

Chapter Three

The Authority of Scripture: Building Our House on the Rock

Built into Christianity and bound up with the idea of knowing God through His Word is the principle of authority. Christianity is a divinely revealed religion. As we learned earlier the written Word of God is the revealed will of God. The Bible claims that God has acted to make known His heart and mind in a written document. Therefore the Bible has authority over our lives. True Christianity is marked by a certainty of beliefs. There are core convictions and clear duties. But there aren't too many people who like the idea of this kind of absolute authority.

I once heard a story about a little boy who was resisting his parents command to sit down. He was just squirming all over the place. Finally, his parents got the boy to sit down, but he said, "I'm sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside." Authority is a hard concept it seems. In our world today it is popular to say that no one really knows what is right or wrong. They insist that what is right for you may not be right for someone else. There are people who are "certain" that there are no absolute truths.

But in the Bible God's people appear as those who know who God is, they know what His will is, they know what is true and good, and they live their lives according to certain convictions. The result is that their lives are blessed and fruitful.¹ Let's read the words of the apostle Paul in his first letter to the believers living in the city of Thessalonica.

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.*
(1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Let me ask you a question. What has the final and supreme authority in your life? Everyone has one. For some people it is their present emotional mood; how they feel at the time. For others, all that matters is the opinion of their friends. For some people the supreme authority is their cultural traditions. Still others base their lives on popular psychology or the newest fads heard on radio, television or the internet.

So, when you are concerned about something. I mean when your back is up against the wall, when you are face to face with reality, where do you turn for answers? When you begin to chart your life's course what determines your goal? What is your compass? When the storms of life attack your ship, what light house leads you to port? There is a poem titled "The Winds" that says,

¹ Psalm 1; Galatians 5:22, 23

One ship drives east and another west
With the self same winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails and not the gails
Which tell us the way to go.

Like the winds of the sea, are the ways of men
As we voyage along through life.
'Tis the set of the soul that decides its goal,
And not the calm or the strife.²

That is a profound truth—it is the set of the soul that decides its goal. But on what is your soul set? What is the focus of your heart? Recently a poll was taken to discover the religious beliefs of Americans.³ Almost ninety percent of those polled expressed a belief in God. Of that ninety percent, about seventy percent said they were Christian. But now here is where the survey gets interesting. Of all those who claimed to be Christian, almost ninety percent said they saw very little difference between how they lived their lives compared to their non-Christian or atheistic friends or associates! In essence these people reported that their religious belief made no real practical difference in their day to day lives.

Basically what the survey reveals is that when confronted with conflicts, when dealing with problems, when having to make moral choices, when doing business, or working on relationships, these people had the same attitudes, feelings and fears as others. They had the same priorities in life and faced the same failing results in life as did their non-believing friends. That is a sad statistic! Now why is this? Let's read the words of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah to discover the answer.

Has a nation changed *its* gods,
Which *are* not gods?
But My people have changed their Glory
For *what* does not profit.
12 Be astonished, O heavens, at this,
And be horribly afraid;
Be very desolate," says the LORD.
13 " For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,
And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.
(Jeremiah 2:11-13)

These words of the prophet concern ancient Israel. The people of his day, although religious, had forsaken God and His commandments. They lived by the ideals of false gods, and their own opinions and attitudes and they suffered greatly for it. The same thing is true today.

² Ella Wilcox

³ The Pew Forum on Religion

Too many people who call themselves Christians are trying to get godly resources from a man made broken cistern. They labor, carrying water to a cistern that leaks, rather than drinking freely from the fountain of living waters.

In another poll⁴ several thousand ministers in the United States were asked this question: “Do you believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God?” Here are the results.

- Episcopalians – 95% said no
- Methodists – 87% said no
- Presbyterians – 82% said no
- Lutherans – 77% said no
- Baptists – 70% said no⁵

The Word of God spoken by the prophet Jeremiah thousands of years ago is just as relevant and enlightening today.

We must understand that powerful Christian living does not happen simply by saying that you are a Christian. It is the result of your being committed to understanding and obeying God’s Word. Jesus Christ spoke a parable that deals with this very issue.

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 2 5 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

26 “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” 28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Matthew 7:21-29)

⁴ Sociologist Jeffrey Hadden, University of Virginia

⁵ Roman Catholic’s place church tradition and the authority of the Pope over the sole authority of Scripture

When you build your life upon the Word of God you are like a person who builds his house on solid rock rather than on shifting sand. And no matter the trials of life your house built on the rock will not fall. Now, if we are going to build our house upon the rock there are four simple principles that we must know about God's Word.

