

The Authority of the Scripture in the Church
Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Timothy 3:14-15

Brothers and sisters in Christ, an easy way to summarize what we've covered in our sermon series on the Authority of Scripture thus far would be to say that the scriptures have divine authority because God is their source, the scriptures have Christ's authority because He is their subject, and the scriptures have the Holy Spirit's authority because He inspired its writers and illuminates its readers.

However there is one more source of authority which is important for us to look at - because it helps to drive home the purpose for which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have infused their divine authority into the scriptures.

Friends, it is possible for the divine authority of scripture to be an interesting but vague concept that we can believe on a Sunday morning – but still effectively keep at arm's length while we go about our daily lives from Monday to Saturday...

Because as the saying goes “when the cat is away the mice will play,” and since we can't physically see God in the here and now... it becomes easy to neglect God's authority in the scriptures, especially in the areas where they call us to change our thoughts, feelings and actions.

This is why the scripture says *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”* (James 1:22) And that really is the hard part isn't it...

So the good news brothers and sisters, and this may come as a bit of a surprise, is that the scriptures also derive their authority from the Church.

The Church gives the scriptures an authority which we are not allowed to disregard and ignore – it is real and active in the present, because the Church is real and active in the present.

Furthermore, as we know all too well, it is quite possible for the scriptures to be misinterpreted, misapplied, and twisted

to say all sorts of things which are half-truths and lies and hijacked to support someone's ungodly agenda.

But with the authority of scripture which comes from the church... there is a safeguard built into what the scriptures can be made to say authoritatively, as it must line up with the Apostolic creeds and confessions and teachings of the Church.

And this authority not only protects the scriptures from being twisted, it also protects them from an infinite amount of personal interpretations.

You see friends, while it is a good thing that we are able to put a copy of the scriptures into the hands of people, and especially into the hand of believers...

And while we believe that the Holy Spirit enlightens believers to be able to understand the message of the scriptures...

This doesn't mean that each believer has the authority to interpret the meaning of the scriptures for themselves and

disregard the authority which the scriptures receive from the Church.

So when we say that the authority of the scriptures also comes from the Church, we mean that in so far as the Church has been created and formed and shaped by the scripture, the scripture receives its authority from the Church.

So the Church needs the Scriptures and the Scriptures need the Church – and I'm not just being cute here, nor am I making this up, the scriptures themselves testify to this symbiotic relationship.

In Ephesians 2:19 the apostle Paul is talking about how we Gentiles have now been brought into God's Covenant people and we are "members of His household."

He then goes on to say in vs. 20 how God's household is "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone*"

So here we have Paul stating to us that the Church, which consists of all who are brought into God's household through Jesus Christ, rests on the message proclaimed by the apostles and the prophets – the New and the Old Testaments which make up the scriptures.

So the Church needs the scriptures, and in many respects we can say that the Scriptures create the Church - in fact we need to say this if we are going to say that Scripture receives its authority from the Church.

So in what ways does the Church need the scriptures in order that the Scripture receives authority from the Church?

Well brothers and sisters the Scriptures sustain the Church, they direct the Church, they reform the Church, they unite the Church and they revive the Church.

You see if the revelation and truth about God and humanity and our relationship to Him and salvation through Christ which comes from the scriptures is used to start the Church –

then we can count on it to sustain the Church and keep it alive throughout the ages.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Matthew writes how Jesus quotes the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 8:3 in saying *“Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matt 4:4) *(built on apostles and prophets)*

If this is true of humanity is it doubly true for the Church, and this is why when we gather for worship the preaching and teaching ministry of the Church plays such an important in worship and why it must be based on the scriptures.

It is only as Christians hear and receive and understand the Word of God that we grow into maturity. Now, this path to maturity does not happen instantaneously, or take place in a sheltered calm environment.

The Church exists in a hostile environment, in which the enemy seeks to destroy, suffocate, or water down the gospel message in whatever way he can.

As Paul says in Ephesians 6:12 *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness...”*

The good news friends is that the Word of God has been given to guide the Church, to be a light in this darkness so that we might find our way. Psalm 119:105 says *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path”*

So the Scriptures direct the Church to know how to think, and feel, and believe so that we live our lives in a way that honors God and brings glory to Him.

