



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SCRIPTURE'S AUTHORITY FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP TODAY

Jason L. Rankin

The authority of Scripture has been the subject of numerous challenges and criticisms. Maintaining the Scripture's authority is crucial because all Christian ideas are based on its inspiration, inerrancy, reliability, sufficiency, and other qualities. Most Pentecostal and Evangelical denominations adhere to its authority, in part, because of the efforts of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. The ultimate source of power and authority, Jesus Christ, is the source of leadership authority in churches, Christian organizations, and for ministry leaders. This article's purpose is to demonstrate that Scripture's authority provides normative guidelines for the purpose, roles, methodology, and setting for leadership. Scripture contains leadership concepts, examples, and principles that Christian leaders can use to establish authority. Scripture can give information on the goals of leadership, the roles of the leader and follower, the approach, and the context of leadership when it is the main source of authority. Since Scripture is the primary source of our knowledge about God, upholding scriptural authority is essential to leadership authority.

INTRODUCTION

There has been much discussion and debate regarding the contemporary challenges to the authority of Scripture. Martin Luther's pivotal act of declaring sola Scriptura with his 95 Theses ignited the Protestant Reformation, asserting that Scripture alone was the final authority for faith and practice: "Movements like the Enlightenment, liberalism, and more recently postmodernism have elevated other voices to the level of

Scripture or even above Scripture, and the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture have been abandoned, something Rome would never have done in the sixteenth century” (Barrett, 2015, p. 10). Challenging the authority of God and His Word can be found in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2-3) and throughout the Scriptures. The Word was challenged when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. These instances demonstrate that Adam failed to uphold the authority of God’s word, and Jesus successfully reinforced the authority of written Scripture. Given the successful example of Jesus, it is foundational for Christianity to uphold the authority of Scripture. All doctrines within Christian theology hinge upon the authority, reliability, credibility, and sufficiency of Scripture. For this reason, it is necessary to hold to the infallible authority of Scripture, which provides a firm foundation for all Christian doctrines to be built upon. Leadership authority, especially Christian leadership, is based upon Scripture’s authority. This article will demonstrate that the authority of Scripture provides adequate and normative guidelines for the purpose, roles, methodology, and setting for leadership.

After a brief synopsis and overview of the theological and biblical foundation for the authority of Scripture, the discussion will proceed to show how leadership authority hinges on it. The next major objective is to apply the authority of Scripture doctrine in the life of a leader; this section will present the fundamental arguments of this thesis, including the purpose, the roles of the leader and follower, the methodology, and the leadership setting. The conclusion will provide a recapitulation and recommendation on the stance the contemporary church should take forward.

EXPLANATION OF THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

As briefly touched on in the introduction, the authority of Scripture is vital to Christianity and a prerequisite for all Christian doctrine, practice, and claims grounded in Scripture. When discussing Scripture’s authority, several related terms are often used in conjunction with or interchangeably with authority. These terms include inspiration, infallibility, reliability, trustworthiness, truth, sufficiency, and inerrancy, amongst others. Essentially, an underlying argument behind the use of these terms is the truth that the Bible not only contains the Word of God, but it is, in fact, in its entirety the Word of God. For this reason, all the aforementioned terms are equivocally associated with the Holy Scriptures.

Theological Terminology of Authority of Scripture

First, an explanation will be provided as to why it is theologically important and vital to uphold the authority of Scripture and its equivocal terms as they relate to Scripture. First, Scriptures self-attest to their own authoritative nature. Second, Patriarchs, leaders, and heroes of Scripture, in the likes of Jesus as mentioned, and the Apostle Paul, gave credence to Scripture’s authority. Despite these examples, some still doubt the Bible’s authority. A notable contention regarding biblical authority is that God used human writers to pen Scripture. One way to summarize the issue of biblical authority that many scholars today face is as follows: Does it not follow that the Bible

must bear the scars of human error and fallibility since the Scriptures were written by humans rather than being sent directly from heaven? Therefore, it is asserted that an infallible God gave His Word to imperfect humans, who then created a faulty record (Schulze, 1960).

There are various responses to such problematic argumentation. One response considers the nature of God in relation to Scripture. Given that Scripture is the Word of God, some arguments follow about the nature of Scripture in relation to the nature of God. One theological argument claims that, based on God's nature, that the aforementioned terms (such as inerrancy and reliability) can be associated with Scripture. God must be all-knowing if he is omniscient. He cannot be ignorant of or mistaken about anything. Furthermore, if he is omnipotent, he can influence the biblical author's writing so much that no errors appear in the finished work. And since he is a veracious or true creature, he will undoubtedly want to use these powers in a way that prevents the Scriptures from deceiving people (Erickson, 2013). This line of reasoning, based on God's nature of omniscience and omnipotence, not only applies to inerrancy but to any of the equivocal terms as they apply to Scripture. Other theologians have used similar lines of reasoning to connect these uses of terminology. Barrett (2015) writes: "If Scripture is not inerrant, then sola scriptura is without foundation. For Luther, what made the Bible alone the supreme authority was that it was not only inspired by God but, as a result of being God-breathed, the Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone, could not and do not err" (p. 14).

