

It's God's Commanding Revelation to Us

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bibles, and we're going to read this morning in the New Testament in Paul's second letter to Timothy, 2 Timothy chapter 3, and we're reading some verses.

I think we'll start at verse 10 of chapter 3, and we'll read through to the first five verses of chapter 4. However, familiar verses to many of us, we're not studying this whole letter, we're in a thematic series at the moment, and we're looking at this issue of why we treasure the Bible.

Different aspects of what the Bible teaches about itself, but its nature, its place in the Christian church, and so on. And here's a place where Paul is writing to Timothy, another church leader, another of his co-workers, to encourage him and to remind him, and indeed the whole church to whom this letter would have been read, of what his priority was to be in leading the church as God's people, and the place indeed of teaching the word of God in Scripture, and the central place of that authority in the life of the church.

So in verse 10, Paul says to Timothy, You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, and my persecutions and sufferings. It happened to me at Antioch, Iconium, and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured. Yet from them all, the Lord has rescued me.

[1 : 45] Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you've learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

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 competent, equipped for every good work. I 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 by his kingdom, preach the word, and be ready in season and out of season.

Reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching.

[3 : 12] But, having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teaching to suit their own passions. And they'll turn away from listening to the truth, and wander off into myths.

But, as for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill, finish your ministry.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, you might like to have your Bibles open, where we read it, 2 Timothy 3 and 4.

We're asking, again, the question, why do we treasure the Bible? And this morning, I want to say that we treasure it, because it's God's commanding revelation to us.

It's an authoritative word, to lead all people under the lordship of our creator and ruler. We're asking why we, as Orthodox Christian people, and as a historic Orthodox Christian church, why we treasure the Bible, the word of God written, as our confession calls it.

[4 : 33] And we've already seen that we treasure it, because the Bible is God's covenant revelation. That is, it's his unique personal revelation, to lead us into a proper relationship with him, through Jesus Christ.

And it can do that to all who will receive it and reckon with it, because it's a clear revelation. It's an accessible word.

It gives light to all, because it's interpreted to us by God himself, so that our minds can grasp what God wants us to see, and wants us to understand.

The Bible's message is not a hidden mystery. It's something that is open to all. But, as we saw last time, it doesn't yield its treasures to chance inquiry.

We can't look at it casually. We can't treat it with contempt, because the Bible is a coherent revelation. Not just a random collection of texts.

[5 : 36] It's a coherent whole. And it gives us a complete revelation of God, our sovereign, so that we can know everything that God wants us to know, about his worth and his ways, everything he wants from us.

And it gives us a coherent and climactic revelation of God's story of salvation, so we can see how all of history unfolds, according to God's plan and purpose for the world, and for the saving of his people from sin.

And, remember, it gives us a coherent creaturely revelation in our human speech, so that we can understand God's divine words in our language.

So, the Bible is a coherent revelation of God's, God our sovereign, saving story in our speech, if you like.

And that means we must treat it seriously, with completeness. We must look at it in context. If we're going to properly understand God, what he teaches, and ourselves, and what he teaches about us.

[6 : 39] And because we can come to know God, and see by his divine light, and because we can understand clearly, all that God wants us to know about him, and about our lives, and how our lives must be shaped by his word, because we can do so, we must do so.

And that's today's subject. The Bible is a commanding revelation. It's an authoritative word. It's to lead all people under the lordship of God, the creator and ruler.

And that means that the Bible is a full, and final, and clear authority, which is given by God to direct all of our lives, and which therefore must be obeyed.

And so true Christian disciples will gladly submit themselves to God's commanding word in its entirety, as the rule for our lives, for our personal life, our family life, and indeed, our church life.

Jesus said, the scripture cannot be broken. He said, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. And the great commission Jesus gave to us was to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, that is, bringing them under the authority of Christ's family, of which he is head.

