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SESSION 11

Submitting

Submitting to the God Who Speaks

Summary and Goal

In today’s lesson, we will explore the authority of the Bible and how God’s Word influences the thoughts, opinions, and behaviors of His people by telling us the truth, cutting to the heart of our sinful condition, and bringing us to repentance. The goal of this lesson is to explore the authority of God’s Word in the life of the Christian so that we will respond in repentance and faithful obedience to God’s commands.

Steps to Prepare

1. Read and reflect on the passages that will be discussed this week. (Notice that the Hebrews passage explains and the Josiah account exemplifies the doctrine of Scriptural authority.)
   - Hebrews 4:12-13
   - 2 Kings 22:3-20

2. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp. 126-133).
   - Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
   - Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.

3. Review the Teaching Plan (pp. 124-125).
   - Refine and adjust the lesson plan based on your group’s particular needs.

4. Pray for the Lord’s guidance as you lead your group through this material.

Lesson Outline

1. God’s Word tells us the truth (2 Kings 22:3-10; Heb. 4:12).

2. God’s Word cuts to the heart of our sinful condition (2 Kings 22:11-13; Heb. 4:12).

3. God’s Word is the instrument by which He brings us to repentance (2 Kings 22:14-20; Heb. 4:13).
Introduce the Lesson
Begin with the illustration of mustaches and the perception of authority (leader p. 126; personal study p. 103). “By what authority?” is a question that determines how we live.

1. God’s Word tells us the truth.
Read Hebrews 4:12 and 2 Kings 22:3-10. Mention the fact that the Word of God had been scarce in Josiah’s day. Ask:

- Would your attitude toward Scripture change if it were extremely difficult to obtain a copy? How so? What if it were illegal to own a copy of the Bible?

Describe the Bible as a “first thing” that is always relevant (leader p. 128).

- What would you say to someone who thinks Scripture is just an outdated book—a dinosaur—that might have been powerful long ago but lacks relevance today?

Transition
Analyze the word authority. Emphasize that God is the Author, the Creator, the ultimate source of authority, and that all earthly authorities are delegated by God and subject to God (leader p. 128; personal study p. 105).

2. God’s Word cuts to the heart of our sinful condition.
Read Hebrews 4:12 again and then 2 Kings 22:11-13. Use “Further Commentary” if needed to help explain the passage (leader p. 129). Using the illustration of how a samurai sword is made, stress the infallibility of Scripture (leader p. 129; personal study p. 105).
When John was on the Isle of Patmos, he saw an image of Jesus Christ with a double-edged sword emerging from His mouth (Rev. 1:16). What does this tell us about the power of the Word of God to judge?

Emphasize that the tearing of Josiah’s clothes was an outward representation of an inward reality—God honors a broken and humbled heart. Point to Jesus and what the tearing of His clothes represented (leader p. 130; personal study p. 106).

Do you read the Bible merely out of habit or do you expect the Lord to convict you of sin and bring you to repentance through His Word? Give examples of when God’s Word has cut to your heart and convicted you of sin in your life.

3. God’s Word is the instrument by which He brings us to repentance.

Read Hebrews 4:13 and 2 Kings 22:14-20. Using the illustration of airport detectors, discuss the power of God to see us as we truly are (leader p. 131; personal study p. 107).

Read Psalm 139. Pay attention to the verbs in this passage. What do these words reveal about the abilities and power of God?

Emphasize the truth that the Word of God exposes our unrighteousness and reveals the mercy of God toward us through the righteousness earned by Jesus Christ.

How would you define “repent”? Compare Ezekiel 33:11 and Matthew 12:41. Who are the recipients of each command to repent? What does this suggest about God’s ultimate plan of redemption?

Conclusion

Mention the faith of the centurion as an example of trusting Christ’s authority (leader p. 133; personal study p. 108). Emphasize that authority belongs to God.

Is the Bible the only source of authority for a Christian or the supreme authority?

How can we distinguish among scriptural authority, conventional wisdom, and false religious teaching?

