

Martin Luther (3): Authority

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[0 : 00] Here I stand, I can do no other. May God help me.

Amen. Of all the words the German monk Martin Luther ever spoke, these are the most famous. From 16th to the 18th of April 1521, so that's just over 500 years ago, Martin Luther stood before a court at a place called Worms in Germany.

It was called the Diet of Worms. He was accused of heresy against the Pope and the Holy Roman Church on account of his views on justification by faith alone and his rejection of the sale of indulgences.

Well, hour after hour at Worms, Johann van Eck, his chief accuser, interrogated, threatened, and intimidated Martin Luther.

Finally, Martin Luther, standing alone before all his accusers, made that speech which has gone down in history as the defining moment of the Reformation. Here I stand, I can do no other.

[1 : 15] The question is this. Where does final authority rest for Christian life and Christian doctrine?

For how a Christian should live and what a Christian should believe. Does it rest with the church? What van Eck called the community of the elect?

Or does it rest with the Bible? What Luther called the Word of God? Or is it a mixture of both?

Where do we as Christians find the authority we need to know what to believe and how to live?

If it's the church, then purgatory, saints, and indulgences are in. If it's the Bible, then justification by faith alone and the free forgiveness of sins are in.

It's a most important question. In many ways, the most important question of the Reformation. To put it in modern lingo, who says what gives?

[2 : 25] Now, we live in a society where truth is largely a social construct, changing with time and circumstance. Many of the things the church has always believed are now under threat from both outside and inside the church.

One such question is that of human sexuality. Who says what gives for the Christian? Is it society around us telling us what we are to do and what we are to believe?

Or is it the Bible which tells us what we are to believe and what we are to do? Another more important question, perhaps the most important question, is that of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Who says what gives for the Christian? The scientific community or the Bible? Another question.

There are many different religions in the world. Who says what is right and what is wrong?

Religious experts? Or the Bible? From Luther's defense of the final and ultimate authority of the word of God at the Diet of Worms in 1521, the Protestant Reformation found its first foundation.

[3 : 41] Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone. It is the Bible alone which is the final authority for Christian life and doctrine. It is the Bible which governs what we believe, how we worship, how we live as Christians.

Not the church around us, not our society, not science, but the Bible. That is not to say that the church does not and cannot shed light on the meaning of the Bible.

After all, I used commentaries written by the historical church to help me write this sermon and to quote Luther's defense at Worms.

And that defense was solidly based by Luther upon the teaching of the early church fathers. And it's not that society cannot and does not open up for us the meaning of the Bible.

It does at times. And that's not to say that science does not and cannot shed light on the meaning of the Bible. But in the last analysis, there is much to be commended of the faith of the simple.

[4 : 49] The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it. If you want to be a Reformed Christian, you want to answer that question, what does it mean to be a Reformed Christian?

In many ways, the best answer is to believe in the final authority of the Word of God for all matters of Christian doctrine and life. For what I should believe and how I should live.

But what was it that gave Martin Luther the confidence to stand before his accusers and say to them, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Here I stand, I can do no other.

It was because the Bible itself, the book on which Luther was taking his stand, asserts its final and ultimate authority in all matters of life and doctrine.

You know, Luther himself had never seen a copy of the Bible until he became a monk in Erfurt. He found it hidden away in the library of the monastery there. One book among many other books.

[5 : 59] In his day, the dictums of the church were the final authority, not the Word of God. So the normal person, yes, even the normal priest had never seen a copy of the Bible nor ever read it.

But when Luther found that old copy hidden away among many other books in Erfurt, he couldn't stop reading it and he discovered that the Bible itself, not the church, claimed to be the final authority on faith and life.

It was the Bible, not the church, which shaped Luther's views on justification by faith alone and the freedom of Christ's forgiveness. The Word of God, the Bible, set the agenda and trajectory of the Reformation as it contains all we must believe and all we must do as Christians living in 21st century Glasgow.

