

A Firm Foundation 1

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[0 : 00] All right, well, welcome team.

We want to begin this morning a series on Scripture and take up the topic of the authority of Scripture. But I think germane to any attempt to state or formulate the Bible's authority is a recognition of the cultural context in which such an affirmation might be made.

For notions always have a plausibility within a particular context. I think we instinctively know this. It makes a difference whether we seek to make a case for pacifism at West Point or Quaker Town. The context matters a lot. So why don't we commence by considering what notions of authority are prominent, even prevailing within our culture?

Now I know by culture, you know, microcultures, all kinds of, there are lots of cultures, there are diverse cultures, but in terms of generalizations that can be made are our culture. So that's what I want to do this morning.

[1 : 30] Look first at the cultural context and then turn to the biblical context to see how it might address some of these cultural issues.

So that's where we're going. Why don't we ask the Lord's help in this? Father, we thank you that you are there and that you are not silent, but you have disclosed yourself to us through your scriptures, through creation, through your scriptures more effectively and supremely through the son of your love.

Thank you for your spirit, who that son has promised, that we might be able to appropriate and apprehend the things that you have given us for our good and your glory.

So we ask your spirit to be present with us as we know he is by your promise and to be greatly at work. In Jesus' name, amen. Okay, so the cultural context.

Next, undoubtedly, authority has fallen on hard times. Of late, in our culture, the very notion of authority evokes suspicion, even reaction.

[2 : 48] One of my Princeton professors remarked, modern thought was born in a crisis of authority.

Took shape in a flight from authority and aspired from the start to autonomy. It's a wonderful book by Jeffrey Stout, *Flight from Authority, Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy*.

The common attitude is conveyed in the widely sported bumper sticker. That's a little snapshot from myself of a bumper sticker that I saw recently.

Question authority. Question authority. That slogan popularized in the 60s by Timothy Leary. So why this visceral reaction against authority in our culture?

Well, let's maybe begin by acknowledging sympathetically that much of this has to do with our experience of its abuse.

[3 : 53] We have experienced the abuse of authority in horrific ways. So often we observe or are ourselves the victims of authority deployed exploitatively or oppressively.

It all has too familiarly been exercised as if in service of the agenda of the evil one who seeks to steal, kill, and to destroy.

And this lamentable experience is, of course, not exclusively a recent phenomenon. It's not as if we in our day are the special victims of authority's abuse.

There have always been perpetrators. Time immemorial. Shoguns. Satraps. And there have always been victims. Serfs and slaves.

As the kind of schadenfreude-esque popularity attests of that 30-volume series. Have you guys come across that at all? The horrible history series.

[5 : 00] They're kind of funny. I kind of grew up with them. Yeah. Those who have kids probably haven't. The horrible histories. I should have showed you some of the book covers. You know, just

horrible things that have been perpetrated throughout history.

But it's difficult to discern whether abuse has become in our day more pervasive, more pernicious. Maybe. Maybe. When Arnold Toynbee, the celebrated historian, they asked him, how would you summarize, most aphoristically, how would you summarize the 20th century?

That century. And he said, the worst yet. The worst yet. But whatever the magnitude as to the mechanisms, we seem today peculiarly adept, do we not, at discerning and tracing its working, unveiling its operations.

We have internalized the unmasking intuitions of the masters of suspicion. This is Paul Ricoeur's term, the masters of suspicion, referring to some of these folk.

[6 : 20] Ah, Nietzsche. You've probably seen him. What a mustache. What a mind. What a philosophy. I don't know. A philosophy. There he is.

That's Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's, perhaps you're familiar with this phrase that's associated with him, philosophizing with a hammer. And, you know, we imagine, you know, some sort of, you know, Teutonic burly swinging his hammer around.

And, yeah, maybe, maybe, in the German, the hammer, remember that hammer has more than one meaning, as Nietzsche intends, always, double entendre guy.

It can mean hammer, the thing that you violently swing to wreck everything before you. But it also means tuning fork in German. Tuning fork. And if you read all of his works, it is likely that that's what he has in mind chiefly.

He takes his tuning fork and puts it up against things that he sees in culture to see whether they yield a hollow sound. Is there something substantive there or not?

[7 : 31] Are they indeed what they seem or what they claim? I suspect no. So, as Nietzsche says, I do not refute ideals.

I merely put on gloves before them. This is in his echo homo. Echo homo. In other words, dissecting gloves to perform a vivisection, to lay bare the inner workings, or simply inspire suspicion.

Kind of like the sibilant, seductive voice in the garden. Is it really the case that? Is it really the case that?

Similarly, Marx. Ah, there he is. Behind claims of the right and rational lurk economic and class interests.

A concealing veil must be pulled back to reveal the true actors and the true dynamics. Again, a master of suspicion.

[8 : 40] And we've internalized these sorts of attitudes. Or, another familiar one. Let's see if we can get another bearded man. Ah, yes.

Sigmund Freud. Reality is not what we imagine it to be, but reflect darker, hidden, even subconscious processes that really affect these different things.

