

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY

REVELATION OR INSTRUMENT: PERSPECTIVES ON THE BIBLE'S AUTHORITY  
CONTRASTED

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## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
The Bible as Revelatory Authority .....	3
God Has Revealed Himself in Scripture .....	3
God Reveals Himself to Be the Ultimate Authority .....	6
The Scriptures are Equal to God’s Authority Due to their Inspiration .....	8
Summary of the Bible as Revelatory Authority.....	14
The Bible as Instrument of God’s Authority .....	14
N. T. Wright.....	16
Scripture as Instrument of God’s Authority.....	17
Scripture as Direction for the Church .....	19
Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke .....	20
Scripture’s Origin in the Tradition of the Church.....	22
Scripture’s Role Informed by Broad Inspiration .....	23
Scripture’s Present Illumination for Various Circumstances.....	24
Summary of the Bible as Instrument of God’s Authority.....	26
Conclusion .....	26
Bibliography .....	29

## Introduction

Christianity is rooted in the soil of authority and that authority is expressed in the Bible. This general principle is affirmed across traditions and denominations.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Luke Timothy Johnson argues that disagreement over the nature of the Bible's authority in Christianity is relatively new. He writes, "Earlier in church history, the subject would not be a matter of explicit debate but an implicit premise so universally assumed as to need no formal attention."<sup>2</sup> Johnson pinpoints where the disagreement over the nature of the Bible's authority originated.<sup>3</sup> Before the Reformation, there was no quarrel over the nature of the Bible's authority. The Reformation and its principle of *sola scriptura* began the debate over the nature of the Bible's authority in the life of the church. Reformers like William Tyndale advocated for the Bible's supremacy over the church.<sup>4</sup> Later, while elevating human reason, Enlightenment figures like Baruch Spinoza questioned the very existence of the Bible's authority.<sup>5</sup> Thus, although a relatively new issue, the nature of biblical authority is a valid topic to address.

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<sup>1</sup> William P. Brown, a professor with theologically liberal views, writes, "Perhaps the best point of departure is to acknowledge first and foremost that Scripture is authoritative primarily with respect to its theological subject, God" (William P. Brown, ed., *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007], xii). From the conservative side, J. I. Packer writes, "All Christians agree that Christianity, being founded on revelation, is a religion of authority, requiring that its adherents conform themselves to the revelation on which it rests" (J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958], 46).

<sup>2</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Bible's Authority for and in the Church," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 62.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> David Daniell writes, "For Tyndale and all the Reformers, the Bible—the whole Bible—was the first and only authority for belief and practice" (William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, ed. David Daniell [New York: Penguin, 2000], xii).

<sup>5</sup> See James S. Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5–6. Preus writes about Spinoza's influence: "Nobody had so clearly seen and unequivocally argued that undercutting biblical authority as such was a necessary condition for permanently securing religious and intellectual liberty...."

A variety of views and expressions on biblical authority have appeared in recent years.<sup>6</sup> N. T. Wright considers Scripture to be the instrument of God's authority that He uses to redeem the world, writing, "God's sovereignty [operates] through scripture."<sup>7</sup> John R. Franke understands the Bible's authority as "ultimately the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is."<sup>8</sup> According to their own distinct epistemological perspectives, Wright and Franke understand that the Bible is an instrument of God's authority. On the other hand, some observe that the Bible is divine revelation with authority that is equated with God's authority. J. I. Packer, a proponent of this view, summarizes: "To learn the mind of God, one must consult his written word. What Scripture says, God says."<sup>9</sup>

This paper will compare these two perspectives on biblical authority. First, the Bible's authority is an instrument of God's authority, and second, the Bible's authority is equal to God's authority. This paper argues that equating Scripture's authority with God's authority best accounts for the Bible's testimony about itself. The point of departure considers the Bible's authority as equal to God's authority. Then, the view that Scripture is the instrument of God's authority will be explained. Finally, the two views will be compared with one another.

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<sup>6</sup> E.g., Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010), 55–97; Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicalism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 163–65; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 109–146; and Brown, *Engaging Biblical Authority*.

<sup>7</sup> N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011), 38.

<sup>8</sup> John R. Franke, "Scripture, Tradition and Authority: Reconstructing the Evangelical Conception of Sola Scriptura," in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguelez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 202; Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 65.

<sup>9</sup> J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 47.

### The Bible as Revelatory Authority

Writing against the polemical backdrop of mid-twentieth century Anglican controversies, Packer identifies his view as “evangelical.”<sup>10</sup> He elaborates, “Its basic principle is that the teaching of the written Scriptures is the word which God spoke and speaks to his church, and is finally authoritative for faith and life. To learn the mind of God, one must consult his written word. What Scripture says, God says.”<sup>11</sup> When the Bible is consulted, Packer claims that it is positioned in judgment over the church.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the primary claim of this view is that God is the ultimate authority and Scripture is God’s word. Therefore, the Scriptures are the ultimate authority in everything they address. This assertion can be explained and defended in the following four points. First, God has revealed Himself in Scripture. Second, God’s self-revelation includes the establishment of His ultimate authority. Third, the Scriptures are equal to God’s authority because of their inspiration. Fourth, the Scriptures’ authority is meaningful because they are clear, sufficient, and illumined.

#### God Has Revealed Himself in Scripture

The concept of revelation is fundamentally that of making something or someone known that was previously unknown, or unveiling something or someone that was previously hidden.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Packer, “*Fundamentalism*” and the Word of God, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 48. Packer writes, “The Bible, therefore, ... demands to sit in judgment on the dictates of both [tradition and reason]; for the words of men must be tried by the Word of God. The church collectively, and the Christian individually, can and do err, and the inerrant Scripture must ever be allowed to speak and correct them.”

<sup>13</sup> John Feinberg writes, “The basic idea of any kind of revelation is to unveil, uncover, bring to light, disclose, and/or make known that which was previously hidden, veiled, and/or unknown.” See John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 38.

God's revelation of Himself is divine revelation.<sup>14</sup> While God reveals Himself in different ways,<sup>15</sup> He especially reveals Himself in Scripture.<sup>16</sup> This is demonstrated by examining several biblical passages.<sup>17</sup> First, Psalm 19:7–9 identifies God's word in Scripture with six different terms, each having the same divine source (e.g., “law of Yahweh,” “testimony of Yahweh,” etc.).<sup>18</sup> This revelation is different from natural revelation because, rather than revealing God's existence, majesty, and power (Ps. 19:1–2), God's revelation in His word reveals His will.<sup>19</sup>

Second, in Matthew 22:31–32, Jesus is confronted by the Sadducees on the topic of resurrection. His answer begins in verse 29, exposing that His opponents do not know the power

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<sup>14</sup> Feinberg defines the term as “a disclosure made by God or by one of his creatures for him” (ibid).

