

# Scripture Is Authoritative

---

We've started looking at some of the attributes of Scripture. Last time we said that [the Bible is inspired](#). This time we'll talk about how Scripture is *authoritative*.

In his book [Systematic Theology](#), Wayne Grudem defines the authoritative property like this:

*The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.*

Whether or not someone believes that the Bible is the Word of God, it's hard to deny that it often claims it is God's Word. The evidence for this claim is clearly visible within the text

## The Old Testament Is God's Words

---

In the Old Testament, this can be clearly seen when someone says "thus says the Lord". In the ESV, this phrase appears in the Old Testament 417 times. To the people of that time, hearing "thus said the Lord" was akin to someone saying "thus says king so and so". This phrase was used to preface a proclamation of the king. These edicts could not be challenged or questioned but simply must be obeyed. And, as God is the sovereign King of Israel, when a prophet would say "thus says the Lord" it was the same as God standing before His subjects and making a proclamation. (Deut 18:18-20, Jeremiah 1:9.29:31-32, Ezekiel 2:7)

Furthermore, there are several verses where God is said to speak "through" the prophet (1 Kings 14:18; 16:12, 34; 2 Kings 9:36; 14:25; Jer. 37:2; Zech. 7:7, 12). What the prophet says in God's name, God says (1 Kings 13:26 with v. 21; 1 Kings 21:19 with 2 Kings 9:25-26; Hag. 1:12; cf. 1 Sam. 15:3, 18).

In these and other instances in the Old Testament, the words that came out of a prophet's mouth are equal to the words coming out of God's mouth. To disbelieve or disobey anything a prophet says is to disbelieve or disobey God himself (Deut. 18:19; 1 Sam. 10:8; 13:13-14; 15:3, 19, 23; 1 Kings 20:35, 36).

So, the inclusion of passages that have phrases "thus says the Lord" and "I will put my word in your mouth" is to demonstrate that these written words within the Old Testament are claiming to be God's own words.

The best commentary for the Old Testament is the New Testament. And, in the New Testament, several passages claim that the Old Testament is God's Word. We talked about 2 Timothy 2:16 already and the phrase "God-Breathed". Paul says that "all Scripture is God-breathed".

The Greek word used for Scripture is *graphe*. This word is used 51 times in the New Testament and it is always when talking about Scripture. Furthermore, we know Paul is talking about the Old Testament as Scripture because in the previous verse (v15) Paul reminds Timothy how he has been acquainted with the sacred writings since he was a kid.

Similarly, in 2 Peter 1:20-21, Peter says that no Old Testament prophecy was produced by man, but that “Men spoke from God as they were carried by the Holy Spirit.” Peter’s claim here is that the true prophets were working to write the Words of God and the Holy Spirit supervised that process – like we talked about last time with inspiration.

Jesus certainly believed that the Old Testament was God’s Word. Take, for instance, his encounter with Satan, when He was being tempted. In Matthew 4:4 Jesus tells the devil “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”.

## The New Testament Is God's Words

---

What about the New Testament? Thus far, we’ve seen examples of writers in the New Testament referring to the Old Testament as God’s Word. What about the New Testament? Again, we look at this word *graphe*. Every time it was used, it referred to the sacred writings. It was never used to reference other written works.

So, do we have any instances when the works of the New Testament authors are labeled as *graphe*? Yes, we do.

**2Pe 3.16 16**as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter shows us that he is aware of the writings of Paul and that all of Paul’s writings should be considered Scripture just like the Old Testament (“the other Scriptures”).

