

⇒ BLESSING 1 ⇐

The Blessing of a Final Authority for One's Beliefs

I have made a covenant with God that he sends me neither visions, dreams, nor even angels. I am well satisfied with the gift of the Holy Scriptures which give me abundant instruction and all that I need to know both for this life and for that which is to come (Martin Luther).¹

Why do you believe what you believe? What is your authority for what you choose to incorporate into your view of the world? Some people trust their reason; some their emotions. Others rely on some religious authority to tell them what to believe. I heard about a man who was asked, 'What do you believe?' 'I believe what my church believes,' he replied. 'Well,' asked the friend, 'what does your church believe?' 'The church believes what I believe!' 'That's interesting,' said the

1. James Swan, 'Luther: Denying Sola Scriptura With An Unbiblical Understanding of the Word "Prophet"?' Beggars All: Reformation and Apologetics. July 20, 2007. <https://beggarsallreformation.blogspot.com/2007/07/luther-denying-sola-scriptura-with.html>.

friend. ‘What do you and your church believe?’ The man thought for a moment, then replied, ‘*We believe the same thing, dummy!*’

For the believer in Jesus, there’s a better authority for what we are to believe – and it’s the Word of God.

WE HAVE A FINAL AUTHORITY FOR WHAT WE BELIEVE!

The Blessing

My friend Mike doesn’t ‘feel’ like he’s lost or unsaved. For many people, their feelings are their final authority for what they believe. As a follower of Jesus, my authority is God’s Word, the Bible. And the Bible is quite clear in declaring the human person’s lostness before a holy, Triune God.

The Bible

The Bible (composed of sixty-six books) claims to be the Word of God. This isn’t a unique claim to Christianity, but there are good reasons to trust the Bible rather than other pretend authorities (such as the *Book of Mormon*, or the *Koran*, or *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*). God’s Word promises to be a light to our path (Ps. 119:105), a treasure of truth to one’s mind (Ps. 19:7-11), nourishing food for one’s life (Job 23:12), and even a double-edged sword piercing one’s soul for good (Heb. 4:12). Martin Luther confessed: ‘The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me.’

For many people their final authority for what they believe is their heart. When we lived in Canada, my good

friend John (who professed to be a believer) asked if I would talk to his brother Nick who believed everything, it seemed, except Christianity. I asked Nick what his authority was for what he believed and he said, 'My heart. If I read something that resonates with me, I add it to my belief system.' He then said to me, 'Larry, what do you think about my practice?' I said with a smile, 'Nick, I'm not sure you want to hear what I really think. And I want to stay friends with you.' He said, 'No, really. I want to know what you think.' I then said, 'Nick, Jeremiah 17:9 says that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked and that we should not trust our hearts as our final authority for what we believe.' I don't believe Nick and I talked about spiritual things much after that, but I told him the truth.

This issue of the Bible's final authority for one's life cannot be overstated. If the Bible is the very Word of God – and there are abundant evidences to affirm that conviction wholeheartedly – then it must have daily power over my decisions, actions, motivations, feelings, priorities, etc.

ACTION STEPS

1. For you as a believer, thank the Lord for God's Word, your final authority for what you are to believe. Write out a new prayer every day this week expressing your gratitude for the Scriptures.
2. A bit of homework: Read through Psalm 119 over this week and list at least fifty benefits of the Word of God in your life.

3. For extra reading, I recommend buying either a *One Year Bible* or a *Two Year Bible* and committing yourself to reading through all of God's Word in either one or two years.
4. Pray today for your lost friend, that he or she might become interested in what the Bible says about life and salvation and the world. Ask God the Holy Spirit to bring a godly conviction to their soul. Consider praying about offering a one-on-one Bible study to your friend.

⇒ BLESSING 2 ⇐

*The Blessing of the Assurance
of Forgiveness*

In the shadow of my hurt, forgiveness feels like a decision to reward my enemy. But in the shadow of the cross, forgiveness is merely a gift from one undeserving soul to another. Forgiveness is the gift that insures my freedom from a prison of bitterness and resentment. When I accept forgiveness from God, I'm free from the penalty of my sin. When I extend forgiveness to my adversary, there's a sense in which I am set free from his sin as well (Andy Stanley).¹

I've been thinking recently about what believers in Jesus have and what my unsaved friends *don't* have in not knowing the Lord Jesus as their Savior. My friend Mike chooses to think of himself as not lost, as not being outside the family of God.

Please don't misunderstand me. Mike is a great guy. He is giving, kind, compassionate, but utterly deceived

1. Andy Stanley, *Enemies of the Heart: Breaking Free from the Four Emotions That Control You* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2006), p. 129.

about his status before a holy God. And therefore, I'm so thankful for God's Word telling me the truth about my need of a Savior. A Savior who can forgive me.

I heard one man say, 'I don't mind forgiving and forgetting. I just don't want the one I'm forgiving to forget that he has been forgiven.' The blessing we want to focus on today is that of having our sins taken care of by Jesus on the cross. For, when I think of what we have in Christ ...

WE HAVE THE ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS!

The Blessing

How audacious of Christians to claim their sins have been eternally forgiven by God, that they are now in His family, and that He will never turn away from them! But that's what the Bible, God's Word, promises to all who turn to Him in faith.

Unfortunately, few in our world seem concerned about their sin and God's holiness. Someone has said that Jonathan Edwards' sermon, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' has been twisted today into 'God in the Hands of Angry Sinners'! God's Spirit brings conviction of sin which, upon belief in the gospel, leads to complete and righteous forgiveness from a holy God.

The Bible

Because the Bible is our final authority for what we believe, we can be assured of our permanent forgiveness by God. We read that it is in Christ, in whom we have redemption, the *forgiveness* of sins' (Col. 1:14,

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emphasis added). We can be thankful with the psalmist who declares, 'But with you there is *forgiveness*, so that we can, with reverence, serve you' (Ps. 130:4, emphasis added). We learn that the Lord Jesus came for sinners 'to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive *forgiveness* of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Christ]' (Acts 26:18, emphasis added). Even the prophets spoke about the coming Savior 'that everyone who believes in him receives *forgiveness* of sins through his name' (Acts 10:43, emphasis added). But the hard fact is that forgiveness is found only in Christ. And if one doesn't have *Him*, one doesn't have *it*.

ACTION STEPS

1. A bit of homework: Interview five Christian friends this week on what it means to be forgiven by God. Take a few notes on your conversations. Discuss what you've learned with your spouse or a good friend.
2. Sometimes we need to use new words because we've become accustomed to the old words. Write out a paragraph of praise to the Lord for your forgiveness in Christ without using words like 'forgiveness' or 'saved' or 'redeemed.' You might consider sharing that paragraph with an unsaved friend. Blame me for the assignment! But ask them if your paragraph makes sense to them.
3. Consider ordering and reading my short booklet on salvation entitled *Saved: Rescued from God, by God, and for God* found on amazon.com at: shorturl.at/bqN18.

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Just type in that url (shorturl.at/bqN18) into your search engine.

4. **PRAYER:** Pray specifically for your unsaved friend this week that he would be open to the Spirit's work of convicting him of his need of Christ. Pray about the possibility of sharing your paragraph (of Action Step #2) with him.