We need to kind of go back beneath. Be suspicious of what you might see on the surface. Well, these masters of suspicion, we as a culture have internalized.

And it has become our instinct to distrust and to deconstruct. The smooth politician. Big pharma. The CDC. The powers that be. Whatever it is that makes some sort of authoritative claim. And in our interrogations, our suspicions, have they not, often been proved warranted.

[9 : 44] As it turns out, there is much to feed a hungry cynicism. Was it Nora Ephron who put it? No matter how cynical I get, I just can't keep up.

Yeah, that's the feeling we have. And not only does our experience sour us to authority. Authority also runs up against powerful cultural enthymemes.

Enthymes. This is Aristotle's term that were drawn from his rhetoric. And by enthymeme, we mean a prevailing, he meant, and we mean accordingly, a prevailing sensibility or way of thinking we virtually take for granted.

Things that you can pretty much count on your audience believing. Okay? So, what are some of these enthymemes that just pervade our culture?

Well, three seem particularly potent and germane to this question of authority. The prospects for authority. The first is freedom.

[11 : 01] Freedom. There are few things we insist upon more vehemently than our utter and absolute freedom.

It is our prevailing premise, is it not, that none can legitimately abridge my liberty of self-determination. Any attempt to exert authority over me is to violate my radical autonomy. And freedom instinctively taken to mean the absence of constraints. That's how we typically as a culture construe freedom. The absence of constraints.

Does he look familiar? Jean-Paul Sartre. In his autobiography, *Le Moe*, or the words, he captures the spirit.

If you've read it at all, you might remember some of the opening scenes. He's a little boy. He writes that a small boy, he mischievously took matches to light their home carpet on fire.

[12:10] So as to like, you know, threatening to burn down the household. And as he was about to light the fire, light the carpet in his house, he experienced the interruption of his conscience.

And he identified that, even a small boy, with God. And was irate at the thought that God would dare intervene with his freedom and spoil his boyish fun.

He hated the thought that any authority, even that of God, would challenge his own sovereign freedom.

And later he would develop this into his philosophy. Would formalize this bedrock enthymeme as the premise of a syllogism.

He said later, if God exists, I am not free. But I am free. Therefore, God cannot exist.

[13:17] We've observed that modern thought took shape in a flight from authority. By modern, we mean ushered in by the enlightenment.

And illuminating as to its central theme is the 1784 essay of Immanuel Kant. There he is, Immanuel Kant.

His essay, *What is Enlightenment?* Enlightenment, modern thought, the culture that we are in largely.

He describes as, quote, release from self-imposed immaturity. Release from self-imposed immaturity.

And by immaturity, he means, these are all quotes from his essay, the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another.

[14:15] So the enlightenment takes as its watchword, says Kant, the injunction of Horus, *sapere aude*, dare to know, meaning dare to know for yourself.

We must come of age, he says, and cast away our tutors and guardians, come out of our nunnage, not nunnery, nunnage, our infancy, and our nunnage of dependence upon guides, and leave behind the leaving strings of the toddler, and walk upright by ourself.

So here, authority is cast in opposition to freedom. Authority and opposition are contrasting prospects.

And the restriction of this freedom is asserted as degrading. Authority tramples on the sacred rights of maturity, just as a human being.

Now, perhaps you think, well, that's 1784. Or that is far too historically distant to be very telling of our present-day sensibilities. Well, let's consider a more recent expression.

[15:33] Upon the 200th anniversary of Kant's essay, so in 1984, French philosopher Michel Foucault, he offered his own essay, *What is Enlightenment?*

Standing in very conscious continuity with Kant and interacting with Kant on this. And in Foucault's essay, there is equal assertion of utter and unconstrained freedom, such that our task as individuals, and I'm drawing quotes from his essay here, our task is a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy.

The patient labor of giving form to our impatience for liberty. But in this impatient labor of self-constitution, so pervasive and profound are the many forces external to us that would seek to define us, impose some norm upon us, regulate, require compliance and conformity.

All these things, whether it be the bureaucrat's form, whether it would be the norm of what is normal sexuality, whatever would seek to define or confine us in any way.

These things, we must be ever vigilant against those things as threats to our freedom. For these intolerable impositions and usurpations of power must be opposed and resisted.

[17:26] You could kind of take the whole of *Corpus* of Foucault and kind of shrink it down. This is how I do this. It's not quite a Foucault quote, but it's pretty close. Whatever renders me a subject, subjects me.

Whatever renders me a subject that defines what I am, subjects me, puts me under a thrall of some alien thing. Hence Foucault's prescription of defying all imposed boundaries in the interest of freedom.

What he calls an ethic of transgression. An ethic of transgression. In other words, if we encounter any sort of boundary, we have a moral imperative to transgress it, merely to assert our freedom as absolute.

Not too long ago, there was a display at Yale Art Gallery on this. And they were trying to think, well, how can we do this? And the way they would do it is they would put the frame for the picture they're supposed to do and then do the picture outside the frame.

