



# Critical Issues Commentary

A BIBLICALLY BASED COMMENTARY ON ISSUES THAT IMPACT YOU

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## THE GOSPEL AND ROMAN CATHOLICISM

BY BOB DEWAAY

*"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all."*

(1Timothy 1:15)

*"He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."*

(1John 5:12,13)

There are many hurting and disillusioned people who grew up under the teachings of the Roman Catholic church. They are disillusioned because the church that they were told is their only hope of getting to God has been found to be scandalous. Knowing nothing but the Catholic Church, feeling let down by the Catholic Church, and knowing of no other way to find God, they feel hopeless. This article is addressed to such individuals. I want to share with you some things that Jesus and His Apostles taught that you probably never heard from your Church. What you know so far seems like "bad" news: only the Roman Catholic Church holds the key to finding God's forgiveness and this church has lost credibility. So you either support the church in spite of evidence that there are many serious problems, or you give up on finding God. What the church has not told you, but is contained in the Bible she claims to believe, is the truth that will set you free.

### JESUS DID IT ALL FOR YOU

The most common problem in the minds of many who have grown up under the guidance of the Roman Catholic church, is the idea that Jesus did not do enough to assure anyone of

heaven. It is understood that the works prescribed by the church are necessary if one is to ever hope to please God and find forgiveness. Another problem is the popular perception that all good people go to heaven, especially if they are Catholic. So there are the confusing, conflicting notions that only by obeying Rome can one hope to find heaven and that everyone will probably go there anyway unless they are horrible criminals. I will show you from the Bible that both of these ideas are not true.

Let us start with the idea that all "good" people go to heaven, especially if they are Catholic. One Bible verse quoted at the beginning of this article says that only the one who "has the Son" has life. Those who do not are excluded. The next verse makes it clear that it is eternal life that Saint John was writing about. The Roman Catholic church believes that there is a literal heaven and hell, and they are right about that matter. But what you have not been told is what the Bible says is the basis of God's final judgment that determines your eternal destiny. Saint John says it is your relationship to Jesus Christ that determines this. Listen to what Jesus said as quoted by His beloved Apostle John: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and*

*believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).* Jesus says that eternal life is something that one can have based on believing His Words and trusting God. When He says, "passed out of death," He is speaking of the matter of our sinful condition. The penalty for sin is death. Here is how Saint Paul explained it: "*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 6:23).

God allowed Saint John, at the end of his life, to see and write about what will happen at the end of this age. He wrote about the final judgment: "*And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds" (Revelation 20:12).* He then wrote about the final destiny of those whose names were not found in the book of life: "*And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).* What we need to know is how our name can be found in that book. What work can we do that will assure that our name will be found in the roll book of heaven? The Roman Catholic church has a long list of works you have been told to do, works that will keep you busy the rest of your life. But what did Jesus say we must do?

Jesus was asked directly what work was necessary to please God: "*They said therefore to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 6:28).* What do you think Jesus' answer was? Did He tell them to make sure to be very religious for the rest of their lives and make sure they give to the church? No. Saint John wrote down the

very words of Jesus on this matter: “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent’” (John 6:29). Jesus was the one God sent, who existed with God from all eternity, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus walked the face of the earth as the only sinless One, fully human and fully God. The Roman Catholic church believes these facts. What Jesus said was that the work of God is to put your faith in Christ. This is not a meritorious work you do, but it is the work of God in you that transforms you.

This belief that is necessary to please God and to have your name found in the Book of Life so that you escape the final judgment, includes trusting in Christ for what He has done for you. Just after Jesus told those inquirers about the work of God, which is faith in Christ, Jesus also said this:

*Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you, that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” (John 6:35-37)*

You must come to Christ and trust Him as the One who has everything you need. Many who personally saw Jesus do many miracles did not believe on Him. Those whom he was talking to in John 6 had seen Him multiply bread miraculously and walk on water. Yet they refused to believe Him when He taught them that He was the only way to God. Consider what He said to these same people: “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40).

### PAYING THE PENALTY

So Jesus taught that you can have eternal life and have assurance that you will participate in the final resurrection to

spend eternity in heaven with Jesus and all the saints. There is important content about this faith you must have that the Roman Catholic church likely has never told you. Their own Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all sins for sinners who trust Him, once for all. It is the **once for all** that your church has failed to inform you about. You likely feel like Jesus has to be sacrificed over and over again in the Mass, and that you must participate or your sins can never be forgiven. Please let me share some Bible verses with you about this matter so you can judge for yourself what Jesus and His personal disciples taught.

