

You Can't Think Straight: The Authority of Scripture, Part 2

By Coty Pinckney, May 2013

Over three blog posts, we're considering our position before God's revelation in Scripture. [Last week](#), we looked at the biblical image of us as two-year-olds before God. Today we consider the impact of sin and the Fall on our ability to think and reason.

Two-year-olds push the limits against their parents. They rebel against authority.

Scripture tells us that this holds for every one of us: All humans have rebelled against God. This rebellion so permeates our being that we cannot think straight. Our reasoning is distorted. Our view of the world is twisted. Some theologians term this the noetic effects of sin.

Many passages bring out this truth. Perhaps the most in depth discussion is found in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16. I commend the entire passage to you; here are a few excerpts:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. . . . 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." . . . 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Note three points from this text and related passages. These points then lead to a few corollaries:

First, Scripture says that the truths it presents will be rejected – indeed, that those whose minds have not been renewed by the Spirit are not able to understand these truths (see especially 2:14). Put that idea in the context of the overall storyline of the Bible: God created mankind in His image as the pinnacle of His work, to glorify Him by enjoying Him forever. Yet the first man and the first woman rejected God's purposes for them, choosing to believe Satan's lie that God was withholding good from them. They chose to disbelieve God, and to establish themselves as the arbiters of what was in their own interest. They then deserved to be wiped out. All of their descendants normally born display that same rebellion. Yet God in His mercy established a plan of redemption which He implemented over the centuries, eventually sending His Son to live the life all men should have lived, and to die to pay the penalty we deserve for our rejection of Him. God raised Him from the dead, and will send Him again to usher in a new heavens and new earth, in which redeemed and perfected humanity will indeed glorify Him by enjoying Him forever.

In this interim period between the first and second coming of the Son, all mankind is stained by the Fall. Should we hear this story, should we read Scripture, we naturally reject it; we belittle it; we mock it. Unless God intervenes, our very thought processes are infected with a disease we do not notice that keeps us from seeing Truth.

This leads to a corollary: *When a skeptic launches a broadside assault on Scripture, he is fulfilling Scripture.* Now, clearly this corollary does not in and of itself prove that Scripture is true. But we must realize that attacks on scriptural authority are perfectly consistent with Scripture being true.

One more corollary of this first point: *If we are to understand Scripture, we will have to come to God as supplicants, asking for His Spirit to open our minds, to clarify our vision, so that we might understand His Word.*

Second point to note from 1 Corinthians 1 and 2:

b) God predominantly does not choose to renew by His Spirit the minds of the most intelligent of men. (see especially 1:27). He does renew the minds of *some* of the most intelligent (including the Apostle Paul himself). But God's redeemed people are not exclusively or even on average from among those who, based on their worldly accomplishments and education, would be considered the brightest men and women on the planet. Paul tells us here why God works this way: So that no human being will have any grounds for boasting before Him (1:29). That is, so that no one might think, "God picked me because I was so smart. God needed me on His team. I have so much to contribute to His cause that God had to draft me." No. God works in such a way that *all* of our boasting can be *only* in Him. Otherwise, we would be glorifying ourselves, not Him.

This leads to another corollary, but some personal information first: My undergraduate degree in mathematics is from Davidson; my PhD is from Stanford. Here's the corollary: *God is not impressed by a Davidson bachelors or a Stanford PhD.* He doesn't need me. He doesn't need my intellectual abilities or my credentials. Indeed, no intellectual accomplishment is impressive to God. No intellectual accomplishment earns merit with God. Should He open my mind to see Him, the only reason will be His grace and mercy.

Third point: The wisdom of God is not intellectual only or primarily. The wisdom of God is fundamentally relational.

Through His plan of redemption, God is reconciling men and women to *Himself*. Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, God restores men and women to an intimate relationship with *Him*. So Paul says that Christ becomes to us not only wisdom, but also righteousness (granting us what we lost in the fall), sanctification (setting us apart for God Himself as His precious possession), and redemption (covering the relational distance necessitated by our rebellion) (1:18-24, 30).

This point also flows from the summary of the overall storyline of the Bible: Since God created us to glorify Himself by enjoying Him forever, His plan of redemption must restore *the relationship*, and not only enable us to appraise truth intellectually.

One final corollary: *God is not and cannot be solely the object of our study.* If the Bible is true, God is not an impersonal unmoved mover; He is not some abstract force or principle. He is personal. To know Him truly is to love Him deeply.

Similarly, my wife Beth is not and cannot be solely the object of my study. In order to be a good husband, I should learn all I can about her. But if I treat her as an object, I will fail miserably as a husband. My knowledge of her must lead to greater love and more effective service for her.

Just so, our knowledge of God must be relational – for it originates with His reaching out to us. He is the offended party. We are under His judgment. We owe Him everything – for life, for breath, for food, for shelter, for intelligence. We are not blank slates rationally looking at the evidence and deciding if

Scripture reflect truth. If Scripture is true, we are rebels against Him, grasping at any straw we can find that will indicate, "I am in control; I am wise; I can forge my own path." He graciously offers us His love and mercy; indeed, He graciously offers us *Himself*, a relationship with *Him*, for all eternity.

So consider those points from 1 Corinthians. Next week we'll ask: [Why did a Davidson math major and Stanford PhD submit himself to the authority of Scripture?](#)