No, nope, we can't even have any boundaries. So, yeah, kind of goofy. But the sovereign Foucault, as he does put it, the sovereign individual in his or her absolute freedom is a being correlative of God.

[19 : 00] In other words, as we define it, utterly sovereign, utterly free, well, that's God. Ah, that's who we are. We're correlative to that. That's what we are.

So there's the first and the end, freedom. And does this not resonate? I mean, we see and feel these things in our culture very much. They're very, very present.

A second enthymeme we might call anti-hierarchy. Anti-hierarchy. There is in our culture a robust aversion to hierarchy among persons.

We must all be on the same level. None may be elevated above his or her fellows and none subject to one so elevated.

For no one is the better or more worthy than anyone else. It's a species of radical egalitarianism in which any hierarchy is regarded as a violation of basic justice and equity.

[20 : 11] Indeed, a violation of the personhood of the one positioned to submit. To be subordinate is to be degraded.

Here's a testimony to this. Oliver Wendell Holmes made this observation before the Harvard Law School, no doubt with dismay within that elite setting, back in 1886, I think.

Holmes writes, I think we should all agree that the passion for equality has passed far beyond the political, one vote per one person, that's fine, has passed far beyond the political or even the social sphere.

We are not only unwilling to admit that any class or society is better than that in which we move, but our customary attitude toward everyone in authority of any kind is that he is only the lucky recipient of honor or salary above the average, which any average man might receive as well as he.

This anti-hierarchy is deep in the American spirit and has long historical roots. Indeed, America's founding identity as a nation is rooted in a rebellion from authority.

[21 : 37] It's just, it's in our blood. And a, so anti-hierarchy. And a final enthymeme to notice, we might call, and I'll explain, poiesis supplants mimesis.

Poiesis supplants mimesis. Poiesis, P-O-I-E-S-I-S. Mimesis M-I-M-E-S-I-S.

So this represents, these two terms represent divergent orientations to life and the way we think about the world and us in it.

Okay, so mimesis, think of mimicry. Upon the mimetic understanding, the world has an order.

An order, an external order, a reality that impinges upon us. And we need to conform to it. And we adapt ourselves to a reality that's external to us.

[22 : 49] And this has been the framework of our lives and thoughts as humanity for millennia. For millennia. Whether that external reality to which the individual needs to conform is the fierceness of nature in primitive tribes and its cruel elements.

If you just go out to plant your seed any old time you want and do not conform to the cruelty of nature in terms of when it can grow, you will starve to death and die.

There are these external realities that impinge upon you necessarily. Steer clear of the volcano when you see it smoking. You know, all of these things.

You know, these are realities that will impinge. So maybe that's, those are the external realities. Or the gods who demand a certain worship and obeisance.

Don't neglect these propitiating sacrifices or it will not go well with you. We must conform. Or perhaps the tribe which determines these practices to which we must conform for the collective benefit.

[24 : 02] Don't have any dealings with the Samaritans or whatever. You know, you get, you get these things all over. Okay. Or perhaps the polis, the Greek polis. The city state which dictates the roles of its citizens.

External. You know, Lycurgus in Sparta comes up with these laws. Well, why, why these laws? Well, the Oracle of Delphi.

There's this extra, we have the, the gods impose these things. And we must conform to these things. Or religion, which unveils the will of God to which we submit our own wills.

So notice, in all of these, there is a governing reality outside of us, which lays claim to direct our lives.

Our very being and our sense of identity. It sets down a course to which we can form. A path that we must walk after.

[25 : 04] A script to follow. And that's how we become who we are. Mimetically or imitatively. Like the little duckling, you know, who grows into the duck by waddling after her mother in mimicry.

A formative mimicry. Or mimesis, as philosophers call this. So there's, there's that, that, that one orientation to all of life.

A frame of reference in which we exist. Mimesis, mimesis, as some pronounce it. And that has, for millennia, that has been the case.

Different iterations, but basically the same framework. Something from outside you determines these things to which we conform. In contrast to the age-old mimetic view of life and the self.

And of quite recent appearance historically is an orientation of poesis. So think of the word poetry. They're, they're, they're related here. The terms, a creative work.

[26 : 15] Poesis. And on this view, the external world is seen as the raw material out of which I create my own reality.

Purpose, meaning, sense of self. I do not look outside of myself to some guiding reality. Instead, I look within myself.

And from that well, within, draw out the inspiration to fashion myself, my identity, my meaning, as my own creative work of art.

We can see how such a view can flourish, perhaps could only flourish, in a world in which it is increasingly easy to imagine that reality is something that we can simply manipulate.

Very easily manipulate. According to our own wills and desires. And not something to which we need necessarily to conform or passively accept. Do we want fresh bananas midwinter?

[27 : 26] Simply order them off Amazon and they'll arrive tomorrow. I mean, we can manipulate our world, it's so it seems. Geography seems completely irrelevant now with, you know, airplanes and so forth.

These things that were, that were so robust seem to be liquefied. Now, in our ability to manipulate reality. So it can engender easily this sort of expansive sense that I can create reality myself.

