

The Authority of Scripture

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Preacher: Colin Horne

[0 : 0 0] So, this morning we are continuing in our study that we began about a month ago on the doctrine of the Word of God, what the Bible teaches about the Bible.

And we've looked at different attributes each week that relate to this particular doctrine. And we've seen, I hope, even in some measure, how these different attributes relate to each other, how they tie together, how they build on one another.

So, as we consider our doctrine of the Word of God, we want to see this relationship between doctrines. Think of it like this. The Bible teaches that it is inspired by God, that it has a divine origin.

And it also teaches that it is without error, that it is inerrant. And that makes sense. You think about the relationship between those two attributes. It's that if, indeed, it is a divinely given book, men carried along by the Spirit, then it makes sense that the perfect God who gave us His Word would not give us a word that is filled with errors.

So, those two attributes relate to each other. The Bible also teaches that it is sufficient, that it is all that we need for life and godliness.

[1 : 2 0] That it is all we need in order to be saved and then to live a life of obedience until we're with the Lord in glory. And so, if the Bible is sufficient, then it also makes sense that it is clear, that what the Bible says is able to be understood.

Because if it could not be understood, then we would not have all that we need for life and godliness. We would not understand what we need to know for life and godliness. So, these attributes build on one another.

This morning, we're going to see another attribute that also builds on previous attributes. And this attribute is the authority of Scripture. The authority of Scripture.

Which simply means that the Bible has the right to demand obedience from us. It is to have the final say in our lives.

It's as our confession says, So, it is the rule.

[2 : 2 9] It is the standard. It is the measuring rod that we live our lives by. But why? Why does the Bible have the right to demand obedience from us?

Because the Bible is inspired by God, and God is the king over all creation. Now, this may sound very elementary, but we need to establish this.

Genesis 1.1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God made everything. Therefore, God is in charge of everything. Psalm 103.19 says, So, God reigns over all that he has made.

And so, it is fitting that the one who reigns over all that he has made, who has established his throne in the heavens, also then establishes the rules that guide our lives.

He tells us what it is, how we are to live. Kings don't make suggestions. They give orders that are to be obeyed. And God is king.

[3 : 4 2] So, this is just the basic creator-creature relationship that scripture just clearly teaches us. We are the creatures. There is one who is the creator. So, we submit to him.

He's in authority over us. Now, man, in his unregenerate state, hates that relationship.

Man wants autonomy from God. Man wants to live by his own rules. But the reality is that we are not autonomous. We are not free to live however we please.

Because we are the creatures. And we have been created very purposefully for the glory of God. We were made for him. Not the other way around.

So, we live according to his laws. Not the other way around. Open with me in your Bibles to Psalm 95. We're going to read this whole psalm.

[4 : 42] And we're going to see that it teaches this very basic relationship. Psalm 95.

Which also has a lot of overlap with Psalm 100. If we had time, we could read that too. But we're just going to read Psalm 95 this morning. We're going to begin in verse 1. This is the word of the Lord.

Oh, come. Let us sing to the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving.

Let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise. For the Lord is a great God. And a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth.

The heights of the mountains are also his. The sea is his. For he made it. And his hands formed the dry land. Oh, come. Let us worship and bow down.

[5 : 41] Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker. For he is our God. And we are the people of his pasture. And the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah.

As on the day at Massah in the wilderness. When your fathers put me to the test. And put me to the proof. Though they had seen my work. For forty years, I loathed that generation.

And said, They are a people who go astray in their heart. And they have not known my ways. Therefore, I swore in my wrath. They shall not enter my rest. So the psalmist here clearly understands this relationship.

Between God as creator. And us as creatures. He establishes that God made all things. He begins by speaking of the created realm. That all of nature is made by God.

And it belongs to him. And then he just transitions very smoothly. Into how we too. As those made by him. And belong to him. Are to be submitted to him.

[6 : 44] What is the proper approach that the psalmist tells us to make? In verses six and seven. Oh come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.

And so the one who made us is to be bowed down to. In obedience we come before him. And what happens if we are in disobedience?

If we live in disobedience towards him? What does verse eight say? Do not harden your hearts. So don't harden your hearts. Don't live in disobedience to your Maker.

Why? Because God has authority over our lives. And that disobedience will lead to consequences. And so verse 11 ends with, Therefore I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.

So do we see the connection here? God is the king over all creation. And when he speaks, his creation ought to obey. We've seen in the past weeks that God has spoken to us in his word.

[7 : 50] The Bible is God's word. They are God's words that are recorded here for us. And because God has spoken to us in his word, we are to obey his word.