[8 : 06] And so, teaching them to obey everything that he commanded to his apostles. That's why the apostle Peter, in 2 Peter 3, verse 2, commands the church to remember the command of our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Because, he says, you know that in the last days, scoffers will come. They will reject the authority of the apostolic gospel. But no, as Paul says, in the passage you read here, in 2 Timothy 4, it's just in these circumstances, when people won't have it, when they reject sound biblical truth, that you are to preach this word, in season and out of season.

You are to do the work of an evangelist. Do the work of an evangelical, one who truly believes and holds to the authority of Scripture.

Don't just believe it in theory. Don't just say, yes, I believe the Bible. But do it, says Paul. Actually live it out in your teaching.

Obey it and teach others to obey. Why? Well, because God's word in Scripture is a commanding word. It's a word of authoritative revelation. And it's to be obeyed as God's sovereign will for our lives.

[9 : 28] Now, notice the difference between merely accepting the notion of the authority of Scripture in theory as your doctrine and actually living it out in practice.

Because there are many Christians, many who would call themselves evangelicals, Christians, who would say, yes, we take the Bible as God's inspired word, as 2 Timothy 3.16 puts it. Who would rejoice that, yes, the Bible is infallible.

Yes, even the Bible is inerrant. Yes, we honor the Bible. But in actual fact, don't truly live under the Bible's authority.

And there are many churches, likewise, that would say, well, we're a Bible-based church. But in practice, it's just the same. It's not actually lived. So you can honor the Bible.

You can talk a lot about the Bible. But the question that Paul the Apostle asked is what do you actually do with the Bible? Where, if I can put it this way, where in the vehicle of our life and our church's life is the Bible?

[10 : 35] Is it really driving everything as a commanding word? Or, is the Bible just along with us for the ride? David Jackman often used to use that illustration of driving in a car and saying, well, where in the car is the Bible?

Well, for many, many people in many churches, the Bible is certainly there. But you could say it's in the passenger seat. It's always there. It's very easily accessible for reference.

But it's not actually in ultimate control of the pedals or the steering wheel. For some, it's there. But actually, now it's more been moved to the back seat.

Gets much more occasional attention. In some cases, even now, it's probably resting somewhere in the back, in the boot of the car. Good to know it's around.

You can speak about it. It's sometimes referred to. It's there in an emergency, like the spare tire is. But it's increasingly unnecessary, actually, in your everyday journey.

[11 : 42] It's easy to think that the Bible is in control of things, but in reality, when push comes to shove, it just isn't so. I remember some years ago speaking to a Cornhill student.

After the first couple of months on the Cornhill training course, he said to me, do you know, I realized that the evangelical church that I belong to doesn't really have the Bible central at all in its church life.

But no, the Bible is God's authoritative word, his commanding word, and it must be in the driving seat in our lives and in our church's life. It must be in charge not just of the destination, ultimately, but it must be in charge of the route.

It must be in charge of the pedals. It must be in charge of the steering wheel. Every aspect of that whole journey. So it's a question, isn't it? Is that so in our lives, in our church?

Is the Bible the commanding word? Apostle James says the same thing. James 1, verse 22, be doers of the word and not just hearers who are deceiving yourselves.

[12 : 54] And it's very easy to deceive ourselves. We can think that the Bible is the ultimate authority, but in practice, when the chips are really down, actually, it's something else that has the ultimate say.

Now, here's where our diagram helps us to see this more clearly. Many of you have seen it before, but I don't apologize for showing it again because it's so very important to get this clear.

Something I've developed to illustrate this point about recognizing where the real authority in our lives actually comes from, when the chips are down. Because that's when the truth is really revealed, isn't it?

When push comes to shove. I got this acronym originally from David Jackman. He got it from Philip Jensen, but it's a vital acronym and it helps us to remember that if the Bible is not our full and final and clear authority in all of life, then by default, one of three other things, will always actually be the ultimate authority in our lives.

So here's the acronym, BREE, B-R-I-E. Not the cheese. I'm actually very partial to the cheese and it's actually very good for you as well. So don't listen to the fat police.