<sup>15</sup> These include His self-revelation through creation (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:18–20; Acts 14:15–17), historical events (cf. Josh. 2:9–11), direct speech (Exod. 3:2–4:17), prophecies about the future (Isa. 42:9), dreams (Dan. 2), visions (2 Cor. 12:1), angels (Dan. 7:15–16), and Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14, 18; Heb. 1:3) (for elaboration on each of these, see Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 85–105). Perhaps also included in God's revelatory acts is “human sensitivity to morality” in Romans 1 and 2 (cf. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 67).

<sup>16</sup> Packer, “*Fundamentalism*” and the Word of God, 47; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987), 45; Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 105; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 33.

<sup>17</sup> That Scripture and specific biblical passages should be consulted for understanding God's self-revelation in Scripture presupposes two fundamentals of theological method. First, the study of theology implies a text to study. Although God has revealed Himself in different ways, He has not preserved those revelations anywhere outside of Scripture. Therefore, the object of study is the Bible since it is divine revelation. Second, to formulate theological principles or conclusions, one should study the passages that explain the teaching being considered. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 34–35; Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 112–13. That approaching theology with presuppositions is valid and necessary, it is a general truth that the principles that are held as the ultimate authority in a matter are also those that serve as presuppositions. As Frame defines it, “A presupposition is a belief that takes precedence over another and therefore serves as a criterion for another” (*The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 45). Further, “For a Christian, the content of Scripture must serve as his ultimate presupposition” (ibid.).

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references taken from *Legacy Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 2021). Psalm 19 concerns both natural and special revelation. In vv. 1–2, creation is “telling,” “declaring,” “pour[ing] forth speech,” and “reveal[ing] knowledge.” As one commentator writes, “Psalm 19 is a classic presentation of divine revelation and its intended effects” (Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1, Kregel Exegetical Library [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011], 467).

<sup>19</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:487.

of God in the resurrection.<sup>20</sup> In verse 31, Jesus addresses the Sadducees deficiency in their understanding of Scripture. In doing so, He appeals to Exodus 3:6, saying, “Have you not read what was spoken to you by God?” The significance for the purpose of this paper is to note that Jesus quotes from a biblical text and says that it was spoken by God. Therefore, it is divine revelation.<sup>21</sup>

Third, at the conclusion of Moses’s extended exposition of the law to Israel on the plains of Moab (Deut 5–28), the prophet hands over “this law” to the Levites (31:9), which he wrote (31:24), and instructs them to set it beside the tablets from Sinai in the ark of the covenant (31:25–26). In Exodus 31:18; 32:16; 34:1, 28, the tablets are said to be “the writing of God.” Stated differently, the tablets are divine revelation. Further, when Moses’s writing is set next to those tablets from Sinai, the claim is being made that this writing is also divine revelation.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, a few other places in the New Testament refer to Scripture as divine revelation. In Romans 3:2, Paul answers a question about the privileges that belong to the Jews. His response includes identifying the revelation they were given as “oracles of God.” These “oracles” refer to the Old Testament (OT) Scriptures.<sup>23</sup> In Romans 9:17, Paul quotes Exodus 9:16 where God commands Pharaoh through Moses to release Israel (cf. Exod 9:13). However,

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<sup>20</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 462.

<sup>21</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 817–18.

<sup>22</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 404; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 33–34.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Second., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 157; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 342.

instead of writing that God spoke to Pharaoh, Paul writes, “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh.” In this way, Paul equates the divine revelation given in history to be recorded in Scripture.<sup>24</sup> Galatians 3:8 is another text that follows the same pattern as Romans 9:17. While referring to God’s promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, Paul identifies the one speaking as “Scripture.”<sup>25</sup> These examples show that the Bible is divine revelation. Next, God’s authority revealed in the Scriptures will be considered.

### God Reveals Himself to Be the Ultimate Authority

God not only has revealed Himself in Scripture, but He has also revealed Himself to be the ultimate authority. To say that God is the ultimate authority is to affirm that there is an inherent distinction between the Creator and the creature.<sup>26</sup> The reasons for this are fourfold. First, God made all things. The Bible begins with God creating all things: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). This statement is supported in Psalm 96:5 (“Yahweh made the heavens”), Nehemiah 9:6 (“You alone are Yahweh, You have made the heavens ... the earth and all that is on it”), and Isaiah 42:5 (“Thus says the God, Yahweh, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring”).<sup>27</sup> Each

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<sup>24</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “‘It Says:’ ‘Scripture Says:’ ‘God Says,’” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1948), 299. Warfield writes, “These acts could be attributed to ‘Scripture’ only as the result of such a habitual identification, in the mind of the writer, of the text of Scripture with God as speaking, that it became natural to use the term ‘Scripture says’, when what was really intended was ‘God, as recorded in Scripture, said’.” See also Schreiner, *Romans*, 497. Schreiner’s comment is helpful for its pointed brevity: “Here Scripture is personified ... showing that what Scripture says, God says” (ibid., fn15).

<sup>25</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 195. Schreiner makes the same observation as he did in Romans 9:17, writing, “Scripture is personified here, so that what Scripture says is what God himself says.”

<sup>26</sup> NB: This claim understands God’s ontological or immanent relations to be unique. That is, His nature as Triune does not serve as a model for relations between Creator and creature. For more on God’s immanent relations, see John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 488.

<sup>27</sup> K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman &



states that God created the heavens and the earth.

Second, as the Creator of heaven and earth, God also created everything in it (Neh 9:6). Corresponding to this, God’s creation of all things means that He owns all things. He claims this ownership in several passages (Exod 19:5; Deut 10:14; Ps 24:1; 50:10–12). In each of these passages, God’s exhaustive ownership is stressed. Accordingly, in Psalm 50 God’s exhaustive ownership requires Israel’s worship to be genuine. In other words, there is a link between God as Creator and God’s ownership of creation, which is part of His exercise of authority over creation.<sup>28</sup>

Third, God also created humans. The sixth day of creation week climaxes with God’s decision to create man (Gen 1:26–28).<sup>29</sup> In Genesis 2, God forms man from the dust (v. 7) and fashions woman from the man (v. 22).<sup>30</sup> In Psalm 139:13–16, God’s creation of individuals continues through the formation of a person in his or her mother’s womb.<sup>31</sup> Just as God as Creator of heaven and earth means that He exercises authority over heaven and earth, so also God is Lord of men and women. In Genesis 14:19, 22, both Melchizedek and Abram refer to

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Holman, 1996), 128; Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 236; Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 165–66.

