

## Authority

2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12, and Jeremiah 23:16-29

December 27, 2020 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

This morning's message is on AUTHORITY. Specifically, the AUTHORITY of God's Word, the Bible, HIS Holy Scriptures. By its very definition, authority requires submission.

**Authority** = "the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience."<sup>1</sup>

**Submission** = yielding to a superior force, will, or authority.<sup>2</sup>

Now, not too many of us, are all that fond of submitting to authorities. This idea of "yielding to a superior force" runs counter to our human nature that wants to go our own way and do our own thing.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the AUTHORITY of God's Word is an incredible gift to mankind. God's Word lays out for us, PRECISELY HOW to live out our lives in this world. In order to RECEIVE this gift, we need to SUBMIT to the Bible's AUTHORITY in our lives.

Please open your Bible to 2 Peter 1:20-21. Let's begin by establishing an essential framework for today's message. Before any of us actually submit ourselves to the authority of God's Word, we need to be absolutely clear on WHERE the Bible gets its authority. The source of the Bible's authority is God Himself. 2 Peter 1:20-21 tells us, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Here is something that we MUST understand:

**The source of the Bible's authority is God Himself.** This incredible, one-of-a-kind book, is NOT of human origin. In other words, the Bible contains the very words of God.<sup>4</sup> One person phrases it this way, "Our authority is God, and he has spoken in one book."<sup>5</sup> Now, obviously, not everyone in our world agrees with this. But there's convincing evidence that the Bible is indeed from God:

**1. The writers were eyewitnesses and personal participants.** These co-authors lived out a personal faith in God. They experienced firsthand much of what they wrote down in God's Word.<sup>6</sup> God's Spirit carried them along as they wrote down HIS Words.<sup>7</sup> There were MULTIPLE authors, over many time periods, living in lots of different places. A 2<sup>nd</sup> piece of convincing evidence is that...

**2. The list of prophetic fulfillments is stunning.** Even a brief comparison of the OT predictions that are fulfilled in the NT, point to one, clear, central story. The central story that is woven throughout the entire Bible, is a story that God Himself has been writing since the dawn of creation. A 3<sup>rd</sup> piece of evidence is that ...

**3. Source and textual criticism reinforce the Bible's credibility.** Academic studies have thoroughly vetted every part of the Bible and found them immensely reliable and accurate. The relatively recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has only added to our confidence in the Bible. The 4<sup>th</sup> piece of convincing evidence is that ...

**4. Archaeological and historical research lend credibility.** Over the centuries, the Bible has stood up to immense scrutiny. It has stood up to a barrage of critical questioning, which has served to greatly increase our confidence in its trustworthiness and reliability.<sup>8</sup> Artifacts continue to be found, various records from other cultures and people groups continue to be cross-matched and lend more support. The last piece of evidence that I'll mention for now is that...

**5. Scientific discovery keeps validating the Bible's creation premise.** By "creation premise," I mean that all of creation suddenly came from nothing; and that the world in which we live, contains more than just matter and energy; it also contains design. Science and the Bible agree on this. Even the most recent scientific discoveries, on the origin of the universe and the complexities of human

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<sup>1</sup> According to Oxford Languages.

<sup>2</sup> According to Oxford Languages.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 John 1:5-10.

<sup>4</sup> See Romans 3:2 "the very words of God" and 2 Timothy 3:16 "All Scripture is God-breathed."

<sup>5</sup> Pastor John MacArthur.

<sup>6</sup> Even the creation account, which obviously had no eyewitnesses, was given to Moses by God Himself.

<sup>7</sup> The Bible itself claims that it's from God. Peter equates Paul's New Testament letters to the "other Scriptures" in 2 Peter 3:16.

<sup>8</sup> This starkly contrasts other holy books. E.g. *The Book of Mormon* lacks evidence for many of its claimed cities and civilizations.

existence, continue to lend strong support to the existence of God. And even those who still refuse to call Him God, will, at the very least, usually admit our universe's need for an Intelligent Designer. Written some 3,500 years ago, the BIBLE, got THIS premise, RIGHT! But our goal this morning is not spend all of our time examining the evidence for how we can know that the Bible is from God.<sup>9</sup> For this morning, our focus is on the AUTHORITY of God's Word. Since many of us already agree that the source of the Bible's authority is God Himself, let's move on to the ramifications of that fact.