[14 : 11] BREE is one of the best sources of vitamin K2. So next time somebody's saying I don't have so much of that, it's bad for you, tell them it's really good for your heart. But anyway, that's an aside. But I'm talking about far more divine protection and disease protection than that because we're talking here, when we're talking about the Bible, we're talking about eternal heart disease.

We're talking about the kind of damage that you can do to your life by an insufficiently biblical diet. So we need to get to grips with BREE, B-R-I-E. Now B, of course, if we can put the diagram up, B is for Bible.

Do we have our diagram? We do. B, okay, great. Bible. B is the most important letter. The Bible is God's authoritative, commanding revelation to us in all things.

It is a full and final and clear authority. But here's the thing, as I said, you can think that you hold a Bible in that unique place but in real life, as they sang in Porgy and Bess, it ain't necessarily so.

And if the Bible is not your full and final and clear authority in all things, then one of these three other things will be. It'll be either R for reason or I for institution or E.

[15 : 41] It'll be your experience. If it's not B, your real authority will be R, I, or E. Let me explain. Let's think first about reason.

Many Christians and many churches are very happy to agree that the Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and life. And many even will see it as a clear authority but at least in practice, they are rejecting the Bible's full authority.

So in practice, what they're doing is they're cutting out, they're excising parts of the Bible. And that's what the emerging liberal theology of the 19th century did very freely.

Scientific rationalism meant that people began to reject entirely any place for the miraculous. So people still would hold very, very clearly to the ethical teaching of Jesus, for example, the morality of the Bible, but they wouldn't have the miraculous.

And in the same way, they wanted to cut out and get rid of any of the ideas that the Bible teaches about the cross as an atonement for sin because to the modern mind, that became a very repulsive thing, a primitive thing.

[17:02] And so increasingly, liberal Christianity rejected any call for the new birth, any call for repentance and faith and forgiveness of sins through the atonement of Christ. So, Jesus became merely an example.

You sing hymns from that period and you'll sing about Jesus our example, Jesus our teacher, Jesus our friend and so on, but not Jesus as our Savior from sin.

You read commentaries from that time about the New Testament Gospels and you'll find you'll come to something like the feeding of the 5,000 and it'll be explained like this. Well, there wasn't really a multiplying of loaves and fishes to feed people, but Jesus' teaching was just so inspiring that all these thousands of people just sat there and forgot all about being hungry.

Doesn't really work for the 12 baskets that were left over, of course, but that's conveniently set aside. When Jesus was walking on the water, well, in fact, he knew that there was a sandbar under the surface and so he was walking on, that kind of thing.

I'm sure you've seen that. You see what that's saying? That is saying that our superior human reason can't possibly believe in miraculous things in a scientific age.

[18:17] And we can't stomach talk about sacrifices for sin through blood sacrifices in our modern sophisticated age. So we will excise, we will explain away these parts of the Bible that offend our reason, our science, our sociology, our psychology, whatever it is.

And so, yes, we will say quite happily that the Bible is clear. The Bible's final, we accept that. But the reality is, in practice, it's not a full authority because it's subject to our reason and rationalism. So, somebody like William Barclay, for example, in the Daily Study Bibles, you read his things, that's the sort of thing you find. He rejected the miraculous, rejected the idea of atonement for sin like that, but of course, argued very, very strongly for Jesus' ethical teaching about things like divorce or adultery or indeed homosexual practice.

We're very, very against that. But of course, you see, once you begin to reject the Bible's full authority, then you'll find that people feel very free to cut out other parts of the Bible that actually you may favor, but they don't.

And the interesting thing today, of course, in our so-called post-modern society, which is a post-truth society, people actually often have far less problem accepting things like the miraculous.

[19:44] In fact, I've often gone to the opposite extreme of becoming absolutely credulous in the kinds of things that they will believe. We Christians believe in the miracles attested to in Scripture because we believe there is credible testimony and real evidence from honest people for these things.

people today will believe all kinds of wild stories and bizarre things with absolutely no evidence whatsoever. But, they still very much want to cut certain things out of the Bible all the same.

It's just different things. So people today have real issues with the Bible's ethical teaching and especially about its teaching on sexual ethics, for example.