1. We must know what God commands us to do and what promises He makes to us.

2. We must know how to do what He commands and how to receive the promises.

3. We must be convinced that God's ability equals His willingness.

4. We must be committed to obeying God's Word faithfully.

Let's examine some Scriptures that illustrate these principles.

- **We must know what God commands us to do and what promises He makes to us.**

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.
(Philippians 4:19, 20)

Here is a promise from the Scriptures. God is willing to meet all your needs, not your greed, but your needs. And He will do so according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus, and those riches are plentiful! Often we look for God to do things His Word says that He won't do. And we overlook things that He says that He will do.

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy
(Colossians 1:9-11)

The above prayer reveals to us that it is God's desire for us to be filled with a knowledge of His will. He wants for us to have a walk or life-style that honors Him and the Lord Jesus Christ. He wants us to be fruitful in every good work and strengthened with His might so that we can joyfully meet the demands of life. Here is another promise of what is available from God.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name!
2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
3 Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
4 Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
5 Who satisfies your mouth with good *things*,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
(Psalm 103:1-5)

The blessings enumerated in the above psalm are all things that are available from God. These are things that He desires to do for you and for me. Let's look at one more example of what God desires for us.

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 36 "Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, " '*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*' 38 This is *the* first and great commandment. 39 And *the* second is like it: '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
(Matthew 22:35-39)

The preeminent commandment from God is that we love Him above everything and everyone else. And then that we love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus also said that He gave us a new commandment about loving others.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
(John 13:34, 35)

Jesus commands us to love one another just as He loves us—with the same passion, devotion and self-sacrifice.

So, the first principle in building your house upon the rock is to know what God commands us to do and what He promises to do for us. Now let's move on to the second principle.

- **We must know how to do what He commands and how to receive the promises.**

The how of doing what God commands us to do and the how of receiving His blessings is to believe.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.
(John 3:16, 36)

The how of receiving everlasting life is to believe what God has done through His Son Jesus Christ. It is to trust His Word. Faith pleases God.

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
(Hebrews 11:6)

Belief or faith in what God desires and promises us is more than mental assent or agreement. When you believe you must act accordingly. Jesus performed a miracle on a man who was blind. This man received his sight because he believed what Christ told him to do and he did it.

Now as *Jesus* passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.
2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"
3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. 4 I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."
6 When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. 7 And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.
(John 9:1-7)

Jesus said for the man to go and wash and he did and came back seeing! The principle is simple. If you believe and trust God's word you will act on it. All of the examples of the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11, knew what God wanted them to do and they did it.

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

(v. 4)

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, **prepared an ark** for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

(v. 7)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he **went out**, not knowing where he was going.

(v. 8) [my emphasis]

All of these people knew what the will of the Lord was, they believed it and they acted upon it. And the most wonderful thing of all is that as you begin to trust and obey, God will work within you to help you accomplish His will.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
(Philippians 2:12, 13)

In the above verses of Scripture the apostle Paul encourages us to believe and obey. And when we do believe, God works within us both to will to do His Word and to obey it. The apostle could encourage us in this because he was keenly aware of God working in him. Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me.
(1 Corinthians 15:9, 10)

God will always be there to give us the strength and energy to accomplish what He has called us to do if we trust Him. The fourth principle is that we must be convinced of God ability and eagerness to come to our aid.

- **We must be convinced that God's ability equals His willingness.**

The great key to living a powerful Christian life is that we must be persuaded that God has both the willingness and the ability to do what He says. God never promises something that He cannot deliver. In Romans, chapter 4, we have the apostle Paul's comments on the faith of

Abraham who received the promise of a son through his wife Sarah though they were both well past the child bearing age.

who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "*So shall your descendants be.*" 19 And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

Abraham received the promise of God because he was fully convinced that God's willingness equaled His ability. Sarah herself trusted in the promise and ability of God.

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.
(Hebrew 11:11, 12)

Finally, the fourth principle.

- **We must be committed to obeying God's Word faithfully.**

You and I must be committed to obedience to God's Word. The victorious Christian life does not flow from wavering faith but from full devotion and obedience. This lesson is taught in the following parable.

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea.
2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.
3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. 8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"
(Matthew 13:1-9)

The Lord Jesus explained the parable a few verses later.

Therefore hear the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. 20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty
(Matthew 13:18-23)

The believer who bears much fruit in his or her life is the one who hears, believes and faithfully obeys. Once you become a Christian root yourself deeply in Him. Learn all that He is to and for you and stay faithful.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. 8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.
(Colossians 2:6-10)

