

# THE AUTHORITY OR INFLUENCE OF SCRIPTURE

## “the word of God is alive and powerful”

### Key question

What is the nature of the Bible’s authority within the Christian community and in the individual believer’s life?

### Key text

## I Corinthians 2:12-16

“<sup>12</sup> Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, <sup>13</sup> which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} <sup>14</sup> But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. <sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. <sup>16</sup> For *who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him?* But we have the mind of Christ.”

### Key Definition

## Biblical Authority

Biblical authority is the right of the Scriptures (properly interpreted) to prescribe creed and conduct as well as the power to motivate an effective response from people.

### Introduction

1. A bumper sticker reads “Question authority.” This is the battle cry of our age.
2. Evangelical Christians claim to submit to the authority of God as He has revealed Himself through the Scriptures. **Philippians 2:10-11** “that at the name of Jesus ‘every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
3. As important as our doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture may be, it means little if we cannot accurately determine what the text says and if we do not accept its message.  
**I Cor.4:6** “that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against another.”  
**II Tim.2:15** “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”
4. Generally speaking, there are two problematic approaches to the Bible.

- a. Those who accept it uncritically (that is **without a discerning mind**). Too often, these individuals are unaware that they are following the authority of something other than God (like tradition, popular culture, etc.).
  - b. Those who look at it **with a cynical mind and also with a critical spirit** (or hard heart). These folks generally know that they are following an authority other than God.
5. The temptation of Eve in Gen.3:1-7 is a meta narrative of the authority crisis.
- a. Eve must choose between two authoritative voices - the Word of God appealing to her relationship with God, the word of the Serpent appealing to her autonomy as an individual.
  - b. The word of the Serpent appeals to Eve’s sense experience to the exclusion of her spiritual connectedness. “There is no good sensible reason not to eat of the tree except that God said not to do so.”

**A. The Word of God is alive and powerful therefore we should expect it to impact our lives.**

- 1. We should expect the Scripture to touch our lives deeply. **Heb.4:12** “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
- 2. The Scripture is not given to satisfy our curiosity, make us feel good, or support our prejudices. **II Tim.3:16-17** “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of god may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

**B. We all are subject to God’s authority because it is based on His relationship with us as Creator and Covenant maker.**

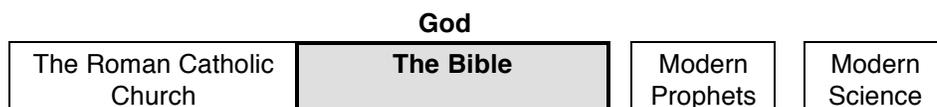
<b>God is Creator</b>	<b>God is Covenant maker</b>
<b>We are image bearers</b>	<b>We are temples of His Spirit</b>
<b>Elohim Gen.1</b>	<b>YHWH Gen.2</b>

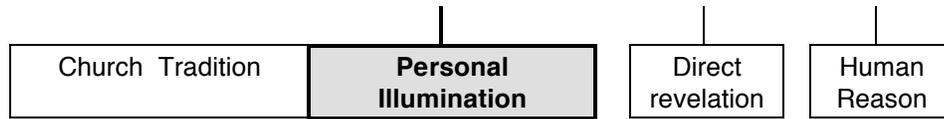
- 1. As **creator** and preserver of all space, matter, and time, He is Lord of all.
- 2. As the **covenant-making** God, He is Lord over His people.

**NOTE:** His authority is not yet universally recognized but one day it will be.

**C. God exercises His authority through secondary agents so we must be willing to listen to several different sources in our search for understanding.**

