

Mr. Roby: We resume our study of biblical theology today by continuing to examine why we should believe that the Bible is the Word of God and should therefore submit to its authority.

Dr. Spencer, we have been addressing the Bible's testimony about itself, and last time we discussed the fact that a central issue in this regard is authority. God has ultimate authority and, therefore, his Word has ultimate authority. We ended by noting that Jesus himself spoke with authority and not only affirmed the Ten Commandments, but gave us a deeper understanding of them. What else do we need to say about this topic?

Dr. Spencer: I think the main point is that the Bible speaks with authority and we need to take its claim seriously; it is God speaking. Jesus Christ himself spoke clearly about the authority of the Old Testament as we discussed in Session 4. We noted then, for example, that in John 10:35 Jesus said that, "the Scripture cannot be broken".¹ But, there are many other verses we could cite. For example, in Luke 22:37 Jesus said that "what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment."

His point was that the Old Testament was a completely reliable witness to future events, and more specifically, that it had in many places and in many details prophesied his coming and what would happen to him in some detail. When Jesus spoke with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, we are told, in Luke 24:27, that, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." The main topic of the Old Testament is Jesus Christ. The Old Testament tell us about sin, and about God's plan to deal with sin. There is a progressive revelation of God's eternal plan of salvation in the Bible.

Mr. Roby: And that revelation begins in Genesis 3, right after the fall, doesn't it?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. In Genesis 3:15 we have what it is sometimes called the protoevangelium, meaning the first or original version of the gospel message. Most people have heard the story, but before I tell it I want to emphasize that this story is factual, not mythological.

After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve hid from God. But, when God called to them and they confessed their sin, he then pronounced the curse that would fall on them and their posterity as a result of their sin. That curse was death, both spiritual death and physical death here, and eternal hell hereafter. Adam and Eve immediately lost communion with God, which is the result of spiritual death, and they immediately started to age and move inexorably toward their physical death as well. And, finally, and worst of all, they, and all their natural descendants became subject to eternal punishment in hell.

But, God also pronounced a curse on Satan, who had appeared as a serpent. And, that curse included the gospel, which means, "Good news." In verse 15 God said to Satan, "I will put

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enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” This statement that the offspring of Eve would crush Satan’s head is a reference to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by which he would defeat Satan totally by freeing his people from their bondage to sin and Satan. So, when God pronounced his curse on man, he gave them the gospel of salvation at the same time. There was hope.

Mr. Roby: And, as you said, there is a progressive revelation throughout the Old Testament.

Dr. Spencer: There most definitely is. This isn’t the time to go into it in detail because we want to stay focused on what the Bible claims about itself, but I think this deserves mention now, and it provides an important piece of evidence for the truthfulness of the Bible’s claims. What needs to be mentioned at this point is that this progressive revelation throughout the Old Testament includes dozens of detailed prophecies about the Messiah, or Savior.

Messiah is a Hebrew word, which means anointed one. And, while a person can be anointed for various different offices, such as a priest or a king, the Old Testament also speaks of *the* Messiah, who is God’s anointed savior of the world. For example, we read about him in Psalm 2, where we read, in verses 1 and 2, “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.” The “Anointed One” in this verse is Jesus Christ.

Mr. Roby: Perhaps it would be good for some of our listeners to explain who “the LORD” is in that verse. I think most have heard Jesus called “the Lord Jesus Christ”, so there may be some who are confused when we hear the LORD being spoken of one person and “his Anointed One” being spoken of another person.

Dr. Spencer: The word LORD in this passage, which is in all capital letters in our English Bibles, is the Hebrew tetragrammaton, which simply means four letters. Biblical Hebrew writing did not use vowels, so we aren’t sure how to pronounce the word, but it is usually rendered as either Jehovah, or Yahweh. In any event, it is the name by which God revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14. It comes from the Hebrew verb “to be”, and so we can translate it, if spoken by God, as “I Am”, or if spoken about him, as “He is”. In either case, the point is clear. God is the only one who can say “I am” in an absolute sense. He is eternal and unconditional. We, on the other hand, like all creatures, have not existed eternally, nor do we exist independently. We will cover the nature of God in later sessions, but the Bible reveals to us that God is triune; meaning that he exists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is an incredibly difficult concept to grasp, but it is absolutely *not* a contradiction, and it is a clear teaching of Scripture as we will see later on.

Mr. Roby: Alright, so you were speaking about the Messiah, or God’s Anointed One, who is referred to in Psalm 2.

Dr. Spencer: Right. And my point was simply that the Greek word for anointed is Χριστός (Xristos), which is transliterated into English as Christ. So, when we speak of Jesus Christ, we are speaking about Jesus, the Anointed One, or, in other words, the Messiah. All of the Old

Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the son born to a young virgin named Mary, who was engaged to be married to the carpenter Joseph. And the Old Testament revelation includes more than just a lot of details about his birth, life, death and resurrection, it also includes a tremendous amount of information about the justice of God and how the death of Jesus can serve as an atonement to pay for the sins of his people. This is, again, not the time for us to get into that in detail, but I want to clearly make the point that the Old and the New Testaments are part of one revelation. They are not two separate revelations. It is all the revelation of God, telling us who we are, where we came from, what our problem is, and how God has solved that problem.