Since God IS the source of the Bible's authority, we must respond in at least 2 ways. First of all, **1) We must submit ourselves to the Bible's authoritative teaching.** 2 Timothy 3:16 says it this way, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." God, uses His Word, to do all 4 of these things:

**Teach** = give instruction, infuse truth.<sup>10</sup> **Rebuke** = Express disapproval, reprimand.<sup>11</sup>

**Correct** = Straighten and restore our direction.<sup>12</sup>

**Train** = Guide our ongoing progress toward righteous living.<sup>13 14</sup>

Each of these are important aspects of what it means to SUBMIT OURSELVES to God's authoritative Word. There is only one reason why each of these is actually USEFUL in bringing us true righteousness: their source. The Bible offers us God-breathed teaching, God-breathed rebuke, God-breathed correction, and God-breathed training. God is THE authority behind each of one of these. And that's why submitting to God's Word brings meaningful, long-lasting, genuine improvements in people's lives. All of this means that God's Word has the final say on everything from sex and money to loving our enemies and forgiveness. This process of submitting to God's Word is not always fun though. It's not always easy. In fact, submitting to the authority of God's Word can be quite PAINFUL sometimes; but that doesn't mean that it's not still INCREDIBLY GOOD for us. In fact, here's one more piece of evidence that the Bible is from God. This is a 6<sup>th</sup> reason, to add to our earlier list of 5.

**6. God's Word TRANSFORMS people's lives.** Many of us, listening to this very sermon, are part of a LONG list of people who've been impacted by this amazing Book. Anyone who personally reads and lives according to these words, experiences meaningful encouragement, deep conviction, and wise counsel for everyday living. Since God is the source of the Bible's authority...

**2) We must commit ourselves to the daily pursuit of God's life-changing Word.** Hebrews 4:12 explains, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The power and effectiveness of God's Word is illustrated here with a double-edged sword. Most of us aren't too familiar with swords these days. Without getting too gruesome, a sword was double-edged so that it could cut both ways. So that is could penetrate the flesh more effectively and more deeply, down into the joints and marrow. Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is even sharper than that; and if something is THAT sharp, it might seem prudent to stay away from it. Indeed, some of us do stay away from the Bible. After all, it's a powerful book; it's not a toy to be treated lightly. After all, there are plenty of other things to read, plenty of other voices to listen to. Voices that aren't so invasive of our personal space, voices that don't meddle in our lives where they're not wanted. You see, God's Word has the ability to reach into the deepest parts of us, our soul and spirit. God's Word has the right to judge the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. God's Word has this ability and has this right, because God is the One doing this. That's what we mean when we say

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<sup>9</sup> That would take an entire sermon series, and maybe we'll do that another time. There are lots of great books/studies available if you'd like to learn more. To learn more, consider reading Lee Strobel's *The Case for a Creator* or *The Case for Christ* or Josh McDowell's *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* as well as many other more recent books on Christian apologetics.

<sup>10</sup> διδασκαλία = "teaching, instruction." (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 240). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

<sup>11</sup> ἔλεγμος = "expression of strong disapproval, reproach, rebuke, reproof." (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 314). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

<sup>12</sup> ἐπιανόρθωσις = "correcting, restoration... improvement." (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 359). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

<sup>13</sup> παιδεία = "the act of providing guidance for responsible living, upbringing, training, instruction... chiefly as it is attained by discipline, correction." (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 748). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

<sup>14</sup> Consider John 16:13a.

that the Bible is alive and active. In other words, the activity of God Himself and the activity of His written Word “are one and the same.”<sup>15</sup>