Another verse where the New Testament writings are equated with Old Testament Scripture comes in 1 Timothy 5:18. Paul writes

**1Ti 5.18 18**For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

The “muzzling an ox” phrase comes from Deut 25:4 – so the Old Testament. But, the ‘laborer deserves his wages’ quote comes from Luke 10:7. So, Paul is labeling Luke’s writings as Scripture right along with the Old Testament

What we have here is very early evidence that the authors of the New Testament knew about the writings of other New Testament authors and considered them to be Scripture. It wasn't hundreds of years later like some propose. Thus, if the works of people like Paul and Luke are considered Scripture, this means that 2 Timothy 3:16 also applies to the writings of the New Testament when it says "all Scripture is God-breathed". The New Testament should also be considered the very words of God and not just some commentary on the Old Testament.

## We Are Convinced As We Read

---

It is different to see the evidence that the Bible is the Word of God and actually believing that the claim is true. I just made a strong case that the authors of the Bible claim their words are God's Words. There is a difference between "belief that" vs "belief in", though.

Take seat belts, for instance. On the first day, we get into a car, our parents buckle us in with a seat belt. We hear "buckle up" all of our lives. When we go through driver's ed they are still reminding us that we have to put on our seat belts. They used to show videos of what happens when you don't wear a seatbelt to convince us that we should have our seat belts on. "Seatbelts save lives" is the slogan. I believe that a seatbelt will keep me safe if I were to get into a crash. But, all of this belief that is based on what I have been told. I've never been in an accident where the seat belt was put to the test. I guarantee you, though, the first time I get into a significant car crash, and the seat belt keeps me in place, I'll believe *in* seatbelts for the rest of my life.

Our ultimate conviction that the Bible is the actual Word of God only comes when the Holy Spirit speaks in and through the words in the Bible to our hearts. When this happens, it gives us inner assurance that these are the actual words of our Creator.

Remember when we discussed the Internal Evidence regarding the truth of Scripture? We talked about how by reading the Bible and seeing for ourselves how true the things it claims are – about the hearts of people, about historical events, about people's motivations, and especially about us individually – we begin to trust what the Bible has to say. It's not reading books about the Bible or Systematic Theology textbooks or watching debates on YouTube that convinces us the Bible is God's Word; it's reading and encountering God in its pages that does that.

This endeavor will seem pretty foolish to those who lack an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul even suggests this in 1 Cor 2:12-14

**1Co 2,12-14** **12**Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13**And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. **14**The natural person does not accept the things of the

Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Apart from the work of the Spirit of God, a person will not receive spiritual truths and in particular will not receive or accept the truth that the words of Scripture are in fact the words of God

And, it isn't as if the Holy Spirit whispers in your ear one day "Hey Dave, that book over there that you haven't opened except on Sundays is the Word of God". No, it is as people are reading it that they come to realize that the Words it contains are true and that they are God's Words.

## The Words Of Scripture Are Self-Attesting

---

The fact that we are convinced that the Scriptures are the Word of God as we are reading the Bible means that the words are "self-attesting". They cannot be "proved" to be God's Word by a higher authority. For example, what if your main measuring stick to determine whether the Bible was God's word was its historical accuracy? Or reason? That would mean that the Bible is subordinate to other authorities.

Yes, we should care about the historical accuracy of the Bible. And, I'm a big proponent of reason and logical thinking. But, I absolutely 100 percent am aware that my reasoning is fallible. I reason OK. But, I make a lot of mistakes. In other words, the authority of my reason is not perfect. And, to make the Bible submit to the authority of my reasoning ability is to make my reasoning ability the ultimate authority and not the Bible. So, if I appeal to things like human reason, historical accuracy, logic, or scientific truth then I am assuming that those things are of a higher authority than the Bible and that they are more reliable than God's Word.

## Is This A Circular Argument?

---

Now, it may seem like using verses in the Bible to say that the Bible is God's word appears to be a circular argument. It seems to say that the Bible is God's word because the Bible says so. In a sense, this is true. And I would never tell a non-believer that they should trust the Bible because the Bible says so. Remember, they do not have the discernment of the Holy Spirit to understand this.

But, this is only a circular argument in the same sense that every other argument we employ becomes a circular argument. Ultimately, every reason we give for why we believe something ends at an appeal to an authority we trust unless it's something we have personal experience with.