Consider closing with the prayer of response (leader p. 133).
Opening Illustration and Discussion Starter

Did you know that policemen in India are paid higher salaries if they can grow out their mustaches? Why? Because according to Mayank Jain, a police chief in India, mustaches command authority and foster “a positive and masterful impression on the local people.”

For thousands of years, God’s people have been asking the question “By what authority?” By what authority should the Holy Scriptures be judged? By whose authority should theology, the gospel, ministry, and missions be judged?

Moses faced this question—“Who made you a leader and judge over us?” (Ex. 2:14). Peter and John faced this question—“By what power or in what name have you done this?” (Acts 4:7). Even Jesus Himself had to answer this question—“Who gave You this authority to do these things?” (Mark 11:28). Every one of God’s people must address the question “By what authority?” How will you respond?

How does one become “an authority” on a certain subject or topic? How does a parent exercise authority over a child? What is the difference between authority that is earned and authority inherent to a position?

Lesson Summary

In today’s lesson we will explore the authority of the Bible and how God’s Word influences the thoughts, opinions, and behaviors of His people by telling us the truth, cutting to the heart of our sinful condition, and bringing us to repentance. The goal of this lesson is to explore the authority of God’s Word in the life of the Christian.
1. God’s Word tells us the truth (Heb. 4:12; 2 Kings 22:3-10).

12 For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart.

3 In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent the court secretary Shaphan son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, to the LORD’s temple, saying, 4 “Go up to Hilkiah the high priest so that he may total up the money brought into the LORD’s temple—the money the doorkeepers have collected from the people. 5 It is to be put into the hands of those doing the work—those who oversee the LORD’s temple. They in turn are to give it to the workmen in the LORD’s temple to repair the damage. 6 They are to give it to the carpenters, builders, and masons to buy timber and quarried stone to repair the temple. 7 But no accounting is to be required from them for the money put into their hands since they work with integrity.”

8 Hilkiah the high priest told Shaphan the court secretary, “I have found the book of the law in the LORD’s temple,” and he gave the book to Shaphan, who read it.

9 Then Shaphan the court secretary went to the king and reported, “Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the temple and have put it into the hand of those doing the work—those who oversee the LORD’s temple.” 10 Then Shaphan the court secretary told the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book,” and Shaphan read it in the presence of the king.

In 1902, a paleontologist named Barnum Brown made a surprising discovery in Hell Creek, Montana. Later named the “world’s greatest dinosaur hunter,” Brown unearthed the skeleton of a “large Carnivorous Dinosaur.” He unearthed a second, fuller specimen in 1908. Unlike other dinosaurs he discovered, this forty-five-foot-long monster (aka *Tyrannosaurus rex*) was a “king of the period and a monarch of its race,” boasting a four-foot-long skull with six-inch-long teeth. It was the greatest discovery of his life, a discovery that forever changed the way dinosaurs were studied in the future.

Almost three thousand years earlier, a high priest named Hilkiah also made an important discovery. During the renovation of Solomon’s temple, Hilkiah stumbled upon a scroll that had been hidden for centuries. This was no ordinary manuscript. To Hilkiah’s surprise, the scroll happened to be the long-lost Book of the Law, the writings that Moses passed down to Joshua (see Josh. 1:6-8).
Would your attitude toward Scripture change if it were extremely difficult to obtain a copy? How so? What if it were illegal to own a copy of the Bible?

We live in a culture of upgrades. Take, for instance, the faithful laptop these words were written on. A MacBook Pro, 2.66 GHz, Intel Core 2 Duo. A fine piece of machinery, for sure. But an outdated one. There’s always something faster on the market, something newer. Our culture values upgrading, and whether it’s the latest iPhone or the latest fashion, new things seem to have authority over old things.

C. S. Lewis once said that some things in this world are permanent and eternal. He called them “first things.” King Josiah understood that God’s Word was a first thing, a primary thing that contains truth that transcends time and place. When Josiah heard about the discovery of the scroll, he understood its significance and ordered Shaphan, the secretary of the court, to read it aloud in Josiah’s presence.