The counsel of God’s Word offers us wisdom/warnings for SO MANY practical, everyday decisions. It offers us SO MUCH blessing and encouragement for the ups and downs in this life.<sup>16</sup> But we can’t receive any of this help, or guard against any of these warnings, or receive any of these blessings, if we don’t learn what God’s Word teaches. The challenge for some of us can be that we simply do not LIKE to read. Reading may not come naturally to us. Reading anything, God’s Word or otherwise, may simply just not be something we enjoy. If this is true for you, let me suggest 2 things: **1. Try the “5x5x5” New Testament Reading Plan.** It’s put out by the Navigators. In just 5 minutes a day, 5 days a week, you can read through the entire New Testament in just one year.<sup>17</sup> There are several reading plans out in our Fellowship Hall, there are also links to them on our website. We also have some GREAT Bibles for sale. You don’t need to read a LOT of God’s Word in order to be transformed by it. We aren’t blessed based on the sheer volume of verses we read. It’s totally fine to read just a few verses and then pray about them. Mull them over and ponder them. Even take some time to discuss them, with a friend or a family member, or in your Life Group. My 2<sup>nd</sup> suggestion is that you **2. Try using an audio Bible.** Simply listening to someone else read God’s Word to you can be a HUGE blessing. And these days, you can choose between any number of different Bible apps with different voices: male/female and Australian/African/Anglo/etc. You can even have instrumental mood music playing in the background. So, even for those of us who struggle to read, there are some really good options out there.

I’d like to wrap up by sharing an example of how God’s Word is unique, from all the other messages that we might hear in our world today.<sup>18</sup> The example I’d like to share with you is from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. He served during a particularly difficult time in the history of God’s people. He grieved over their sin, their hard hearts, and their rejection of God’s message. Jeremiah 23 recounts for us a time when God’s people were failing to pay attention to God’s Word.<sup>19</sup> Let’s take a look at 23:16-29, “16 This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. 17 They keep saying to those who despise me, ‘The LORD says: You will have peace.’ And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, ‘No harm will come to you.’ (These words “you will have peace” and “no harm will come to you” SOUND like a nice message... the only problem is that it was an untrue message. God was actually handing down judgement and getting ready to exile them to Babylon. The people needed to hear a stern warning to repent, NOT empty pleasantries. These lying

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<sup>15</sup> See *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2072 footnote on Hebrews 4:13.

<sup>16</sup> Hebrews 4:13 goes on to clarify, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” ALL of our thoughts and attitudes, our very souls and spirits are laid bare before God. And He is the one to whom all of us must give an account. That’s why reading God’s Word can be intimidating sometimes. It can feel incredibly risky and vulnerable to spend time in God’s Word. And while we SHOULD reverently tremble before God’s Word, it is much riskier to ignore God’s Word. (See Ezra 9:3-4) It’s such a shame that any of us should ever miss its life-changing wisdom and warnings. God’s Word is for our benefit, for our blessing and the blessing of those around us. The Bible helps us to rightly understand God and how He wants us to live. It transforms us and changes us into the righteous people that He wants us to be. As we learn from God’s Word, and as we live it out and experience its life-changing authority, we will then experience the many blessings of walking in His ways. Psalm 119 contains 176 verses about the goodness and greatness of God’s Word. Psalm 119:1-2 begin, “Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.”

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.navigators.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/navtool-5x5x5.pdf> You can also find other reading plans on our website:

<https://efcbemidji.org/article/2021-bible-reading-plans/>

<sup>18</sup> There’s an incredible Old Testament story about when King Josiah rediscovered the genuine, transforming power of God’s Word. You can read it in 2 Kings 22:1-23:30. The book of the law is found for King Josiah when he was still a young adult, ~26 years old. He had ordered that money be spent in repairing the temple. During this process, Hilkiah, the high priest, found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord. Then, Josiah’s secretary, Shaphan, read it to King Josiah. Josiah was cut to the heart by God’s Word and tore his robes and wept in repentance for the terrible way that his people were living. Josiah realizes that God’s anger was burning against His people because of all of the ways they were disobeying His Word. Josiah inquires of the Lord and indeed God’s anger was burning against them due to all of their sin. God is about to bring disaster upon them. Josiah then conducts a massive series of reforms burning down temples of false gods, cutting up and burning idols, etc. Despite all of this, God allows disaster to come on those living in Jerusalem. However, he blesses Josiah by not letting him live long enough to see these terrible days ahead.

