

# Knowledge of God

## (Authority of Scripture)

### 1. Authority

**An authority is something that we obey.**

Combining what we've seen so far:

God speaks to us in **Revelation**,  
particularly in **Special Revelation**



We get Special Revelation primarily through the **Inspiration** of Scripture  
— The Bible is God's words



Therefore we need to hold Scripture up as our ultimately **Authority**

## i. Other Authorities

### a) Reason (or logic)

Paul thinks we can use reason:

Romans 12:2 (NIV): Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing** of your mind. Then you will be able to **test** and **approve** what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Reason is used in everyday guidance for the normal Christian. This is seen again in the way Paul prays for the Philippians:

(Philippians 1:9-11 NIV): And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,<sup>10</sup> so that you may **be able to discern what is best** and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,<sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

1Cor 10:15 (NIV) I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

### b) Tradition (other people's opinions)

One of the things the Bible tells us that God raises up people who teach the Word and help us understand the Bible (Eph 4:11).

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV)

Paul also sees that tradition is a legitimate authority when he says:

1 Corinthians 11:16 (NIV)<sup>16</sup> If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

Examples of Tradition for us might include:

- The first four ecumenical councils: Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (430), Chalcedon (451).
- The Creeds: Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian.
- Church Confessions: e.g. Belgic, 2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic, 39 Articles, Heidelberg, Westminster, London Baptist.
- Liturgical practises
  - e.g. Both Baptists and infant-baptists have historically appealed to the ancient practises of the Church
- Significant theologians whose work has proved consistently fruitful over time.

### c) Experience

The Bible does point to experience – including our emotions – as some sort of authority, although it does seem more limited.

Paul says:

Phil 2:1 (NIV) If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, (1 Peter 1:8 NIV)

Paul prays that that all Christians would:

and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:19 NIV)

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. (Philippians 2:1-2 NIV)

For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. (Galatians 5:17 NIV)

## ii. The Order



### *Scripture*

### *The rest*

#### **Two useful things to say:**

1. Everything we come up with from reason, tradition, and emotion needs to come **under Scripture** and be prepared to change according to Scripture.
2. Particularly in our **individualistic culture**: Tradition is not infallible, but it ought to carry a fair bit of clout when we're thinking about Christian things. I think that's just **humility!**

## **b) An Aside – the Enlightenment**

The key thinkers of the Enlightenment were hostile to traditional Christianity [although not necessarily to the idea of God]. The role of revelation was replaced by reason alone such that people sought to test everything against the **ruling norm of reason**. The Enlightenment arose from (a) the shift that Descartes caused in philosophy, and (b) the rise of modern science.

**See now, that the starting point suddenly shifted from God to the individual human.**

### **iii. Application**

How would this help you?:

- Buy a house
- Think about who to marry
- Talk to friends about God

## 2. The Bible in the Christian Life

### i. Sufficiency

2 Timothy 3:14–17 (NIV) 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have **known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.** 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is **useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,** 17 so that the servant of God may be **thoroughly equipped** for every good work.

Here, what does the Bible do?

But it is completely sufficient to know God; be saved by God; and to live this life to honour God, until Jesus returns.

#### a) Against the Gnostics

#### b) The Closed Canon

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. (2 Peter 1:12- 15 NIV)

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles. (2 Peter 3:1-2 NIV)

## ii. Clarity

What about the clarity of Scripture? Does the bible need a special interpretation?

For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that,  
(2 Corinthians 1:13 NIV)

(Roman Catholic objection)

He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.  
(2 Peter 3:16 NIV)

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. (Romans 15:4 NIV)

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11 NIV)

They didn't consult a magisterium that correctly interpreted the Bible to test Paul!

**In God's providence, he has given us a Bible that clearly tells us what we need to know.**

If you want to be edified in further reading, Irenaeus and Luther will be great sources to look at

Since, therefore, the **entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them;** and since they proclaim that one only God, to the exclusion of all others, formed all things by His word, whether visible or invisible, heavenly or earthly, in the water or under the earth, as I have shown from the very words of Scripture... [Irenaeus: Against all Heresies, 2.27.1-2, ANF 1:398-399]

For what sublimer thing can remain hidden in the Scriptures, now that the seals have been broken, the stone rolled from the door of the sepulchre [Matt. 27:66; 28:2], and the supreme mystery brought to light, namely that Christ the Son of God has been made man, that God is three and one, that Christ has suffered for us and is to reign eternally? Are not these things known and sung even in the highways and byways? Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what you will find left in them? The subject matter of the Scriptures, therefore, is all quite accessible, even though some texts are still obscure owing to our ignorance of their terms.

[LW 33:25-26, WA 18:606.24-31 cited by Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 194.]

### **iii. Inerrancy**

Inerrancy is to say that Scripture is Reliable, Trustworthy and True. They contain no errors.

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17 NIV)

We can set the argument out as follows

- Scripture is entirely God's word
- God's word is truth (John 17:17)
- Therefore Scripture is truth.

A good definition:

Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences (Feinberg, *"The Meaning Of Inerrancy,"* 294).

#### **a) Qualifications:**

### **iv. Modern Translations**

#### **Conclusion:**

We don't worship the bible.

We accept the bible as God's self-revelation.

It logically leads us to know him; to know his Salvation in and through his Son, and therefore to worship him as is appropriate.

In the words of Peter:

Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. [John 6:68]