Now we may not be standing in the very presence of God in a physical sense. We may not be literally before his throne at this very moment. We're not with him face to face as the Bible would speak.

But to disobey or to disbelieve anything that God says in his word is to disobey or to disbelieve God himself.

Think about decrees that are sent out by great kings. How well would it go for the subjects of a king if those subjects read or they heard a decree and they said, I don't obey paper, I obey people.

So unless the king comes and speaks this decree to me face to face, I won't obey. I don't want to go too well for those subjects. That's not how this works.

[8 : 56] It's not how the laws in our own land work. Decrees, written, legislation, these documents carry the weight of those who authored it or at minimum authorized it.

And the Bible is authored by God. And so the Bible also is clear. God has successfully communicated to us. We saw that last week. And therefore the Bible carries God's authority.

We are accountable for obeying what God has said in his word. Well, let's look at an example from the word of those who lived with this understanding of this attribute.

Turn with me to Acts chapter 17. Acts chapter 17. And we are going to see a contrast this morning between those who understood what it means for God's word to have authority and those who did not and did not live accordingly.

So Acts chapter 17. We are going to begin reading in verse 1. And this is on one of Paul's missionary journeys.

[10 : 04] The gospel is spreading into the known world in the book of Acts. And we see it here in Acts 17 as Paul comes to Thessalonica and then as Paul and his companions come to Berea.

So we are going to first be in Thessalonica. And we'll begin reading in verse 1. Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

And Paul went in as was his custom. And on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying, this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.

And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous.

And taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them.

[11 : 23] And they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus. And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.

And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. And when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue.

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. So the Bereans heard what Paul had to say. And what was their response?

It was entirely unlike the response of the Jews in Thessalonica. The Jews in Thessalonica, in the main, heard the word, rejected it, gathered a mob together, set the city in an uproar, sought to find Paul in Jason's home, failed to find him there, but if they had found him, would have likely done him great harm, and caused Paul to flee from the city.

[12 : 35] They clearly and definitively rejected what God's word had to say by the mouthpiece of Paul. They rejected the message.

They heard Paul's words, and they rejected it. But the Berean Jews had a very, very different response. They heard Paul's words, and they were eager.

Now they didn't immediately accept what Paul had said. They didn't hear Paul's words and say, yes, we believe Jesus is the Christ. No, they were more cautious, but not in necessarily a bad way.

The text says that they examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. The Bereans compared the words of Paul to what the Old Testament Scriptures taught, because Paul was proving from the Old Testament, Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah.

He's the one that we've been waiting for. We need to believe on him. And they said, we need to look at our Bibles, as they had their Bibles then. Because they didn't know anything about Paul.

[13 : 46] They didn't know anything about Jesus being the Christ. And so they needed to check Paul's words. They weren't just going to accept what Paul had to say about Jesus Christ without first checking against their final authority, the Scriptures.

And it wasn't a quick check. It wasn't just this rash acceptance after quickly skimming the pages of the Old Testament. They examined the Scriptures daily. They put in the work to make sure that Paul's words checked out with the Old Testament text.

And they realized that his words did. And by God's grace, they believed the good news of the Gospel. We've been using Kevin DeYoung's book here as our guide for this study.

And this is what DeYoung says in his book. The Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians because they were utterly submissive to the Scriptures. They would accept something new if it could be supported in the Scriptures.

They would believe something controversial if it was based in the Scripture. They were willing to follow Christ for the rest of their lives, provided they were in the process following the Scriptures.

[15 : 00] So the Bereans serve as a very helpful example to us of how to treat the Bible as our final authority. And also, just as a side note, this passage is really good evidence for the clarity of Scripture as well.

The Bereans understood what the Old Testament taught. They were not confused about their Old Testament. And they could compare that to what Paul was teaching and understand that what Paul said lined up with what the Old Testament said.

So we see in this passage the clarity of Scripture on display and we see the authority of Scripture as well. Everyone has a final authority.

Everyone submits to an ultimate standard for truth claims. We all give someone or something the last word on what is true.

DeYoung gives us a good list here of examples. Our parents, our culture, our community, our feelings, the government, peer-reviewed journals, though I don't reference those all the time, opinion polls, impressions, or a holy book.

[16 : 12] Many good examples. And if we're sitting here thinking, I don't submit to anything or to anyone, I have no final authority, well then, we're just making ourselves the final authority.

And, we're probably living in ignorance of final authorities that we are submitting to and we just don't realize it. We're unaware of the influences of ideas on ourselves. No one lives in a vacuum.

Everyone submits to something or someone or some set of beliefs, no matter how convoluted those beliefs are. We all have a final authority. The question is, what is our authority?