Josiah’s response to the discovery of the scroll teaches us that the Word of God is our final authority, the standard by which all things are judged—even us. The Bible is old, but the Bible never gets old. You and I can examine and scrutinize the Scriptures, but God’s Word also examines and scrutinizes us. Since God is the Author of His Word, to disobey or disbelieve Scripture is to disobey and disbelieve God.

What would you say to someone who thinks Scripture is just an outdated book—a dinosaur—that might have been powerful long ago but lacks relevance today?

The Authority of Scripture

Think about the word authority. Do you see another word inside it? Author. The Bible has authority because God is the Author. It’s true that God spoke through human authors in order to get His message across. But ultimately it is God’s message revealed in the Scriptures. The Bible has authority because God is the Author, the Creator, the ultimate source of all authority.

Pastor Joshua Harris writes: “The doctrine of Scripture teaches us about the authority of God’s Word. Scripture must be the final rule of faith and practice for our lives. Not our feelings or emotions. Not signs or prophetic words or hunches. What more can God give us than what he’s given in Scripture? The question is, will we listen? Will we obey when we don’t like what the Bible has to say? This is a moment when our belief about Scripture meets reality. What we say we believe makes very little difference until we act on our belief. I suppose most Christians would say that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. But until this authority actually changes how we live—how we think and act—talk of
the authority of Scripture is nothing but a bunch of religious lingo. We’re treating the God-breathed Word of God like a lot of hot air.”

When push comes to shove, we show what we really believe about the Bible by how we act. We can say that we believe the Bible is true and authoritative and therefore we are to submit to it, but what we affirm about God’s Word can be denied by actions that undercut the Bible’s authoritativeness. If the Bible is true and if it is truly authoritative, it must change the way we live.

2. God’s Word cuts to the heart of our sinful condition (Heb. 4:12; 2 Kings 22:11-13).

12 For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart.

11 When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. 12 Then he commanded Hilkiah the priest, Abikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the court secretary, and the king’s servant Asaiah: 13 “Go and inquire of the Lord for me, the people, and all Judah about the instruction in this book that has been found. For great is the Lord’s wrath that is kindled against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words of this book in order to do everything written about us.”

In feudal Japan, it could take up to a whole year for a blacksmith to forge a single samurai sword. Unlike Roman, Viking, or Arabian swords, the katana (also called “Japanese steel”) was heated and folded thousands of times until most of the impurities were hammered out. That’s why the samurai sword could slice through anything in its path.

The author of Hebrews tells us that God’s Word is “sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow” (4:12). Although it could take a full year to forge a samurai sword, God spent over 2,000 years forging His Holy Word—a pure and perfect weapon without flaw or impurity.

We call this truth the infallibility of Scripture. It’s the idea that God’s Word is pure in its authority and authoritative in its purity. In other words, God’s weapon contains no deficiencies inherent to its design, construction, and effectiveness. It pierces its target every time, for God said, “My word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do” (Isa. 55:11).

Jesus once said that the “mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart” (Luke 6:45). Because God’s Word flows from God’s heart, we can be confident that the Bible is the ultimate standard of truth.
When John was on the Isle of Patmos, he saw an image of Jesus Christ with a double-edged sword emerging from His mouth (Rev. 1:16). What does this tell us about the power of the Word of God to judge?

The “sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word” (Eph. 6:17) is a powerful weapon against Satan (see Matt. 4:1-11), but it is also capable of piercing the hearts of God’s people. Look at Acts 2:37. After Peter proclaimed the gospel to the crowd, we read that “they came under deep conviction,” and then they repented. The same thing happened to King Josiah after he heard the reading of God’s Word. Having realized that his people had provoked God to wrath by not keeping the laws of God, Josiah tore his clothes, a sign of humility and repentance.

The tearing of Josiah’s clothes foreshadowed a future event when the Roman soldiers tore up and “divided [Christ’s] clothes” (Luke 23:34). Jesus embodied a spirit of humility. We see it not only in His words—“The gentle are blessed, for they will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5) and “I am gentle and humble in heart” (11:29)—but also in His actions, for He “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).

