

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

LESSON 6:

By What Authority?

MEN OF THE WORD

November 3, 2021

au·thor·i·ty

- Millard Erickson: “By authority we mean the right to command belief and/or action” (*Christian Theology*, 212).
- Bernard Ramm: “Authority itself means that right or power to command action or compliance, or to determine belief or custom, expecting obedience from those under authority, and in turn giving responsible account for the claim to right or power” (*The Pattern of Religious Authority*, 10).
- If “truth” is that which corresponds to reality, then it is “authority” that determines what reality is and means.

- Thus, the concept of “authority” is integral to any discussion of “truth” and “the mind.”
- “Authority” is that to which we appeal in order to *justify* a belief, a choice, an attitude, an action, a worldview.
- Our “authority” is what we point to in answering the fundamental question, “Why?”
- The authority for justifying belief or action can be openly acknowledged or implicitly assumed. But one always exists.



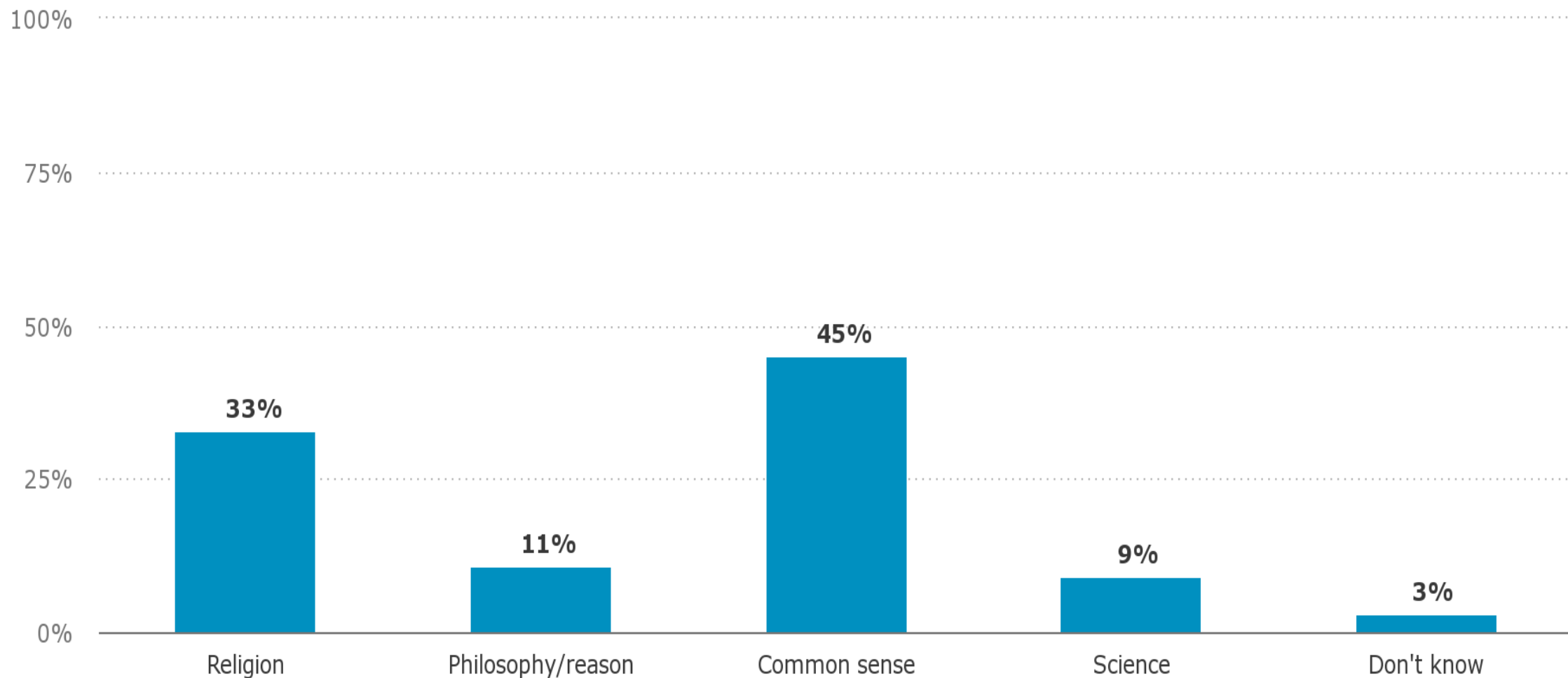
- When we stand at a fork in the road to decide between *truth and falsehood*, or *right and wrong*, or *beauty or ugliness*, that to which we appeal in order to decide is our *authority*.