Now, as Christians, the Bible is our final authority. There are other good authorities that we should submit to, authorities that God has put in place.

But the final authority, the authority with the last word, is the Bible. And one good reason should jump out to us, because the Bible is never wrong.

[17 : 15] Now, can we be wrong in our understanding of what the Bible teaches? Can we misinterpret the Bible? Can we misunderstand the Bible? Can we be mistaken about what the Bible says?

We can. That is why we indeed hold our convictions firmly, but humbly. We can be wrong. And when error or misunderstanding are on our part about what the Bible says is brought to our attention, we should be like the Bereans and go back to our final authority to see what it says.

So we can misinterpret the Bible, we can be wrong about what the Bible teaches, but the Bible is never wrong about what it teaches itself. Our understanding could be askew, but the Bible is never.

DeYoung says this, when interpreted correctly, paying attention to the original context, considering the literary genre, thinking through authorial intent, the Bible is never wrong in what it affirms and must never be marginalized as anything less than the last word on everything it teaches.

So we don't turn to anyone or anything else to prove the Bible. If we did, then we would be whatever we would be making, whatever we turned to, our new final authority.

[18 : 42] Ultimately, we believe what the Bible says because God is the author of the Bible and God is the king over all. He's also the standard of truth itself.

God doesn't just say what is true. He sets the standard for truth. So the author of this book has given us the standard that we live by in this book.

Listen closely to what Jesus said in his high priestly prayer in John 17. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth.

Did you hear that? Jesus did not say your word is true. He said your word is truth. truth. There's a very important difference here.

Wayne Grudem explains it very well for us. This statement encourages us to think of the Bible not simply as being true in the sense that it conforms to some higher standard of truth but rather to think of the Bible as being itself the final standard of truth.

[19 : 55] Now, I want to make this point clearly in saying that the Bible doesn't exhaustively state all that is true. We know this in general revelation.

There is much that God shows us that is true in the world that the scriptures do not directly speak to. Two plus two equals four. I think we all believe that's true though there are some weird ideas about math these days that are making some people question that.

But we know two plus two equals four and the Bible is not what taught us that. God gifted us with the ability to reason and understand from general revelation two plus two equals four.

But, if something that is taught in scripture is contradicted or goes against from an outside source we don't take that outside source and say hmm, seems like a good point.

I suppose the Bible may be mistaken on this. No, the Bible is our standard of truth. Listen to how our confession explains this. The scripture is self-authenticating.

[21 : 04] Its authority does not depend upon the testimony of any man or church but entirely upon God, its author who is truth itself. It is to be received because it is the word of God.

So it speaks for itself. The Bible doesn't need anything to bolster its authority. Now this flies in the face of so much false teaching.

And we can give lots and lots of examples. I'm just going to give one example this morning and it's from the Catholic Church. And that's in part because our confession speaks to the Catholic Church in much that it says.

It was written during much of the post-Reformation era, the heart of scholars and theologians coming to an understanding that the Bible is our final authority and we don't submit to the Catholic Church.

So the Catholic Church is helpful to think through and how they teach authority. John Luther, I've referenced him, he wrote one of the chapters in the exposition of our confession.

[22 : 11] He says this, The Church of Rome teaches that the authority of the Bible depends on the testimony of the Catholic Church. The way of life issuing from such a belief is that a person who trusts the Bible trusts the Bible because the person trusts the Church of Rome.

But the confession teaches and we believe that the authority of the Bible depends on the testimony of God alone. No church need approve the Bible to be a person's authority.

Just two days ago, I came across a really good example of this. There was an article that I saw online and the article read, Transgender people can be baptized and be godparents, says Vatican.

And so when I read the article, the article referenced this three-page document that the Vatican had just recently published to kind of defend this position it was taking. So I went and I said, we've got to find this document.

It's only three pages. We can quickly read it. I found it. It was written in Portuguese. I don't know Portuguese. And I couldn't find a translation of it online into English.

[23 : 23] So I did the next best thing. I used Google Translate. I wasn't going for like the most thorough, perfect translation of this document.

I just wanted to know, did the Catholic Church look to God's Word to inform to inform its decision. And guess what? In my skimming of my Google Translated document, there were zero references to the Bible as the support for the conclusions that were determined in that document.

Now I did come across things like, in the case of baptism, the church teaches. Or, the catechism teaches. Or, St. Thomas Aquinas taught.

Or, Augustine taught. Now, there's nothing wrong with quoting from Augustine, quoting from Thomas Aquinas, I'm quoting from Kevin DeYoung. But nowhere are their conclusions grounded in the final authority of God's Word.

