

# Biblical Authority at The Chapel

Acts 6:1-4

September 9, 2012

## Introduction

In Western culture there is a general, comprehensive crisis of authority. Now don't get me wrong, this crisis of authority is not really new, it has been around since the events disclosed in the narrative found in Genesis chapter three. But it does seem to be more pervasive and even accepted. It is seen in the general lack of respect in the elementary schools and continues into the workplace. Politicians, government officials and business leaders exemplify this rebellion against authority. And it has not escaped finding its way onto the landscape of Christianity. Americans in particular, with our history of "rugged individualism," find the attitude of submission to authority particularly irritating. No one around us is able to do things exactly the way we wish it to be done and we often bemoan and demean those who have been placed in positions of responsibility over us. What is true in the workplace and household is even more true within the context of the church life. This is somewhat the impetus for this sermon series flowing out of this year's Elders' retreat. It is not so much that Clearcreek Chapel is facing a "crisis" in authority but we need to have a clearly articulated vision of how authority, our response to it and how the leadership here should express it. Tonight, flowing out of Pastor Russ's exposition positioning the Bible itself as the revelatory source mediating Christ's ultimate authority, we will explore several ways that Clearcreek Chapel attempts to make this truth a practical and visible reality.

## Exposition

From Luke's second treatise to Theophilus we know as the Book of Acts, or The Acts of the Apostles, we find this interesting vignette in the life of the church in Jerusalem in chapter six. Take your copy of Scripture and turn to Acts 6 and we will read verses 1-4.

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

Let us first of all notice the circumstances or situation. Without going into great detail, we should notice, “a complaint arose.” Yes, even the apostles had to deal with concerns, problems, inequities and the like. There are issues of both legitimate and illegitimate complaint that has been with church life since Jerusalem. Now it happens that this particular complaint had to do with the “daily distribution.” Because of the large growth of believers there was a need to care for those “widowed” out of the gifts brought to the apostles. In other words, a ministry had been established and its oversight was allowing for at least the potential for inequity in its accomplishment. “The Twelve”, the eleven named disciples of Jesus now accompanied by Matthias, had this situation placed before them to answer.

Now notice the dilemma that the apostles put back to those with this concern. “Preach the Word” or “serve tables” were the options delineated. Seems a bit harsh to our ears. This was a legitimate ministry with significant ramifications. Their answer almost seems trite or flippant. And this may be true if a clear and careful answer to the problem was not presented. But our focus tonight is not to highlight the problem or the solution, but the context that created the response.

You see, the apostles were much more concerned with the status and authority of the Word as they were commissioned to make disciples. Programs, process, products all can insert themselves and take on a life of their own, frequently leaving the basis of their existence behind and allowing conflict and concern to supersede their rationale. The apostles recognized acutely the primacy of the authority of the Word and the need to base everything else that they did upon a clear and comprehensive understanding of the Word, in prayerful submission and reliance on Spirit-given wisdom. It is only when we forget the essential nature of the authority of the Word that the apostles’ response does not seem to take the matter to heart.

This short, simple story that has more implications than what we are pointing out tonight does however provide powerful instruction to keep the authority of God as communicated to us through the written word central in all of what may be described as ministry. So just how do we at Clearcreek Chapel make special effort in this regard? I want to expose you to just four areas of thought where this takes special note.

## **Attitude**

First of all, Clearcreek Chapel intends to inculcate a posture of submission to the Word in all of life. This attitudinal approach views the Scriptures as not merely a message of instruction or source of information but as the relational communication from Christ himself. Christ intends to bring “his people” into relationship with himself to such a degree we are referred to as being “in Him”

and “He in us.” To believe this is to have a desire to hear and commune in and with Him. His word is the means that this relationship is accomplished. As a follow-on to our recent series on our “body”, we affirmed mankind was created as a unified entity. Even though there is a separability of our being such that a conscious, personal existence occurs after death, it is the creational and eternal intent to place us in a bodily existence. This was affirmed in an understanding of Christ’s resurrection and ascension. Not only did he take on the nature of our human existence, he intentionally took it back to heaven as the “firstfruits” of the resurrection that is to come. This implies that our normal sensory faculties, although faulty and subject to misinterpretation and misrepresentation, are the intended means that relationship is to be maintained with both God and one another. Therefore, to read and hear the Scriptures is to read and hear his voice. We must maintain this consistently and continue to cultivate this attitude to those we are in human relationship. This allusion to the idea of cultivation is intentional to bring us to the Clearcreek Chapel mission statement.

Indeed this idea of the authority of Scripture is imbedded in all of the Clearcreek Chapel mission-vision documents. These are intentional to maintain this attitude of submission to the authority of the Word.

The mission statement goes like this: “By God’s grace and through His Word, it is our vision to cultivate in the hearts of God’s people, a passion for the supremacy of God: magnified in love for Him, manifested in love for one another and multiplied by love for the lost.” We have a goal with observable outcomes, that is a “passion for the supremacy of God” that can be seen in our love for Him, one another and the lost. But this is cultivated as empowered by God (by his grace) and generated “through His Word.”

We also have these four vision statements that you see on your bulletins each week. The first is “Savoring the Supremacy of God.” We elaborate it as: “Our vision is to magnify God as the all-satisfying object of the believer’s life in worship and service, here and forever.” The others have a more direct dependence upon the concept of Scripture but even this statement is intended to be understood as referring to the God of the Christian Bible in all he is and is doing.

