

Scripture's Authority

BI: The singular characteristic that should distinguish Christians from the world is that our lives are governed by God's word.

Last week we learned about the life of William Tyndale and his struggle to produce a translation of the word of God in English. The finished product of his labor eventually became an influence in England that literally altered history and left an indelible mark on the world. King Henry VIII (with the help of German authorities), in turn, repaid Him for his labor by having him arrested, imprisoned for 18 months, and then publically tied to a stake, strangled to death and then burned both as a punishment and as a warning to anyone else who would dare defy the RCC by translating the word of God into the language of the people.

Before Tyndale breathed his last, he called out with a loud voice, "Lord! Open the King of England's eyes!" And sure enough, God answered his prayer. Even before his execution in Germany, the tide had already begun to turn back in England. While he was in prison King Henry the VIII suddenly decided that a translation of the word of God into English was exactly what England needed, so he gave permission to a man named Miles Coverdale (who happened to have been a fellow scholar and personal friend of Tyndale's) to complete the work that Tyndale had started. The first official and legal translation of the Bible in English, then, was called the Coverdale Bible, and it largely consisted of William Tyndale's translation.

After that, another friend of Tyndale's by the name of John Rogers (1537) published an improved translation called the Mathew's Bible. After that came what was called the Great Bible ("chained Bible). It was the first English Bible to be read in churches. King Henry VIII sent orders that every church in England should have one. "People flocked eagerly to the churches to see the Bibles which had been set up for public reading. In fact, these Bibles became so popular that after a while the preachers complained because the people chose rather to hear the reading¹ of the Bible than to listen to their sermons.

But, there was still another Bible that was destined to become the most popular bible of the century. It was translated while Queen Mary ("bloody Mary") was in power. Under the protection of John Calvin and the civil authorities in Geneva, Switzerland, it was the first Bible to contain chapter and verse numbers, and every page had explanatory notes so that everyone could understand what the inspired biblical authors meant. That made it the first "study bible." It was called the Geneva Bible. Just as the Great Bible became the bible of the church, this Bible – the Geneva Bible – became the bible of the home.

This was the Bible used by Shakespear in his later plays. It was the bible of the settlers of Jamestown, Va. It was the Bible brought by the pilgrims to Plymouth on the

¹ Neil Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2003),180-181

Mayflower. Nevertheless, it was not popular with English church officials, nor the new king. When King James took the throne he was infuriated by some explanatory notes in the Geneva Bible that allowed for disobedience to kings, so he made it illegal to purchase or own a Geneva Bible. “Moreover, James 1st authorized the production of a new Bible which drew largely from the Geneva Bible minus, of course, its [study notes].”²

Amazingly, however, after the years of work put into the making of the King James Bible, it turns out that between 80-90% of the translation was carried over from the work of William Tyndale. And yet, it must be added that Tyndale was not the first Englishman to see the need for the Word of God in English.

Back in the 1100s, 350 years before Luther posted his *95 Theses*, a group known as the Waldensians began to teach that the Bible alone is the authority for the church. They defied papal authority, committed themselves to preaching the gospel, and even translated the Word of God into the common language of the people. They were severely persecuted by the RCC, and as a result often found themselves hiding in the Alps.³

In the 1300s, still two centuries before Luther, an English scholar named John Wycliffe began make his mark on the world. He was nicknamed the “Morning Star of the Reformation” because of his uncommon commitment to the plain teaching of Scripture. He was actually the first to translate the Bible into English, but it was *Middle English* and not easily understood. Moreover, the printing press had not yet been invented so there was no way to mass-produce his work.