Well, in 2 Timothy 3, 15 through 17, the Apostle Paul, the aged Apostle Paul, is writing to his young apprentice, Timothy.

Paul had spent his earlier years resting his life and his teaching, his faith in life upon the teaching of the rabbis. He had viewed the Word of God, the Old Testament, through their spectacles.

[7 : 22] But having come to know Jesus for himself, he took off those spectacles and he started reading the Bible for himself. And for all those years of service to Christ, he had found the Bible to be authoritative and reliable.

All the guide he needed to preach forth the gospel and to live out the gospel. And now he's commending that same Bible to Timothy.

Now, we could spend weeks studying these three verses in 2 Timothy 3, 15 through 17. I want to summarize their teaching under two headings. Authority from who and authority for what.

These verses are the Bible commending itself as the final authority on all that we need to believe and all that we need to do as Christians, namely the gospel.

First of all then, authority from who. In some of the most famous words Paul ever wrote in 2 Timothy 3, 16, we read, all scripture is breathed out by God.

[8 : 37] The NIV translates it all scripture is God breathed. The King James Version, that version with which many of us were brought up, translates it as all scripture is given by inspiration of God.

You then have these three terms to define the origin of the Bible, breathed out, God breathed, inspiration. And all of these are designed to convey the meaning that the Bible comes from God. We can talk about how God inspired the Bible but more accurately Paul is saying that God expired the Bible. When we breathe in we are said to inspire.

When we breathe out we are said to expire. That's very much what's in Paul's mind using this word here. The Bible is God's out breathing.

The word of God does not consist so much in verbs and nouns but in breath. The Bible is God's breath. You breathe into a balloon and it inflates into shape.

[9 : 47] He breathes and there is word. This is the authority of the word of God that it comes from within the lungs of God as it were and it's breathed out upon us.

Actually the medieval church that Luther was striving to reform and Luther himself agreed about this that the final authority for all we must believe and all we must do as Christians rests with God.

Not society not science but with God. It's God who says what gives. The question then becomes where does God reveal himself to us?

Where does God tell us what we are to believe and how to live? For Luther the final answer rests in the word of God.

It's in these 66 books God breathed through the words of common men. He speaks and tells us what we are to believe and how we are to live.

[10 : 53] Our own history as Scots is built on Luther's views. Question two of the Shorter Catechism asks what rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

Or in other words what gives? To which the answer is the word of God which is contained within the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

You want to know how to glorify and enjoy God which after all is your primary purpose your chief end in life? It's the Bible which holds the authority these two testaments old and new.

It's the Bible which teaches us what we are to believe concerning God and what duties God requires us. Here's our final and ultimate authority.

Not a human institution called the church. Not a powerful religious figure or a set of social constructs but writings breathed out by God himself.

[12 : 11] in the academic world of which I was very much a part in a previous life whenever someone is writing a paper or a report it is vital that he or she accesses the primary sources.

The primary source of the Bible is God and it's he who gives the Bible its authority. When we read the Bible it is as if God is breathing upon us.

it is God who is speaking he is its primary source. So you have two children arguing in the playground about whether Chelsea had a better football team than Manchester City.

Is that right Rory? And one will challenge the other one saying who says? When it comes to what we believe and how we are to live as Christians someone challenges us saying who says?

Holding a Bible up in our right hand we respond with the words God says. When Martin Luther stood before his accusers he found authority in the word of God.

[13 : 23] That word breathed out by God himself. His accusers found their authority in a church ruled by sinful human beings. Luther as sinful as the next guy found it in the perfect word of God.

