

EQTH105 Basic Bible Doctrine

Unit 6c Authority of Scripture

Presented by the



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Hello and welcome back. In the first sections of this unit, we asked two questions. First, we asked what God is like, and then we talked about the personal, knowable nature of his being. Second, we asked, “How can we know all this is true?” and then we discussed the four types of revelation. In this lesson, I’d like to dig a little deeper into that question of knowing and talk about the authority of Scripture. Authority. Now there’s a word we don’t like. It starts with kids who say, “You’re not the boss of me,” and goes on right through adulthood. We don’t like to be told what to do. And yet the Bible does exactly that. It tells us what to do. So it’s a natural question to ask, “Is the Bible the final authority? Does the Bible have the final say on all matters?”

Well, before we answer that question, let’s state what we do know. Foundationally, the Bible states that it is God’s authoritative word to the human race. In both testaments, we find that the writers testified that they were recording God’s actual words. This is what the Bible has to say about itself: the idea that the Bible is the authoritative word of God. Now, this is accepted not only by evangelical Christians, it’s also accepted by Roman Catholics, Mormons, and various other groups. So we agree that the Bible is the authoritative word of God, but the question is does the Bible have the final say on all matters? The question is not the authority of the Bible, but perhaps could be stated this way: Is the Bible the full, sufficient, clear, authoritative, and adequate rule of faith? Or is there something else that the believer needs? In other words, is the Bible enough? Is it the last word on every subject in which it deals with, or do we need something else? Is there another source of divine authority?

Now, the answer to this question is actually very simple when we limit the question to matters of belief and practice. And in that, the Bible is indeed the final authority. Now, the Bible, while authoritative, is not going to tell me how to change a flat tire on my car, for example. But when it comes to matters of belief and practice, the Scriptures are sufficient. Nothing else is needed. Now, not every denomination will exactly agree with that. Some believe that the church itself rather than Scripture has the right to have the last word on all matters of belief. And while they believe the Bible is God’s divinely inspired word, they do not accept the idea that the Bible alone is enough. They also believe and teach that holy tradition is an equally authoritative source. Furthermore, they believe that the church is able to properly interpret Scripture and sacred traditions.

Well, without getting into a controversy that goes back to 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the church in Germany, let us say this. First, there is the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, which is Latin for “Scriptures alone.” The Scriptures are our ultimate and trustworthy authority for faith and practice. Now, this doesn’t mean that the Bible is the only place where truth is found, but it does mean that everything else we learn about God and his world and all other topics and subjects should be interpreted in light of Scripture. The Bible gives us everything we need for our theology.

Second is the doctrine of *sola Christus*, Latin for “Christ alone.” God has given the ultimate revelation of himself to us by sending Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:15 says, “The Son is the image of the invisible God, and firstborn over all creation.” Only through God’s revelation in Jesus do we come to a saving and transforming knowledge of God. But Christ alone means that there is no other ingredient that needs to be added. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him.”

That word complete means complete. Neither religious rituals nor good works mediate between us and God. Acts 4:12 emphasizes this when it says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heavens given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Now, you can research on your own the other three doctrines of the reformation: faith alone, God’s grace alone, and God’s glory alone. But the point is this. Every word of the 66 books of the Bible is inspired by God’s Holy Spirit, and it gives us everything we need for our theology.

Now, while we are on this topic of other denominations or even other religions, people often ask the question about common features in all religions. Many people believe that all religions are essentially saying the same thing in different ways. This naturally leads to the conclusion that all denominations and all religions eventually lead to the same place. In other words, all religions are fundamentally the same and superficially different. So let’s look at that.

Most religions do have some things in common. They all attempt to meet a deeply felt need of all human beings to worship something and to experience ultimate reality. They all have a creation story. And interestingly, many religions even have a universal flood story. They certainly have similar codes of ethics. It is generally believed across all religions that such things as murder and stealing are wrong and loving is right. Therefore, there is some common ground between all faiths. Based on this, people often make the mistake of assuming that all religions are the same. And if we make the mistake of concluding that, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians are all ultimately saying the same thing. And if this is the case, why then make such a big deal out of Christianity? Often, we hear it asked like this: Why make such an issue about Jesus Christ and Christianity? All religions ultimately teach the same thing, don’t they? Wasn’t Jesus basically saying the same thing as Buddha or Confucius or Muhammad or any of the other founders of great religions? They all teach that God is love, right? We’re to love our fellowmen, right? And that we should give ourselves for others, right? Well, if this is the case, then why single Christianity out for special attention?

But the answer is that Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and other religious groups are not experiencing the same God because the way they define God contradicts each other. For example, Buddhists believe in an impersonal God. They do not separate God from creation. They believe that God and creation are one and the same. However, Christianity believes and teaches that God is personal. He is not the same essence as his creation but has a separate existence from it. Christians believe in a triune God, a Trinity, and Muslims absolutely do not. And more importantly, while Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet, they absolutely do not believe that Jesus is God. In the end, there are many examples of major differences between the various religions. So the reality is that religions are superficially the same and fundamentally different. A study of the various religions show that they teach different and contradictory things from each other about the nature of God and how a person can get to know him.

Now, they cannot all be true at the same time. They can all be wrong, but they cannot all be true. It is impossible for God to be personal and impersonal at the same time. And in the end, to say that all religions are ultimately the same shows a lack of understanding of these religions and what they are teaching. Again, the whole purpose of this course is to deepen our understanding of the truths of the Christian faith.

Think of it this way. The main question that needs to be answered by any religion or any belief system is not “Do they contain some truth?” The real issue is can they save? And the short answer to that, as we have discussed earlier, is that faith in Jesus Christ alone is the only thing that is able to save humanity.