Some scholars and theologians do not appeal to reasoning or logical argumentation but suggest that the authority of Scripture resides in one's faith and is beyond human comprehension. Henderson (2017) supports, "Holy Scripture is perfect, authoritative, sufficient, and essentially clear. It is the inerrant Word of God. Human eyes cannot see this, and human reason cannot prove it. It is an article of faith "that is hidden and not obvious" (p. 146). Mayhue (2004) summarizes a theological argument on Scripture's authority:

1) It is not a derived authority bestowed by humans; rather, it is the original authority of God. 2) It does not change with the times, the culture, the nation, or the ethnic background; rather it is the unalterable authority of God. 3) It is not one authority among many possible spiritual authorities; rather it is the exclusive spiritual authority of God. 4) It is not an authority that can be successfully challenged or rightfully overthrown; rather, it is the permanent authority of God. 5) It is not a relativistic or subordinate authority; rather it is the ultimate authority of God. 6) It is not merely a suggestive authority; rather it is the obligatory authority of God. 7) It is not a benign authority in its outcomes; rather it is the consequential authority of God (p. 234).

A point needs to be made about the timelessness of Scripture's authority. Since the Scriptures are divinely inspired, containing teachings and principles about and relating to God, they are just as binding on the contemporary church as they were on the first-century church. The concepts and assertions found in Scripture are

authoritative due to their divine inspiration and ought to be always applied universally to the church. Which leads to providing information on some denominations and the stance of churches on Scripture's authority.

Many evangelical and protestant denominations promote a strong view of the authority of Scripture, while certain new movements have even taken some opposing viewpoints. Folarin claims that the Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations share a commitment to upholding Scripture's authority. In his writing about the Christ Apostolic Church, he asserts, "the belief in inspiration and authority of the Scriptures is common to both Evangelical and Pentecostal churches" (Folarin, 2018, p. 2). Despite some views that suggest Pentecostalism inherited these views from Evangelicalism, others say the authority of Scripture is not a main tenet of Pentecostalism. Ellington (1996) observes that Pentecostalism does not necessarily oppose the doctrine but views it from a different vantage point. Ellington (1996) points out, "this suggests to me that Pentecostals do not found their understanding of the authority of Scripture on a bedrock of doctrine, but that, in fact, their doctrine is itself resting on something more fundamental, dynamic and resilient; their experiences of encountering a living God, directly and personally" (p. 17).

Biblical Foundation of Authority of Scripture on Leadership

It must be established that all authority, Scriptural, leadership, and otherwise, comes from God, which is self-attested in Scripture and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. Here, authority refers to God's indisputable, absolute, and unconditional power in the world. It is inferred that the Bible, which is the Word of God in its entirety, is the voice of God speaking to humans because this power belongs to God alone. The Bible is the only standard that requires unconditional obedience; there is no recourse to any other authority (Schulze, 1960).

The primary source of authority and power resides with God and is evidenced in Scripture. Romans 13:1 says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Jesus also alluded to God's primary authority in John 19:11, which says, "Jesus answered, thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." Also, Jesus identifies Himself as the source of all authority when He says in Matthew 28:18, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." There is not adequate space allotted to exegete Scripture to demonstrate how, from Genesis to Revelation, that Jesus is the source of all power and authority.

Given God as primary authority, it can be asserted that His scriptures carry equal authority because they are His Word. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (emphasis mine)." Therefore, it would not be invalid to say that Scripture carries high, if not primary, authority. Jesus, being the Word of God (John 1:14), repeatedly emphasized the authority of Scripture. Evans (2015) writes, "Jesus quotes or alludes to all of the books of the Law, most of the Prophets, and some of the Writings. Superficially, then, the 'canon' of Jesus is pretty

much what it was for most religiously observant Jews of his time” (p. 37). Jesus upheld the authority of Scripture (the law specifically) in Matthew 5:18, which says, “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” One of the foremost foundational scriptures on biblical authority is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, “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.” This Scripture is a prime example and evidence of Scripture being self-attesting. Many people gloss over this phenomenal truth and just label it as a presupposition in their writings. Scripture is a “consistent self-witness to itself” and based on extensive exegesis, Mayhue (2004) syllogistically articulates that: “(1) Scripture is the Word of God, (2) The words of God are authoritative. Conclusion: Scripture is authoritative” (p. 232). This conclusion is supported throughout Scripture, alluding again to its self-attesting attribute. Mayhue (2004) expounds:

Since the origin of Scripture can ultimately be explained by divine inspiration (Zech. 7:12; 2 Tim. 3:14–17; 2 Pet. 1:20–21) as defined above, then the authority of Scripture is directly derived from the authority of God.¹¹ Those who do not take God’s authority in Scripture seriously are condemned (Jer. 8:8–9; Mark 7:1–13). On the other hand, those who rightfully honor and submit to God’s authority in Scripture are commended (Neh. 8:5–6; Rev. 3:8) (p. 234).

