

# Systematic Theology: Authority

*Systematic Theology*

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**Preached on:** Saturday, October 1, 2016

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I suppose I should introduce what I'm trying to do here today and what we're trying to do with these series of studies that we have planned on systematic theology. Systematic theology is a study that uses different Bible passages to determine biblical teaching on many topics and so what we're doing here is not expositing a passage like we normally do on Sunday or on Tuesday but looking to bring a lot of different Bible passages together to establish its teaching on key doctrines and I have a specific purpose for these classes that I want to be candid and up front about. I kind of debated on whether to say this but I'm going to say it because I think it is important to say. We have a specific purpose for these classes that goes far beyond conveying information to you and just creating another environment for us to get together and be under God's word together. I'm kind of thinking about this and approaching it more in the sense of kind of targeted and intensive discipleship, you might say, I really don't like to use that term very often but it does help to understand what we're trying to do here. This is more than a study about systematic theology, this is the foundation for the future of our church, really, is what I have in mind. We want to cultivate biblical convictions in such a way and biblical affections with these studies so that you and I will serve Christ better, more effectively in life and – watch this – and in the local church. This is about building up Truth Community Church as much as it is anything else.

Here's the thing: we've been at Truth Community Church now, we've been doing this for about five years now and I'm very thankful to God for what he's done and for the progress that we have made, but if you look at our church and you look at the broad perspective and you project things five or ten years out, we're a church that's a little bit vulnerable with our leadership. We have a small group of elders, we have three elders now. I am by far the youngest of those elders, I might add, at the tender age of 55 with my birthday last Saturday, and we have Andrew and Dane and I'm very grateful for their leadership but what we need to start to cultivate and start to develop is a next generation of leadership coming up after that. You know, we can go fine like this for a few years but what happens when Dane starts to fall off the edge mentally as could happen? Or somebody gets ill or somebody has to relocate or something like that? We need to be developing the next generation of leadership in our church and I'm very grateful to have so many fine and outstanding Christian men that are serving in so many different ways, in so many different aspects of our church. I'm grateful for what you men do in facilities and in security and in music and in evangelism and all of those things. That is absolutely

awesome and outstanding, that's part of how a church expands its foundation, but what we want to do, what we want to be candid about is that we need to over the next few years, a couple 3-4 years, we need to prepare and identify future elders in our church. We need to identify men in our church whom God has gifted to teach and men who have a particular characteristic of faithfulness about them. You know, ladies, all of this is for your benefit as well but when it comes to the church, a church needs male leadership and we have a lot of good men in our church and I've just felt the need to step my game up a little bit to make it better and to be more intentional about preparing men to enter into roles of spiritual leadership.

And what kind of men are we looking for? Well, the fact that you're here says a lot and it's very simple and you guys who are a little bit younger, what are we looking for? We're looking for men who will be here when the saints gather together. That's one thing, men who are consistently here when the saints gather together. Elders need to be present in order to lead the people of God, right? How could you have an elder that was gone 50-60% of the time and think that he was exercising spiritual leadership in the flock? Well, we're just talking about general principles here. We need men who will be here when the saints gather together.

Secondly, we need men who love Christ and I believe that all of you that are here today are indicative of that; that all of you have that characteristic. You're here because you love Christ and because you love his word. Good for you. That's what it takes. Beyond that, beyond that, to be an elder, you need to be a man who love the sheep of Christ; that a man of God is not just coming to be with the people of God just for his own edification, not just to expand his own knowledge but he recognizes that when Christ commissioned the apostles he said, "Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. Tend my lambs." We need men who have as one of the defining affections of their heart, "I am going to give whatever God has given me to the life of the local church to protect and to build up and to minister to the people of Christ. Why? Because I love Christ. And why do I love Christ? Because he gave himself for me. I want to be part of serving Christ in that particular way."

Now, that means something. It's going to be a man that loves his truth; men who have an ability to teach his truth. Look over at 2 Timothy 2 and you'll see exactly what I'm getting at here. 2 Timothy 2:2. In other words, there is a great opportunity at Truth Community Church for young men who say, "I want to develop into a spiritual leader," and this is part of the opportunity for that. 2 Timothy 2:1, Paul says to Timothy, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others as well." And there are four generations of believers in that verse: there is Paul; there is Timothy; there are the men that Timothy will teach; and then there are the men beyond those men that they will teach. So Paul teaches Timothy who teaches men who teach other men. Well, if we're going to develop men who are like that, we need to have a common foundation of what we believe and what we teach and how we think about the truth. We need to be upfront and clear about that and there is kind of a long term perspective about the health of Truth Community Church that's at work in what we're doing here.

