

Discipleship in Depth – The Bible

Introduction: Just as the author illustrates in his personal story at the beginning of the chapter, children tend to play authority figures against each other so they may get their own way! While this is true on a small scale in every family, it is true of the Christian life. Without a single, absolute and final authority human nature is such that every man will do “what is right in his own eyes” resulting in confusion! We need a definitive, authoritative and final authority to answer our most important questions:

- What now?
- What should I expect?
- Where should I go?
- Who do I ask?
- What should I believe?
- What do I do?
- Who do I trust?
- Who has the final say?

We all look for sources of authority to guide and direct our lives and we have all kinds of options. Sadly, these options will not always agree. So where do you go for authority in your Christian walk? There are five authorities we can look to for guidance, but only one should have the final word. They are:

- Reason
- Experience
- Emotions
- Tradition
- The Bible

Reason: God made man with the capacity for reasoning. He gave us amazing brains and he expects us to use them and use them well. Here are some of the fascinating facts and figures about the human brain*:

1. The typical brain is about 2% of a body's weight but uses 20% of its total energy and oxygen intake.
2. Your brain is 73% water. It takes only 2% dehydration to affect your attention, memory and other cognitive skills.
3. Ninety minutes of sweating can temporarily shrink the brain as much as one year of aging.
4. Your brain weighs about 3 pounds. Of that, the dry weight is 60% fat, making your brain the fattiest organ.

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5. Twenty-five percent of the body's cholesterol resides within the brain. Cholesterol is an integral part of every brain cell. Without adequate cholesterol, brain cells die.
6. No one knows for sure, but the latest estimate is that our brains contain roughly 86 billion brain cells.
7. Each neuron connects with, on average, 40,000 synapses.
8. A piece of brain tissue the size of a grain of sand contains 100,000 neurons and 1 billion synapses all communicating with each other.
9. All brain cells are not alike. There are as many as 10,000 specific types of neurons in the brain.
10. Only 5 minutes without oxygen can cause brain damage.
11. Babies have big heads to hold rapidly growing brains. A 2-year-old's brain is 80% of adult size.
12. As any parent can attest, teenage brains are not fully formed. It isn't until about the age of 25 that the human brain reaches full maturity.
13. Brain information moves anywhere between 1 mph and an impressive 268 miles per hour. This is faster than Formula 1 race cars which top out at 240 mph.
14. Your brain generates about 12-25 watts of electricity. This is enough to power a low wattage LED light.
15. The average brain is believed to generate around 50,000 thoughts per day. Disturbingly, it's estimated that in most people 70% of these thoughts are negative.
16. More than 100,000 chemical reactions take place in your brain every second.
17. In general, men's brains are 10% bigger than women's, even after taking into account larger body size.
18. Albert Einstein's brain weighed 2.71 pounds (1,230 grams) — 10% smaller than the average of 3 pounds (1,400 grams). However, the neuron density of his brain was greater than average. Few facts about the brain are as weird as the story of Albert Einstein's brain. The pathologist who performed Einstein's autopsy kept the brain in a jar in his basement for 40 years. Eventually he made a cross-country trip with the brain in a Tupperware container to deliver it to Einstein's granddaughter. You can read the full story about one of the most bizarre road trips ever in [Driving Mr. Albert: A Trip Across America with Einstein's Brain](#).
19. We are not getting smarter. Since the Victorian era, average IQs have gone down 1.6 points per decade for a total of 13.35 points.
20. Our attention spans are getting shorter. In 2000, the average attention span was 12 seconds. Now it's 8 seconds. That's shorter than the 9-second attention span of the average goldfish.
21. Ever wondered why crash dieting can leave you in a mental fog? Brain cells cannibalize themselves as a last-ditch source of energy to ward off starvation. So in very real ways dieting can force your brain to eat itself.
22. Our brains crave mental stimulation. Men especially would rather receive electric shocks than sit quietly in a room and think!
23. Although pain is processed in your brain, your brain has no pain receptors and feels no pain. This explains how brain surgery can be performed while the patient is awake with no pain or discomfort.
24. Over 140 proteins in the brain are negatively impacted by exposure to electromagnetic frequencies — the kind emitted by your cell phone and other electronic devices.
25. The human brain is not solid. It's soft and squishy similar to the consistency of soft tofu or soft gelatin. And it's very fragile.

