

UNIT 3: God's Revealing Work

Section 4: Authority

Theological Works:
Berkhof, Calvin, Chafer, Erickson,
Grudem, Warfield

INTRODUCTION:

Over the past few sessions we've been laying the groundwork for a proper appraisal of God's Word, the Bible. We've looked to the Bible itself for an understanding of "what" the Bible is – God's very Word written down by men through the process of "inspiration." We've already spoken of the fact that the Holy Spirit superintended the writing of Scripture such that the final product was precisely what God intended, therefore preserving it free from falsehood and error. God's Word since it is from Him bears His character, being true without any mixture of error.

Why is this whole clarification regarding the nature of the Bible so important? Why belabor this point? The reason is found in our discussion here in section 4 – AUTHORITY. The issue of authority has wide ranging implications in all facets of life... but nowhere does it have greater implications than in the area of spirituality. Failing to recognize one's proper earthly sovereign can carry deep consequences for one's length and quality of physical life, but failing to fear, honor, and worship the Supreme Sovereign bears eternal consequences – not only in this world but the one to come. So, here, we must pause and ask some important questions – and provide good answers as well! ☺

Q1: What is authority? Why is it important?

Q2: What constitutes legitimate authority?

Q3: How is the Bible's authority legitimated?

I. The Concept of Authority

A. The Bare Essentials of Authority

1. A working definition...

- a. The power to prescribe a course of action, or settle issues; the right to control, command, or determine. – Those having such power can be said to be "authorities..."
- b. So someone/thing is an authority if it has the right to command/prescribe certain belief and/or behavior.
- c. Dictionaries point out that "authority" is recognized not only due to "position or office" but also "expertise or skill."
 - A king would have the right to enforce actions by virtue of his office
 - A scientist would have the right to testify authoritatively in a court of law after having been recognized as an "expert" in a particular field of study.
 - Authority arising from Position is "extrinsic" – power by virtue of superior office held
 - Authority arising from Expertise is "intrinsic" – power by virtue of superior knowledge acknowledged
- d. So we must not confuse "authority" with "force" – for while ideally those with rightful authority should be the ones in power to enforce a certain behavior, this is not always the case – a rightly elected official might be deposed, or a usurper might function in the place of the rightful chief... Also, "expert authorities" may "prescribe" but generally not enforce (such as a doctor's prescription)...

2. It's Inescapable...
 - a. We live in a time when people are increasingly resistant to dictatorial or arbitrary forms of authority... External authorities which attempt to impose their will upon others through force are increasingly being rebutted. In its place people have become more internal in their authority beliefs – looking to themselves as final authority.
 - b. **Erickson** points out an important distinction: “The distinction between authoritativeness and authoritarianism is also important to maintain. An authoritative person, document, or institution is one that possesses authority and consequently has the right to define belief or prescribe practice. And authoritarian person, on the other hand, is one who attempts to instill his or her opinions or enforce his or her commands in an emphatic, dogmatic, or even intolerant fashion.”
 - c. This has brought some to attempt to reject the very concept of authority...
 - d. BUT properly speaking, authority is inescapable. To make an appeal to anything is to invoke some sort of authority – authority is the “foundation” which holds up any argument – there must be some underlying substance which provides a statement with veracity (correspondence with reality) and the ability to compel.
 - e. Again, this is an example of a type of “1st principle” – to deny the existence of “authority” is sure to bring the question – “on what authority ought I dismiss all authority??” – to compel others to dismiss authority is to evoke authority...
 - f. Also understand that an authority which is ignored is sure to bring consequences!
 - g. **Erickson**, “Their failure to recognize authority does not abrogate it.”
3. It may be delegated...
 - a. As a matter of fact, most authority is... The one who has the “most authority” usually ends up managing others who are given portions from the overall responsibility. Obviously the amount of delegation is commensurate with the size of the responsibility and the amount of people involved.
 - b. A husband is given the responsibility of overseeing, caring for, protecting, and providing for his family... so in fulfilling that obligation from the Lord, certain responsibilities are attended to by himself, others by his wife, and still others by his children. Some things CANNOT be delegated, but others can and ought to be!
 - c. I spoke with a soldier from the Marines while attending a wedding – and here the importance of a system of authority becomes “crystal clear.” Having clearly established responsibilities for each leader in the military ensures quick action and the completion of clearly established protocols whenever called for.
 - d. While everyone is important, if the authorities are in error, huge consequences follow!
4. It might be disobeyed...
 - a. There are countless examples of “authorities” being sabotaged and overthrown
 - b. There are also examples of “authorities” being ignored
 - c. But rebellion against authorities brings consequences...