If we are discussing things like proper medical treatments for coulrophobia (fear of clowns), we would ultimately have to appeal to authorities on the subject to make our cases. And if I ask you why I should trust Dr. McDonald, on some level, the response is going to be “because he is trustworthy”. So, this issue with the circular argument is something that exists in the secular world as well any time someone appeals to authority.

Take these examples, for instance:

- “My reason is my ultimate authority”

“Why?”

“Because it seems reasonable to me that it should be.”

- “Logical consistency is my ultimate authority”

“Why?”

“Because it is logical to make it what I rely on.”

- “I know there can be no ultimate authority because I do not know of any such ultimate authority.

Anytime someone says they use reason or logic as their authority they are going to have to use that thing as part of their “reason”. “I use reason because it's the most reasonable”. “I rely on logic because it is the most logical choice”.

These types of statements have to be held as what's known as “properly basic” - which means no further reason need be given. They are just true. And, when you get to this point, it feels kind of circular. So, using a thing to justify itself isn't just something we do with Scripture at times. We do it with other things too.

So, then, how do we choose what is our ultimate authority? It can't just be “because our religious leaders said this is our book”. Mormons and Muslims also “get a feeling” that the Book of Mormon and the Qu'ran are true. So it can't just be a feeling. No, we are convinced of the truthfulness of the Bible because – as we read it – we see how it lines up with reality. It is more persuasive than other words because we see how it lines up actual life experiences, that it gets history right, and it makes the most sense of why things are the way they are. Other works making the same claim are disqualified because they do not.

So what about people who have read the Bible and don't believe it is the Word of God? Bart Ehrman knows WAY more about the content of the Bible than I ever will probably. And yet, he doesn't believe it is the Word of God. The Bible will commend itself in being persuasive in this way but only if we are thinking rightly about the nature of reality, our perception of it and ourselves, and our perception of God.

The reason our perception of reality gets thrown all out of whack is that sin distorts our perception of reality and of God. Sin is ultimately irrational, and sin makes us think incorrectly about God and about creation. For us to be persuaded that the Bible is the Word of God

requires the work of the Holy Spirit to overcome the effects of sin and enable us to see reality clearly.

That may sound like a bunch of religious hand-waving so allow me to speak from personal experience on this. When I was born-again, I remember looking around and it was as if everything around me had come into a focus and clarity that is hard to describe. I'm not being hyperbolic here in saying it was like a veil had been removed; like when you get the windows in your car cleaned and you suddenly realize how dirty and unclear the windshield you've been looking through has been this whole time.

And it wasn't as if I read the Bible for the first time and had to change EVERYTHING I thought. No, it was because the words of Jesus lined up with a lot of what I had been experiencing. There were also a lot of observations and conclusions about the world I had come to on my own BEFORE I read His words that I saw in the pages.

## Is This A “Leap Of Faith”?

---

So, do people have to take a “leap of faith” to get to the point where they believe that the Bible is God's Word? No, of course not. We return back to the discussion on appealing to authority. Like I said, other books claim to be the words of God. And that as one reads them they will get an inner feeling that the words are true. The Bible, the Qu'ran, the Book of Mormon are all VERY different books making VERY different truth claims on the nature of God and what His revelation is to us. So, how do we decide which one to follow? It can't be just a feeling.

The reason we can believe that the Bible is true and accurate is because we will see that it is accurate in all that it teaches and it will not steer us wrong. This has been shown time and time again as archaeology and historical research continue. Let me give you a few examples.

Take, for instance, the Wall of Jericho. This is the city that in the Book of Joshua, God commanded the Israelite armies to march around 7 times, blow trumpets when commanded, and the walls would fall.

