

The Shepherds Authority

by Colin Anderson

Colin Anderson's sermon emphasizes the authority and inspiration of Scripture, urging believers to uphold its truth against modern challenges.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 30:5-6, Isaiah 8:20, Matthew 4:4, John 5:31, 2 Timothy 3:13, 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Authority"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker divides the topic into four paragraphs. The first paragraph focuses on what the scripture says about itself, emphasizing the importance of the Bible's own testimony. The second paragraph addresses the irrationality and inconsistency of questioning the inspiration and authority of scripture for Christians. The third paragraph discusses the limited function of extra biblical information. Finally, the fourth paragraph briefly introduces the topic of inspiration and authority, particularly in relation to shepherding, and invites further discussion and reaction from the audience. The speaker also recommends a book called 'Inherency' edited by Norman Giesler, which supports the points made in the sermon.

Transcript

Just echo those words of appreciation for the ministry that the Lord Jesus has given to us through his servant this morning. That was something very, very precious to me, and I appreciate so much that devotional word. And when I say devotional word, that's just what I needed, because what we're going to get into now is a little more academic, and that's really not up my street, but that's what I'm going to do this morning, address myself to the subject of the Shepherd's Authority, which is the inspired word of the Lord.

A little while before, and before having to prepare this paper, and it is a paper, I shall be reading it, but I trust that it will not thereby lose interest, as far as you're concerned, because I shall be reading it. I'm reading it because I want to be careful about what I'm saying, and to say exactly what I mean to say. That really puts me on the line.

But nevertheless, when I was preparing this, a young man who I had just gotten to know in London, Ontario, we've been there for about a year, a year and a half now, and a young man who knew that I was giving this paper, came to me and he said, well, he said, I have read this book and I think you should read this book before you give the paper. It was the book. Well, I didn't have time to read the book.

I just glanced at it and thought that would be very nice. I have to work on this paper on my own. I can see that.

I can't get into all of this. It says academic books. That's a little bit beyond me.

I'm a plain man and I'm assuming that I'm speaking to plain people. But you know, after I had finished my preparation, I did get some time to go through this book and I really appreciated it. And what encouraged me so much was that these learned brethren, in this book called Inerrancy, edited by Norman Giesler, these learned brethren said in a much more profound way and after much more research than I could have given to the subject, they were saying exactly what I want to say to you this morning.

Now, they're not to blame for what I say. You understand that. But nevertheless, as far as I could discover, they were backing up what I'm trying to say to you in very simple, plain, ordinary layman's language.

But I do commend the book to you. Some of you may be dissatisfied, and please don't tell me if you are, with the presentation that I make this morning. But if you are, let me recommend this book to you.

And I think, although you may disagree with some small points here and there, you will find it of great benefit. It's published by Academic Books. I have not heard of them before, but the writers will be known to you as you see the different ones who contributed to this book, simply called Inerrancy.

All right, that's the first thing I want to say. And the second thing is that we're going to be thinking together about the holy scriptures. They declare themselves to be inspired.

Now, such a statement that the scriptures are inspired refers to the original text, or what we call the autographs. We don't have these. We don't have the original manuscripts.

Nevertheless, those who are competent to weigh such matters assure us that the words or the verses about which there is serious question form a very small fraction of the whole. And, says Dr. Hort, not any of these differences affect an article of faith or precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of scriptural teaching. So, for all practical purposes, when we speak of the inspired writings this morning, when we speak of the holy scriptures, we're virtually speaking about any faithful translation of the word of God, even though we are not dealing with the original manuscripts.

Now let us turn to the word of God. 2 Timothy, please, chapter 3, and verse number 13. We want to read this carefully and thoughtfully.

It's the scripture speaking about itself. 2 Timothy 3, 13. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

You, however, continue in the things that you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate and equipped for every good work. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom preach the word.

Now I wish to divide our topic into four paragraphs. We're first of all going to look at what the scripture says about itself. Secondly, we're going to show that for a Christian to question the inspiration and authority of scripture is both irrational and inconsistent.

Thirdly, we will consider the limited function of extra-biblical information. That's a current concern to me. Fourthly, we will open up the subject, and then leave it for your reaction, because I'm going to ask our brother Donald Norby to come up here and to chair a discussion which I hope will be profitable for us and which should follow my presentation.

First of all then, we want to look at what scripture says about itself. We're thinking of inspiration in the light of the testimony of the Bible. In a moment we shall look at inspiration in the light of the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we're going to look at inspiration in the light of the Bible's own testimony.

Now that doesn't suggest that we're indulging in circular reasoning. You know, the Bible says it's the word of God, so it is the word of God. The Pharisees said to our Lord Jesus Christ, you are bearing witness of yourself.

