

Series: *What Does It Mean to be a Scripture-Driven Church?*

Title: "Wrong Views of the Bible's Authority"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/1/2009

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In 2nd Peter chapter one, we read these words, beginning at verse 16:

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

This passage, along with other key passages such as 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, Hebrews chapter 4 verse 12, and the second chapter of First Corinthians, is one of the most powerful statements in the Word of God concerning the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture.

We find that the historic confessions of the Christian church have their foundations in these passages. The historic confessions affirm what the Word of God itself teaches us about the nature of the Bible, and how the church of Jesus Christ is to use the Bible.

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In chapter one of both the Westminster Confession of Faith, written in 1646, and the London Baptist Confession, written in 1689, we find these words:

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”

And in the same two confessions, we also read this:

“The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly.”

And in those same two confessions, we also find this:

“The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”

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These are historic statements of the Protestant church. And we find many similar statements in many other confessions and catechisms that have been written and subscribed to by various church bodies over the centuries.

The church of which I am an ordained minister includes these statements in its constitution:

“We are united in submission to the inspired and inerrant Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which are the only authoritative rule of faith and practice given by Christ to His Church. We are united in the belief that the only infallible rule for the interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself.”

And,

“We are united in doctrine, each minister and elder of this church subscribing to grammatical-historical principles for the interpretation of Scripture...”

In other words, the literal interpretation of Scripture.

What does all this mean? What were the men of God who composed these various statements attempting to communicate? Well, I think we can sum it up in one simple statement. They were saying this: It is our firm resolve to be *a Scripture-driven church*.

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You hear much today about “the *purpose*-driven church.” You can buy books on the subject. And the sum of what those books say is this – that the church needs to look to the unbelieving world for input. The church needs to *define* itself in terms that are acceptable to the unbelieving world. And the church needs to constantly redefine and repackage itself according to the changing whims and fads of the unbelieving world.

That is the purpose-driven church philosophy. Dear friends, that is false teaching. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord and Head of the church, He has defined His purpose for His church. It has not changed in 2,000 years. And it will never change, because He never changes, and His Word never changes. We don't need to go off into the world searching for identity and purpose. We need to go to the Word of God. We need to be a Scripture-driven church.

The question we're considering is this: What does it *mean* to be a Scripture-driven church? And that leads us to a pair of subsidiary questions:

First, how are we as individual Christians, and how are we as a body of believers, to view the Bible? What are we to understand about the nature of Scripture, and how then are we to respond to it?

And second, how are we as individual Christians, and how are we as a body of believers, to *use* the Bible in our daily lives, and in the life of the church?

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These are critical questions for the church in all ages, and they are especially critical in the times in which we live. There is a great deal of confusion about these two questions in the church today. There are lots of wrong answers going around. We need to be sure of the right answer.

So now let's take up the first question: How are we to view the Bible? What are we to understand about the *nature* of the Book we hold in our hands? We say that the Bible is inspired, inerrant, and infallible. But just what do we mean by those words, and what does it mean for the individual Christian and for the church? We find the answer here in Second Peter chapter one, especially verses 20 and 21, where we read this: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

That is the right answer. And we're going to look at that answer in some detail. But before we get to the right answer, we need to briefly consider some of the wrong answers. By God's grace, there are churches today that still really believe that Scripture is our supreme and unique authority. They really *believe* the words we just read. They are Scripture-driven churches. That makes them different from a lot of other churches. And it also makes them different from the cults – groups that may call themselves Christian, but are really nothing of the sort. It makes them different for two reasons.

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The first reason is this: Today, some churches say the words, but they don't really mean them. They say that they believe that Scripture is supreme. They may even have a constitution or a doctrinal statement that says Scripture is supreme. But in actual practice, these churches are living a lie. In actual practice, Scripture no longer has first place. Something else has taken first place.

The charismatic movement falls into this first category. Most charismatic churches say that the Bible is their authority. But in their churches, if someone gets up and says he has a new revelation from God, then that supposed new revelation immediately becomes the *de facto* doctrinal standard of the church, even if it disagrees with the Bible. We are going to see that the Bible itself makes it clear that there is no new revelation from God for the church. Scripture is complete, and fully adequate. We need nothing else.

The major movements among evangelicals today, also fall into this first category. The church growth movement, the purpose-driven church movement, the emerging church movement, they all say that the Bible is their authority. But as we said a moment ago, the churches that subscribe to these philosophies also say that in order to grow the church, we need more than the Bible. We need to go to the unbelieving world and ask the world what the church should be like. And then, we need to reinvent and repackage ourselves to meet the world's specifications. And as the world's specifications change, we need to change.

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But when churches do that, they are putting the world's opinion above Scripture. And besides that, they're going to the most unqualified people on earth. In fact, they are going to the enemies of God to ask them how we should run the church. Now, they may be very nice people, humanly speaking. But spiritually, they are the enemies of God. The Bible tells us in Romans 8 verse 7 that the worldly mind, the unbelieving mind, is at war with God. And First Corinthians chapter 2 verse 14 tells us that the worldly mind, the unbelieving mind, is incapable of discerning spiritual matters. In other words, the unbelieving world is absolutely unqualified to advise the church about its nature and purpose. Scripture defines the nature and purpose of the church, not the world, and not even the leadership of the church.