I only reference, Kevin DeYoung, I only reference our confession because they are helping us to see what the scriptures are, in fact, teaching us. So the Catholic Church is just one of many, many examples where the Bible is not the final authority.

[24 : 41] Or where the Bible needs other sources to verify it in order for it to be authoritative. But the Bible teaches otherwise. Jesus said in John 17, Your Word is truth.

So let's go back to the Garden of Eden. Let's go back to basically the beginning. Adam and Eve are a good example to us of failing to take God at His Word.

God had given them a command. You may surely eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

So could Adam and Eve, could they have known that what God had said would in fact happen? Could they empirically verify it?

Could they run tests? Could they somehow do experiments? Could they consult other authorities to determine the trustworthiness and the truthfulness of what God had said would happen?

[25 : 49] If you eat from this tree, you will surely die. No, they couldn't. They had to take God at His Word. He was their final authority on the issue.

So what did Adam and Eve do? They did consult another authority. They consulted a far lesser authority. They believed Satan's lies because Satan said, you will not surely die.

He went on, he said, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So Adam and Eve trusted a lesser authority, an authority that lied to them, an authority that misled them, misguided them.

And they believed that lie. They believed the lie that they could make themselves the final authority. They believed that they could be like God.

They thought, we can ascend to God's throne, we can be like God, knowing good from evil. I've heard this called cosmic treason.

[27 : 00] That's what Adam and Eve committed. But they were wrong and they felt the consequences of their disobedience. God exerted his authority over them.

Their relationship with God was broken. Death entered the world through their sin and they were banished from the garden. They learned who had authority over their lives.

So too does God have authority over us. He is king over all. We've established that. He is also a good king. He gives good laws.

We're working through 1 John in our sermon series in the evenings. Eventually, we will get to 1 John 5. And what does 1 John 5 say? God's commandments are not burdensome.

God is not like human kings or human rulers who lord their authority over their subjects. He is good.

[28 : 01] He commands what is good. And what He commands is for our good. Flip over to Psalm 19. Psalm 19 is a beautiful, beautiful expression of the goodness of God and the goodness of what He says.

Psalm 19. We'll begin reading in verse 7. Listen to over and over again how the psalmist describes the laws of God, the commandments of God, all that God says.

Listen to how it's described. Not once is it described as binding and as enslaving and as giving death to us.

Much the opposite. Verse 7. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The commandments of the Lord, the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

[29 : 20] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned, in keeping them there is great reward.

That last line, is that not a picture of the Garden of Eden? God had warned Adam and Eve and if they had then indeed kept his command, there was great reward.

They enjoyed all of God's good garden and yet they didn't believe that that was true. They didn't believe in the goodness of God. They thought, no, he's lording his authority over us.

We need to get out from under God's authority and the fallout from their sinful choice. It proved that that line of thinking was very wrong.

God is good and so what his word says, what his word demands, it's also good. J.C. Ryle, he was a 19th century preacher.

[30 : 19] Listen to what he says. Happy is the man who possesses the Bible. Happier still is he who reads it. Happiest of all is he who not only reads it but obeys it.

So we've considered the authority of God's word this morning and I appreciate how John Frame very succinctly describes this attribute. He says, an authoritative word is one that imposes obligations on those who hear and the word of God imposes an absolute obligation.

He goes on to say, when God commands we are to obey. When he asserts we are to believe. When he promises we are to embrace and trust those promises.

So this is the word of God and this word comes to us from our good God. It carries his authority and it calls us to obey.

And so we should be treating God's word just as the Bereans did in Acts chapter 17. We should examine it. We should search it. We should treat it as the final word for our lives.

[31 : 35] And we remember now that the majority of the Thessalonians rejected the word. They wanted nothing to do with it. But some believed. Acts 17 said that some were persuaded.

Some believed the word that Paul brought. And we have two letters that Paul wrote to those believers in Thessalonica. And this is what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2.13.

And we also thank God constantly for this. That when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God which is at work in you believers.

So may we treat God's word like that. And remember and rejoice that God is at work in us as well. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, what a precious word that you have given to us. What a joy it is that we have it. Help us indeed to submit to it wholeheartedly.

[32 : 41] You are a good God. You have demonstrated such love for us. Love that led to Christ going to the cross for our sins.

Help us to believe and to obey what you have said. You are good. What you say is good. And what you give us is for our good. And it's for your glory. So Father, we recognize our sin that remains.

We see the ways in which we desire to go our own way still. We pray Lord that you would reel us in. That you would keep us near to yourself.

That you would give us a love for what you say. Give us eyes to see that indeed your word is to be our final authority in life. We pray all of this in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're dismissed.