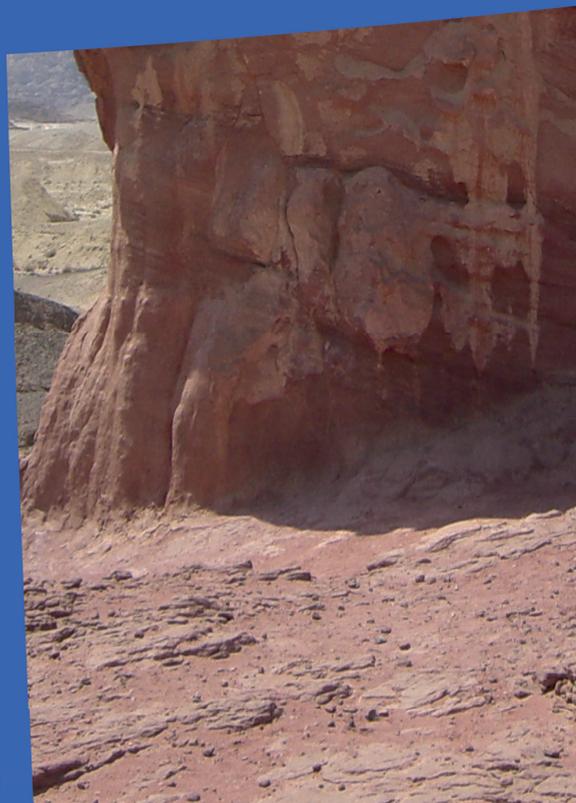




The Authority of Scripture

*Where our Authority lies
and what is its relevance
to us*

Written by Keith Parker



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THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Where our Authority lies and what is its relevance to us?

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The historic and original testimony of the Church is that all her authority comes from God's word, the Bible. However there are several ideas concerning the source of our authority in moral and doctrinal matters which are in circulation at present.

SECULAR HUMANISM

Of course in the world, in our western and once-Christian society there has been a retreat from trusting in God's written word. Modern humanism has put in the place of God and his standards the idea that 'man is the measure of all things' and that there is therefore no final authority to which we ought to bow. Instead both morality and religious belief should 'move with the times'. It would be wonderful if this rebellion against the authority of scripture were only a feature of secularism. Sadly it has frequently been the church itself which has contributed to this sad state of affairs, for it has itself become sceptical of the Bible. And I'm not just referring to old-fashioned theological liberalism.

It all started with the church modelling itself on the world and its notions. Because the atheists declared that Evolution as distinct from Creation was the cause of all that we see around us, the church copy-catted and came up with Theistic Evolution: that God used evolutionary processes to bring about the world that we see. Once the church had conceded the very basis of our faith (Divine Creation) the idea of the "Fall" of a historic Adam and the need

for a redemption was undermined. Actually, the church is called to witness to the world the truths of our Holy God, whether those truths are acceptable to the world or not. What we are going to do now is to look at the contortions some Christians have got themselves into by modelling themselves and their beliefs on the world instead of on the Bible. "The Bible 'Contains' the Word of God but is itself imperfect"

This has become an acceptable position with some 'evangelical Christians': what I would call 'soft evangelicals'. For this variety of Christian you cannot appeal to scripture alone to prove any moral or doctrinal point. That would be 'fundamentalist', and for soft evangelicals 'fundamentalism' is almost a cardinal sin. So how do soft evangelicals function? If they are sceptical of the idea of an infallible Bible, what do they put in its place? I am going to mention three errors that have been adopted, two by people who are sceptical of God's word, and one which some who are more orthodox have invented. De-contextualizing Scripture

WHAT DO I MEAN BY THAT?

It involves saying that you cannot appeal to the plain sense of the Bible, because it was written in a certain cultural context, and you have to peel off the out-dated cultural background to re-apply the 'basic truth' to our modern culture. They would say that the Bible was written in the context of a somewhat primitive agricultural society, and that the values of that society are out of keeping with those of today. Christian feminism has copied humanistic feminism. Our churches have

accepted women in places of overall authority within the body. Even to question this is to display inexcusable bigotry in the eyes of soft evangelicals. Moral Issues In the area of morality we have to push Christian values into the box of secular culture. The church's blanket condemnation of homosexual behaviour is no longer acceptable. It is said, we can accept even the recently legislated redefinition of marriage to include the union of two men or of two women. This kind of teaching is even flirted with by some within the Evangelical Alliance. Furthermore we are not to condemn co-habitation of unmarried heterosexual couples. "Isn't that good enough for some of our Royals?" It is sadly true that cohabitation is winked at in some of our 'evangelical' churches.

