

Is the Bible God's Final Authority?

(by Bob Pulliam)

Some people might wonder why we would even ask this question. In all honesty, many people claim to believe the Bible to be God's final authority, and then do what seems best to them. It is important, as one studies God's word, that one respect its message as God gave it. There are reasons why people read their Bible and then do as they please. A few are:

- The Bible demands more than they are willing to give.
- They have held an unscriptural position for years and pride prevents them from changing.
- Their parents/grandparents/children hold a position they will not abandon.

In regard to this problem, Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:34-38) If we want to follow Jesus, we had better listen to Him.

Who do We Listen To?...

You'll find a lot of preachers and groups saying "listen to us!" While I do not question their sincerity, I do know that we should never blindly follow anyone. Even the apostle Peter was capable of making mistakes (Matthew 26:69-75; Galatians 2:11-13). Solomon set up idols for his wives in his old age (I Kgs 11:1-8). Who do you know that is better than Solomon, or the apostle Peter?

The Bible can be understood by those who will seek to know. The word of God offers the words of life that we need (Phil 2:14-16; Acts 5:20; 11:14). The power of God unto salvation is the gospel (Rom 1:16).

Where does the church stand in relation to the word? Some want the church to be in control of the Bible. They want the church to have the authority to interpret it, and even change it. But the word of God was not the product of the church. Instead, the church was the result of the word. The church exists because Jesus ordained such by His word. This is why you never find the church sitting down and writing the Bible in the first century. In fact, when a question arose in the book of Acts, the church sought what God had already revealed (rather than voting on the matter). Peter began by pointing out what God had revealed through him (Acts 15:7-10). Barnabas and Paul then related what God had done through them (Acts 15:12). Lastly, James quoted an Old Testament prophecy which pertained to the question at hand (Acts 15:14-17). When the church wanted to know what God's will was, they consulted Him, rather than an ecclesiastical council.

When there was trouble with churches, the apostles had authority to deal with them accordingly. Paul had to rebuke the Corinthians for more than one problem among them (I Corinthians 1:11-15; 6:1-7; 11:17-22; etc...). The churches of Galatia were turning away from Jesus to the old law (Galatians 1:6f). And the apostle John had to deal with a trouble-

maker in the church named Diotrephes (III Jn 9f). Churches did not police other churches, nor was some council or synod established to do so. The apostles did this in the infancy of the church as the New Testament was being revealed. With the New Testament complete, we are expected to follow its precepts just as if an apostle of Christ was present delivering the message personally.

But Is the New Testament Complete?...

Let's see what it has to say for itself:

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 3)

When Jude writes "the faith" in this passage, he is talking about the system of truth which produces faith. The same phrase is used in Acts 6:7 where we find priests becoming obedient to "the faith." Disciples were exhorted to continue in "the faith" (Acts 14:22), and "with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). So this system of truth, the gospel of righteousness, was "once for all delivered." If it has been delivered once and for all, what is left to send?

When the apostle Peter wrote his second epistle, God had already given all things that pertain to life and godliness (II Peter 1:3f). Some might say that this has nothing to do with the word. Look again. In verse two Peter refers to the "knowledge of God." How was that received? And then "exceedingly great and precious promises" had been given. Did this have nothing to do with God's *word*? Of course it did! Now, if they had received all things pertaining to life and godliness, what additional information do we need?

The Final Word...

The final word in this matter should come from the One who will judge heaven and earth on that last great day!... "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (II Corinthians 5:10) What will be the basis of Christ's judgment?... His word and obedience to it.

"He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." (John 12:48)

"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. 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?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

It's not enough to call Jesus "Lord." You must be a follower of His will. That will is revealed in the New Testament by inspired men who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." What is the basis for your faith and the religion you practice?

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete,

thoroughly equipped for every good work."
(II Timothy 3:16f)

If we may be complete and thoroughly equipped through the scripture given, why do we need anything further? Unfortunately, many people do not want the Bible to be complete. If it is complete, then we have to do precisely what it says. The result is prophets in our land who cry peace and safety when there is no peace, just as it was in Jeremiah's day (Jer 8:11; 23:15-17). They wish to say, "We will follow only the Bible," but they proceed to sidestep its precepts and clear examples of how we should walk. They then speak of the Lord laying something on their heart. A mysterious, indefinable process where the person gets to do as he pleases.

No, my friend. The Bible is complete. It does contain all that pertains to life and godliness. It can be understood by any rational individual who will apply himself diligently to it's message.