<sup>28</sup> Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013), 165.

<sup>29</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 160. Mathews lists eight reasons why the creation of man is the climax of creation week: 1) human life is the pinnacle of creation; 2) only this act is preceded by God’s counsel with Himself; 3) the counsel is set in personal, rather than impersonal language; 4) only humanity is created in the image of God; 5) the verb *bārā’* is used three times; 6) the act’s description is longer than previous events; 7) a chiastic parallelism focuses on the word “image”; 8) only humanity is “a direct creation of God” (ibid.).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 195, 218.

<sup>31</sup> Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 3, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2016), 826–28.

God as the “possessor” of heaven and earth. That is, He is Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>32</sup> As Creator, God’s lordship extends over all those who dwell in the world, which includes unrivaled authority over men and women (Ps 24:1–2).<sup>33</sup>

Finally, God made all things by His word. This brings together God’s authority as Creator of all things, including humanity and His self-revelation. Throughout Genesis 1, God’s word creates what He intends to create.<sup>34</sup> Hebrews 11:3 supports this observation, affirming also that all things were created out of nothing.<sup>35</sup> Tying together God’s creation work and His authority, Psalm 33:6–7 says that God made the heavens by His word and exercises authority over the waters. Verses 8–9 say this power exercised through His word should produce fear of God in all of earth’s inhabitants.<sup>36</sup> Thus, drawing together these four reasons, it is evident that God reveals Himself to be the ultimate authority because He is the Creator of all things, including humanity, and His position as Creator means that He is also creation’s sovereign Lord.

#### The Scriptures are Equal to God’s Authority Due to their Inspiration

Thus far it has been argued that God reveals Himself in Scripture and that His self-revelation includes the revelation of His ultimate authority over the world and everything in it. Now it is argued that the Scriptures possess authority that is equal to God’s authority. The means by which this is argued is by appeal to the Bible’s inspiration. The Scriptures testify that they are

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<sup>32</sup> K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 150, 156.

<sup>33</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:577–78.

<sup>34</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 144; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 338–39.

<sup>35</sup> David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2010), 545.

<sup>36</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:733–34.

God-breathed, that is, they are inspired.<sup>37</sup> According to Frame, “*Inspiration* [is] a divine act that creates an identity between a divine word and a human word. Such inspiration takes place in all verbal revelation.”<sup>38</sup> The inspiration of Scripture ensures that what is written in the Bible is God’s word. There are four reasons that support this claim.

First, in asserting that Scripture is dynamically useful for believers,<sup>39</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16 also contends that all<sup>40</sup> Scripture is “God-breathed” or “inspired by God.”<sup>41</sup> The adjective θεόπνευστος is either active, indicating that Scripture is “filled with God’s breath and that it breathes out the Spirit of God,” or passive, which would say “that scripture itself is a result of” having its source be “the breath of God.”<sup>42</sup> A “convincing”<sup>43</sup> article by Warfield examines early patristic usage of θεόπνευστος, showing that the word carries “a uniformly passive significance, rooted in the idea of the creative breath of God.”<sup>44</sup> In another place Warfield concludes, “What is declared by this

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<sup>37</sup> Packer, “*Fundamentalism*” and the Word of God, 47.

<sup>38</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 140 (emphasis in original).

<sup>39</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy & Titus*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Evangelical Biblical Theological Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 268–69.

<sup>40</sup> George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 445. After some detail, Knight concludes that “Paul is contemplating scripture as a whole here” and “it is more likely that he would say that the whole of scripture equips the man of God (v. 17) than that every passage does so.”

<sup>41</sup> Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy & Titus*, 267; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 446–48.

<sup>42</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 446.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* Knight notes that “Warfield’s study has proved to be so convincing that BAGD list only his work in its bibliographic note on θεόπνευστος.” This observation remains valid in the entry in BDAG, although it includes a more recent work to support Warfield’s findings. See Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. θεόπνευστος.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “God-Inspired Scripture,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*

fundamental passage is simply that the Scriptures are a Divine product, without any indication of how God has operated in producing them.”<sup>45</sup> Feinberg concurs, “Paul is saying, then, that all of Scripture is the result or product of God’s breath (or breathing out, i.e., speaking).”<sup>46</sup> In sum, 2 Timothy 3:16 says that Scripture’s source is God, making Scripture God’s word.

Second, God gave His word through His prophets who spoke from Him, for Him, and with His authority. Central to this assertion is the claim of 2 Peter 1:19–21 for the process of the inspiration of the Scriptures.<sup>47</sup> In context, Peter responds to the charge that the apostles created their own clever myths (1:16). His second response to this charge is that their teaching on eschatology is grounded in OT prophetic expectation.<sup>48</sup> This word of prophecy should be attended to by believers in anticipation of the Lord’s return (1:19), which means that it has abiding authority until the coming of the Lord.<sup>49</sup> Believers should give their attention to the prophets’ words with a fundamental principle<sup>50</sup> in mind (“know this first of all”). Namely, “that

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(Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1948), 275.

<sup>45</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Biblical Idea of Inspiration,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1948), 133.

<sup>46</sup> Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 123. Lea and Griffin add, “Paul was not asserting that the Scriptures are inspiring in that they breathe information about God into us, even though the statement is true” (Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary [Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992], 236).

<sup>47</sup> Several scholars note that 2 Timothy 3:16 asserts the reality of Scripture’s inspiration and 2 Peter 1:19–21 indicates the process of inspiration. See Warfield, “The Biblical Idea of Inspiration,” 133; Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy & Titus*, 268; Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 236.

<sup>48</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1983), 226.

<sup>49</sup> Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 227; Edwin A. Blum, “2 Peter,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 274–75; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 321–22. Blum writes, “After affirming the reliability of the OT Scriptures, Peter exhorts his readers to continue to pay careful attention to the prophetic message. . . . Christians are to ponder and keep the word of God ‘until the day dawns’” (274).

<sup>50</sup> Peter H. Davids, *2 Peter and Jude: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New

no prophecy of Scripture comes by one's own interpretation" (1:20) because, negatively, prophecy is of divine origin ("no prophecy was ever made by the will of man") and, positively, the prophets "spoke from God."<sup>51</sup> This means that the prophets' words were their words ("men spoke"), but they originated with God ("from God").<sup>52</sup> Peter makes this claim based upon the active agency<sup>53</sup> of the Holy Spirit in the process of their writing ("prophecy of Scripture," v. 20).<sup>54</sup> Thus, similar to Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16, Peter claims Scripture's divine origin because the prophets spoke and wrote from God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>55</sup>

Third, Peter's assertion is confirmed when considering how the OT reveals the relationship between God and the prophets. Furthermore, there is also a note of divine authority

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Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 62. Davids notes that the adverbial use of *πρῶτον* indicates "a marker of degree: 'in the first place, above all, especially' (BDAG, 894.2.b)."