Saint Peter explained the purpose of Jesus’ death, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God” (1Peter 3:18a). Since Jesus was sinless, He died for **our** sins, not His. That He died “once for all,” means that the payment He made to God for sins was sufficient payment for any and all sins. No further sacrifice would ever be necessary. When we speak of the blood of Jesus, we are speaking of his laid down life, and the literal blood shed when He was crucified. That one act satisfied God’s holy and just requirements for payment for sins. “Once for all” means that it never needs to be or will be repeated. We need to trust His once for all payment for our sins rather than trust human works. All religious works are worthless if they are not done out of faith in Christ’s finished work. Saint Paul wrote, “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23b).

Peter also told that Jesus’ “once for all” death for sins is for the purpose of “bringing us to God.” It is Jesus who brings us to God. Those who put their faith in Jesus and Him alone, He will bring to heaven so that we might be in the presence of God. Jesus Himself said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). After Jesus died for sins, He was raised from the dead on the third day. After appearing to His disciples He bodily ascended into heaven. The apostles of Christ had been told to

be comforted, because He was making a place for them there. Jesus then made a very strong statement, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me’” (John 14:6). Jesus and Jesus alone can bring us to the Father, and give us a place in Heaven.

### THE MEDIATOR

God brings us into a relationship with Himself when we come to Jesus Christ by faith and believe that He paid the penalty, once for all. This means that we repent (turn away from trusting our selves or anything other than God) and believe (trust fully in the resurrected Christ). Those who repent and believe are saved from the wrath of God. Saint John wrote about this, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). God’s wrath against sin was averted by the blood of Jesus. The Bible tells us about how Jesus made a better sacrifice than the Old Testament animal sacrifices:

*And not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:12-14)*

Jesus cleanses us not just by an external covering of sin, but He cleanses us from the inside out. He does a work of grace in our hearts and minds. When our conscience is defiled because we know we have sinned, doing a few good deeds will not cleanse it. If we trust Jesus’ finished work, He will fully cleanse our conscience, making us forgiven and clean.

The next verse in the book of Hebrews after the one just quoted calls

Jesus our “mediator.” This is very important for you to understand. It on this point where the Roman Catholic Church has misled you and millions of others. You likely have been told that there a numerous mediators between you and God, from the local priest, to the bishops, other prelates, the pope, glorified saints, and Mary. However, please think about what Saint Paul wrote in the Bible: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1Timothy 2:5). There is only **one** mediator, Jesus Christ. You may have been told that you cannot go directly to Jesus. If so, nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible says that you **must** go to Jesus to be saved: “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Jesus is man and God, the only perfect, sinless savior. As God He is able to hear your prayers as well as everyone else’s. Any person lacking the qualities of deity cannot do so. We are finite and shall always be finite for all eternity. If you are in a room with ten or 15 people speaking at once, you are soon unable to understand any of them. Imagine having a million people speaking to you at once! To be able to hear them all simultaneously and respond to them would require infinite intelligence and power. Jesus has that, since He is God. Mary is a glorified saint<sup>1</sup>, but still finite as are the rest of the saints and all created beings. Jesus was never created, but

existed with God and as God from all eternity. Therefore, Jesus can hear you and go to the Father on your behalf, if you trust him.<sup>2</sup> Mary cannot possibly hear and answer all the prayers being directed her way every day, she is a **finite human being**. Only Jesus can help you, and He wants you to ask Him to. Jesus makes this invitation to you: “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28,29).

**TRUSTING JESUS FOR SALVATION**

The Gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. The gospel is free. None of us will ever merit salvation, it is given to sinners as a free gift. The Bible ends with and invitation to receive this free gift: “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost” (Revelation 22:17). Coming to Christ means giving up trusting self, man, or any religious system. It means trusting the finished work of Christ on your behalf.

The message of the Bible is very simple. It is summarized in **Jeremiah**: “Thus says the Lord, “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the Lord . . . Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord And whose trust is the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:5,7). To trust any system

of religious works is to trust man. We must repent of this and believe upon Jesus Christ whom God raised from the dead. Saint Paul wrote: “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Romans 10:9). To be saved means to be rescued from the penalty of sin and the wrath of God. To be saved means to be assured of spending eternity in heaven with God and all the glorified saints.

