

Why Did a Davidson Math Major and Stanford PhD Submit Himself to Scripture? The Authority of Scripture, Part 3

By Coty Pinckney, May 2013

Over three blog posts, we're considering our position before God's revelation in Scripture. [Two weeks ago](#), we looked at the biblical image of us as two-year-olds before God. [Last week](#), we considered the impact of sin on our ability to think and reason. Today, I'll tell my own story of coming to submit myself to the authority of Scripture.

I graduated from Davidson as an excellent student and an accomplished athlete. I believed I could do anything I set my mind to doing. For to that point in my life, I either had – or had a good excuse for why I hadn't.

I called myself a Christian. I read the Bible – occasionally. I had read all the New Testament, and perhaps eighty percent of the Old. I thought I knew it.

But I did not believe in the authority of Scripture. I was not *under* the Word; rather, I was *over* it, judging it. If Scripture seemed reasonable to me, I liked it and followed it – and used it to justify what I already believed. If it didn't seem reasonable to me, I didn't follow it. So in the end, my own reason was my authority - my own *fallen* reason, my own *sin-soaked* reason.

I had grown up in the Washington, DC area. Many of my friends in high school had parents with bad marriages – usually because the father was a workaholic, neglecting his wife and children. So even while I was in high school, I told myself: Should I ever get married, I won't be like that. I will make the marriage work.

By the time of my Davidson graduation, I was seriously involved with the perfect woman, Beth. There was no question: Our marriage would work. We loved each other; we were committed to each other; and we were both wonderful. Of course our marriage would be wonderful.

Yet two and a half years after our wedding, the marriage was in disarray. Indeed, it was falling apart. One pivotal night thirty-one years ago, I had to acknowledge that I was destroying our marriage, Beth, this supposedly perfect woman, was destroying our marriage, and there was nothing I could do to keep it from dissolving. Indeed, I had to recognize that, left to my own devices, I would continue to destroy it.

I was an economics PhD student, but I was not maximizing my utility. Instead: I was destroying what I really loved and wanted most.

That night, I confessed my sin before God, and asked His forgiveness through the blood of Jesus.

God worked powerfully that night. I still didn't believe in the authority of Scripture. But I did see that my putting myself above scriptural authority was part of the problem. I had ignored parts of Scripture that I didn't want to listen to – and some of those parts spoke directly to the issues in our marriage.

So I began reading the Bible in a fresh way. I asked God to give me insight into it. I prayed for wisdom to understand His Word. I beseeched God to change me through His Word.

As I approached Scripture as a supplicant, I began to see more and more of myself described in it. Particularly powerful was Romans 7, where Paul describes exactly what I had gone through:

I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
(Romans 7:21-25)

As I read this and other Scriptures over the course of the next eighteen months, God convinced me of Scripture's authority. Though I wouldn't have used these terms at that time, this is how it came about:

I recognized that I had been seeing God as the coach and myself as His quarterback, or God as president and myself as Secretary of State. And I had to acknowledge that I was not even His second string defensive tackle. I had thought that God was fortunate to have someone with my talents and abilities to call himself a Christian; and I had to acknowledge that I was the problem, not the solution to God's problems.

I had made my own reason my ultimate authority, judging Scripture by it. Because of the noetic effects of sin, I had to acknowledge that my reason could *never* play that role; I could not understand His Scriptures apart from Him, apart from His help. Indeed, I would without fail distort them and misinterpret them for my own selfish – and ultimately harmful – purposes.

But when I approached His Word with humility, I discovered the truth of Proverbs 2:3-6:

If you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

I then saw that I was only God's two-year-old. That is, I had nothing that would make Him want to choose me, nothing that would make Him want to have me on His team.

"Only" His two-year-old – that was a humbling thought. However, I was *His* two-year-old! I was *His* precious child! This process of putting myself under the authority of Scripture was not solely an intellectual process, a way of coming to Truth – but it was fundamentally relational. I was *His beloved child* – He chose me out of His own goodness and mercy, He gave His Son for me, He welcomed me into His presence.

He accommodated Himself to my capacity; He spoke baby talk to me so that I could be like a weaned child with his mother: so that I could rest in Him and delight in Him.

So that's how a Davidson math major and Stanford PhD came to submit himself to the authority of Scripture.

So where are you? Do you doubt the authority of Scripture?

If so, take this test: Commit yourself every day to come humbly before the Word of God. Follow some systematic plan for reading through Scripture ([the Bible Unity Plan](#) is one option). Before you read each day, pray to God something like this: "God, if You exist, and if the Bible is indeed Your revelation, then it tells me I cannot understand it on my own. In my inner being, I really do want know the Truth; I want to submit to the Truth. So if the Bible is Your Word, open up this passage to me. Enable me to understand it and apply it. If it is Your revelation, open my eyes to see that truth."

I challenge you: Make that commitment. And then go to the Word in that way every day – for thirty years. I trust that God, by then, will have answered your prayer.

Note: The argument presented for the authority of Scripture in the three previous posts is non-standard and idiosyncratic. Here are some references that provide more standard arguments; they also address many points that I don't mention:

- [The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy](#): A helpful clarification of what inerrancy affirms and what it does not.
- All of the standard evangelical systematic theologies have presentations on the authority of Scripture. Michael Horton, in [The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way](#), does the best job of integrating his discussion of biblical authority with the history of modern thought.
- John Frame's [The Doctrine of the Word of God](#) is a well-received, book-long presentation of these and related issues.
- Timothy Ward's [Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God](#) is another non-standard presentation, but interesting and helpful.
- [Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Post-Modern Approaches to Scripture](#), edited by James Hoffmeier and Dennis Magary, is a recent response to many issues raised by critics – particularly by those who want to call themselves evangelical but abandon inerrancy.
- Michael Kruger's [Canon Revisited: Establishing the Authority and Origins of the New Testament Books](#) addresses the recognition by the early church of biblical authority.