BC Article 5- “Authority of Scripture” I Thes. 2:13 ; Dt. 18:15-22

I. The Place of Authority II. The Proof of Authority

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we return to the BC this morning, we continue to focus on the authority of this book we hold so dear. BC art. 2-7 deal with the perfections of Scripture. BC art. 2 deals with the necessity of Scripture, BC art 7 with the sufficiency of Scripture and BC art 5 deals with the authority of Scripture. Now this is for good reason. How can we know God? How can we know about our salvation? We saw last week that this book comes from God- but what authority should that Word have over our lives? How can we know what truth is if we do not receive God’s word as the source of authority? Last week we saw that one of the key marks that proved that a prophet was sent from God was the fulfilling of prophecy. Hananiah was shown to be a false prophet because his word was not fulfilled. This week we consider a true prophet- proving that Christ is to be heard and also obeyed because He was sent from God. The church receives and believes Scripture- it does not give Scripture authority. It has been said that Scripture obtains its full authority only when it is regarded as sprung from heaven. Scripture clearly shows us the true God. Without the Bible, our lives would be like ships on the sea with no compass, no stars, nothing to guide us on our way. We also saw last week that the Bible is protected and authorized by the Holy Spirit. To base your life on anything outside of Scripture is not safe ground. Only on the solid rock can we stand. To believe and behave in a way that is contrary to Scripture puts your life in danger. It has been said, "This Book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding; its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy.” Today we will consider this theme, God’s Authoritative Word guides the believer in all of life. We will see two points, one the place of authority and two, the proof of authority. God’s Received, Authoritative Word guides the church in all of life.

I. **The Place of Authority**

In our first point we will consider the place of authority, or what place does God’s Word have in the believers’ life? To begin with, we see that all of our faith and life must be centered on God’s Word. There is no area of life that the Bible does not speak to. Marriage, money, prayer, work, children. Its all here. The Bible clearly reveals what God wants us to know. Stated in the negative, you should not believe something that is contradicted in this Book. The Bible is to have central and primary authority. But what about our Creeds and Confessions? Should we believe these- or should we throw them out and have the Bible alone? There are many Christians today who will argue that the church should not have doctrine. Saying we do not need human doctrines in the church. But what they fail to see is that even though these doctrines such as the 3 Forms of Unity were written by man, they are in total agreement with Scripture. Every doctrine that we hold dear is derived from Scripture. They are not based on human reasoning, and there is no contradiction. The authority of our confessions is found in that they agree with or summarize what the Bible teaches. That is the reason that we have sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism or upon the Belgic Confession, because these confessions are faithful summaries of God’s Word- so when the preaching is faithful to them, the preaching is faithful to God’s Word. The confessions have authority and are binding because they agree fully with Scriptures.

Yet it must be said that the Bible is the only source of doctrine and truth within the church. A person cannot be bound or required to believe anything that is outside of God’s Word; and the Word must always have central place within our church. As our text from I Thessalonians 2:13 says, the Word of God was handed down and received by you. It was received as a gift from heaven. It is not the words of men, but the very Word of God. We do not judge this book; by this book will we be judged! As we remember from article 3, the Bible has one author. And since God is the Bible’s author, it has all authority. It is God who made man. It is God who tells us who we are, who He is, what He has done, and what we are to do. Because it is God’s Word, it has the ability and power to work in believers and bring new life by the Spirit. The Bible is a gift given from God and delivered to the church- the Bible did not spring forth from the church- but rather the church is called together by the Bible. As I Thes. 2:13 also says, this word must be received as the Word of God- even though spoken by the apostles- and we could add prophets from long ago- it still remains the Word of God. As this verse closes, it says that this Word is at work in you- it is a Word applied by the Spirit- powerful and active. So the word is at work- Paul says- the presence of the Word does something! Article 5 gives us three uses of Scripture in the life of a Believer. The Word of God regulates our faith, is the foundation of our faith, and the confirmation of our faith. As a regulatorit gives control and direction. It is a standard by which your life is guided-like a map telling us how we might be saved, and how we are to live. The Word of God is also our foundation of faith and life. The only place that we find a firm foothold is in Scripture. Only in Scripture will you see Christ; in it we are anchored to the truth. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. Finally, God’s word confirms us in our faith. It is proof that what we believe is true. The Word is not only the source of our faith; it also builds us in our faith. By it we are strengthened for our journey. Just like when you are building a home- you have blueprint, a foundation, and finally the finished walls. The Word guides us at every point. As Eph. 2 says, the church was built on the foundation of prophets and apostles. The church would not exist if not for the Word. We must look to God’s Word to build us and confirm us in our faith, because this Word has been received from on high. Or to change the illustration, the Word of God is our solid food- the meat and potatoes of a mature Christian life. This is heavenly food- the HS testifies to our heart that this is not from men, but from God.