You have probably been told that no one can know for sure if they are completely right with God and assured of heaven. The Bible says differently. I will repeat this passage that was cited at the beginning of this article: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1John 5:13). You can know your eternal destiny now. Lay aside all the religious works and human intermediaries and turn in faith to Christ, believing that He paid the penalty for sins, once for all. God cannot lie, and He said that He gives eternal life to all who believe in Christ.

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1. According to the Bible all believers are saints. See Romans 1:7
2. You can ask the Father in Jesus’ name also, See John 16:23.

**THE BATTLE FOR AUTHORITY**

BY K. JENTOFT

Prophecy and Subjective Words:

Their place in the Church

Their place in one’s life

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” (2Timothy 3:16)

**Premise:**

Scripture is the only objective revealed Authority until the return of Jesus.

**Thesis:**

By seeking or claiming additional authority in subjective words beyond what is written in Scripture, many pursue lawlessness and sin.

**Definitions:**

- Authoritative words—the objective authority to define an action as God’s

will. Authoritative words demand obedience; any failure to listen and obey them is “sin.”

- Objective—certain; explicitly proven by Scripture.
- Directive—here meant in the authoritative sense; declares that a choice or action is certainly God’s will.
- Predictive—foretelling a future event.
- Subjective words—man’s words based upon individual perceptions not objectively proven in Scripture (may be

disregarded without risk of sinning or opposing God's will.)

### THE BATTLE FOR AUTHORITY

Does the completion of the Scriptures mean that the Holy Spirit has ceased working with men or speaking to us subjectively? No. It means that the Holy Spirit has ceased giving us additional "authoritative" words. Jesus came to Earth as a man, spoke to us the words of God and gave us gifts when He ascended (**Ephesians 4:8**). These gifts were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. We see these gifts at work among us today; they will continue until His return. The Holy Spirit continues to do the work of God in this world through evangelists, pastors, and teachers as they preach and teach the mystery of God, the gospel, to mankind and the church. The authoritative apostles and prophets that Christ gave us are still with us in their teachings and writings in the New Testament.

This revealed authority of His kingdom, the Scripture, was left with us to obey until He returns. It is *"the Faith which was once and for all handed down to the saints,"* as Jude says in verse 3. This objective Word of God was completed with the written words of the last authoritative apostle and prophet, John in the book of Revelation. However, I believe that the gifts of the Spirit (**1 Corinthians 12**) may still be expressed as the Holy Spirit wills today. In addition, if the authoritative Word of God is made alive in us by the Spirit, we will continue to grow in the expression of the fruits of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22**) in our lives.

### THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

One of these "gifts of the Spirit" mentioned in **1 Corinthians 12** and **14** is the gift of prophesy. This gift is also referred to in **1 Thessalonians 5:19**: *"Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."*

The central issue regarding modern

"prophecy" is whether we consider it "authoritative" or "subjective." Any predictive element in prophecy is secondary and will be addressed later. The central issue is this: Do we currently have the mandate or ability to declare modern prophecy authoritative? "Authoritative" defines the will of God that must be obeyed. God never asks us to "judge" His words but commands us to obey them or incur His wrath. Peter calls the apostle Paul's letters Scripture (**2 Peter 3:2, 15-16**). Paul himself declares his own words to be authoritative (**1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:4-6**). The Scriptures are very clear: only the Scriptures are to be considered "authoritative." This is not a new idea. It was at the heart of the Reformation when Luther declared *"Sola Scriptura,"* meaning "the authority of Scripture alone." **2 Timothy 3:16** declares all Scripture to be God's Word: *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*

