

## CHAPTER II

### THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY

#### The Biblical Description: **Christianity is Final Authority.**

Christianity is not an institution, not a list of rules, not a religious experience, and not a certain type of service. Christianity revolves around a Person, Jesus Christ the Son of God.

When one asks, "What does this mean in practice?" the Biblical answer is "final authority."

The engineer and the physicist are inescapably and rigidly limited by the laws of nature. They will succeed only by carefully working in harmony with these laws. They are under an authority which is external to them and over which they have no control. The engineer may have an intense dislike for concrete. But this personal dislike does not give him license to build the bridge out of paper mache.

And so it is in Christianity. God has revealed Himself. This revelation is no less authoritative than the laws of physics. It is, in fact, much more so. The Scripture is emphatically clear on the necessity of repentance, the new birth, faith, love, confession of sin, and obedience. In these areas the right and the wrong has been clearly stated. The Christian may not live as though God has not spoken, as though Jesus Christ has not come, as though the Crucifixion and the Resurrection did not happen, as though the Bible were not written.

It would be ridiculous for the airplane builder to think that he could operate successfully without taking into account the laws of gravity. It would be even more so for the Christian to believe that he could succeed without a wholehearted acceptance of the authority of divine revelation.

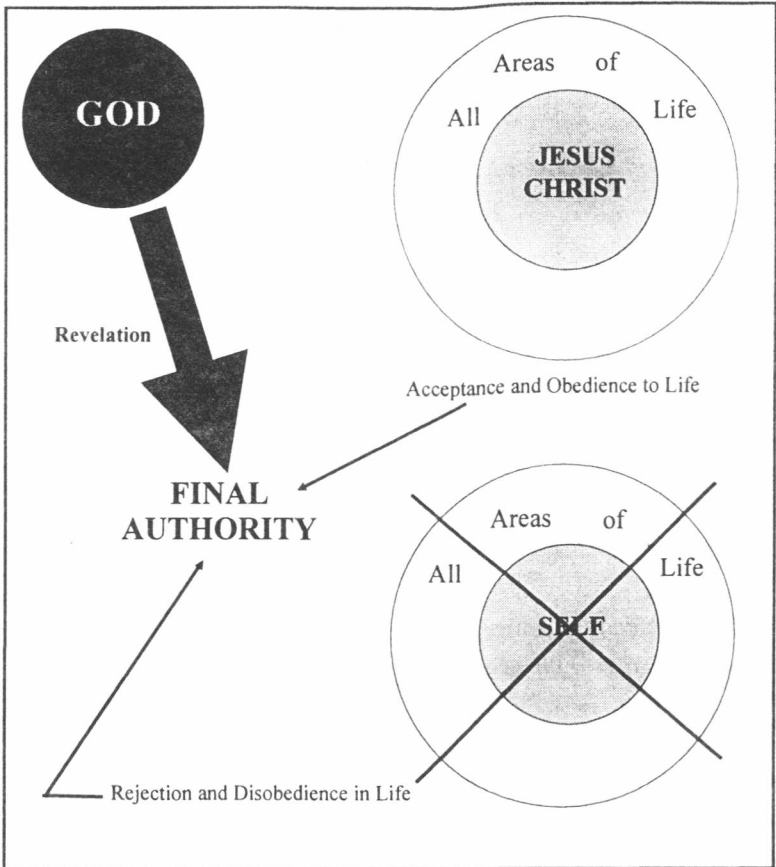
Such an acceptance is exceedingly difficult to make. To do so is to shift the source of authority from ourselves to God. As sinful persons we unconsciously attribute final authority to ourselves. We soon learn that we are not intuitive experts in the areas of chemistry, architecture, thermodynamics or similar fields. But every one of us, by nature, believes he is an absolute expert in the truths of religion.

There are at least three wrong responses which we make to the revelation of God. We reject it, we resist it, and we pervert it. Even in the life of the committed Christian these three may be present at one time. Although such an individual may submit to divine authority in many areas of daily life, he will, in some areas, reject the will of God, perhaps almost unconsciously so; in others he will accept it partially, with resistance; and in other areas he will attempt to succeed with a perversion of divine revelation.

Such a sinful response is intensified in the life of the non-Christian. It is not unusual for such a person to glibly call God "a liar" (I John 5:10). In the Scriptures God has said that all men are unrighteous and sinners (Romans 3:10,23), but the non-Christian states, "I'm not a sinner!" God has said that no man may come to Him except through Jesus Christ (John 14:6) and by the avenue of the new birth (John 3:3, 5), but the non-Christian affirms, "I don't need to believe in anyone but myself and I'll get there by my good works!"

There is only one correct response to divine authority. It is that of total acceptance. In the inner spiritual life it means complete surrender. In the manifestation of spiritual life it means complete obedience. It is surrender and obedience to a Person.

**The Key To Success: Accept The Revelation Of God As Your Final Authority And In Your Obedience Give Jesus Christ His Rightful Place. Cancel Out Your Sinful Self.** See Diagram 4.



