

A Passion for God's Word

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The Authority of God's Word

In order to experience the full impact of the Bible, you need to accept its authority over your life. Acknowledging the full authority of the Bible as God's Word to you is a watershed decision for you. From that point on, the Bible is no longer simply a book, but has the voice of God imprinted on its pages. It is no longer about other people; it is about you.

Once the authority of God's Word over your life is a settled issue, the study of the Bible changes from an academic exercise to a process of discovering God's thoughts – seeing the world, as it were, from his perspective.

This authority is embraced by you on two levels:

- Acknowledging the authority of God's Word
- Submitting to the process of God's Word

We'll take a look at both of these in detail.

Acknowledging the Authority of God's Word

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Acknowledging the authority of God's Word means accepting it "as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe." Knowing the origin of the words in the Bible is vitally important, for the identity of the author establishes the authority of his words.

Take as an example a child who sees her brother stealing a cookie from the cookie jar. She goes up to him and says, "Put that cookie back!" You can imagine her brother's reaction. Her words carry no authority and he can brush them off as being of no consequence to him. But suppose she runs and speaks with her father and the father tells her, "Go back and tell your brother that I said, 'Put the cookie back!'" Now it's a different story. Now when she speaks to her brother, she says, "Dad says, 'Put the cookie back!'" It is no longer the "words of the sister" she is bringing, but the "words of the father." Her brother disobeys now at his own peril.

In the same way, how we acknowledge the authorship of the Bible will reflect on its authority to challenge our thinking and behavior. If it is merely the words of men, then it is hardly of consequence to you, because your life is separated from the original authors by many centuries. If the Bible is solely human in its origins, then its words are historically distant, culturally distant and, by today's standards, philosophically distant.

But if you accept the Bible as the words of God, this puts the Bible in a whole different light. Its author hems you in "behind and before" (**Psalm 139:1-5**) and you must give an account of your life to him (**Hebrews 4:13**). The Bible thus carries the full weight of the authority of God himself.

Let's take a quick look at what the Bible says about its own authority:

The authority of the Old Testament

Read 2 Peter 1:20-21

Peter declares four things about Old Testament Scripture:

- It did not come about due to the prophet's "own interpretation."
- It did not have its origin in the will of man.
- Its writers spoke from God.
- Its writers were "carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Thus Peter establishes that Old Testament is God's Word, with its origins anchored in the will of God. Jesus also regarded the Old Testament to be, in its entirety, the Word of God. He quoted many times from the Old Testament Scripture (**Matthew 21:42**). He considered the Old Testament to be infallible (**John 10:35**) and regarded key Old Testament people and events as historic fact. He spoke of, among many others:

- Adam and Eve (**Matthew 19:4-5**)
- Abel (**Matthew 23:35**)
- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (**Matthew 8:11**)
- Moses (**Mark 12:26**)
- David (**Matthew 12:3-4**)
- Solomon (**Matthew 6:29; 12:42**)
- Daniel (**Matthew 24:15**)
- Jonah (**Matthew 12:39-41**)

Jesus also submitted to the authority of God's Word in his confrontation with Satan on the Mount of Temptation. He used the Scripture as his sole authority when countering the Devil's temptations.

Read Matthew 4:1-11

And as an interesting aside, there is even an Old Testament writer who refers to other portions of the Old Testament as Scripture.

Read Daniel 9:2

Just seventy years after Jeremiah had dictated his book to his secretary, Baruch, his words were already regarded as Scripture by Daniel.

The writers of the Old Testament themselves were very conscious that they were not speaking or writing their own words, but the words of God himself.

Read Exodus 4:11-12**Read 2 Samuel 23:2****Read Jeremiah 1:9**

And the New Testament writers held the Old Testament up as the perfect Word of God.

Read 2 Timothy 3:15-16

It was the Old Testament Scripture that Paul was referring to when he said that Timothy had known from infancy the holy Scriptures. These Scriptures, Paul says, are “God-breathed.” There is nothing stale about God’s breath. What he breathed life into for Paul and for Timothy, he continues to breathe life into for us today.

The authority of the New Testament

The writers of the New Testament were very conscious that they were writing under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit and under the full authority of the Lord Jesus himself.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

In the New Testament letters to the first century churches, Paul and others give explicit instructions on “how to live in order to please God,” and in this passage, Paul urges the Thessalonian Christians “to do this more and more.” But note the authority that Paul calls upon in giving these instructions.

- ☞ “Now we ask you and urge you *in the Lord Jesus...*”
- ☞ “For you know what instructions we gave you *by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*”
- ☞ “Therefore, he who rejects this instruction *does not reject man but God...*”

The New Testament Church did not view Paul’s words as simply the instructions of a church leader to his flock. His words were taken as the instructions of the Lord Jesus himself. In the same way as Peter had declared that “no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation” (**2 Peter 1:20**), so now the New Testament writings were also seen not to have “its origin in the will of man, but men [wrote] as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (**2 Peter 1:21**).