In contrast, "subjective" consists of individual perceptions that may be disregarded without risk of sinning. This battle for authority between subjective ideas of man and Scripture began the Reformation with Luther denouncing the belief that, in addition to the Scriptures, the laws and decrees of the Roman Catholic Pope could also be authoritative. Modern prophecy, along with all forms of subjective words, is never authoritative because no man's words on their own are authoritative, only God's. Thus, the apostles repeatedly command us to "test" and "judge" prophecy and not to obey it. See **1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 1 John 4:1**. Those "judging" a prophecy may declare it an authoritative Word from God if, and only if it is explicitly revealed in Scripture — never on its own merits. Therefore, any prophecy claiming revelations not explicitly revealed in Scripture (a void or omission in Scripture claimed to be filled with subjective words) can never be "judged" authoritative. Christians

are always free to disregard all forms of subjective words without risk of sinning or opposing God's will. In contrast, anyone who is claiming that subjective words to be authoritative sins and speaks delusion because subjective words are simply the perceptions of man, however spiritual they might seem. Jesus exposed the dangers of looking to man's words as authoritative when he echoed the words of Isaiah in **Matthew 15:9**, *"But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men."*

### Biblical History of the Battle for Authority

#### The Battle in the Old Testament

Biblical history records many attempts to usurp the authority of the objective Word and infuse "authoritativeness" into subjective words. Satan asked Eve, *"Indeed, has God said...?"* Eve responded with what God had said but included additional words (*"nor shall you touch it"* see **Genesis 3:1-3**) that God had not said. Thus, Eve went beyond God's word and defined "touching it" a sin, even though God had not. In the time of Moses himself, men like Korah in **Numbers 16** opposed God's objective authority. Throughout Biblical history, sincere deluded men led Israel astray and emboldened the people in their pursuit of sin. The issue at stake was not for the right to say, "I had a vision or dream"—anyone can have a dream, vision, opinion, or experience. The issue was authority —people claiming their subjective words were authoritative so people must follow and obey them. God's authoritative Word declared Israel sinful and under wrath. This is in contrast to false subjective words from people proclaiming false peace amid sinful apostasy. This is the pervasive message of, "peace, peace where there is no peace" (**Jeremiah 6:14**). Consider the epic battles of Elijah (**1 Kings 18**), the prophet to Bethel (**1 Kings 13**), the challenge of Micaiah (**1 Kings 22**), and the battles of Jeremiah/Hananiah/Shemaiah (**Jeremiah 28, 29:31**). Jeremiah captures God's view of the battle for

authority between subjective words and God's word in **Jeremiah 23:16, 17**:

*Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise Me . . . They say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.'"*

False prophets proclaim a subjective peace where there is no objective peace and lead people to destruction.

The Jewish infatuation with pagan prophets ended with the Babylonian Captivity. We have no Biblical record of non-Jehovah prophets ever becoming popular after the Jew's return to Israel. Instead, the battle of the authoritative Word vs. false subjective authority moved within the spiritual government of Judaism and its leaders. By the time of **Malachi**, the authoritative Scriptures were considered less important than the leaders' words. Consider these passages from Malachi:

- **you say**, 'The table of the LORD is to be despised.' (1:7)
- **you say**, 'The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.' (1:12)
- **you also say**, 'My, how tiresome it (God's altar) is!' (1:13)
- **you say**, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them," (2:17)
- **you have said**, 'It is vain to serve God; (3:14)

#### **Malachi 2:4-8**

*"Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you.... "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,"*

The Jewish leaders reject what God has said and obey their own subjective words instead. This is a theme throughout Malachi. This battle (leaders' subjective words vs. God's objective

Scripture) crystallized into an even deeper form of apostasy in the inter-testamental period. They set aside the authoritative writings of the true Jewish fathers, and the subjective words of the leader's oral law were elevated to the same authority as the written Scripture. The Macabbees, in their fight for Judaism and the temple, claimed the high priesthood and the kingship, offices illegal for them to assume under the Law of Moses. Though they ostensibly loved and fought for the authority of God's Word, they corrupted it and usurped its authority for themselves. The corrupt system that developed was in place when the Messiah appeared. The high priests, who claimed to love the Scriptures, had corrupted the covenant of Levi by having as leaders men who were no longer the sons of Aaron/Zadok as the Scriptures required (**Ezekiel 44:15, 48:11**).

#### **THE BATTLE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

When John the Baptist arrived on the scene in the spirit of Elijah, he preached that sinners were to return to the authoritative message of the Jewish fathers. He further called for repentance and condemned the Pharisees because their actions were not in accordance with the authoritative Word (**Luke 3:7-14**.) He then pointed them to one who would speak the "words of God," and God's words are always authoritative. See **John 3:34** and **Matthew 21:32**.