(authority)

Sources of guidance on right and wrong

% of adults who say they look to...most for guidance on right and wrong



1. Authority as Determined by the World

- The world is at war with authority.
 - **Genesis 3:1, 4** – “Has God said?” “You surely will not die!”
 - **Psalms 10:4** – “The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek *Him*. All his thoughts are, ‘There is no God’” (see Ps 14:1–3; 53:1; Rom 3:10–12).
 - **Proverbs 12:15** – “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (see Prov 14:12; 16:2; 21:2).

- **2 Timothy 3:1–4** – “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”
- But the attack on authority is not an attack against the *concept* of authority itself, but on the *location* of authority.
- The war on authority is a war against *external/transcendent* authority in defense of *internal/subjective* authority.

a) Intuition

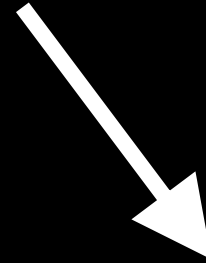
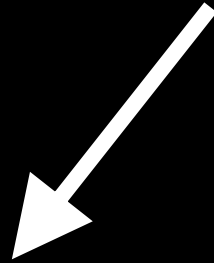
- Intuitionists attribute ultimate authority—the right to determine what reality is and means—to man's *impulses*.
- Intuition is appealed to as the judge for determining reality according to that which is *felt* or *sensed*.
- A reverence for intuition leads to *mysticism*, the belief that truth is *internal*—existing apart from any external point of reference—and will be found by looking within.
- Truth is intuitive; intuition therefore must decide the transcendent—what is real, good, beautiful.

“The eye through which I see
God is the same eye through
which God sees me; my eye and
God’s eye are one eye, one
seeing, one knowing, one love.”

—Meister Eckhart (1260-1328)



MY INTUITION



REALITY
(state of
things)

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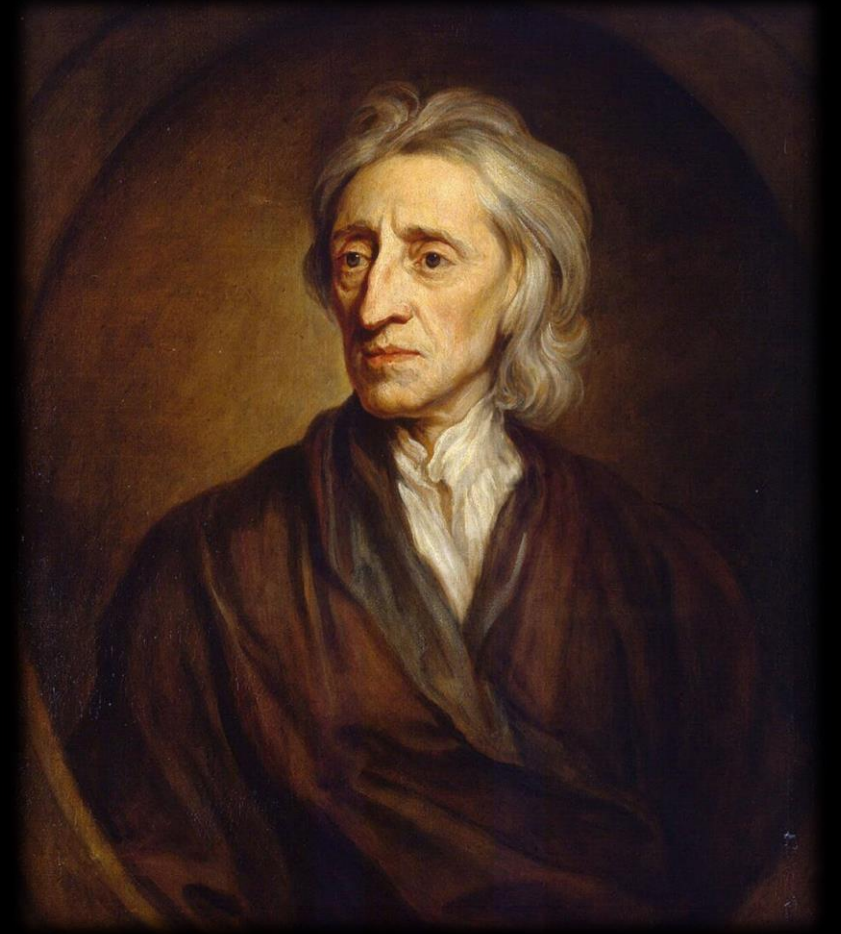
TRUTH
(description
of things)

