

# The Self-Attesting Authority of the Holy Scriptures (Part Two)

By Jay Wegter

***The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7).***

***“To avoid Christ at any point in the academic pursuit is to be misled, untruthful, and spiritually dead” (Greg Bahnsen).<sup>i</sup>*** One must be *presuppositionally* committed to Christ in the world of thought or else, by default be deluded by *persuasive argument* (Col 2:8). All ‘Life View’ thoughts and philosophies fall into one of two categories: *obedience* or *captivity*, as the Apostle Paul states: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Col 2:8).

In our discussions with unbelievers, we are to press the antithesis (the mutual exclusion of opposites)—and in doing so remove all imagined ‘middle ground’. For, without repentance, including intellectual repentance, one remains in a state of foolishness, folly, and eternal darkness.

***There are only two starting points in the realm of knowledge: God or self. God the Lord is the Originator of all truth.*** Therefore, all our knowledge is a *receptive reconstruction* of God’s primary thoughts. Intellectual self-sufficiency always leads to foolishness and delusion. According to Scripture, a ‘fool’ does not want to find the truth, he only wants to be justified in his vain imaginations (obfuscations). The fool will not leave his intellectual folly UNTIL (by the Word and the Spirit) he sees that his imagined autonomy is hostile to knowledge (Eph 4:17ff.).

***An appeal to neutrality is nothing more than a thinly veiled disguise for all-out war against the epistemic authority of Christ.*** By Christ’s *epistemic authority*, we mean that Christ is the Word of God, the eternal utterance of God, the *Logos*. Therefore, He is our ultimate source of knowing. His lordship over knowledge is absolute.

To paraphrase Christian apologist and theologian Gordon Clark, we could say of the *Logos* of John 1:1—in the beginning was Logic; Logic was with God and Logic was God. Christ embodies the laws of logic contained in creation and the Bible—Christ (*Logos*) is the Agent of creation (1:3). Thus, as Gordon Clark observes, the laws of logic are not a secular principle imposed on Christian world view, the laws of logic perfectly correspond with Scripture’s assertion that Christ, who is the eternal *Logos*, ‘upholds all things’ (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3). He is the source of rationality which gives order and purpose to our universe.<sup>ii</sup>

***For John the Apostle, Logos is God, the creative Word, who takes on human flesh in the man Jesus Christ. The Logos of John’s Gospel is personal, and active; He is divine reason; He acts as the ordering principle of the universe.*** To the Hebrew, historically “the word of God” was the active self-assertion of the divine personality. “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host” (Ps 33:6).

To the Greek, the *logos* formula denoted the rational mind that ruled the universe. In his Gospel, John was endeavoring to bring out the full significance of the Incarnation of Christ to the Gentile world as well as to the Jewish people. John asserts that the “Word” is the source of all

that is visible and antedates (pre-exists) the totality of the material world.

The Jewish Hellenist philosopher Philo used *logos* to try to synthesize Jewish tradition and Platonism. According to Philo, *logos*, was the mediating principle between God and the world. Philo in part, drew the concept from the O.T.—that *logos* can be understood as God’s Word, or divine wisdom, which is immanent (present) in the world.

In the prologue of John’s gospel, the Apostle declares that the *Logos* was already present at the creation—He was ‘in the beginning’ (Genesis 1:1). The *Logos* had the closest possible relationship with God (Greek – *pros*, ‘face to face with’—John 1:1). *Logos* was preexistent to all creation; *Logos* was God (in the literal Greek, “and God was the Word.”) (Jn 1:1).

***The entire work of creation was carried out through and by the Logos*** (Greek – *dia*, through the agency of). *Logos* is the source of life, and the light of every man (Jn 1:4, 9). God’s life incarnate in Christ is called ‘light’. “Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life’” (Jn 8:12). Christ sheds light on the value of ontological existence; upon morals and ethics. Truth and love are synonyms for light. Evil, darkness, and hatred, are antonyms of light.

