

The Only Authority

By Stephen Finley

To the student of history, it is interesting to trace the ever shifting ebb and tide of intellectual and spiritual “authority.” In the realm of science, one might hearken back to a time five hundred years ago when the authorities dogmatically asserted that the earth is flat; and those who denied that it was so were laughed to scorn. Two hundred years ago, the authorities said that a sick person must have his blood let in order to get rid of the “bad blood.” Those who denied this were mocked. As recently as the turn of the 20th century, those who asserted that a surgeon must wash his hands and utensils in order to prevent the spread of infection were still sneered at by many medical authorities. For the last one hundred and fifty years, the “authorities” have overwhelmingly and dogmatically asserted that man evolved from apes through a process of biological evolution; and those who deny this philosophy are scoffed at as simpletons. The theory itself has been in a constant state of evolution since its inception. For instance, its modern champions have assiduously worked to erase the racist implications that are inherent to the whole idea of “survival of the fittest.” (Darwin’s famous book, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, showed us, in no uncertain terms, how brilliantly racism and “science” harmonise together. Hitler, of course, built his hideous racist philosophy upon Darwin’s theory.) Those were messy days; but with the modern “Out of Africa” or “African Eve” theory, the “authorities” have now assured us that all humankind has, indeed, evolved to the same level of intelligence, and that there are no lesser-developed *homo sapiens* roaming the earth. Of course, the theory does seem to smack more of political convenience than anything else. Perhaps we all would have been better off if we had simply taken God at His Word when He said that He “hath made of one blood all nations of men” (Acts 17: 26).

How about in the religious realm? Can we find any reliable authority there? Again, the path seems to be strewn with inconsistency. Five hundred years ago, people were actually documented to have been burned at the stake for refusing to believe that a mouse would die if it should happen to eat a crumb that fell off the Host. Now the same authorities that made such dogmatic and brutally fatal anathemas centuries ago are systematically discarding one ancient dogma after another in order to fit into the modern world—all the while maintaining their authority.

Whom can we trust? Is there such a thing as a completely reliable, flawless authority? Is there anything in our lives upon which we may utterly depend? There is, my friends! That flawless authority is the Word of God, the Bible!

“Hold on!” you may say. “Didn’t you just call into question the authority of religion?” Yes, I did! However, I am not speaking of religion. I’m speaking of the Bible. What of the church, you say? Well, in this present Gospel era, the Lord has given to His true churches the authority to preach His Word (Matthew 28: 18-20). However, the church is not Truth! A church is a simple *ekklesia* (local, “called-out assembly”) of born again believers who have, upon profession of faith, been baptised to show their identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6: 1-10). They are to shine forth as “lights” in the midst of a darkened world (Philippians 2: 15). Nonetheless, Christ’s churches are still made up of sinful, fallible people. Nowhere did the Saviour give His church the temporal authority to govern nations, much less the status of infallibility in this world. Only God’s Word is Truth (John 17: 17)!

I am often asked, “How can the Bible be flawless if it was written by men?” The answer is simple: God gave to the human authors of Scriptures the very words to write. The Bible is *God’s* Word, given to men through divine revelation. The all-wise God delivered to men His own words, yet in their own languages, styles, and expression. The Apostle Peter declares, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved [literally, ‘forcefully carried along’] by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1: 20, 21).

So confident was the Apostle Paul of the divine origin of the Gospel message that had been given to him and to the other Apostles by divine revelation, that he pronounced a curse upon *himself* should he ever preach anything contrary to what he had received from the Lord! “But though we [the Apostles], or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1: 8)

What a strong statement! God’s Word does not change with the times! No ecclesiastical body on earth has the power or right to change the teachings of Scripture in order to fit their traditions or philosophies. For example, Revelation 20: 11-15 tells us that someday the dead will stand before God to be judged; and that, their names not having been found in the book of life, they will be “cast into the lake of fire,” which is called “the second death” (Revelation 20: 14). The Bible warns us repeatedly of this place called “the lake of fire.” It is called a place of “darkness,” “fire that is not quenched,” “everlasting fire,” “brimstone,” “weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth,” “torment,” “no rest day nor night,” etc. Many religions today deny the existence of this terrible place. Despite the clear, undeniably literal meaning of these warnings in Scripture, they prefer to go with the current vogue, dismissing hell as “allegorical” or “unscientific.” Yet, “the word of the Lord endureth forever” (1 Peter 1: 25). Its words are “pure words” that will be kept and preserved “from this generation for ever” (Psalm 12: 7). Its judgments will stand, regardless of man’s attempts to suppress, distort, or extinguish them.

