

“BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE: AUTHORITY”

What does the Bible mean to you? When you read it, what effect does it have upon you? What is your attitude toward it? You know, some approach the Bible from a scholarly standpoint, some merely from a literary standpoint. Some lightly approach it from a devotional standpoint or out of a devotional motive. But even though they read it, the reality is that they remain fairly detached from it. The general attitude is that the Bible is an interesting, perhaps profitable book to some extent. But many don't see it as having any real authority in their daily lives. But, my friend, by the Bible's very nature, it calls for a response from every person who opens its sacred pages and reads it. The way we think about and talk about the Bible is very indicative of how we personally respond to the Word of God, and thus to God.

We are living in what is called the 'postmodern era.' Postmodernism is a term that we really should be familiar with because it describes a growing number of people, especially among the millennial generation. The postmodernist essentially denies the existence of absolute truth. In other words, he argues that there is no source of moral authority. Every man is his own authority, and consequently, they will say that whatever is true for you is not necessarily true for me, and vice versa. From that philosophy has been born the demand for tolerance. Really more than a demand for tolerance, it's a demand for acceptance: of all other ideas, of all other lifestyles and beliefs. That is, unless your belief doesn't allow for someone else's. If it doesn't, then your belief has to be done away with. That's the hypocrisy of postmodernism because somewhere in all of that, even the postmodernist is saying that there IS a standard by which to judge an idea. But postmodernism claims that there is no such thing as absolute truth. But, you know, when you get down to the bottom of it, all of us believe that there is some line, some standard of truth. The question is, what is the standard?

If you believe the Bible, especially if you believe that the Bible has any kind of authority in people's lives, you're going to be ridiculed, marginalized and insulted. You'll probably be labeled something like a fundamentalist or evangelical fundamentalist. And I don't claim that term. I don't wear that label or any other label like that. I am simply a Christian and I believe the Bible. But the term fundamentalist is thrown around and is usually said with a hiss. The label actually arose during the early part of the 20th century, during the anti-modernist movement. In the 1800's, there was a rise of biblical criticism. Darwin's theory of evolution arose and began to cause people to question the accuracy and the authority of scripture. So, as a result, modernists in religion began to change New Testament doctrine and morality to become more accommodating and accepting of what they view as scientific evidence. That way, they could believe the secular view and still claim to believe in God. They began to deny the creation account of Genesis, the historical narratives of the Bible, the miracles recorded in scripture and ultimately the deity of Jesus had to be explained away along with His resurrection. The bottom line, according to the modernist is that you can no longer claim that the Bible is an inspired, infallible book with any real authority over our modern day lives.

Today, many who spew the term 'fundamentalist' at those who are more conservative than they, have come under the influence of secular humanism and postmodernism. And they use terms like that in

order to discredit people with whom they disagree. They, on the other hand, generally look at the Bible as a book that has no real authority, that does not have God as its author, at least to any great degree. And if they place any importance on the scriptures, they interpret them in such a way as to allow for compromise with the secular world. I was asked some time back to explain what an evangelical fundamentalist Christian is. Without going into a long explanation of the folly of labels or the individual doctrines usually implied by the label, for the sake of brevity, I described to him what I basically just described to you: that people who use that term usually don't have a lot of confidence in the Bible as the Word of God, and they think of themselves as being a part of the mainstream Christianity and of thought, rather than these 'Bible-thumping fundamentalists' who believe that the Bible is literally God's Word. He said, Oh, I see. I believe in God as long as God agrees with me. You know, that's a pretty accurate way of explaining it. But, as I said, I'm not concerned with labels, but if somebody wants to call me a name for believing that the Bible is the Word of God, that's up to that person. But I can tell you that I believe in the inspiration, the relevancy, the sufficiency and the authority of the Bible. And the Bible claims to have such authority.

As I've said before in this series of studies, the battle for the Bible is not so much being waged in the hearts of unbelievers, as they already reject the Bible as part of their unbelief. Satan already has them. Where this battle is being fought is in the hearts of people who claim to believe in and love God. Eve believed God. She had communion with God. But what did the serpent ask her in the garden? "*Hath God said...?*" In other words, Eve, do you really believe what God said? The fruit is pleasant to look at and it'll even make you wise. No, you won't die...That battle is still raging hot in the minds of men and women today. It's the age-old conflict of man's reason vs. God's revelation. So, Satan was able to compromise the Word of God in the mind of Eve, and he is still compromising it in the minds of millions of people today.

II Corinthians 4:4 "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

If you claim to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, you need to understand what the Bible says about itself. The Bible not only claims divine inspiration, but divine authority as well. Look at the chain of divine authority pictured in God's Word.

God is sovereign and all authority comes from Him.

I Corinthians 11:3 "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."

God vested His authority in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:18 "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

Phillipians 2:6-10 “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.”

Hebrews 1:1-2 “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...”

So, God gave His authority to the Lord Jesus, who now rules as head of the church, king of His kingdom (**Ephesians 1:20-23**).

But then, Jesus has expressed His authority through His apostles, who HE called His “ambassadors.”

II Corinthians 5:20 “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ...”

Well, what’s an ambassador? An ambassador is a diplomat or a sent representative of a king or government. Here in the U.S., we send our ambassadors all over the world and they become our representative or our voice in that foreign country. They are bestowed with the authority to speak with our interests on our behalf in that foreign land. We sometimes hear Christians referred to as ‘ambassadors for Christ,’ but that’s really a misnomer. We are not the ambassadors of the Lord Jesus. If you look at the personal pronouns that Paul uses in the above passage and their antecedents, you’ll see that Paul is talking about himself and those like him, as opposed to the other Christians at Corinth to whom he was writing. What he is saying is that the apostles of the Lord, those men who were eyewitnesses of Christ’s resurrected glory and were filled with the Holy Spirit, now stand in Christ’s stead on this earth. Not the pope—the apostles of Christ, who lived in the first century. Let’s read the rest of that verse.