A generation later, in the early 1400s, a Bohemian preacher named John Huss thundered onto the scene... Like Wycliffe, Huss opposed the papacy and taught that Christ alone is the Head of the Church. And if Christ is the Head of the church, than His Word is the only authority in the church. And if His Word is the only authority, then the gospel must be defined from Scripture alone.⁴

Then, in 1415, after being promised safe passage to the Council of Constance, John Huss was arrested, falsely accused, put on trial, condemned as a heretic, and burned at the stake.⁵

Now we need to ask at this point, why were these men, and many more like them, willing to give themselves over to the flames of execution for the sake of the Bible? It was because they believed with every fiber of their being that the Bible is the very word of God to man and therefore the only divine authority over people’s lives.

² Robert L. Reymond, *John Calvin: His Life and Influence*, (Christian Focus, 2004), 83

³ Nathan Busenitz, “The Gospel According to Church History – Part 2,” *Pulpit Magazine*, November 2012, 15.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

It probably goes without saying that this position was in direct opposition to the official teaching of the RCC. Yes, the Catholic Bishops believed in the Bible. But they contended that in addition to the Bible God had given human scholars (the magisterium) the authority (under the auspices of the Pope) to rule the people in all things both spiritual and civil. And when there arose a conflict between what the Bible teaches and the official traditions of the magisterium, the official traditions always trump the Scriptures. This was a point of irreconcilable conflict between Rome and the Reformers. And this was the very ground and foundation upon which the Reformation was built. It was an unshakable commitment to the authority of Scripture.

Over the next four Sundays, Brent and I want to offer four messages on the topic of Scripture. We want to talk about the Clarity of the Scriptures, the Necessity of the Scriptures and the Sufficiency of the Scriptures. But this morning I want to use what's left of my time to consider the Authority of the Scriptures.

I believe that as we move closer to June and the planting of Living Hope Bible Church in Mansfield, it is imperative for us to go back and consider the basics of who we are and why we do what we do. There are reasons why we call ourselves a Bible Church. Before the term was ever coined there were centuries of rich history that eventually led us to become who we are today. We dare not lose that history. And we dare not lose the essential teachings that will keep us grounded in the turbulent years ahead. So this morning, let's consider the very bedrock of the church; namely, the authority of Scripture.

Now, if we are going to think about the authority of Scripture will be helped to understand...

I. The apostle's view of Scripture:

1. The apostles had a very high view of Scripture. As you might expect, our thinking on this needs to begin with the Apostle Paul in his 2nd letter to Timothy. So turn with me to 2 Timothy 3:14-16

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is ***inspired by God*** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" 2 (Timothy 3:14-16).

2. The important statement is in v. 16, "All Scripture is inspired (lit. "breathed out") by God." What Paul is telling us here is that the words of Scripture are the very words of God. Charles Hodge explains:

On this subject the common doctrine of the church is, and ever has been, that inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of His

mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God, that what they said God said.⁶

3. In other words, Scripture is the final authority in the believer's life because the words of Scripture are in fact the very words of God. Inspiration was necessary in order to guard against the propensity of man to err. This is true even of the prophets and the apostles. None of them were perfect. All of them were sinners. However, as Peter explains in 2 Pet. 1:21, when God used them to communicate his revelation, they spoke "as they were carried along by the H.S."

4. This is what makes the word of God unique in its authority. No other purported source of revelation can legitimately make this claim. The early church fathers were not inspired. The creeds were not inspired. The Pope is not inspired. The Magisterium is not inspired. Psychologist and scientists are not inspired. The word of God alone was breathed out by God.

5. As Peter explains again in 2 Pet. 1:3, in His word God has "granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence."

6. As Dr. Wayne Grudem explains, "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." The apostles believed that the Scripture was the ultimate and final authority because they are the very words of God.

7. We have seen (in brief) the apostle's view of Scripture. Now let's consider...

II. The Savior's View of Scripture:

1. Religion in our day is not unlike the religion in Jesus' day. The two dominating religious forces in Jesus' time were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. But even though both of these groups claimed to have a high view of Scripture, they differed from one another. The Sadducees only believed in the first 5 books of the O.T. (Pentateuch). Because of that, they didn't believe in resurrection, angels, the afterlife, and a number of other teaching that are found in the remaining books of the O.T.