And, in speaking about the detailed prophecies that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, I've always thought that they are truly amazing evidence for the fact that the Bible is God's divinely inspired Word. How else could you explain the detailed fulfillment of these prophecies about Christ? Only God can accurately tell us about the future. And we know from the Dead Sea Scrolls that these prophecies were truly written long before the time of Christ. No reasonable argument can be made, as it used to be, that someone cooked the books to make it look that way.

Mr. Roby: Certainly, predicting the future requires authority!

Dr. Spencer: Yes. And thank you for bringing us back to our topic of authority. Only God has the power and authority to bring about what he intends, and so only God has the ability to accurately tell us about the future.

Mr. Roby: I notice that you didn't say God can accurately *predict* the future!

Dr. Spencer: You're quite right, and that was – as you surmised, deliberate. To predict the future would imply that God can look ahead and see what will happen, which is certainly true. But the Bible goes much further and tells us that God has ordained what will happen. But we'll leave that for a future session and get back to this issue of authority.

We have been making the case that the Bible claims authority, and have extended that case to show that Jesus himself claimed authority. In fact, one of the most wonderful examples of this is the story of Jesus healing a paralytic. The story is told to us Matthew 9, Mark 2 and Luke 5. There is a paralytic who has four wonderful friends. These friends have heard about Jesus and have seen him perform miracles, so they want their friend to be healed. They carry him to the village of Capernaum, at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus is teaching and healing. But, there is such a crowd gathered that they can't get near Jesus. So, they go up onto the roof of the house Jesus is in and they make a hole in the roof and lower their friend on his mat so that he is in front of Jesus. Just imagine how everyone's attention would be riveted on this man! This was certainly a pretty bold maneuver. And what did Jesus say to the man? We are told, in Luke 5:20 that Jesus said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Mr. Roby: I'm going to hazard a guess that this was not the response he and his friends were looking for!

Dr. Spencer: I think your guess is a good one. Jesus often surprised people, but always with a purpose. And we quickly find out what the purpose was in this case; it was to reveal his

authority, that he is God. We read in the very next verse that, “The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, ‘Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’” And, of course, that was precisely the point. Then, in verses 22-25 we read, “Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, ‘Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up and walk”? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...’ He said to the paralyzed man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.”

Mr. Roby: I would say that Jesus made his point pretty clearly.

Dr. Spencer: And I would agree with you. Jesus is God. He knew what they were thinking and, far more importantly, he has authority to forgive sins. So, the Bible has authority because it is the Word of God, and Jesus has authority because he himself *is* God. And Jesus gave authority to his apostles to preach the gospel and to rule the church.

Mr. Roby: OK, now you’re treading on thin ice with many modern Christians again. They don’t like the idea of the church having any real authority. What would you say to them?

Dr. Spencer: I would turn to the Word of God, as always. After Jesus’ resurrection he gave his disciples what is called the Great Commission. We read in Matthew 28:18-20, that “Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’” And he goes on to say, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Notice that Jesus didn’t make suggestions, he commanded. And the church is to teach people to obey these commands. And the church is clearly given authority by God to do so. For example, we are given a command in Hebrews 13:7, which says, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” This clearly establishes that this section in Hebrews 13 is speaking about leaders in the church. Then, in verse 17 we read, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.” We are to obey our church leaders and submit to their authority. But, notice that they are men who must give an account. And it is God to whom they will have to give an account. So, they should lead for the benefit of those who are under them. And that is why the writer says it would “of no advantage” to us if we don’t obey.

Mr. Roby: And, of course, it isn’t just church authority that we should obey. In Romans 13:1-2 Paul wrote that, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.”

Dr. Spencer: And we need to remember that he wrote this while living under the very wicked rule of the Roman Empire! As that passage notes, there is “no authority except that which God

has established.” God has given us clear lines of authority. A husband has authority over his wife, a father and mother have authority over their children. Church leaders have authority over the members of their church. And civil leaders have authority over their citizens.

Mr. Roby: Since this idea of authority is so alien to our society, I think it would be good to remind everyone of one thing you said earlier; biblical authority should always be exercised for the benefit of those who are under you.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. Our culture has a problem with authority, but authority is necessary, and it is good if it isn’t abused. Someone has to have the final say. Think about a company for example. If you get all the managers together to make some decision and they cannot come to a consensus, someone has to have the authority to make the final decision. And, if the company is operating properly, the others will all get behind that decision and do everything they can to make it work.

I think we are near the end of our time, so I’d like to read a passage from the book I mentioned last time, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. The book is called *Authority*, and on page 60 he has a wonderful summary about the progressive revelation we have discussed in the Old Testament, and the gifting given to the apostles and others for writing the New Testament. He says,

“Here is God’s revelation of Himself, given in parts and portions in the Old Testament with an increasing clarity and with a culminating finality, coming eventually ‘in the fulness of the times’ to the perfect, absolute, final revelation in God the Son. He in turn enlightens and reveals His will and teaching to these apostles, endows them with a unique authority, fills them with the needed ability and power, and gives them the teaching that is essential to the well-being of the Church and God’s people. We can build only upon this one, unique authority.”

Mr. Roby: That is a wonderful summary to end our discussion of the Bible’s teaching about itself.