

“THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURES.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Sermon Texts: Psalm 12:6; II Timothy 3:14-17; I Corinthians 2:13-14

Introduction to Authority.

What is authority? Authority is the right or power to command, tell, direct, guide, decide or control.

Where does authority come from? Authority comes from a higher authority. Someone in authority or with authority gives it to someone beneath or below them.

There are degrees of authority. There is the authority of governments, military and police. During the Boston Marathon bombing there were multiply levels of authority all working together, local police, state police, FBI and ATF.

There is authority by way of experience or education, some people are known experts or authorities on something. There are principals and teachers, elders and pastors, and parents. A mother can give authority to a ten year old to watch after a five year old in the backyard.

There can only be one absolute, ultimate and final authority and whoever that is, is God. There is no higher authority than God. He made the universe and everything in it and He has absolute authority over it all. He has complete power to decide, direct, command and control.

The Holy Scripture has absolute, ultimate and final authority because it's from God, it's the very Word of God.

It's our only rule of faith and practice [life] and it alone regulates, founds and establishes our faith. “We believe without a doubt all things contained in them [the canonical books]” (Belgic Confession, Article 5).

How do we come to know that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God?

The Belgic Confession begins by telling us how we don't come to believe the Bible is true. It says it's not “because the church receives and approves them as such.” This is a specific historical reference to a serious debate that took place at the time of the Reformation between the protestant reformers and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church claimed that the Scriptures got their authority from the church. That placed the church (meaning men) over the Scriptures as its authority. But the reformers rejected this false doctrine. The church cannot give the Bible authority, the church can only recognize the authority it already has. The church is:

Ephesians 2:19-20 ... the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

The church is founded on the writings of the prophets and apostles. The church doesn't approve the Scriptures but rather receives and believes them.

I Thessalonians 1:6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you *received the word* in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

I 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 back to our original question. How do we come to know that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God?

The Belgic Confession identifies two sources for our knowing, from the Holy Spirit and from itself (self-attestation). I am going to take these in reverse order.

The Bible claims to be the Word of God.

This is called self-attestation or self-authentication. The Bible proves itself to be from God. The Bible bears witness to itself that it is true and has absolute authority.

You cannot prove the Bible is authoritative by some other higher authority. If we try to use reason or logic or historical or scientific evidence or the voice of the church, then the Bible would not be our highest authority, that other thing would be over the Bible.

Some people claim that this is a circular argument, when we believe the Bible is true because it says it's true.

And this is true, but it's always true when you are talking about ultimate authority. You are left having to appeal to that authority since there is no higher authority that can be appealed to.

The Bible makes many claims to authority and those claims are persuasive. The ultimate truthfulness of the Bible commends itself to the reasonable mind.

The Bible claims it's the very words of God. It says over and over, "The Lord says" and "It is written..." When the prophets speak they say, "Thus says the Lord."

"All Scripture is breathed out by God" (II Timothy 3:16). "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:21). "The things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Paul refers to Jesus' words as Scripture (Luke 10:7).

Peter refers to Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:16).

As the Belgic Confession concludes, fulfilled prophecy alone should be enough to prove it to us. Even the blind can see this. And we could go on and on with many more arguments and proofs that the Bible is uniquely the authoritative Word of God.

Consider that the Bible consists of 66 different books of all kinds, history, poetry, prophecy, letters and revelations; written by 40 different authors from all different cultures, backgrounds,

and education; from a variety of occupations including kings, peasants, doctors, fishermen, tax collectors, scholars; written in different locations: wilderness, dungeon, palace, prison, in exile, at home; written in different times: war, peace, poverty, prosperity, freedom and slavery; and written in different moods: from the heights of joy to the depths of despair; written on three continents in three different languages over a period of 1600 years and given all of that difference and variety there is absolute harmonious agreement, consistency and unity on a widely diverse range of subjects and doctrines.

I ask you, how do you explain that? Are you persuaded?

Then add to that the archeological collaboration, the miraculous preservation, the worldwide reception and the powerful transformation of lives, communities, nations where the Word has been preached. Finally consider the clarity and simplicity of its message, the beauty and majesty of its subject and the purity of its truth as it reflects the glory of God in all its parts.

I ask you, how do you explain that? Are you persuaded?

After having said all that and having made the case as best as I can, I have to say that is not enough. Everything I have said so far is secondary proof at best. The doubter will not be convinced by arguments or proofs. Here is how the Westminster Confession of Faith put the issue.

Westminster I. 4. 5. "We may be influenced by the testimony of the church to value the Bible highly and reverently, and Scripture itself shows in so many ways that it is God's word; for example, in its spiritual subject matter, in the effectiveness of its teaching, the majesty of its style, the agreement of all its parts, its unified aim from beginning to end (to give all glory to God), the full revelation it makes of the only way of man's salvation, its many other incomparably outstanding features, and its complete perfection. However, we are completely persuaded and assured of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Bible only by the inward working of the Holy Spirit, Who testifies by and with the word in our hearts."