MATTERS OF DOCTRINE

On the doctrinal level, the idea of Christ bearing the wrath of God for our sins when He suffered on the cross has been called 'cosmic child abuse'. You see, it is out of keeping with the standards of our modern western society to believe in a 'substitutionary atonement'. Also the idea of an eternal hell has been either directly denied or conveniently 'forgotten' by some prominent evangelicals.

As for the Bible's account of end-time events, the idea of God bringing judgment to bear on sinners and the visible and physical return of Jesus Christ to this earth: how can we be 'culturally relevant' if we say things that are no longer intelligible to our fellow men? Some would reinterpret the Second Coming to mean that somehow Christ will have victory, probably through the

ministry and witness of his church. As far as judgment is concerned, even some 'evangelicals' have made 'man-made global warming' into the great sin, which will be judged by catastrophic climate change. This is a wanton copying of the opinions of the humanistic world around us. The sharp edge of traditional Christian teaching on what is sin, and what is forbidden has been blunted by the church copying the ideas of the (atheistic) world.

ECUMENISM

It has become "de rigueur" among soft evangelicals that the future lies in unity with other professing Christians, specifically with the Church of Rome. We are panicking because the world no longer respects or listens to our opinions, so perhaps we can gain some degree of credibility by all getting together and speaking with one voice. Actually the world despises us because the church claims moral authority, but at the same time has itself rebelled against the Bible, which is our foundation. (A friend of mine, commenting on ecumenism, used to say you won't get a resurrection by putting all the corpses into the same graveyard.)

The evangelical forefathers taught that the Papal Church was Antichrist and to be fled from. Here, for example is what Charles Spurgeon wrote: "It is the bounden duty of every Christian to pray against Antichrist, and as to what Antichrist is, no sane man ought to raise a question. If it be not the popery in the Church of Rome there is nothing in the world that can be called by that name. If there were to be

issued a hue and cry for Antichrist, we should certainly take up this church on suspicion, and it would certainly not be let loose again, for it so exactly answers the description". We have moved a long way haven't we? Why do real Christians countenance unity with what is error? It is because we have lost confidence in our doctrines, and have put experiences and what we think is the fruit of the Spirit in their place. I have heard it put this way: "if we will only call each other 'brother' and love one another, then doctrine doesn't matter so much. Let's get together and we can sort those secondary things out later". Who said they were secondary?

THE AUTHORITY OF MODERN PROPHETS AND APOSTLES

The time-honoured and ancient teaching of the reformed and protestant evangelical church is that revelation is contained within the covers of the Bible and that the foundation of the church is the teaching of 'the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief Corner-stone'. Now we see in our day a new generation of apostles and prophets, who have been able in a subtle way to move us onto a different foundation.

Maybe they didn't mean to do that but this is where we have got to. What I mean is that if men today claim a similar authority to that given by Christ to his Apostles and Prophets, we have become captives to what may come forth from the mouths of the teachers of Restorationism, and the teachers of hyper-charismaticism.

WHAT IS THE RELEVANCE OF ALL THIS TO PFI?

Isn't it interesting that a century or more ago most of the mainline evangelical Christians taught that Israel would be restored to its land and its Messiah? The thing they all had in common was a belief in an infallible Bible. Amazingly the spiritual descendants of (for instance) C. H. Spurgeon, J. C. Ryle and Horatio Bonar now regularly deny what their fathers taught on the matter of the future of the Jewish people. I would suggest that the denial of God's prophetic future for the Jewish people is part and parcel of the general retreat from the authority of the Bible. It is part and parcel with the spirit of our age, which is anti-Israel (a rather less toxic term than anti-Semitic). Our position as those who believe in God's purposes for Israel, I would submit, ought to be uncompromisingly Biblical.