The next is “Studying the Word of God.” Again it is explained as: “Our vision is to work out both the large picture and the immediate texts in Holy Spirit enabled exposition and application in the public and private ministry of the Word of God.” A real and vital connection is required to the Scriptures as God’s Word, so much that we see it as essential to the vision of what a healthy New Covenant congregation looks like. You will notice the understanding of the Scriptures involves a competence in both the “large picture” and “immediate texts.” It also entails the public proclamation and the private reading and assimilating the Scriptures in study, devotion and counsel.

This is so that there will be a clear commitment to “Shaping the People of God.” This is expounded as: “Our vision is to see minds, affections, and wills transformed by the Word of God so that God is magnified by an obeying faith in every sphere of life.” The authority of the Bible is expected to engage the whole man, in more “biblical terms” the whole heart. Change in our lives is only expected in engagement with the Scriptures. A recent criticism has been leveled that we at Clearcreek Chapel engage in some sort of Christian mysticism. This would entail a minimizing of the Word’s work in our Spiritual transformation if not an outright denial. No, we emphasize the work of the Spirit (remember the “by God’s grace” line) in the message of the Scriptures (the “through His Word” part).

This then allows us the vision of “Spreading the Gospel of God.” This is developed as: “Our vision is to proclaim the gospel to all the people groups □so that God is glorified in every tribe, language, and people group.” This cannot be understood without a concrete, vivid exposition of the Gospel as all that God has done and is doing in Christ to bring us back into a proper and real relationship with Him. We only know the work of Christ in its plan, purpose and power from our reading and hearing the Scripture; otherwise it is a gospel of our own design.

What we hope to express is a sense that the Scriptures and their proper understanding is to permeate all of life and ministry here at Clearcreek Chapel. This attitude is foundational to all that we seek to accomplish in fulfilling our purposes of exaltation, edification and evangelism.

## **Basis**

So how to we ensure that this is indeed the basis for all we intend to do as “ministry” here at The Chapel? Here is just a small sampling of the many ways that the ministries here find their ground and structure from the Scriptures as authority.

1. Elders meetings: We begin with Scripture and prayer to be a tangible reminder of this concern. This may delay our getting on to business, but our first business is to the “ministry of the Word and prayer.” This is where we start. And as the elder’s wives know all too well, the Elders’ meetings often take longer than expected in order that in answering specific issues, we often wrestle with interpretive and application issues.

2. Preaching and teaching: The buzzword is “expositional.” It is intentional that most preaching and teaching is organized around the explanation of Scriptural texts. Even when topical concerns are presented, they are done so with exposition from Scripture, not merely logical or theological deductions. Now keep in mind we are using the idea of “expositional preaching” in its largest sense. Those of you who are familiar with the homiletic literature or the teaching of preaching know that the term has variety of nuances. We emphasize the

“working through of larger texts” in their discourse context as the principle way to correctly understand and then “use” that reading to bring change.

3. Ministry implementation. Each specific ministry has a Ministry Organizing Document (affectionately known as its MOD) that elaborates on the Scriptural principles underlying its reason for existence and often the strategies necessary to carry out its purpose. Leadership in each ministry is focused and selected on each individual’s maturation in the Word. It is one’s apparent effectiveness in living under and expressing the power of Scripture in their lives that marks one as qualified for Biblical leadership not merely the presence of talents. Spiritual giftedness must be coupled with an obvious dependence upon the Spirit’s enablement especially in the application of the Bible upon the particulars of that ministry’s work. Conventional business and organizational concerns are often less important in this area of church life.

## **Presentation**

Clearcreek Chapel also has a strong desire to insert the Scriptures into each family. Not only does our preaching and teaching explain the Bible, but also there is an intentional and purposeful component to exemplify the actual interpretive principles involved. This focus is in place, even though it might not always be as evident as we would like in the Bible-teaching at all ages. Russ’s sermon structures model how the text is allowed to drive its own meaning and outline. By following the grammar and inherent structure of the text, its “melodic line” becomes the anchor for the application of the sermon. Frequently in the Adult Bible Education classes, the tools of interpretation are either overtly explained or used in the class’s discussion of various texts. In Children’s ministries the centrality of the Gospel in the work of the Gospel is presented as the focal interpretive “center” for the entire Bible. This begins with our preschool classes, as we set the tone for this Christ-centered hermeneutic. This is set this way because we desire all to be active interpreters of the Word, not passive actors.

The children’s curriculum is reviewed periodically to ensure that Scripture is central in expression. We try to keep the actual Bible as the focus, not a theology, in the material presented. That is why it is important for children to bring (and parents to ensure) a copy of Scripture with them each week. They may not read large amounts from it any given Sunday, but it is desired to have actual contact with the words of Scripture. The English Standard Version, or ESV, is the unofficial-official translation here at Clearcreek Chapel and there are many inexpensive products available. A nice Children’s Bible for ESV is available with many child-friendly features but any hardback copy will hold up nicely.

## **Reflect and Respond**

So as we examine our lives together here as “church” we desire to build a culture of Scriptural authority. A network of understanding that seeks to work together as one, in unity grounded not on our personalized approach but as a community of the Word. We desire to understand authority as having at least two discernable facets. One of recognition of the value and importance the Scriptures have understanding God and His will. We see that from our emphasis that God reveals Himself to us, communicates with us as mediated through our reading and “hearing” the written Word. The other is the actual submission of our lives to the Scripture’s teaching. We need to pause and consider: are we careful to put these two concepts into practice daily? Ask yourself, am I pursuing God’s Word as though I am hearing Him speak into my life (or am I more interested in knowing what my favorite author has to say)? And, am I living in response to this message in what I hear from the Word and its teaching here at The Chapel (or do I desire to follow my own nuance and whim)?