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# **Authority of the Bible**

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## Authority of the Bible

This essay puts forth the argument that the Bible is the Authoritative Word of God. The following articles and authors approach this argument from their own point of view. R.C.Sproul gives us a rundown on Sola Scriptura and its necessity to evangelicalism. Sola Scriptura is the doctrine that the Bible is the only infallible and inerrant authority for the Christian faith, and that it contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness. Consequently, *sola scriptura* demands that only those doctrines are to be admitted or confessed that are found directly within or indirectly by using valid logical deduction or valid deductive reasoning from scripture. Any allowance of limited inerrancy would devalue sola scriptura. Next, the authority of the Bible is presented by J. Stafford Wright who tries to assess the way which we can approach and learn about God through reasoning. J.W Wenham considers Christ's use of the Old Testament and how He viewed those Scriptures which He used. N.T. Wright shares his experiences in regards to the authority of the Bible. He explains the claim of the authority of the Bible toward authority and inerrancy. Then there's B. B. Warfield on the Authority and Inspiration of the Scriptures. Next we have the Authority of Scripture by William Webster who tells us how the Scriptures claim divine inspiration for itself. Finally Ken Schurb explains how the Scriptures are the results of God's direct inspiration.

Sproul says that 'The only source and norm of all Christian knowledge is the Holy Scripture.' This does not exclude God talking to us and guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. However, in referencing the Reformation, he says that the major theological issue of the Reformation was the idea of justification. But a more controversial point was concerned with authority of the Pope which Luther challenged continually in 1517 in debates at Augsburg and Leipzig and then in 1518 with Cardinal Cajetan of the Dominicans. Luther argued that only the Scripture carries absolute normative authority. Luther felt that the sola of Sola Scriptura were inseparably related to the Scriptures' unique inerrancy. So Sola Scriptura ascribes a unique authority to the Scriptures. Sproul quotes the Geneva Confession which was written in 1536 affirming the desire to follow Scripture alone as a rule of faith and religion, without mixing with it any thing which might be devised by the opinion of men apart from the Word of God, and without wishing to accept for our spiritual government any other doctrine than what is conveyed to us by the same Word without addition or diminution, according to the command of our Lord.

Interestingly, those that push limited inerrancy will say that the Bible is infallible only when it speaks of faith and practice. Whereas the Reformation put forward that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. The Catholic Church seemed to have acknowledged two sources of special revelation, Scripture and the tradition of the church. However, some argue that tradition adds no new content to Scripture but only serves as a tool of the church. In this, the Reformation wanted to make sure that no church council, synod, classical theologian, or early church father was regarded as infallible.

Scriptures being the essence of Christianity according to Ramm has more to do with the state of evangelicalism. The Sproul continues by saying that to subordinate the importance of the Gospel would be to obscure the centrality of Christ. So, to subordinate Sola Fide to sola scriptura would be to misunderstand the essence of the Reformation. As Luther voiced that the Word of God alone must rule, and no Christian dare do other than allow it to enthrone itself in our conscience. Schaeffer says that holding to a strong view of Scripture or not holding to it is the watershed of the evangelical world. So the Scriptures are the central core of evangelicalism and also consistent evangelicalism. At the same time, to know that in Scripture we have divine revelation is no small matter to grasp. It doesn't depend on human ideas or speculation.

The Sproul now asks whether Sola Scriptura is compatible with limited inerrancy. If we had limited inerrancy then that would reduce Scripture to be de facto to the content relating to faith and practice. Any attempts to use limited inerrancy only leads to canon reductionism, which questions both New Testament supernaturalism and Biblical history. The Sproul goes so far to say that we exclude history from inspiration or inerrancy then we inevitably lose the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It would make Christians immune to Old and New Testament historical criticism. A person would not be able to relate the Scriptures to the physical history which Israel and Christianity grew out of. Limited inerrancy would also cause corrupt theology and would not be a guarantee to Biblical orthodoxy. With those who support limited inerrancy, other challenges are put forth against matters of faith and practice. Our faith and practice depends on a fully infallible rule or absolute acceptance of Sola Scriptura.