APPLICATION OF THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE TO THE LIFE OF THE LEADER

Having established and explained the doctrine of the authority of Scripture, this discussion will show how leadership authority hinges on Scriptural authority and how this authority defines the practices of Christian leadership. Barrett (2015) provides Martin Luther’s claim, “Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men’s books and human teachers” (p. 9). Christians should not turn to secular constructs for authority, purpose, roles, or leadership methodology, but should rely on Scripture’s authority. Howell (2003) says, “Holy Scripture, comprised of the Old and New Testaments, is the authoritative guide for the Christian believer in every realm of life, including how one grows into and conducts oneself as a leader of others” (p. 1).

Scripture’s Authority Forms/Informs the Purpose of Leadership

Since Jesus is the source of all authority and Scripture is the primary authority in the life of Christians, it obviously follows that leaders, especially Christian leaders, find their purpose in Jesus and Scripture. Pastors, overseers, elders, deacons, and other ministry leaders have explicit qualifications outlined in Scripture, as well as anecdotal leadership principles derived from biblical accounts. Anyone desiring to be a Christian leader must acknowledge their purpose and disposition in relation to Jesus and

Scripture. One of the foremost purposes of a leader is to glorify and please God. As evidenced by a desire to glorify and please God, a leader's life will portray complete devotion and obedience to God and His Word. The Scriptures explicitly instruct Christian leadership as to its purpose. Ephesians 4:11-13 says, "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Therefore, it is clear that these ministry leaders' purpose is to equip and edify God's people.

Scripture's Authority Forms/Informs the Role of the Leader

Since Jesus is the primary and source of all authority, leaders must acknowledge their primary role as first followers of the highest leader, Jesus Christ: "The chief characteristic of a Christian leader must be submission to Christ, and only those who have learned that submission is the key to power can be effective Christian leaders" (Lawrence, 1987, p. 318). As part of submitting to God and following Him, leaders must know what God wants, know His Word, and desire to please Him. Murray (2011) says, "the Christian leader sees himself primarily as a servant, not a ruler. He is a servant of God first, then of His people" (p. 318). After establishing one's relationship and disposition with God, leaders must exhibit a Christian lifestyle that influences others to want to follow them. This means that a leader will possess character and practices that others will follow: "Truth, love, and righteousness must be evident in the Christian leader's character, behavior, and relationships if he is to expect other believers to respond to him as their leader" (Lawrence, 1987, p. 318). The leader ultimately seeks to fulfill one of the primary purposes of leadership: edifying and equipping the body of Christ. The leader brings God's people together in contemplative, disciplined, respectful, and Word-centered worship. However, he also guides and leads worship so that it touches and uplifts the emotions and the heart. He wants worship to be full of spirit and truth, just like the Father. In addition to teaching, training, organizing, and empowering God's people to serve Him, His church, and His world as their abilities and opportunities allow, he prioritizes worship (Murray, 2011).

He equips and inspires God's people for works of service. While prioritizing worship, he also teaches, trains, organizes, and enables God's people to serve Him, His church, and His world as their talents and opportunities permit. Smith specifically identifies the responsibility of "planning" for a Christian leader. Just as planning is a role of God, it is also part of the role of leaders: "Biblical planning is carried out in submission to the authority of the Word of God and in dependence upon the provision of wisdom from God" (Smith, 1991, p. 73).

It must be noted that desiring leadership roles is commended in Scripture; understanding one's motives for desiring leadership and the disposition of leadership must be carefully examined. The Scriptures discourage the desire to rule or lord over people for the sake of feeling higher or better than people. A leader's motive should be

to guide, serve, and help others rather than rule over them. Patterson (2018) explains: “guarding and caring for the believer’s contrasts with forbidden authoritarian behavior that Jesus refers to as ‘lord it over’ (Matt. 20:25)” (p. 81).