2. The Pharisees, on the other hand, claimed to believe in the entirety of the O.T. But the reality was that both of these groups sought to rule over the people of Israel through their own unique interpretations of the Scriptures.

3. Now if Jesus approached religion with the rationale and rhetorical style that dominates popular religion in our day, he might have told both groups to quit talking so much about doctrine and texts and start working on being more loving, accepting, and inclusive. That's not what He did.

⁶ R.C. Sproul, *After Darkness, Light: Essays in honor of R.C. Sproul*, (Pittsburg, P&R, 2003), 44

4. Jesus repeatedly told the Pharisees that their view of Scripture was still too low. He said things like:

- John 5:46 “If you believe Moses, you would believe me.”
- Mark 7:8-9 “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”⁹ He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

5. Every time there is a dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees or Sadducees, Jesus responds by appealing the absolute authority of Scripture.

- Matt. 5:17–18 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.¹⁸ “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.
- Luke 16:17 “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.”
- Mark 12:10 “Have you not even read this Scripture...”
- Luke 21:33 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”
- John 10:35 “Scripture cannot be broken.”

6. Think about it. Jesus, who was the very Son of God and had all authority in heaven and earth, could have refuted his opponents any way He wanted. But he chose to refute and corrected them using the authority of the Scriptures. And he did the same thing when tempted by Satan in the wilderness: “It is written... It is written... It is written.”

7. Not only that, but His goal for you and me is that we would grow to be all that God wants us to be by the ministry of God’s word. In John 17 when Jesus was praying to the Father about you and me, He said, “Sanctify them in the truth; *your word is truth.*” It’s important to note here that Jesus does not use the adjective “True” (Your word is true), but the noun “Truth” (Your word is truth). That is to say, God’s word (the Bible) is not merely “true,” but it is truth itself. “Thus we are to think of the Bible as the ultimate standard of truth, the reference point by which every other claim to truthfulness is to be measured... Truth is what God says, and we have what God says... in the Bible.”⁷

8. Now we have considered the apostle’s view of Scripture, and the Savior’s view of Scripture. Now let’s think for a few minutes on...

III. The Church’s View of Scripture:

1. As the Reformation began to take shape, one the rallying cries of the reformers was the Latin Slogan, *Sola Scriptura* – “Scripture Alone.” When the Puritans picked up the baton,

⁷ Grudem, 83

they were careful to define what *Sola Scriptura* meant in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It reads,

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.⁸

2. In other words, the word of God must be seen as the final authority for all things pertaining to life and godliness. The authority over the believer's life is literally, *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture Alone.

3. John MacArthur explains further,

Sola Scriptura simply means that all truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life is taught either explicitly or implicitly in Scripture. It is not a claim that all truth of every kind is found in Scripture. The most ardent defender of *sola Scriptura* will concede, for example, that Scripture has little or nothing to say about DNA structures, microbiology, the rules of Chinese grammar, or rocket science. This or that "scientific truth," for example, may or may not be actually true, whether or not it can be supported by Scripture—but Scripture is a "more sure Word," standing above all other truth in its authority and certainty. It is "more sure," according to the apostle Peter, than the data we gather firsthand through our senses (2 Peter 1:19). Therefore, Scripture is the highest and supreme authority on any matter on which it speaks.

4. Beloved, this is so important for us who live in a post-modern, pluralistic society where it is commonly believed that there is no absolute truth. The fact is, God has given us the truth. He has given us a means of measuring our thoughts, ideas, and impulses to be sure they are true.

5. How do we determine what is right and what is wrong? How do we discern the will of God for our lives? How should we respond when we are mistreated? What should we think about marriage and sexuality? What should we believe about life after death and how to be reconciled to God? All of these, and 10,000 other issues are answered for us in the Scriptures. We don't look to psychology to answer these questions. We don't look to science, or politics, or pop-culture to tell us how to live.