Wright introduces us to how we can discover more about God through revelation. Since God has made us, He wants us to know Him and to have fellowship with Him. He questions, 'If the whole Bible is inspired by God, does this mean that every part of it is authoritative for us today? He then points out that the Bible is the only religious book that wants us to have personal knowledge of a personal God. It seriously deals with sin and our

own life in terms of living the life that God wants us to live. In the very early church there were collected documents and letters about Jesus Christ. With some of these, there was an obvious authority on them which distinguished them from other writings. Eventually the Gospels and letters brought on recognition and canon by themselves. The Church became a vessel of keeping the canon the canon. The Old Testament was immediately accepted by the Christian church simply because Jesus referred to it constantly. Inspiration has been described in many extremes; such as: the writers were like typewriters and those who wrote it were simply enlightened by God. The Bible has been considered God's revelation to humanity, rather than man's thoughts about God. This was a special kind of inspiration that was given to the prophets and writers. He chose them and gave them the gifts and training and influenced their writings. This is the normal view of inspiration and for the person who studies it continuously gets the most out of it. We see that certain statements have been collected in the form of creeds from the Bible about the Trinity of God, the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, etc. These represent the basics of what we believe. Because of Jesus these beliefs are now given to all nations, not just Israel and the history and regulations of the law are given to us to remind us what God has done for us. There were much deeper teachings for example by Jesus and Paul on the Ten Commandments. Revelation from scripture must be interpreted in light of context and comparison with the rest of Scripture.

The Sproul confesses that the Bible is not without its difficulties and commonsense shows us this, but fuller knowledge and further investigation will clear up any problem we find in the text. For example, there is difficulty in understanding the Trinity and the fact that Christ was divine and also human. Often some things must be accepted by faith until we can understand the different aspects of Christ's deity and humanity. Most difficulties can be placed within two areas: scientific difficulties and apparent discrepancies. One thing to keep in mind, the Bible was never intended to be a science textbook. This does not mean that it's inaccurate concerning things of science but it's from a different perspective and point of view. Anthropology and archaeology shows that civilization began in the Mesopotamian area around 6,000 BC and there has been no scientific discovery that has contradicted Biblical accounts. The Sproul says in regards to miracles, many can be explained rationally except for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Also any discrepancies have been explained as solutions have been found for them.

Finally, Wright says on the other hand the Bible is not a book of difficulties. It teaches us what God is, what we are, and how we may live a life in close touch with God. It's a

treasure chest with treasures waiting to be taken. Even more, it's a gold mine with the finest gold down below the surface.

Wenham looks at how Jesus viewed the Old Testament Scriptures He used. First, he states that for years he has based his own life upon the belief that Jesus was a dependable Teacher who taught us to believe in the truth and authority of the Scriptures. However, sometimes when he finds scholars arguing about the historicity of Jonah, for example, he wants to believe them. This would take away the historical basis of Jonah and would also take away the force by which Jesus used the reference to the three days of Jonah. Jesus took it literally of Jonah. Wenham believes that the Gospel-writers were guided by the Holy Spirit to write and they did to give us a reliable historical record. Christ's attitude was consistent and unchanging to the truth the history, authority and inspiration of the writing. To Christ, the Old Testament was true, authoritative and inspired. The God of the Old Testament was a living God and Old Testament teaching concerned itself with the teaching of a living God. Christ treated the historical narratives of the Old Testament as records of facts. He approached the Scriptures from a literal point of view. Jesus believed in the law as given by Moses; however He was more concerned with the ethics the law presented. The Lord also accepted the Davidic sonship and lordship of the Messiah and used this to teach what Messiah ship meant. Jesus gave an incredible slam against the people of Israel when he said, 'If the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done here, it would have remained until this day. It will be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgement, than for you!' Jesus continued, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day ... before Abraham was, I am.' If Abraham and the messianic promise were not historical, these sayings would be meaningless. In being tempted, on all accounts Jesus used the formula, 'It is written!' referring back to the Scriptures. But it's important to understand that Jesus' reference to the human authorship of the books of the Old Testament were second to the real author. The Scriptures collectively have shown what God has wanted to teach us.

For the Pharisees of Jesus' day, Jesus condemned them for not taking up the weightier matters of the law. Jesus said, 'whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus taught his disciple to obey not only the spirit of the law but also the letter. Jesus further spoke of Moses, 'he wrote of me, but if you believe not his writings, neither will you believe in me.' To understand this: faith, love and a right attitude must be a person's keys. But as to the

Sadducees, Jesus plainly says that they don't know the scriptures or the power of God. What they knew was only by human reason.