It is not this author's purpose to engage in a scientific or historical defense of the Bible. Having read the works of brilliant, world-renowned, Bible-believing scientists, I could spend the rest of this volume posing such questions as, "How does one account for the massive deposits of fossils that are found on mountaintops and prairies all over the world—in which are contained the fossils of land, marine, and fresh-water creatures of every climate and continent, all thrown together indiscriminately and violently into one mangled heap?" I could pose the question of why petrified trees are often seen to go vertically through several levels of strata that are supposed to represent "millions of years"; why alleged "missing links" keep turning out either to be deliberate hoaxes, or to have wildly varying and ludicrously contradicting ages ascribed to them; why rocks from very recent volcano eruptions have, when tested with carbon dating, been diagnosed as hundreds of thousands to millions of years old; or, perhaps, why cities, places, and names of historical personages in the Bible that used to be dismissed by the academics as "fiction" just keep annoyingly turning up in the sands of the Middle East. Such a discussion may be interesting or stimulating; but, ultimately, all the extra-biblical, scientific proof in the world cannot make an unbelieving heart to believe. Therefore, I shall refer to the Word of God without apology—for it alone is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit...and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4: 12). It alone is the Authority for our lives.

The Ultimate Question

If, reader, your heart is truly stirred by the truth that the Bible is God's Word, and, thus, that it is the absolute Authority, then you most likely have also given some serious thought to the ultimate question: "What is my standing with God?" If you claim to believe that the Bible is God's Word, and that God means what He says in His Word, then, surely, for you to entrust your eternal destiny to any philosophy or tradition outside God's divine revelation, the Bible, would be utter folly! I am challenging you, reader, to lay aside for a moment any pre-conceived notions you may have of "eternal life," or of what you must do to spend eternity with God in heaven, if you cannot verify it with Scripture. In short, I challenge you to look to God's Word.



Sin is an abomination to God, just like a rotting carcass. Even your best efforts are vile and unacceptable to Him (Isaiah 64: 6).

First of all, consider carefully God's Word on the subject of our sin—its origin, its severity, and its consequences:

"Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:" (Romans 5:12)

"The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." (Psalm 58: 3)

"For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Ecclesiastes 7: 20)

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3: 23)

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17: 9)

"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." (Isaiah 64:6)

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2: 10)

"Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?" [the words of Jesus] (John 7: 19a)

"Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Romans 7: 7b, 9).

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Romans 3: 19)

"For the wages of sin is death:" (Romans 6: 23a)

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Revelation 21: 8)

These verses present a bleak, fearful picture for every one of us! We are all sinners and rebels against God! None of us has kept God's Law, in letter or in spirit: and God's standard is absolute perfection. The Law (the Ten Commandments) does not provide us with a means to earn our way into heaven: on the contrary, the Law condemns us (declares us guilty before God), because it reveals our wickedness! God regards "harmless" sins such as unbelief and lying in the same light as sorcery and

murder! God equates lustful thoughts with the act of adultery (Matthew 5: 28); anger with murder (Matthew 5:22); rebellion with witchcraft; and stubbornness with “iniquity and idolatry” (1 Samuel 15: 23). Since we all have fallen short of God’s mark of absolute holiness, we are, unless and until we receive His salvation, spiritually separated from Him, and bound for the second death (an eternity in the lake of fire)!

The Only Answer



Every sin you have ever committed, or ever will commit, was laid on Christ!

Now, if you will not accept God’s Word concerning the matter of your sin, then there is no point in your proceeding with the matter of your salvation. If, however, your heart trembles at the thought that you have offended a holy God, I have good news for you: God has provided a sure way of escape! Here is how He made it possible:

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” (1 Peter 3: 18a)

“For he [God the Father] hath made him [God the Son] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5: 21)

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” (1 Peter 2: 24)

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him [His Son, Jesus], the iniquity of us all. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin...He [God the

Father] shall see of the travail of his [Christ the Son’s] soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.” (Isaiah 53: 6, 10a, 11)

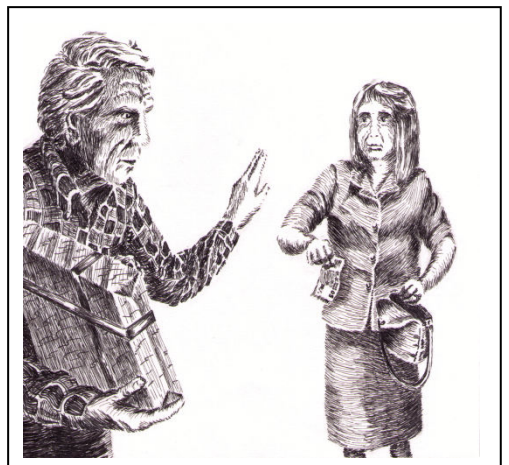
“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us:” (Galatians 3: 13a)

Allow yourself to absorb the truth of these verses! If it sounds to you as though Christ has done all the redeeming work for your salvation on your behalf, and that there is nothing you can do to add to it, you are absolutely correct! He literally took the curse of your sin upon Himself! God Almighty, the one who pronounced the curse upon us because of our sin, *became* sin! He *became* a curse! He voluntarily became your Substitute—taking upon Himself all your sin, as though it were His own, and paying your debt in full! He offers you, in return, His imputed righteousness—as though it were your own! That is what God’s Word calls “grace”—a gift that you do not deserve. Ephesians 2: 8, 9 declares: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.”

