

The Bible: God's Redemptive Words

Lesson 3: God's Word Authenticates Itself

Intro

- Thus far we have examined God's General Revelation that he has placed within the hearts of all humanity and to which His creation attests.
- This revelation shows that He is the Ruler, Creator and Law-giver of the universe, as well as the fact that humanity is sinful and needs forgiveness for their rebellion against him.
- But this General Revelation does not reveal God's plan to accomplish this forgiveness through Christ's work as our Redeemer. This, God has reserved for His the special revelation in His Word.
- How then do we know that this special revelation is true and authoritative?

Scripture provides and witnesses to its own authority

- If the truth of God's revelation is not the foundation on which our arguments and belief rest, on what do we base it? If we cannot base our belief in Christianity's truth on Scripture, but first have to prove Scripture's worthiness, where do we begin?
- Where else *could* we begin? What piece of evidence in the entire universe has more authority than the voice of the Lord? Unbelieving historians'? Anti - Christian philosophers? Scientists?
- If we begin our argument for Christianity's truth on the beliefs of non – Christians, we are saying that their opinions are more authoritative than God's own claims about Himself.
- The moment we say that God truthfulness must be *first* be corroborated by human historians, human philosophers, or human scientists we have just made those disciplines an authority to which God must bow His knee.
- We can and must believe in God **because of what He has said about Himself**. Historical evidence, and philosophical arguments *help point us* to Him, but they can never be the *basis* for our belief in Him.
- Since there are none greater than God, He swears by His own name. We see this claim attested to in the following verses of scripture:

Heb 6:13-19

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

II Tim 3:16

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

- God expects that His own Word needs no help from man in order to make it authoritative.
- Another crucial point is that we see people convinced of Christianity's truth NOT from external evidence but because **they know God as a person**, and thus His words are guaranteed to be true.

2 Tim 1:11-12

¹¹ And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. ¹² That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, **because I know whom** I have believed, and am convinced that **he** is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

Psalm 76:1

In Judah God is *known*; his name is great in Israel.

- The relationship we have with God is through Faith, yet that faith is certain knowledge, not weak opinion.

Heb 11:1-3

Now faith is being *sure* of what we hope for and *certain* of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

The Witness of the Church

- This belief is not only attested to in Scripture, but has been the official position of Protestants since the Reformation and the position of the Church since the beginning.

Westminster Larger Catechism Question # 4

Q: How does it appear that the scriptures are the word of God?

A: The *scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God* by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God; by their light and power to convince sinners, to comfort and build up believers to salvation: *but the Spirit of God, bearing witness by and with the scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very word of God.*

The Westminster Confession (1647)

1.4 The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or Church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God. **1.5** We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the holy Scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

1.10. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

Belgic Confession (1561) Article 5 - From whence the Holy Scriptures derive their dignity and authority:

We receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith. And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them-- not so much because the church receives and approves them as such but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God. For even the blind themselves are able to see that the things predicted in them do happen.

Second Helvetic Confession (1566)

1.1 Canonical Scripture: We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and *to have sufficient authority of themselves*, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either added to or taken from the same.

- This is also the position of **John Calvin**.

Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, *and that Scripture is indeed self-authenticated; hence it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning.* And the certainty it deserves with us it attains by the testimony of the Spirit....Therefore, illumined by His power we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God Himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. *We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon*

*which our judgment may lean; but we subject our judgment and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork!*¹

- Thus, we can see that the testimony of Scripture and our theologians is unified: the Bible does not need any outside proof in order to be trusted as the Word of God. It gets its authority from itself and from the testimony of the Spirit.
- Now this does *not* mean that no evidence exists in proving Scripture's truth; it simply means that to say Scripture *needs* proof, is blasphemy. Again **Calvin** says:

True, if we wished to proceed by arguments we might advance many things that would easily prove, if there is a god in heaven, that the law, the prophets and the gospel come from Him.... *Yet those who try to build up firm faith in Scripture through disputation are doing things backwards....* But even if anyone clears God's Sacred Word from man's evil speaking, he will not at once imprint upon their hearts that certainty which piety requires. Since for unbelieving men, religion seems to stand by opinion alone, they, in order not to believe anything foolishly or lightly, both wish and demand rational proof that Moses and the prophets spoke divinely. But I reply, 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.²

- **Benedict Pictet**, (1655-1724) a Reformed theologian a couple generations after Calvin perfectly explained the balance between faith and reason,

In fact, reason and faith, though of a different nature, are not opposed to each other. Hence we maintain that we must not admit anything, even in religious matters, which is contrary to right reason... but what we maintain is that reason cannot and ought not to bring forth any mysteries, as it were, from its own storehouse; for this is the prerogative of Scripture only. Also, that reason is not to be heard when complaining of its incapacity to comprehend the mysteries of faith: for, being finite, it is no wonder that reason should not comprehend many things that relate to what is infinite; and to reject a mystery because it is incomprehensible to reason, is to offend against reason itself.³

- Anglican missionary **Lesslie Newbigin** (1909-1998) has recently shown how foolish it is to reject this foundation for God's reliability:

What are we to make of this demand for a proof of the existence of God that assumes that there are grounds more trustworthy than those given in God's own self-revelation? If God really exists, is there not something ridiculous about one of

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, vols. XX-XXI, ed. J.T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 1.7.5.

² Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

³ Benedict Pictet, *Christian Theology*, trans. Frederick Reyroux (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1834), 54.

God's creatures taking a stance that in effect says to God: "I can demonstrate your existence without relying on what you tell me about yourself." If it is really the case that God is the author of all being, including our own, then all claims to knowledge starting from elsewhere must end in confusion. The search for an authority prior to, and more basic than, the authority of God's self-revelation must end in failure.⁴

- So this is not anti-intellectual "It's true because I feel it" sentimentalism. Instead, this is humanity recognizing that there is nothing higher than God's own authority and so He, in all His glorious holiness, is what *makes* His Word true and authoritative.

⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth and Authority in Modernity* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 9-10.