***Christ illumines the fact that the universe is ‘value packed’ with moral structure. ‘Light’ is the moral/ethical dimension of truth and knowledge.*** The inescapable connotation is that men are accountable to God. The light gives us our moral mandates. This cosmos is not ‘value free’, but value-laden. John 1:5 tells us that when the Word shone into the darkness, “*the darkness did not comprehend it.*” The darkness did not grasp the light; the darkness did not embrace the light, nor was it able to quench the light.

***Christ, the Word of God is the revealer of God (Jn 1:18). His office is to make God known.*** “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*” (Jn 1:18). The manner in which the ‘darkness’ reacted to light manifests just how deep man’s depravity is, and how entrenched man’s hatred is toward God. “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil” (Jn 3:18, 19-21).

In Revelation 19:11-16, the *Logos* is a conquering militant ‘general’—the ‘*Logos* of God’ takes back the title deed to the earth. As in Hebrews 4:12 (“the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword”), it is the O.T. picture of the shattering effects of God’s Word upon the minds of fallen men.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and on His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *on Him* which no one knows except Himself. *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh, He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev 19:11-16).

*In the philosophic use, logos is depicted as a ‘shock absorber’ or mediating influence between God and the universe—the manifestation of divine principle in the world.* The use of *Logos* in John 1 differs radically from philosophic usage. For Greeks, the word, *logos*, was essentially impersonal reason. But, for John, *Logos* was essentially “Word,” – the eternal utterance of God; the second Person of the Godhead. By contrast, in philosophy *logos* is impersonal ‘it’. For John, and thus for all true believers, *Logos* is ‘He’—God incarnate, revealing, upholding, and redeeming. John lifts Christ above the materialistic, pagan concept of deities. The source of John’s *Logos* doctrine is the historical Person, and work of Christ, of whom, and of which John was an eye witness.

*John does not interpret Jesus by the logos of Greek philosophy, John interprets logos by Jesus.* In other words, John does not superimpose *logos* philosophy on Jesus, John proclaims that Christ is the Creator and source of rationality and order in the universe. Knowledge, rationality, and logic are not self-existent realities in our universe, they originate, and are upheld every moment by Christ, the living Word of God. Therefore, the antithesis between imagined human autonomy and Christ’s authority cannot be erased.<sup>iii</sup> We must confront the arrogance which assumes that genuine knowledge is attainable independent of God’s direction and standards. Attempts at self-sufficiency unavoidably result in futility.

So, this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (Eph 4:17-19).

*God’s justice is filled with His intention to demonstrate His wrath in the form of a divine ‘object lesson’.* The propensity for human autonomy from God is idolatrous; it causes God’s wrath to burn. Like a public hanging, error and rebellion will forever be hung on the ‘gallows’ of God’s justice and eternally exhibited in all its ugliness and horror. “What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?” (Rom 9:22). “For the Lord will execute His Word on the earth, thoroughly and quickly” (Rom 9:28).

Consider how men who do not fear God are oblivious to this public purpose of God to demonstrate His wrath. *God’s unbending purpose is to publicly make foolish the wisdom of the world. God is destroying human wisdom through ‘Christ and Him crucified’.*

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1:18-20)?

***God is in the pride-destruction business.*** The Word of God says that one cannot know God and the world aright by means of independently exercised reason. Reverence and faith must precede the knowledge of God and what He has made. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7).

***The Hebrew word for fear is YARAH.<sup>iv</sup> It means to hold in honor—to be afraid—to be in awe—to worship—even to be alarmed.*** The word ‘fear’ in the context of fearing or revering God frequently refers to the reverence and awe and respect which God’s Person elicits

Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, *and* to keep the LORD’S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? (Deut 10:12-13).

***The fear of God is associated with obedience to His commands—obey, walk, do, listen, hear, fear, heed—thus fear of God is inseparable from appropriate moral conduct as set forth and required in Scripture.*** Fear of God is also associated with the wonder and awe of God which are an essential part of true worship.

Of Job’s fear of God, the Word says that he was “blameless, upright, turning away from evil” (Job 1:8). The fear of the Lord is wisdom. Proverbs and Psalms are the major books of the Bible dealing with the fear of God. Fear of God, wisdom, and knowledge are closely associated in Scripture. The theme of Proverbs is the wise man versus the fool. The wise man fears the Lord; the fool is lacking fear of God. I think that we are seeing that truth is ethical in nature, for the prerequisite necessary to hold fast to the truth is the fear of God and the hatred of sin.