The Old Testament is also a guide to ethics. It provides objective moral standards which speak to our hearts. The two greatest commandments as quoted by Jesus summed up the Old Testament. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' These two verses were the heart of the Old Testament. Taking a closer look, one can easily see that the mind of Christ was saturated with that of the Old Testament. Christ even though he elevated the Old Testament above all, He, himself, was above the Old Testament. For example, the Old Testament says, thou shalt not murder but Christ disapproved of hatred and a hating spirit which leads to murder.

We see that Post Reformation rightfully places Scripture in the primary place and everything else lines up with that. Wright says that the western generation has a problem with authority. But yet at the same time, people want to understand the line of authority as they ask, 'Who's in charge?' This really means, who takes the responsibility? We easily see that the meaning of authority changes according to the context which it's used in. Authority in the church is concerned with organization, boundaries and doctrine. In regards to the Bible, interestingly, however, when we read the text of the Bible, we usually apply it to ourselves and others who listen add various presuppositions to it subconsciously and often the authority of scripture becomes to simply mean, the authority of evangelical tradition. To some, authority is only used in terms of control. Control over the congregation, theology, programmes, etc. People want to make sure that the church doesn't go off in the wrong direction. However, according to the Sproul, the Bible doesn't necessarily consist of rules and regulations or list of commands to be obeyed or believed.

The Sproul wants to know how any text can function as authoritative. We can say that the Bible is a catch of timeless truth. The Bible is culturally conditioned from Genesis to revelation as it is written as a witness to historical times and events, but this is not the reason for its authority. The Sproul states that the scripture's own view of authority focuses on the authority of God himself. Or another way of saying this, though authority belongs to God, who has somehow invested this authority in scripture and in the New Testament, it is invested in Christ. From this point of view, the notion of God's authority is based on the fact that God is loving, wise, creator, and redeemer. The Bible isn't a vehicle of God's authority for the sake of the concept of authority itself. Rather, God's authority is vested in scripture with a certain shaped and character designed to liberate human kind. The New Testament gives us a

strong theology of the authoritative Holy Spirit. God exercises His authority by working through the prophets and those He calls. The authority is centred on the stories that people have shared about Christ and their relationship with Christ. The story unfolds in specific narratives of creation, the fall, Israel, Jesus, the New Testament, the Holy Spirit and the Church. The Old Testament is a story that reached its climax in Jesus as the Sproul puts it and the Bible as a whole is a means by which God puts His purposes of judgement and salvation to work. The Bible is designed to function through people, through the church, to those living by the Spirit. So the church was to do for the world what God did for Israel. They were, with scripture in its hand and heart, to speak and act for God in his world and use the authority of scripture to declare to the world authoritatively that Jesus is Lord. To conclude, we mustn't belittle scripture by bringing the world's models of authority into it. We must let scripture be itself.

Warfield says that the foundations of Christianity are laid in the apostles and prophets and their sanctified lives and Jesus Christ stands as the chief cornerstone as its only basis and its only head. He chose to found His church through a gifted and trained body of apostles guided by the Holy Spirit. Their authority came through as Christ's representatives. The authority of the Scriptures doesn't rest on the authority of the Church. The Scriptures determine the Church. Warfield says that apostolicity determines the authority of Scriptures, yet the apostles only ever claimed they were only acting as the agents of Christ, but with those who wrote the Scriptures wrote in the Spirit of Christ. Even though the Bible had a human authorship, behind them was a divine authorship with an influence of the Holy Spirit through the expression of God's will. The Bible is the crystallization of God's authoritative will.

Webster states that Scripture itself makes the claim of authority. Peter said that prophetic Scripture wasn't a human but a divine work. Webster here makes a point that this does not include the writings of the Apocrypha. He wants us to understand that. This is confirmed by a number of Jewish Historians and the Early Church Fathers such as Athanasius, Epiphanius, Anastaius, the patriarch of Antioch in 560 AD and Byzantium. Jesus never quoted from the Apocrypha. The Roman Catholic Church later adopted these writings in the 1600's to support their own theology which they developed later. Later, for some, canon came to have two meanings: one broad and the other narrow. The books that were considered inspired and authoritative were the proto-canonical status. The apocryphal, on the other hand, while not authoritative in defining doctrine were valuable for edification and held a deuterocanonical status. Augustine took up this position. St Jerome also distinguished between

canonical books and the apocryphal books and along with Origen another Biblical scholars rejected the Apocrypha and the church nearly unanimously followed this view.