**Diagram 4: God, not Self, is Our Final Authority**

**The Scriptural Foundation: Jesus Christ, His Work, and His Word.**

God is final authority. And in Christianity we are dealing with God, not with a man, an institution, an experience, a way of thinking, or even a way of life.

The authority in Christianity is reflected in its three foundation stones. These form the minimal content of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul stated that the Gospel had to do with (1) Jesus Christ, (2) His death, burial, and resurrection,

and (3) the Scriptures (I Corinthians 15: 1-4). The same threefold emphasis is found in the post-resurrection instruction of our Lord (Luke 24:44-48).

The authority of God is vested first of all in Jesus Christ. He is, according to the Scriptures, the eternal son of God. Out of love He became a member of the human race to be man's Redeemer.

The Lord Jesus Christ declared that He was the Truth (John 14:6) and the Apostle Paul stated that all wisdom and knowledge finds its source in Him (Colossians 2:3). The authority of God therefore rests in a Person. We may not " ... *refuse Him that speaketh*" (Hebrews 12:25). Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Genuine Christianity is a manifestation of God in human history. The nature, characteristics and structure of Christianity have been determined by Who and what God is. God is holy. We have been commanded to be holy (I Peter 1:15, 16). God is love. We have been commanded to love one another as we have been loved (John 13:34). The list is quite endless. God has revealed Himself. When this revelation is correctly practiced, the result is Biblical Christianity.

The authority in Christianity is also found in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. His work may be described as the deeds of God in history. These deeds determine the structure of Christianity.

An illustration of this is found in the Old Testament. There we are told how God supernaturally delivered his people through the events described as the Exodus. This deed of God formed the basis as well as the structure of the Theocracy. The Hebrew people were therefore a redeemed race. They belonged to God. The yearly memorial of the

Passover was given to remind them of these truths. the very roots of their nation, their calling, and their religion were found in the Exodus.

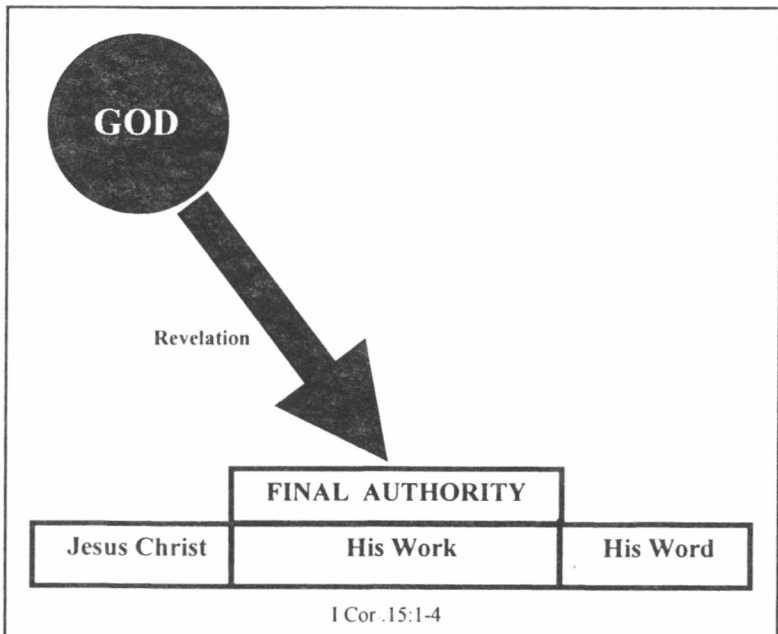
Biblical Christianity has been unalterably structured by the incarnation of Jesus Christ, from His life and ministry, from His Crucifixion, His Resurrection, the Ascension and from Pentecost. When the Christian sins, acting as though he belonged to himself, he is acting in disharmony with the character and deeds of God. Sin is therefore described in the Bible as "lawlessness" (I John 3:4). This is to emphasize that it is a violation or contradiction of authority. To sin against God is to act contrary to His nature and contrary to the four deeds of God in history.(The Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and The Day of Pentecost).

Since the authority in Biblical Christianity is found in the work of Christ, it is necessary for the Christian to accept the evaluation and the demands of these deeds. Christ died to deliver us from the guilt and power of sin. The only correct response we may make is to accept this evaluation of sin. Man is under a solemn authority to repent of sin, to condemn and forsake it in all of its forms, to receive the forgiveness of salvation and the daily deliverance and enablement provided by Jesus Christ for a successful Christian life. The Christian may not live as though Christ did not die and rise from the grave. These deeds have authoritatively structured every facet of Biblical Christianity.

The authority in and for Christianity is also found in the Holy Scripture. This does not mean that the Scripture is a third type of authority. The three foundation stones of Christianity, the Person of Jesus Christ, His deeds in history, and His Word, are inseparably related. God has not only revealed Himself in history but also through the inspired record and interpretation of His work. What we know of God and His work is through His authoritative Word.

When Jesus Christ was on earth he referred to and utilized the Scripture as final authority. He spoke of it as "*the commandment of God*," and as "*the Word of God*" (Mark 7:6-13). Of His opponents He repeatedly asked, "*... have ye not read ... ?*" (Matthew 12:3,5; 19:4). He quoted the Scriptures in His temptation (Matthew 4:4,7,10) and reminded the disciples that all which had been prophesied of Him would surely come to pass (Luke 18:31).