***In Ecclesiastes, God’s absolute sovereignty is a just cause for fear and reverence for God.*** The fear of God underlies wise decision-making. “The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person” (Eccl 12:13). The whole duty of man is to *fear God and keep His commandments*—consider how ‘rational’ this is in view of the fact that God will “*bring every act to judgment; whether good or evil*” (Eccl 12:13-14).

***A true understanding of who God is inspires worship, even trembling.*** “Who understands the power of Your anger, and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?” (Ps 90:11). The fear of God inspires moral conduct. “But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God” (Neh 5:15). Such fear is *imparted* to God’s people and learned through the Word of God in order that they might not sin. “Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin” (Ex 20:20; Jer 32:40).

The hard-hearted do not have the fear of God. “Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways and harden our heart from fearing You? Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes of Your heritage” (Is 63:17). Jesus commands men to fear God. “But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you,

fear Him! (Lu 12:5). The fear of the Lord is the first principle of wisdom. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*; His praise endures forever” (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7).

***The fear of God is also associated with knowledge.*** “Then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God” (Prov 2:5). We’ve seen that it is through the fear of God that men gain knowledge and wisdom. And, as those who revere God, we gladly come under the Word of God, for it is God’s ‘imperial’ instrument by which He rules us.

***God’s purposes underlie ultimate reality. Thus, Scripture teaches a metaphysical system—all things are of God, through God, and unto God.*** “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:33-36). Theologically—this is “Mount Everest”—all rationality therefore is stipulated upon reasoning from this vantage point of all things from God, through God, and to God. There is no other reality.<sup>v</sup>

***Therefore, we must think God’s thoughts after Him in order to bow before His authority in the Holy Scriptures and in order to understand and interpret the world as a whole.*** The Bible’s *metaphysical scheme* (i.e. Romans 11:33-36, quoted above) is absolutely essential for Christian Worldview. What a contrast this is to the unbeliever’s metaphysical system of empiricism, speculation, myth, and folly. In spite of Scripture’s self-attesting authority, unbelievers attempt to reason autonomously (apart from God’s revelation).

***The philosophy of empiricism (facts contain their own interpretation) is the preferred error of Western thinkers. Empiricism suggests that man, by studious observation (and by science), may successfully aspire to explain all phenomena (apart from divine revelation).*** Empiricism cannot do the following:

- It cannot correct illusions (it can’t go beyond appearances).
- It cannot open up the world of reality lying beyond the senses.
- It cannot determine the limits of possibility and impossibility.
- It cannot deal with the world as a whole (it’s left with a fragmented view of the world).
- It cannot produce certainty concerning truth and meaning.
- It cannot set forth an explanation of the nature of reality.<sup>vi</sup>

***Metaphysically, empiricism is capable only of reckless flights of speculation (the goal of collecting and correlating facts will not yield ultimate reality, nor answer ultimate questions).*** Empiricism cannot *discover* the plan of redemption by looking at a cursed earth in which nature is red in tooth and claw and dominated by cruelty. The Apostle Paul tells us why this principle of decay and suffering dominates our world. “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of

God” (Rom 8:20-21).

***This is sobering indeed, that the unbeliever, because he rejects the infallible Word of God, cannot make sense of life, no matter how dedicated his investigation.*** Therefore, is it any wonder the impenitent reprobate is ultimately plunged into the depths of eternal confusion? Since Satan energizes this blindness (2 Cor 4:3-4), it should not surprise us that for the present, humanistic utopian ideas appear attractive to those who embrace ‘deified’ human reason.

***To be void of fear of God is to abandon the very condition necessary for knowledge.*** Thus, to reject Scripture as the presuppositional starting point is to destroy the possibility of knowledge. Man cannot ‘get out in front of God’ and reason his way to truth. The faculty of human reason was created to receive God’s revelation. Therefore, we are to call unbelievers to abandon their suppression of the knowledge of God (Rom 1:18-23), to repent of their rebellious mindset, and to abandon the ‘worship’ of their own imaginings.