Can't have that. So those are the bits of the Bible we find most offensive today and so people want to silence those. And we know that don't we? Today all around us spirituality is very, very popular but only insofar as it makes no moral demands upon me that I don't want to hear.

So people like William Barclay would be horrified for example at the Church of Scotland stance on homosexual relationships but he should have seen and others like him should have seen where their approach to eroding the Bible's full authority would actually lead his denomination one day.

[21:10] And that approach to the Bible ignoring its full authority is all around us today. Maybe it's your approach although actually you might not like to think that. But when push comes to shove the real authority in practice is my own reasoning.

That's colored by what you may think science says or your philosophy says or sociology or whatever it is that society tells us is the norm today. And of course what society thinks is the norm today is shaped more and more and more by those who are in control of the media and in social media.

People who allow or who censor what they want society to think is normal. And increasingly what's supposed to be normal today are many things that even just a very few years ago nobody at all would have thought were remotely normal.

Like for example the idea that there are not simply two biological sexes and that there are any number of fluid genders and so on. So that today if you merely state in public what any school biology textbook actually tells you you're in danger of being cancelled aren't you in public life hounded on Twitter and so on.

And maybe soon in Scotland if the justice minister gets his way with his hate crime bill you may be arrested and charged with inciting hatred. The Roman Catholic Church has recently pointed out that even possessing a Bible may soon be considered as a hate crime in this country of Mr.

[22 : 53] Yusuf's bill is put through that's why we must pray that it won't be. But it's striking isn't it where liberalism takes you and how quickly liberalism actually can take you to tyranny.

That's the first attitude the first alternative authority to the Bible reason my own reasoning is really the ultimate authority.

And that usually means what I want actually to be true what I want to convince myself of more than what God said is true. Well the second alternative authority to the Bible is the institution.

Some Christians will very happily accept the Bible's full authority and its clear authority but in fact in practice they reject it as the final authority because that final authority lies in the institution of the church.

A classic example of that of course is the Roman Catholic Church or the Eastern Orthodox Churches where the final authority lies in the magisterium with the Pope and the Catholic tradition and so on.

[24 : 04] And so the church's tradition stands over scripture to interpret scripture and so what really matters to people is not so much what the Bible says but what the institution pronounces.

And that's why you find in these traditions often that very few people actually read the Bible for themselves. Well why bother? Because all you need is what the priest tells you. All you need is what the Pope decrees to be the case.

Of course that same institutional authority can actually occur equally in many other denominations and groupings. And again it's just the same. When the chips are really down when what the Bible says may be very very clear there can be great pressure to bow to the institutional position to bow to the establishment and not rock the boat.

And that's very powerful of course especially over those whose livelihood depends upon that institutional favor. The clergy for example who are paid by them. That's why the governments and states love religious institutionalism because it's much easier to control institutions more easily because they have hierarchies.

you go way back to the 17th century when James VI was on the throne in Scotland even in the late 16th century.

[25 : 34] He was always being challenged very uncomfortable by Scottish churchmen. He hated it. When he went down in 1603 he went down to London when he took on the English throne as well.

His eyes were opened because he saw how much more easy it was to control the English church. Why? Well because they had a hierarchy of bishops and he could flatter them on the one hand he could threaten them on the other.

And so he decided what a good idea that was. Wanted to impose that on Scotland as well because much easier to control an institution through a hierarchy of bishops than it was to control these unruly presbyters like Robert Bruce and Andrew Melvin people like that.

Well nothing has changed over the centuries. You see the Russian state loves the Russian Orthodox Church. The institution and the real authority there is an institution propped up by the state.

The same in China. Much easier to control the official registered institutional church than the house churches and so on. That's always a danger in every nation.

[26 : 40] State flattery and threats to institutional leaders. Offering them a seat at the table. Offering them a place in important national matters and so on.

So easy for the institutional church not to want to rock the boat. Not want to bow. Not want to get out of kilter with the establishment.