B. The Legitimization of Authority

1. Authority is always seeking legitimization...
 - a. For something to be called “legitimate” it must be in accord with applicable laws, rules, or standards.
 - b. Typically in politics, an institution is achieves legitimacy if the people governed recognize its authority.

- c. Remember, authorities prescribe/enforce beliefs and behavior... but if an authority is considered illegitimate, than its ability to prescribe and enforce belief and behavior is drastically diminished.
 - d. Legitimacy is achieved in a number of ways – most often by appealing to a higher authority!
 - A child tells his sibling to do something because “dad/mom said so...”
 - A justice of the peace marries someone “by the power invested in him by the state of...”
 - A police officer arrests a criminal because he has authority granted to him by the government
 - A soldier fights in a war on the basis of submission to the government
 - A representative operates “by the people and for the people”
 - e. But what happens when we move higher and higher up the hierarchy in our appeals for authority? Who/What sits at the top?
2. Ultimate authority must point to itself by definition...
- a. If an authority points to another authority for legitimization, then the other authority pointed to is of “higher status” than the former...
 - b. For this reason, claims of “ultimate authority” are inherently circular!
 - c. This does not make the argument invalid, however, as it makes other arguments...
 - Everyone either implicitly or explicitly uses some kind of circular argument when defending his or her ultimate authority for belief.
 - **Grudem** provides some good examples:
 - My reason is my ultimate authority because it seem reasonable to me to make it so.
 - Logical consistency is my ultimate authority because it is logical to make it so.
 - The findings of human sensory experiences are the ultimate authority for discovering what is real and what is not, because our human senses have never discovered anything else: thus, human sense experience tells me that my principle is true.
 - So the real question becomes which authority is truly ultimate, since there is a multitude competing for the title... And HOW can we be assured that we have it right?
 - There are a host of arguments that commend the Bible as being the ultimate authority in contrast to other claimants...
 - The Bible corresponds with reality, recounts history accurately, is internally consistent, and provides a host of fulfilled prophecies for further proof...
 - If humanity was not burdened by the effects of the Fall, the Bible would be easily identifiable as the Truth in contrast with all the imposter authorities claiming to be ultimate. Sin has affected humanities perception – causes them to think incorrectly about God and creation... so something more than arguments such as these are needed...

II. The Authority of the Bible

A. *God's Unique Status*

1. **Erickson** provides us with a good starting point: “As creator and source of all truth, God has the right to command belief and obedience from all human beings.”
2. The Bible (as God's Word) possesses the supreme right to define what we are to believe and how we are to behave.

3. In previous sections we've already established the "divine origin" of the Scriptures, but here's just a few reminder testimonies from Scripture itself...
 - a. The repeated declaration "Thus says the Lord" testifies to this fact...(Ex 4:22, Josh 24:2, Judges 6:8, 1 Sam 2:27, 2 Sam 7:5, 2 Kings 19:6, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc...)
 - b. The prophet is said to only speak the Lord's words – Num 22:38, Deut 18:18-20, Jer 1:9, Ezek 2:7, etc)
 - c. ***This is exactly what the NT testifies to as well: 2 Pet 1:21*** "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."
 - d. **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;
 - e. Also remember – 2 Pet 3:16 & 1 Tim 5:18

