

The Authority of Scripture in a Christian's Life

By Gerald E. Cumby

It is the Christian's duty to employ the mind of Christ in all he does rather than human reasoning. Since we have been changed and now have access to the mind of Christ, we should think as a regenerated mind should think. The Bible is God's ultimate authoritative Word. The Christian should always be under the authority of the Bible. We should bring in the Bible to our world at the beginning of our walk with God. We should not step out from under the authority of God's Word.

Since God is Creator of this world and is all wise, He interprets the world. He is the Maker, the Creator, and the Only One who is qualified to interpret the world. He interprets mankind and tells us why we are here, our purpose, and what we ought to be doing. The Christian is not the captain of his own ship. God should be the one that steers and controls the vessel (we who have yielded ourselves to Him). Not only should we acknowledge God and come into agreement as God sees us (hopeless without Him...and helpless without the grace of God). It is His Word that cuts us down to size (puts us in our place). For we are nothing without Him and it is in Him and through Him that we become joint heirs with Christ. Being joint heirs with Christ does not give us the authority to set ourselves up higher than others. All of us, both saved and unsaved, are sinners. Only grace and mercy and the blood of Jesus have put us in line to inherit our right to the kingdom of God. The Christian should look at his salvation as his willful act, by choice, to give up his life to the righteousness of Christ. He should look at his salvation as a means to serve the Master Creator and to give Glory to the One Who Sits on the Throne. All that Jesus did, all of the miracles that He performed, were to give glory to the Father and the Son. The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead was done to give Glory to the Father

God, not to please man or receive accolades from human beings, or to receive praise from Lazarus's sisters or those that witnessed the miracle. It was precluded that Jesus would perform the miracle, *"but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it"* (John 11:4). Although Jesus' compassion was shown for Lazarus, the family and friends (*Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, John 11:33*), he raised Lazarus from the dead to help the people to understand that he has power over death and God's glory is being revealed as it would be when He would raise Jesus from the grave.

Human reason should never "authorize" Scripture. *"Many Christian apologists begin without the Bible when trying to establish the existence of the one true God. Greg Bahnsen wrote: 'It is a common mistake among evangelicals to imagine that the authority of God and His Word is the basis for their theology and preaching, but the authority for defending this faith must be something other than God and His Word.'"*¹ *These apologists employ what is essentially a modified "Natural Theology" as the first step in their apologetic procedure. They attempt to get to God without taking into account the Self-disclosure of God. In establishing the theistic arguments on their reason alone, these men are doing four things that ought to give pause to Bible believers:*

- 1. They set up human reason as the first (and therefore, ultimate) court of appeal.*
- 2. They can only deal in probabilities, never certainties.*
- 3. They can only posit a deity, not the triune God of Scripture.*
- 4. They hide their own Christian pre-commitments by their methodology, but they are forced to admit Christian concepts only.*²

¹ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, (Nacogdoches; TX, CMP, 2002), 112.

² Paul Martin Henebury, *Biblical Apologetics (workbook)*, unnumbered pages, #7 The Clash of Worldviews, So Should Human Reason "Authorize" Scripture?

The Christian should understand that his faith is based on the Truth of the Word of God; not a “probable” faith or presupposition. The Christian is to “*sanctify Christ as Lord in his heart, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.*”

There is a great rebellion against authority in America, and that breakdown of authority is essentially a rebellion against God as well as against the morals and authority of the Bible. In Matthew 4:4 Jesus is being tempted by Satan, and He quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures, Deuteronomy 8:3: “...It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” The Bible is God’s authority on earth. When it comes to a judgment time, Romans 2:12-15 says that every man in the world will be judged either by the written law or by the law written in his heart. The Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me” (John 5:45, 46). And again Jesus said, “...the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). All judgment is given to the Son, but the judgment will be on the basis of the Bible. The Bible is God’s written authority for everybody.³

It is important for the Christian to stand on the authority of God’s Word by, “*studying diligently, whereby we will rightly divide the Word of Truth.*” If it is not truth, it is a lie. Therefore, holding that this Scripture is the ultimate authority, we must handle it as truth. No grounds or reason should ever be to stretch the truth or make light of it. If it is in the Scriptures, we must take it for granted as truth. If it is in the Scriptures, we must pray that our understanding might line up with God’s understanding. Our presuppositions can easily take us

³ John R. Rice, *God’s Authority in Home, Government and the Bible*, pamphlet, Sword of the Spirit, page 19.

into a false area of understanding God's Word. Our culture, our education, our presuppositions and sometimes our imaginations carry us into a realm of thinking that is not godly. The Christian is to think truth, think the Word, and think on the mind of God. We should ask ourselves...with our spirit man in mind, what does God mean by this? We are to keep our minds stayed on God and we are to think, speak, and act the way the Bible instructs.