Both Josiah’s and Jesus’ clothes were torn on behalf of their people’s sins. However, the tearing of Christ’s clothes was not out of repentance but rather out of forgiveness: “Father, forgive them,” said Jesus, “because they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Amazing love! The selfless trajectory of grace and sacrifice. When Christ absorbed the sins of His people, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom and sinners were granted access into the presence of God. Two thousand years later, the Holy Spirit continues to remind us of this event by convicting us of our sins and using God’s samurai-sharp Word to penetrate our hearts, judge our thoughts, remove our impurities, and bring us to a place of repentance and ultimate healing in Jesus.

Do you read the Bible merely out of habit or do you expect the Lord to convict you of sin and bring you to repentance through His Word? Give examples of when God’s Word has cut to your heart and convicted you of sin in your life.

**The Right Diagnosis**

The perfect Word of God shows us our imperfections and gives us a true diagnosis of our fallen state. Whereas the world often tells us that our problem is failing to believe in ourselves, the Bible gives us a stark picture of our true state: we are in rebellion against God. In this way, the Bible cuts to the heart of our sinful condition.

It may be appealing to agree with the world and to think we’re not as bad as the Bible says we are, but as Trevin Wax points out, this watered-
down understanding of sin actually robs us of the beauty of God’s grace: “What looks more glorious? A God who loves us by ignoring our sin? Or a God who pays the enormous debt for our sin by taking it upon Himself? When sin is seen as the rebellion it is, grace is costly—and transformative! When sin is shrunk to the point that our accountability to God is removed, then grace is cheap, and it leaves us unchanged.”

We need the Word of God to provide us with the stark reality of our fallen condition. Ignoring the Bible’s teaching about sin is like ignoring a serious diagnosis from an expert doctor. But thankfully the Bible doesn’t just tell us about our fallen state, it also leads us to the prescription: repentance and faith.

3. God’s Word is the instrument by which He brings us to repentance (Heb. 4:13; 2 Kings 22:14-20)

13 No creature is hidden from Him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

14 So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah, wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem in the Second District. They spoke with her.

15 She said to them, “This is what the Lord God of Israel says, ‘Say to the man who sent you to Me:’ 16 ‘This is what the Lord says: I am about to bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants, fulfilling all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read, 17 because they have abandoned Me and burned incense to other gods in order to provoke Me with all the work of their hands. My wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. 18 Say this to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the Lord: This is what the Lord God of Israel says: As for the words that you heard, 19 because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I Myself have heard you—this is the Lord’s declaration— 20 therefore, I will indeed gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster that I am bringing on this place.’ ” Then they reported to the king.

Controversial as they might be, backscatter X-ray detectors have become the latest advance in airport security. Also known as the “whole body imager” (WBI), this machine detects ionized radiation reflected from objects and then creates a three-dimensional image of those objects. In other words, if you’ve got a gun in an airport, the WBI is going to see it.
The author of Hebrews says, “all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account” (4:13). All things. That means you—and me! Job said, “For His eyes watch over a man’s ways, and He observes all his steps. There is no darkness, no deep darkness, where evildoers can hide themselves” (Job 34:21-22).

God sees through all of us all of the time. Every thought, every action, every hidden sin and secret is known and perfectly perceived by the all-knowing eye of the Almighty. It is a dangerous thing to stand naked in the presence of a powerful God.

Isaiah discovered this to be true when he looked up and “saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and His robe filled the temple” (Isa. 6:1). What was the first thing out of Isaiah’s mouth? “Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips” (v. 5). In the presence of God, even the angelic seraphim had to shield themselves from God’s glorious light.

Read Psalm 139. Pay attention to the verbs in this passage. What do these words reveal about the abilities and power of God?

King Josiah sought light for his people. He knew that unless he humbled himself before the presence of God on behalf of his people, God would destroy them. A day of reckoning was coming. But when God saw Josiah’s repentance, He said, “because you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I Myself have heard you” (2 Kings 22:19).