And so they'll bow the knee to the powers that be. And convince themselves that this is very good for their witness. But no it's not. What it's good for is your preferment.

It's very bad for real Christian witness. That's not exactly what you see happening in Acts chapter 4 for example with Peter and John. They were told by the religious institution to stop preaching Jesus for the sake of the peace of the church as it were because they didn't want the authorities to come down on their religion.

And Peter and John said no. We must obey God rather than men as the final authority. And often it is like that today when the institution says one thing but the Bible commands another.

[27 : 55] The question is which authority will we bow down to? Will it be B for the Bible or when push comes to shove will it be I for the institution?

That's the crisis that we faced as a church ten years ago when we were a church of Scotland congregation but we were an evangelical church that believed the Bible as the full and final and clear authority of God.

And so we had to face that question which of these will we take as the thing that we can't ever sacrifice? Will it be our belonging to the institution or will it be our submission to the word of God in scripture?

As all matters of faith in life are buying to them? Well we had to make our choice even if it meant that we lost a lot even if we lost properties even if we lost money even if we lost our homes and so on.

That's a question in practice. Is it the institution and its traditions or is it the word of God? And that's still something that can happen to us within any single church and within our own personal lives?

[29 : 14] Sometimes all the time every congregation develops its own traditions its own ways of doing things its own culture and so on. Those things can become more authoritative than the Bible itself.

Things like that can creep up on us. But what if the Bible's command demands that we have to change something in our culture or our way of doing things and so on?

It's a key question isn't it? All the time. Especially when we face hard things, when we face uncomfortable things. But if we don't believe in practice that our gospel and if God's authority is something that must often change the church, how can we possibly believe that it's a message that's ever going to impact and change the world outside the church?

That's why the watchword of the reformation was always being reformed according to the word of God as the full and final and clear authority for us.

Of course that doesn't mean churches always have to be changing everything just for the sake of it. Of course not. Certainly doesn't mean churches should always be changing things to adapt to the ways of the world round about us.

[30 : 27] But it does mean that we must constantly be bringing our thoughts and our words and our deeds back to the final authority of the Bible.

Because it's so easy isn't it to drift into the dead wood of institutionalized religion. For we might honor and respect the Bible and might talk about it and so on but we're not actually letting it shape everything that we do in our lives and in our church life.

How it's organized, how it's prioritized, how we practice things. Being driven by the commands and the demands of the gospel.

And the traditions of men can so easily come to trump the gospel itself when these traditions become institutionalized and when they corrupt in the end the real authority of scripture.

And that happens very easily in church life and it happens in personal life. Because these traditions can be personal things. like our politics for example, like our particular agenda that we might espouse, like a particular cause that we support or whatever it might be.

[31 : 45] Anything like that can become a rival authority to the scriptures in our life. But the Bible is the final authority in all things.

It's God's commanding word. So there's two rival authorities. The third rival authority, if it's not the Bible, is E for our experience.

You can be happy to call the Bible the full authority, not cutting any bits out. You can say, no, I'm happy it's the final authority. I'm not going to bow to any other institution. But in practice, you can

regard the Bible as not quite sufficient.

It's not really a fully clear authority. And in our real life, that means that we need something more. In a sense, that's the opposite of the liberal position, which is the Bible minus.

You cut bits out. This is the Bible plus. It's really what's characteristic in the Pentecostal and charismatic theological positions. Because to them, the Bible is authoritative.

[32 : 54] But in practice, actually, it's not fully sufficient. And so, what's needed are further specific revelations from God as extras.

For our guidance, for example, for decision making, for all kinds of things. So there's a great emphasis in these traditions on special words of knowledge, on prophecies for today, and all that sort of thing.

And the implication of that, you see, is the Bible on its own, with nothing else, isn't quite clear enough for actual life. So you need something in addition in your own experience.

And as I've said, it's characteristic of the more Pentecostal and charismatic churches. But many evangelical Christians and many evangelical churches actually are just the same in their thinking. Particularly when people think about guidance and so on for their lives. They want to appeal to special words or to get special Bible verses, for example, to help tell them what to do in a situation.