*“The Lord’s primary way of speaking to us today is through His Word. We already have the complete revelation of God. He doesn’t need to add anything else to this Book. The revelation of God is the unfolding truth of God by God about Himself. The most assured way we can know we hear from God is through His Word. When we face difficulties and heartaches, rather than seek this counsel or that counsel, we should first go to the Scriptures.”*⁴ The Christian should always remember that he has an advocate to help him to understand what is truth. *“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 14:26).* We know that Jesus was speaking primarily to His disciples; however, we are secondary receivers of this promise. We can stand on the fact that the Holy Spirit lives in us as He did in the early Church believers. Paul stated in *Romans 8:9*, *“...you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”* Therefore, it is imperative that we, as holy, sanctified, born-again believers, catch the impact of knowing that the *“spirit is alive in us because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you” (Romans 8:10b-11).*

It is clear; Jesus Christ Himself authenticated the Bible. In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus said, *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to*

⁴ Charles Stanley, *How to Listen to God*, Thomas Nelson publisher, Nashville, 1985; page 13.

fulfill. For I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” Jesus lived by the Bible (Scripture); He quoted the Bible. He relied upon the Bible. It is the eternal Word of God. The Bible is the only authority that anybody can have to live for God. Christians should be aware when they question Scripture...or try to judge whether it was relevant or irrelevant. Scripture is Scripture, and Christians should be ready to defend the Word, not take issue with it.

Concerning His own Word, God said: *“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper [in the thing] whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).* This is absolute authority speaking. There are no conditions attached, no restrictions and no limitations. This statement indicates the sovereignty of the One who spoke the Word and the absolute perfection of the Word spoken – it needs nothing added to it or taken from it. To the Believer, the Holy Bible is the ‘Divinely Inspired’ Word of God; the ultimate standard of measurement for Christian conduct, Church order and doctrine. Of course we don’t worship the book called the Bible; nor do we worship Words of the Bible. We worship the one that spoke and gave approval for the word to be written and carried to man and the generations that have followed. Again, in His own Word, it is written: *“Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven. What a Word! What a Book! So few professing Christians realize what they have in their possession, in a Book called The Holy Bible. For thousands of years man has tried to probe its height, its depth, its breadth – still we’re only scratching the surface of its richness. So enduring is the Word of God, as contained in the pages of the bible that Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).⁵*

⁵ Bible Believers Organization, *God’s Word – The Final Authority*, <http://www.biblebelievers.org/thusbibl.htm>

The term “Sola Scriptura” or “Scripture (the Bible) alone” is a short phrase that represent the simple truth that there is only one special revelation from God that man possesses today, the written Scriptures or the Bible. Scripture states this concept repeatedly and emphatically. The very phrase “It is written” means exclusively transcribed, and not just hearsay. The command to believe what is written, for the Christian and non-Christian, means to believe only the pure word of God. What is at stake before the All Holy God is His incorruptible truth. To the Christian, this is imperative for a right relationship to God and His Son. To the Christian, there is no other means for entering the kingdom of heaven than to rely on God’s Word to be truth. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Faith is relative (pertinent) and required for salvation. If the Christian has a problem with authority of God’s Word, He will have a problem authenticating and justifying his salvation experience. How can the person trust one part of God’s word, if he does not believe it all? If God’s Word is used in a “cafeteria style” way (specific scriptures or passages chosen for personal or presuppositional use, but suppressing other scriptures because it does not fit his character/beliefs), then how can he know what passage is truth and what is not? This might satisfy the weak, foundationally insecure person who wants the salvation God offers. However, it would be difficult for the person to “know” whether he is saved or not with this type doctrine or immature thinking.

