

Dear Friends,

If we accept the internal testimony of our Bible, we regard it as our exclusive authority for our faith and our lifestyle. Sadly, this is not the case with many sincere, but naive believers in our day. If you listen with any attention at all, you will quickly learn what a particular believer regards as their true authority for what they believe and for how they view the world around them. "I like John Doe, and John Doe says this about the passage we are discussing. I believe him." As rapidly as personal like shifts from John Doe to Jerry Ping, this person's beliefs will change. These confused people live in a state of flux. What they believe constantly changes with their ever-changing favorite person or Bible teacher. They may read such passages as 1 Corinthians 15:58 that teaches us to be steadfast and unmovable in our faith, but they fail to grasp its meaning for their thinking and beliefs.

Scripture directs us to two authoritative sources for our faith. 1 Timothy 3:15 teaches the church that Scripture describes as Jesus' Church as "...*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches that Scripture itself is God given and God preserved, "...*is given by inspiration of God,*" not "...was given...." Further, 2 Peter 1:15-21 teaches us that inspired Scripture is far more reliable and authoritative than any personal experience we might have, Peter using his personal experience with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration as an example. His teaching is powerful; what we have in Scripture is a "...*more sure word of prophecy*" than what he saw and heard on that mountain, and that mountain experience was from Jesus and wholly true, but Peter couldn't cite it as a public and verifiable authority as he could the writings of Scripture.

No, I do not suggest that any church has the authority to contradict Scripture by its opinions or assertions. I rather suggest that the church which Paul describes in 1 Timothy 3:15 is more reliable as a steadfast defender and proclaimer of Biblical truth than my or your personal opinion.

How do we reason with people who hold to different ideas regarding salvation or other spiritual truths of faith? Increasingly, it seems that professing believers regard Bible discussion as the latest sports fad. Bible banter, or as I occasionally describe it, "Bible ping-pong," is often regarded as the favorite sport of the day. Advocates of this new sport relish endless ping-pong of one opinion after another, endlessly batted back and forth. Sadly, these discussions typically involve far more opinion than Bible teaching.

If we follow Jesus' examples in dealing with those who disagree and oppose our faith, we shall faithfully avoid this unprofitable and endless "Ping-pong" game. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, how did He respond? He cited a precise and appropriate passage of Old Testament Scripture (The New Testament was not yet written). He didn't reason endlessly back and forth with Satan. He cited a verse and gave His reason for resisting based on that verse. Period. He needed to do no more.

In Jesus' second example, from which I cited this week's study passage, Jesus responded to a "Trick question" the Sadducees posed to Him. Notice that He didn't engage them in endless ping-pong. He cited one verse from the Old Testament. He made one relevant point from that verse, a point that simply and clearly refuted the Sadducee error. His choice of that verse and His appeal to the present tense verb in that verse said everything necessary to expose the error and to assert the truth regarding the resurrection.

How do you and I find such precise verses from our Bible to affirm our faith and to refute and reject the common errors that we encounter today? Our only path to such wise insights from the Scripture is to invest in long, faithful, **believing**, and clear **study** of Scripture. You'll never realize such insights into Scripture by spending fifteen minutes a day speed reading a section of Scripture. For many years, in my personal Bible study, I keep a notebook and pencil handy whenever I study. This present writing series addresses a "Study" mindset in contrast with a speed reading casual regard for Scripture. Acts reports a "Noble" description of one group of people who heard the gospel about Jesus, the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to validate what they were taught. (Acts 17:10-12 KJV).

What shall it be? Shall we strive to become such noble Bible studiers? Or shall we settle for a daily T-V dinner quick read of Scripture?

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Scripture—God’s Exclusive Authority for Faith and Living

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. (Matthew 22:29 KJV 1900)

What source of authority should every believer look to for what he believes and how he lives life to the glory of God? For many believers, the answer is simple and straightforward, Scripture and Scripture alone. For others, the answer is A-Z, plus Scripture more as an afterthought than as the exclusive source. An example. Early in the Pandemic season, I started streaming my messages on Facebook, so I was able to reach many people who would not otherwise hear my messages. Look for the good potential, even in bad things, and work to make something good come out of them. A man who heard those messages wrote me an e-mail challenging my teaching. It was clear from his reasoning that he believes in hybrid salvation part by God and part by human works, not by God and God’s grace alone. He asked a few questions and made a number of assertions. I replied with what I hoped would prompt him to think, reasoning from a specific Scripture with each point I made. In the man’s reply, he ignored all the Scriptures I cited. He continued to make assertions, but never in an extended e-mail dialogue did the man ever quote a single Scripture, not one. Beginning to end, the man argued from his own opinions and beliefs only. Eventually I called that flaw to his attention and suggested that, if he truly wanted a serious dialogue, he needed to reason from the Scriptures, not apart from them. He assured me that he would follow my suggestion and get back to me shortly. Two years later I haven’t heard a word from the man. His whole religious perspective was based on his opinions and imagination, not on Scripture.

The wise Bible believer will often encounter similar situations. Follow Scripture; insist that your critic cease reasoning from opinion and imagination and reason from the Scriptures. (Acts 17:2 KJV) If we ignore Scripture and try to reason with such people based on their—or our—imagination and opinions, the final outcome of the discussion will not be a determination of truth, but rather a contest of wit and fast talking. The person who thinks fastest “On his feet” and can out-talk the other wins the argument, even if he believes little to nothing of Scripture. When faced with this situation, the faithful Bible student has two wise options. Do as I did and point out to the person that he is reasoning from opinion and imagination; he has not cited a single Scripture. Any discussion based on his opinions and imaginations is foolish and useless. He is right in his own opinion, even if his ideas contradict Scripture wholly. You’ll never convince him to change until he accepts the final and full authority of Scripture alone as the basis for everything he believes about God. The other option is simply to point out to the person that he is reasoning from opinion and imagination, not Scripture. You have no logical obligation whatever to respond to his opinions. You may respond similarly to a person who reasons from logical fallacies. You should “Take the roof off” the person’s fallacies, tell him the fallacy he is following, and end the conversation unless he is willing to reason from Scripture alone. The naïve or unlearned believer will try to reason endlessly with these people and, if that person is a fast talker, he will overthrow the believer’s faith.