Scripture’s Authority Forms/Informs the Role of the Follower

Since leaders are first and foremost followers of Jesus, the follower’s role likewise begins with a disposition of submission to Christ. After submission to Christ is submission to Christian leaders and to each other in humble servitude. Followers’ role should also be rooted in a desire to glorify and please God. They will exemplify good character, practices, and biblical qualities such as love. Ephesians 5:1-2 admonishes to be imitators of God and “be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.” Patterson (2017) expounds: “The followers of Jesus are called to serve as God’s stewards from a platform that is free of positional tension or self-ascendant attitude” (p. 78). As He emptied Himself of all desire for honor and glory (Phil. 2:7), so His followers are called to a leadership model marked by humility and powered by love. How these roles play out in a church setting varies tremendously. Many followers view their role as more involved, while others take a more passive approach. Bilezikian (2007) explains, “passive believers are discovering the thrill of participating together in the ministries of the local church. Laypeople demand to be involved in the decision-making process relative to matters that concern their church life” (p. 5).

Scripture’s Authority Forms/Informs Leadership Methodology

There are numerous leadership constructs, both biblical and secular. Some scholars extract other leadership philosophies from Scripture (Dobbs, 2001; Wagner, 2012). Dobbs (2001) used the biblical archetype of Moses to construct what he called the situational model of leadership. However, Dobbs (2001) acknowledges “the current model of choice seems to be Servant leadership, but I believe there are other models that are equally valid” (p. 33). Some theologians stress that church leadership should be biblically derived but emphasize leadership methodologies specifically derived from the New Testament. Wagner (2012) argues, “a proper biblical philosophy of leadership appropriate for today must have a dispensational perspective. All scripture is profitable.” He does not discard Old Testament leadership principles and examples but suggests that only the New Testament has, “along with its own principles and examples, the many divine commands of leadership that should be heeded today” (p. 37). The methodology for Christian leadership that will be promoted by this author, and is highly regarded in Scripture, is servant leadership. In Luke, Jesus instructs His disciples on what is commonly referred to as servant leadership. Luke 22:26-27 says, “he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who *is* greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? *Is* it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.” Servanthood is a deeply embedded leadership paradigm in Scripture. Moses is repeatedly called the servant of God. Isaiah predicted that the coming Messiah would be the servant. As Jesus develops his ministry, he comes as the quintessential servant and makes service integral to his

mission (Mark 10:45). Moreover, Jesus exhibits his ministry of service in the Lord's Supper in a highly tangible way (MacIrvine III, 2016).

Application of Scripture's Authority to a Specific Setting

The obvious setting for the application of Scripture's authority is a Church or Christian organizational context. However, it must be noted that borrowing principles are practiced between both secular and Christian organizations. Garner (2015) argues, "one of the more obvious differences between churches and other types of organizations is the mix of sacred and secular practices influencing decision-making. While organizational facets of churches such as hierarchies, budgets, and facilities management have secular overtones, churches exist for sacred purposes" (p. 416). However, it can be argued that, historically, there has been just as much use of biblical principles in secular organizations, though not as overtly. There are arguments that the problems with church leadership stem from borrowing leadership philosophies from secular constructs (Benware, 1999). Benware (1999) identifies that the problem in leadership comes from churches replacing "biblical principles with psychological ideas" and "when marketing strategies take the place of passionate praying that is scripturally induced" (p. 6). Ideally, Christian leaders have been given authority by God to equip and edify the church, which determines what happens in a church setting. Since leaders derive this authority from God and Scripture, they should obviously rely on Scripture as their source for leadership philosophy.

CONCLUSION

There have been various challenges and developments regarding the authority of Scripture doctrine. Given the fact that all Christian doctrines hinge on the inspiration, inerrancy, trustworthiness, reliability, sufficiency, and so forth, it is vitally important to uphold the authority of Scripture. Various denominations and churches hold different views on the doctrine. Partly due to the actions of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, most Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations hold to Scripture's authority. The leadership authority of Churches, Christian organizations, and ministry leaders comes from the supreme source of authority and power, Jesus Christ. Understanding that Jesus is the Word of God, and that God has the attributes of omniscience and omnipotence enables one to have faith in Scripture's authority. Leadership principles, examples, and philosophies can be drawn from Scripture to provide authority and guidance for Christian leaders. With Scripture as a primary authority, it can provide information on the purpose of leadership, the role of the leader and follower, the methodology, and the setting of leadership. The purpose of church leadership is to glorify and please God through a life devoted to him and serving others. Everyone is a follower submitted to the supreme authority of Jesus Christ. The Christian leaders' role is to equip and edify the body of Christ through a servant-leadership methodology. It is crucial to leadership authority and to all Christian doctrine to uphold scriptural authority because most of what we know about God comes from Scripture. Scripture should be the primary source for leadership authority and leadership philosophies, especially in the Church and Christian organizations.

About the Author

Jason L. Rankin, Ph.D., is a Christian, husband, and father. He is a former officer and combat veteran of the US Army. He received his Ph.D. in Christian Leadership from Liberty University.

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