b) Reason

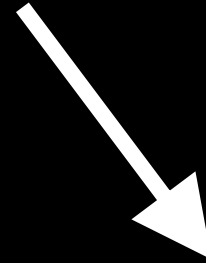
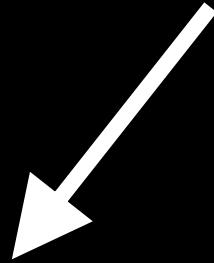
- Rationalists attribute ultimate authority—the right to determine what reality is and means—to man's *reason*.
- Reason is considered the starting point and final test of all truth. If something is true, it cannot contradict human logic.
- J. I. Packer: “The humanist asserts that all authority belongs to human reason; and if there be a god, his status is merely that of patron for the truths which reason determines” (*Honoring the Written Word of God*, 51).

“Nothing that is contrary to, and inconsistent with the clear and self-evident Dictates of Reason, has a right to be urged, or assented to, as a matter of Faith.”

—John Locke (1632–1704)



My REASON




REALITY
(state of
things)

=

TRUTH
(description
of things)

c) Senses

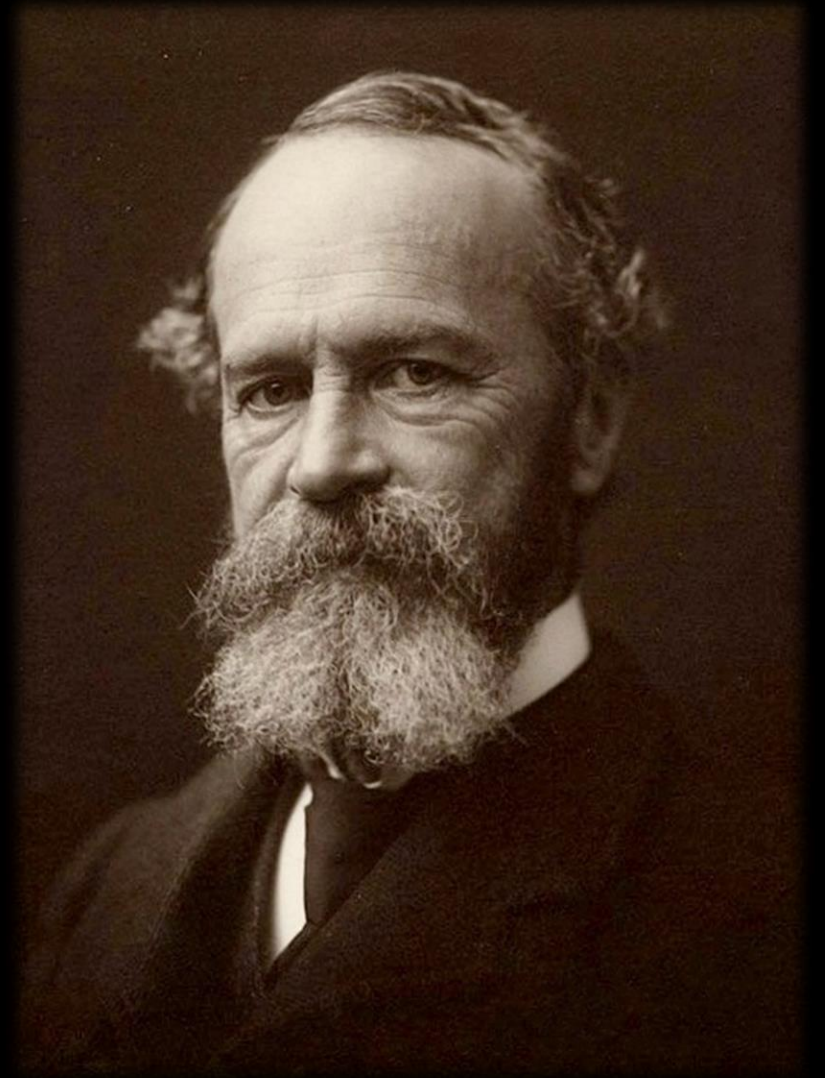
- Empiricists attribute ultimate authority—the right to determine what reality is and means—to man's *senses*.
- Carl Henry: “The empiricist rejects the mystic's call for intuitive illumination of transcendent reality, and the philosophical rationalist's call for human reasoning, and considers sense observation the source of all truth and knowledge. Empiricists do not wholly reject reason, since reason must relate sense perceptions in an orderly way, but all truth is held to be derived from experience” (*God, Revelation and Authority*, 1.78).