After John the Baptist, the battle for the authoritative Word escalates. Jesus arrives. Jesus claims the authority to forgive sins that belongs to God alone and claims to **only** speak the authoritative words of God (**Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21**). Jesus backs up His claims with mighty supernatural miracles that Scriptures predicted would be performed by the Messiah. Jesus, a man claiming to be equal with God, has a ministry-long battle against the misplaced authority of the Pharisee's subjective words. Supporting the authority of Scripture, Jesus declares that Moses himself, though dead, accuses the Pharisees of sin through his writings.

Jesus exposes the Pharisees as hypocrites who claim the Scriptures are authoritative, but in practice set the Scriptures aside and obey their own subjective revelations and words. He states that their worship is in vain and condemns them for, "*teaching as doctrines the precepts of men*" (**Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7**). This progression culminates with Jesus, the prophet that their Moses predicted (**Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22; 7:37**), proclaiming eight "woes" of blistering judgment against the Pharisees and their words (**Matthew 23**). In essence, Jesus reiterates the words of John the Baptist condemning the Pharisees to the wrath of God because they would not obey His words.

#### **Matthew 22:29**

*But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.*

#### **John 5:39**

*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me...the one who accuses you is Moses...*

#### **John 7:19**

*Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law?*

#### **Matthew 23**

- 14: *Woe to you...you will receive greater condemnation.*
- 15: *Woe to you...you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*
- 16: *Woe to you, blind guides, . . .*
- 17: *You fools and blind men!*
- 19: *You blind men . . .*
- 23: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*
- 24: *You blind guides, . . .*
- 25: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites . . .*
- 26: *You blind Pharisee . . .*
- 27: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! ...you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*
- 33: *You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?*

In **Matthew 7:15** Jesus commands us to beware of the coming false

prophets who claim the authority of Jesus for themselves by acting and speaking in His name – even doing miracles. In verse 22 Jesus exposes their delusion (sincerely thinking Jesus was their Lord) and eternally casts them away because they didn't listen to Scriptures ("these words of Mine") or obey them. Jesus sets an example by eternally excluding these "wonder-working men speaking in His name" exactly as he commands us to treat them now in **2 John 10**. Why? Because like the Pharisees, these men usurped the authority of God's name by bringing their own subjective words instead of obeying the objective words of Scripture.

#### Matthew 7:22

"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 'And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

#### 2 John 1:10

"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting."

Several times the sect of the Pharisees brought their subjective words into the church; attempting to make them authoritative; see **Acts 15:5**:

[T]eaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

The objective teachings of Christ and his authoritative apostles are complete and written in the Scriptures. Like Moses, Jesus' authoritative apostles, though dead, continue their work today to equip and build up the church through their writings in Scripture until we reach the unity of the faith and we are like Him because we see Him just as He is at the second coming (**Ephesians 4:11-13**; **1 John 3:2**). Some, however, reject this authority and claim a special anointing. The Roman Catholic Pope claims to be another authoritative apostle and to speak on behalf of God Himself additional authoritative words,

not contained in Scripture. Many "modern apostles and prophets," in a similar way, claim to be "anointed" by God to speak their subjective words with His authority. Their prophecies often do not deny the Scriptures; they add to them and go beyond what is written. These men claim their subjective revelations are given by God and that we must obey them. Thus, they reject Scripture's authority (**2 Peter 2:10**, **Jude 1:8**) that declares only God's words are authoritative. **2 John 1:9** says that those who go too far and don't abide in what Christ has already taught, do not have God and are teaching evil.

*Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2John 1:9, 10)*

Authoritative "subjective words" are false and hostile to God because they are rejecting Scripture's authority. According to **2 Timothy 3:16**, Scripture is for reproof, correction, and the training in all righteousness. Therefore, authoritative communication from God must be Scripture and not man's words. According to **1 Timothy 1:5-7**, leaders straying from the authoritative Scriptures to teach subjective assertions leave behind a pure heart, good conscience and sincere faith to follow vanity and lawlessness:

*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.*

When we look at "testing" prophecy it is very similar to all the passages

which command us to judge teachings of men, which is exactly what "subjective words" and "prophetic utterances" are. Jesus told His disciples to beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which was their teaching (**Matthew 16:6, 12**). In Acts and in his epistles, Paul warns us again and again against false teachings and false teachers. Peter, James, John and Jude also warn of false teachers. What is clear is that any teacher who shares his words and thoughts is obviously bringing the "precepts of man" because they are men. The teachings of men are not sin. There are many teachings of men that have brought temporal comfort to the world in mathematics, science, and philosophy. What is a "sin," rejected and condemned, is to teach these precepts of man as "doctrines"— meaning as God's words, claiming that they have the authority of God. These are the very teachings we are to ignore, and if those who teach them refuse to publicly acknowledge their teachings as wrong (not having God's authority) and repent, they are to be 100% ignored as well.

