

# A Light in the Darkness

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

# What Does It Mean to be 'Authoritative'?

What are some legitimate ways that one might understand the claim that the word of God is "authoritative?"

# What Does It Mean to be 'Authoritative'?

- Authority as *truth* or '*the facts*'
  - A statement, rule or claim is authoritative simply because it is *true*. Disagreement with such a statement, rule or claim means someone is mistaken (by definition).
    - Georgia is east of Texas
    - The area of a right triangle is equivalent to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the base multiplied by the height
    - Something cannot be both true and false at the same time and in the same way (law of non-contradiction)
    - God exists
- Authority as an *obligation-giver*
  - Something or someone that has the right to create or define normative behavior
    - Supervisor
    - Constitution
    - Parents
    - God

# What Does It Mean to be 'Authoritative'?

- Authority as a *reward-giver* and/or *consequence-enforcer*
  - Judge/Jury (the State)
  - Parents
  - Supervisor
  - God
- Authority as *epistemic superiority* in an area
  - Someone is an epistemic authority if they know more than almost everyone else about a particular subject or situation.
    - David McCullough
    - Gandalf
    - God
      - Unlike other epistemic authorities, because God is omniscient, he is superior in knowledge to *every* being in *every* area.

# What Does It Mean to be ‘Authoritative’?

- Authority as *acknowledged* truth and/or superiority
  - Authority in this sense is what *actually* governs or influences someone or something instead of what is *supposed* to govern or influence—“subjective” authority instead of “objective” authority.
    - An anarchist vs. the State
    - An atheist vs. God
    - Christian ethics vs. utilitarianism

# What Is the True Source of Our Theological Knowledge?

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Tradition</b>
<b>Experience</b>	<b>Reason</b>

- Tradition as *Functionally* Supreme
  - Beliefs will line up with theological exposure and denomination
    - “The first thing I turn to for theological answers is the Early Church Fathers, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Catholic Catechism etc.”
- Experience as *Functionally* Supreme
  - Personal history, intense feelings and the hearing the voice of God will feel “more real” and clear than anything else. Questioning conclusions based on these things is often very upsetting and sometimes is even taken as insulting—what is/was experienced is/was so clear and real that it must be true and accurate.

# What is the True Source of our Theological Knowledge?

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Tradition</b>
<b>Experience</b>	<b>Reason</b>

- “I am so miserable, angry and hurt in my marriage and my spouse doesn’t even seem to like me. Last night I prayed harder than ever before seeking God’s face and in his grace he gave me perfect peace about pursuing another spouse, one who loves Jesus.”
- “My same-sex attraction feels so right that I’m more confident that God desires me to find a faithful, loving partner than I am any interpretation of Romans 1; there are a lot of smart scholars who disagree about those kind of passages anyways. I’ve never been more certain of something than these feelings.”
- “I had an abusive father and a domineering first husband. I’ve seen firsthand the dangers of thinking that a man is supposed to be the head of a household and have teaching authority in churches. It’s not just oppressive to women, it’s dangerous. This perspective has been incredibly helpful in understanding what Paul is really getting at when he talks about male leadership

# What is the True Source of our Theological Knowledge?

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Tradition</b>
<b>Experience</b>	<b>Reason</b>

- Reason and Intuition as *Functionally Supreme*
  - “A perfectly loving God would not eternally punish those he created and loves, especially those who have never heard the Gospel.”
  - “If God infallibly knows what I will do tomorrow, I am not free in any meaningful sense to do otherwise, rendering me not morally responsible. Sure, God has knowledge of the future, but isn’t *perfect* knowledge.”
  - “If from eternity past God has somehow planned everything that happens, then he wouldn’t actually be morally perfect because that would mean he planned the Holocaust. If you think a perfectly loving God could remain perfectly loving and plan the Holocaust, then the word “loving” has no real meaning.”



# What Is the True Source of Our Theological Knowledge?

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Tradition</b>
<b>Experience</b>	<b>Reason</b>

- Scripture's Clarity as *Functionally Supreme*
  - “If someone makes a claim about God, the church or how to live, the first place I turn is Scripture to see if there is evidence for that claim.”
  - “I’m more confident that I can understand the Bible correctly than I am about any innate intuitions I have about concepts like God’s love and justice being accurate. If the truths of Scripture brutalize my ordinary understanding of how things are or how things should be, too bad, Scripture wins.”

# What Is the True Source of Our Theological Knowledge?

What are some examples where experience, reason or tradition might *legitimately* affect of your hermeneutic (approach to biblical interpretation)? That is, in what cases does what you know from outside of Scripture at the very least help you understand what a passage almost certainly does *not* mean?