

**"CLEAVE, SERVE, WORSHIP AND TRUST"**  
II Timothy 3:16-17

The year was 1560. It was a turbulent, stormy time in Scotland.

Bitter struggle had erupted between the supporters of the Roman Catholic Church led by the Queen Regent Mary of Guise and those who embraced the Reformation and opposed Catholicism. Mary had adamantly opposed all attempts at reformation of the church in Scotland. When Mary died in her sleep in 1560, the Protestant leaders and nobles of Scotland petitioned the Scottish parliament to take action. The Scots were able to secure English recognition of Scottish sovereignty in the Treaty of Edinburgh. There was much suffering and bloodshed. To the Scots, this favorable conclusion to the civil war with Mary's French-supported forces represented a providential deliverance.

The Scottish Parliament, having now declared Scotland a Protestant nation, asked the clergy to frame a confession of faith.

John Knox, the leader of the Reformation in Scotland, and five other ministers, whose first names were also John, drew up the Scots' Confession in four days, which was promptly ratified by the Parliament as, "doctrine grounded upon the infallible Word of God." The Scots Confession pointed the way, in often angry terms, out of the errors of medieval Roman Catholicism and away from the tyranny of the throne, to a way of faithfulness to the Word, a way of self-discipline in the church, and a way of loyalty to God's Kingdom.

Beginning with a pledge of unconditional commitment to the triune God who creates, sustains, rules, and guides all things, the first eleven chapters of the Scots Confession narrate God's providential acts in the events of biblical history. The kirk (or church) of the present and future is continuous with the kirk of God's people going back to Adam.

While affirming that the Bible is the norm by which judges itself, the Scots Confession also sees the Scriptures as a sacred history in which the present day church, through the Holy Spirit, participates until the end of time.

God's providential deliverance is a continuing, not merely a past, reality.

The Scots Confession sets forth three marks of the true and faithful church:

"the true preaching of the Word of God." "The right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus," and "ecclesiastical [or church] discipline...

whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished." Its central doctrines are

those of election (predestination) and the nature of the Church. As a call to

action in a turbulent time, the Scots Confession reflects a spirit of trust and

a commitment to the God whose miraculous deliverance the Scots had

experienced firsthand. The key words found in the Scots Confession are

"Cleave, serve, worship, trust"- the title of my sermon today.

Please turn your attention to the Scots Confessional Banner that appears to my right, your left.

It is precisely what the Scottish Parliament said about the document when they declared that it was, "doctrine grounded upon the infallible Word of God" that I want us to focus on today. But what does the word "infallible" mean? Mr. Webster declares in *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* that the word "infallible" means, "incapable of error, not liable to mislead, deceive or disappoint, certain, incapable of error in defining doctrines touching faith or morals."

The authority of this very book, God's Word, the Bible, has been under attack for many years. Once a church loses confidence that the Bible is the authoritative witness of God to the world, then the erosion begins and we slide down the slippery slope. Historic Christianity has upheld the authority of God's Word and divine inspiration. Listen to what those six Scottish ministers wrote regarding The Authority of the Scriptures: "As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God, so do we affirm and avow their authority [that is the

Scriptures] to be from God, and not to depend on men or angels. We affirm, therefore, that those who say the Scriptures have no other authority save that which they have received from the Kirk are blasphemous against God and injurious to the true Kirk [or church], which always hears and obeys the voice of her own Spouse and Pastor, but takes not upon her to be mistress over the same." (*The Scots Confession*, Chapter XIX, The Authority of the Scriptures, 3.19)

But let me bring this discussion about the scriptures to us today. If you can go back in your memory bank to Sunday, June 8, 2008, that was the first of two Sundays that our church ordained and installed Elders and Deacons, the two elected offices in our church. The second ordination/installation question that both Elders and Deacons were to answer was this: "Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?"

Taking that question apart, **what is it that makes the Scriptures unique?** The answer is, there is nothing else like it. It truly is a "one of a kind," there is no alternative. Now, that was pretty easy to define.

But then, **what makes the Scriptures authoritative?** Now this is a more involved question. I believe a key to answering this is in the portion of the question the Elders and Deacons responded to that says, "by the Holy Spirit." "Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ...?"

Down throughout history, Protestant theology has always affirmed the authoritative role of the Holy Spirit in the writing of the Scriptures. This is what is known as the **venerable doctrine of inspiration**. And the passage that we turn to for support of this teaching is our passage from II Timothy 3:16 where it says, "All scripture is inspired by God."

But there is a fundamental hurdle that needs to be overcome.

Since the time of the Enlightenment of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, we Christians in the West have seen a cultural philosophy that is very suspicious, maybe even offended, of all claims to authority, especially if those claims to authority appeal to tradition. The mantra of the modern world is, "You better think for yourself," meaning that you should believe nothing if there is some external authority telling you so, whether it is the Bible or the church. And so what **we have today is a thought process where you appeal to experience, a shift from before where reason was emphasized.** And so what we are experiencing today are reactions to authoritarianism rather than to authority proper.