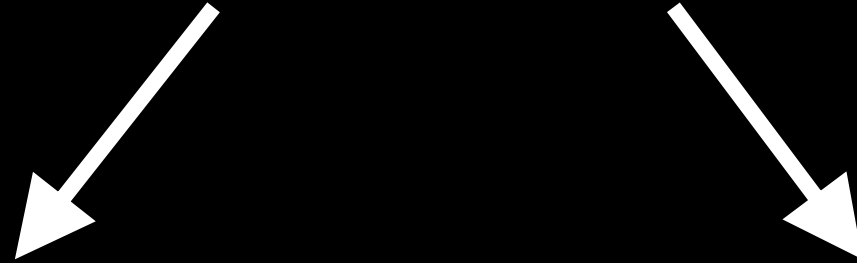
**I BELIEVE
IN
SCIENCE.®**

“To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced.”

—William James (1842–1920)



MY SENSES



REALITY
(state of
things)

=

TRUTH
(description
of things)

“Modernity and postmodernity seem to be connected thus: modernity essentially locates authority in the human self, and postmodernity radicalizes it.”

—Stephen Williams, “Towards Trust,” *The Trustworthiness of God*, 219



2. Authority as Recognized by the Christian

- Reminder: the question is not *if* you appeal to an authority, but *what* you appeal to *as* an authority.
- The man of the world appeals to his own *subjective* authority—intuition, reason, or senses, or a combination of all three—to determine and justify a belief, a choice, an action.
- But what makes a man a Christian is that he appeals to an *external* authority—to *God . . . specifically, to God as he has spoken in his word.*

1) God's authority is *inescapable*; it cannot be denied.

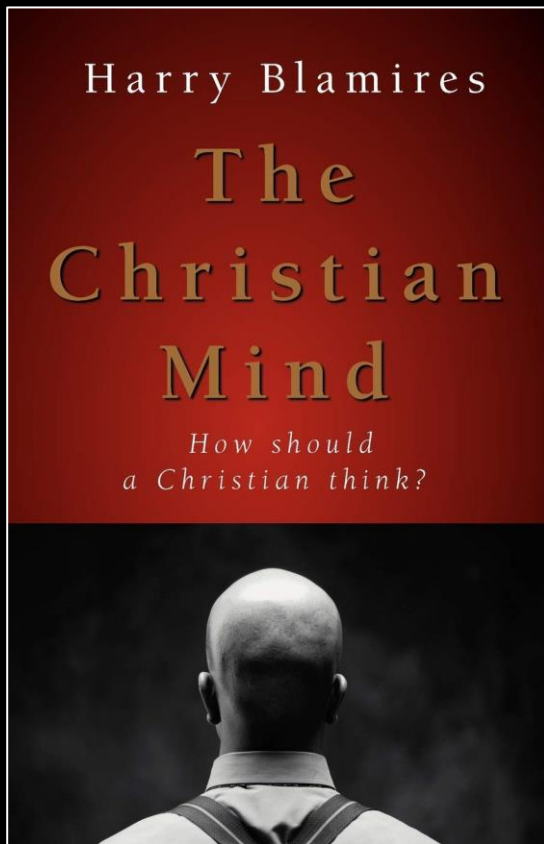
- Self-evident: he is the ultimate authority by virtue of the fact that he is God (consider his *names* and *perfections*).
- **Romans 11:33–36** – “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.”

- There is in our day a concerted effort to make authority and goodness mutually exclusive if it is found anyone else other than self.



“For the task of re-establishing the notion of God’s authority is obstructed not only by the current depreciation of authority itself but also by a false, pre-established picture of God—found even within the Church. Certainly the Church has preserved the concept of a loving God, a merciful God, a compassionate God. But have Christians generally themselves any vivid sense of God’s power and his dominion? . . .

“Do we, when we worship God or when we reflect upon his nature, catch a clear echo of his resounding and indomitable majesty? Are we inwardly and vitally aware of that tremendousness before which



all the greatest achievements of human civilization shrink to insignificance? It cannot be denied that this is the God we are supposed to worship—not just a companionable God who is to be sidled up to and nestled against, but an awesome God before whom the worshiper prostrates himself, a wrathful God whose raised right arm can shake the universe.”

—Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, 137

2) God's authority is *exclusive*; it cannot be equaled.

- **Jude 25** – “To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”
- **2 Chronicles 20:6b** – “Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You.
- There is no one else. No one contributes to this authority. No one accredits or certifies or delegates or ascribes this authority.
- Any other form of authority is derived from him.

3) God's authority is ***absolute***; it cannot be scrutinized.

