Authority of Scripture

Introduction

Every generation the church must answer a foundational question: will we submit to the authority of Scripture, or will we attempt to re-do the spirit of the age? In recent years, many voices within and outside the church have begun to question, redefine, or openly abandon the historic doctrine of Biblical inspiration. Scripture is increasingly treated as inspirational rather than authoritative, culturally conditioned rather than divinely given, and open to revision rather than received as the final word of God. This is not merely academic. When confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture erodes, the church loses its anchor for doctrine, its clarity in moral teaching, and its confidence in the gospel itself.

Because of this cultural and theological moment, it is essential to remain clearly what the church has long believed: that the Bible is not simply a witness to God's revelation, but is itself God's inspired, truthful, and authoritative Word. This paper seeks to reaffirm that conviction by tracing the church's historic understanding of Scripture's authority, examining the biblical testimony concerning its nature, and articulating how Legacy Church seeks to live within that authority today. Our aim is not innovation, but potential and confessional, calling the church back to the confidence that God has spoken, that His Word is trustworthy, and that it remains the final rule for faith, life, and doctrine.

Authority of Scripture and the Early Church

The earliest Christian communities held Scripture to the highest regard as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. Even the first century forward, the Church recognized both the Old Testament writings and the emerging apostolic writings as carrying divine authority.

Apostolic Foundation (First Century)

The apostles themselves appealed to the Old Testament as God's authoritative word. Paul wrote that "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16), affirming the divine origin and authority of the sacred texts. Peter recognized Paul's letters as Scripture alongside "the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15), indicating early recognition of New Testament authority. Clement of Rome, writing around 95-A.D, who spoken quotes and alludes extensively to the OT, as Scripture and also appeals to apostolic instruction and sayings of the Lord as binding for the church. (1 Clement 42-44)

The Sub-Apostolic Era (100-150 AD)

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-108 AD), a disciple of the apostles John and Paul, spoken extensively about fidelity to the gospel handed down by the apostles. In his letter to the Magnesians (13.1), he wrote: "Be eager, therefore, to be firmly grounded in the teachings of the Lord and the apostles." Ignatius recognized the authentic Christian teaching must align with apostolic instruction as its foundation.

Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69-155 AD), another disciple of John, demonstrated unwavering commitment to apostolic authority. In his letter to the Philippians, he wrote, "Let us therefore so serve Him with fear and all reverence, as He Himself gave commandment, and the Apostles who preached the Gospel to us, and the prophets who proclaimed in advance the coming of our Lord." Polycarp's commitment to age-old authority in his conviction that Scripture's authority superceded even the threat of death.

Confronting Heresy: Through Scripture (150-200 AD)

As Gnosticism and other heresies emerged, the Church increasingly articulated its doctrine of Scripture. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD) defended Christianity by appealing to the prophets Scripture and Jesus's fulfillment in Christ. In his First Apology he wrote: "We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that he is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers, and those who lived reasonably are Christians."

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202 AD) provided the most comprehensive early articulation of biblical authority in his work "Against Heresies." He insisted that true doctrine must come from apostolic tradition preserved in Scripture, not mere knowledge or secret interpretations. Irenaeus wrote: "We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time preach to public and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures." For Irenaeus, Scripture was the "pillar and ground" of faith, the standard against which all teaching must be measured.

Scriptural Sufficiency in the Third Century (200-300 AD)

Tertullian (c. 155-220 AD) strongly defended Scripture's clarity and sufficiency against heretical teachers who claimed special revelation. He defended the sufficiency and clarity of Scripture against heretical innovation, arguing that doctrinal novelty signals corruption rather than progress. "When diversity of doctrine is found, there, then, must the corruption both of the Scripture and the expositions thereof be regarded as existing" (Prescription Against Heretics 38). Tertullian insisted that authentic Christianity maintains fidelity and loyalty to the apostolic testimony preserved in Scripture.

By the end of the third century, the Church had firmly established several key principles: Scripture originates from God, carries absolute authority over faith and practice, suffices for salvation and godly living, and serves as the standard for testing all teaching. As Athanasius would later write, "The sacred and inspired Scriptures are sufficient to declare the truth."

The early Church commitment to biblical authority arose from three distinct theological generations but from practical necessity. Facing persecution from outsiders and heresy from within, Christians clung to Scripture as their anchor the unchanging, divinely breathed testimony to God's revelation to Christ.

