

## LESSON 5:

# Rediscovering Redeeming Love

## *The Authority of Scripture*

### Getting Started

Although the Bible proves itself to be the *inspired, infallible, and inerrant* Word of God, the Roman Church, during the Dark Ages, did not use the Scriptures as its sole authority. They made the claim that the church's interpretation of Scripture was also infallible. It was believed that this was especially true when the pope spoke *ex cathedra* or *from the chair* of St. Peter. This added a second tier of infallibility which was not scriptural. Many of the edicts handed down by the pope and other church leaders were not based on Scripture. The reformers set out to correct this wrong. Their cry was "*Sola Scriptura*" or authority based on *God's Word alone*. Remember, the first cry had been *Soli Deo Gloria*, which meant *For God's Glory Alone*. It was their belief that nothing that was not based on God's Word alone, or that didn't proceed from God Himself, could possibly glorify God!

The Reformation was like a large river that was fed by many tributaries. We have already seen that John Wycliffe, an Englishman (1330-1384), was considered the *morning star* of the movement because of his great desire to put the Bible in the hands of the common people. Martin Luther, a German (1483-1546); William Tyndale, an Englishman (1490-1536); and John Calvin, a Frenchman (1509-1564), all came along in a steady flow soon after Wycliffe's death in 1384. Martin Luther was only seven years older than William Tyndale. (All of these dates and the progression of these events can be found in Chart 2 and 3.)

Tyndale was often called the *father of the English Bible*. Before his time there was the *Wycliffe Bible*, but it had never been printed and was not altogether accurate, having been translated from the Latin Vulgate. Tyndale was first exposed to Luther's ideas at Cambridge University soon after he received his M.A. degree at Hertford College. He soon became determined to produce an accurate English version of the Bible, translated from the *original* Hebrew and Greek, and make it available to all of God's people. It is no surprise that the church authorities were opposed to that plan. In 1408, due to the Lollard threat (Wycliffe's followers), they had banned the Wycliffe Bible and were viciously opposed to any new version. Therefore, Tyndale was forced to leave England and go underground in Germany in 1524 to begin his immense project. In 1525, a printer was found for the completed New Testament and printing began. However, while indulging in wine, one of Tyndale's assistants spoke too freely about the secret project, and the press was raided. Tyndale, however, managed to escape with the pages that had already been printed. He moved to Worms, a friendlier environment, where he succeeded in getting all of the New Testament printed. Many of the copies were smuggled into his native England in sacks of corn and flour. Later some of the Old Testament was printed in Antwerp where Tyndale later settled and remained undercover.

Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the fiction, that the power of judging Scripture is in the church, and that on her nod its certainty depend. When the church receives it, and gives it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful or controverted, but acknowledging it as the truth of God, she, as in duty bound, shows her reverence by an unhesitating assent.

—John Calvin

The Reformed doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, then affirms that the Bible is the sole written authority for the faith and life of God's people. We respect and submit to lesser ecclesiastical authority, but we are not bound by it absolutely as we are by biblical authority. This is the basis for the Reformation principle *simper reformanda*, which indicates that reformation of the church is an ongoing process. We are always called to seek more and more to bring our faith and practice into conformity to the Word of God.

—R.C. Sproul

In 1535, William Tyndale was betrayed by a fellow Englishman, Henry Phillips. Phillips induced Tyndale to venture onto the streets of Antwerp, and he was ambushed and seized while walking down a narrow passage. He was taken to the state prison near Brussels. After almost a year and a half of confinement, he was strangled and then burned at the stake in Brussels on October 6, 1536. His last words were reported to be: “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes.” In the end, however, the victory belonged to Tyndale, because until very recent times, his translation became the basis for almost all *English* translations of the Bible.

What price are you willing to pay so the precious Word of God can be known and understood by those in your own generation? In order for you to give it out to others, you must first know and understand it yourself. Will you make a commitment to expose your own family to God’s Word? What part can you play in making certain that those in your church, your city, and your country know the truth? Today, there are plenty of copies of the Bible out there, but its authority has been stolen this time by a postmodern worldview which denies absolute truth!

In this lesson, we will be looking at what we need to understand before we can combat that worldview.

The thoughts for this week are:

*The Authority of Scripture*

*The Privilege of Private Interpretation*

*The Literal Interpretation*

# The Authority of Scripture

We have seen how during the Dark Ages, the supreme authority rested with the church, not the Bible. This meant that *man*, not *God*, had the last word. What man believes about the Bible's authority really doesn't matter. If God is the *God* we have learned that He is, and He reveals something to us, then it carries the weight of His authority and is the *final* Word. The fact that the Bible *was not* subordinate to the church was of the greatest importance to the reformers.

1. (a) Read Ephesians 2:20-22. What does this passage say about what should be built on what?

