

Addendum to Lesson 2 - Ascertaining Biblical Authority
Taken from "You Can Understand The Bible" by Thomas Warren

1. No question is more important than the question of authority. Everything which men do is either by authority of God or by the authority of men. The question Jesus poses in **Matthew 21:23-27** makes this clear.
 - 1.1. The passage explains that Jesus is teaching in the temple at Jerusalem, and the Jewish chief priests and elders ask him, "(23) By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" Now notice Jesus' reply recorded in verse 25. Notice carefully that He specifies two sources of authority, God and man: "(25) The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?"
 - 1.2. No question is, or can be, of greater importance than the question of religious authority. All legitimate authority is traceable to God. All such authority inherently resides in God, by virtue of the fact that he is the Creator of all that exists, other than Himself. Since the Bible is the word of God, what the Bible teaches is authoritative as if God Himself were to speak from heaven in an audible voice. The "chain of authority" goes from God (the Father) to Jesus Christ (the Son) to the Holy Spirit, to the apostles and prophets and finally to the sacred Scriptures, the Bible (**Eph 3:5; 2 Ti 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 John 9-11; 1 Cor 4:6; John 10:35**). Therefore, Christianity is the religion of Biblical authority. In fact, whatever one does, if he is to have God's approval, must be authorized by Bible teaching.
 - 1.3. In regard to the matter of Biblical authority, the four propositions below are critical:
 - 1.3.1. Either subjectivism is the correct approach in seeking the truth, or objectivism is the correct approach.
 - 1.3.2. Either there is some objective standard, to which all men have obligation, or there is no such objective standard.
 - 1.3.3. Either men can know the objective standard (both that is and what it is), or men cannot know the objective standard.
 - 1.3.4. Either the Bible is that objective standard or it is not.
 - 1.4. To say that one operates from the objectivistic point of view is to say that he holds truth is absolute. To say that truth is absolute is to say that it is not dependent on the subjective condition of the knower. It is to say that truth has objective stability and independence outside of the knower. It is to say that when an individual human being comes to the knowledge of a certain truth, this does not change that truth in any way.
 - 1.5. On the other hand, to say that one operates from a subjectivistic point of view is to say that he claims that the truth of some proposition depends on the mental state of the knowing subject. Obviously, the subjective view should be rejected by every responsible human being. The truth is objective and absolute.
 - 1.6. The Bible was written over a period of several centuries, with the last words of it being penned near the end of the first century. We sometimes hear such views as the following set out: "The Bible teaches doctrine X to man A, and it teaches doctrine non-X (the contradictory of doctrine X) to man B, and both man A and man B hold views that are true. Doctrine X is true for man A, and doctrine non-X is true for man B. I brand such statements as utterly false.
 - 1.7. The Bible teaches now just exactly what it taught when it was completed in its writing, approximately nineteen hundred years ago. The fact that you and I have drawn conclusions about what it teaches does not change one "iota" of what it teaches.
2. Either there is an Objective Standard or there is not.
 - 2.1. Either there is some objective standard to which all men have obligation, or there is no objective standard.
 - 2.2. The truth is that man must have some objective standard to which he can refer in order to obtain the correct answer given by anyone to any religious questions is a true and acceptable answer! This is self-contradictory and therefore false.
 - 2.3. If any sense is to be made of human existence, there must exist an objective standard. There must exist that to which men can refer in order to ascertain the correct answers, not merely answers, to the most important questions that men can ask, those that pertain to their spiritual welfare.
 - 2.4. The Bible is the word of a being that can and does do what he claims he will do. And, further, the Bible does claim that it can be understood by men (**Is 55:11; 2 Ti 2:15; 3:16-17**). So it follows that there is an objective standard, and it can be known by man. The truth, God's word, is both absolute and attainable (**John 8:32**).
3. What is THE Standard?
 - 3.1. Feelings?
 - 3.1.1. Some people use their own feelings as a standard. Some people answer such questions as, "Why are you convinced that you are saved?" by saying, "Because I feel it right here" (while they point to their fleshly heart).
 - 3.1.2. The Bible makes clear that "there is a way that seemeth right to man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (**Prov. 16:25**). It is clear that it is possible to feel entirely satisfied about one's spiritual condition and yet be lost (**Matt. 7:21-23**). Thus, it is the case that feelings simply are not the true standard by which to judge one's life. If in a given case, a person who feels that he is right with God may either be right with God or wrong with God. Right feelings must come from one's having (Knowing) the truth and obeying that truth.
 - 3.1.3. Thus, it should be clear that merely "feeling good" about one's total situation does not at all constitute proof that one is pleasing to God. See **Acts 8:26-40**.