<sup>51</sup> Even though verses 20–21 have been interpreted in different ways, the difference for this paper's purpose is negligible. Because of Peter's supporting sentence in verse 21, whether the prophecy and interpretation originate from God, or the prophecy and its subsequent interpretation comes from God, "both the origin of prophecy and its subsequent interpretation stem from God himself" (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 324). Schreiner summarizes the different views as stemming from whether "the revelation and the interpretation are of one piece," meaning that they both originate from God, or the "proper interpretation" of the prophecy subsequent to its revelation (*ibid.*, 322, 323). For detailed reasoning of both views, see *ibid.*, 322–24; Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 229–33.

<sup>52</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 324; Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 234.

<sup>53</sup> Lea and Griffin note that the passive voice of the participle *φερόμενοι* in reference to the men who spoke by the Holy Spirit corresponds to the passive meaning of *θεόπνευστος* in 2 Timothy 3:16 (Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 236).

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 324; Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," 135–37. Schreiner writes, "Human beings spoke, and they spoke with their own personalities and literary styles; hence inspiration does not require a dictation theory of inspiration. The words the prophets spoke, however, ultimately came from God. They were inspired, or 'carried along', by the Holy Spirit. Hence, Peter defended the accuracy of the prophecies in the Scriptures" (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 324).

<sup>55</sup> Drawing these two passages together, just as "men spoke from God" (2 Pet 1:21), so also "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). Furthermore, in verses 19 and 20, Peter uses the phrases "prophetic word" and "no prophecy of Scripture," which means that to have a prophecy from Scripture is to have what the prophet spoke. Therefore, the authors who wrote these writings did so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Warfield identifies this revelatory act "concurvative operation," that is, the characteristics of individuality in the writings are real, but "in no way ... affect their purity as direct communications from God" (Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Revelation," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1948], 94). See also Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 324.

in the prophets' ministries. Regarding the relationship between God and the prophets, this is how God describes the relationship between Moses and Aaron in Exodus 4:16, "... [Aaron] will become as a mouth for you, and you will become as God to him."<sup>56</sup> In Deuteronomy 18:18, God says that He puts His words in the prophets' mouths, who in turn are responsible to speak to the people. Moreover, verse 19 warns against disregarding any prophet's words because to ignore his words is to ignore God Himself.<sup>57</sup> Other passages show that prophets spoke from God and that their word was God's word, carrying God's authority. David affirms in 2 Samuel 23:2 that God spoke by him and He spoke God's word.<sup>58</sup> Jeremiah 1:9 refers to this same relationship between God's word and Jeremiah's word when the prophet is called (cf. Jer 5:14).<sup>59</sup> Further, in Jeremiah 30:1–2, the words recorded in chapters 30–33 are words Jeremiah received from Yahweh, establishing a link between God's word and the writing of the prophet.<sup>60</sup> These words were written to establish a permanent record of hope for the exiles of Judah and Israel. In this

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<sup>56</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, "Exodus," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 329. Kaiser comments, "Nothing defines more accurately the intimate relationship between God and his prophet than [Exodus] 4:16 and 7:1."

<sup>57</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 273. "The Moses-like spokesmen, called by God from among the people of Israel, would receive and speak only those things committed to them by the Lord (v. 18). So great would be their authority that anyone who disobeyed their word would have disobeyed the word of the Lord and accordingly would be made accountable."

<sup>58</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 1082. Youngblood connects David's claim to the doctrine of inspiration: "That David spoke 'by the Spirit' on another occasion is affirmed by Jesus himself (Matt 22:43), and David's use of the phrase 'spoke through' represents a clear claim to divine inspiration."

<sup>59</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, "Jeremiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 384. Feinberg writes, "Thus [Jeremiah] was inspired to speak God's truth, and thus the impartation of the divine message was indicated to him. From then on Jeremiah's words would be truly God's, and he would actually become a mouthpiece for God (cf. Isa 6:7)."

<sup>60</sup> Feinberg, "Jeremiah," 558–59; F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 260. Feinberg comments, "These verses constitute the introduction to chapters 30–31 and in all probability for chapters 32–33 as well (so Harrison). ... These prophecies, then, were not to be spoken, as were most of Jeremiah's prophecies; but they were to be written so that they could be read."

way, these words bear the authority of God because of the expectation of their fulfillment.<sup>61</sup> The apostle Peter’s commendation of the prophets’ words to believers in 2 Peter 3:2 serves to summarize the assertion being made here. That is, believers should recollect what the prophets spoke and wrote. In context, this remembrance is grounded in God’s authority by way of believers’ sustaining hope in God’s promises (2 Pet 3:3–10) and pursuing holiness and godliness in their lives (v. 11).<sup>62</sup> These passages demonstrate not only that God gave His word through His prophets, but also their word carried God’s abiding authority.

Finally, when biblical writers support their instructions, they often refer to prior Scripture as authority. For example, when Paul discusses compensation of elders in 1 Timothy 5:18, he cites two passages as support for his instructions. First, he quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4, which establishes a precedent for attending to the needs of those who labor. Just as God was concerned for the care of oxen in the field, so also a church should be concerned with meeting the financial needs of its pastor.<sup>63</sup> Second, Paul quotes from Luke 10:7, where Jesus commends the households that care for His ministering disciples.<sup>64</sup> This serves as further support for Paul’s instructions. At the beginning of the verse, the apostle identifies both Deuteronomy 25:4 and

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<sup>61</sup> Gerald L. Keown, *Jeremiah 26–52*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 89–90. Keown summarizes, “The production of the book as a written document is in itself a sign pointing to the LORD’s promise to return the whole nation, both Judah and Israel, to their ancestral land. It is a sort of promissory note or written guarantee of the survival of God’s people into the future.”

<sup>62</sup> Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 295. Bauckham explains what Peter’s second letter is intended to accomplish in the believers: “The purpose of 2 Peter, like that of 1 Peter, is to ‘remind’ (cf. 1:12–15)—specifically, to recall the eschatological prophecies of the OT prophets and the ethical implications of the Christian gospel, the two points that need emphasis in opposition to the false teachers.”

<sup>63</sup> Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 155–56; Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy & Titus*, 173–74.

<sup>64</sup> Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy & Titus*, 174. On whether Paul refers to Luke 10:7 or a traditional saying, Köstenberger notes, “The fact that the wording of Jesus’s saying matches the version preserved in Luke’s Gospel suggests that the latter may have been Paul’s source (cf. 1 Cor 11:24–25; Luke 22:19–20)” (ibid.).