As Arthur Pink puts it:

“Paul and the other writers were conscious of the fact that they expressed the mind of Christ, under the guidance of his Spirit. Their letters are therefore full of teaching, imparted to the first readers by apostolic authority, which retains its validity to the present day, and have by divine providence been preserved for our instruction.”¹

For the first century church, the authority of both the apostolic letters and the gospel accounts was seen to be equal in authority to the Old Testament. Quotations from the Old Testament are seamlessly woven together with quotations from Jesus and from the apostles.

Read 1 Timothy 5:18

In one breath, Paul quotes both from the Old Testament (**Deuteronomy 25:4**) and from the words of Jesus (**Luke 10:7**) and refers to both as Scripture. Some New Testament writers also quote from other parts of the New Testament – for example, Jude (**Jude 17-18**) quotes from Peter (**2 Peter 3:3**), and Peter himself refers to “the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles” (**2 Peter 3:1-2**).

Read 2 Peter 3:15-16

Here Peter refers to Paul’s writings, classing them together with “the rest of Scripture.” His writings, together with the rest of the Bible – both the Old and New Testaments – are declared to be invested with the authority of God’s voice. Thus it was with the confidence declared by the Bible itself that we can truly call the Bible in its entirety “God’s Word.”

Read 1 Peter 1:10-12

Note how Peter equates the revelation of the Gospel found in the Old Testament (verses 10-11) with the Gospel preached by the apostles in the New Testament (verse 12) – that which has “now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by *the Holy Spirit*...”

The Word of God has authority because it is the pure expression of God’s thoughts, God’s requirements and God’s plans.

Read Psalm 12:6

Read Psalm 19:7

Psalm 119:160

And because God’s Word is pure, it also produces life in the heart of the one who is open to receive the Word. Because the author of the Word of God is called the author of life (**Acts 3:15**), the Word of God carries a life-generating authority.

Read John 6:63,68

Submitting to the Process of God's Word

Establishing the authority of God's Word is not merely an interesting theological exercise. It has a direct bearing on your life. This is because the Bible doesn't just demand your intellectual allegiance to its authority; it demands your obedience.

George Barna, in his book *The Second Coming of the Church*, states:

“Most Christians have plentiful exposure to God's truths and exhortations, but few have actually been pierced by the truth, principles, and meanings of the Christian faith.”²

The Bible is clear that it's not good enough just to give verbal assent to the authority of God's Word. You believe that the Bible is the Word of God? Excellent! So does the Devil. He quoted from it in the Garden of Eden (**Genesis 3:1**). He quoted from it on the Mount of Temptation (**Luke 4:9-11**). And he continues to quote from it in every “doctrine of demons” (**1 Timothy 4:1**, KJV) that he concocts, twisting the authority of God's Word to suit his own purposes.

The important thing to realize about your relationship with God's Word is that simply *acknowledging* the authority of the Bible is not enough. You must also *submit* to the process of God's Word.

Read James 1:21-25

In verse 22, we find James' famous admonition: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” Or as the New King James Bible puts it: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only...”

Note that if we acknowledge the authority of God's Word, but don't submit to that Word, we are engaging in a dangerous game of self-deception. The self-deception is this: that our lives are OK simply because we've been exposed to the Word of God, that this somehow makes us different from those who haven't heard. This is the subtle trap of empty religion – the subtle deception that just because I “belong” to the way of truth means that I am walking in the way of truth.

Read Romans 2:1,13,17-24

Here Paul speaks of Jews who regarded the covenant of law to be like an inoculation against God's judgment. No, Paul says – it is not the hearer of the law who is declared righteous, but the doer of the law. Although we, as Christians, are now no longer under the covenant of law, the same “hearing-doing” principle applies to us also.

Jesus also warns us against falling into the trap of verbal assent to the authority of God's Word without the follow-up of submission to that Word.

Read Luke 6:46-49

Verbally acknowledging the authority of Jesus' lordship means nothing if we don't obey him. In the same way, the proof of our acknowledgement of the Bible's authority is not in our words but in our actions. It is in the *doing*, not the *hearing*.

Your study of God's Bible can also follow either of those two routes. As a student of God's Word, you can either be a "studier" or a "student." A studier is someone who simply studies the Bible to get more information about it. A genuine student is one who desires to become like his teacher (**Luke 6:40**). Thus genuine Bible study is a transformation process, not simply an education process.

Read again James 1:21

Note that James challenges you to "humbly accept the word of God *implanted* in you..." This allowing of God's Word to take root in your heart is what real Bible study is all about. Wouldn't it be a shame to complete a Bible study course but not be qualitatively different at the end! No, if you have a sincere heart to follow Jesus, you cannot study his Word without being transformed in the process. Thus, submitting to this process of transformation through God's Word is a natural outworking of your acknowledgement of the authority of that Word.

