

# APOLOGIA

... always be ready to give a defense [Greek, *apologia*]  
to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you ... 1 PETER 3:15

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## WHAT IS THE BIBLE BASIS OF AUTHORITY?

### ***CONFLICT IN CONCEPTS OF AUTHORITY***

1. **ROMAN CATHOLIC** - God makes His will known through the Scriptures AND authoritative pronouncements of the church (i.e. Roman Catholic hierarchy, especially the Pope)
2. **ORTHODOX** - Scripture, but as authoritatively interpreted by tradition, particularly the Seven Ecumenical Councils (1. Nicea, 325 AD; 2. Constantinople, 381 AD; 3. Ephesus, 431 AD; 4. Chalcedon, 451 AD; 5. Constantinople, 553 AD; 6. Constantinople, 680-1 AD; 7. Nicea (mostly), 787 AD)
3. **CHURCH OF ENGLAND** (Anglican) - The prophetic and apostolic testimony vested in Scripture, together with the episcopal authority of the Church (i.e. bishops, who, unlike the Apostles and Roman Catholic *magisterium*, do not make infallible pronouncements)
4. **EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT** - Inspired (infallible, according to fundamentalists) Scripture, interpreted directly by the Holy Spirit without 'official' aids; evangelicals differ on the use of 'unofficial' aids, (e.g. whether Bible helps are essential; forms of church government, discipline)
5. **CHARISMATIC** - Scripture, interpreted by the Holy Spirit (generally without human mediation, though the 'third wave' movement is a modern example of the tendency to crave authoritative teaching, in this case not popes, councils or bishops, but modern 'prophets and apostles')
6. **JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES** - Infallible Scripture, but ONLY as interpreted by fallible 'faithful and discreet slave' (Watchtower organization)

### ***EVANGELICAL EMPHASIS –***

### ***INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE, NOT CHURCH***

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1. **INFALLIBLE AUTHORITY** - Virtually all evangelical literature which discusses the foundation of biblical authority concentrates on the nature of INSPIRATION. Especially in North America is the authority of the Bible inevitably linked to the doctrine of INERRANCY - as usually stated, the concept that the 'original autographs' of the Bible books were without error in every detail (i.e. verbally inspired). This emphasis, and this definition of inspiration, though not shared by all Protestants nor even all evangelicals, parallels the Roman Catholic position – that we need an INFALLIBLE AUTHORITY ON EARTH as well as in heaven.

2. **INERRANCY** - North American evangelicals, in all good faith, have therefore placed the credibility of Christianity on the foundation of an INFALLIBLE BOOK (contrast the Roman claim of an infallible book needing an infallible interpreter). But since all the above communions admit that the authority of Scripture, particularly the New Testament, rests upon the AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLES, we must establish the basis of apostolic authority before we can address the issue of the nature of Bible authority.

While all communions agree on the necessity of an AUTHORITATIVE SCRIPTURE, modern debate, even among evangelicals, rages about the *nature* of its authority. Most popular evangelical literature inevitably attaches this authority to the inerrancy position, fostering an all-or-nothing, fortress-under-siege mentality (e.g. Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* and *The Bible in the Balance*). This type of argument often links liberalism's doctrinal deviations to its abandonment of inerrant Scripture. However, as millions of Christians who have not wandered into liberalism do NOT subscribe to the inerrancy position, we must ask whereupon such Christians rest the authority of the Bible if NOT upon an inerrant (original) text.

### ***THE NATURE OF APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY IN ACTS***

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While the book of Acts is often used to establish the authority of the Spirit in the Church, and among charismatics and Pentecostals to demonstrate what they consider NORMATIVE Christianity, it is seldom

used to demonstrate the authority of Scripture. That is simply because the early successes of the Church did not depend on Scripture per se, but on the power of the APOSTOLIC TESTIMONY. While the Acts of the Apostles lays little stress on the concepts of ‘inspiration’, ‘infallibility’ or ‘inerrancy’ (the only use of ‘infallible’ is in Acts 1:3, where it refers, not to Scripture, but to the proofs of the resurrection, and is better rendered *convincing proofs*). ‘Inspiration’ and ‘inerrancy’ or related words occur not at all in Acts. In fact, the ONLY use of the words ‘inspiration’ or ‘inspired’ in the NT is the familiar text in 2 Timothy 3:16. A few moments thought, however, suffices to show that Paul, in urging Timothy not to neglect inspired Scripture, could not be arguing according to modern evangelical patterns. For it is evident that: 1. the ‘sacred writings’ from which Timothy had learned ‘the wisdom that leads to salvation’ (3:15) were undoubtedly the Septuagint Greek translation, not the Hebrew ‘autographs’, which probably had already disappeared; 2. Paul was here referring to the Old Testament, not the entire Bible. The ‘inspired Scripture’ used by the early church – with both Jew and Gentile – was therefore the flawed, textually-different Greek translation of the Old Testament, not the ‘inerrant’ Hebrew originals. Nevertheless, God used this corrupt vessel to *turn the world upside down* (Acts 17:1-6), even as He used the clay vessels called Apostles to that end (2 Cor.4:7).