- **Isaiah 40:28** – “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.”
- **Psalms 147:5** – “Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.”
- There are no means or methods or principles which could even be applied to appraising God's authority.

“God will not be tested, as if there were any authority higher than himself. His word is not subject to evaluation by human standards. It is not doubtful or disputable.”

—John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 86

“The very word authority has within it the word author. An author is someone who possesses a particular work. Insofar as God is the foundation of all authority, He exercises that foundation because He is the author and the owner of His creation. He is the foundation upon which all other authority stands or falls.”

—R. C. Sproul, “The Divine Foundation of Authority”

4) God's authority is ***total***; it cannot be isolated.

- **2 Corinthians 10:4-5** – “*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”
- All truth is God's truth; it belongs to him, not us.
- We cannot relegate God to Sundays while we take ownership of Monday to Saturday. We cannot put him in charge of the “sacred” while we oversee the secular.

“There is not a square inch in the
whole domain of our human
existence over which Christ, who is
Sovereign over all, does not cry,
‘Mine!’”

—Abraham Kuyper



5) God's authority is *revealed*; it cannot be ignored.

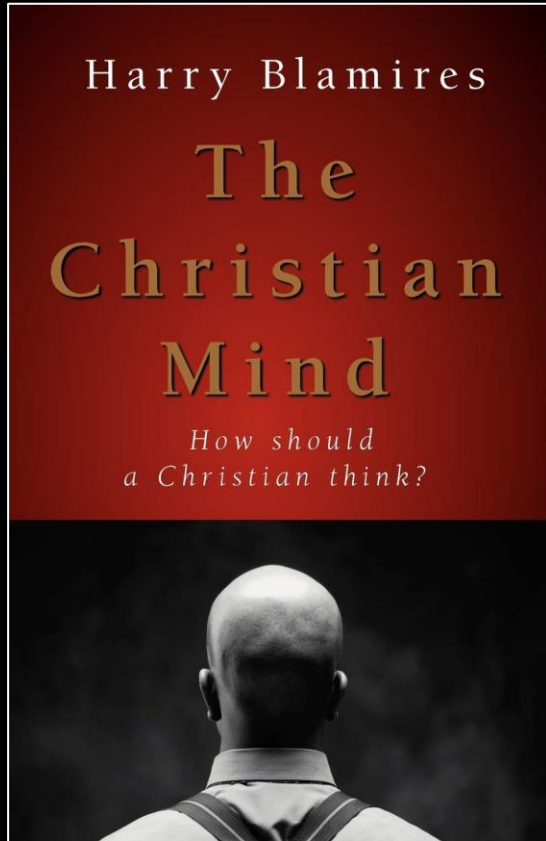
- **Isaiah 45:19** – “I have not spoken in secret, in some dark land; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek Me in a waste place’; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, declaring things that are upright.”
- **Hebrews 1:1–2** – “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”