Reality is what we creatively fashion it to be. It is not given to us, but graven by us.

It is a poetic world. In a poetic world, purpose, meaning and identity is not discovered, but invented. Anything that transcends the self and disappears from reality, or at least relevance. No creator's purpose or human nature can dictate the shape of my life.

[28 : 41] I choose for myself as a creative self-expression. So we're left with what Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher, calls an imminent frame.

Not open to any transcendence. Imminent frame with, as individual, what he calls expressive individualism prevailing.

As part of a culture of authenticity. So these are his terms. A culture of authenticity.

I simply have to be true to myself. That's the all-important thing. True to my own self-creation, self-perception.

What I find within, to conform to anything outside me, would be inauthentic. Surely that's not right. Inauthentic. If you're interested in these things, some books on this.

[29 : 45] So I mentioned Charles Taylor, The Secular Age. Yeah, that's sources of the self. He has the ethics of authenticity. These are three of them.

I think I might even have... Ah, yes, there's Charles Taylor. There's Charles Taylor. So these are good. Also, Philip Reif.

If you've come across him. Triumph of the Therapeutic. Therapeutic. Speaking about the same notion is we don't necessarily ask, well, what is real or what is authority?

But what will make me feel good or be happy or lead to that? And how can I shape reality to conform to what would just be conducive to my own self-conception of my well-being? And this is the all-decisive consideration for us. This is a triumph of the therapeutic. He also has three-volume work. Really, really hard.

[30 : 44] It was really hard for me to get through. It's an incredible dense prose and idiomatically really eccentric, but remarkably profound.

Death works or something. I forget the exact title. But this is Philip Reif. But he talks about similarly kind of the first world, second world, and third world.

And we live in the third world. He's kind of tongue-in-cheek, calls it that. Same sort of observations about mimesis being supplanted by poiesis. So those are some good books.

Probably most accessible, he tried to take some of this thought and render it somewhat accessible, is a work by Carl Truman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*.

Very helpful in this, where he's particularly looking at how this plays up in terms of our particular understanding of sexuality and kind of a politics of recognition.

[31 : 46] He opens up by saying, you know, the statement that is commonplace today. Well, I'm a woman just trapped in a man's body.

How this just makes so much sense to us today. But how, like, several generations ago, you try that on for your grandfather or grandmother, and they think, excuse me?

I can't even begin to understand what that could even mean. What is it that has happened in our culture for something to be utterly incomprehensible to become commonplace?

I mean, these are fascinating historical questions to ask. So that's Carl Truman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. An easier book to read is *A Strange New World* by Carl Truman.

Ah, thank you, Raul. It's a little thinner, and he goes through everything in his book. Excellent.

Okay, great. *The Strange New World*. Okay, very helpful. *Strange New World*.

[32 : 48] Good. Yeah, the late, yes, alas, late, Sir Roger Scruton sees this sea change of mimesis to poiesis, even manifested in popular dance.

He's got this piece where he talks about earlier forms of dancing typically involved formal steps that needed to be learned. One, you know, one would imitate kind of the dance instructor, and you would be formed by the dance.

It would kind of regulate your motions, and that's what it used to be. And a meaning and a pleasure was derived from the individual taking part in a coordinated effort.

We still have, you know, what, I don't know, Texas, I don't know. There still are dances like that thing. Yeah, but, and then he, Scruton contrasts this with kind of what he calls the nightclub style dance.

Dance is not my forte, so I'm not in kind of way. But nightclub style dancing in which the individual simply kind of does their own thing. It's kind of like just an individual creative self-expression.

[34 : 02] So even in the way people dance expresses this. Well, with poiesis supplanting mimesis as the cultural enthymeme, and where does it not in our current culture, any claim of authority faces a steep uphill climb, incredibly steep uphill climb.

So this then is some of the ethos of our culture when it confronts authority. An atmosphere suffocating, or at least deeply skeptical of the imposition, even suggestion of any authority claim.

Let's pause here and ask, because I've been droning on for a long time now.

Let's ask together, okay, what is right? What is right about these sensibilities?

Often as Christians in relation to culture around us, we immediately assume a stance of opposition and contradiction. Oh, that's wrong. That's not right.

[35 : 20] For these 19 reasons, it's not right. And we need to get there eventually. But sometimes if we're engaging with unbelievers, it's much more profitable to ask, is there something I can affirm?

You know, as these views are articulated, is there a way that we can respond? Yes, I see that. I see that concern. I feel that.

I think that, that bit there is right. And it seems very important. To begin with some genuine affirmation, can fruitfully reframe our encounters with as yet outsiders to our faith.

You see what sort of difference that can make? Can we frame it as maybe a problem or a puzzle that we commonly find ourselves in and could collaboratively work together to solve?

And this sort of shifts the interaction from a conflictual to a collegial. Wow, these are really hard things, aren't they? Wow. Let's, let's, let's, let's figure this out together.