So that's just a little bit of an introduction, kind of throwing that out to some of you young men to think on over the next few weeks and months. "Do I want to be that kind of man?" Well, the opportunity is there for someone who wants to be like that and says, "Yeah, I want to serve Christ in exactly that way. I want to be serious. I want to be here. I want to be faithful." That's the kind of men that we're looking for and the kind of men that we need. I'll be honest with you: we need men to step up into leadership; to manifest the faithfulness that is required for leadership. Men that will be here. Men that will stay. Men that will be strong when the winds blow and not bend. We need that and we want that. We intend to encourage that with what we do.

Now, let me just say a couple of things along with that about men being men. When we started this church, I don't know, it's been long enough now that I can tell these kinds of stories because the people that they apply to are long gone and long forgotten. When we started this church back in the beginning of 2012, almost 4 ½, 5 years ago, there was a discernible pattern that became amusing to me that there was just a type of men that were with us for a period of time. At one time I could have named them all by names, I know there were at least a half dozen men like this; none of them are anywhere near our fellowship anymore. When you start a church, there are a lot of interesting things that happen. People come a little bit out of curiosity and people also project their own desires and their own expectations on the new work and say, "Oh, this church will be like..." without even being conscious about it, they project their desires on what that church will become and so they come expecting one thing, one manner of teaching or leadership or philosophy of ministry and when it turns out not to be that way, they leave. That's okay.

People need to search out and find what they want to do but there was an amusing thing. I consider it amusing for reasons that you'll see why. This is all going to developing men to lead Truth Community Church going forward in the years to come, okay? This is what we're talking about. There was a pattern, it was laughable, especially if you know me, you would know how laughable this is. I had a number of men who came to me and promised me that they were going to be my best friend in ministry and, "Don, you can count on me to be with you." They practically said exactly these words, "You can cry on my shoulder. I'm gonna be there for you." You know, look, I'm not a guy that cries and I'm not so weak that I need a guy that I can emote all over. I don't need that. The funny thing is that the men who were most loudly proclaiming their future loyalties were the ones that left quickly. They left without a word. I'm talking about things that happened 4 and 5 years ago, nothing recent in what I'm describing here. These men promised, "I am going to be the pastor's best friend," and they weren't there three months later. You know, and so you just see how laughably superficial their character and their loyalty was.

Well, Proverbs talks about this. Proverbs says many a man proclaims his own loyalty but who can find a trustworthy man? So what we're looking for in men is not men who will say, "I'm going to be that kind of man," because words and talk are cheap. What I think God would have you search out in your own heart, "Do I want to be that kind of man?" And the man who is that kind of man doesn't have to talk about it. He doesn't have to proclaim it. He doesn't have to verbalize things and draw attention to himself. He just

goes about and quietly becomes that kind of man who is faithful, who is there, who loves the sheep, who prays for them, who is committed to his own spiritual growth. You see, that's the kind of men that we need. We don't need men who proclaim their own loyalty, we need men who are faithful; who are faithful rather than men who declare themselves to be faithful. Do you see the distinction? And what we have gathered together in this room here today are a lot of men who are just simply faithful and I love you for it. I'm grateful for you and this is part of the way that we go to the next step is through studying theology, systematic theology together.

Now, in general speaking, for those of you on the live stream, we've been using this book as a kind of a little bit of an outline, "A Summary of Christian Doctrine," by Louis Berkhof. I'm actually probably not going to refer to that too much in the course of our time together. And by the way, again, this is a lot of introduction here. You can tell that I'm sitting down instead of standing in the pulpit; that's one aspect of how things are different. I'm wearing jeans and tennis shoes which I know for some people is hard to believe. I had people shocked one time when they saw me in jeans, "You're wearing jeans!" No kidding. Well, whatever. This is a little bit different and the manner of teaching here is a little bit different in that this is a little less preaching from what you're used to on Sundays and Tuesdays, it's less preaching and a little bit more teaching.