Sola Scriptura



Scripture Alone



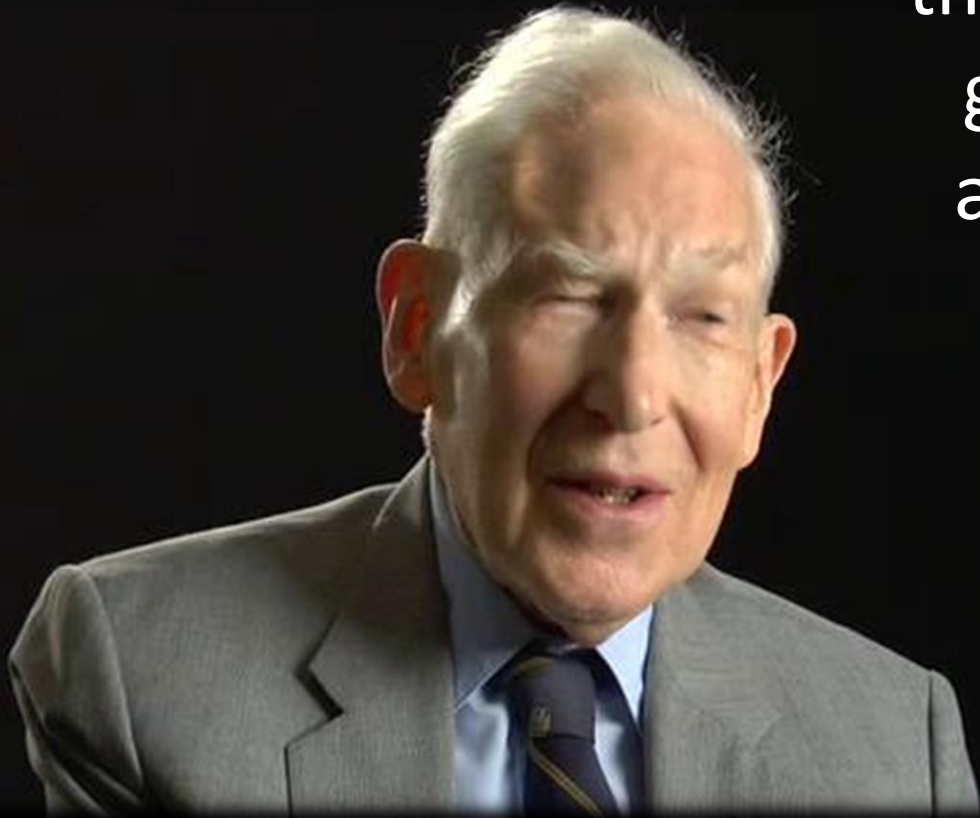


“To think Christianly is to think in terms of revelation. For the secularist, God and theology are they playthings of the mind. For the Christian, God is real, and Christian theology describes His truth revealed to us. For the secular mind, religion is essentially a matter of theory: for the Christian mind, Christianity is a matter of acts and facts. The acts and facts which are the basis of our faith are recorded in the Bible.”

—Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, 110–11

“The gospel . . . is a message that tells us that it is useless to seek the truth about God by speculation, and it comes to us as a command to stop speculating, and to put faith in what God has said, simply on the grounds that it is he, the God of truth, who has said it. The gospel, in other words, repudiates absolutely the authority of reason, and demands implicit subjection to God’s revealed truth.”

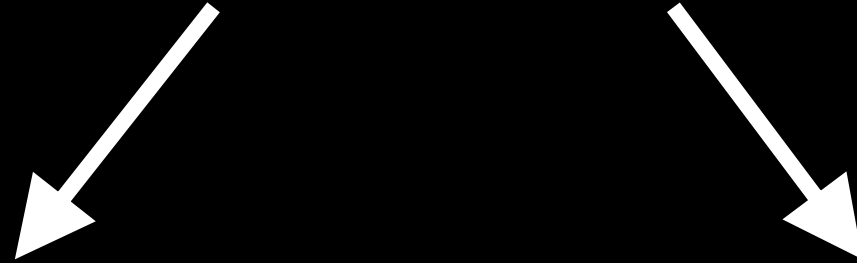
—J. I. Packer, *Honoring the Written Word of God*, 62



“To doubt revelation in favor of a private hunch was the sin into which Satan led Eve, and Eve’s children have been committing the same sin ever since the fall. The impulse to indulge oneself in believing something other than what God has said is an expression of the craving to be independent of God, which is the essence of sin. The temptation to know all things, including God, by reason, without reference to revelation, is the form that this craving for independence takes in the intellectual realm, just as the attempt to win heaven by works and effort, without grace, is the form that it takes in the moral realm. Pride prompts fallen mankind to go about, not merely to establish their own righteousness, but also to manufacture their own wisdom.”

—Packer, *Honoring the Written Word of God*, 62

GOD'S REVELATION



REALITY
(state of
things)

=

TRUTH
(description
of things)

“A true disciple inquires not whether a fact is agreeable to his own reason, but whether it is in the book. His pride has yielded to the Divine testimony. Teacher, your pride is still unbroken. Break down your pride, and yield to the word of God.”