[36 : 38] Let's put the puzzle together. Have you found any corner pieces? Is something reasonably solid for you? How about this piece? Does that fit in? Could that, that, that, that blue, mostly blue with a little white?

You think that that's sky and cloud? Or could it be water and wave? I don't, what do you think? See, then you're engaging together with them.

So, let's practice that a little bit together as the people of, people of God. And again, I think we have a theology that allows us to do that.

I mean, we could talk about that too. That would be a great discussion. But remember, every individual that we encounter, you know, I remember asking one of her daughters, I won't name which one, and, and, oh, she was being critical.

I said, oh, wait, Bill. What, what, what? Oh, I'm sorry. Forgive me. Wait, what, what, what, what do we know about every person?

[37 : 40] They're sinners, Dad. They're sinners. But, but, but, more fundamentally. More fundamentally. What do we know before that? Okay, they're in the image of God.

Yes. So, what does that mean? That means that they reflect something of the divine glory in them.

Yes. Yes. So, in every time you encounter somebody new, at least the first five minutes, discover and delight in what you find in them that reflects the image of God.

It will make for a happier life for you and a more promising encounter. Okay, Dad. But she's getting better at it. She's, she's, she's getting a lot better at it.

It's, it's wonderful. So that's, that's, that's what we want to do. Um, um, so a much more promising dynamic, at least in my experience. Um, so let's take some of these things.

Uh, and, and, and for a while, uh, uh, uh, what, what seems right? Or on the right track with these notions and sensibilities that animate our culture?

[38 : 46] Uh, do we have any reason to question authority? Yeah, yeah. There you go. Yeah, yeah. There you go.

We, we have experience, do we not, of, that's just, it's not always good. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Um, I don't remember what, which, uh, person that we were talking about here, but, uh, one of them seemed to mention that, like, there was a, there's some set scripts that are handed down to us by authorities that we're, we're supposed to follow.

Yeah. Even things like, I don't know, television sitcoms teach us how to run our relationships. So, like, when is it okay for me to forgive something wrong to me?

Like, well, if they cheated on me this way, then I'm never going to speak to them again, again. Or if they lied to me in this way, I guess that's acceptable because I understand why they, you know, there's these, these literally scripts are teaching us how to run our lives so that when we encounter the same situation, we, we have this, like, uh, mental preset, this mimesis.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, I, you know, that made a lot of sense to me when I saw it on TV and now I'm in this situation. This is not. Yeah. Yeah. Conscious thoughts running through our heads, but we, we're, we're trained by culture, even with things like forgiveness in which Jesus has sometimes radically different things to say.

[40 : 17] Yeah. So, those authorities may be, ought to be questioned. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Helpful. Yeah. Yeah. Can you think of any sort of biblical warrants that we would, that we would, you know, do we always just take all authority as it, as it, as it comes?

Can you, can you think of any, any, um, biblical, uh, principles or, or, or, um, stories that, that, that might give us as believers reasons to be pretty sympathetic to the need to question authority.

The guys in the fiery furnace. There you go. That's, yeah, yeah, that's right. Excellent. Yeah. Yeah.

Remember, uh, uh, when, um, when, when Jesus was often confronted by these, these strange claims or actions with the question, by what authority do you do these things?

Was he dismissive of that, that line of questioning? No, he engaged it. I'll tell you. I'll tell you. And it's a little, it was a legitimate question.

He, uh, yeah. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, examine all things and cling to what is good. Cling to what is good.

[41 : 35] Examine all things. I don't just want to take these things in. Uh, yeah. Yeah. There's, there's, there's a lot of false or bad authority. Remember the story of the seven sons of Sceva?

In Acts. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. In the name of Jesus. Whoa, whoa, whoa. I know Jesus and I've heard of Paul, but who are you? Who are you? Didn't turn out very well for them.

How about, you know, this, we, we, we talk about the masters of suspicion. Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and, and others.

Um, uh, any biblical grounds that we might have for suspicion? Yeah, yeah. So some of these enlightened thinkers shaped the Protestant Reformation or the ideas around that, which led to us being able to read the Bible independently and have copies.

So in some ways rejecting the authority of the Catholic Church led to access of God's Word. Yeah, yeah. It led to a thousand denominations in the church, schism.

[42 : 45] That is also true. Yeah, also true. Yeah, so it's not uncomplicated, is it? So there's some good authority. There's some that needs to be held up to a touchstone. And many of them, the reformers, what they wanted to do is they, there was a, there was a question of on what ground, on what grounds do we evaluate these things?

Popes can err. Councils can get it wrong. The word of God being the touchstone. My conscience is captive to the word of God.

Here I stand, I can do no other. You know, so that question of how do, what, what is authority for the believer in our Christian life was a critical question to try to grapple with.

Absolutely. Absolutely. That quote is an interesting in-between where you were questioning the authority of humans involved in religion, but in opposition to Foucault, whose conscience that God is then imposing on his faith.

Yeah. Right? Yeah. Yeah. Excellent. Did Jesus entrust himself to all people? No.

[44 : 05] He didn't. And why not? Because he knew what was in them. See, you know, there are good grounds, I think, to, you know, whether we call that suspicion or caution.