The joy of salvation is that God does not look at His people without a filter. Instead, the Father sees believers through the lens of Jesus Christ’s righteousness. The Messiah’s atonement shields us from the wrath of God. Despite our manifold sins and our rebellious natures, God is “patient…not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

How would you define “repent”? Compare Ezekiel 33:11 and Matthew 12:41. Who are the recipients of each command to repent? What does this suggest about God’s ultimate plan of redemption?

Jesus once said, “Unless you repent, you will all perish” (Luke 13:3,5). The Greek word for “repent” in this passage can be broken into two words: meta (a preposition that means “after” or “with”) and noeo (a verb that means “to think” or “to perceive”). When these two words are combined, the compound word connotes a significant shift of thinking and action, a dynamic “changing of one’s mind.”

Think of some well-known characters of the Bible. How many people can you identify who experienced a genuine repentance, a turning from sin?
Conclusion

Of whom did Jesus say, “I have not found so great a faith even in Israel!” (Luke 7:9)? Was it Peter, James, or John? Perhaps it was Mary or Martha. No. This honor went to a random officer in the Roman army, a centurion. We don’t know much about this centurion; in fact, we don’t even know his name. But what we do know is that this Roman officer recognized the authority of Jesus better than anyone else Jesus had met, even the disciples.

When the centurion’s slave was sick, he sent his friends to tell Jesus, “Lord, don’t trouble Yourself, since I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. That is why I didn’t even consider myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be cured. For I too am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under my command. I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it” (vv. 6-8).

Why did Christ pay him the compliment “I have not found so great a faith even in Israel”? Because this centurion knew the answer to the question “By what authority?” By what authority can my sick slave become well again? Not by Satan’s authority. Not by Caesar’s authority. Not by tradition’s authority. Not even by religion’s authority. The supreme authority in heaven and earth belongs to God alone.

Ultimate authority does not come from man-made institutions. It does not come from power, wealth, social status, or reputation. It certainly doesn’t come from an ability to grow out a mustache! Instead, all authority under heaven and earth belongs to God alone.

Is the Bible the only source of authority for a Christian or the supreme authority? How can we distinguish among scriptural authority, conventional wisdom, and false religious teaching?

Prayer of Response

Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. I confess to you today that I have strayed from your Holy Word. I have not loved you enough. I have not served you enough. And there is no health in me. Yet you are a God of forgiveness. You are the One who scatters sin “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12). So I ask You today to examine my heart. Examine my priorities, my ambitions, and my attitudes. Reveal to me my impurities and remove every barrier keeping me from You. By the power of Your Spirit and by the promise of Your Word, I ask that You draw me nearer to Your side, both now and forevermore. Amen.

References
6. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted in Spurgeon & Son by Craig Skinner (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 236.
12. Adrian Rogers, What Every Christian Ought to Know, 22.
Devotional Material
Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the personal study guide.

Study Material
- “Obedient Love: Intersection of Two Ideals”—Chapter 10 from Compelled by Love by Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation
- “Reading the Bible for Transformation: A Conversation with George H. Guthrie”—Chapter 4 from Read the Bible for Life by George H. Guthrie
- “The Four Characteristics of Scripture: (1) Authority”—Chapter 4 from Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem
- “Josiah’s Reform”—Article by A. O. Collins on Biblical Illustrator Plus (CD-ROM); order at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator

Sermon Podcast
Adrian Rogers: “The Wonderful, Spirit-Filled Life”—The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Chapel

Video
D. A. Carson, John Piper, and Tim Keller: A conversation about “Biblical Authority in an Age of Uncertainty”

Find links to these at gospelproject.com/additionalresources

Tip of the Week
Getting More Discussion
Most of us will not risk looking bad in front of a larger group. We may have a legitimate question, but it will go unanswered if the risk outweighs our desire to know. The same is true for the people you teach. The larger the group, the less likely many will take the risk of asking or commenting. If you lead a larger class, create small groups when using discussion questions. This allows for more people to participate and lessens the perceived risk some may have when it comes to public speaking.