—Adoniram Judson, 19th century missionary to Burma



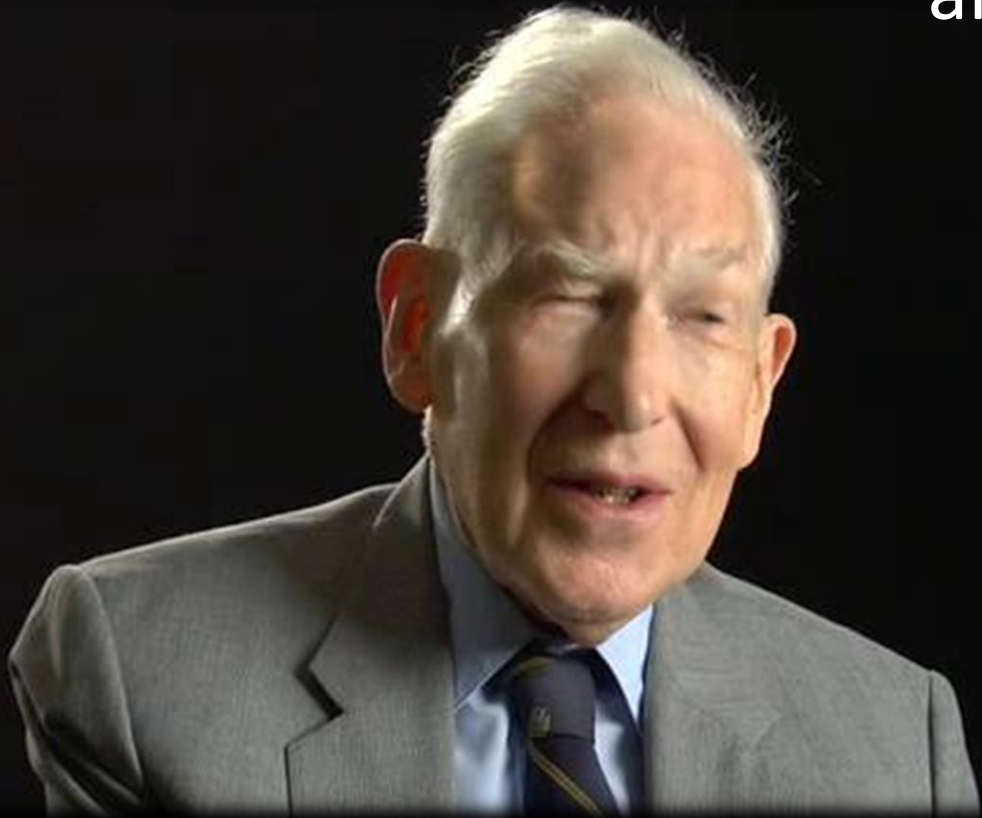
How then shall we respond?

1. Do you think according to God's authority?

- It is one thing to be conscience of your own thoughts.
- It is another thing—a second order kind of thinking—to be aware of *how you justify* your claims to truth, goodness, and beauty.
- Establishing our claims according to the standard of God as he has revealed himself in his word is not a *natural instinct*. It is a *spiritual discipline*, possible only for the regenerate man.
- Discipline your mind to think deliberately according to the standard of God's revelation.

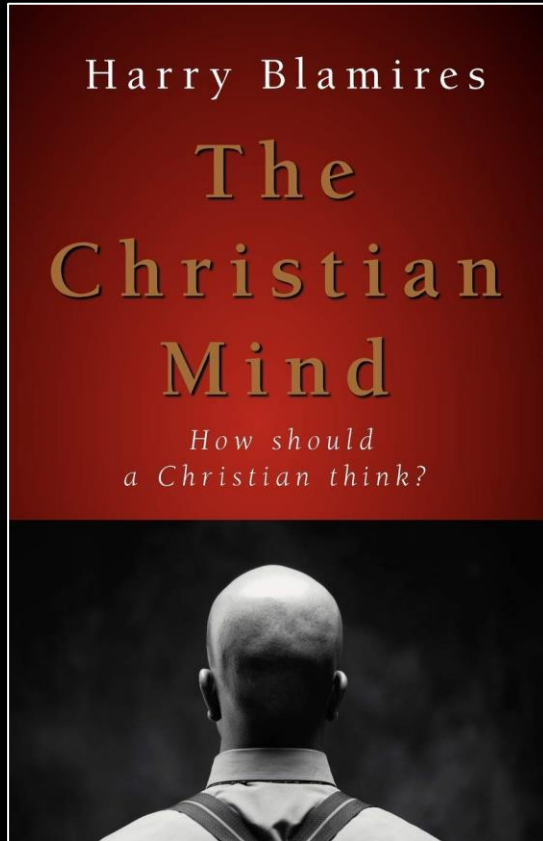
“It is one of the marks of the Christian man that he is convinced, through the Spirit’s inner witness, of the divinity and authority of Holy Scripture, and subjects his mind and binds his conscience to it.”

—J. I. Packer, *Honoring the Written Word of God*, 63



2. Do you embrace the doctrine of God's authority?

- Do you believe that God has the indisputable right to determine *for you* what to think and how you should think it?
- Do you believe that your own intuition, reason, and sensory perception are not only limited and faulty, but never intended to serve the ultimate authority in the first place?
- Have you humbled yourself like Job: “. . . Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; even twice, and I will add nothing more” (Job 40:1-5).



“God is not the bolsterer of our human wisdom, the buttress of our self-sufficiency. He is the despoiler of our human self-reliance. His name does not head the list of contributors to the fund for extending our empire of mastery; rather his Signature seals the death warrant of our egotism.”