You know, we can identify with these instincts of, as yet, unbelievers that are pervasive in culture.

Yeah. How about freedom?

Is it something we can affirm about this instinct for freedom? It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. There you go. We are fantastic. Galatians 5.1.

It was for freedom that Christ has set us free. If the Son has made you free, you are free indeed.

Ah, free indeed. In other words, there are probably other species of freedom that maybe are false freedom.

Not free indeed, but seemingly free. But so, yes, yes, but it's complicated. Let's figure this one out. What really enslaves us? It's like a fish is only free of the water and a train is only free on the tracks.

[45 : 09] Yeah. Once it's out of the water, it dies. Once it's off the track, it can't do a thing. Yes. We have our own perimeters that we can't cross over. Right, right.

Yeah. So, so helpful. You know, we oftentimes, maybe we just think about freedom from, but freedom for what? This, you know, were we made for something?

Absolutely. Good. Once we worship the creation, instead of the creator, I think we would come and play. Yeah, yeah. Isn't that, yeah.

And that's precisely what Romans 1 talks about. It's these things that we elevate and worship, they become actually our masters.

We think that they're going to serve us, but we end up serving those things. Yeah, absolutely.

Anti-hierarchy. How about, how about that?

[46 : 12] Anything that we could affirm about this, this anti-hierarchical impulse as believers?

Yeah, yeah. Jesus is praising the Pharisees.

Ah. He says, you know, they put themselves in the seat of Moses. Very. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Very helpful. Being lied to by presidents and so forth.

And they're stuck. Yeah. Just because someone's elevated doesn't, doesn't, doesn't. Yeah. Yeah.

The, one of the, one of the interesting things of this notion of the image of God.

Historians will say this was radically democratic in the sense, because you did have a notion, the image of God, that that would be Pharaoh.

But Pharaoh alone sitting atop the society. Or the king alone was the image of God. But then the Hebrew scriptures come in, or our Bible says, no, no, no, no.

[47 : 12] Every human being is equally the image of God. Radically egalitarian in that, in that, in that sense. So there's, there's something robust to affirm that, that, that we can.

So no one is more or less elevated with respect to value, worth, dignity in those. We can affirm those things. How about poiesis mimesis?

Was there, yeah, yeah. I think in some ways, yeah, sort of, there's a freedom to innovate or be creative or even sort of, or Amazon Fresh, is that what's called?

Or you can order bananas. You know, it can lead to, like, people in unresourced areas having access to fresh foods. It's not, not always in and of itself a bad thing to be able to innovate and sort of think outside the box.

Yeah, yeah. Or could be used for human flourishing. Yeah. Yeah. That's one of the ways we're in the image of God. God is a creator. And we, as people, like to create, right?

[48 : 14] All artists are creators. Everyone kind of is a creator. Yeah, wonderful. What, what Tolkien calls sub-creation. And that's what we are. And we image God by being creative.

And we do that, not all the same, but in all kinds of unique signature ways. Just like we all have our signature ways of being. We're all alike sinners.

Others, all we like sheep, have gone astray. But we each have our individuality. Each one has gone their own way. We all have our signature sins.

And likewise, too, with, you know, with, with, with, with glory, star will differ from star and glory. We will eat. There will be a uniqueness. There's a creative individuality that glorifies God and finds expression.

Tulips are nice. He didn't make all tulips. There's a variety. He loves, he loves this. So, what is the, yeah.

[49 : 15] Jesus talking to Peter about how he would glorify him. And then John says, well, you know, and then Peter says, well, what about him? Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

What is that to you? If I want to do this with him and you, well, you follow me. You got your own path. We're each going to have creative, you know, poiesis.

There's a, there's a, there's a God glorifying poiesis. Every tongue tribation. And it gets even more particular, I'm sure. So things to affirm, things, things, things to affirm. And I, I, try that on as, as a good godly discipline.

When you encounter these things that you, okay, that's kind of, that, that's, that's a really tough environment for authority. But before I just negate and fire away at that thing from my church parapet, let me see if I can, you know, sympathetically engage with some of these, these things they have.

Because remember, everybody's created in the image of God, but also fallen sinners. So there, there, there will be some sort of twisting of the timber of all of our notions.

[50 : 30] All of our notions will, will be an amalgam of something that reflects the image of God and something that reflects our sinfulness. Yeah. Sometimes God says that he's a jealous God, but when he does jealousy, he does it perfectly.

Yeah. It's warped. Yeah, exactly. Great example. Great example. And then to, to, to, to discern that. Okay.

Thanks. Oh, yes. Let's, let's move on quickly and, and turn now from our cultural context to the biblical context. You know, can, in such an atmosphere, is it even possible to construe authority as a good?

Can authority be rehabilitated in any positive sense? And it seems from the perspective of the Bible, it's vital for us to do so. For our well-being, both as a culture and as individuals will depend upon our doing this.

Why is this the case? Well, the biblical context provides the answer. And while the Bible acknowledges and fiercely opposes the abuse of authority.