And this is a really dangerous idea. Perhaps the most dangerous idea of all the ideas that we've explored over the years here in Glasgow City. That our final authority for life and doctrine doesn't come from society around us.

it doesn't come from the expanding field of science. It doesn't come from an institution we call the church. It comes from the Bible because it is the word of God.

church. Let's apply this truth. Our children sing the song Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.

yes children sing it so do i and so do those who are far older than me because in many ways this is our heartbeat as christians i say this as a phd scientist if you listen to science it will tell you nothing about the love of jesus for you it will treat you as a complex molecular machine or a hyper powerful organic computer if you listen to a church where the bible is not central it will tell you nothing about the love of jesus for you rather it will treat you as a consumer of its dogma and a contributor to its wealth if you listen to society around you it will tell you nothing about the love of jesus for you you are a national insurance number you are fodder for its publicity machine and so as we all get from time to time you're downbeat you're depressed things aren't going well for you the wind is most definitely blowing against you and you are filled with doubts and then you ask the question how do i know that jesus loves me and look up into a merciless universe and you look round at your harrowing circumstances you look within in your doubts and fears and you question how jesus could ever love you who says what gives upon what authority can you beaten up broken down believe that jesus loves you it is as you open up your bible and you read of his love for you in black and white letters sometimes even red i'm speaking here to the teenagers so so so so listen up you may say to yourself my friends hate me yes i even hate myself but this one thing is true jesus loves me this i know for the bible tells me so that one line in that children's hymn has been my anchor all the way through 35 years of being a christian that from the very mouth of god through his word i hear his voice in the mind of my heart saying to me colin though your friends may hate you and sometimes they do and though you may hate yourself and sometimes i do i will always always always always love you all i do is open my bible to hear his voice again and so when i say to myself or when others say to me see what sinful things you have done see how weak and useless a christian you are how dare you say that jesus loves you i can hold the bible in my right hand and say my conscience is captive to the word of god here i stand i can do no other authority from who from god well secondly and a bit more briefly authority for what authority for what given that he was willing to stand before his accusers and faced a possible sentence of death clearly martin luther felt that the final authority of the word of god was of first importance in the christian life he did not learn

his doctrine of justification by faith alone in christ alone form

[18 : 20] from the church nor did he write his 95 thesis propounding the doctrine of free forgiveness of sins with the gospel of christ from what society around him told him he learned these things from the bible he found in that that old library in erford for luther and for the rest of us the bible is our final authority our captive our soul our consciences are not captive to the church's rules or to society's standards rather we stand upon the word of god in life and in death and we can do no other lest we descend into the madness of emotional and spiritual chaos authority for what then first of all verse 15 authority for christian birth authority for christian birth in verse 15 we have these words from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings i far prefer the holy scriptures there which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in christ jesus which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in christ jesus the christian has comes to salvation when he or she has faith in jesus i'm just generalizing here whereas once he was headed for a lost eternity under god's righteous condemnation he is now destined for eternal life under god's righteous acceptance and all because he or she has faith in christ jesus the beginning of a christian life is as she exercises faith in the lord jesus sacrificial death for her on the cross and puts her trust in him and paul's saying in verse 15 that we all need a guide which will point us and make us wise for salvation through christ jesus and that guide is the bible church can't guarantee salvation society doesn't really want to be saved seems to be science most definitely cannot guarantee salvation the bible can as it makes us wise for salvation through christ jesus our lord as we engage with the bible's teaching on the nature of our sinfulness and how we love jesus took our sins onto the cross and bore our punishment we become wise for salvation as we read that what is required from god or by god for salvation is faith in christ we become wise unto salvation from the very beginning of scripture we read these words the righteous shall live by faith it's by faith in jesus christ not our own good works we are saved so for what does the bible have final authority answer for making us wise unto salvation through christ jesus and that's one reason why it's so important for you in your personal evangelism that you use a healthy dose of quotes from the bible because the holy spirit will take the word of god and drive it home to the hearts of unbelievers opening their blind eyes and bringing their cold hearts to life that's the raison d'etre behind the gideons just like god breathed life into the nostrils of the first man adam and he became a living being so through the god breathed word the holy spirit speaks into the hearts of unbelieving men and women and gives life our words are never inspired but god's words are many years ago we were privileged to have a young student come to faith in christ among us here her name was pauline forsyth and i hope she doesn't mind me telling her story pauline had been brought up as a devout roman catholic and had been sent to a private roman catholic school here in glasgow she was dating someone from this church who brought her along one sunday and she came to faith that sunday morning when finley mckenzie who was at that time the associate minister when he was reading the biblical account of the death of jesus christ on the cross from matthew 27 you see for all her devout roman catholicism pauline had never heard the bible being read before she knew nothing about it and for those few short minutes as finley read from there god's spirit drove home the inspired god breathed words of scripture to her heart it wasn't the sermon i preached it wasn't the songs you sung it wasn't the friendship she encountered nor was it the sacraments we dispensed that day it was through the reading of the word of god pauline forsyth came to a living faith in christ why do you suppose we invest so much time in this connexation in investing investing so much time in teaching our children the bible and helping them to memorize verses and passages it's because god's word is pregnant listen to this saying i like this saying god's word is pregnant and it gives birth to faith in jesus christ god's word is pregnant and gives birth to faith in jesus christ an evangelistic church will always teach the word to its children and both reads and preaches the word of god to unbelievers for it alone has the authority for christian birth but secondly for what and finally verse 17 christian life christian life in verse 17 we read that the word of god read preached and believed has this impact that the man of god may be complete equipped for every good work earlier translations talked of the man of god being fully equipped in this verse paul is referring to the christian life a life of faith in christ jesus scripture has authority to begin that life scripture has authority to complete that life fully equipping the man or woman of god for good works scripture has everything we need to survive and thrive as christian believers peter commends to us the virtue of growth i quoted this text with data but grow in the grace and the knowledge of our lord and savior jesus christ scripture contains everything we need for growth in grace and knowledge for the christian to thrive even in the face of