3.2. Dreams or Visions?

3.2.1. When asked why they are convinced that they are Christians, some people give such answers as the following. "Several years ago I awakened in the middle of the night and saw an angel standing in the doorway of my bedroom, and the angel spoke to me and said, 'You are a child of God.'"

3.2.2. In **Galatians 1:6-9** Paul makes clear that even if an angel were to preach any doctrine other than what Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit had preached, that angel would be anathema.

3.3. Formal Creeds?

3.3.1. Some people believe that formal creeds are the standard. Many religious groups publish books setting out the official positions of the respective group on various religious questions. For some people, these creedal statements constitute the objective authoritative standard. Such people regard these creedal statements regarded as the revelation of God.

3.3.2. **Galatians 1:6-9** makes it clear that such a view is a false one. Every person would do himself or herself a great favor by studying fervently and prayerfully **Galatians 1:6-9** and many other passages which set forth the same basic message.

3.4. Conscience?

3.4.1. Some people regard their own consciences as the true objective standard. The conscience is that God-given faculty within each individual which urges him to act in harmony with that which he believes to be right. There are no occasions in which it is right for one ever to violate his own conscience.

3.4.2. Paul said, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (**Rom. 14:23**) This means that whatever we cannot do with the conviction that it is acceptable to God, is sinful for us to do. This is the case even if the action itself is right. Conscience does not tell us what the truth is.

3.4.3. One must learn the truth from God's revelation to man. In the case of Saul of Tarsus, the Bible makes clear that one can live "in all good conscience" and yet be "the chief of sinners" while so doing (**Acts 23:1; 1 Ti 1:15**). Conscience is not the true objective standard.

3.4.4. Conscience is the God-given conviction (to each person) that he should do what he is convinced is the right thing to do!

3.5. Common Sense??

3.5.1. Some people believe that common sense is the objective standard. They hold that one can just figure out by rational thought alone what to do, without any revelation from God. But this simply is not the case.

3.5.2. The prophet Jeremiah makes it clear that "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (**Jer. 10:23**). The writer of Proverbs makes it clear that men are not to lean on their own understanding, but are to trust in the Lord with all their hearts (**Prov. 3:5-6**).

3.5.3. We trust in the Lord by trusting in the revelation that he has given to man (**Jas 2:24-26; Gal. 5:6; John 14:15**).

3.5.4. We study the evidence in God's revelation and reason about it correctly, drawing only such conclusions as are warranted by the teaching of the Bible (**Is 1:18; 1 Thes. 5:21**). Merely reasoning is not sufficient to become the recipient of God's approval. To be sure one must reason correctly. But if he does not reason about Biblical statements that are relevant to a given problem, he may draw a false conclusion.

3.6. The Bible

3.6.1. There is a chain of authority from God (the Father) to Jesus Christ (the Son) to the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets and, finally to the sacred Scriptures, the Bible (**1 Cor 15:27; Mt 28:18; John 16:13; Eph 3:5; 2 Ti 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 John 9-11; 1 Cor 4:6; John 10:35**). Therefore, Christianity is the religion of Biblical authority.

3.6.2. Authority inherently resides in God. This is the case because God is the creator of the world and of man (**Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3**). It is God who, by virtue of the fact that He is the Creator, and is infinite in all attributes, stipulates conditions with which sinners must comply in order to be saved and to remain saved (**Deut. 11:26-28**).

3.6.3. With the exception of the Father, Christ is the highest authority. This truth is made clear in **Matt. 28:18-20** with **1 Cor 15:27**. It is He, Jesus Christ, whom men are to hear (**Deut. 18:15; Matt. 17:5; Acts 3:22-23**).

3.6.4. In turn, Christ has delegated authority to His apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. This was in accordance with Christ's promise to His apostles (**John 14:26; 16:13; Matt. 18:18; Acts 1:5-8**).

3.6.5. Through the laying on of the apostles' hands, disciples received the miraculous gift of prophecy, a gift of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 6:6, 8; 8:14-18; 1 Cor. 12:4-11**). These apostles, along with prophets, have revealed the will of God to man (**Eph 3:5; 2 Pet 1:19-21**).

3.7. And so, the Scriptures are authoritative because they are God's word. The Holy Spirit so guided the writing of the Scriptures that the very words of the Bible are just as much the words of God as if God Himself were to speak in an audible voice.

4. Inspiration

4.1. Every word of the original manuscripts is one that came as the result of the miraculous gift of prophecy. The inspiration of the New Testament as well as the Old was accomplished by means of the gift of prophecy (**1 Cor 12, 13, 14; 2 Pet 1:20-21; Eph 3:5**). No one living today has the gift of prophecy. Therefore, no one can write Scripture. (Although both the Old Testament and the New Testament are inspired, as to a specific law in force, men today live under the new covenant: **Heb. 9:15-17; Gal. 4:21-31; Heb. 10:9**).