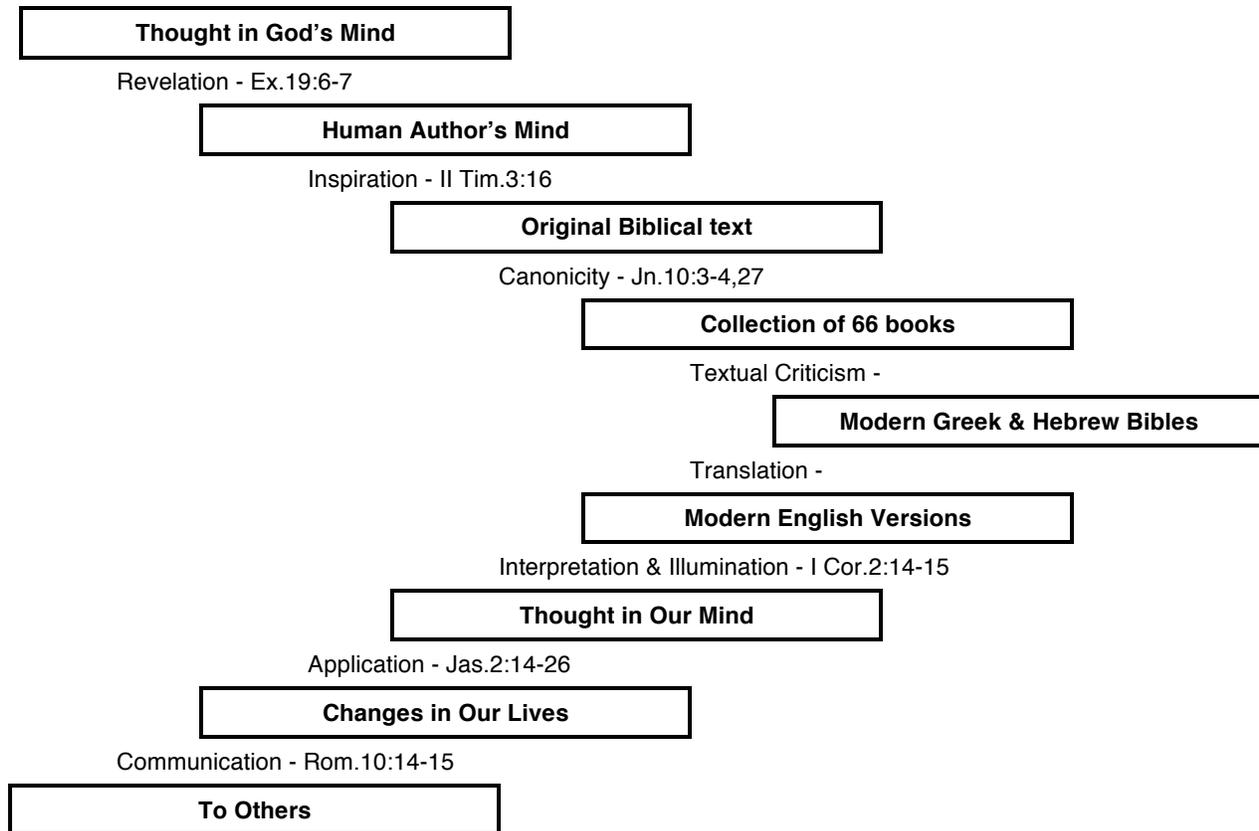
- 1. God’s secondary agents — the Scripture (His Word), His Spirit, the covenant community, and natural law (the creation).
- 2. God’s authority is expressed through the Bible and is acknowledged as the Holy Spirit illuminates our hearts. While His authority can be expressed through modern **prophets**, special revelatory **experiences**, human **reason**, and church **tradition**, these channels are secondary to the **Scripture** interpreted by the Spirit.





3. The relationship of **Scripture, Spirit, Science, and Society**
  - a. Science by itself is limited to the world of human sense experience.
  - b. The Spirit’s subjective impressions are limited by our human shortsightedness. We see in a glass dimly. This is buffered by the role of the church as it discerns the Spirit’s leading.
  - c. The Scripture cannot be understood apart from human experience and Spiritual illumination.
  - d. The social environment is powerful, but subject to a number of forces which are not of God.

**NOTE:** The four cannot be separated without doing damage to the authoritative voice of God.
4. The Roman Catholic church views the Magisterium (Bishops and Pope) as the final authority in matters of truth. I Tim.3:15 “the church of the living God is the pillar and bulwark of the truth.” While Protestants agree that the insights of the church (both past and present) have an important role in interpreting the Scripture, they do not believe that the Roman Catholic Magisterium is in unique possession of that authority.
5. The path of authoritative revelation from God’s mind to the world.