Paul says that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. Paul was referring to the Old Testament which had already found cohesiveness hundreds of year's earlier! In saying this he indicates that it was authored by God. And because of this, is infallible and inerrant. The Bible doesn't depend on tradition either. The Pharisees misinterpreted the Scriptures in order to adhere to their own traditions. Jesus condemned them for this. He constantly used the Word of God as a standard of authority when He was in conflict with what others said. Christ applied Scripture to His own life and through obedience to the Word and He had victory in that. There was only one man in history who was a Jew; a direct descendant of King David; born in Bethlehem before 70 AD who claimed to be the Son of God and Messiah; performed miracles; entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, scourged, tortured, suffered crucifixion, reportedly died, buried and there days later reported to have risen from the dead. That person was Jesus.

Schurb says pretty much what most of the other authors have said in this essay; the scriptures are given to us as a direct result of God's direct inspiration. The Sproul puts forth a question; how can human words be identified unequivocally as the words of God? He quotes Barth (1886 - 1968) as saying God's Word speaks to us and is heard by us as the authentic witness to divine revelation and is therefore present as the Word of God. Barth says that near the turn of the 20th century Biblical history was subjected to relentless criticism at the hands of scholars who ruled out the prospect of supernatural intervention in the world. This didn't bother Barth so much because he thought that they could say what they want to say as it could not change what God's had already done in the Scriptures. Barth's idea that Scripture becomes the Word of God when God so wills; however, this does not differ much from Calvin's view that the Holy Spirit only decides at times to work graciously through the Word. Schurb says that Christ is divine and human. The bible is the word of God given through the pens of men; it too is divine and human. The human words of the Bible are God's words and his truth. Schurb concludes by saying that God's Word is all that matters, and that His Word to us is 'yes' in Jesus Christ.

Note that 'The only source and norm of all Christian knowledge is the Holy Spirit.' I found this interesting in light of the thousands of books written on various subjects of Christianity, this includes Bible doctrines, books of the Bible and everything else. Other authors put forth questions and answered those questions through explanations and reasoning.

One comment says that the Bible has a special kind of authority and revelation given only by God through the Prophets. Luther voiced that the Word of God alone must rule, and Christians dare not do other than allow it to take over ones conscience. According to the Sproul, protestant churches are confessional and thus reformable because they are fallible. However, often when decisions are made by a church, they are often treated as infallible by those in leadership who made the decisions and everyone in the church are expected to follow those decisions blindly. This is so true and in some ways Protestant Churches can have similarities with the Catholic Churches. One author commented, 'But it should be pointed out that Scripture alone is the essence of Christianity.' I'm not sure what this means and I'm not sure that I agree with it. There is more to Christianity than the Scriptures in the sense of fellowship, prayer and the Holy Spirit in our lives. He later clarifies his point in relation to evangelism.

Wright seems to think that there can be valid explanations of the various miracles in the Bible and can easily be explained by human events. I find that this attitude waters down the super naturalness of the Scriptures. In order to present the authority from a non fundamentalist viewpoint, Wright seems to turn to reason more often than not in order to explain the way the Bible has been written rather than say God in his majesty gave us the Scriptures super naturally and divinely. I think he got a bit off track. Why take this approach? It actually reminded me of those of the Jesus Seminar who aren't even within the circle of Christendom.

Jesus taught his disciple to obey not only the spirit of the law but also the letter. Jesus further spoke of Moses, 'he wrote of me, but if you believe not his writings, neither will you believe in me.' So as Wenham puts it: faith, love and a right attitude are the keys to an understanding of Moses and of Christ. Those of the Jesus Seminar, those who believe in limited inerrancy and anti Christian people against the authority and inerrancy of the Bible will not simply accept God's Testimony to His own Word. Like the Sadducees, Jesus plainly says that they don't know the scriptures or the power of God. What they knew was only by human reason. Human reason, isn't this what is being proclaimed today that Scripture should be understood in terms of human reason and not by any supposedly super natural God!

I think that N.T. Wright in his, 'How can The Bible be Authoritative?' was really good reading. He summed up that the 'authority of scripture' was a shorthand expression for God's authority, exercised somehow through scripture. I really think he failed to make his point, nevertheless, the article fit well within the objectives.

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