Now if we didn't still struggle with our sinful nature, the efforts of the enemy to deceive us and our capacity for human error – then it would all be pretty straightforward.

But the truth of the matter is that in every generation of the Church, we drift and we wander and we are deceived by *“fine sounding arguments”* and shaped by the *“hollow and deceptive philosophies which depend on human tradition and*

the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.” (Col 2:8)

And so the Church needs to continually go back to the Scripture and examine what we believe and espouse and teach about God and this world and salvation... and if we discover that some of our teachings and beliefs and practices are out of line with Scripture- then we need to re-form them and bring them back in line with Scripture...

A great example of this within the scripture is the story of Nehemiah gathering all of those who returned to the Promised Land after the Babylonian exile and reading the Law of Moses to them and the people responding by changing how they lived to bring their back lives into Covenant obedience with God. (Nehemiah 8-10)

In the same way, throughout history and in our current day and age the Scripture reforms the Church, which is why the Scripture is also able to unite the Church.

Brothers and Sisters, it is easy to see that there are many differences among us – age, life experience, personality type, race, nationality, cultural, and personal preferences and opinions.

Yet in spite of all these variables we can find unity as the body of Christ when we all obey and submit ourselves to the Word of God in the scriptures, and allow it to reform us...

Not so that our differences are erased, but so that all our differences are re-formed in order that the diversity which God created might be re-oriented to give Him praise and honor and glory instead of being used to honor and worship ourselves.

Remember, John's vision of heaven in the book of Revelation shows us a great multitude in heaven made up of *"every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."* (Rev 7:9) and this great multitude was singing *"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."* (Rev 7:10)

So we see all these differences unified in the proclamation of what is essentially the message of the scriptures - the Scriptures unify the Church.

And finally brothers and sisters the Scriptures revive the Church. In my humble opinion as a pastor, there are few things as beautiful as when the Church is experiencing renewal and revival...

People are coming to realize their need for Christ and turning to Him for salvation, and those who have plateaued in their faith and propelled forward to new heights, healing and reconciliation are taking place among people who have been estranged, the grip and harassment of the enemy on people's lives is being broken, and there is joy and peace and praise and worship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It's a lot like what happened at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out.

And I'm not one to minimize the work of the Holy Spirit by any means, but when the Apostle Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit what did he do?

He proclaimed the message of the scriptures, referred to the prophet Joel, to King David's writings, invoked the Messianic promises of the Old Testament and applied them to Jesus Christ. (Acts 2:14-41)

And the Holy Spirit worked through this proclamation of the message of scripture and revived the people of God to put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah and over 3000 became believers that day.

Brothers and sisters in Christ – we won't see revival in the Church without the Scriptures because the Scriptures revive the Church.

So, now that we can see how the Scriptures sustain, direct, reform, unite and revive the Church we can better understand how the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church.

So let's look at our second scripture reading comes in this morning from 1 Timothy 3:15.

Here Paul clearly defines God's household as "*the church of the living God*" and further describes the church as "*the pillar or supporting buttress and foundation of the truth.*"

And Paul also reveals that he is writing this letter to Pastor Timothy so that people will have instructions on how to conduct themselves as they are a part of this Church.

So we see that the scripture itself acknowledges that the Church is to function as something which gives the scriptures authority.

The Church is a foundation for the truth. In other words the correct and reliable understanding and interpretation of the scriptures rests on the Church.

It is the Church's responsibility to ensure that Scripture is properly and correctly understood.

And the Church is a pillar of the truth. It supports and lifts up the truth, holding it up high for all people to see. It is the Church's responsibility to defend and contend for the truth by making scripture accessible and available to all people and by teaching them how to – as Paul also instruction Pastor Timothy – “*correctly handle the word of truth.*” (2 Tim 2:15)

So the Church needs the Scriptures and the Scriptures need the Church.

Now the application that we need to learn about this morning, which will help us not just “*listen to the word, but actually do what it says...*” (James 1:22) but which will also help us to become “*approved workmen who can correctly handle the word of truth.*” (2 Tim 2:15) is called Biblical Equipping.