5. There is only one final authority in the life of the believer – it is the word of God as revealed in Scripture.

6. This whole discussion remind me of what was happening in Israel when the Prophet Isaiah was God's representative before the people. They were looking to all kinds of things to help them determine God's will. They were even consulting spiritists who said they could communicate with the dead. This was a terrible offence against God. And so God said through the prophet (Isa. 8:19-20)

When they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult their God? *Should they consult* the dead on

⁸ Ligonier Ministries, "What Does Sola Scriptura Mean?" <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-sola-scriptura-mean/>, (accessed January 8, 2015).

behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

6. This is similar to what happened in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 – “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead”

7. You see, the Word of God has always been the believer’s authority. Because God has spoken, we have a sure and perfect word to serve as the anchor and compass for our lives.

8. As Christians, we believe what the true church has always taught. Namely, that the Bible is actually the authoritative word of God. We believe in *Sola Scriptura* – the Scripture Alone is the sole and final authority regarding everything pertaining to life and godliness. So we read the Bible, Teach the Bible, Preach the Bible, Counsel with the Bible, Encourage, Exhort, and Correct with the Bible. We Meditate on the Bible, and invite the world to discover the joy of knowing the God of the Bible.

8. But it’s not just the church’s historical view of the Bible that convinces. We are even more fully convinced by...

III. Calvary’s View of Scripture:

1. As we move into the challenges of the coming year and as we develop our “fallible, dependent vision” for future years, you should know that the elders of Calvary and the elders of Living Hope are committed to the absolute authority of Scripture.

2. Those of you who have been here for some time know that for me to preach a topical sermon like this is an uncommon thing. Normally, I preach expository messages from a certain book in the Bible. It is a very slow process to move through the Gospel of John, for example, because we are committed to plodding through it verse by verse. Why? Because we have a high view of Scripture. The church meets primarily to hear the word of God.

3. As elders of this local church we understand that we have no authority in ourselves. The only authority we have is that which comes from God’s word. As a preacher, I understand that I am not the authority, God’s word is. My job is to serve you as one who stands under this book. And your job is to test what I say against this book, and to not allow anyone to lead you astray by clever and plausible teaching that is not rooted and grounded in the plain meaning of this book. Because we have the word of God as our final authority, we have the capacity to exercise discernment. Nothing is needed more in the church today!

4. So when you come to us for counsel, expect us to take you to this book for answers. Our “wisdom” is nothing if it is not the wisdom of this book.

5. Are you committed to the authority of Scripture? Why not ask yourself some basic questions:

- Why do I relate to my wife the way I do. Am I governed by my own impulses, pop-psychology, Dr. Phil, or by the authoritative word of God?
- Why do I relate to my children and lead my family the way I do?
- Why do I relate to my in-laws like I do?
- Why do I spend, save, and invest money the way I do?
- What governs how much time I spend with my family as opposed to time at work?
- What rules my decisions when its time to pay taxes?
- By what standard do you discern between true and false teaching?

5. Beloved, the authority of Scripture is a really big issue in the church. In fact, submitting to the word of God is what distinguishes Christians from the rest of the world. J.I. Packer in his book *Knowing God*, asks,

What is a Christian?... True Christians are people who acknowledge and live under the word of God. They submit without reserve to the word of God written in 'the Book of Truth' (Dan. 10:21), believing the teaching, trusting the promises, [and] following the commands. Their eyes are upon the God of the Bible as their Father and the Christ of the Bible as their Savior."⁹

6. Consider this. The only way we know God, His Son, His Spirit, His Gospel, and His will for our lives, and His plan for the ages is through the authoritative teaching of this book.

7. Do you see now why Tyndale, was willing to die if that would be the cost of putting the word of God into the hands of the English people? Without it we are lost. But with it, we have everything we need for life and godliness. And that is why John Wesley once cried,

"O give me that book! At any price give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one book."¹⁰

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⁹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*. (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1979), 104

¹⁰ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House), 42.