God’s Word is absolutely sufficient in itself. (Psalm 119:160), *“The sum of Thy word is truth, and every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting.”* The Biblical message breathed out by God is revelation in written form (2 Timothy 3:15-16). When the Lord Jesus Christ said, *“The Scripture cannot be broken”* (John 10:35), He was speaking of God’s written word. The events, actions, commandments, and truths from God are given to us in prepositional form (meaning logical, written sentences). God’s declaration in Scripture is that it and it alone, is this

final authority in matters of faith and morals. Therefore, there is only one written source from God, and there is only one basis of truth for the Lord's people in the church....for you and me, the Christian that has been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

When the Christian sees that the authority of God's Word is affirmed by Jesus Christ, it should be enough for him....a "convincing statement" by the one who died should be sufficient and without a doubt, an assurance to the Christian that what God has said, He means. The Lord Jesus Christ identified truth with the written Word. In His great high priestly prayer, He said, "*Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.*" This shows consistency with the declaration in the Old Testament in which the Holy Spirit continually proclaims that the revelation from God is truth. Psalm 119:142 states, "*thy law is truth.*" There is no source other than Scripture alone to which such a statement applies. **That source alone, the Holy Scripture, is the believer's standard of truth.**

In the New Testament, it is the written word of God and that alone to which the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles refer as the final authority. In the temptation, the Lord Jesus three times resisted Satan, saying "*It is written*" (example: Matthew 4:4, "*he answered and said, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*") This statement (it is written) by the Lord Jesus is the exact same statement that is used in the Bible forty six times. The repeated phrase underlines its importance. The Lord's total acceptance of the authority of the Old Testament is evident in His Word found in Matthew 5:17-18).

Although people often attempt to give human traditions higher authority than God's Word, Christians should take note that this was true of the Jews of Jesus' day. In refuting the errors of the Sadducees, the Scripture records the Lord saying, "*Ye do err, not knowing the*

Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). Christ Jesus continually castigated and rebuked the Pharisees because they made their traditions on a par with the Word of God. This corrupted the very basis of truth by equating their traditions with God’s Word. With that in mind, Jesus declared to the Pharisees in Mark 7:13 *“You are making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered; and many such things do ye.”* Since scripture alone is inspired, it alone is the ultimate authority and it alone is the final judge of tradition.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Peter declared, *“knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. For prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter 1:20-21).”* This declaration and inspired Word makes it very clear that in order to maintain the purity of God’s written word, the source of interpretation must be from the same pure source as the origin of the Scripture itself.

It is only with the Holy Spirit’s light that Scripture can be comprehended correctly. For Scripture can only be understood correctly in the light of Scripture, since standing alone, it is uncorrupted. It doesn’t have to be proved. It proves itself. The Holy Spirit causes those who are the Lord’s to understand Scripture (John 14:16-17, 26). Since the Spirit does this by Scripture, it is in accord with the principle that Scripture itself is the infallible rule of interpretation of its own truth. 1 John 5:6 bears this out, *“it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.”*

We know that much of the Old Testament was available to the early Christians. However, a substantial part of the New Testament was available, also. Under the inspiration of the Lord, the Apostle Paul commands his letters to be read in other churches besides those to which they were sent. This shows that the written word of God was being circulated even as the

Apostles lived. The Lord's command to believe what is written has always been something that the believers could obey and did obey. In this matter we must have the humility commanded in the Scripture not to think above what is written. 1 Corinthians 4:6 states, "...that ye might learn in use not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another."

Jesus himself looked to the authority of the Scriptures alone, as did His apostles after Him. They confirmed the very message of the Old Testament. "*The law of the LORD is perfect*" (Psalm 19:7). The believer, the Christian, the Child of God is to be true to the way of the Lord, holding alone to what is written.... "*Thy Word is truth.*"

For the Christian, no leading, no circumstance must limit his obedience to the Word of God. The authority of the Bible and of Jesus Christ is for all men and women, saved and lost; it is for individuals and for governments alike. Any "so called" leading which is contrary to the Bible is of Satan and of evil spirits; it is not of God. The Christian cannot follow any leading nor any premonition nor any feeling, if it goes against the Word of God, and be safe. Saved children of God must rely on the Bible. One might think that if he runs with infidels he will be able to do more good. Don't believe that....just take what God says: "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers*" (II Corinthians 6:14) and "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly*" (Psalm 1:1). You simply take what God said and let the Spirit of God reveal to you as to what is right and what is wrong. The Bible is the instruction book. Follow it and you will be able to put the puzzle together. The Christian should be quick to think and say to himself, "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*"