(*Source: <https://bebrainfit.com/human-brain-facts/> Accessed 08/02/17)

Reason is the human capacity and inclination toward rational, logical, and analytical thought. God has gifted you with the ability to think, reason, and draw conclusions your abilities in this area are by no means perfect, but they are abilities nonetheless. He created you with a mind to think for a reason. It is not a Christian virtue to go around believing things that don't make sense!

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You are not to check your brains at the door when you become a Christian. God expects you to think and to think well.

For example, Idolatry is totally irrational. (Isaiah 44:9-20; Romans 1: 21-23).

“They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. 10 Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? 11 Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. 12 The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint. 13 The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. 14 He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. 15 Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. 16 He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: 17 And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. 18 They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. 19 And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread

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upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? 20 He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” Isaiah 44:9–20

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Romans 1:21–23

Reason however is not perfect. It can go wrong:

- it can misuse data
- it can misinterpret data
- it can lack crucial data - in fact this is the greatest problem with reason. Only those with all the information are able to draw perfectly sound conclusions from data. As people are limited in knowledge and intellect we simply do not have all the information.

Thus, if we are looking for a final authority, reason, while helpful and even crucial, simply does not stand up to the test. We must seek for some other ultimate standard of authority.

Experience: Experience is defined as information that comes through direct encounter, participation, or observation. God certainly wants to meet you in your experience. As a believer, you will see God’s hand everywhere in the agency of life. He will use circumstance and providential experiences to open and close doors in your life. He will send people across your path to aid you.

“God is a God of history. He did not finish the Bible and go AWOL. When the last chapter of the Bible was complete, God did not turn into a cheerleader on the sidelines of history. He is still involved. You should expect that He hears your prayers and moves in time, accomplishing His will through you.”

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But we must be careful with experience! Experience, like reason, can be misinterpreted, abused and even manipulated. Take note of the author's extreme illustration concerning whether he should or should not get married. His caution that we should always be looking for God's movements in our life but not forcing them should command close attention.

Often our experience will conflict with the experience of others. You do not have to go any further than the ratings for some restaurants on the Internet. Some individuals will give a restaurant five stars and rave about it while contemporaneous reviews say it was ghastly! The point is experienced is often colored by history and personality. This is nothing to base the eternal destiny of your soul upon. We must seek another authority!

Emotions: God is passionate about emotions-after all he created them! Emotions can be defined as "subjectively experienced psychological feelings." With reason, we think of emotions as a second-rate form of guidance. Men criticize women for being too emotional in their considerations and decisions. And while it is good to be cautious concerning emotions, we dare not dismiss them too quickly! God will move through them.

- One of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin (John 16:7-8). Conviction is an emotion from God that we dare not ignore.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. 8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:" John 16:7-8

- The Bible speaks about the peace of God which comes into our lives that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). The sense of peace is a powerful emotion and is used by God.

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:7

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- Emotions can be powerful and you should invite God to comfort and guide you using your emotions.

However, emotions can be misleading. See the author's illustration concerning his friend whose emotional attachment to an unsaved woman runs contrary to the scriptural admonition of II Corinthians 6:14-18.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:14–18

In this case emotions appear to have trumped Scripture which is a dangerous thing.

When I was first saved, my best friend also trusted Christ. I went to a church that taught the Bible. He went to a church that emphasized emotions. I grew up certain of my salvation because of what the Bible said. He grew up trusting in his feelings and on some Sundays he felt saved and other days he did not. My life was secure and stable but his was on and off an insecure. Beware of over-emphasizing emotions.

We should welcome God to talk to us through our emotions, but our emotions cannot be the final arbiter of truth they are far too subjective. We need another source of authority.

Tradition: Another potential source of authority in our lives is tradition. We should look to the past to find wisdom for the present. The best way to describe tradition is “the collective wisdom of those who have gone before

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us.” As Christians, we have a heritage. We call it the Church. Now the church is far more than the local assembly meeting in the building on the corner.