Jericho began being excavated in the early 1900s. In the 1950s, Kathleen Kenyon discovered that the wall had collapsed suddenly. She even found a layer of soot on it as if it collapsed by fire. However, she and her team dated the event in the 1550s BC – which would have been 150 years later than the Bible account. So, it would seem that the Bible got this part wrong.

Fast forward to 1990, Time magazine released an article called “Score One For The Bible”. Turns out Kenyon was wrong in her dating. She based her dating on the absence of certain types of pottery she would expect to be there. But, decades later, a pottery expert examined the evidence she had discovered and determined her conclusion was wrong because of where she did her digging in the city. And, thought further study – along with carbon dating on the soot they

found – it was determined that the city fell in the 1400s. Therefore, the Biblical account is accurate.

Another point of contention between secular historians and Biblical scholars was on the part of King David. He is such a prominent figure in both the Old and the New Testament. And yet, there was no evidence outside of the written record that he ever existed. This is understandable to a certain degree because – like many ancient sites – Jerusalem has been build, torn down, rebuilt, ransacked, and rebuilt over and over again. Much of the undiscovered history of the Bible probably lies under the buildings we see today.

That all changed in 1993 when an inscription was located at the site of Tel Dan in northern Israel. The fragmentary inscription commemorates the victory of an Aramean king over his two southern neighbors: the “king of Israel” and the “king of the House of David.” We don’t unfortunately, know which king this was – nor the names of the kings he defeated. So, it is hard to date. But, the fact that the king called one of his enemies “of the house of David” implies that David was a historical figure.

There are dozens more examples like these. The point here is not to automatically go to the stance of “the Bible got it wrong” because we don’t have the historical evidence. Time and time again, the Bible proves itself to be true as more archaeological finds are made. So, if there is a point in history that the Bible claims, but we can’t make sense of it, my money’s on the original eyewitnesses getting the record right because that is what they have consistently shown to do

## To Disbelieve Scripture Is To Disbelieve God

---

Now, we’ve laid out the argument that the words of the Bible are God’s Words. That means they speak to us with an authority unlike anything else. The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.

Because the Scripture is the Word of God, to read something and then say “Well, I’m not going to believe that” is the same as saying “Well, God, I’m not going to believe you”.

I will say, however, that it IS ok to say “but, God, that doesn’t make any sense. I don’t get it”. Not understanding something is one thing. Thinking God is wrong on a matter is different.

## God Cannot Lie or Speak Falsely

---

Because we see Scripture as authoritative, we must also consider its truthfulness. If we are to believe all of the words of Scripture, we must have confidence that they are all true. We’ll deal

with this in more detail when we talk about inerrancy, but it's appropriate to touch on it here for a moment.

The biblical authors repeatedly affirm that the words of the Bible are God's own words. Well, what can we know about the character of God's words? Because any trait of God's would also be applied to Scripture as they are also God's Words.

First off, God's words are truthful. In Titus 1:2, Paul writes "in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised...". God is morally perfect. Therefore, God cannot lie.

This point is also made by the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 6:18 when they write

**Heb 6.18** **18**so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

The author doesn't say merely that God does not lie, but that it is impossible for God to lie.

Similarly, David says to God "You are God, and your words are true" in 2 Samuel 7:28

## All The Words Of Scripture Are True and Without Error

---

Since the words of the Bible are God's Words, and God cannot lie or speak falsely, the conclusion we come to is that the words of Scripture are true and without error. The Bible affirms this in several locations. In Psalm 12:6, the psalmist says "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times". The words of the Lord are like silver that has been through a refining process to the point of complete purity (seven is the number of perfection in the Bible).

"Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him" (Proverbs 30:5) (not some of the words, every word)

"Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens" (Ps. 119:89)

Jesus said "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35)

In contrast to God's Words, we have man's words. "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind" (Num. 23:19).

Again, this may seem like circular reasoning because we are saying that all the words in the Bible are true and we are using words in the Bible to make the case. But, remember, the case



isn't made on these words – they only back up what we come to see on our own as we live and read and engage with the Scriptures.