<sup>19</sup> In fact, God’s people were guilty of the same sin that we’re warned about in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” Sadly, our sinful human natures will not only cause us to turn our ears away from the God’s truth in the future, but we’re already doing it today. And Jeremiah 23 reminds us that this isn’t anything new; it was also happening in our past.

prophets were effectively “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic” while the ship was actively sinking!)<sup>20</sup>

(Verse 18 goes on) “But which of them has stood in the council of the LORD to see or to hear his word? Who has listened and heard his word? 19 See, the storm of the LORD will burst out in wrath, a whirlwind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. 20 The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand it clearly. 21 I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. 22 But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds.

(You see, what God’s people needed to hear was a call to repentance, a call to turn from evil. But what these false prophets were saying was more pleasing to their ears. It was more what they WANTED to hear. There are times when God’s Word needs to make us uncomfortable. When a call to repentance and turning from evil is exactly what we need to hear. Not all lollipops and sunshine and how to be happy. Please pray that all of the pastors at E-Free Bemidji will “stand in God’s council,” and proclaim God’s Word in this church. In fact, pray this for anyone who teaches anything in our church.)

(Verse 23 goes on) “Am I only a God nearby,” declares the LORD, “and not a God far away? 24 Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?” declares the LORD. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the LORD. 25 “I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’ 26 How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? 27 They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship. 28 Let the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?” declares the LORD.” (I had to think about verse 28 for a while. I’m not a farmer and I don’t really use straw and grain that often. However, anyone who does knows that straw is mostly for bedding and grain is for food. In other words, at best, the empty words of these lying false prophets could provide a comfortable bed to sleep in. But ultimately, their words were only as good as the straw that would become saturated in urine and manure. Only God’s Word offers genuine food and nutrients that satisfies our hungering souls.)<sup>21</sup>

God continues His question in Jeremiah 23:29, “Is not my word like fire,”<sup>22</sup> declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”<sup>23</sup> One of the ways that we can really be sure, that we’re listening to God’s Word, is that it HURTS sometimes. Certainly there are times when God’s Word is like grain that feeds our soul. It feels good to be well-fed and encouraged. But if God’s Word is also like fire, like a hammer, then it will also bring heat and brokenness and pressure. In other words, spiritual growth/maturity often come with growing pains. God’s Word is not idle, nor is it wimpy or timid about its purpose. It is designed to authoritatively chisel away our rough edges, to break us down, and then to beautifully remake us into Christlikeness.<sup>24 25 26</sup>

***Brother of Sister in Christ, as we approach the year 2021, let’s commit ourselves to submitting ourselves to the authority of God’s Word!***

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<sup>20</sup> It was a “futile action in the face of impending catastrophe.” ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/arts-post/post/literally-rearranging-the-deck-chairs-on-the-titanic/2012/04/12/gIQAqKhbCT\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/arts-post/post/literally-rearranging-the-deck-chairs-on-the-titanic/2012/04/12/gIQAqKhbCT_blog.html))

<sup>21</sup> Consider 1 Peter 2:2, “so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

<sup>22</sup> Proverbs 17:3 says, “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.” Check out the song by Delirious “The Crucible for Silver.” It will bless you. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owVXGo-x14I> Also consider the contrast of Proverbs 27:21.

<sup>23</sup> Jeremiah 23:30-32 concludes this section, “Therefore,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. Yes,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’ ... **They do not benefit these people in the least,**” declares the LORD.”

<sup>24</sup> God is in the business of restoring us to HIS image. See 2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 15:49, and Colossians 3:5-10.

<sup>25</sup> 2020 has been a challenging year filled with glorious opportunities for God to refine our faith, to reveal areas of sin and weakness, and to restore us to His image. In the year ahead, Romans 12:2 reminds us, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

<sup>26</sup> In other words, we can know that we’re listening to God’s authoritative Word, and not just to some empty words of man, when it TRANSFORMS us into greater Christlikeness. God’s Word is designed to be TRANSFORMATIVE. Transformation can be uncomfortable. It requires things like heat and sweat and surrender. Transformation calls us to humble ourselves, to open ourselves up to God’s instruction, and to die to ourselves; die to our own way of thinking, our own assumptions and preferences in this life. (See James 4:10 and Isaiah 55:8-9) In Matthew 16:24 Jesus teaches His disciples, “...Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Taking up our cross means that we take up our death. We die to ourselves. Not just once, but daily.