Luke 10:7 as “Scripture.” This indicates that Paul grounds his authority for financially supporting pastors in the authority of the Scriptures.<sup>65</sup>

### Summary of the Bible as Revelatory Authority

In sum, the Scriptures are equal to God’s authority due to their nature as inspired by God. That is, they are God’s word. Second Timothy 3:16 claims the fact of the Scriptures’ inspiration. Second Peter 1:19–21 asserts the process of their inspiration. The biblical data from the prophets support these assertions. And, as 1 Timothy 5:18 demonstrates, the biblical writers ground their authority in the authority of the Scriptures. Therefore, as God is the ultimate authority, the Bible is authoritative because it is divine revelation that is God’s own word. Put differently, the Scriptures carry the authority of God because they are inspired as God’s self-revelation to His creatures, from whom He expects obedience.<sup>66</sup>

### The Bible as Instrument of God’s Authority

Having considered the view that the Bible as divine revelation makes its authority equal to God’s authority, now an alternative view is described. Proponents of this view include N. T. Wright,<sup>67</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, and John R. Franke.<sup>68</sup> Wright advocates for Scripture’s authority to be exercised in the church through the lens of the overarching biblical story that, enabled and transformed by the Spirit of God, focuses on the consummation of the kingdom of God by means

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<sup>65</sup> Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 156; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 233–34.

<sup>66</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “‘It Says:’ ‘Scripture Says:’ ‘God Says,’” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1948), 299; Packer, “*Fundamentalism*” and the Word of God, 47; Schreiner, *Romans*, 497fn15; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 195.

<sup>67</sup> Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*.

<sup>68</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*; Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority.”



of an orientation around Bible reading and teaching.<sup>69</sup> That is, reading Scripture is a reminder for the church of its place in the “story” and where that story is going.<sup>70</sup>

As postmodernists,<sup>71</sup> Grenz and Franke differ with Wright concerning his emphasis on the overarching biblical story,<sup>72</sup> replacing it instead with an emphasis on the community as the orienting concept.<sup>73</sup> In this framework, the Bible’s authority is found in the authority of the Spirit who uses it as His instrument in the life of the church.<sup>74</sup> This means Grenz and Franke’s view of

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<sup>69</sup> Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 115. Wright writes:

We urgently need an *integrated* view of the dense and complex phrase “the authority of scripture.” Such an integrated view needs to highlight the role of the Spirit as the powerful, transformative agent. It needs to keep as its central focus the goal of God’s kingdom, inaugurated by Jesus on earth as in heaven and one day to be completed under the same rubric. It must envisage the church as characterized, at the very heart of its life, by prayerfully listening to, strenuous wrestling with, humble obedience before, and powerful proclamation of scripture, particularly in the ministries of its authorized leaders (emphasis in original).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 116. Wright elaborates: “We read scripture in order to be refreshed in our memory and understanding of the story within which we ourselves are actors, to be reminded where it has come from and where it is going to, and hence what our own part within it ought to be.”

<sup>71</sup> According to Grenz and Franke, postmodernism refers to “the fundamental critique and rejection of modernity, and the attempt to live and think in a realm of chastened rationality characterized by the demise of modern epistemological foundationalism” (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 19). Their book makes a case for a theological method that can respond to the philosophical and epistemological challenges of postmodernity, especially its emphasis on cultural context. They write, “We hope that our efforts will foster conversation about and participation in the task of theology in a manner that is responsive to the postmodern situation. Moreover, we hope that this conversation will nurture an open and flexible theology that is in keeping with the local and contextual character of the discipline ...” (*ibid.*, 26–27). On theological method and the postmodern challenge, they write, “The task of a helpful theological method, in turn, is to set forth a program for the shaping of a theology that can carry out the theological vocation in a manner that is solidly biblical and truly Christian and that takes seriously the postmodern situation” (*ibid.*, 54).

<sup>72</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 23. “Chastened rationality [i.e., reasoning that recognizes the failures and limitations of modernity (*ibid.*, 19)] is also manifest in the ‘loss of the metanarrative’ and the advent of ‘local’ stories.”

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 234. “Community, we maintain, provides the integrative thematic perspective in light of which the various theological foci can be understood and the significant theological issues ought to be explored.”

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 65. They write:

The Protestant principle means the Bible is authoritative in that it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks. Taking the idea a step further, the authority of the Bible is in the end the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is. As Christians, we acknowledge the Bible as scripture in that the sovereign Spirit has bound authoritative, divine speaking to this text. We believe that the Spirit

Scripture's authority is conveyed in similar terms to Wright's view. Therefore, this section will consider Wright first, followed by Grenz and Franke, concerning their understanding that the authority of the Bible is in its instrumentality for the church.

### N. T. Wright

Wright's main claim is that Scripture's authority resides in its instrumentality as God's work through the Holy Spirit in people as they read, study, teach, and preach Scripture.<sup>75</sup> It is important to emphasize that he does not see the Bible as possessing authority. Instead, he prefers to put it this way, "God's sovereignty operating through scripture."<sup>76</sup> Elaborating on this point, Wright proposes, "We must understand [scriptural authority] like this: God is at work, through scripture ... to energize, enable, and direct the outgoing mission of the church, genuinely anticipating thereby the time when all things will be made new in Christ."<sup>77</sup> This places the authority of Scripture as a "sub-branch" of biblical and practical theology.<sup>78</sup> This is the reason

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has chosen, now chooses, and will continue to choose to speak with authority through the biblical texts.

<sup>75</sup> "The authority of scripture' refers not least to God's work *through* scripture to reveal Jesus, to speak in life-changing power to the hearts and minds of individuals, and to transform them by the Spirit's healing love" (Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 117). Later, in a parenthetical statement, Wright states, "In other words, through the Spirit who is at work as people read, study, teach, and preach scripture" (ibid., 138).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>77</sup> Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 138. "Our word 'authority' is, frankly, far too narrowly focused to do justice to all this. To attempt to sum up the role which scripture played within Israel we would need to say something like 'God's sovereign activity in, through, to and for Israel by means of his spoken and written word'. Or, to put it more simply, 'God's sovereignty operating through scripture.'"

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 27–28. "The authority of scripture' is thus a sub-branch of several other theological topics: the mission of the church, the work of the Spirit, the ultimate future hope and the way it is anticipated in the present, and of course the nature of the church." Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm's comments about Friedrich Schleiermacher's understanding of Christian theology are relevant here because of the affinities with Wright's statement that Scripture is a sub-topic in theology. They write:

This understanding of Christianity [i.e., as expressions of the religious consciousness that marks a particular church at a particular time] brings with it a heightened emphasis on the church as the community through which Christ's work is transmitted. Schleiermacher develops his doctrine of

why Wright understands Scripture to be an instrument that is used by God in the exercise of His authority.