[51 : 44] And again, it's not as if modernist or postmodernist pundits and their hermeneutics of suspicion. It's not as if we really need them to reveal these things.

The scripture has been telling us all along in categories of the false and the desperately wicked heart. But, you know, but yet the Bible insists that our negative experience of authority derives from a twisting of a good thing.

A corruption of something that's positive. And again, I wish we had more time because I don't want to just skate over this. For lives have been broken terribly by such abuse.

And you can't just move on without weeping with those who weep in these areas. And seeking to bind up the wounds and setting ourselves to kind of beat those plows or those swords that have been so wounding into some sort of helpful plowshares.

And we'll hope that he spends more time on that. But critically, it is the unrelieved assertion of the Bible that in God, authority is utterly uncorrupted.

[53 : 13] Never abusive. Always an instrument of holy good. So let's consider briefly the nature of God's authority.

So, first, the king's credentials. First, God's authority is good. The Bible presents the authority of God as a reign. It is that rule or rulership that prevails within the kingdom of God.

And because God's rule is benign, the kingdom, as a result, is the sphere of blessing and flourishing, healing and restoration.

The sphere, as Romans 14 says, of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. So the one who finds it finds a great treasure, Luke 13.

A pearl of great price. Something so wonderful that it's worth giving up all that you have to obtain it. Unspeakably wonderful.

[54 : 17] The Old Testament term to characterize this kingdom is shalom. A comprehensive well-being of everything perfectly in place. And by perfectly in place, we mean perfectly submitted to God's will and well-ordered rule.

The kingdom, the sphere of the authority of God is a place of blessedness. He exercises his sovereign reign for the good of his people. Jeremiah 32.

You know, good, good, good. You don't have to be an English literature major to pick up the theme.

Good, good, good, good, good. Jeremiah 29. I know the plans that I have for you, saith the Lord.

They are plans for your, not for your calamity, for your welfare and your flourishing.

To give you a future and to give you a hope. Jeremiah 29.11. You know, Matthew 7. Remember, oh, if your earthly father knows how to give good gifts to you, to children, how much more your heavenly father, how much more your heavenly father knows how to give good gifts.

The Holy Spirit is metonymy for all things good and wonderful, superlatively so. And not only is God's authority or rule good, it is also, second, right and real.

[55 : 35] It is right and real. God's claim to authority is a just claim. For his authority is derived from his being the creator.

Indeed, the very word authority derives from author. He is the author of our existence.

Therefore, he has authority over our lives. Romans 9. Remember, quoting Jeremiah 18. Does not the potter have a right over the clay? And while this claim is absolute over all creation, all of his created beings, his claim is compounded for the believer.

We are his not only by creation, but also by redemption. You are not your own. You have been bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your bodies.

1 Corinthians 7. And in his authority, we have not only a just claim, but a giant credibility.

[56 : 44] His authority is real and credible. It is, for one, it reflects an intimate knowledge of us. Psalm 139, you know, begins in verse 1.

Thou dost know me. And then on and on. For thou hast formed me. He fashions us so he knows what will be for our flourishing, not for our floundering.

It's kind of like the engine maker's warning. Don't put diesel in this tank. It runs on something else.

The problem with all earthly authority is that it is finite and fallen.

It's finite. So, like the World Bank or your substitute teacher, doesn't always know the best.

Exercises authority ignorantly. Fruit and drug administration.

Oh, whatever you do, don't eat eggs. Oh, no. Eat as many eggs as you can. Oh, don't eat eggs.

You know, it's like, you know. So, finite or finite doesn't have the ability to bring it about.

[57 : 58] It exercises its authority impotently. Kind of like the stop signs in New Haven. It's as if everything that's kind of got a white frame, that must just be a suggestion, not a demand.

So, finite, but also it's fallen. Like the corrupt cop or the corruptible judge doesn't always desire the best.

Exercise of authority self-servingly or exploitatively. But God's authority is neither hamstrung nor compromised by finitude nor fallenness.

He is a credible authority. Another aspect of its credibility is that God's authority will be vindicated and upheld. We may not spurn it without consequences.

Whether we experience the effects of our defiance throughout our lives. If we have lived against God's authority, contrary to his benign reign, we are living against the grain of the universe.

[59 : 07] And we'll probably get splinters if we do so. Furthermore, his authority will be vindicated when we are called to account at the judgment.

To spurn his authority is to miss of the way of blessing and, finally, to experience his just and certain wrath. So, some of that judgment is just the unfolding consequences of our own bad choices, gathering up inertia and playing out for all eternity.

But some of it is that you have offended God and there is a just retribution also. So, both of those aspects. His authority is not bluff and bluster.

It is very real. So, how does this play out? Well, God exercises his authority by establishing his creatures in a context, an environment of bounded freedom.

Where they enjoy the blessedness of his reign. Think of the Garden of Eden. Freedom. Of any of the trees you may freely eat. But bounded.

[60 : 20] But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat thereof. Boundaries. Yes. But these were to protect and to promote freedom and blessing.

