

## Podcast: Confessing the Faith

### Episode 4: Calvinism: First Things First: What is our Authority for Truth?

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Published: 12/3/2015

#### Introduction

#### Q1: Why these episodes devoted to “first things”? Why don’t we just jump into the “five points of Calvinism”?

A1: There are doctrines that are even more basic and fundamental to a biblical and Christian worldview which, when believed, lead naturally to a recognition of the truthfulness of the so called “five points of Calvinism”.

#### Q2: What is our Authority for Truth?

A2a: God is our authority for truth.

A2b: God has revealed himself through two ways:

- General, or natural, revelation
- Special, or word, revelation

A2c: God has delivered special revelation to mankind in a variety of ways throughout human history.

- “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” (Hebrews 1:1–2, ESV)
- God has engaged man in human history by acting/speaking.
- God’s acts are recorded for us in the Holy Scriptures.

A2d: The scriptures are our authority for truth.

- Should we expect any more scriptures to be written? No! The Son has come and, having accomplished redemption, has fully revealed the Father to us.
- The New Testament scriptures are the record of that act in human history and the application of it to the people of God, as given by the Apostles of Christ.
- The next event on God’s timetable is the return of Christ, the resurrection, judgment, and eternal state.
- LBC 1.1 - “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience...”

#### Q3: Why are the scriptures necessary? Can’t we discover God by way of the light of nature?

A3a: Special revelation is necessary, and the light of nature inadequate, for three reasons:

- One, we are creatures. “In the beginning was the Word...” (John 1:1)
- Two, we are now fallen. Dead, blind, crooked and perverse.
  - “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:18–23, ESV)
- Three, general, or natural, revelation - even if we were to interpret it properly - only reveals *general* things about God.

- “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20, ESV)

A3b: Special revelation (a Word from God) has always been needed (even before the fall) in order to know the truth about God, ourselves, and how we are to live before him.

A3c: I’ve heard a lot people argue against “Calvinism” insisting that as they look at the world around them, and as they use the reason that God has given them, they cannot accept these doctrines as true.

- My response? You’re betting on your interpretation of general revelation while neglecting what is clearly stated by God’s Word.
- Question: do you do the same thing with the doctrine of the Trinity? Or the deity of Christ? Or the penal substitutionary view of the atonement?

**Q4: What are the characteristics of scripture?**

A4: The scriptures are authoritative, perfect, and clear.

**Q5: Why do we view the scriptures as authoritative?**

A5a: They are words of God.

- “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16–17, ESV)
- “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21, ESV)

A5b: Jesus viewed the OT scriptures as the word of God and authoritative.

- “But he answered, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’” (Matthew 4:4, ESV)

A5c: The Apostles viewed the OT scriptures as the word of God and authoritative.

- Obvious from the book of Acts onward...

A5d: The Apostles viewed the writings of the other Apostles as the word of God and authoritative.

- “There are some things in [Paul’s letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.” (2 Peter 3:16, ESV)

A5e: LBC 1:4 - “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.” ( 2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:9 )

**Q6: What do we mean when we say that the scriptures are perfect?**

A6a: Infallible - They do not mislead

A6b: Inerrant - Without error in the original

A6c. They contain all things necessary for life and godliness.

- “and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:15–17, ESV)

**Q7: What do we mean when we say that the scriptures are clear?**

A7a: LBC 1.7 - “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.” ( 2 Peter 3:16; Psalms 19:7; Psalms 119:130)

- This is the great doctrine of the reformation
  - It is often misunderstood.

- Not all passages are equally clear
- Original languages
- Teachers need
- But the gospel is clearly stated in the scriptures
- Peter even says that Paul is difficult to understand
- “Learned” and “unlearned” means literate and illiterate in the confession
- Due use of ordinary means - if they come to church and hear the word preached.

**Q8: How does this all apply to our conversation about “Calvinism”?**

A8a: We believe these things because we have been compelled by a careful study of the scriptures, the scriptures being necessary, authoritative (given that they are inspired by God), perfect, and clear.