In support of his view, Wright provides two reasons why God's authority through Scripture works this way. First, Scripture serves as an instrument of God's authority. Second, since God's authority is expressed through Scripture, the Bible directs the actions of the church in carrying forward God's mission in the world.

### *Scripture as Instrument of God's Authority*

Wright maintains that Scripture operates as an instrument of God for the exercise of His authority first over Israel, and now over the church.<sup>79</sup> What he means by instrument is, first, God reveals His plan of salvation for the universe in the Bible. Second, this plan is launched by Jesus. Third, the plan is implemented by the church in its life as it reads and applies Scripture.<sup>80</sup> Below is Wright's elaboration of these three points.

First, the scope of Scripture is to tell the story of God's Kingdom at work to put right all wrongs, redeem His people, and restore or renew creation. Wright explains, "To speak of God's Kingdom is thus to invoke God as the sovereign one who has the right, the duty, and the power to deal appropriately with evil in the world, in Israel, and in human beings, and thereupon to

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Scripture as an element within his broader doctrine of the church, identifying Scripture as one of the 'immutable elements' in the church's life. His identification of teaching about Scripture as an element within teaching about the church represents a crucial feature of Schleiermacher's understanding of Scripture, and a departure from a Protestant tendency to place Scripture at the head of the theological enterprise as the source and guarantor of Christian teaching (Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 305–06).

<sup>79</sup> Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 38.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 115–16. Wright states, "The shorthand phrase the 'authority of scripture,' when unpacked, offers a picture of God's sovereign plan for the entire cosmos, dramatically inaugurated by Jesus himself, and now to be implemented through the Spirit-led life of the church *precisely as the scripture-reading community*" (emphasis in original).

remake the world, Israel, and human beings.”<sup>81</sup> Scripture’s role in this work of God’s kingdom is to serve as “the place where, and the means by which, Israel discovered again and again who the true God was, and how his Kingdom-purposes were being taken forward.”<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the Bible’s role as instrument is to serve as a witness, record, and reference point of God’s plans and goals for Israel and the world.

Second, appealing to Mark 1:15 for support, Wright asserts that Jesus’s appearance brought “the *story* of Scripture to its climax, and thereby offering to God the *obedience* through which the Kingdom would be accomplished.”<sup>83</sup> This approach is attractive to Wright because it allows for Jesus to be “set ... in the context of the larger scriptural story, ... [and thereby] discover a much richer, and more narrational sense of ‘fulfillment,’ which generates that subtle and powerful view of scripture we find in the early church.”<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, this understanding of the context of the biblical story grounds Jesus’s statements about the authority of Scripture. Because Jesus is the climax of the story, His claims to authority over-against other biblical passages only make sense in this context (e.g., Mark 3:31–35; 7:1–23; Luke 14:26).<sup>85</sup>

Third, in light of Jesus’s coming, the early church understood that “God’s word was at work by the Spirit within the community, to put Jesus’s achievement into effect and thus to

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 41 (emphasis in original). That is, God’s saving plan is “dramatically inaugurated by Jesus” (ibid., 116).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 44.

advance the final Kingdom.”<sup>86</sup> This means the New Testament establishes a “charter” for the church to refer to in living out the rest of the story until God’s Kingdom is consummated. Wright states, “The New Testament understands itself as the new covenant charter, the book that forms the basis for the new telling of the story through which Christians are formed, reformed and transformed so as to be God’s people for God’s world.”<sup>87</sup> Taking this understanding of the Bible, Scripture’s authority is to integrate, on the one hand, God’s sovereign work in the world to redeem creation through Jesus’s obedience with, on the other hand, the application of that redemption by the Holy Spirit in the life of the church as it, in turn, reads, ponders, and responds to Scripture.

### *Scripture as Direction for the Church*

Having asserted that Scripture’s role serves God’s authority as an instrument in the execution of His plan, it is now necessary to consider how the church uses Scripture as “*the scripture-reading community*.”<sup>88</sup> Wright counsels the church to read the Bible according to a “‘five-act’ hermeneutic ... creation, ‘fall,’ Israel, Jesus, and the church.”<sup>89</sup> If readers know where the text is located within this five-act drama, then they will recognize why characters speak and act in the ways that they do. Most importantly, today’s readers must understand that they are in the fifth act, which began “with Easter and Pentecost; its opening scenes were the apostolic period itself; its charter text is the New Testament; its goal ... is sketched clearly in such

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 116 (emphasis in original).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 122. Wright identifies interpretive issues such as “genre, setting, literary style” as “vital” for reading the Bible accurately (ibid., 121–22).

passages as Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 21–22.”<sup>90</sup> This means that the church intentionally places itself as those through whom the story progresses towards God’s goal.<sup>91</sup> However, this does not mean that the church has freedom to act in the drama in any way it chooses. It may “improvise,”<sup>92</sup> but the fifth-act’s “first scene [i.e., Jesus’s resurrection and Pentecost] is non-negotiable, and remains the standard by which the various improvisations of subsequent scenes are to be judged.”<sup>93</sup> In sum, the church participates in God’s mission to renew the world through its reading and application of the Bible according to its place in God’s story. This is how God’s sovereign authority is exercised through Scripture.

Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke

Grenz and Franke understand the Bible’s authority in a similar way to Wright. Just as Wright sees Scripture as God’s instrument for accomplishing His plan of renewing the world, Grenz and Franke consider the Bible to be what God has chosen and continues to choose to

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 125. According to Wright, God’s goal is “to renew the whole world. This is the unfinished story in which readers of scripture are invited to become actors in their own right” (ibid., 27). Franke adopts an earlier version of Wright’s “‘five-act’ hermeneutic” (N. T. Wright, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative,” *Vox Evangelica* 21 [1991]: 7–32) and highlights the role of church tradition for performing the fifth act. He concludes, “In this conception, the Christian tradition provides a spiritually animated, historically extended and socially embodied context in which to interpret, apply and live out the communally formative narratives contained in the canonical texts” (“Scripture, Tradition and Authority,” 209–10). The role of tradition as part of the Spirit’s instrumental use of Scripture in the life of the church will be considered below.