[34 : 01] Or particular signs or all that kind of thing. And friends, that is very dangerous because our experience is a very powerful thing.

It's bound to affect how we think. That's so obvious in life. And of course, not necessarily a bad thing. Often experience is a very, very good thing.

We're right to value our experience. And other people's experience. If I want to have surgery, especially if it's very difficult surgery, let me tell you, I want an experienced surgeon on the job. I don't want a novice who's got no experience. If I'm flying in a plane through a very bad storm, I'm really hoping the pilot is a man of experience, not somebody who's really just doing it for the first time.

And just in that same way, the New Testament, the church urges that we should have experienced leaders. Paul says, not novices to lead the church. And we want people with experience to be our mentors, to guide us, to help.

[35 : 04] Of course we do. But true Christian experience is forged and shaped by the unchanging authority of the Word of God and not ever beyond it.

That's the point. It is possible for an experienced doctor, for example, to know better than the current generic guidelines and algorithms.

And they may be right in some situations to disregard them and do something differently. It is possible for an experienced pilot to do the same thing. Some of you will have seen the film about the pilot, Sully, who landed that plane in the Hudson River in New York, against all the advice of the algorithms to try and get back to the airport, which you wouldn't have done and would have failed. That can happen in life, but not so in Christian experience because we can't ever know better than God. We can't ever override God's authority in His Word, not mattering what our personal experience might tell us.

No experience of our own can ever take us away from or take us beyond Scripture. It's so dangerous when that happens.

[36 : 21] For example, I've often heard Christian leaders talking about their involvement with same-sex couples whom they've loved, who are so kind, who are so caring, who are so loving, whose relationship has so many joyful features about it and so on.

And that leads them through their experience to go against Scripture and to begin to accept something that God's Word clearly says is wrong.

Or there are people whose experience of people suffering terminal diseases and so on has led them through that experience to want to support euthanasia, the taking of life as a good thing and not as an evil thing.

Or similarly, people's experience of handicapped children or something like that led them to support the aborting of fetuses in the womb to avoid that pain and suffering and so on and so on.

And you see, our experience may teach us that, yes, we can know better than the current convention in medicine or the current convention in science or the current conventions in flying a plane or all things, but our experience cannot ever take us to the place where we know better than God.

[37 : 45] Yes, experience can legitimately make us look again at our assumptions of what Scripture actually says. Maybe it doesn't actually say what we once thought it said. That's reasonable.

But our experience can never make us disregard the final authority of what Scripture does say. So we've got to be very, very careful of allowing our experience to trump the clear authority of Scripture. Scripture. I've seen in my life at times what I believe to be miraculous healings. Things that have happened that I can find no medical explanation for, nor can anybody else. But my experience of that, which I don't doubt, and I've come across things like that from other people as well, which I do not doubt, my experience of those things cannot allow me to think that these things are unusual and to be expected.

It must always happen. And if they don't happen, there must be some fault because of a lack of faith or a lack of prayer or whatever it might be. Because the Bible clearly does not promise that kind of miraculous healing in all circumstances in this world.

[39 : 06] Only in the world to come. What the Bible does promise and what the Lord Jesus promises is struggle and suffering and certain mortality. It's appointed for us to die.

Once. And then face judgment. And we've got to accept that, you see. So our experience can be very dangerous because our experiences are so powerful and so personal.

And it's so easy to favor these things, which are so personal and so special, over what are the clear words of God in Scripture.

It's almost impossible to argue with somebody when they say to you, you know, God has told me this personally, especially in a vision.

I've had a revelation. It's such a powerful experience. It's impossible almost to argue against that.

So you can see in practice how easy it is for that to trump the clarity of Scripture.

[40 : 08] Just as it's very easy in practice for our reason or for the influence and power of an institution to be the real authority and the real rule over our lives.

But no, says the Bible itself and no, says Jesus himself. The Bible is both authoritative and sufficient. It has full authority against all human rationality, rationalizing away things we don't like, things we find hard to believe, hard to accept.