II Corinthians 5:20 “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

So, Paul and the other apostles were standing “*in Christ’s stead*” or in His place and speaking by His authority.

John 17:18 “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.”

Galatians 1:11-12 “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after men. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

II Corinthians 13:3 “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.”

In that last passage, Paul is affirming his apostleship to the Corinthians. These passages show us why the apostles were described as the foundation of the church in **Ephesians 2 and 3**. These men were vested with authority from Jesus Christ, and that gave them a seal of authority that does not belong to men today. That's why Paul could say the following:

II Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God..."

I Corinthians 14:37 "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

So, that's the chain of authority. All authority is God's to give. He placed that authority in His Son, Jesus Christ, to rule over His church. Christ sitting at the right hand of God in heaven, left His chosen ambassadors, His apostles, here on earth and filled them with His Holy Spirit and inspired them with His words, so that when they wrote the scriptures, you see, they were writing by Christ's authority and thus by God's authority. What all of that tells us is this: the Bible is a book of authority. It was inspired and penned with the express purpose of being obeyed by the church.

People will tell you that there aren't any rules in the Bible because it's just a love letter, a general message from heaven. Well, the Bible IS the greatest expression of love known to man, but it was given to the church in order to be followed.

Phillipians 2:12 "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Galatians 3:1 "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth..."

II Thessalonians 3:14 "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed."

Yes, the Bible is a book of authority. But Satan has waged war on that premise. How? We're told, for example, that we shouldn't take the Bible literally. I mean, that's one of the primary things we hear today in an effort to discount obedience to the scriptures. Admittedly, there are things written in the Bible allegorically, poetically and prophetically. There are different genres within the scriptures. But does that include the commandments of Jesus and His apostles? Does that mean the Bible's practical instruction for holy lives, the pattern for worship or nothing else is to be taken at face value and be followed and obeyed literally? It's interesting that we don't hear people saying that we can't take the so-called golden rule literally. *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."* It's really interesting that people who don't want to accept the Bible's teaching on marriage and sexuality, for example, and say that we can't take those ancient commandments literally, don't seem to have a problem taking *"Judge not that ye be not judged"* literally. They believe that should be literally applied. What it boils down to is this: we will take the Bible at its word IF it agrees with our philosophy or our

lifestyle, or if it bolsters our cause. But, all of a sudden we can't take it literally if we deem it too restrictive or it conflicts with our will or the lives we want to live and the sins we want to commit.

We're also told today that we have freedom in Christ. We get scolded for being legalists and pharisaic if we insist that we abide by the teaching of scripture. My friend, when Jesus condemned the attitudes and deeds of the Pharisees, He wasn't condemning obedience to the Word of God! He was condemning their hypocrisy by claiming to follow the law, but instead doing what suited them. Jesus commended obedience, He never condemned it. In fact, He insisted on it. He kept the law Himself.

John 14:15 "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

When Paul spoke of our liberty on Christ (**I Corinthians 8, Romans 14**), for example, he wasn't talking about freedom from the commandments of Jesus and the instructions of the apostles. He wasn't talking about the liberty just to live as we please with no restraint, instruction or rules to live by. He was talking about freedom from the bondage of the Old Testament law that shackled men in a perpetual state of sin and condemnation (**Romans 7, Galatians 3**). He was telling them that those laws were no longer going to be what judged them, and teaching them how to treat one another in that age of transition from one law to the next. How to forbear with one another as many were coming out of the Gentile world and into the church and so forth. But in all of that, he never suggested that we are free from the commandments of the Lord Jesus or the instruction of the apostles.

Let me speak to something along that line. It's amazing how Google and a Facebook account suddenly turn people into Bible scholars and theologians. Many allege that the Bible isn't to be obeyed today because of some of the seemingly strange laws contained in the Old Testament. People reject the teaching of Christ and His apostles on marriage and sexuality, for example, because of some of the exacting and straining laws that Moses taught back in Leviticus. Friend, that is a gross misunderstanding of the Bible. Those Levitical laws were given to the Jews and not to the modern church. Paul later explained in **Galatians 3** that that burdensome law was given to the Jews and the children of Abraham back there to impress upon sinful man the holiness of God and man's need for a savior. And Paul taught in both **Galatians 3 and Colossians 2** that Jesus came and fulfilled that law and took it away. We are now subject to the moral teachings and commandments of the New Testament, the will of the Lord Jesus. The New Testament doesn't forbid eating shellfish or bacon, or mixing types of fabrics, etc. but it does condemn the impurity, the lewdness and the lasciviousness that our culture is steeped in today. The apostle Paul said not to let such things ever be named among the church (**Ephesians 5:3**).

Friends, we are saved by God's grace and mercy and we are free, thankfully, from the shackles of the Mosaic law. We are not saved by our righteousness, but that doesn't mean that we can be saved without obedience. There must be some authority. Even nature is governed by immutable laws, and when something or someone tries to defy those laws, trouble and chaos ensue. You see, the real battle we are fighting today over the Bible arises from the fact that sinful people want to be free from any moral restraint. Paul teaches in **Romans 1** that that's why the Gentiles suppressed the truth and rejected God. They chose evil over good. If you accept the Bible, it means that God makes the rules. It means that God is the authority. His Word is the authority.

Judges 17:6 “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

The book of Judges describes the results of that: absolute anarchy, disorder, moral and spiritual confusion. That’s what we have today. We have that today because people have rejected the Bible as God’s authority. As a result, we have chaos in the world today. The fabric of our society is coming unraveled. Won’t you believe and put your faith in the everlasting book of the ages, the Bible, the Word of God?