- 4.1.1. It is clear, therefore, that the Bible claims to be the true objective standard. That is, the Bible claims to be the source of right answers to religious questions. The conditions with which sinners must comply in order to be saved are the conditions that the Bible sets forth (**2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 12:48**).
- 4.1.2. No one can be saved who does not comply with the conditions set forth therein (**2 Thes. 1:7-9; Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15-16**).
- 4.1.3. All who practice what is not authorized by the Bible sin in so doing (**Lev. 10:1-2**).
- 4.2. The Very Words are Inspired
 - 4.2.1. To say that the Bible (the totality of the original manuscripts) is inspired is to say that its very words are the utterances of God. There is absolutely no middle ground between inspiration and non-inspiration. If a writing is inspired, then it is of God. It is divine. If the writing is not inspired, then it is not of God. It is of human origin. It is absurd on the very face of it for anyone to refuse to face up to this clear alternative.
 - 4.2.2. The Bible is God speaking to man. That the words of the Bible claim to be the words of God is seen from such passages as the following: **Heb. 1:1; 2:3, 4; Luke 1:70; Acts 3:19-21; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Matt 5:17-18; John 10:35**. Further, inspiration applies to the very words of the Bible: **Jer 1:9; John 17:8; 2 Pet 1:21; Ex 20:1; Is 1:10; Eze 2:7; Ex 4:12, 15; Deut 18:18-20**. (Each reader is urged to study these passages of the Bible.)
- 4.3. Not Human "Inspiration"
 - 4.3.1. When I affirm that the Bible is the inspired word of God, I am not referring to the so-called "natural revelation"; that is, I am not affirming that the Bible was written by men who were "inspired" in the same sense that they were merely men of literary genius. If such is all that is meant by "inspired," then the Bible is nothing more than a human document, and it cannot rightly be regarded as the authoritative, inerrant will of God.
 - 4.3.2. It is clear that the writers of the Bible claim to be speaking the words of the external God. Note such passages as: **Jer 1:5-10; Is 8:11; Ex 4:10-12; 2 Sam 23:1-2; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Ti 3:16**. Jesus and the New Testament writers used Old Testament writings as the very word of God.
- 4.4. Not Just Parts are Inspired
 - 4.4.1. When we make the claim that the Bible is inspired, we do not mean to say that only parts of it are inspired. Rather, we mean to say that all of it is inspired, completely and entirely, in every part of it. Every part of the Bible is inspired and equally inspired.
 - 4.4.2. This claim is clearly substantiated by a number of passages to which I have already referred. In claiming that the Bible is inspired I am not claiming that God inspired merely the thought and allowed the various writers to put these thoughts into their own words merely as they might remember them (thus being liable to human error). According to such a theory the actual words of the Bible are not inspired.
 - 4.4.3. We reject this view, because it entails the view that the infallible God has entrusted His infallible truths to fallible men who were authorized to write it as they thought best. This view would mean that men wrote the Bible without the guiding power of the Holy Spirit.
- 4.5. Not Just "Contains" the Word of God
 - 4.5.1. When I say the Bible is the inspired word of God, I do not mean to say that it merely "contains" the word of God. There are those who claim that the so-called "fundamental truths" are inspired but that the arguments and explanations, numbers and historical facts are of human origin and are therefore liable to error.
- 4.6. Guaranteed Inerrancy of Every Word
 - 4.6.1. When I say that the Bible is inspired, I mean that the Holy Spirit guaranteed each writer from writing error in the Bible. Error of any sort! When we claim the Bible is inspired, we are affirming that the inspiration is full, complete, entire, that it extends to every word of every part of the Bible (**2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21**).
 - 4.6.2. To say that the Bible is inspired means that the inspiration pertains to words, as well as to book. To say that it pertains to words is also to say that it pertains to letters (the elements of words). Verbal inspiration is the work of God so directing men, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the choices which they make of the subject matter and words, that their writings are exactly what God desired and all that He desired them to contain. This means that every word in the Bible is just exactly what God wanted. There were no words left out of it that should have been there, and that there are no words in it that should not have been there.

Conclusion

To reject Biblical authority is to reject Christianity. To reject Christianity is to reject Jesus Christ. To reject Jesus Christ is to reject the only way of salvation that is available to man. The Bible, being the inspired and objective word of the one true and living God, is the authoritative word of God. Whatever any man does during his sojourn here on the earth must be that which the Bible authorized. May it be the case that no one will regard this truth lightly, thereby falling into sin. No man who denies the inspiration, the all-sufficiency, the inerrancy, and the authority of the Bible can be regarded rightly as a faithful servant of God.