Your witness is not true. His answer was, even if I bear witness of myself, my witness is true, for I know where I came from. Neither the Lord himself nor scripture must be faulted for making a statement like that.

Indeed, the absence of such claims would provide even more ammunition for those who were opposed to the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture. We who would defend that doctrine could be accused of defending the case of those who were not themselves prepared to speak as confidently as those who advocate the inerrancy position. No, the position we hold that all scripture is God-breathed is infinitely strengthened by the scripture's own claim to inspiration.

It thereby dares anyone to speak to the contrary, and at the same time invites our confidence, our faith. Now, if it did this without sufficient ground, without sufficient reason, the Bible would have to be a very evil book. But even the Bible's enemies refer to it as the good book.

How can it be good if it is not inspired of God when it says it is? Let's look at that in a little more detail. All scripture. What does that mean? All scripture without exception.

Not only those parts dealing with spiritual or moral issues, but also those that record historical events, or comment upon the nature of the universe, or the world in which we live. All scripture as it speaks of the origin of our world, its maintenance at this present time, its destiny. All scripture, the philosophy of scripture, the history of scripture, the prophecy of scripture, all scripture, whether it deals with the message of salvation or touches on matters of science, whether couched in words of prose or poetry, all scripture, the total, and forgive the alliteration, the total and the tittle, all scripture is inspired by God.

That is, it is God breathed. Since he breathed it, we can speak with certainty on matters about which we would otherwise be quite ignorant. Inspired.

That's the way it's translated in English, but the original does not suggest the method by which God spoke to and through the men whom he chose. It rather emphasizes the source of scripture. As Warfield says, this implies that the scripture is not a human product of what was breathed into the human writers by God, but rather a divine product breathed out by God through the instrumentality of its human authors.

Secondly, for a Christian, for a Christian, a real Christian, to question the inspiration and authority of scripture is both inconsistent and irrational. Now, believers are frequently beguiled by Satan to speak or act irrationally. For example, the Galatians were bewitched into believing that having begun in the spirit, they were now to be perfected by the flesh.

Again, Peter, some years after Pentecost, fearing certain men who came from James, withdrew from the Gentiles with whom he had been fellowshipping. His action was quite inconsistent with what he believed. Again, the Colossians were in danger of being taken captive through philosophy or vain deception.

That's a current problem. Norman Giesler says philosophical presuppositions are often imbibed unconsciously in the study of other disciplines. It has been my experience, he adds, in evangelical circles that godly scholars, unaware of the nature and implications of their scholarly research, sometimes absorb into their thinking philosophical presuppositions that are antithetical to the historical Christian position on scripture.

The results of their accepting unchristian assumptions should come out only gradually in their own teaching and writing. Often those results are discovered first by their students and then later by other scholars. Tragically, the person who has unwittingly brought into these presuppositions, has bought into these presuppositions, is often the last person to realise it.

Now what he's saying in plain language, that's the kind of language you run into in this book, but when you think it through, what he's just saying is that people sometimes do not realise in their research that they are taking in, they are imbibing certain teachings, philosophies, ideas that are twisting them off or turning them off from the truth. And we need to be careful of that. Well, whichever way, whether it was the Galatians who were bewitched, whether it was Peter or the Colossians, it was Satan that made them feel that their thoughts were plausible, their actions were rational.

But in each case, their behaviour was not only reprehensible, it was ridiculous. Likewise, a believer in any way who denies the full inspiration and authority of scripture, is about as sane as a man who, being perched on the branch of a tree, proceeds to apply a saw at a point between himself and the trunk. What we're saying is this, it's ridiculous to call into question the reliability of the word upon which our faith must rest.

Yet not only unbelievers, but saints are among those who from time to time are found criticising the word in which they profess to believe. A hymn writer, speaking not of the Bible, but really of the Lord, says, Ashamed of Jesus, that dear friend on whom my hopes of heaven depend. It's just as reprehensible to be embarrassed to speak boldly of the inspired word, which is infallible and inerrant in every respect.

Whatever the reason for such behaviour, whether it's deception, fear or ignorance, it calls not for sympathy and soft words, but sound rebuke. We neither serve the truth nor our brethren by remaining silent for the sake of peace. Whether a fire is lit by accident, by carelessness, or intentionally, if it's about to burn the house down, we need to warn everyone and do the best we can to put out the flames.

Some years ago, Harold Linthell called fire in his book *The Battle for the Bible*. He saw reason for concern in the conflicts raging in the Lutheran Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, and full of theological seminaries. He prophesied that the fire would spread.