#### PREDICTIVE PROPHECY

Now that we have dealt with the central issue of authority, there remains the issue of predictive prophecy. Can modern prophecy be "predictive" and foretell the future? I believe that the gifts of the Spirit still operate and therefore I believe the answer is, "Yes." However, I do **not** believe that modern predictive prophecy can be authoritative. Predictive prophecy is also subject to the authority of Scripture; Deuteronomy 13 and 18 specifically define the standards to test this type of prophecy.

#### Deuteronomy 13:1-3

*"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your*

heart and with all your soul.”

### Deuteronomy 18:22

“When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

The prophet must be 100% accurate in his predictions based on **Deuteronomy 18:22**. Therefore, for predictive prophecy to be true it must be factual and it must come true. A person who makes prophetic prediction that does not happen is to be 100% rejected and we are told not to fear them. In addition, predictive prophecy must not limit freedom by declaring certain responses to be the will of God or not. Authoritative predictive prophecy, because it sets itself up as equal to the authority of God’s Scriptures, is a sin.

Even if the prediction is accurate, **Deuteronomy 13:3** tells us that the person still may be false based on their teachings as compared with Scriptures. Balaam prophesied correctly concerning the Messiah (**Numbers 23, 24**) but is still condemned as a false prophet from **Numbers 31:16** through both testaments to **Revelation 2:14**. This is because, though Balaam prophesied correctly, his teaching caused Israel to sin.

The premise of this paper is that God has completed His objective words to us through His Son and apostles. “The Anointed One,” (Christ) the Jesus that the apostles preached, is objectively revealed in the Scriptures. Any additional prophet or apostle claiming to speak for God and reveal “more” of Jesus goes beyond what is written, leading towards another subjective Jesus (**2Corinthians 11:4**) and fails the test of **Deuteronomy 13:1-3**. Ultimately, God Himself will destroy them if they don’t repent.

Both Deuteronomy 18 and 13 command us to reject a false prophet entirely — the person whose predictions do not come true and the person whose predictions come true but brings a misleading message.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SUBJECTIVE WORDS AND PROPHETIC UTTERANCE?

Scripture encourages prophecy. So we must ask “What place does prophetic utterance and subjective words legitimately fill in the church and in our lives? The answer is found in **1Corinthians 14:3**:

- edification-(*oikodome*) and
- exhortation-(*paraklesis*) and
- consolation/comfort-(*paramuthia*).

Edification, exhortation, and comfort do not authoritatively determine God’s will or sin – they are for the building up of the church.

### AGABUS, A NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE

An excellent illustration of this is found in Acts 11 and 19, 20, 21. Agabus is one of the few “non-apostle” prophets who is mentioned by name and whose prophecy is recorded in the New Testament. His first appearance is recorded in **Acts 11:27-30**:

*Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.*

It was “by the Spirit,” *pneuma* in the Greek, that Agabus said that there would “certainly” be a famine all over the world. It was a prediction that could be objectively verified; the same standard we should use today. The Scripture then states that it happened as Agabus had said. It is especially interesting that Agabus never indicated that anybody should take any actions or indicated what response was God’s will. While he predicted the future, it was

factual NOT directive/authoritative. Even the leadership didn’t use the prophecy as a command of God but the text specifically says “each of them determined” to send a contribution and that, by their own trusted men, not by the prophets. They were all free to send something and they were all free not to send anything. Either action was allowed without any threat of sin or promise of reward. Neither did God prophetically tell them that they had to give anything. When the famine happened as predicted the church was comforted and edified, the loving generosity of the Gentile Christians feeding their hungry brothers in Jerusalem.