***What is the highest, ultimate standard and criterion for truth; a standard that is clearly known, possessing the authority to validate or refute all other proposed authorities for truth? Answer: it is the Word of God.***<sup>vii</sup> God the Lord interprets everything definitively. If we want to know something, we must think His thoughts after Him. God plans, knows, and sees all—therefore the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.<sup>viii</sup> He knows Himself, then creates a cosmos and fulfills His plan for it.

***Authority is part of His Lordship. He has the right to command, to tell us to obey, and to tell us what to believe.*** When sinners try to gain knowledge apart from the fear of the Lord, that knowledge is necessarily distorted. Why is this so? The answer is that God Almighty upholds all reality. His relationship to the creation as Maker, Owner, Upholder, Ruler, Owner, and Judge, IS the very essence of prime reality (again, we cannot outgrow Romans 11:33-36; “all things are from Him, and through Him, and to Him”). We can only know God, the universe, man, and man’s place in the cosmos IF we submit our minds to the mind of God found in His self-revelation—the Holy Scriptures.

***When we speak of the unbeliever’s knowledge being distorted, we do not mean that every sentence he utters is distorted—what we do mean is that his worldview is distorted, twisted, and unreliable—it does not correlate with reality.*** To make self, or something other than the God of the Bible, the ultimate reference point, and the final standard of truth is to commit epistemological suicide. The willful assumption of autonomy always results in epistemological disaster. God calls this speculation, utter foolishness, for it is helpless to yield reliable knowledge.

***The unbeliever’s method of knowing—his epistemology—his philosophy of fact—and his criterion for truth are collectively (according to Scripture) what make him a fool (Rom 1:18-25).*** What any individual regards as a fact depends upon his worldview.<sup>ix</sup>

The autonomous man (who wants knowledge rationally, but not revelationally) becomes his own ultimate epistemological authority—this is hostile to the Word of God and it is abhorrent to God who proclaims Himself as the ultimate authority of the universe. God condemns man’s self-referential quest for independence and intellectual self-sufficiency.<sup>x</sup>

***When an unbeliever questions the Word of God as an ‘autonomous’ critic, the Word of God draws that person into judgment.*** God’s sure Word is the final authority and final criterion for truth. God’s Word is the ultimate authority in the world of thought. “Woe to him who strives with his Maker” (Is 45:9). The creature has no right to question the Creator.<sup>xi</sup> The self-attesting authority of God’s Word is the necessary presupposition for all true knowledge. Rather than having God pass tests of fact, logic, beneficial effect, and subjective satisfaction, the Apostle Paul taught that logic and fact (and all other criteria) are senseless without God.<sup>xii</sup>

***A fool trusts his own heart.*** “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who walks wisely will be delivered” (Prov 28:26; 29:11; 12:15). A fool trusts his own utterances, his own opinions, and his own professed wisdom. It is impossible to arrive at truth in this way, and it is impossible to autonomously verify the Word of God. “If one does not begin with the truth of God, he cannot conclude his argumentation with either truth or God.”<sup>xiii</sup>

***God is ultimate self-consciousness—God’s knowledge of Himself is foundational—what He says is truth, is real, and is fact.*** He is self-sufficient Creator and Designer (Ex 3:14). The mind of man is not self-sufficient; we must take in the Word of God as our starting point and standard of knowledge. We must presuppose Christianity—nothing can be known if the Creator-Redeemer is not known first. The knowledge of God is the condition of rational inquiry.<sup>xiv</sup>

***Autonomy is destructive to human reason because autonomy makes impossible demands on finite, dependent, human intellect.*** In the Word of God, the knowledge of God is so certain that no reasonable man should doubt it. “All the treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge are in Christ” (Col 2:3). Aside from Christ and His self-attesting Word—man can produce nothing but vanity. These vain opinions are to be rejected. Paul describes them as, “Arguments that are falsely called ‘knowledge’” (1 Tim 6:20). Thus, the quest for certainty can be successful only as one takes the fear of the Lord as the beginning of knowledge.<sup>xv</sup>

***God states in His Word that the fear of the Lord is the only reliable ‘gate of knowledge’—all other proposed gateways to knowledge put a person in a position to NOT possess or acquire truth and knowledge.*** All other proposed gateways to knowledge (*empiricism, philosophic naturalism, man-made religion, etc.*) assume that man’s reason is autonomous—in other words, that man’s reasoning processes are able to attain real knowledge independent of God’s infallible revelation.