<sup>92</sup> Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 127. By “improvise,” Wright does not mean “‘anything goes,’ but precisely a disciplined and careful listening to all the other voices around us.... . . . All Christians, all churches, are free to improvise their own variations designed to take the music forward. No Christian, no church, is free to play out of tune.” Returning to the metaphor of a drama, “No actor, no company, is free to improvise scenes from another play, or one with a different ending” (ibid.).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 126. Wright offers five “strategies for honoring the authority of Scripture” in individual and corporate life. They include a “*totally contextual* reading,” a “*liturgically grounded* reading,” a “*privately studied* reading,” a reading that is “*refreshed by appropriate scholarship*,” and a reading “*taught by the church’s accredited leaders*” (128–142, emphasis in original).

speak through to the church. It is in this way that the Bible has authority.<sup>94</sup> According to Franke, this view of Scripture's authority seeks to establish common ground with the Reformation since its confessions teach that Scripture is "ultimately the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is."<sup>95</sup> Accordingly, the work of the Spirit is authoritative in the trajectory of the church's composition, interpretation, and application of the Scriptures.<sup>96</sup> As Franke writes, "The authority of both Scripture and tradition is ultimately an authority derived from the work of the Spirit."<sup>97</sup>

As noted earlier, these claims share parallels with Wright's view in that both understand Scripture's authority to be derived from God. However, there is a key difference which distinguishes the two. This difference also plays a role in how Grenz and Franke seek to demonstrate its validity for understanding the Bible's authority. The difference is this: Wright locates authority in *God's* use of the Bible in the church, but Grenz and Franke locate that authority in the *church's* use of the Scriptures. Capturing this key difference is best elaborated in three ways: the Scriptures originated in the tradition of the church, the tradition of the church necessitates a broader doctrine of inspiration, and the ongoing tradition of the church receives illumination by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures for application in various circumstances.

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<sup>94</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65. "The Protestant principle means the Bible is authoritative in that it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks. Taking the idea a step further, the authority of the Bible is in the end the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is. . . . We believe that the Spirit has chosen, now chooses, and will continue to choose to speak with authority through the biblical texts."

<sup>95</sup> Franke, "Scripture, Tradition and Authority," 202. Cf. Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

<sup>96</sup> Franke, "Scripture, Tradition and Authority," 203. "The Scriptures witness to the claim that they are the final written deposit of a trajectory or a traditioning that incorporates a number of varied elements in their composition, including oral tradition and other source documents. The community of faith recognized these writings as authoritative materials, and these materials in turn were interpreted and reapplied to the various contemporary situations."

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

*Scripture's Origin in the Tradition of the Church*

Franke asserts that the church created Scripture through the process of “traditioning.”<sup>98</sup> He supports this claim with the following: “The community [i.e., church] precedes the production of the scriptural texts. In a certain sense, the faith community was responsible both for the content of the biblical books and for the identification of particular texts for inclusion in an authoritative canon to which the community has chosen to make itself accountable.”<sup>99</sup> According to this view, the Scriptures’ own testimony confirms this conclusion. Franke writes, “The Scriptures witness to the claim that they are the final written deposit of a trajectory or a traditioning that incorporates a number of varied elements in their composition, including oral tradition and other source documents.”<sup>100</sup> In other words, the Bible is the collected and finished product of centuries of traditional material, which the church undertook and oversaw.<sup>101</sup>

Franke points out a common objection to this claim: either Scripture or tradition is inherently authoritative, but not both. Franke identifies this as a “foundationalist” assumption.<sup>102</sup> He states that the Scriptures’ authority “is contingent on the work of the Spirit. ... To misconstrue the shape of this relationship by setting Scripture over against tradition or by

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<sup>98</sup> Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority,” 202. By “traditioning,” Franke means, “The process ... which began before the composition of the inspired books and continues without interruption through the ages.” For more on this concept, see Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992), 96.

<sup>99</sup> Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority,” 202.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>101</sup> Grenz and Franke connect this discussion to inspiration and the meaning of 2 Timothy 3:16 (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65–66). This will be considered below.

<sup>102</sup> Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority,” 205. “Neither Scripture nor tradition is inherently authoritative in the foundationalist sense of providing self-evident, non-inferential and incorrigible grounds for constructing theological assertions.” Grenz and Franke identify foundationalism as an epistemological framework of modernity and the Enlightenment (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 23).



elevating tradition above Scripture is the failure to comprehend properly the work of the Spirit.”<sup>103</sup> That is, to speak of Scripture is to speak of tradition because that is part of the Spirit’s ministry, so the objection presents a false dichotomy. Therefore, although the church played a determining factor in the existence of the Scriptures, the process finds its authority in God because of the role of the Spirit.

*Scripture’s Role Informed by Broad Inspiration*

Grenz and Franke rest their view of the Bible’s authority on a doctrine of inspiration that is “broader” than usually believed. Franke writes, “Our awareness of the role of the community in the production of the writings of Scripture, that is, to the process of Traditioning present already within the biblical era leads to a broader concept of inspiration.”<sup>104</sup> Furthermore he states, “The direction of the Spirit permeated the entire process that climaxed in the coming together of the canon as the book of the Christian community.”<sup>105</sup> Their biblical rationale for this position is drawn from 2 Timothy 3:16–17. They say the meaning of this passage is likely that the Spirit “enlivens” the biblical text and enables the community to acknowledge its authority.<sup>106</sup> According to them, Paul draws on the life giving breath of God breathed into Adam (Gen 2:7) in order to say that ““God breathes into the Scripture’ thereby making it useful.”<sup>107</sup> It was for this

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<sup>103</sup> Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority,” 205.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65. “The connection between the Spirit’s enlivening of the text and our acknowledgment of biblical authority may actually be the point of the verses to which theologians routinely appeal as the *locus classicus* for the traditional doctrine of inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16–17)” (emphasis in original).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* In this way, they understand θεόπνευστος to be active in meaning rather than passive.

reason that “the church ... came to confess the authority of scripture because the early believers experienced the power and truth of the Spirit of God through these writings.”<sup>108</sup>

This position is further supported in three ways. First, since the traditioning process grew out of the soil of a variety of individuals’ writings, inspiration includes those compositions.<sup>109</sup> Second, inspiration “incorporates the work of the Triune God in the midst of the Hebrew and early Christian communities, leading these people to participate in the process of bringing Scripture into being.”<sup>110</sup> Third, inspiration includes the interpreting work of Israel and the church: “The people of Israel and the early Christian communities engaged in the interpretive task *within* the process of the formation of the canon.”<sup>111</sup> This view’s broad conception of inspiration ties together the underlying writings of individuals, God’s work in directing the participation of communities in formulating these writings, and the interpretation of those writings by the believing communities.