The Meaning of Submission

The word "submission" is an often misunderstood word in Christian circles. In the original Greek, it literally has the meaning of "a [voluntary] coming under" someone else. Rather than being a forceful subjugation, it indicates a willingness to yield to another, to align your way of life with theirs. In the words of A.W. Tozer:

"We can hold a correct view of the truth only by daring to believe everything that God has said about Himself...Much of our difficulty as seeking Christians stems from our unwillingness to take God as He is and adjust our lives accordingly. We insist on trying to modify Him and to bring him nearer to our own image."³

Submitting to the authority of God's Word is a "coming under" the Word of God, yielding to its declaration of God's nature and its precepts for human life. As your thinking comes into line with the Bible, God's outlook becomes your outlook. His concerns become your concerns. His goals become your goals. In this way, your thinking is "submitted" to the authority the Word of God.

The moment you submit to God's Word you personalize it. Up to that point, the Bible is just a book and as much as you may say it is God's Word, there is a distance between you and that Word. But when you yield to its precepts, you immediately embrace it and call it your own. It is no longer just "God's Word" as a concept; it is God's Word to you.

The Absolute Standard

Read 2 Corinthians 10:12

We live in a world of relative values and subjective morality. We compare ourselves with one another and establish a pecking order of wealth, beauty and goodness. We even try to do this with God. One of the most common excuses people give to why they don't need Jesus is: "I'm just as good as the next person."

But even as Christians, we can get caught in the same trap. A legalistic Christian (one who is caught in the trap of self-effort) is a Christian who compares himself with others. But we need to understand that there is only one measuring rod against which God measures us – his own glory and goodness (read **Romans 3:23**). This is the kind of comparison that the Bible makes – not a comparison between you and others, but a comparison between you and God (see **Isaiah 64:6**).

Read Matthew 24:35

Read 1 Peter 1:23-25

There is an "eternal" and "enduring" quality to God's Word. It is eternally relevant and eternally authoritative.

The Bible is a measuring line that compares our righteousness with the righteousness of God. In a world of subjective values, the Bible remains an eternal yardstick, defining your life from God's perspective, acting as an absolute reference point which brings your life into accountability before God. This is not comfortable, but it is vital.

Like Pontius Pilate, many today ask "What is truth?" (**John 18:38**). Many claim that truth is only relative to a person's culture and personal circumstances. Yet the Bible declares that there is such a thing as absolute truth.

Read John 16:13

If there is no absolute truth, then how can it be distorted (**Acts 20:30**) or rejected

Moral Subjectivism

Moral Subjectivism is the philosophical outlook which holds that all morality is subjective and relative to a person's history, culture and personal standards of truth. According to this philosophy, there is no absolute truth or absolute morality. There is only comparative morality based on individual moral values.

Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli call moral subjectivism "an extremely popular and destructive philosophy." This philosophy is reflected in many popular cliches, such as "don't be judgmental," "don't impose your values on me," "different strokes for different folks" and "alternative lifestyles." They write:

"One of the reasons our culture finds moral subjectivism so congenial is that we have been conditioned to talk about moral *values* instead of moral *laws*. The very word law suggests something objective...The word *values*...suggests something subjective, something relative to a subject: "*my values*" or "*your values*" or "*our values*" or "*Society's values*" ...The choice of words makes a real difference – Moses did not receive the Ten Values from God on Mount Sinai."

Extracted from Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli's *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois.

(**Romans 2:8**)? In fact, the Bible says that the judgment of God comes against those who have “suppressed the truth” (**Romans 1:18**) and “refused to love the truth and so be saved” (**2 Thessalonians 2:10-12**). But then, without absolute truth, there can be no sin or judgment, repentance or salvation.

George Barna makes this observation:

“Without an objective standard of right and wrong, laws and regulations become recommendations rather than mandates. Rights are nothing more than sets of competing preferences. There can be no such thing as deception, only different vantage points...Without absolute moral truth, there can be no right and wrong. Without right and wrong, there is no such thing as sin. Without sin, there can be no such thing as judgment and no such thing as condemnation. If there is no condemnation, there is no need for a Savior. This progression renders the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ historically unique – and eternally meaningless.”⁴

Once we recognize the authority of the Bible, however, we are able to declare to God, as Jesus did: “Your word is truth” (**John 17:17**). Only then can Jesus’ statement come true: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (**John 8:32**).

Exercising the Authority of God’s Word

Read Luke 7:2-8

This Roman centurion knew that to have authority, you must be under authority. When you come under the authority of God’s Word, you receive the right to exercise the authority of that Word. Jesus was submitted to the authority of God’s Word, and when he was tempted, he used the authority of God’s Word against Satan.

The Word of God is described as being like a sharp sword (**Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12**). When we have submitted our lives to the authority of the Bible, we can say, like Isaiah: “He made *my mouth* like a sharpened sword...” (**Isaiah 49:2**). When your heart and mind are aligned with the truth of God’s Word, your words take on the authority of God’s Word.

Read John 15:7

The Online Bible College can be accessed at www.online-bible-college.com

¹ Arthur W. Pink, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976), p. 65.

² George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p.121.

³ *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from Compton’s Interactive Bible NIV.

⁴ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p.62.