It did. That's not my purpose to cite a lot of cases where ministry and methods that undermine the inspiration of Scripture have become acceptable in certain congregations professing to follow the New Testament. Whether such cases exist in fact, or are the result of my own paranoia, is irrelevant.

The danger is real, and we do not have the resources to put out a major conflagration. We'd be wise to act now while we see the children playing with the matches. But we don't need to look just at our present circumstances to believe that even saints would attack the foundations of the faith.

The word itself is clear on this matter. The Spirit speaks expressly that in the later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits, doctrines of demons, in pointing these things out to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ. Now we must remind ourselves that although spirits and demons sound sinister, they never make themselves obvious.

But they do have power to influence unsuspecting servants of Christ, so that they in turn may lead others astray. The personal motives of those servants who are used as tools by the enemy may be quite amiable, even as when Peter said to the Lord, be it far from you. Yet this exhibition of apparent love and devotion was really the voice of Satan.

We find it hard, do we not, to think that good and amiable men and women can be Satan's instruments to undermine the faith of the elect. But the examples that I've cited of Peter on two occasions, of those who influence the Galatians, the warning of those who use fair speeches to deceive the ignorant, the teaching given in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 where we're told that Satan's ministers are transformed into angels of light, should be enough to alert us to the danger. This is the way we must expect Satan to work in the 1990s.

Then there are those who are, we can call them old prophets, like the one mentioned in 1 Kings chapter 13. Old not simply in age, but prematurely decrepit in a spiritual sense. They once held to the truth, and the truth once characterized them.

Once blessed in their ministry, they cling to the memory of it because it gives them reputation. But they counsel younger prophets to err, and thus deprive them of their reward. We must also be aware of other inconsistencies with regard to our view of Scripture.

I want to come now to inspiration in the light of the testimony, not of the Bible itself, but in the light of the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, a disciple is not above his teacher. It's enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher.

Now the context of those words indicates that the Lord is speaking of the inevitability of persecution for those who are his followers. He says if they called the head of the house Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household. But there's a wider principle here which is applicable to our subject.

He said a disciple is not above his teacher. It's enough for a disciple that he become as his teacher. So if I, by attitude or by word, betray that I have a different view of Scripture to that of our Lord, then I'm not acting as a Christian, a Christ one.

It is a disciple who is called a Christian. I'm not acting as a true disciple, as a follower, as a Christian, if I interact with Scripture in a way different to that of my master. If I imply, for example, that times have changed, certain parts of revelation may be ignored, downplayed, discarded, then I presume to be greater than my teacher.

I know more than he, for as we shall see, he did not treat the Scriptures in that cavalier fashion. Let us see how he spoke of Scripture. He taught that while men may break commandments, the word of God remains inviolate.

The Scripture, he said, cannot be broken. He used the Scripture in dealing with the enemy, even verses that were penned at a different time in the world's history under very different circumstances. He didn't say, it was written, as though it was something long ago in the past.

He said, it is written. To him it is the word of the law, living, abiding forever. When faced with human opposition, he silenced his foes with this word, you do greatly err not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.

Without embarrassment, he referred to Adam and Eve as historical figures. When faced with questions about divorce, he answered and spoke about the beginning and the situation that prevailed when God first created man. We could go on and on, showing that he took the greatest pain to fulfill prophecy, even to the cross.

Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I am thirsty. And he, by example and teaching, upheld every principle of the Scriptures. I must ask this question.

Are we in the decade of the nineties wiser than he? For nearly two thousand years the Church has agreed in this. The Church hasn't agreed in much, but for nearly two thousand years the Church has agreed in this. The Bible is God's word, infallible and inerrant.

That's true of the Roman Catholic Church. That's true of the Protestant bodies. Wesley may be quoted here.

He says, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, he says, it did not come from the God of truth. In this connection I'd like to quote from a liberal New Testament scholar, Kersop Lake, a professor at the University of Chicago.

Harold Linsell quotes for him thus. Says Kersop Lake, remember a liberal professor, it is a mistake often made by educated persons who happen to have that little knowledge of historical theology to suppose that fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind.

It is the partial and uneducated survival of a theology which was once, notice the word, universally held by all Christians. How many were there, for instance, he adds, in Christian churches in the eighteenth century who doubted the infallible inspiration of scripture? A few perhaps, very few. No, the fundamentalist may be wrong, says this liberal.

I think that he is, but it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he. I'm sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a fundamentalist on the basis of authority, and he goes on. Yet now, in this day in which we live, the Bible is being betrayed in the house of its friends, just as Elijah fled before Jezebel.