More and more reputedly conservative churches are falling into this first category of putting something else ahead of Scripture. They say, for example, that it doesn't matter how long you think the day is, in the creation account in Genesis, just as long as you agree with the statement that God created the earth in six days. What they're really trying to do, by the back door, is accommodate the philosophy of evolution – what is, in fact, the false religion of evolution – the religion that says that man is the product of time and chance and not special creation, and therefore man is his own god.

So, *my* day can be a literal 24-hour day. (And by the way, that's the only kind of day the text of the Bible will support. And there is nothing in actual scientific fact that contradicts the Bible's plain teaching of literal six-day creation.) But someone

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else in the church can say that the Genesis day is actually billions of years. And still others in the church can say that the day isn't really a day at all, it's only a figure of speech. Here we have the influence of postmodernism on the church. Everyone arrives at his own subjective "truth." There's no objective standard. The words of Scripture no longer have fixed and settled meaning to the postmodern mind.

But that's okay, many churches say today, just as long as we all agree that there were six of whatever kind of day it was, because the Bible says "six days." Well, that's a perversion of Scripture. And it's also utter nonsense. But many people today, even in reputedly conservative churches and seminaries, go even further than that. They are very open in saying that it doesn't matter what you think about the first eleven chapters of the Bible, from the creation through the flood, because, they say, those chapters are not an accurate historical record.

We hear statements today that the Bible is to be trusted when it speaks on spiritual matters, but it isn't trustworthy when it comes to matters of history and science. Listen to this statement by a man who is associated with a reputedly conservative theological seminary:

2 Timothy 3:16 contextually limits the authority of Scripture to matters of faith and morals. When it says that Scripture is authoritative for "correction," it contextually is referring to matters of faith and morals, not the correction of geology, astronomy, or any other science.... The absolute

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inerrancy of Scripture (inerrant in science as well as in faith and morals) is not a necessary doctrine of Scripture. It cannot be proven from Scripture.¹

Let's think about that statement for a moment. The dictionary defines science as "the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and explanation of phenomena." If the Bible is not "inerrant in science" – if it is not inerrant when it speaks about things that are empirically observed and investigated – then on what basis are we to trust the accounts of the plagues in Egypt, or the parting of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, or the presence of God's *shekinah* glory above the mercy seat of the tabernacle, or God's provision of manna for Israel in the wilderness, or the miracles performed by Jesus and the apostles, or the Transfiguration, or the Resurrection?

Where do you draw lines in the pages of Scripture between the errant and the inerrant? Who gave *anyone* the right, the authority, to draw lines in the pages of the Bible, to set boundaries, to establish artificial categories, to say that one part of the Bible is to be trusted while another part is not? The answer is, "No one."

But that has become the position of many reputedly conservative churches and seminaries today. The problem is that they are putting the word of man in authority over the Word of God.

1. Paul H. Seely, "Re: Noah's Flood," groups.yahoo.com/group/presbyterians-opc/message/28105. Seely is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and several of his articles promoting this kind of thinking have appeared in its theological publication, the *Westminster Theological Journal*.

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Dear friends, this is an easy thing to slip into. Let us not think that we are immune. We need to be constantly on our guard, because once you take that kind of compromise position in one vital area of doctrine, compromise on other doctrines will soon follow. It always does.

Well, that's the first category – churches that say Scripture is supreme, but in practice, they have certain areas of doctrine where they don't really mean it.

But there is, as I said, a second category. Some churches are at least honest enough to come right out and say that the Bible is not their supreme authority. They say we need something else besides the Bible, and they don't try to hide the fact that they believe that. There are churches that fall into that category, and the cults also fall into that category.

The Roman Catholic church falls into this category. Rome says that nothing is more dangerous than for people to try to interpret and understand the Bible for themselves. When you get into a serious discussion about the Bible with a Roman Catholic, one of the things you'll often hear is this: "Well, I'll have to ask my priest about that." There is only one safe thing to do, Rome says, and that is to go to the church. The church alone can interpret the Bible. The church interprets the Bible by the accumulated wisdom of its traditions. The church establishes those traditions through its councils, and the College of Cardinals, and the Pope. And the traditions of the church are superior to Scripture, according to Rome. The Bible is not enough.

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The cults also fall into this category. I'm thinking of groups like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Mormons say that their Book of Mormon, which, by the way, has been thoroughly discredited, is superior to the Bible. And they say that the President and the Board of Elders of the Mormon Church are the only ones who are qualified to interpret the Bible. They also teach that those men can receive new revelations from God.

The founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Charles Russell, taught that man's reason has authority over Scripture. That is the basis of their entire system.

Those are just two of the cults that call themselves Christian. But the cults always deny the authority of the Bible. That's how they get off the track. And when they do that, it doesn't take very long for them to get into all kinds of serious error.

Well, those are some of the wrong answers. But the true church of Jesus Christ must take a different stand. We must take a Biblical stand. True believers must be united in submission to the inspired and inerrant Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which are the only authoritative rule of faith and practice given by Christ to His Church. True believers must be united in the belief that the only infallible rule for the interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself.

That is the right view of the Bible. Why do we believe that? How are we sure of that? We find the answer right here, in Peter's second epistle.