---

---

- (b) The word *cannon* actually means *measuring rod*. (See margin.) Do you believe that your church is dedicated to using Scripture as its measuring rod or standard? Why or why not?

---

---

---

Luther wrote: "It is not the Word of God because the church says so; but that the Word of God might be spoken, therefore the church comes into being. The church does not make the Word but it is made by the Word."

In the believer's life today, the Bible should always be the final authority. Scriptures delegate how we are to live our lives. Wayne Grudem gives the following definition of the *authority of Scripture*: "The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God."

In order to *obey* God we must study the Bible to discover what He says we should *do*. We don't have to worry about whose truth to believe like others in our age, there is only *one* truth for the Christian. This eliminates a lot of confusion. Read your Bible and do what it says. As James 1:22 says:

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

It is one thing to be *intellectually* convinced that the Bible is God's Word; but, it is another thing when the Holy Spirit speaks *in* and *through* its words directly to our hearts and gives us an inner assurance that these are the words of our Creator. *Illumination* is the process by which the Bible goes from the written Word on paper to the heart of the person who reads it. It is the point at which the Holy Spirit, who wrote the Word in the first place, *illuminates* it in the heart of the one who is reading it and gives him understanding.

2. (a) What does Hebrews 4:12 say about God's Word?

---

---

*We usually think of the Bible as one large book. In reality, it is a small library of sixty-six individual books. Together these books comprise what we call the **canon** of Sacred Scripture. The term **cannon** is derived from a Greek word that means 'measuring rod,' 'standard,' or 'norm.' Historically, the Bible has been the authoritative rule for faith and practice in the church.*

- R.C. Sproul,  
**Essential Truths of the  
Christian Faith**

*In addition to the sixty-six books of the Bible accepted by Protestants, Roman Catholics also accept the Apocrypha as authoritative Scripture.*

Roman Catholics view the canon as an infallible collection of infallible books. Protestants view it as a fallible collection of infallible books. Rome believes the church was infallible when it determined which books belong in the New Testament. Protestants believe the church acted rightly and accurately in this process, but not infallibly.

—R.C. Sproul

(b) Describe a time when you have read the Bible and been assured *within* your spirit that these words were from God.

---

---

(c) According to 1 Corinthians 2:13, why do some people read the Bible and understand it and others do not?

---

---

(d) If you want to persuade someone that the Bible is God’s Word, what do you want them to read more than any other work of literature? Why?

---

---

The process of God’s Word being understood by the reader is *illumination*, but the next step in accepting the authority of Scripture is *transformation*. If the Bible is our *measuring rod*, then we should bring our lives in line with it.

3. (a) What would you say to Christians who don’t study their Bibles and don’t know what God requires of them? Is it their responsibility to know what God requires or not? Explain your answer. (Psalms 1:1-3)

---

---

(b) How do you see our culture, even our churches, moving away from the authority of Scripture?

---

---

(c) What are some things in today’s world that often hold more authority over people than God’s Word? Is God’s Word the final authority in your own life? Explain your answer.

---

---

- The Bible is not under the church’s authority, the church is under the Bible’s authority.
- The Holy Spirit works through our spirit to help us understand Scripture as we read it.
- Before we can fully obey God, we must fully know and understand His Word.

**Truth for Today:** *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners...But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.* Psalms 1:1-2

# The Privilege of Private Interpretation

The Roman Church of the Dark Ages took the stand that the common man did not have the ability to read and interpret Scripture for himself. It was believed that only the church leaders, particularly the pope, was given the ability to interpret the meaning of Scripture. At the time of Martin Luther, church leaders wanted to keep the Bible in Latin so the common people could be prevented from reading and then misinterpreting it. One of the great legacies of the Reformation was the principle of *private interpretation* (also referred to as the *priesthood of the believer*). The premise of private interpretation means that every Christian, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, has the right to read and interpret the Bible for himself or herself.

With this right, however, comes the responsibility of handling the Bible carefully and accurately. The Bible is not to be interpreted according to our own desires and prejudices. We must seek to understand what it says without forcing our own view upon it. Hermeneutics prescribes the principles by which we seek to understand a passage of Scripture. (See margin note.) The reformers laid out essential rules of hermeneutics for the interpretation of Scripture. They include:

- **Narratives should be interpreted in light of *teaching* passages.** For example, the story of Abraham offering Isaac on Mount Moriah might suggest that God didn't know that Abraham had true faith. But the didactic portion of Scripture makes it clear that God is omniscient.
- **The *implicit* must always be interpreted in light of the *explicit*;** never the other way around. That is, if a particular text seems to *imply* something, we should not accept the implication as correct if it goes against something explicitly stated elsewhere in Scripture.
- **The laws of logic govern biblical interpretation.** If, for example, we know that all cats have tails, we cannot then deduce that some cats do not have tails. If it is true that some cats do not have tails, then it cannot also be true that all cats have tails. This is not a matter merely of technical laws of inference; it is a matter of common sense. (Taken from R.C. Sproul)

If these principles are applied to the understanding of Scripture, R.C. Sproul says: "Though each biblical text may have multiple applications, it has only one correct meaning."