Now, with that said, when you come to the issue and to the area of systematic theology, I think that there is an important way to approach it. In any field of study, in any realm of human thought, you have to determine your starting point. You have to say, "What am I going to start from? And what do I build from there?" Berkhof in his book, his first chapter is titled, "Religion," and he starts with religion and he defines it like this, he says it's a conscious and voluntary relationship to God which expresses itself in grateful worship and loving service. That's on pages 1 and 2 in this book. And so he starts with the idea of kind of the human worship of God and what does that look like and how do you approach God. Fine. That's great. No criticisms of Louis Berkhof. I couldn't shine his shoes as a theologian.

So having acknowledged that, I think however you need to start further back and you and I are going to start further back. There is a way to think, there is a pattern of thought that we need to cultivate as we approach this. And how do men, how do Christian men who are leaders and Christian women, for that matter, and ladies, I'm not excluding you in the things that I've said here. You get it. We're a church with male leadership but that embraces women as you grow in your own lives. Here's the thing. I used to practice law, as some of you know. I used to be an attorney and the first thing that an attorney needs to know if he's going to go into court and argue a case before the judge, he has got to know what the law is. One of the first questions that the judge will ask you is, "What's the case law? What's the case that's on point? What applies here? What's the law that matters?" In other words, you have to establish what the authority is before you can begin to discuss and assess the rest of everything else. In Christian theology, in Christian thinking, in Christian leadership, you have to start with this question: how do we know what is true? What is our authority? One writer asked the question this way, he says, "Has God provided a source from which we may arrive at his truth and thus bring ourselves under

his authority?" I believe that you need to approach it this way, you think in this way: we approach this question, we try to answer this question of authority not from the perspective that our first objective is to define it in a way that is acceptable to unsaved men. That doesn't matter. That is incidental and a secondary application of what we're talking about. What we want to do in my judgment, you have to start answering this question, you have to view this from God's perspective. If we are going to be people of God and men of God, we need to think about the whole issue of authority and truth claims from God's perspective. In other words, stated differently: what we do is we think God's thoughts after him. We're not trying to impress an unbeliever with how we articulate our truth claims. They are dead in sin, they are blinded by the devil. How could we ever make truth acceptable to them? That's not our starting point. What we want to do is anchor our thinking vertically, how is reality as God sees it and then proceed from there.

So to me it seems helpful to start with a basic outline of authority. Who is the authority on these matters? It's not a theologian. It's not me. It's not you. It's certainly not an unbeliever. Realizing that I need to give a little bit of an outline, I did a lot of introduction here. Point 1 for your notes: the establishment of authority. The establishment of authority. Once we establish what our authority is, what the law is, so to speak, then everything else flows from that and so we start with how do we establish authority and there are three sub parts to this that we'll go through very quickly here. The establishment of authority and the first principle under that, sub part A, you might say is the most obvious thing that you could say. Again, we're looking at this from God's perspective. God is the ultimate authority. God is the ultimate authority. We saw in some of our studies of the Psalms, God is King. God is sovereign. All authority, all true authority traces its source back to him and there is no authority apart from God. God is King, all authority traces its source to him, and there is no authority apart from God. Psalm 103:19 says,

19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

So God is the ultimate authority. We start with him. That's where time began was with the authority of God. Genesis 1:1,

1 In the beginning God [the authority, the Creator] created the heavens and the earth.

So God from the very beginning of time was the authority. He was the Creator. He was the Maker of heaven and earth. Everything flows from that. So what we're doing here is we're establishing a way to think, a pattern of thinking. We clear through all of the fog and mist of competing truth claims and we go back and we say God is the ultimate authority. Notice something basic, that the Bible starts out with an assertion of the existence of God rather than an apologetic for it. The Bible does not start with a lot of philosophical arguments about the probability of the existence of God, it simply makes a declarative statement from the beginning, "In the beginning," without apology it says,

"God created the heavens and the earth." So it starts there and we assert that as one of our primary presuppositions, one of our axioms, one of our primary fundamental principles of thought is that there is a God and he is the ultimate authority. Okay?

Now, secondly under this establishment of authority, this is really really crucial: Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of God's authority. Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of God's authority. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh therefore when he came to earth, he came with all the authority of God, even though he was humbled for a time in his Incarnation. Here's what we're trying to do: we're just trying to establish kind of a vertical line of authority and just understanding step-by-step where authority lies because that's going to tell us why we believe what we believe. And not only that, beloved, it's going to give you a sense of confidence; the clarity of this blows away the fog of your mind and gives you clarity to say, "Ah, now I know why I believe what I believe. Now I know what the authority is. I believe what I believe not because of my own personal opinion, I believe based on an authority that is outside of myself, that is independent of me, that existed before I was born and that will continue on after I'm gone." That is crucial. That is absolutely essential for your proper thinking to understand that you believe on an authority that is independent of yourself. This is not about your opinion or mine. God is the authority and as we walk through this, we're going to see how this works out.

