

## Introduction

But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. As a result, other Jewish Christians followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. When I saw that they were not following the truth of the gospel message, I said to Peter in front of all the others, "Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you now trying to make these Gentiles follow the Jewish traditions? (Gal 2: 11-14).

- **We all \_\_\_\_\_ on authority, whether it involves a parent or spouse, teacher or employer, friend or government.**
- **God's authority is \_\_\_\_\_, yet God also gives us Scripture, minds, and other means for godly living and discernment.**

## What Is Authority?

**Authority pertains to :**

- **God ultimately is the source of all authority, though in practice ...**

(Matt 7:29; Mark 1:27). (Matt 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1; d. Acts 1-2).

## Historical Developments in Religious Authority

### Ancient Church

Emperor Constantine (280-337 C.E.)

Church Councils

### **Nicene Creed**

*We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.*

*And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

### **Arian controversy**

In 1056, the Western and Eastern Christian churches officially split to form what we today call the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

### **Medieval Church**

Religious authority primarily came \_\_\_\_\_,

*deposit of faith* (John 16:13). It was passed from the apostles to the succession of bishops, who had the responsibility of safeguarding and defining the body of teaching and commands entrusted to them by Jesus and preserved through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is considered to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, but its origin and continuation must be understood within the context of the church. So the authority of Scripture does not supersede that of the church and its historic traditions. Instead, it stands in *mutual authority* along with that of the church.

## **Protestant Reformation**

**Martin Luther** (1483-1546)

*sola scriptura*

(Rom 3:21-30; Eph 2:8-9).

**John Calvin** (1509-1564).

## **Anglican Church**

"middle way" (Latin, *via media*)

## **Deism**

The Cosmic Clockmaker

Herbert of Cherbury (1583- 1648)

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Thomas Paine (1737- ~ 1809).

The Place of Reason

## **Evangelical Revivals**

Jonathan

"Great Awakening"

## **Liberal Protestantism**

The Enlightenment emphasized the primacy of reason and strict scientific method.

## **Process Theology**

**Alfred North Whitehead** (1861-1947).

## **Liberation Theologies**

**Gustavo Gutierrez** (1928~)

## **Neo-Orthodoxy**

**Karl Barth**

## **A Deeper look at Evangelical Authority?**

Sola Scriptura vs Vatican II:

"It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls." (Walter M. Abbott, ed. *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York: Herden and Herden, 1966, p. 118.)

*Sola Scriptura* as opposed to:

Tradition

Clergy (1 Peter 2:9)

Science/Reason

## Objective vs. Subjective Authority

"The written word, correctly interpreted, is the objective basis of authority. The inward illuminating and persuading work of the Holy Spirit is the subjective dimension." (Erickson, Christian Theology, 252).

## The Extent of the Bible's Authority

The Bible's Authority is for Daily Christian Living (Psalm 119:105)

The Bible's Authority is for Ethical Decision Making

The Bible's Authority is for the Church.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is the nature of religious authority? Who or what serve as religious authorities for you? Which authorities do you consider most relevant and reliable? Why?
2. What is the difference in the views of authority between Catholicism, liberal Protestantism and churches like ours?
3. Do evangelicals, in practice, really believe in sola scriptura? Consider the following:

*Most heirs of the Reformation, not least evangelicals, take it for granted that we are to give scripture the primary place and that everything else has to be lined up in relation to scripture. There is, indeed, an evangelical assumption, common in some circles, that evangelicals do not have any tradition. We simply open the scripture, read what it says, and take it as applying to ourselves: there the matter ends, and we do not have any 'tradition'. This is rather like the frequent Anglican assumption (being an Anglican myself I rather cherish this) that Anglicans have no doctrine peculiar to themselves: it is merely that if something is true the Church of*

*England believes it. This, though not itself a refutation of the claim not to have any 'tradition', is for the moment sufficient indication of the inherent unlikelihood of the claim's truth, and I am confident that most people, facing the question explicitly, will not wish that the claim be pressed. But I still find two things to be the case, both of which give me some cause for concern. First, there is an implied, and quite unwarranted, positivism: we imagine that we are 'reading the text, straight', and that if somebody disagrees with us it must be because they, unlike we ourselves, are secretly using 'presuppositions' of this or that sort. This is simply naïve, and actually astonishingly arrogant and dangerous. It fuels the second point, which is that evangelicals often use the phrase 'authority of scripture' when they mean the authority of evangelical, or Protestant, theology, since the assumption is made that we (evangelicals, or Protestants) are the ones who know and believe what the Bible is saying. And, though there is more than a grain of truth in such claims, they are by no means the whole truth, and to imagine that they are is to move from theology to ideology. If we are not careful, the phrase 'authority of scripture' can, by such routes, come to mean simply 'the authority of evangelical tradition, as opposed to Catholic or rationalist ones.'* N.T.Wright

4. When people in the church talk about authority they are very often talking about *controlling* people or situations. Is that really what the Bible is for? Is it there to control the church? (Gods authority has to do with his sovereign exercise over all things)

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