means Scripture has the last word on all contested matters, it is the final arbiter of truth, and though believers are given to various influences and biases; in the end all are accountable to uphold and obey God’s Word as final.

2. What is the basis for the authority of Scripture?

“The phrase ‘authority of Scripture’ must be understood to be shorthand for ‘the authority of God as he speaks through Scripture.’”²¹

A. God’s authority is declared by the claims of Scripture.

“[I]f we are to trust Scripture as God’s Word, we must do so on the basis of its own teachings about itself.”²²

“[W]e owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.”²³

- Psalm 2:11 “That power belongs to God.”
- Romans 13:1 “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”

¹⁷ Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.10.

¹⁸ John Knox, “The Appellation from the Sentence Pronounced by the Bishops and Clergy: Addressed to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland 1558,” in *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559*.

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 173.

²⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:455.

²¹ Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 128.

²² John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 164.

²³ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (ed. William Pringle; Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845–46), vol. 1, 127.

- Jude 25 “to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”
- Matthew 28:18 “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”
- God has aligned himself with his word. That is only a problem *if* this God cannot be trusted; if his character is suspect, or he is a proven liar.
- God’s authority is not a value judgment that we make concerning it but it is what God claims Scripture to be.
- Authority is grounded in inspiration

“There is in fact only one ground on which the authority of Scripture can be based, and that is its inspiration.”²⁴

- His name affirms his authority: Yahweh, which carries the idea of, “I am,” declares God’s eternal and unchanging nature.

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends 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.²⁵

B. God’s authority is directed through Scripture.

- The fact of inspiration leads us to conclude that what Scripture says, God says.

“Divine authorship is the ultimate reason why Scripture is authoritative. Its authority is absolute because God’s authority is absolute, and Scripture is his personal word to us.”²⁶

- The writers were granted divine authority.
 - Almost 4,000 times in the OT we have expressions such as “The Lord commanded” or “The Lord said.”
 - The prophets understood that they were speaking from their own authority. For example, Micah distinguished himself in this way: Micah 3:8 “But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord.”

²⁴ Bavinck, 1:462.

²⁵ Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.4

²⁶ Frame, 165.

- Zechariah spoke on behalf of all OT prophets and accused Israel of ignoring “the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets” (Zech. 7:12).
- David said a similar thing: 2 Samuel 23:2–3 “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me...”
- In Matt 28:18 Jesus said “all authority had been given to Him by the Father.” Also in John 17 Jesus says something wonderful about His disciples, John 17:7–8 “Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them...”
- In the NT, Paul affirms that the words of the Apostles and NT writers came from the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 2:13 “which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit...”
- The words of biblical writers were binding (i.e., to be obeyed).
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:1–2 “Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. ²For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.”
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:4 “We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.”
 - In Galatians 1:6-12, Paul made the claim that the gospel he preached was the biblical gospel and that any that message that opposed this was anathema. Such a claim presupposes that the gospel contains the authority of God.
- Biblical writers claimed authority from Christ.
 - 1 Corinthians 14:37 “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.”
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:6 “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.”
- Problem passage:
 - 1 Corinthians 7:10 “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband.”

- He is saying that Jesus has already dealt with this issue, which he did in Matthew 19:1-9. The issue of divorce in the case of adultery.
- 1 Corinthians 7:12 “But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.”
 - Now here Paul is saying that Christ has not talked about this issue of an unbeliever leaving a believer in a marriage so this is a new teaching from Paul.
 - It’s still authoritative, later in v. 40 Paul says, oh by the way, “I think that I also have the Spirit of God.”
- Ultimately, the authority of Scripture is consequent of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Simply by the existence of Scripture, we can, therefore, conclude that Scripture is authoritative. God is not one voice among many, but the only voice among no one:

“For I am God, and there is no other” (Isa. 45:22).

3. What are the implications of biblical authority for us?

A. We can have confidence in *biblical* instruction (e.g. expository preaching, teaching, discipleship, counseling).

- Insofar as we properly interpret Scripture, biblical preaching and teaching is, by nature, carries God’s authority. This, of course, mandates a reverent and accurate hermeneutical approach.

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.”

- The authority of Scripture gives reverent freedom to the task of expository preaching in the local church. Insofar as the expositor accurately exposit Scripture, he may rest in an authority that is not his own. All the authority rests in God’s word. For this reason, the pulpit is central to the integrity and strength of the local church.