***Here is a summary of reasons why the fear of the Lord is the sole gateway to truth:***

- Man, as the image of God is an *analog* of God. Man’s mind is uniquely created to receive revelation from God. As such man’s mind is not a neutral reasoning faculty. Man, as *image-bearer* of God is designed by God to think His thoughts after Him. The highest man can attain to in the realm of truth is to think God’s thoughts after Him.<sup>xvi</sup>
- Man is utterly dependent upon divine revelation in order to know as he ought. What God reveals in Scripture, man could never discover through his own independent inquiry.
- God structures all reality. God and His plan for His creation comprise ultimate reality. The Word of God is His revelation concerning Himself and His plan.
- Truth has no origin or existence independent of God. Therefore, truth is an ethical issue.

***Truth is an ethical issue for the following reasons:***

- Man was created with the **capacity** to know God. God made the knowledge of Himself evident *in them*, and evident *to them* (Rom 1:19). There are certain attributes of God that every man knows—this knowledge of God is inescapable (Rom 1:20; Ps 19).
- God charges man with **culpability** for suppressing the truth of God (Rom 1:18). Sinners studiously suppress the knowledge of God that they have been given. Because they work to suppress the knowledge of God they already possess, they are without excuse (1:20). Man is eternally responsible with what he does with both general and special revelation.
- Those who suppress the truth bear the **consequence** of their willful sin (Rom 1:18). The wrath of God is revealed against their ungodliness and unrighteousness which calls forth the wrath of God against them because they “hold down the truth in unrighteousness.”
- God paid an infinite **cost** to put men back in possession of the truth. Christ is God’s truth incarnate. Christ is God’s eternal utterance; the Word made flesh. Nothing less than the death of the Son of God in the sinner’s place can remove the darkness from men’s minds and hearts (2 Cor 4:4-6). Regeneration (purchased for God’s people at the cross of Christ) is the **resetting** of the mind to receive God’s truth from His self-attesting Word.

Endnotes:

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<sup>i</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 5

<sup>ii</sup> By the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, *logos* described the faculty of human reason and knowledge that men had of the world and each other. In the Socratic view, mankind wanted to get the most from life by finding values in the universe, but the quest for these values was conducted **rationally**, rather than **revelationally**. Aristotle, who studied under Plato, developed the concept of *logos* (or logic) as depicting the rules of human rationality. Stoics saw *logos* as the animating power in the universe; nature’s overall rational structure. At the time of Christ’s earthly ministry, both the Jews and the Hellenists understood the idea of *logos*. As a result, John’s Gospel must have hit like a ‘smart bomb’. Especially for the Hellenists, the Apostle John turns the concept of *logos* on its head when he claimed “*Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8

<sup>iv</sup> NIDOT, 2:527

<sup>v</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 180

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181

<sup>vii</sup> John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 7-8

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50-52

<sup>ix</sup> Michael Kruger, *TMS Journal*, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” 12:1, pp.76-78

<sup>x</sup> Kruger, p. 78

<sup>xi</sup> Greg Bahnsen, “Socrates or Christ: The Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, p. 217

<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xiv</sup> Greg Bahnsen, “Pragmatism, Prejudice, and Presuppositionalism,” *Ibid.*, pp. 287-290

<sup>xv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292

<sup>xvi</sup> All the great leading scientists initially were Bible-believing Christians. They believed that they were---in the words of astronomer Johannes Kepler---“thinking God’s thoughts after Him.” They understood that a rational God had made a rational universe, and it was their job as scientists to discover those laws that the Creator had impressed into His creation. Kepler (1571-1630) wrote, “Since we astronomers are priests of the highest God in regard to the



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book of nature, it befits us to be thoughtful, not of the glory of our minds, but rather, above all else, of the glory of God." The scientists were thus God's priests, in Kepler's view.