If you desire to know God and have eternal life, it is as simple as receiving a gift! The only way you can receive that gift is to place your complete faith (trust) in Him alone! When asked by a Roman guard how he could be saved, the Apostle Paul gave this simple answer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16: 31). The “belief” of which he spoke is not simply an intellectual belief or assent to a creed. (Even the devils believe and tremble—James 2: 19) No, it is a *heart* belief—a complete transfer of dependence from self to Christ. It is a sorrowful acknowledgement that you are utterly sinful and undone (the Bible calls this “repentance”—a humble change of mind toward God), and that you are placing your full confidence in what Christ did on the cross to save you. Paul did not say, “Receive the Sacraments.” No, he said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” He did not say, “Receive forgiveness of original sins through baptism, and then pay for the rest of your sin debt through a life of good works.” No, he said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

What is the reward for those who will reach out in simple faith and receive this wonderful gift of salvation? Paul answers that question in this way:

“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.”



To offer money for a gift would be an insult to the giver. Either it is free, or it is not a gift at all



Christ offers eternal life as a gift, having already purchased it for you in full with His own blood on the cross of Calvary.

To offer one's own works for that gift is an insult to His redeeming blood. Salvation must be received as a gift, or not at all.

In other words, those who are trying to do good works and rituals in order to earn the “reward” (salvation) do not look at that reward as “grace” (an undeserved gift), but rather as a “debt” (something God owes them)! My friend, God is debtor to no man!

The answer is clear: those who put their complete trust and dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ receive complete forgiveness of sins, and are given the imputed righteousness of Christ! When I stand before God, I have no question that I will be pronounced “innocent,” and will be allowed to spend eternity in His presence. I do not say this presumptuously or arrogantly. Quite the contrary! I do not deserve heaven! Though an undeserving sinner, I claim

His complete pardon with utmost confidence, because I am resting on the promise of God in His Word. When I stand before Him, I will be granted to be arrayed with fine linen, clean and white, which is “the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19: 8). That righteousness was imputed to me (declared upon me) by my Saviour, Jesus Christ, the moment I placed my faith in Him years ago. I still belong to Him; and I always will (John 10: 27-29). He gives me a peace and joy that this world, with all its fading, sinful pleasures, simply cannot offer.

As you can see, the “faith” that most people speak of is not the “faith” the Bible tells us we must have. “Faith,” to most people, is a “religion”—most likely the one into which they were born. “Faith,” according to the Bible, is utter dependence upon Jesus Christ. (When I look into the credulous eyes of little children, and see their implicit trust in daddy and mummy, I am reminded of Jesus’ description of the kind of faith it takes to be saved: “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as [like] a little child, he shall not enter therein.”) Mere religion and ritual is cold and lifeless. True, child-like faith in Christ brings new birth and new life (John 3: 1-36).

My friend, there is no halfway mark between death (spiritual separation from God) and eternal life (a relationship with God through Jesus Christ—John 17: 3). Either you belong to Him, or you don’t. The Apostle John wrote, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that *hath* the Son hath life; and he that *hath not* the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God [not those who merely *profess* the name of Christ, but rather those who have put their *full* trust in Him for salvation]; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5: 11-13a). Eternal life is not a “think so” or “hope so” matter. It is a know so salvation! Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath [present tense!] everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5: 24).

If you are struggling with that ultimate question—the question of where you stand with God—then please look to the only Authority, the Word of God, and you will find the one and only answer! Jesus Christ is called “the Word” (John 1:1, 14). To accept His Word is to accept Him!

Will you turn to Him for salvation? The Bible tells us, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6: 2). Truly, to have the faith that is required for salvation is not easy. It requires that you strip yourself of all pride, lay aside your own righteousness and merit, and utterly humble and abase yourself before God. Perhaps, at this very moment, your heart is ready to cry out to God in simple faith, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” If so, your plea will not be denied! Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). To all those who will come God through Him, He promises, “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37)! You have God’s Word on it!

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” (Romans 4: 4-8)