The first century Sadducees were an influential Jewish subculture that denied any thought of a final resurrection, possibly including any thought of angels or life after death. Quite likely they had often tripped other Jewish people with the story they told to Jesus. But they were reasoning with the One who wrote the Book, not an unlearned reader of the Book.

If you were to encounter someone who told you they did not believe in the final Second Coming and resurrection or life after death, though they admit to believing “Some” of the Bible, how would you respond to them? We’d likely try to multiply Scriptures and flood them with passages.

What did Jesus do? As in the temptation in the wilderness, He cited Scripture to stop the mouth of error and temptation. Jesus didn't quote large blocks of Scripture to the Sadducees. He quoted one simple verse, Exodus 3:6. Ponder this verse and Jesus' one sentence reasoning from it.

I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. (Matthew 22:32 KJV)

Jesus didn't waste time with endless banter over the Sadducees' imagination and opinions. He didn't play personal opinion ping-pong with them. He imbedded his reasoning in one key verse of Scripture, and He drew a one sentence conclusion from that verse, a conclusion that wholly refuted the Sadducee error. Jesus honored the precise wording of Exodus 3:6. He reasoned based on the present tense of the verbs, "I am," not "I was." God "Is" the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, forcing the conclusion that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are now living in heaven, a clear, simple, and convincing refutation of the Sadducee errors. The Sadducees obviously understood His reasoning. They had no answer or argument for Jesus. Verbal ping-pong, endlessly batting personal opinions, ideas, imaginations, and futile reasonings back and forth, may be an entertaining sport, but it is not a wise Bible strategy to confront error or to convince a person of his errant belief. The man I mentioned above demonstrated by his silence that he didn't want to reason from the Scriptures; he only wanted to play the ping-pong sport. He is likely a smooth talker who has won many an argument by his fast talking and quick wit. But fast talking and quick wit are not an acceptable replacement for sound Biblical reasoning.

A large number of professing Christians in our culture live their faith with a low regard for Scripture. Major denominations promote this low regard by altering 2 Timothy 3:16. The verse in the KJV reads.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

The ASV, one of the more conservative of the modern editions of the Bible, reads.

Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness.

The implication is sadly clear. Some Scripture is inspired of God, and those Scriptures are profitable, but perhaps some other Scriptures are not so inspired, and they are not profitable. How does one go about determining which Scriptures are inspired and which are not? Personal opinion and imagination rules, not Scripture alone.

Ask the populist modern pastor to explain this verse, and you will most frequently hear, "All Scripture **was** inspired when God gave it to the human author, but copying and translation errors have compromised the message, so it is not inspired now in its present form." How then does the believer read the Bible with any confidence whatever that he is reading God's message to His people? The populist opinion is to buy

as many different editions of the Bible as you can, read them all, and decide, verse by verse, which edition you think is the right one. What is the deciding factor in this idea? Personal opinion again rules, not Scripture alone. How does this popular attitude toward Scripture match Scripture's self-testimony?

The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever. (Psalm 12:6-7, KJV)

Did David write, "The words of the Lord were originally pure words, but not now?" Emphatically no. He used the present tense verb. He also assured his readers that God not only gave pure words in Scripture, but that **He promised to preserve those words "...from this generation forever."** If we believe both this lesson and 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we have uncompromising confidence in the accuracy and authority of Scripture for our faith, for what we believe, and our Christian life.

I suggest that both in the wilderness temptation and in His brief and focused response to the Sadducees, Jesus affirmed this high regard for the "Words" that He had directed and preserved. He built his whole refutation of Sadducee error on the present tense of the verb, "am," in a passage that Moses originally wrote some fifteen hundred years earlier. How many copies of that original document had been made during that time? Do copyists make mistakes? Of course they do. However, God has a delightful way of exposing, identifying, and correcting them. I love the example of a King James Bible that was printed rather early in the history of the KJV. The typesetter overlooked the word "Not" in one of the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20:14, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" was printed as "Thou shalt commit adultery." Almost immediately the conscientious Bible reading Christian community discovered the error and widely published it. Very soon this edition became known as "The Adulterer's Bible." I suspect it just as quickly disappeared from the shelves of Bible sellers' stores.

God has given us a book in our Bible that affirms timeless truth that He gave and preserved. I offer no apology for my strong allegiance to the KJV. Its extended history in the English-speaking world bears ample witness to its integrity. I hold similar regard for the Geneva Bible, translated a few years earlier than the KJV and with similar regard for the integrity of God and His message to His people. If you compare the two, there are no differences in essential meaning between them.

We have a Book in our KJV Bible that stands head and shoulders above human opinion and imagination. It speaks for itself of its integrity and its word for word communication of God's message to His people. To the extent professing Christians doubt or diminish the accuracy and authority of Scripture, we give our chief adversary a key advantage, and he well knows how to exploit it against us. Believer, you have no sound reason to give up that ground or that advantage. Read your Bible with full confidence that you are reading God's message to you today. But read and study it constantly and intensely—and, above all with prayer and with confidence that you are reading God's message to you.

Elder Joe Holder