2 Timothy 4:1–4 “I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”

- Insofar as Scripture is accurately expounded, with every verse unpacked, God functionally is permitted to exercise his authority in that church. However, where the word is mishandled—whether deliberately or not—sinful man becomes the authority.
- As soon as we deviate from Scriptures on matters of faith and practice, we reject God’s authority and replace it with man’s.

E.g. In 2011, the Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUSA) denomination voted to permit the ordination of individuals in same-gender relationships to the ministry.²⁷ In so doing, they usurp God’s authority from his word with their own.

E.g. Churches of a charismatic and continuationist persuasion who hold to the continuation of words from God/the Holy Spirit (i.e. additional revelation), risk usurping God’s authority with man’s.

- The Bible can be misused and abused to justify all sorts of things. That is not the fault of Scripture but the fault of sinners.
- Acts 17 and the Bereans.

Acts 17:10–12 “The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.”

- Since all Christians are commanded to make disciples and function as salt and light, we are obligated to do our best to accurately handle Scripture. Other Christians and unbelievers will come to us with questions and advice. This behooves us to prioritize getting equipped in the word.
- We can humbly and boldly believe and speak the word of God. The authority does not rest with us, but with God. If individuals reject, they are rejecting the very authority of God.

You must boldly take your stand on His words, which no devil, hell, or death can suppress. Therefore no matter what happens, you should say: There is God’s Word. This is my rock and anchor. On it I rely, and it remains. Where it remains, I, too, remain; where it goes, I, too, go. The Word must stand, for God cannot lie; and heaven and

²⁷ <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2011/5/10/presbyterian-church-us-approves-change-ordination/>.

earth must go to ruins before the most insignificant letter or tittle of His Word remains unfulfilled.²⁸

B. We must obey *all* of God's Word.

- Humanity's job is not to determine *what* is authoritative within the 66 books of Scripture (for all Scripture is authoritative by nature), but to determine the *meaning* of Scripture and respond accordingly.
- Cf. Matt 4:4—Implication is that we live by *every* word from God.
- Since Scripture, by nature, is inspired by God, and, therefore, inerrant, every word is binding on our lives.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- The purpose of God's word is to lead us to obedience and in this way we are shaped according to His will, sanctified for Him.
- We do not submit to a passage of Scripture on the basis of cultural or personal acceptance, but on the basis of the authority of God's word.

It states that we believe that all of this is true, that the sovereign God has indeed authored Scripture this way and chooses to relate to us in this way through Scripture. It commits us to giving the Bible the sovereign place in our lives that must follow from its central place in relation to God and his actions.²⁹

- Problem: Do we follow Christ or do we follow Scripture? If we are to be obedient to Christ alone, how can it be said that we must obey Scripture? Isn't that putting Scripture on equal footing with Christ?

The antithesis is a false one. Jesus Christ is Lord of the Scriptures in the same sense in which any absolute monarch is Lord of the laws and proclamations which he sees fit to issue for the government of his subjects. The ruler's laws carry his personal authority, and the measure of one's loyalty to him is the consistency of one's observance of them.³⁰

C. We can “grow up” in Christ.

- 1 Corinthians 14:20 “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.”

²⁸ Martin Luther, *Kirchenpostille* on John 3:16.

²⁹ Ward, *Words of Life*, 129.

³⁰ J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (3rd ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 97.

- Ephesians 4:13–14 “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;”
- 1 Peter 2:2 “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation”
- Psalm 119:130 “The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”
- Paul Lamey: “The purpose of Scripture is broadly redemptive but also devoted to our full sanctification.”

No area of human life is excluded from the concern of Scripture. Believing God at his word, i.e., on his authority, is in no way inconsistent with human dignity, any more than that it dishonors a child to rely with unlimited trust on the word of her or his father. So far from gradually outgrowing this authority, Christian believers rather progressively learn to believe God at his word and to renounce all their wisdom...To the degree that they increase in faith, they cling all the more firmly to the authority of God in his word.³¹

CONCLUSION:

- Logical flow of Bibliology: Inspiration → Inerrancy → Authority
 - In other words, God brought about special revelation through inspiration. Therefore, whatever he inspires will be inerrant. Therefore, since it is inerrant, it is absolutely authoritative.
 - Therefore, every person of all time is under the authority of God, and under the authority of his word. From known kings to unknown citizens, from presidents and prime ministers to citizens of a land, all are under the authority of God’s word, regardless of personal opinion on the matter.

Cornerstone Doctrinal Statement:

We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31, Exodus 31:17). We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

³¹ Bavinck, 1:464.