B. Establishing the Authority of the Scriptures

1. **Grudem**, "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."
2. **But** how is the authority of Scripture established? How do we come to recognize this authority?
 - a. The Roman Catholic position
 - The Scripture's authority is established through the church. It is via the Church that we come to understand the Bible and are convinced of divine authorship.
 - **Berkhof** explains, "[The RC Church] maintained that the Church temporally and logically precedes Scripture, and therefore does not owe its existence to Scripture, but exists in and by itself, that is, through Christ or the indwelling Spirit of God.
 - The argument here rests upon the proposal that apart from the church and particularly the canonizing councils, no one would be able to recognize the correct writings which make up the Scriptures.
 - They go further to say that apart from the church, people cannot be assured of correct interpretation of the scriptures either. The logic is as follows: "What benefit does an infallible, inerrant Scripture have for one who is not assured of an inerrant interpretation?" Since all of human reasoning is limited and subject to error, an infallible individual or institution is required to complement scripture's infallibility. (i.e. the Pope).
 - b. The Rationalist position
 - Human reason becomes the means for establishing the Bible's origin and meaning.
 - A mere examination of the evidences spread throughout scripture is enough to convince anyone of its divine origin. Points of significant weight are the vast number of fulfilled prophecies and miraculous accomplishments.
 - Arriving at the correct meaning of Scripture is just an exercise in careful human reason – Proper interpretation is arrived at via grammars, lexicons, histories, etc.
 - c. The Illuminationist position
 - There is an internal working of the Holy Spirit upon the hearer/reader of the Bible.
 - This "working" is called "illumination" – the Holy Spirit grants understanding to the one in ignorance and plants God's truth in the person's heart. This process

- The Holy Spirit, then also brings certainty to the person’s mind/heart regarding the divine origin of the Scriptures.
 - This is NOT to say that other “evidences/arguments” are invalid... just not finally convincing! Knowing the historical accuracy, internal consistency, and prophetic fulfillments of Scripture, along with its profound depth of teaching and incredible impact on humanity demonstrate the Bible to be utterly unique in comparison with any other literature... but final conviction does not come from these sources.
 - Chapter 5, Of the Holy Scriptures from the ORRB Confession of Faith:
 - **Section 4:** 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 (2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:9), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.
 - **Section 5:** We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church of **God** to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, and the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole **which is to give all glory to God**, the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, and many other incomparable excellencies, and entire perfections thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts (John 16:13-14; 1 Corinthians 2:10-12; 1 John 2:20, 27).
3. Arguments in favor of the Illuminist position:
 - a. There are limitations inherent to the creature’s relationship to his Creator.
 - God is transcendent, being beyond finite human concepts and vocabulary. He is incomprehensible! God’s infinitude is contrasted with our finiteness!
 - These limitations are not a result of sin, just the result of our being the ones created, and him being the One who creates! But help is needed nonetheless!
 - b. There are limitations resulting from the Fall.
 - Humanity is burdened by the dreadful effects of sin...
 - Sin has affected the human mind – “total depravity” – all of man is affected!
 - This is particularly evident in spiritual matters – both belief and behavior!
 4. The Need for the Holy Spirit’s Work:
 - a. The Rationalist fails to see his dreadful condition and need for help...
 - **Jesus explained: Matt 13:13-15** "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; ¹⁵ FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND

UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.

- **Rom 1:21** For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
 - **2 Cor 4:4** in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
 - We see this “practically” in the fact that many within one room can hear the same truth, and yet respond in drastically different ways...
- b. The Roman Catholic fails to look to the correct source for help...
- The Pope’s role/position has long been understood as usurping the role and place which God alone fulfills. It is the H.S. who illuminates the mind, granting understanding, and ensuring obedience to the Word of God.
 - **Berkhof**, “Over against the position of Rome, the Reformers emphasized the *autopistia* of Scripture, the doctrine that Scripture has authority in and of itself as the inspired Word of God. They did not hesitate to ascribe great importance to the testimony of the Church to Scripture as a *motivum credibilitatis*, but refused to regard the testimony of the Church as the final ground for the acceptance of Scripture. They firmly maintained the position that the Bible must be believed for its own sake. It is the inspired Word of God and therefore addresses man with divine authority. The Church can and should *acknowledge* the Bible for what it is, but can in no sense of the word *make* it what it is.”
- c. The Illuminationist understands his need and depends upon the HELPER!
5. The Nature of the Spirit’s Work:
- a. In Regeneration – (“being born again” and “granted the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit”) what was formerly “foolishness” and a “stumbling block” now is the “wisdom and power of God” – **1st Cor 1...**
- b. But not only does the Spirit enact this change from the outset, but He continues to work within the believer in a number of ways:
- **John 14:26** "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.
 - **John 15:26-27** "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, ²⁷ and you *will* testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.
 - **John 16:7-11** "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. ⁸ "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; ¹¹ and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.
 - **John 16:13-14** "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