German philosopher, "Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his monumental critique of Enlightenment prejudices, reclaims the authentic sense of authority by the remarkably simple observation that there are people, past, present, who know more about certain subjects than we do. These people – be they scientists, physicians, artists, actors, whatever—know more about

their subject than I do, for example, and are therefore an authority to me on that particular matter.” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, p. 248) So, pulling Gadamer’s thoughts into this discussion of the authority of the Bible, the biblical writers, by the Holy Spirit, knew what we do not know and cannot know apart from their testimony. And so believers in Christ must come to the place where we understand that we are, in fact, dependant on the scriptural witness to Jesus Christ for our knowledge and understanding of the God in whom we trust for our salvation and in whom we desire to serve. Friends, if we do not come to the point that we 1) trust in Jesus Christ our Savior, acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through Him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and 2) accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God’s Word to us then we better rethink why we are here.

Friends, our understanding of this Book that contains 66 Books affects every aspect of faith and life. And the disagreements over this Book, the nature, meaning, and role of this Book lie at the very heart of much of the conflict in our churches today. Let me just highlight three ways people view this Book and ask you to decide which view you support.

First, **the Bible contains the Word of God**. Think of it this way using the example of a prospector panning for gold in a riverbed. The reader stands over the Bible as they try to discern and understand God's word among all the debris of human expression. There is a group known as "The Jesus Seminar" who does exactly this. They are a group of academic theologians who study Christian writings from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century [CE](#), from a religiously liberal perspective. They are composed of members with "*Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and independent*" backgrounds. <sup>1</sup> Their initial goal was to determine what Jesus really *said*. Their second goal was to describe what Jesus really *did*. Their conclusions differ greatly from what Christian

denominations have historically taught. They are also in major conflict with the current beliefs of most present-day conservative Christians. Fellows of the Seminar do not regard Christian Scriptures as inerrant. They do not believe that the authors were uniquely inspired by God. Rather, they view the Bible as a very human document, composed by writers who actively promoted their own theological beliefs (or those of the group to which the writers belonged).

Second, there is a view that **the Bible becomes the Word of God**.

Like an alchemist (alchemy was an ancient "science" that was devoted to discovering how to transform more common metals into gold and silver), the reader stands alongside the Bible, hoping that the Holy Spirit will somehow change the "base words" of the human authors into the gold of revelation.

So whenever I hear a preacher, preparing to read the Bible say, "listen for the Word of God" I hone in, for this phrase implies that what is heard or read cannot be equated with God's actual Word.

For you see, while this view focuses on the importance of personal involvement and encounter, it makes the validity and truth of the Bible passage dependent on the subjective, personal experience of the reader. So then, the Bible is not accepted as objective truth, and it is not accepted as a special revelation of God's actual words and acts in history. The Bible is just the way God uses to communicate with us.

And third, **the Bible is the Word of God.** This is where the person stands under the authority of the Bible. And this, my friends, is the orthodox view and this is, with no exception, the standard for what we believe and do. This view is like having an investor who sees and knows the value of gold in and of itself, and sees this Book as, in fact, the Word of God, and desires to understand it so that he or she can be under its authority.

So there is the prospector who stands over the Bible as a judge and jury of the revelation of God's Word, there is an alchemist who stands beside the Bible as an equal partner in the revelation of God's Word, or there is the

investor who stands beneath the Bible and desires to study and serve the revelation of God's Word. And how we view this Book determines everything else in life. Which of these three views do you ascribe to?

And so, like the Scots of old, may we **Cleave to God alone**, may we **Serve God alone**, may we **Worship God alone**, may we **Trust God alone**.

May our God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who is revealed to us in Holy Scripture be glorified, and may we claim the authority of Scripture, for this IS the Word of the Lord. Amen.

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Introduction: The year was 1560...

The authority of the Bible has been under attack for many years

Elders, Deacons and Ministers this Question: "Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?"

### **What makes the Scriptures unique?**

### **What makes the Scriptures authoritative?**

The venerable doctrine of \_\_\_\_\_ II Tim. 3:16

Since the Enlightenment of the 17<sup>th</sup> century...

Today- what we have today is a thought process where you appeal to \_\_\_\_\_ , a shift from before where \_\_\_\_\_ was emphasized

Three ways people view the Bible

First, **the Bible** \_\_\_\_\_ **the Word of God** (a prospector panning for gold)

Second, **the Bible** \_\_\_\_\_ **the Word of God** (an alchemist)

Third, **the Bible** \_\_\_\_\_ **the Word of God** (an investor)

Conclusion: like the Scots of old, may we Cleave to God alone, may we Serve God alone, may we Worship God alone, may we Trust God alone.