### *Scripture’s Present Illumination for Various Circumstances*

Having explained the origin and inspiration of the Scriptures, Grenz and Franke’s third reason in support of their main claim considers the present role of the Holy Spirit’s illumination of the Bible for the various circumstances of the people of God. That is, the church now receives the illuminating ministry of the Spirit “speaking through canonical Scripture.”<sup>112</sup> This enables

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 65–66.

<sup>109</sup> Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority,” 203.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 204 (emphasis in original).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

the church “to fulfill its task of living as the people of God in the various historical and cultural locations in which it is situated.”<sup>113</sup> Franke supports this reason with two connecting pieces of evidence. First, he reiterates his main claim, writing, “The authority of [tradition and Scripture] is contingent on the work of the Spirit, and both Scripture and tradition are central components within an interrelated web of beliefs that constitutes the Christian faith.”<sup>114</sup> That is, authority is found in the work of the Spirit through Scripture in the life of the community.<sup>115</sup> Second, he asserts that “all theological formulations are culturally embedded.”<sup>116</sup> Therefore, Franke infers from this that the various Christian communities around the world and throughout the centuries have available to them an “open” confessional tradition, which “understands its obligation to develop and adopt new confessions in accordance with shifting circumstances.”<sup>117</sup> In other words, the Scriptures are illuminated by the Spirit for the church in various cultures and circumstances for formulating, embracing, and adjusting the traditioning that has taken place throughout the centuries. Because of this, Grenz and Franke conclude that the Scriptures are authoritative in the life of the church: “The Bible is the final authority in the church (and hence the norming norm in theology) precisely as the Spirit pours forth further light through the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>115</sup> Because of this emphasis on the community, Grenz and Franke reject the charge of subjectivism. They write, “What leads to subjectivism is the articulation of such a theology in the context of a basically individualistic understanding of the event of revelation. In other words, the problem of subjectivism arises only when we mistakenly place the individual ahead of the community” (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 68).

<sup>116</sup> Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority,” 206. NB: This argument is self-defeating. If the assertion is that “all theological formulations are culturally embedded,” then it follows that such a statement is culturally embedded, and therefore does not necessarily apply to other cultures.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 207. “Through scripture, the Spirit continually instructs us as Christ's community in the midst of our life together as we face the challenges of living in the contemporary world” (Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 67).

text.”<sup>118</sup> In this way, the Scriptures are the instrument of the Spirit for speaking to the church.<sup>119</sup> The Holy Spirit directed the Scriptures’ origin in their composition and reception by the church, and now He continues to speak through them to the church for its current and cultural circumstances.<sup>120</sup>

### Summary of the Bible as Instrument of God’s Authority

In sum, Wright, Grenz, and Franke argue that the Bible is an instrument of God in the exercise of His authority over the church. Wright understands the overarching biblical story to be the orienting center for the church to play its part in God’s plan to consummate the kingdom. God’s authority is exercised in the church as the church reads and teaches the Bible. While Grenz and Franke take issue with Wright’s overarching story concept, they agree that the Bible is used by the Holy Spirit for the mission of the church. God chose and continues to choose to speak through the Scriptures to the church. While Wright emphasizes authority is in God’s use of the Bible in the life of the church, Grenz and Franke accent how the church uses the Scripture in its various contexts. Nevertheless, both fundamentally consider the Bible to be an instrument of God’s authority.

### Conclusion

This paper has compared two perspectives on the authority of Scripture: Scripture as the instrument of God’s authority or Scripture as equal to God’s authority. According to the

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<sup>118</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 67.

<sup>119</sup> “If the final authority in the church is the Holy Spirit speaking through scripture, then theology’s norming norm is the message the Spirit declares through the text” (ibid., 74).

<sup>120</sup> NB: Franke commends Wright’s “‘five-act’ hermeneutic” for the church’s use of Scripture’s storyline but emphasizes the role of church tradition to help the church carry out its mission (Franke, “Scripture, Tradition and Authority,” 209–10).

instrumental view, the Bible is the story of God’s plan for renewing the world (or, in Grenz and Franke’s view, the local community). Because God has chosen and is choosing to speak by the Spirit in and through the Bible, God uses Scripture as His instrument to direct the life of the church as it participates in His plan. In this way, “‘God breathes into the Scripture,’ thereby making it useful” for the church.<sup>121</sup> This broad view of inspiration also influences the history of the church in its composing, collecting, and finishing the canon of Scripture.

On the other hand, the view that equates the Bible’s authority with God’s authority is grounded in the Scripture’s testimony that it is divine revelation. That is, God has revealed Himself in Scripture. One element of divine revelation is God’s authority as Creator of all things, including humanity. God’s work of creation was accomplished by His word. These two claims—the Bible is divine revelation and God is authoritative because He is the Creator of all things—establish the ground for the Scriptures’ authority, namely, the Scriptures are equal to God’s authority because they are inspired, or “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16). Because the Scriptures are the written word of God, this means God revealed His word through the prophets who spoke from God (2 Pet 1:19–21).

This demonstrates that there is a fundamental difference between the two views. While both views affirm the usefulness of the Bible, this paper has shown that biblical authority as an instrument of God’s authority is not the same as saying the Bible is equal to God’s authority. It seems the reason for the difference between the two views concerns inspiration. As noted above, Grenz and Franke understand the Scriptures to have God’s breath breathed-in to them. This makes them useful for the church.<sup>122</sup> In effect, this broadens the act of inspiration and conflates it

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<sup>121</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 65.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

with illumination.<sup>123</sup> For Wright, he understands the Bible to be the story of God's saving plan and the church needs to participate in that plan as the people who read Scripture.<sup>124</sup> However, the Bible is divine revelation that is verbal in its content and objective in its nature.<sup>125</sup> Objectively, while the Bible reveals God's saving plan, it reveals much more.<sup>126</sup> Verbally, the Bible is divine revelation that is inspired in one divine act. In sum, rather than an instrument of God's authority, Scripture's testimony is that its authority is equal to God's authority.

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<sup>123</sup> According to Feinberg, illumination is:

... a work of the Holy Spirit on the minds and hearts of believers and nonbelievers which can accomplish any and all of the following in regard to divine revelation, including Scripture: (1) help them to grasp intellectually the content of the revelation; (2) help them to see how that intellectual content applies to actual situations and circumstances in their lives and in others' lives; and (3) move them to adopt and apply the truth to their own lives (Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 619).

<sup>124</sup> Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 115–16.

<sup>125</sup> Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 140. "Inspiration [is] a divine act that creates an identity between a divine word and a human word. Such inspiration takes place in all verbal revelation" (emphasis in original).

<sup>126</sup> See 1 Timothy 5:18 as an example of Scripture being used authoritatively concerning a topic that has little to do with God's plan to renew the world.

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