a hostile society there is no situation we can face as human beings for which we cannot find biblical precedent or biblical principles to apply maybe it's loneliness maybe it's grief maybe it's temptation maybe it's despair maybe it's conflict maybe it's confusion maybe it's frustration maybe it's debilitation maybe it's depression whatever the situation we're going to find biblical principles to apply in that situation we are it is no coincidence that maturity in the christian life is directly proportional to our knowledge understanding and belief in the word of god martin luther grew exponentially in his experience

of the gospel of christ's grace as he read studied and believed scripture and that's why he was so keen to place a bible translated into the vernacular language into the hands of every german citizen because he was convinced it was the only way the christian faith would prosper and grow luther knew that a society the society in which he lived didn't have what it took to help him survive as a christian for all the fellowship and all the sacraments of the church neither could it only the word of god could provide what luther needed to persevere in his faith to fill him with joy and peace and peace in believing no wonder then that at worms in april 1521 just over 500 years ago today luther stood before his accusers and said i am bound by the scriptures my conscience is captive to the word of god here i stand i can do no other may god help me my dear brother or sister in christ don't you know what treasures you have in that bible that lies on your bedside table as you open that bible god the holy spirit breathes on you jesus said about that bible you have on your bedside table these are the scriptures that testify about me by your bedside you have everything you need for christian birth and christian life but perhaps more important than anything else you hear the word of god himself saying to you jesus loves me this i know for the bible tells me so that bible you have by your bedside was dearly bought by the courage of men like martin luther dearly bought by scotsmen in the 16th century who smuggled bibles from holland into the eastern ports of montrose and our growth but ultimately the salvation that this bible reveals to you was even more dearly bought by luther's lord and savior jesus christ it's a gospel and salvation that luther experienced for himself and made all the difference in the world to him keep reading your bible children keep reading your bible keep growing in your faith keep learning of christ's grace keep maturing in your holiness and as you read experience the the breath of god filling your heart like a balloon with his joy with his love with his hope with his peace and in those dark hours when you are filled with self-loathing with anxiety with fears and with doubts meet them head on with the words my conscience is captive to the word of god here i stand i can do no other may god help me amen thank God then for sharp in his will be yard and by the word bo is the said