So evangelicals are running scared of the feminist movement, and as they run, those passages dealing with the distinct roles of men and women in the church are being scattered in every direction. What so many fail to realize is that the Bible is an integrated whole, and if you take the liberty to discard or ignore what some speak of as secondary issues, then soon the whole will be at the mercy of the wind. The

executive director of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada was embarrassed recently by the fact that women in evangelical organizations are rarely at the executive level.

He sought to distance himself from what many of the people he's supposed to represent believe, and at the same time represent them. He said, although I respect how denominations analyze scripture and develop their own structures, I believe that Canadian churches are either in reaction to the radical feminist movement, or are incapacitated by tradition and adherence to an old biblical hermeneutic, meaning way of interpreting scripture. Well, I don't want to defend all tradition, or fight for unenlightened principles of interpretation, but such sweeping statements do little to help the cause of the truth.

The interpretation of scripture is not really my subject, but our hermeneutic impinges upon our view of scripture. I'd like to quote Bernard Ram at this point. He helps us to clarify the issues we want to discuss.

He says, general hermeneutics--remember, ways of interpreting the word of God--general hermeneutics is that set of rules employed in all materials which stand in need of interpretation. Something stands in need of interpretation when something hinders its spontaneous understanding. To put it another way, he says, a gap exists between the interpreter and the materials to be interpreted, and rules must be set up to bridge the gap.

In that the interpreter is separated from his materials in time, there is a historical gap. In that his culture is different from that of his text, there's a cultural gap. In that the text is usually in a different language, there is the linguistic gap.

In that the document originates in another country, there is the geological gap, and the biological gap, the flora and fauna. In that usually a totally different attitude toward life and the universe exists in the text. It can be said that there is a philosophical gap.

Now all of this makes--I think again of 2 Timothy 3.16. It says that by the God-breathed word, a man of God is a man of God, and a man of God may be adequate, fully furnished, fully equipped for every good work. How then are we to bridge the time gap, the culture gap, the language gap, the geological gap? Having had some experience in communicating the word of God to people in a more primitive culture than our own, I'm wondering now if I was right just to take my Bible along. Perhaps as I entered those villages in Uganda I should have had a boy with me with a barrow to carry all the books.

I would need them to bridge the gaps between biblical times and the age and circumstances in which my hearers and I live. Of course that's ridiculous. But let me ask the question in all seriousness.

When we talk about gaps which do indeed exist between any material to be interpreted and the interpreter, how does this apply to the Bible? Are there in the case of Holy Scripture any other factors which would help us? Indeed there are. First of all, we're handling divine revelation. That revelation declares itself to be all that is required to render a man of God adequate, fully equipped for every good work.

There's no suggestion of any other means being essential to the reaching of those goals. We may say, well, those books can be helpful. Of course they can.

But the point is this. They must never be. They must never be the determining factor in our interpretation.

Once they become the determining factor in our interpretation, what I'm saying is that the word of God is no longer adequate. I am questioning, therefore, its inspiration. Yet we must remember, and this brings us to another factor in which we have additional help, it only proclaims itself adequate for the equipment of the man of God unto good works.

It does not profess to be the total word for scientific research, for the study of anthropology, agriculture, medicine, or outer space. Yet at the same time, where it touches on those subjects, it tells the truth. So, when the word of God speaks on the subject of baptism, it speaks all that I need to know.

All that God requires me to know and obey about baptism is found in the word of God. It is adequate. It will equip me unto every good work.

I might ask, well, when did baptism begin historically? In what form was it practiced when it first began? For such information, I might study intertestamental literature, and I might discover some fascinating things about the practices of the Essenes. However, that must never be the determining factor in my interpretation of baptism. I do not need that information to be fully equipped unto every good work.

The word of God is the only divinely supplied interpreter of the word of God. All else may be informative, it may be interesting, but it is not inspired. It may lead me off course.

That brings us to the point that these helps to bridge the gap between the material to be interpreted and the interpreter. These helps are not infallible. They are not inerrant.

History outside of scripture is notoriously unreliable. It is inevitably biased by the political and economic views of the historian. The same may be said of every other department of human research and scientific endeavor.

All is fallible and errant. Not so the word of the law. When I think or teach so as to allow fallible products to mix with the infallible in my mind, or in the mind of those who are listening to me, I do great disservice to God's word, to myself, and also to those whom I seek to instruct.

Be diligent to present yourselves approved unto God, as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. How then am I to bridge these gaps? By the study of all scripture. Everything that I need to know is there.

Now granted it may not be immediately apparent, and some other saint living or now with the Lord may become my instructor, leading me into avenues of scriptural research that I had not yet explored. Such help is only valuable though inasmuch as the help given is in harmonious relationship to the inspired text, to the law, and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them.