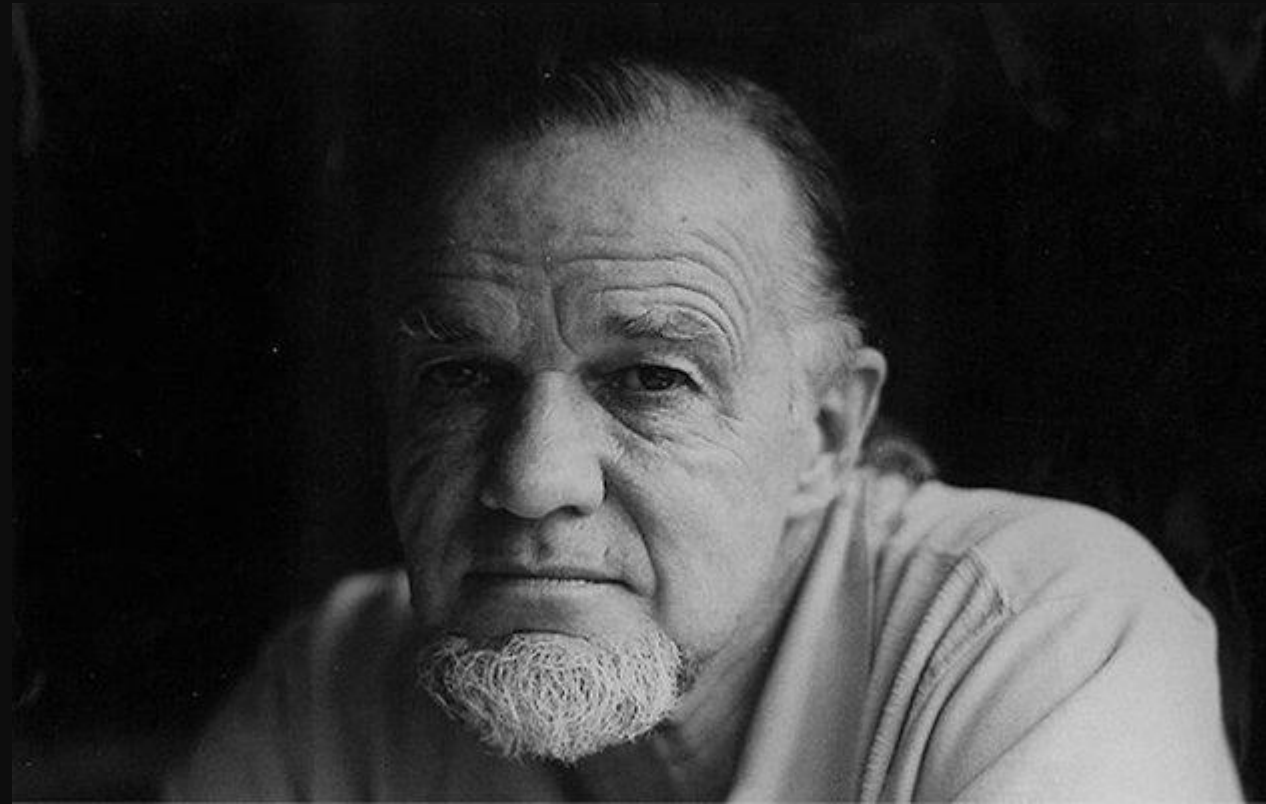
—Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, 146–47

3. Do you openly appeal to God's authority?

- We have been told by the culture to “keep God out” of our discussions of everyday life (ethics, politics, etc.).
- We must recover the courage to admit and assert a biblical worldview which claims no other justifying authority than God himself as he has spoken—over *all* of life.
- “There is nothing in our experience, however trivial, worldly, or even evil, which cannot be thought about Christianly” (Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, 45).

“It is not too strong to say that we are at war, and there are no neutral parties in the struggle. One either confesses that God is the final authority, or one confesses that Caesar is Lord.”

— Francis Schaeffer



4. Do you take refuge in God's authority?

- **Proverbs 14:26–27** – “In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death.”
- It is tremendously liberating to recognize that the truth belongs to God and that it is his to avenge when that truth rejected.
- Our role is to be faithful in application and proclamation, and leave the rest to God.

How Firm a Foundation

How firm a foundation,
Ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith
In His excellent word!

What more can He say
Than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge
To Jesus have fled?

MEN OF THE WORD

Wednesdays 7:00-9:00 PM

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Use the QR code below to submit a question pertaining to this MotW session. We will use these questions to produce additional resources to help provide you with the answers you need.



SCAN ME