The Reformers and Biblical Authority

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century represented a decisive return to the authority of Scripture. While the medieval Church had increasingly elevated church tradition and papal authority alongside Scripture, the Reformers insisted on Scripture alone (Sola Scriptura) as the final and definitive authority for Christian faith and practice.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Martin Luther sparked the Reformation by challenging church practices that contradicted Scripture. At the Diet of Worms in 1521, Luther famously declared: "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, for to go against my conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

Luther emphasized Scripture's clarity (perspicuity), arguing that the Bible's essential message is clear enough that ordinary believers can understand it without requiring the Church's magisterium to interpret it for them. He wrote: "The Scriptures are the magnet to which Christ lies." For Luther, all theology and practice must be measured against the standard of God's written Word.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

John Calvin provided systematic theological grounding for biblical authority. In his Institutes of the Christian Religion, Calvin argued that Scripture is self-authenticating through the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Yet this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has internally taught rightly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And this certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit."

Calvin emphasized that God's Word carries intrinsic authority because the Church confirm it, but because it is God's speech. The Church recognizes Scripture's authority it does not create it. Calvin wrote: "A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed, that Scripture has only as much weight as is conceded to it by the consent of the church... the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

The Five Solas and Biblical Authority

The Reformation's commitment to Scripture found expression in the principle of Sola Scriptura: Scripture alone as the final authority. This did not mean Scripture was the only authority (church tradition, reason, and experience have legitimate roles), but that Scripture is the supreme authority to which all other authorities must submit.

The Reformers' conviction that Scripture is God's authoritative Word led them to translate the Bible into vernacular languages, preach vigorously, and establish schools for biblical education. Mainstream Protestantism

Reformed Churches

Contemporary Reformed churches sustain the Reformation's commitment to biblical inerrancy and authority. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) articulates this position: "Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it teaches."

Reformed theologian Alec Ian Johnson Jr. Johnson Jr. Johnson's scripture authority in determining doctrine and practice. Pope writes: "We believe that God's revelation, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right." This high view of Scripture shapes Reformed approaches to theology, ethics, and mission.

D. A. Carson articulates the Reformed understanding of biblical authority by affirming that Scripture, though mediated through human authors, is God's own reliable and trustworthy word and therefore bears divine authority in all that it affirms. As Carson observes, when Christians speak of Scripture's authority, they affirm that it is "God breathed and utterly reliable in all that it says... and therefore... has God's authority."

Charismatic Churches

Charismatic and Pentecostal churches likewise affirm biblical authority while also emphasizing the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Sam Storms, a Reformed charismatic, explains this balance: "...if you believe in the sufficiency and the functional authority of Scripture, you must necessarily believe in the ongoing validity and edifying power of revelatory gifts of the Spirit."

Charismatic leaders like Mike Chandler emphasize that trust in biblical authority is a vital first step toward deeper life of obedience. "If you are not confident in the authority of the Scriptures, you will be slow to obey what scripture tells you."

Both traditions agree that Scripture is inspired, inerrant, and authoritative. Their difference emerge primarily in how they understand the Spirit's ongoing work in relation to Scripture, not in their commitment to biblical authority itself.

Whether Reformed or Charismatic, evangelical Christians in the West assert around Scripture's divine inspiration, infallibility, and supreme authority over all matters of faith and practice. This shared commitment to biblical authority provides common ground for partnership in the gospel despite differences on secondary matters.

Biblical Passages on Scripture's Authority

The Bible's teaching about its own authority rests on numerous passages throughout Scripture:

Divine Inspiration and Origin

2 Timothy 3:16-17

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

2 Peter 1:20-21

"Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

1 Thessalonians 2:13

"And we also thank God continually for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."

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Scripture's Trustfulness and Reliability

Psalm 119:160

"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever."

John 17:17

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

Proverbs 30:5

"Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar."

Titus 1:2

"In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began."

Scripture's Sufficiency

Deuteronomy 4:2

"You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you."

Revelation 22:18-19

"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life."

Psalm 19:7-8

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

Scripture's Power and Effectiveness

Hebrews 4:12

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Isaiah 55:11

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and grow, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth: it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Romans 1:16

"By faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Scripture's Permanence

Matthew 24:35

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

1 Peter 1:24-25

"For, 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you."

Isaiah 40:8

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Jesus's Affirmation of Scripture

Matthew 5:17-18

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and the earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

Luke 24:44-45

"Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."

John 10:35

"Scripture cannot be broken."

Scripture as the Standard for Truth

John 17:17

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

Acts 17:11

"Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."

Galatians 1:8-9

"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."

