

# Undermining the Authority of Scripture

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Scholars, theologians, and seminary graduates are revered as being the experts that we dare not question. But the lowly Bereans, on the other hand, were hailed for holding even the apostle Paul to the authority of Scripture, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Act 17:11). Are modern scholars greater than Paul? If the Bereans were commended for questioning the teaching of him who was sent by Christ Himself, then we should confidently follow their example.

Most Christian denominations have developed their own body of systematic theology that has become their authority by which they understand the Scriptures rather than the other way around. Instead of the Scriptures being the ultimate and final authority, their system has taken authority over the Scriptures! Thus many Christians are more loyal to their denominational system than they are to Christ Himself. It’s essentially the same error as with the Roman Catholic Church—the Church is the authority that interprets the Scriptures and their followers aren’t allowed to think for themselves or even so much as question the system.

Protestant Christians are indoctrinated with a theological system, then taught debate and apologetic skills to successfully defend that system. The problem is that they become adept at defending even the false assumptions within the system. But rather than becoming skillful in defending something false, my approach is to first make sure that what I’m teaching is true. I allow the Scriptures to interpret themselves and defend themselves. Now, I’m certainly not claiming that I can never be wrong about anything but only that I make every effort to be sure that what I’m teaching is the truth.

If we’re seeking the truth, then we’ll have no problem with questioning our current beliefs sincerely and objectively. But I’ve come to learn that many Christians aren’t willing to do this. Rather, they’re convinced that their current beliefs are true and will go to great lengths in defending them. This is particularly the case with ministers who have invested decades into preaching and writing books. It’s extremely difficult for them to sincerely question what they’ve poured their lives into. However, if we won’t judge ourselves we’ll be judged by God. We either lose a little now or much more later.

## John MacArthur’s Commentary on Hebrews

A good example of someone imposing their theological system upon the Scriptures is the stated method of John MacArthur in his Commentary on the book of Hebrews. I don’t know MacArthur’s heart so I’m certainly not accusing him of wrong motives—all I can do is point out his actions. There are many good things I can say about his teaching but this certainly isn’t one of them. The method he employs in his Hebrews Commentary is anything but sound hermeneutics.

In the Introduction he states: “A proper interpretation of this epistle requires the recognition that it addresses 3 distinct groups of Jews: 1) believers; 2) unbelievers who were intellectually convinced of the gospel; and 3) unbelievers who were attracted by the gospel and the person of Christ but who had reached no final

conviction about Him. Failure to acknowledge these groups leads to interpretations inconsistent with the rest of Scripture.”<sup>1</sup>

Where did he get this idea that the intended audience of Hebrews is “3 distinct groups of Jews”? He simply states that if this IS NOT the case then it “leads to interpretations inconsistent with the rest of Scripture.” But rather than questioning his interpretations of the rest of Scripture, he imposes this special interpretive grid upon the Scriptures themselves. By establishing at the outset this method as the way to achieve “A proper interpretation of this epistle,” he can then effectively make any part of the epistle either speak or not speak to Christians. He has essentially given himself a blank check to make the epistle say whatever he thinks it should be saying.

In a sermon he preached on the book of Hebrews, he quoted this verse, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27), then made this statement: “Now those are messages given to one who is an unbeliever, not to a Christian and not to one who is necessarily convinced intellectually, but to that one who needs to know who Christ really is. And there are many other such illustrations. So there are three groups then in view in the Epistle. And the key to interpreting Hebrews my friend is to understand to which group he is speaking. And if we don't understand that then we mess everything up because we confuse the issue. He is not saying to believers it is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment, is he?”<sup>2</sup>

His theological system won't allow him to consider that confessing Christians will have to stand in judgment after death, therefore he imposes his unique interpretative framework upon Hebrews. This gives him an escape to keep his theological system unscathed. It's mainly because MacArthur is highly revered as a scholar and theologian that hardly anyone raises a peep about him doing this.

## Feed my sheep

Jesus told Peter that if he truly loves Him he will “Feed my sheep” (Jhn 21:16, 17). Peter will later write, “Feed the flock of God which is among you” (1Pe 5:2), “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary **the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1Pe 5:8-9). The devil is like a lion seeking to devour the weak unfed sheep among the flock. If we truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, we'll first make sure that our own beliefs are correct, then we'll feed His sheep regardless of harm to ourselves.

I decided for myself that my loyalty is to Christ and the correct understanding of the Scriptures. If I truly love God, then I will seek and embrace the truth regardless of what anybody else claims to be the truth. And if I truly love people, then I will teach the truth regardless of how I might suffer for it. I don't care if I'm labeled as a heretic, a wolf, a false teacher, or a fool. I rejoice because Christ said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach *you*, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.” (Lke 6:22-23). The reward comes to those willing to be nothing for Him to be everything.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB58/hebrews>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1600/introduction-to-hebrews>