Secondly, a Christian studying the scriptures is not to be compared with anyone else seeking to understand ancient texts. Our verse does not say that any man may be adequate and equipped unto every good work. It says the man of God may be so.

That title presupposes two things. First that the person is indwelt by the author of scripture, who desires to lead him into all truth. Some years ago I was staying in the home of a middle-aged Christian.

He'd been saved a relatively short while. Before going off to work one morning he shared with me the appropriate reading from the choice gleanings calendar. After he'd read the comment he said, hmm,

comment there doesn't seem to make sense to me.

What do you think it means? Since I was the author, and he hadn't noticed my name at the bottom, I didn't reply directly to the question. I simply paraphrased what I'd already written. I don't know why the writer didn't put it like that.

He said that makes a lot more sense. But you know that incident gives me a lovely illustration of the work of the Holy Spirit. We not only have the word of God, but when you're talking about a man of God we have someone who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is there to teach him, and to guide him, and to lead him into all truth.

So this instance illustrates what we're saying about the help that God has provided for his people. It's a supernatural, notice that, a supernatural assistance to understanding so that a very otherwise ignorant person can bridge the gap. But the title man of God may mean more that the person is simply a Christian.

It suggests that he's seeking to conduct his life in a way that pleases God, that he fears the Lord and is set on a pathway of obedience. The secret of the Lord, it says, is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant. Where really are we? We're really in no position to pass judgment on the word of God.

It's ridiculous for us to criticize the Holy Scripture. We have to remember that it will be our judge one day, and it is even now. I've already alluded to the issue of the respective roles of men and women in the Church.

I do not think God put 1 Corinthians 11 through 14 and all other related passages in his word to give us something to fight over. Those teachings are of the class that test where we are spiritually. If I don't want to obey what is written, I may easily find excuse by referring to the gap in time or circumstance that existed between Paul and the believer today.

Culture easily becomes a catch-all, a convenient carpet under which I may sweep all that I cannot or will not accept. Why will we not allow Almighty God to have reasons beyond our own puny minds? Can we no longer teach things which are unacceptable to our society or offensive to our present culture? Cultures change. The word of God does not.

Could it be that society in the 1990s is drifting off course? Perhaps it is. Why then this almost universal urge to throw off all that speaks of authority, not only in our world, but in the Church? Is it not by obedience to the word of God? Is that not one of the ways that the Church becomes salt and light? I don't mind for a moment if a person argues from the word of God that this or that may be the way we should understand such a passage of scripture, but I am horrified when people just try to sweep it under a cultural carpet. I'm not riding a hobby horse here.

I believe that Satan has found our weakness and has gained a point of attack. The real issue, as far as he's concerned, is not the role of women in the assembly, but the whole matter of how we interpret scripture. Once we allow him in this issue, room and culture or other biblical factors become acceptable modifiers of what the word of God actually says, we're granting the enemy a bridgehead and he will widen it until at last we have to yield all of the inspired word to the enemy.

And of course, the present mood of this world, no doubt under the influence of evil spirits, is to throw off all authority. We see it in the mind-boggling changes in the shape of Europe, the rising up of people in Russia, the recent standoff between the Indians and the Canadian government at Oakville, Quebec. All

are symptoms of the same disease, the desire to overthrow anything that God has established for the maintenance of order in a confused world.

But I must now come to the subject of inspiration and authority, especially in relation to shepherding. The inspired word is the shepherd's authority. He has none, apart from scripture.

The Bible must be inspired and be held by him, in every practical sense of that. Be held by him to be inspired. If the shepherd is to exercise any authority at all, he carries no secular sword, he is forbidden.

Dominance of spirit, so characteristic of world leaders, is forbidden him. Our Lord said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you.

Peter, a natural leader, learned this lesson. He says to fellow elders, shepherd the flock among you, nor yet lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. The shepherd's sword, if you can speak about a shepherd having a sword, but the shepherd's sword is really the sword of the spirit.

He must have absolute confidence in that word, and be consciously obedient to it himself, in order to be the leader that God intends him to be, and to have his authority ratified by heaven. Let me give you an old testament example. Samuel said to Saul, the Lord sent me to anoint you as king over his people, over Israel.

Now therefore, listen to the word of the Lord. As we know, Saul was swayed by other influences, the people. He compromised.

Samuel then said, you, who's that you? You who have been anointed to be king. You whom God gave that great privilege. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.

I wish to leave you with a most challenging, at least to me, and encouraging word. To this one will I look, says the Lord, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, who trembles at my word. Now we want to talk about what I have said before you, and I'm going to ask our brother Don Albee to come up and direct the question.

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