We are ultimately convinced of the Bibles claim only by the Holy Spirit.

There is no Word apart from the Spirit. And there is no message from the Spirit apart from the Word. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the Word He inspired.

The Holy Spirit testifies to the heart of the believer that the Scripture is the very Word of God. The testimony of the Holy Spirit is more excellent than all of human reason.

I Corinthians 2:13-14 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

John 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

John 14:26. "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

II Corinthians 4:6 For God ... has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

I John 2:20. "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth."

If you know in your heart of hearts that this book truly is the Word of God and believe it to have the very authority of God Himself, then that is pure evidence that the hand of the living God is upon you and the Spirit of the living God is in you. It's that real and that personal.

God has spoken to you and given you ears to hear and eyes to see. You have been given an incomparable gift and a precious treasure.

Calvin I. 7. 4. "*...the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason.* For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded."

Even the blind see. The Perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture.

The Belgic Confession adds a statement about the clarity of the Scriptures, saying that even the blind can see what Scripture teaches. This is sometimes called the perspicuity or clarity of the Scriptures.

This doesn't mean that every part is equally clear, but that the essential message and content of the Gospel is clear enough to be understood. God loves His people and He wants to communicate in a way that we can understand.

Biblical Christianity is not an esoteric mystery religion. It's not vague and hidden. It's truths and meanings are not limited to a certain priestly class or to remote gurus. It's plainly and clearly revealed, in fact so much so that it is offensive to the unspiritual.

The Reformers taught that for anyone who can read, the gospel is clear enough to understand for their salvation. This is the truth that drives the work of the Gideons. They place Bibles everywhere they can believing that even people who have never been in a church, or without a single person explaining to them what the text means, can come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit works through the Word to convert that person.

Application and Conclusion.

Liberal Theology basically denies the authority of Scripture.

Eve was the first theological liberal, she added to God's Word and changed it. Liberal theology begins when man's opinions take the place of God's truth. They look to the thoughts, impressions, judgments, theories and speculations of history and science and culture. They

elevate the authority of individual reason and experience and do not treat the Bible as totally trustworthy or as having absolute authority.

Liberalism has been undermining believers confidence in that trustworthiness and authority of the Word of God since the turn of the twentieth century. Entire denominations have been destroyed. And it continues to this day.

Many Christian colleges and seminaries are increasingly questioning and undermining the authority of Scripture and this includes my alma mater, Wheaton College, and Calvin College and Calvin Seminary. You see it in *The Banner* in nearly every issue.

The editorial in the March issue by the editor Bob DeMoor is titled, "Don't Be So Sure." He casts doubts about what is true, he wants us to be open to many interpretations. He undercuts the faith of God's people in God's revelation. He suggests that we can't possibly understand the great truths of Scripture and we need to leave them in the realm of mystery.

Many articles in *The Banner* seek to cloud and confuse rather than clarify from Scripture. The January issue has an attack on creation and on whether Adam was real or not. We will take that up later, but I mention it now only to point out how many articles subtly undermine God's people's confidence in God's Word.

Notice how many article use mystery or uncertainly, or agreeing to disagree, or just referring to opposing and contradicting views as different interpretations.

Where is our rock, where is our foundation, where is our anchor, here is our standard? If parts of the Bible are not reliable, then how do we know which parts are? What about the resurrection? What about assurance?

Orthodox Reformed Theology teaches affirms the authority of Scripture.

We accept the Scriptures as our only and final authority for our faith and life and practice. We trust the Bible over all modern authorities, over science, over modern opinions and speculation. We submit all our thoughts and words and actions to the Word of God.

God cannot lie or speak falsely so what He says in Scripture is completely truthful. All the words of Scripture are completely true and without error, it is inerrant and infallible. It is pure as the psalmists says (Psalm 12:6).

There are no errors or contradictions in the Bible. There will never be some fact discovered someday that contradicts or proves to be false something in the Bible.

We must also hold to the absolute authority of the Bible because there are hard days coming and we are going to need an anchor in the storm. We must leave our children and grandchildren something sure and solid.

As John Calvin said so clearly on II Timothy 3:16, "We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God."

John 14:15, 21, 23-24. "If you love me, you will obey what I command."... "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my

Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."..."Jesus replied, 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.'"

Jesus Christ is Lord of the Scriptures. His rules, laws and proclamations carry His personal authority. Our loyalty and faithfulness to Him can be measured by our obedience and our obedience should be a glad obedience marked by delight in God's truth.

Cultivate a hunger and thirst for God's Word. It's your life, your health, your joy. Embrace it, love it, let it be your passion and zeal.