It has final authority against all human traditions, all institutions, everything we hold dear and won't let go of sometimes.

And it's a clear authority, not our human experience, not our feelings, not whatever we might feel God is really telling us to do over against Scripture.

Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that human reason or the institutions or indeed our own experiences are totally unimportant. All of these can have a place.

[41 : 17] All of these do have a place in our lives. And we can be fully submitted to biblical authority without denying the proper place for all of these things.

You can see that the Bible there interacts with all of these things. And we all have natural temperamental differences. And some of us will be inclined more and one direction than another. Some people are more naturally reason dominated people. Some people are more naturally emotionally and experience driven people. Some people are more naturally institutional people, the company man.

And some are more the opposite way. But the point is none of these other things can ever be the ultimate authority. None of these things can put the Bible in second place.

So the center of gravity moves away from the Bible to one of these other things. Because God's word is a commanding revelation. It is the full and the final and the clear authority.

[42 : 18] As our Westminster Confession puts it, it ought to be believed and obeyed. And it's to be received because it is the word of God.

That means it's not enough to just believe 2 Timothy 3.16 that the whole scripture is inspired by God. We've got to live in line with that. The whole Bible must teach us and reprove us and instruct us and train us in righteousness.

Otherwise, we can't be properly equipped for every good work. Listen again to the Westminster Confession of Faith as it puts it. The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits are to be examined.

And in whose sentence we are to rest can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture. See, when we're thinking about our churches, about our church life, about our own life, how we make decisions, how we set priorities and so on, what we spend money on, what meetings we're to have and not to have, what staff we should have, what leaders we should choose, all of these things.

The key question is not ever, what's the most practical thing? What does church growth theory tell us? What does the media tell us sells today? What will be best? No, no, no.

[43 : 41] It's none of those things. None of the things mentioned in the Confession either, the opinions of ancient writers, which some folk are very keen on, the doctrines of men. The private spirits that I know God is saying just to me.

Now the key question is what is the Holy Spirit saying in scripture? Friends, that is a great challenge but is also a great relief and a great blessing to us.

It's a great challenge, especially in situations of conflict and disagreement, both within a congregation or within a wider group like a denomination and so on. We can't just be ever driven by just institutional concerns, by party concerns, by personal preferences above real gospel concerns. The Bible must be the primary authority. It must be in the driving seat over every institution, every desire of human beings. That's why establishing real Bible-driven evangelical churches is very tough.

It's very costly. It's very draining. Because it provokes conflict and division. Because it forces people to choose which authority they're really going to buy down to as their final authority.

[44 : 59] And sadly when the crunch comes, the truth is often it's not the Bible that people want as a full and final and clear authority.

But when it is that, it's such a great relief. Because we don't have to have endless soul searching, seeking what it is that God might be saying to the church today.

No, it's not nearly as complicated as people want to make it. The Bible is clear. His words are clear. And they are an unchanging authority. So we can know without any dispute what the revealed will and purpose of God is for us.

What a relief. And what a great blessing, isn't it? To know exactly where to go for God's commanding authoritative word.

His full authority for our lives. That saves us from all kinds of cultism and exploitation. And the power of people who can use their position to control people.

[46 : 02] What a blessing. We're liberated from that. To obey God rather than men. Because as Peter says, he's given us all things that pertain to life and godliness in his great and precious promises in the scriptures.

God's authoritative words of commanding revelation. That we have with full and final and clear authority in this book, in the Bibles that we treasure.

So let's trust him and let's obey him by submitting in all things to the Bible, to God's word written. And let's thank him for this open word which is published to all.

And which is a word of grace to all who will hear. We treasure the Bible because it's God's commanding revelation to us. It's an authoritative word to lead all of us, indeed all people, under the lordship of our creator and ruler.

Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your open word which we can trust and obey, knowing that there is no other way, no other way to be happy in Jesus and to be fulfilled and to find joy in life, but to trust and obey this word that you've given to us.

[47 : 36] Help us to help one another to trust and obey your word as our full and final and clear authority in life. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.