Now, so God is the ultimate authority and Christ is the Incarnation of his authority. You can write this verse down if you would like, Matthew 28:18, Jesus Christ said,

18 All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

So when it comes to authority, when it comes to defining what truth is, what is the final standard, who is the ultimate judge of truth, it's Jesus Christ. It's not me. It's not you. It is Jesus Christ. Martyn Lloyd Jones said this in his book titled, "Authority," he said the really big claim which is made in the whole of the New Testament is for the supreme authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. So Christ is the supreme authority. Stated differently, God who had all authority came to earth in the person of Christ and he brought the fullness of the authority of heaven with him when he did and he made it plain as he was on earth before he ascended back into heaven. He claimed all authority for himself. Stunning claim of prerogative by our Christ.

So God is the ultimate authority, God the Son is the Incarnation of God's authority, and finally, we'll talk about this more another time, the third aspect of this and this is massively important, this is huge what we're about to say: Christ delegated authority to his apostles. In that same passage in Matthew 28, Christ delegated authority to his apostles. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus was talking to his disciples and he commanded them, he said,

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."

And so Christ takes his authority and he delegates it, as it were, to the apostles and says, "You go and teach what I commanded you while I was here on earth." He commissioned the apostles.

Look over at Acts 26, if you would. Acts 26:14, the Apostle Paul speaks and he is describing to King Agrippa his conversion as part of his defense against the baseless charges that the Jews were bringing against him and you will remember when he was struck on the road to Damascus that Christ spoke to him and Paul recounts this in Acts 9, Acts 22 and Acts 26, and the Apostle Paul says in Acts 26:13, he says,

13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 "And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;

What is he doing here? He is appointing Paul as an apostle. He is conferring authority on Paul to be a revelatory instrument of the word of God. By the authority of Christ, who has all authority, he gives that authority, he delegates authority to Paul to be a declarative revelatory agent on his behalf. That is unlike anything that exists in the world today. It is a very serious error for somebody to claim to be a modern day apostle. To be an apostle, you had to see with your own physical eyes the resurrected Christ. No one is like that here today. The apostles were unique by their qualification and by the reception of delegated authority from Christ to go and be his unique witnesses on the earth. So Christ delegated his authority to the apostles.

Let's take a breath and ask ourselves: what does that mean? When the apostles were writing the books of the New Testament, on what basis were they asserting divine authority? On what basis? What was their claim to authority? Understand that the 12 apostles received their unique authority directly from Christ himself. Christ appointed them, delegated them. You can read about that in the Gospels as he chose the 12 and Judas being replaced in the book of Acts after his betrayal of Christ. All of this, beloved, this is a really important hinge point here: all of this helps us understand why Christianity is true; this is fundamental to why we believe what we believe: Jesus Christ commissioned the apostles to be his unique representatives. He sent the Holy Spirit to empower them. Christ, then, is the guarantee that the apostles were trustworthy because they were acting with his power and they were acting with his authority in a way that was non-repeatable after the close of the Canon.

So understand the lines of authority: God is the authority; Christ is the Incarnation of God's authority; and Christ by sovereign prerogative delegated his authority to the apostles in part so that they would write the New Testament that we now have today.

Again quoting Martyn Lloyd Jones on this issue, Martyn Lloyd Jones again says this, "Christ enlightens and reveals his will and teaching to these apostles, endows them with a unique authority, fills them with needed ability and power and gives them the teaching that is essential to the well-being of the church and God's people." Should I say that one more time? You got it, I'll say it one more time. Christ enlightens, listen to it carefully, enlightens and reveals his will and teaching to these apostles, endows them with a unique authority, fills them with the needed ability and power and gives them the teaching that is essential to the well-being of the church and God's people. The apostles were the foundation, Ephesians 2:20.

Now, someone might say, "How does that help us today?" The apostles are gone. They haven't been replaced. There was no succession of apostolic authority. The whole Roman Catholic claim to a succession back to Peter is a hoax; it is a false authority; they are usurpers with a false claim. How does the authority of the apostles help us today? It's not because the office continued in the bishop of Rome, no, that's not the authority. There is nothing in Scripture that would establish a manner of communicating and delegating the apostolic office. The apostles received authority from Christ but in that delegation of authority there was not authority to redelegate it on their own.