And being Equipped by the scriptures in this way isn't simply like getting another handy tool for your shop or gadget for your kitchen which you pull out and use every once in a while –is it more like being trained and conditioned by the scripture, and this is what makes it different from regular “bible study.”

Friends, the fact is that we like to read and interpret and apply the scriptures in a very individualistic and subjective manner... and this is problematic because we end up focusing on the question “*what does this scripture mean to me?”*

Most bible studies which I've experienced are simply exercises in reader reflection responses. We all take turns sharing how the bible verse or bible passage impacts us personally, nod appreciatively as each person shares, say a closing prayer and then we go our separate ways.

Or it was an opportunity for the group leader to get their personal point across by having group members read selected bible verses out of context and be lectured about them.

Brothers and Sisters, neither of these ways of interacting with the scripture respects the authority of the scripture as it comes from the Church – but friends, Biblical Equipping does.

You see in Biblical Equipping we are committed to approach the scripture together as a small group of believers.

And we listen to the passage of scripture – pausing to start with a prayer for illumination from the Holy Spirit to clear our minds of the clutter and noise to make us receptive...

Then we listen as the scripture is read, once, twice and then we pause again – resisting the urge and the temptation to speak right away and say what this text means to us.

Instead we take time to explore the background information about the scripture passage we're reading.

The person who is facilitating the Biblical equipping shares this background information with the group- resisting the urge to teach, preach, moralize, or apply the passage.

Typical background information that is helpful for the group to know about is: Who is writing this passage of scripture? Who is it being written to? What is the immediate context in the passage? What covenant administration does this fall under? What kind of biblical literature is this? Are there any difficult words/translations or concepts that need explaining?

Once the leader has shared this information, the group begins to explore the passage of scripture by asking questions which rely on grammar, syntax, sentence structure, composition and the meaning of words to help us summarize what the author is intending for the reader to understand from their writing.

After a few exploring questions help us to summarize the message of the passage, the group brainstorms on how that message can apply to our lives as Christians.

Then after some considering the different ways the point of the scripture passage applies to our lives, the group leader selects a verse from that scripture passage.

All the group members write down a way in which they can be obedient to this verse; this is why brainstorming about the application is helpful.

Then all the group members write down a specific time and day during the coming week when they are going to spend 15-30min meditating on that scripture verse.

The goal is to clear your mind and simply focus on this scripture verse and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal new and or deeper insights about God through this verse during this time, and write them down to be able to share them later on.

Group members also write down a specific time and day they will take 15-30 min to reflect on how they have or haven't been obedient as they intended to be, and if the selected scripture verse has spoken to them further about other aspects of their lives – and write this down to share it later on.

Once this preparation for their time apart is completed, group members share with each other what they intend to do and when they will do so they can be held accountable for it.

When the group meets again the next time, the time of Biblical Equipping begins with each member sharing about their times of meditation and reflection and obedience before they go through these eight steps together again with another scripture passage.

And brothers and sisters in Christ – I can tell you, *and this comes from someone whose main style is not Scripture Driven* – I can tell you that when you begin meeting with a small group and work through these eight steps of Biblical Equipping on a regular basis- you begin to become formed, sustained, directed, reformed, united and revived by the Scriptures.

And the Word of God releases its power and authority into your life as a member of the Church in a way that you've never experienced before.

And as you are under the authority of the Word and under the authority of the Church, you are enabled to wield that authority and power in your own life – so that you are *“fully equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim 3:17) *“which God has prepared in advance for us to do”* (Eph 2:10) as a member of the Body of Christ - the Church.

Because friends – if we do not respect the authority of the Scripture as it comes from the Church, then all we may believe

about the divine authority scripture has from God, from Christ and from the Holy Spirit doesn't count for much.

Believing in it will amount to deceiving ourselves, because we are just listening to the Word and not doing what it says.

But the scripture has authority from the Church – and that gets very real and personal and up front and into our lives, so that we *“don't just listen to the Word, but we go and do what it says.”* (James 1:22)

That's your verse to meditate on brothers and sisters – so may the Word of God dwell in you richly.

Amen.