## God's Words are The Ultimate Standard of Truth

---

In John 17 Jesus prays to the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). This verse is interesting because Jesus does not use the adjectives *alēthinos* or *alēthēs* (“true”), which we might have expected, to say, “Your word is true.” Rather, he uses a noun, *alētheia* (“truth”), to say that God's Word is not simply “true,” but it is truth itself.

The difference between “true” and “truth” are significant. If I say that something is “true” – like if I drop a pencil it will hit the ground – this statement is true in the sense that it conforms with a higher standard of “truth”. So, what Jesus is saying is not simply that the things God says are true, but that God's Words are the ultimate standard for truth. His Words are the words that all other truth statements should be measured against.

Speaking of measuring, a great analogy for this is the lowly tape measure. I have several tape measures in my shop. Many woodworkers keep a tape at each tool for convenience (and because tape measures – along with pencils - have a reputation for hiding from you as soon as you put them down somewhere). But, what you learn pretty quickly is that rarely do the lines on tape measures line up exactly. For the first 3 or 4 inches they may look identical. But, if there is even a 1/64 of an inch difference, by the time you are out to a couple feet, the difference could be pretty pronounced. In other words, if I use one tape to measure 2' and make a cut, and then measure 2' on another tape and make a cut, my pieces won't be the same and it could throw my whole project off. The solution to this problem is to pick one tape and make that the standard that every other tape is measured against.

So, too, is Scripture our standard of Truth. Whenever we hear something we should test it against the standard of what the Bible has to say. We are told to “test the Spirits” – not to simply trust something that someone may even tell us is a prophecy.

This isn't to say that the Bible is the only thing that says true things. Even the Qu'ran or the Book of Moses or the teaching of Buddha say some true things. But, they are to be measured up to the standard of truth and that is Scripture.

Setting God's Words as the standard of truth in my life has been one of the greatest things I have ever done. We are constantly bombarded with information. And, I would say, in this day in age, it's harder than ever to know who to trust. I don't put my trust in news outlets, I don't put my trust in websites or YouTube channels – even the ones I agree with on most topics. But,

what I have come to realize over time – and is confirmed for me every time that I open its pages – is that God’s Words are the truth standard that we should measure everything else against.

God’s Words are that anchor point – that waypoint on the map that I focus on to keep my bearings. And this isn’t something I decided on blindly, either. Or consistently put into practice. Even after becoming a Christian, I have wasted a lot of time spinning my wheels on multiple occasions trying to figure things out on my own or by trusting in some other means – even though I’ve clearly read the answer to my problem before during my Bible study. And, every single time I’ve done this, I’ve had to come back and say “yeah, God. You were right. I should have done it this way”.

Truth is what God says, and we have what he has said right here in the pages of this book.

## Should We Fear That Some New Fact Will Contradict The Bible?

---

New scientific, archaeological, and historical facts are discovered constantly. Should we ever worry that some new fact will contradict Scripture? Here we can say with confidence that this will never happen. God, who is the author of Scripture, knows all facts. There are no surprises for Him. And, if some new “fact” comes up that does seem to contradict what God has spoken, it is false.

Now, I am not suggesting that we immediately dismiss some new fact because there is an apparent contradiction. More often than not, a new scientific or historical discovery actually enhances our understanding of the text. Take, for example, Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and his being stabbed by a spear in his side. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus going up to the garden to pray – asking God to “take the cup” but ultimately, to have His will done. They also record the disciples falling asleep and a few other details. But, only Luke mentions that Jesus was in so much agony about what was going to happen to him that he sweat blood.

**Luk 22.44** **44**And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Now, when Luke wrote that, he had no idea what it meant. He was just recording observations. Luke was a physician, after all, and he records more little details like this than anyone else. And, for a long time, nobody else knew what it meant, either. So, they taught that it was some sort of imagery or metaphorical flourish Luke used to make a point. But, it turns out that there is actually a medical condition where people sweat blood under extreme moments of stress. It’s called Hematidrosis.