2 John 10

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

Authority of Scripture and Legacy Church

Legacy Church stands firmly in the historic Christian conviction that Scripture is the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. We believe the Bible does not merely contain God's words it is God's word. It's speech to His people. As our Statement of Faith declares: "The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. Every word is God-breathed, trustworthy, and sufficient. Scripture is the final rule for faith, life, and doctrine."

Our Conviction: Scripture's Divine Origin

We affirm with the Church Fathers, the Reformers, and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy that Scripture originates from God Himself. The Holy Spirit moved human authors to write exactly what God intended, using their personalities, vocabularies, and historical contexts while preserving every word from error. This divine origin gives Scripture unique authority. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. Therefore, we do not evaluate Scripture by our reason, experience, or culture; rather, we submit our reason, experience, and cultural assumptions to Scripture's corrective authority.

Our Conviction: Scripture's Inerrancy and Trustfulness

We believe Scripture is without error in all that it affirms. This includes not only theological and spiritual matters but also historical details, scientific claims (properly understood), and cultural commands. The Bible presents a unified, coherent testimony to God's character and purpose from Genesis to Revelation.

This conviction shapes how we read difficult passages. When Scripture seems unclear or contradictory, we assume the problem lies with our understanding, not with the text. We study harder, seek wise counsel, and trust that deeper investigation will vindicate Scripture's trustfulness.

Our Conviction: Scripture's Sufficiency

We believe Scripture provides everything necessary for salvation, godliness, and faithful Christian living. We need no additional revelation, no secret knowledge, no new prophecies or gut-with Scripture. A commandment, we believe God will provide the tools, practices, disciplines, and resources, but these never carry the same authority as Scripture and must always be tested against it.

The Bible is the sole infallible rule of faith and practice for the church. All prophetic words, visions, dreams, tongues, and interpretations are subject to the biblical test. Modern prophecy is not infallible, divine revelation but a divinely prompted interpretation that must be tested by Scripture.

This is precisely one position Scripture alone is infallible, all other claims to divine communication must submit to biblical authority.

Our Conviction: Scripture's Clarity

We believe Scripture's essential message is clear enough that ordinary believers, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, can understand and apply it. We do not stand at the close of interpretation or a magisterium will tell us what the Bible means. The gospel is plain: we are sinners saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. As Martin Luther insisted, the Bible is its own interpreter, and the clearer passages illuminate the harder ones.

This does not mean every passage is equally easy to understand. Peter acknowledged that some of Paul's writings are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16). However, the Bible's central message, the story of God's redemption through Jesus Christ, shines clearly throughout Scripture.

Practical Guidelines for Legacy Church

Given our conviction that Scripture is God's authoritative Word, we commit to the following practices:

Expository Preaching	Our preaching will be text-driven, explaining and applying Scripture to its context. We will not use the Bible as a springboard for our own ideas but will faithfully expose what God has said.
Bible of Literacy	We encourage all members to read, study, and memorize Scripture regularly. We provide resources for Bible reading plans, small group studies, and personal discipleship.
Testing All Things	Following the Berean example (Acts 17:11), we test every teaching, including sermons, prophecies, and testimonies, against Scripture. If a teaching contradicts the Bible, we reject it, regardless of how spiritual or convincing it seems.
Humble Interpretation	While we hold convictions firmly, we recognize we can misunderstand Scripture. We walk with humility, seek wise counsel from church history and contemporary teachers, and remain teachable.
Rejecting Cultural Accommodation	We refuse to reshape Scripture to fit cultural trends. When culture contradicts Scripture on matters like sexuality, marriage, gender, or the inclusivity of Christ, we stand with Scripture regardless of cultural pressure.
Applying Scripture Holistically	We believe all Scripture is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16), including Old Testament narratives, wisdom literature, prophecy, and law. We seek to understand how the whole Bible points to Christ and shapes Christian life today.
Scripture Memory and Meditation	Following Psalm 119:11 ("I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you"), we encourage hiding God's Word in our hearts through memorization and meditation.
Doctrinal Accountability	Our elders are committed to teaching sound doctrine based on Scripture. We hold each other accountable to biblical truth and address false teaching when it arises.

Conclusion

Legacy Church stands with the universal Church in affirming that Scripture is God's inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and authoritative Word. We call our church from this foundation. In an age of relativism, biblical authority grounds us in objective truth. In an age of secularization, Scripture provides a reliable guide. In an age of compromise, God's Word calls us to faithful obedience. We will stand on the Rock, knowing that "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
Psalm 119:105