One of the things that Christians should remember is that we are going to be judged on the basis of the Word of God. *Even nations are going to be judged on the basis of whether they*

go by the Bible. Romans 13:1-7 tells us that “the powers that be are ordained of God” and that the ruler “is the minister of God to thee for good” and that “he beareth not the sword in vain.” According to Scripture the rulers have to give an account to God and be judged as God’s ministers.⁶

To be saved means that I take the Gospel...that “Christ died for our sins.” This means I take God’s moral plan—He is right and I am wrong, so there is a heart penitence and repentance from sin. This should give us the assurance of the Word of God that when I trust Jesus, I am born again and He saved me on the basis of the Word. There is no other plan for redemption. There is no other plan for man’s sin to be removed from him. There is no alternative plan. There is no other “back-up” plan in case this one does not work. God’s Word has made it clear; Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”* Jesus is the plan; Jesus is the door; the way in which we are saved and given the assurance that we are one of His own. This plan can be found in God’s Word. There is no other authoritative script that does what the Word of God can do. Just as there is one God....and there are no other legitimate gods, there are no other plans or scripts (by man or a god) in which we can be assured of accuracy, truth, and a salvation in which we can trust as a legal and binding contract.

Paul Martin Henebury, Professor at Tyndale Theological Seminary, states (quoted as a paraphrase from notes in class), “Bible believing Christians should believe in the Bible as the ultimate authority; For God’s Word is the ultimate authority when it comes to the Doctrine of Creation, Doctrine of Providence, and that which deals with the material and spiritual realm, etc. In fact, it is the ultimate authority in all that exists. However, convincing those that believe contrary to this belief (the Bible is the ultimate authority in life and death) is the problem for the

⁶ Ibid, *God’s Authority in the Home* (John R. Rice), page 25.

Christian Apologist. I stand on the fact that the Bible teaches absolute values and that God's mind has been revealed to those that have been born of the Spirit. Scripture says it to be so."

Every person has a basis of authority of which he/she thinks and acts. For the Christian this should be the Bible, claimed to be a book that is different from all others. The term scripture is used in the New Testament of the sacred books of the Old Testament which were regarded as inspired (2 Timothy 3:16; and Romans 3:2) and also of other parts of the New Testament (2 Peter 3:16). The phrase, "Word of God," is used in the New Testament of both Old and New Testaments in written form (Matthew 15:6; John 10:35; Hebrews 4:12). Each of these terms refers to the Book par excellence, the unique record of God's revelation to man. By some very obvious tests the Bible is a unique book. It was written over a period of 1,500 years by about 40 different authors, and yet it is one book without contradictions in what it says. And what it says is remarkable, for it speaks with equal ease and authority of the known and unknowable, of the pleasant and unpleasant, of man's accomplishments and failures, of the past and the future. Few books ever attempt such scope; none is completely accurate except the Bible.⁷

Since Almighty God never tells the Christian to do anything to contradict His Word, the better he knows it, the more readily he will identify His speaking voice. If the Christian is in the process of making a decision about a relationship, he needs to go to the Word of God and see what He says about relationships. If it's about finances, he needs to see what the Word of God says about finances. Whatever the need in the Christian life, some portion of Scripture can offer godly guidance. If what the Christian hears in prayer is not consistent with Scripture, then what he hears is not God; it's another voice—that of Satan and his host or that of the flesh. The Voice of God will never include any data or revelation that violate the principles of Scripture.

⁷ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, The Ryrie Study Bible, synopsis of Bible Doctrine, page 1955.

It is relevant and certainly necessary for the Christian who wants to be foundationally secure in his thinking and his fundamental principles in life to be submissive to the authority of God's Word. Being a servant of the most High God is certainly better than being submissive to man's laws and instructions as to how to live. It is a matter of choice for the Christian; believe in the Holy God or believe in "error prone" man.

"Though He (Jesus) had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, 'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 'He blinded their eyes, and He hardened their heart; lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them'" (John 12:37-40).

Oh, Lord God, may we hide your word in our hearts that we might not sin against you!

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