So how does their authority help us today? The men are gone but their writings live. Apostolic authority is preserved for us in the New Testament. Watch this because this is fundamental to knowledge, this is fundamental to truth: in the New Testament, Jesus Christ himself speaks through his apostles. Christ speaks through his apostles. He delegated them, he empowered them, and what they wrote is now our trustworthy record about Christ that is rooted in the authority of God and Christ as mediated through the apostles. Scripture is absolutely trustworthy. It is absolutely true because of the chain of authority which was established in order to give it to us. God, Christ, the apostles, their Holy Spirit inspired writings. If you have that clear in your mind, a lot of other things flow naturally from it. All of a sudden you're not intimidated by the truth claims of Roman Catholic tradition. You say, "That's not apostolic." All of a sudden you're not intimidated by the truth claims of Islam and Mohammad. He wasn't a prophet. He certainly wasn't an apostle. And the New Testament closes in Revelation 22 with a dire warning, "Don't add to these words. Don't take away from them." This whole thing is closed now and it is contained within the Scriptures. So when you understand the authority, the line of authority, in my judgment you say, "Okay, now we know where truth is found. Now we're in a position to move forward."

Now, S. Lewis Johnson, who is perhaps the best theologian that a lot of people have never heard of, he states it this way, he states that we speak from these presuppositions: there is a God; he has spoken; and we know truth as we believe the Scripture through faith given by the Holy Spirit. Look at it this way: there is a God, we're looking at it from God's perspective now, okay? That's the only perspective that matters. This is reality as God sees it. This is reality from God's perspective and so we want to think God's thoughts after him. God knows within himself that he is the sole and final authority. Christ comes and manifests that authority on earth and he delegates that authority in the appointment of the apostles. So we look to the apostles through the apostolic writings and we tap in, as it



were, to that divine line of authority so that we have an authority for what we believe that is independent of our own thinking, independent of our opinions. This is how we know what is true. It's the starting point for the way that we think.

Now, people will say, "You're guilty of circular reasoning. You're saying that your authority is the authority because it's the authority." Well, one writer says this, I've quoted this in the past. I'll just summarize it: any claim to ultimate authority is going to have the issue of finding its final point or as you reason back, what is your starting point? What is the final authority? Here's the thing, beloved, here's what you've got to understand as a Christian thinker and what you men must understand and think and embrace if you're going to move into spiritual leadership in the future: there is no higher authority than God. You cannot appeal to an authority higher than God in order to establish the authority of God. Once you get to God, you've reached the final argument; you've reached the final authority.

There is no Supreme Court above God and so you appeal to the final authority to establish your authority and ultimately when you help people think through the way that they reason and the way that they think, they have to come to a point where they realize that there's a final authority for them as well. For most people without even thinking about it, it's either their own reason or their own feelings about things. "Well, I don't like that because it doesn't feel right to me. That can't be true because it doesn't seem reasonable to me." And what are they saying when they say that? They're saying, "I am the final arbiter of what's true. It doesn't sound right to me or it doesn't feel right to me, therefore I dismiss its truth claims." Science is just a little more sophisticated in it but they have their own presuppositions as well. Many of them, unbelieving scientists, would start with a presupposition, "There are no miracles therefore miracles cannot exist because there are no miracles." That's their presupposition and they define everything supernatural out of existence from the very beginning of their presupposition. Well, we don't accept that and so we have to have a clash at a presuppositional level and what we try to be honest about is that these are our presuppositions. There is a God. He has spoken in Christ and Christ has spoken through his apostles.

Let me say one other thing here, another aspect of this, another way that this plays out is that what we're talking about here about the line of authority culminating in the apostles and in their written revelation and I don't know if this will step on any toes, I don't care if it does. It shouldn't step on any toes in this room, even though it would step on many toes outside of this room. Truth is found in God's word alone. Truth is not found in a mystical or charismatic approach that says, that assumes, that thinks, that God also reveals his truth to me personally, individually, subjectively in my inner feelings in a way that is independent of God's word. That is not true. That is saying that God mediates his authority directly through me in my inner person and in my inner thoughts.