**D. We must be aware that both internal and external factors influence our moral decisions.**

1. Morality requires free will, not just material determinism. The simplest proof that human will is free to choose is this: If you are not free to choose, then all our ordinary language about morality is totally meaningless.

**NOTE:** The extent to which our decisions reflect Christ-likeness will determine the extent to which God is the functioning authority in our lives.

2. Constraints on our will
  - a. Internal factors
    1. The **SIN NATURE** — which is in bondage to foolishness (Gal.5:17).
    2. The **HOLY SPIRIT** — regeneration, illumination, and sanctification.
    3. **GENETIC HERITAGE** — predisposing us to certain patterns of behavior.
  - b. External factors
    1. The **SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT** of our present life.
    2. The **NURTURING ENVIRONMENT** of our childhood — with both noble and sinful strategies to cope with life.
    3. **SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION** — the cumulative observations of the world by many people over time.
    4. The **SCRIPTURE** — what I learn from sound interpretation.
  - c. The **DIVINE DECREE** — God’s sovereign purpose (Acts 4:27-28)
3. Recognizing the present limits of our horizons is necessary, if we are to grow in our freedom to choose.
  - a. **Presuppositions** — our assumptions about how things are, i.e. *Secular humanism, Biblical worldview, Eastern philosophy.*
  - b. **Suppositions** — our observations of what is immediately before us, i.e. *death, pain.*
  - c. **Predisposition** — The four temperament types of Myers Briggs.
    1. **SJ** (law, order and discipline)
    2. **SP** (freedom and generosity)
    3. **NF** (harmonious relationships)
    4. **NT** (unified understanding)
  - d. **Dispositions** — our mood at the moment. i.e. *hurt, joy, love.*

**E. Be on guard against an unhealthy view of authority.**

1. Signs of an unhealthy relationship with authority.
  - a. When everything must be clear in black and white look out. Insistence upon complete closure on all issues is a red flag.
  - b. Complete unquestioned trust in another person is not wise.
  - c. The inability to trust another person at any level is a sign of trouble.
  - d. A lack of balanced reason with respect to experience, tradition, community, Scripture, and inner prompting of the Spirit is not good.
2. Cardinal rules of submission to authority.
  - a. Accept responsibility for your beliefs and conduct while recognizing that we each have different constraints and gifts.
  - b. Respect God-ordained institutions (government, family, church) while at the same time realizing that they are not infallible.
  - c. Approach your understanding of the Bible with humility, expectancy, reverence, and patience.
  - d. Present yourself as a living sacrifice while taking active responsibility for your life and ministry decisions.

## F. What is the role of human authority in the believer's life?

1. Spheres of human authority.
  - a. **Civil** - Jn.19:11 Jesus addressing Pilate, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above."
  - b. **Commerce** - Col.3:22-23 "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."
  - c. **Church** - Heb.13:11 "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."
  - d. **Family** - Col.3:18-20 "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord."
2. The two fold responsibility of those under human authority.
  - a. **Obedience** - a spirit of submission
 

I Pet.2:13 "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority. or to governors as sent by him"
  - b. **Appeal** - a need for accountability
    1. I Tim.5:1-2 "Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father . . . older women as mothers."
    2. Col.4:1 "Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven."
3. Two positions that those under human authority must avoid.
  - a. **A spirit of resignation** - (blind obedience) - The failure to make a proper appeal to authority and hold authority accountable.
  - b. **A spirit of rebellion** - (selfish pride) - The failure to cultivate a spirit of submission.
4. Attitudes that reflect spiritual maturity.
  - a. A willingness to **forgive**. Eph.4:32 "And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."
  - b. A willingness to **forebear**. Prov.25:15 "By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone." Eph.4:2 "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love."
  - c. A willingness to **compromise**. On issues of fundamentals to the faith we should not compromise but we must decide on what other issues we are willing to stand firm on. In many cases, the unity of the church is more important than having our preferences on every issue.
  - d. A willingness to **yield**. In order for there to be harmony and unity in any organization there must be a willingness to yield to others, usually the majority or the leadership. This does not mean that there is no room for debate or appeal but at some point there must be a willingness to yield.
5. How to appeal to those in authority.
  - a. Deal with the human spirit of **autonomy**. Rom.12:1-2 "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God,