- The word “church” comes from two Greek words that mean “called out.”
- About 95% of the references in the Bible to the church are referring to a local, visible assembly of Believers who meet to worship and serve God. They have their own officers and specific membership. This refers to the visible local church and we will learn more about it in lesson eight.
- The Bible also references the whole church, made up of all of those both living and dead who have trusted Jesus Christ as personal Savior.
 - The Holy Spirit of God has led and guided a multitude of saints who’ve gone on before us.
 - Their common confession through their deeds and the record of their beliefs forms an authority for Christian life.
 - Their witness builds a foundation of truth and beckons for us to follow in their footsteps.
 - This witness can be very helpful for us. Let me quote directly from the author of our book:

“A man once came to me and pointed to a particular portion of Scripture. He told me that he believed the Holy Spirit had given him an understanding of this particular passage the night before. As he told me about his interpretation, I realized one problem: no Christian before him had ever interpreted the passage in that way. His interpretation was completely outside the great Christian tradition that has been held for the last two thousand years. If his belief was true, then multitudes of Christians who had come before him had missed it, even though they were being led by the same spirit as he supposedly was. This should give us pause. In fact, it should scare us a bit. Look into tradition. Become a student of the great believers of the past. Read biographies on them. Read their works. Let them become close friends.”

Tradition is not perfect. There are clearly cases in the Bible and in church history where people have inadvertently and in some cases deliberately misread, misinterpreted and manipulated the Scriptures.

- Tradition is an excellent guard for the Scriptures, but it should never be substituted for them or placed above them.
- Rightly interpreted Scripture either affirms or corrects all traditions.

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- We should look to the community of God, both living and dead, for guidance.
- We should fear coming up with something “new.”

We must, however, never place tradition above Scripture. So ultimately, we need a higher authority than tradition, emotion, experience or reason. Fortunately, we have one: The Bible.

The Bible: The primary authority of any believer’s life is the Bible. In Protestant circles, we use the term “sola scriptura” -- meaning that the Bible is the final and only infallible source of authority for our faith. We will talk more about sola scriptura later but for right now let us consider a few facts about the Bible.

- The Bible is one Book. It tells one story -- the story of God seeking and saving the fallen human race by the incarnation of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to suffer vicariously (one in the place of another) upon the cross for our sins and to rise victoriously over sin and death (and as a sign of God’s acceptance of his ultimate sacrifice for us)!
- The Bible is a collection of sixty-six ancient books (the term books is probably not the best way to put it, but it is what we will use for now).
- The Bible is made up of many genres:
 - History
 - Poetry
 - Personal letters
 - Community letters
 - Genealogies
 - Proverbs
 - Eternal laws
 - Temporal laws
 - Hymns and songs
 - Biography
 - Prophecy
- The history of the Bible goes back to the dawn of recorded history and the last book in the Bible was written at the end of the first century.
- No books have been added to the Bible since its completion and Christians do not expect that anything else will ever be added to it.

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- The books and make up the Christian Bible are called the canon of Scripture.
 - Protestant groups hold to a sixty-six books canon.
 - Catholics add a few books to the Old Testament called the deuterocanonical books or the Apocrypha.
- The Bible is divided into two testaments or covenants.
 - The first testament is called the Old Testament.
 - It deals with the creation of man
 - man's fall into sin
 - and God's promise to fix what man, through sin, broke
 - the primary focus of the Old Testament is the nation of Israel
 - God gave a promise through Abraham as father of the nation that he would have a son and through One of his descendants would come a great blessing to all the world.
 - We later learned that this great blessing is the Messiah or the Redeemer.
 - The Israelites did not know exactly what to look for, but they eagerly anticipated the coming of the Messiah.
 - Various signs and predictions of His coming are given throughout the Old Testament and they point to one who would be both a sacrifice for sin and a sovereign to rule the nation.
 - While the Jews struggled with what seems to be two contradictory roles for Messiah, we now understand that Christ would come twice:
 - once as a sacrifice for sin forever as the suffering Savior
 - once as a sovereign to rule for ever as King of Kings and Lord of lords.
 - This story is explained and developed in the New Testament
 - The Second Testament or covenant is the New Testament.