So I had to deal with this sometimes in the early days of Truth Community Church. I remember sitting with a man having lunch with me and he was telling me how God told him this and God told him that and, "God spoke to me about, you know, which car I was supposed to take today." And you just kind of roll your eyes at this stuff. What we have

to understand is this: we reject out of hand any claim that says, "God told me such-and-such," based on someone's subjective impressions even though we understand that that is a common way for so-called Christians to talk today. We reject that. That is not the line of authority that God has established. It would bypass the apostles. It would bypass Christ and say, "He spoke to me personally in my heart."

Well, think about it: there is no way that that's true. There is absolutely no way that that is true. There is no way that God would communicate to people through that manner. Think about it: what do you have in Scripture, what do you have in a written revelation? I should have written all of these things down. I did but I didn't bring it with me. In part you have something that is independent and it is fixed. You have something that can be studied. You have something that you can appeal outside of yourself and say, "This is the standard. It is not subject to faulty memory and it is not subject to an individual accurately reporting it." It's already fixed. It's established. It's there. It's an open book that each one of you can open and read and in its clarity find direction for truth.

When you start talking and I know for some of you this really connects on the charismatic issue because this is where you came out of. I get that. There's a lot at stake here. I get that. When someone starts saying, "God told me such-and-such," number 1, they have established themselves as the authority over you. They're saying when God has spoken to me, they place themselves outside of the realm of correction from you. That's not true. That can't be right. The spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. You're supposed to discern the spirits. How can you do that if it's left to somebody's subjective assertion of something?

Then furthermore, how do you know that they heard it right? How do they know that they heard it right when it's just based on their subjective impressions? How do we know that they're reporting it accurately? How do we know that they're telling us the truth about this subjective impression? How do we know that they didn't just really need to burp? Seriously. "You know, I felt it in my gut." Well, I feel a lot of things in my gut after I eat Mexican. It isn't God speaking to me.

Now, I'm being funny, I'm being a little bit extreme about it but this is a valid point. When you realize and understand the treasure that God has given us in Scripture, you realize that it's open for all and it's available for examination. When someone says, "God spoke to me," everything that makes the Scriptures unique and special and authoritative is vitiated, it is annulled, and all of a sudden you are at the mercy of somebody telling you what was going on in their mind, and rather than having a Christ appointed apostle as the delivery vessel of truth, what do you have? You have a finite, sinful creature misled about authority reporting to you their subjective feelings about what they think God said. We reject that out of hand. There is no room for that in Christian theology. There is no room for that in Christian thought. There is no room for that in Truth Community Church because that's not the authority. That's not the way it's done. If you were serious about it, if we really believed it, we would be adding, "Let me write that in the back of the Bible. Oh, God spoke to you and God told you to take the Honda not the Toyota today, huh? Alright. Yeah. Let me write that down." It's foolish.

So that's not how God speaks to us. Experience, reason or inner voice could never be the final source of truth. Just think about it with me, beloved. That could never be the final authority for truth because that roots truth in the mind of mortal sinful men, finite creatures, sinful creatures. That cannot be the way that a holy omniscient God would communicate his truth today when he's already given a word that he declared to be authoritative. It's very essential for us to have that clear in our minds and so at Truth Community Church, we're not going to be swayed or intimidated by people that come and say, "God told me such-and-such." No, God spoke in his word and that's where we find truth.

Now, this God who has all authority has made himself known. That introduces for us the second point on your outline, third on mine, introduces the issue of revelation. We've talked about the establishment of authority, now we're going to talk about the issue of revelation. How can we know what an unseen God thinks? How can we know the existence and the will of an unseen invisible God? That's a crucial question. Well, when we get to the doctrine of revelation which was introduced in part in Berkhof's book, we can say this, a very simple definition: revelation is the act of God making himself known. Revelation is the act of God in making himself known. A finite sinful creature could not cross the chasm, could not cross the gulf in order to know God. It had to be God crossing the chasm himself and making himself known.

We'll start with this and stop with it for this session. S. Lewis Johnson I think helpfully says that God's revelation is like a two volumed book. There are two aspects to God's revelation that we are going to study in the next session. There is general revelation and there is special revelation. God has made himself known in two distinct ways. God has revealed himself in a general way to all of mankind; he has revealed himself in a special way, you might say, to his people. That's where we will stop for now. We'll pick it up having introduced it. We'll take a 15 minute break for now and then we'll come back to this issue of general and special revelation in our next session.

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