- c. **So in illumination the H.S.** grants understanding of the Truth, brings about persuasion and conviction regarding the Truth, and produces obedience to the Truth!
- **Grudem**, “Our ultimate conviction that the words of the Bible are God’s words comes only when the H.S. speaks in and through the words of the Bible to our hearts and gives us an inner assurance that these are the words of our Creator speaking to us.”
 - **He points out** that this is analogous to Jesus description of those who were His disciples – **Jn 10:27** “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” – there was no “committee convened” or “other religious authority consulted” – Jesus explained that when His own heard Him speak, they recognized His voice and followed Him!
 - Grudem provides another good explanation here... “This conviction that the words of Scripture are the words of God does *not* come *apart from* the words of Scripture or *in addition to* the words of Scripture. It is not as if the Holy Spirit one day whispers in our ear, ‘Do you see that Bible sitting on your desk? I want you to know that the words of that Bible are God’s words.’ It is rather as people read Scripture that they hear their Creator’s voice speaking to them in the words of Scripture and realize that the book they are reading is unlike any other book, that it is indeed a book of God’s own words speaking to their hearts.”
 - **Calvin**, “... the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted.”
- d. Scripture recognition was immediately apparent by the early Christians:
- Peter recognized Paul’s writings as Scripture – **2 Peter 3:15-16** “and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,¹⁶ as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”
 - Paul recognized Luke’s writings as Scripture – 1 Tim 5:18 “For the Scripture says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” (Lk 10:7)
 - Paul recognized His own writings as Scripture:
 - **1 Cor 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.”
 - **1 Cor 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.” – Since Jesus had not spoken on this particular situation, Paul gives instruction – and that instruction carries the authority of God.
- e. This is exactly how Paul describes how the Church in Thessalonica recognized Scripture’s authority:

- **1 Thessalonians 1:5** “for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”
 - **1 Thessalonians 2:13** “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”
- f. **And this was what Paul prayed for: Eph 3:14-19** “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”
6. **Now** understand that the Scripture’s authority has two components – the “objective word” – the Scriptures themselves, as well as the “subjective word” – the illumination of the H.S.
- a. **It is** these two together that constitutes the authority over every Christian.
 - b. **To** neglect either is to result in a dangerous/wrongful position:
 - Those who neglect the importance of the Holy Spirit might result in a “sacramental view” of the Bible itself... In other words, that the mere reading of the Bible will bring about change... Just as we would have no scripture to read w/o the superintending work of the H.S., so we have no real understanding of the Scriptures apart from the H.S. Both Inspiration and Illumination necessary! (**I Cor 2:12-14**)
 - Those who neglect the importance of the Scriptures result in a position where no normative standards are used to determine the veracity of various interpretations.
 - c. **To** affirm both is to benefit from the blessing of God!
 - **Erickson**, “The written word, correctly interpreted, is the objective basis of authority. The inward illuminating and persuading work of the Holy Spirit is the subjective dimension. The dual dimension prevents sterile, cold, dry truth on the one hand, and over excitability and ill-advised fervor on the other.”
 - The greatest servants of God throughout history have been those who have recognized the authority of Scripture, been broken by its truth, submitted to its every command, and entrusted its doctrines to others! This is the Christian life, and it is the purpose of the church – to know, obey, and proclaim who God is and what He has done! All authority stems from God – for He possesses all authority!
 - How thankful we can be that we can speak with authority when we make it the goal of our lives to know and follow God’s Word, clearly proclaiming it to others! God’s Word stands above all human philosophies, and functions to rule and guide the Lord’s people.
 - Instead of being ruled by the Church, God’s Word provides a much needed rule to the Church (and every other governing authority for that matter). **Chafer**, “... the Scriptures go so far as to declare God’s will to ecclesiastical councils and human governments.”