Same when Jesus' side is pierced with the spear. In John's Gospel (the only disciple that was there with Jesus when he was crucified), he writes "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water." (John 19:34). Now, for centuries, preachers and theologians taught that John added this detail to show that Jesus' blood was the water of life. They took it as some sort of imagery and not as a fact. It turns out that this "water" is actually fluid that builds up around the heart and/or lungs when the body goes into shock. This condition is called pleural effusion when the fluid buildup is around the lungs and pericardial effusion when the fluid surrounds the heart. Jesus had been beaten nearly to death before he was hung on the cross, he had suffered much blood loss, and he had hung there laboring to breathe. The water that John records is a sign of the amount of shock Jesus' body had gone through, and a sign of his death.

The point here is that the discovery of "new" facts should not cause us concern. Most of the time, new discoveries only enhance our understanding of what the original authors recorded. It's our theology AFTERWARD that may have to change. But new "facts" don't cause us to call things in the Bible false. And, if new "facts" are discovered that seem to contradict the Bible's telling – like how Kenyon dated the fall of Jericho – we should either dismiss it or just hold on because it will probably be shown to be false by other means. No TRUE fact will ever contradict the words of God who knows all facts and who never lies.

## **Liberal Theology Vs. Traditional/Classic Protestant Theology**

---

Here I think it is appropriate to discuss some of the differences between liberal theologians and what we would call traditional or classical or evangelical or (dare I say it) conservative theologians. I hesitate to use that term because of the political baggage it bears currently. Here I don't mean conservative in terms of how one votes, but in how one attempts to conserve traditional doctrinal teachings.

It is appropriate to begin talking about liberal theology vs classical/historic theology now because the topic of the authority of Scripture is the start of the divergence of the two schools of thought. The following table highlights some of the differences between classic theology and liberalism.

The case I've made thus far is that the Bible is not only human words but the very words of God. This view is essential to the rest of evangelical theology because almost all other doctrines are based on this one. This is why we cover it so early in the line of doctrines. And, it is the position that the church has held for over 2000 years and Judaism for 1500 years before that.

Liberal theologians do not believe that the Bible is the work of God, but solely the work of humankind. As J.I. Packer puts it liberals believe that the Bible is “a fallible human record of religious thought and experience”. They see the Bible as man’s contemplative reflection on lived experiences and that God had little to nothing to do with its authorship. To liberal theologians, the Bible contains historical inaccuracies, internal inconsistencies, and, most importantly, outdated theological and ethical teachings that we must reject or rethink to fit into today’s world. This view dominates most classes about the Bible in colleges and universities today – including the ones that claim to be Christian institutions

## **Conclusion: Our Final Authority Is Written Scripture, Not Academic Speculation About Background Topics**

---

It is important to realize that the final form in which Scripture remains authoritative is its written form. It was the words of God written on the tablets that Moses put into the ark. Later, God commanded Moses and other prophets to write down his words. And it was written Scripture that Paul says is “God-breathed”.

This is an important distinction to make because of cases where people will try to look “beyond” or “behind” the Scripture to propose what was really going on. For instance, some will propose that we need to translate the original Greek manuscripts into Aramaic to know “what Jesus really said”.

The idea is that something was lost in translation from Aramaic to Greek. Or, frequently, this idea is proposed so that we can “correct” supposed erroneous translation work from the original Greek authors. (this isn’t really a problem because the original authors were all Jews (except for Luke) and spoke both Greek and Aramaic). Also, you will sometimes hear things like “what Paul really meant”. Or “I know Peter says X, but what he really should have said was...”.

So, in conclusion, once again all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God. Because it is the ultimate source of truth, the Bible should be our main source for how the world works, who God is, what His plans are, and how the world gets fixed.