The Lord Jesus pointed out that it was contradictory indeed to call Him "Lord" and then disobey His Word (Luke 6:46) In harmony with this the Bible teaches the inseparable relationship of love for God and obedience to His Word (John 14:15, 23, 24; I John 2; 3-5; 5:3 II John 6). We may not presume that our actions are acceptable with God or that we are expressing love to God while disobeying the Scripture. Such an attitude is a violation of the very structure of Christianity.



**Diagram 5: God is Final Authority**

Christianity comes to us as final authority. It is a manifestation of God's character which, in turn, has been revealed through the deeds of God in history, and in His inspired Word.

See diagram 5

**The Key To Success: Recognize That The Source Of Authority In Biblical Christianity Is Found In The Person Of Jesus Christ, In His Work, And In His Word.**

**The Inescapable Results: Spiritual Freedom or Slavery.**

It is not enough to live in harmony with the church, to obey all the rules of the legalist, to perform all the ceremonies of the liturgist, to say all the right words of the Pharisee, to have the right experiences of the emotionalist, and to perform the right services of the Christian worker. We may do all these things without serious question as to whether God were dead or alive. We may, indeed, do all these things and be lost.

Christianity demands a complete surrender of one's self to God in the acceptance of His authority. This surrender is a personal subjugation of one's will to Another. The Apostle Paul described himself as " ... *a slave of Jesus Christ*" (Romans 1:1).

Christianity has been designed by God to be operative. Therefore, it must be put into practice before it becomes effective. It is the provision of a daily redemption. When we are in total subjection to God and live in daily obedience, the power and grace of Biblical Christianity will flow into our life.

Since more will be said about this later it may be sufficient here to point out the Biblical nature of this principle. Simply stated it is this: when we obey, God works. this is in no way

meant to deny the sovereignty of God nor the depravity of man. All faith and obedience can only be traced back to God's sovereign generosity.

The promise of Jesus Christ is simple and clear. He said, "*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32). The word "know" in Scripture designates more than a mere intellectual apprehension. It includes decisions of faith and correct practice. It is self evident from the Scripture and from what has been said before that to "know the truth" is the practice of a personal relationship.

The freedom promised by Christ is primarily spiritual. It is the freedom of the inner man. It is freedom to be the right kind of person. To be able to choose your own thoughts and actions without being pressured by men, circumstances, or sinful desires. It is the freedom produced by the grace and power of God which enables one to know right and wrong, to practice the right, and to enjoy it.

The warning of Jesus Christ is equally clear. He said, "... *whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*" (John 8:34). To "commit sin" is the opposite of "knowing the truth." It is the rejection of the personal authority of Christ and the elevation of self to the position of God. It is the practice of making one's self the final authority, and the personal satisfaction the goal of one's endeavor. When this choice is made and practiced it produces slavery. One becomes enslaved to one's self. Instead of all things revolving around Jesus Christ, they revolve around one's self. Freedom has been lost, selfishness is practiced, and any enjoyment is highly temporary.

The choice is ours and the results are inescapable—freedom or slavery.

See Diagram 6



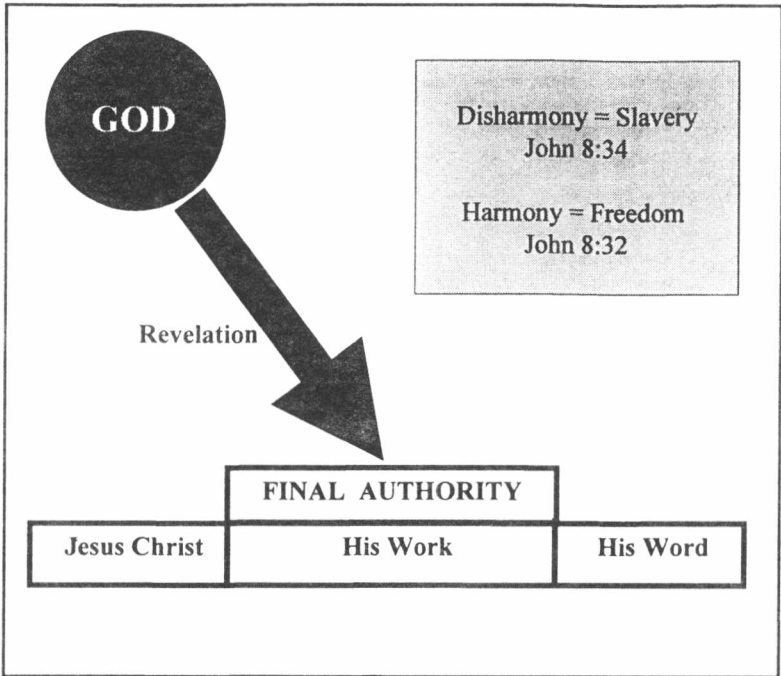


Diagram 6

**The Key To Success: Live In Harmony With The Person Of Jesus Christ, The Character Of His Work, And The Commandments Of His Word. The Result Will Be A Glorious Freedom.**