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- While the Old Testament covers thousands of years, the New Testament covers no more than about one hundred years.
- Its primary focus is on the Messiah promised in the Old Testament
 - This Messiah Is Jesus Christ, the Very Son of God who came to fix what man had broken.
 - How did God fix everything?
 - Through sending His Son, God in the flesh, to take the punishment for the sins of the world on a wooden cross
 - The New Testament is the account of the sacrifice and the implications it should have in our lives
- While the Bible is a story about what we are to believe concerning God
 - the fall of man
 - and his salvation
 - It is also a kind of instruction book on how to live
 - this instruction comes by direct commandment
 - and by example
 - it teaches us what God's will is for our lives
 - and how we should live
- The Bible is called God's Word.
 - This means when it speaks, God speaks!
 - We call this inspiration - the process by which God got His Word to us through certain men used as His instruments.
 - As we have seen God is very involved in history and as we have mentioned we should expect to see His movement through experiences in our lives, but we should not expect to hear God's literal voice speaking directly to us
 - This is how Paul says God speaks to us today:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Timothy 3:16-17

- The Bible equips us for every good work, not just some good works.

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- The Greek word for inspiration literally means “God-breathed”
 - The Bible is the very breath of God
 - Every word in the Scriptures is exactly what God wanted to write
 - yet God used over forty men
 - from all walks of life
 - from fisherman
 - to Kings
 - to write His Word exactly the way He wanted it
 - without sacrificing their individuality
 - personality
 - vocabulary
 - or writing style
 - this is one of the great mysteries of the Bible!
 - The apostle Peter puts it this way in II Peter 1:21:

“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

- As these men wrote the Scriptures they were carried along by the Holy Spirit as a boat is carried along by the wind!
- God used man by moving through their thoughts and words.

Sola Scriptura: We have many sources of authority in our lives. In addition to:

- Emotion
- Experience
- Tradition
- and reason
- We can add:
 - Parents
 - Governments

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- and pastors.
- All of these are to one degree or another from God and carry various levels of authority over our lives
- In the final analysis, however, none of these authorities are as authoritative as the Scripture
- Scripture is our final authority in all things.
- When Scripture speaks clearly it does not matter what your emotions, experience, reason, or tradition say, God’s Word is final.

In the book of Acts, shortly after Christ ascended back into heaven, the disciples were taken into custody by the governing authority of their land. They were commanded to quit preaching about Christ or suffer the legal consequences. This is their reply:

“But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:19-20

We also know that the Christians in Berea actually fact-checked the apostle Paul against the Scriptures and they were commended for it!

“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ 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.” Acts 17:10-11

Conclusion: Human beings are so constructed to both crave and need someone or something in authority over them. It is also human nature to attempt to manipulate the authorities in order to get our way. But if we live our Christian life in such a fashion we will consistently fall flat on our faces

- be outside the will of God
- be like fish out of water
- for any Christian, the best place to be is under the authority of the ONE who loves you and made you
 - He knows what is best for us

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- Why should we seek anything else?

As a Christian disciple, we must build respect for all the authorities God has given.

- Yes, God is the ultimate authority in our lives!
- The Ultimate Way, God has chosen to communicate this authority is through the Scriptures.
 - Therefore, we must read the Scripture
 - meditate upon the Scripture
 - and study the Scripture as often as we are able
- **THIS IS INDISPENSABLE FOR TRUE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP!**

Questions to ponder:

1. How has your understanding of Christian authority grown during our lesson?
2. In what ways do you think emotions could conflict or support the teachings of the Bible?
3. Why should we trust Scripture over experience? Can you give examples of where experience might support the teachings of the Bible?
4. What is tradition both dangerous and wonderful? Give examples outside of Christianity of how tradition is used.
5. If the Scripture seems to come in conflict with modern science for academic opinions, one should we as Christian believers do? Can you give some examples?