II**. The Proof of Authority**

As we continue, lets focus on the proof of the Bible’s authority. Here we add to last week- not only does the Bible comes from God- it is also speaks within itself about its authority. We can divide this proof into two parts- two ways that the authority of the Bible is clear- internal and external. The internal is what the Bible itself claims and the external would be the evidence of fulfilled prophesies. The Bible has self-attesting authority; the church does not give the Bible more authority than it already has. This is in contrast the Roman Catholic teaching. Rome starts with Tradition. The church has counsels and then determines the canon. The church gives authority to the Scripture because the church preceded Scripture in their view. But we recognize that the church simply recognizes what the Bible already is. The moment these books were composed, they were immediately authoritative in the church. They were called and revered as sacred scripture! The truth of the Word is something that the Bible itself claimed long before any church counsel recognized it.

First, consider the internal evidence which proves God’s Word is truthful, and that it has authority in our lives. The Word of God is effectual, doing the task that God has set out for it. As Isaiah 55 says, the Word that goes out of God’s mouth will not return to Him empty. God is not a man that He should lie, and His ways are not our ways. As John 17:17 says, your Word is truth; and as John 10 says, Scripture cannot be broken. The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul- Psalm 19. His Word breaks rocks into pieces, it is all powerful- I Kings 19. His Word is full of wisdom, His ways who can search out. It is trustworthy, unchanging, and eternal, it cannot be broken. As the prophets who spoke, thus saith the LORD- at His Word all must listen. So the Bible speaks within itself- it claims authority as it speaks from God and claims to be true and without error.

But there are also external evidences. This is not talking about going to the Red Sea and finding chariot wheels as proof that God’s Word is true. No, we do not rely on archeology to prove our faith. Rather, as this article says, even the blind can see that the things foretold in the Word were fulfilled. There is no lack of evidence that everything in God’s Word has come or will come true. Consider that there are over 300 Messianic prophesies in the OT. Where Jesus would be born, to whom would he be born to, what miracles he would perform, how he would suffer, how he would die, and even how many days he would stay in the grave. Over 300- and every one of them were fulfilled in Christ- undeniable! Last week we considered a false prophet- Hananiah who claimed to speak from God but was not sent from God. Hananiah’s predictions did not come true, and he was rebuked by God as a false prophet. This week we briefly consider a true prophet. One who did speak for God- someone who our children will know as the final and perfect prophet of LD 12- the chief prophet and teacher. Our reading from Dt. 18 speaks of prophet whom God will raise from among his own brothers- a prophet like Moses- one in whom God would put his words. This prophet would be a mediator- speaking to the people of God on behalf of God. This prophet will speak in the name of the LORD- and you will know that I have sent Him when His word comes true. Here again, we find this test. If a prophet speaks and his word is not fulfilled, then God has not sent him and you need not fear him. But if the prophet’s word is fulfilled, then God has sent Him and you must fear Him! Jesus is the final and perfect prophet. We know that God sent Him because His word has and is coming true. For example, consider the words he said to Peter in Luke 22- before the rooster crows you will deny me 3 times. Jesus also foretold the betrayal by Judas- and it happened, just as he said. Or consider the very clear references to his death. Jesus told his disciples at least 3 times- and very clearly- I am going to Jerusalem to die and be raised on the 3rd day. And it happened- just as He said! Jesus also foretold the destruction of the temple- which happened some years later. The point is this- Jesus is a faithful prophet sent from the Father- and we know this for certain because His prophetic word came true! He also promised to pour out His Spirit on the church- and to gather and protect His people. Which He is doing today! Our proper response is to fear Him- to listen to His word knowing that He was sent from God and speaks on His authority! And today, Jesus speaks to us in His word- the Bible!

To conclude, the Spirit testifies about Christ, and the Spirit is truth. The testimony of God is the greatest. And this is the testimony, that we have life in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has given us this one book- sufficient and authoritative, in which the Son speaks to us today! The self-authenticating authority of Scripture may be hard for people to swallow, but it is true. Is may be difficult to stand with Scripture as the only final authority, but it will always be safe and right. So what do we lose if the Bible does not have this kind of authority? We are like ships lost on the sea with no bearing or direction. Tossed to and fro by every wave of doctrine. We will succumb to the world and will lose all truth, and we will even lose our lives- everything will be relative and like Pilate we will say- what is truth?! The chief enemy of the Christian faith is doubt. Did God really say? So then, who do you trust? Where do you go to seek guidance? Do you trust God’s Word? Jesus is clearly the prophet that Moses foretold. He is God’s Son, so we must listen to Him! We have great hope and trust, because this book is so true, that even the blind can perceive that all things foretold in it do come to be. Praise God for His authoritative Word and believe His promises, because His word is true!