Concerning God's boundaries, David writes in Psalm 19. Moreover, by them, these boundaries, is thy servant warned. And in the keeping of them there is great reward.

Warned. Protection. And great reward. Provision. So, all of God's boundaries are for our protection and for our provision. And recall the serpent's stratagem.

To insinuate that the boundary, that the restriction is not for our good. God wants to limit your flourishing. Keep you down. He's a killjoy.

Tragedy is that we, like our forebearers, believe the lie. And when we do, we end up where they did. You know, defiance of God's authority did not bring that satisfaction that the serpent promised.

[61 : 28] But disappointment, sense of loss, we realize we've been had, sold a bill of goods. And with a further consequence that each time we distrust and disregard God's authority, it makes us all the more susceptible to doing so again.

Rebellion picks up momentum and inertia. And ironically, rather than the sorry consequences, wising us to Satan's stratagems and blandishments, it seems more to addict us to his fare and clouds our judgment.

Where are we left? Fugitives from God's authority. Inheritors of a deadly independent streak. With our judgment darkened.

And darkened further and further by every exercise of our rebellious rejection of God. In desperate need of coming under his rule as the realm of healing and flourishing.

Dying of our self-inflicted wounds. And all the while, distrustful of the only thing, the only one who can rescue us.

[62 : 53] Well, into this dismal condition of ours, the king comes. So finally, the king's coming. The king comes in the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Where he dispenses healing and shows that his reign is the realm of blessing. Blessed are you when? And then he points out the kingdom path. And flourishing.

I've come that you might have life and have it abundantly. John 10. He offers reconciliation to rebels, a fresh start. And invites us to experience his life-giving rule.

Invites. Is that not tender and gentle? He could. Come unto me, all ye that weary and are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. He could command us, Acts 17.

Commanding all men everywhere to repent and believe. Because we are subject to his authority. And our refusal is a fateful scandal. But he invites us.

[63 : 51] Of course, the rule realm of his kingdom to which he calls us. Is, as in the garden, a bounded freedom. Out of love he restricts us. From all that is death-dealing and destructive.

Like the guardrail on a mountain road. And here, we must trust that his rule is good. In the garden, we had no reason to distrust him.

Why believe an interloper with whom we had no relationship? We only had reason to trust.

But we now, after the incarnation and the cross, do we not have even more reason to trust him?

Greater love has no man than this.

And he'd give up his life. Romans 15. The cross.

[64 : 52] This was the glorification. John 17. Father, the hour has come. Glorify me. And don't think that the cross, because of its so hideousness, was just that moment that he had to get through, that then he would be glorified.

Then, afterwards. No. The cross, John says clearly in his gospel, was the glorification. Glorification. That is, this is the supreme manifestation. This is the praiseworthiness.

This is where God is most penetrated and praised. Here. And what was that? An utter pouring out of the self. And as Lewis writes, I think, in *The Problem of Pain*, you know, this was, on the cross, this was just God doing in the wild weather of the outlands what he had always been doing for eternity.

That complete self-giving. The Father completely pouring out the self in adoration and joy and delight and serving and giving, self-giving to the Son.

The Son receiving and giving that back. That's for all eternity. And that is displayed in the cross. That is the nature of this God who is our authority.

[66 : 01] Is that not reassuring? How it could not be used exploitively. So the question is, will we trust him? This very credible king who has come, will we submit to his reign?

Surely if we know his rule is the way of life, we ought to render glad submission. As David says, run in the way of his commandments. Psalm 119. To run out of the way is to abandon the way of life. To exclude ourselves from the sphere of blessing. It is to rush headlong into destruction. As the Bible so often presents it, sin and rebellion is insanity.

We can't look at these verses now, but you know, 2 Timothy 2. Like when we pull a person from sin, it's like an intervention for them to come to their senses. The prodigal son came to his senses. It's insanity. Sin is insanity. Rejection of this. Ezekiel asks repeatedly, Ezekiel 33. Why would you die? Why would you die?

[67 : 06] Choose life. Deuteronomy 30. Again and again, we would go home and read this. This is the positive biblical context for authority.

And it must overcome the negative cultural context if we are to have any hope of flourishing. If we are to experience life worth having. Well, I've gone on long.

I better stop there. I will stick around if anybody has any questions or comments. Next time, Lord willing, we will begin to take up the scriptural case for its authority.

Looking at what I find, it's like the hanging gardens of Babylon. There's so many reasons that the Bible gives to trust God's authority and take this authority. We're going to look at what I think are the best grounds.

And then we'll consider that next time. And then the third time, looking at what if you still have doubts? How do we deal with doubts? So that's where we're headed. So, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure.

[68 : 08] Yeah. Go ahead, Tom. Yeah. Yeah. Father in heaven, let me just thank you for your reign over us. We cast ourselves on you. We ask that you help us to submit to your gentle, just, and righteous reign and to your authority.

Help us also to place ourselves under your word. Help us to be filled with joy as we do so, God. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.