{which is} your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

1. All are to submit to the authority of God.
  2. Those who are submitted to God’s authority will respect “God ordained” authority – civil, church, family, etc.
- b. **Expect God** to use circumstances to develop and demonstrate your character.
1. The pressure of circumstances can reveal your hidden motives and spiritual strongholds.
  2. Your response to circumstances is the sphere where you have responsibility and control.
- c. The **prerequisites** to an effective appeal to authority.
1. We cannot appeal without **love**.
  2. We cannot appeal without **humility**. It should be recognized that we all are going to make mistakes of the tongue (Jas.3:1-12) and we each will have areas that are vulnerable to critique.
  3. We cannot appeal without **facts**.
  4. We cannot appeal without **respect**.
- d. **Talk to God** - Pray - We are to cast our cares on God because He cares for us. I Pet.5:7 “casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.”
- e. **Talk to those responsible** (not about them behind their back).
1. As much as possible, when giving a negative report, speak as though the person you are talking about is present.
  2. Do not share negative reports with people who are not a part of the problem or the solution.
  3. Distinguish between facts and feelings in speaking to or about others.
  4. Note that those in positions of leadership are vulnerable and easy targets for misunderstanding and criticism, which has the effect of undermining their ability to perform their duties. For this reason, they need protection and respect above and beyond that of others.
- f. **Be gracious with both favorable and unfavorable responses.**
- g. Be sensitive to the right **timing**.
1. Speaking the **truth in love**. Eph.4:15 “but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects unto Him, who is the head, even Christ.”
  2. Speaking **graciously**. Eph.4:29 “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”
5. How are leaders to respond to those who resist or question their decisions?  
**I Pet. 5** “<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as {your} fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to {the will of} God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; <sup>3</sup> nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. <sup>5</sup> You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*”

- a. Leaders are to take the role and attitude of a **servant**.
- b. Leaders are to recognize that they can easily **abuse** those under their care.
- c. Leaders are to respect the wisdom that can come from **diversity** of perspective.
- d. Leaders communicate love to those under their charge as they work hard to **listen to, understand, and show respect** for those who challenge them.
- e. Leaders must **discern the spirit** of those who resist them.
  1. A rebellious spirit must be disciplined while a Godly spirit is to be respected.
  2. A “weaker” or “younger” believer is to be given more grace and forbearance than a “Pharisee”.

### The Point

The Scripture is given to us not to satisfy our curiosity but to change our lives.

## Response

### Head

#### I am to understand that:

The Bible, when rightly understood, is the most important source of wisdom for life.

### Heart

#### I am to believe that:

The truths of the Bible can lead to positive change in my life and the lives of others.

### Hands

#### I am to behave by:

Submitting to what I understand to be God’s will.

## Pastoral advice

### What can I do to posture myself aright before Biblical authority?

1. We must respect the authority of Scripture as part of our responding to the Lordship of Christ.
2. While the Scripture is authoritative we must be careful to qualify our interpretations as less than perfectly inspired.
3. We need to be aware of the signs of an unhealthy relationship with authority.
4. It is just as important to study “yourself” as it is to study Scripture. If you know the Scripture and do not know yourself your application of the Word will not be to the core of your soul but superficial and fleeting.



## **Questions that you should be able to answer.**

### **1. Specific facts you should know.**

- a. What is the meaning of “Biblical authority”?
- b. Where does the Scripture speak of religious authority?

### **2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.**

- a. What are some of the principles of sound Biblical interpretation?
- b. What are the signs of an unhealthy relationship with authority?
- c. What are some of the factors that influence our interpretation of the Bible?

### **3. Questions you should wrestle with.**

- a. How do Scripture, Science, The Spirit, and Society interact in the interpretation of the Bible?
- b. How free is our will in responding to the Bible? What factors limit our will?