In contrast to the emphasis on inspiration (undefined) in 2 Timothy, and in contrast to modern emphasis on inerrancy, Luke, the author of the gospel AND Acts, rests the case for Christianity upon: 1. the reliability of eyewitnesses; 2. the viability of their testimony; 3. the accuracy of his record of this testimony (Luke 1:1-3). Therefore, Luke affirms, his reader *might know the certainty of the things* he had learned. In his preface to Acts, Luke ties this CERTAINTY to its ultimate foundation – the RESURRECTION of Christ. In Acts 1:3 Luke lays the emphasis upon these ‘convincing proofs’ (‘unquestionable evidence’, *Amplified NT*) in establishing the authority of the Apostles, to whom this evidence was given.

This emphasis upon APOSTOLIC WITNESS continues through Acts, as these references demonstrate:

- 1:8                   ... you shall be my WITNESSES both in Jerusalem ...  
to the remotest part of the earth
- 1:21,22           ... of the men who have accompanied us all the time ...  
one of these should become a WITNESS with us of His  
resurrection ...

- 2:32               This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all  
WITNESSES.
- 3:15               ... the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead,  
to which we are WITNESSES.
- 4:33               And with great power the APOSTLES were giving  
WITNESS to the resurrection ...
- 5:31,22           He is the One whom God exalted to His right hand as  
a Prince and a Saviour ... And we are WITNESSES of  
these things ...
- 10:39-43          And we are WITNESSES of all the things He did ...  
God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that  
He should be manifested, not to all the people, but to  
WITNESSES chosen beforehand by God, to us, who  
ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.  
And he ordered US to preach to the people, and  
solemnly to TESTIFY [*diamarturasthai*] that this is the  
One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the  
living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear  
WITNESS that through His name every one who  
believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins ...  
[and let us note that the Spirit here seals the SUFFICIENCY  
OF THIS WITNESS by dramatically closing Peter’s ‘gospel  
message’!]

## ***JEWISH LEGAL PRECEDENT FOR TESTIMONY***

Even where the technical word *witness* (the Greek verb *martureo* and its cognates) does not occur, the emphasis in the speeches of the Apostles follows the above pattern. For example, Peter and John, in defying the order of the Jewish authorities to cease their preaching, counter with *we cannot stop speaking about WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD*. Consistently, the Apostles centre their witness, their ‘good news’, upon FACTUAL TESTIMONY – that type of evidence which will stand up in any court today, and stood up even then in courts of the civilized world. For instance, in the law of Moses the demonstration of guilt or innocence depended upon the testimony of two or three witnesses - that is, persons who had SEEN OR HEARD that which was to be admitted as evidence (Deut.17:6; 19:15). Indeed

this is a higher standard of trustworthiness than we demand in our modern jurisprudence. Yet in the law of Moses, as in our courts, the viability or credibility of evidence does not depend on the INFALLIBILITY of the witness, but upon his or her CREDIBILITY. Factors may prevent the testimony of a witness from being accredited, such as prior relationship to the accused, or moral character, or demonstrated bias. The testimony of a witness may count for nothing at all if it can be shown that he is not trustworthy; i.e. an habitual liar, psychologically unstable, etc.

Yet neither in Mosaic law nor in modern jurisprudence is it demanded that a witness be INFALLIBLE. Obviously all legal human testimony, save Christ's, would be invalidated if we set such a standard. Granted that the witness is of sound mind, and unbiased, we give the benefit of the doubt that his testimony is reliable. That is, we depend ultimately upon the EVIDENCE of the witness's senses, and the ability of that witness to process the information reaching those senses, i.e. the viability or dependability of his faculties.

This is the very kind of evidence with which the Apostles hoped to convince the world of their gospel. More important still, it is the very basis of the authority given to the Apostles by the Lord Himself. For before commanding them to *Go therefore ... make disciples ... teaching them* the Lord first convinced them of HIS OWN AUTHORITY, which authority was demonstrated infallibly by His rising from the dead.

*And when they saw Him they worshipped Him, but some doubted.*

MATTHEW 28:17-20

The forty days with Jesus after the resurrection put to rest whatever doubts remained in the Apostles, whether they be doubts regarding the reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection (Luke 24:36-43) or doubts in regard to the reliability of their own – or others' – senses (John 20:20,25). We who transmit their testimony (the New Testament) would do well to imitate the Apostles' emphasis upon of the resurrection in demonstrating the truth of Christianity. Rather than wrangling over the nature of biblical inspiration, while the world looks on bemused and uncomprehending, we should return to the method that demonstrated the authority of Christ to the power-obsessed Roman empire. Christ, Paul stated, was

***declared with power to be the Son of God, by the resurrection from the dead ...***

ROMANS 1:4