

## **Sovereign Grace Church**

### **“Authority” outline**

October 23, 2016

**Amos 5: 21-24; Matthew 15: 1-9**

*One of the major issues during the Reformation was the issue of authority. What provided the ultimate authority for direction and guidance in our quest for salvation and the living of the Christian life? Everyone agreed of course that God had spoken in His Word, the Bible. However, it was also obvious that the interpretation of the Bible was not always agreed upon by those seeking to understand its message. The Church of that day had developed an understanding that the Bible could only be interpreted authoritatively by the Church herself. By means of the “teaching hierarchy” of the Church, interpretations of Scripture over time were accumulated in the Church's tradition. This tradition went beyond interpreting the meaning of Scripture to certain additions and corrections of Scripture as well. The Church herself was seen as the authority which gave rise to the Bible's authority in her official designation of certain books having canonical authority.*

*All of this was challenged by the Reformers in their quest to appeal to the original sources as their authority. It was the Scriptures that gave rise to the Church and not the other way around. Thus, certain current practices of the day, such as the sale of indulgences, should be rejected as going against the plain meaning of Scripture. Eventually this included questions relating to salvation itself. The Reformers appealed to the Scriptures as their ultimate authority while the Church appealed to her teaching tradition as the final authority.*

*This morning we will attempt to get a clearer understanding of ultimate authority as it relates to the Bible, the Church and our fallible interpretations.*

#### **1. Church tradition is more authoritative than the Bible.**

- **The Bible is only partly authoritative. II Tim. 4: 3-4**
- **Tradition must guide our interpretation of Scripture.**
- **Limits on the Bible's jurisdiction**

#### **2. The Bible is more authoritative than Church tradition. Matt. 15: 3**

- **The Bible conveys knowledge from God. II Tim. 3: 16**
- **The Bible conveys grace and power. I Pet. 1: 22-23; Ac. 16: 14**

- **The Bible provides a transcendent base for morality. Psm 119: 89**

### **3. Objections to the latter**

- **Isn't for me to choose the Bible over the Church another way of affirming me over both the Church and the Bible?**
- **Isn't the Church's claim that the Bible is more authoritative than the Church, itself Church tradition?**
- **Don't we need the Church to settle interpretational disagreements?  
I Tim. 3: 15**

### **Questions for Pleasant Conversation**

- 1. How would you explain the relationship between a document's authority and the possibility of mis-interpreting the message of that document? Does the fact that we can err in our interpretations of the Bible challenge the usefulness of the Bible's authority in our lives? Why or why not?**
- 2. Read the same passage of Scripture privately. Discuss its meaning. Is there a consensus? If there are differences how are they resolved? If they can't be resolved, what should be concluded?**
- 3. How does our society's current rejection of objective truth affect the problem of authority in both the church and society? How does a society which rejects truth handle a church's proclamation of truth? How does this same society handle differences of interpretation (say of the Constitution) within the society itself? What does this indicate?**
- 4. How did the Reformers handle different interpretations amongst themselves? Cf., Luther and Zwingli. What happens when our emotions begin to trump our thoughts in our conversations about these differences? Why is it important for the Christian to settle on his obligation to love his challengers before engaging those challengers in debate?**