1. (a) What would happen if believers gave up reading the Bible for themselves and only listened to church leaders and teachers, and only read books *about* the Bible?

---

---

- (b) In what ways has this already happened to some extent in your own life or in the lives of those you know?

---

---

---

The word **hermeneutics** is related to Hermes, a Greek god. Hermes was the messenger of the gods, corresponding to the Roman god Mercury. In mythology Mercury is often depicted with wings on his shoes to facilitate the delivery of messages with speed.

Hermeneutics describes the process by which we seek to understand a message.

The word *hermeneutics* comes from the Greek word **hermeneuo** which means **to interpret**. Hermeneutics is **the study of correct methods of interpretation** (especially interpretation of Scripture).

*Exegesis is a term that refers to the actual **practice of interpreting Scripture**. When one studies principles of interpretation that is **hermeneutics**, but when one applies those principles and begins actually explaining a biblical text, he is doing **exegesis**.*

2. What does 2 Timothy 2:15 say about your responsibility in understanding the truth in Scripture?

---

---

---

3. (a) Given the church's stand on private interpretation during the Dark Ages, why do you think Martin Luther was so anxious to translate the Bible into his language?

---

---

---

(b) Why do you think church leaders like William Tyndale were persecuted and even killed for translating the Bible into the language of the people?

---

---

---

(c) In what ways do you believe religious persecution goes on today for *correctly handling the word of truth*?

---

---

---

- The Reformation gave the church a translation of the Bible in their own common language.
- Private interpretation is not a license to interpret the Bible according to one's own desires and prejudices.
- Though each biblical text may have multiple applications, it has only one correct meaning.

**Truth for Today:** *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

2 Timothy 2:15

# The Literal Interpretation

R.C. Sproul says: “The principle of literal interpretation was intended to put an end to a method that had become popular in the Middle Ages (Dark Ages), the *quadriga*. This was a method of interpretation by which four distinct meanings were sought for each biblical text: the literal, moral, allegorical, and analogical. This led to excessive allegorization and obfuscation of the text. By contrast, *sensus literalis* (literal interpretation) was designed to seek the plain sense of Scripture and to focus on *one meaning*. Though a text may have a multitude of applications, it has only *one correct meaning*.”

Luther said: “The Holy Spirit is the plainest Writer and Speaker in heaven and on earth. Therefore His word can have no more than one, and that the most obvious, sense. This we call the literal or natural sense.”

Living in today’s culture, it would be easy to fall prey to teachers who teach from their own personal philosophies rather than the true meaning of the Word of God. This is not a new phenomenon. Paul ran across the same problems in his day and age.

1. (a) What were Paul’s instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 concerning the handling of God’s Word?

---

---

---

- (b) How do you believe churches should achieve that goal today?

---

---

---

- (c) What measures does your church take to ensure that God’s Word is handled correctly by those who teach?

---

---

---

- (d) How do you protect your children and other family members from those who do not handle the Word of God correctly?

---

---

---

2. Do you think that the doctrines in the New Testament can ever be fully understood by someone who does not have a good understanding of the Old Testament? Why or why not?

---

---

The principle of **literal interpretation** is **sensus literalis**. It says that the Bible must be interpreted according to the manner in which it is written. **Literal** refers to the **literary** form of Scripture. It does not mean **literal** in the sense of concrete.

Allegorical interpretation is interpretation by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths. These have **hidden** spiritual meanings that override the literal meaning.

3. Do you believe it is appropriate for pastors or Bible scholars to speak to the church and base his or her arguments on the special meaning of Greek or Hebrew words that the church members themselves are unable to evaluate? Why or why not?

---

---

---

4. (a) What warnings are given in Proverbs 30:6 and 2 Peter 3:13-16 to those who distort the meaning of Scripture?

---

---

---

(b) The book of Revelation is a book that is difficult to understand, but even it comes with a warning from the Apostle John. What is the warning given in Revelation 22:18-19?

---

---

---

5. Everyone has a worldview whether they are aware of it or not. Why is it important to know Teacher's worldview before accepting his interpretation of Scripture?

---

---

---

- *Literal* refers to the *literary* style of a passage of Scripture and does not mean *concrete*.
- A passage of Scripture can have *many* applications, but only *one* meaning.
- The Bible warns us not be swayed by teachers who are not teaching from a Christian worldview.

**Truth for Today:** See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Colossians 2:8