In **Acts 19:21** Paul purposed to go to Jerusalem and Rome, “Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’” The next passage is **Acts 20:22** where Paul is telling the elders of the Ephesian Church what he believes that the Holy Spirit is telling him. Was this communicated prophetically? Perhaps, it certainly was later in Caesarea. Here is what Paul said:

*And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:22-24)*

Paul indicates that the Holy Spirit has communicated to him in every city that bonds and afflictions await him in Jerusalem but he goes anyway. He was even in a hurry to get there as we see in verse 16. Paul’s exhortation comforts the leaders of Ephesus because when the predicted bonds and afflictions awaiting him occur, they are not “Satan’s victory” but part of the ministry God had sovereignly prepared for Paul

to proclaim His gospel. This story continues in the first part of Acts 21 when Paul arrives at Tyre.

*After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again. (Acts 21:4-6)*

The disciples of Tyre through some spiritual perception, kept telling Paul to change his plans and not go to Jerusalem. Paul ignores their subjective words and never even responds to their direction. When his days there are ended Paul gets back on the boat, goes to Caesarea, and stays with Phillip and his four prophetess daughters. Here in Philip's house we find the prophet Agabus again.

*As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!" (Acts 21:10-14)*

Agabus claims to be speaking for the Holy Spirit Himself and makes a prediction, declaring to Paul what will happen to him in Jerusalem. This is consistent with what Paul already said the Holy Spirit had indicated to him in Acts 20:23. Agabus, on behalf of the Holy Spirit never requests Paul to do something or indicates if Paul's plans are God's will or not. However, all the others around them respond with their own subjective words begging Paul

not to go but, since Paul refused to be persuaded, they finally left it in the Lord's hands and asked that "His will be done."

This story is the complete account of Agabus from the New Testament. Agabus is consistent with the standards for a true prophet as defined in Deuteronomy 13 and 18. Agabus was never recorded as predicting something that didn't happen. In addition, Agabus' predictions were neither directive nor authoritative. Paul and others were free to follow their own conscience without doubting that perhaps they were sinning or missing God's will. When Agabus' prophecy actually happened, Paul and the church were encouraged because they knew that he was in God's hands and that His will was being done as predicted.

### CONCLUSION

God's complete authoritative word is contained in the Scripture. The gift of prophecy promised in this Scripture is to be used for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of the Church. While modern prophecy may predict the future, Scripture commands us to judge it and never accept it as authoritative. Therefore, true prophecy cannot be directive or declare the certain will of God in matters of guidance. Authoritative guidance is only found in the Scriptures. All forms of subjective words, including prophecy, may be considered and evaluated regarding the many decisions of life, however all subjective words are uncertain. Seeking authoritative guidance from subjective sources, including the words of modern apostles and prophets, is sin. According to Scripture, following these blind guides leads to delusion and destruction instead of the false peace they promise.

If we lack wisdom, the New Testament encourages us to ask God for wisdom and to act in faith (James 1:5, 6). We may make poor decisions contributing to difficulties and afflictions. However, like Paul during his journey to Jerusalem, we do not need to fear. Based on the authority of the Scriptures, we proceed in faith that God's sovereign, omnipotent power is sufficient to work all things together for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

### Implications of Biblical Authority

1. God may provide subjective words, and even predictive words, of edification, exhortation, and comfort to His church through man.

2. If someone claims to believe in the authority of Scripture and also claims to believe in "authoritative" subjective words, this person is in delusion. These ideas are contradictory. Thus, a statement of faith that declares the authority of Scripture is inherently opposed to any authoritative or directive subjective revelations. Any attempt to claim both Scripture and subjective revelations as authoritative is abusive. This is the essence of the Reformation doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*.

3. Seeking or claiming to provide the objective will of God or authoritative direction outside of the Scriptures is a sin. According to the Scriptures this is not where it is legally to be found.

4. A congregation, leaders, or prophets that judge subjective words to be authoritative and "true" (on their own merit without objective direct proof in the Scriptures), risk being "false" themselves by claiming objective authority through their own subjective judging. It is not an "eat the cherries and spit out the pits" approach because there are no authoritative cherries to be found in subjective words.

5. Prophecy (prophetic utterance, visions, revelations, perceptions) and subjective words that claim to be authoritative on their own (not directly proven by Scripture) must be rejected outright as false and disregarded; no further "testing" or "judging" of the prophecy is required. If the person speaking them refuses to repent, they are to be excluded from fellowship, hopefully to redemption, so that they will come to their senses and repent (see 2Timothy 2:24-26).

### Critical Issues Commentary

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