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Series: People of the Book
Message: Submit To The Word Whatever The Cost

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In Western society over the years the attitude and relationship that our society in the West has had to the Word of God can probably be divided into three groups of people. The first group of people would be those who respect the Bible is true but don't really live their life by it. So they would be what I would call the coffee-table Christians, right? They have the great huge family Bible on the coffee table and there really isn't anything else going on in that home that relates to that big book on the table - but there it is. And they respect that book for reasons of growing up within that kind of context and understanding. The second group are those who reject the Bible as simply a myth, as simply a legend. Their response would be, "A book from God? Okay. Really? Right. Yeah, sure." And a third group of people would be those who believe and follow the Word of God and the Bible with a spirit and heart of devotion.

You look at those three groups and I would say today it's probably fair to say that that first group is in serious and rapid decline. I don't think there is necessarily a large contingent anymore who respect that Book in the way that maybe generations previous had and sit it in a prominent place in their home right on that coffee table. I think that group is declining rapidly.

That second group is growing more and more vocal about their attitude and their opinion towards the Word of God. They aren't satisfied any longer to suggest to us that it's just a matter of legend or myth. It was, "if you want to believe that, that's fine for you." Now they're entering into a period of time where this Book is out of touch. It is irrelevant. It is oppressive. And there would be many who would say it's dangerous to believe and follow the things in this Book.

And it's that third group that really speaks to where I would hope most of us are. But this third group is under enormous pressure to abandon the historic orthodox interpretation and understanding of the Word of God as it applies to crucial areas of life.

When you think of those three groups I couldn't help but think of Jesus's words to the spiritual leaders of His day when He said to them, "You understand not the Scriptures nor the power of God." What an incredible indictment for Jesus to say you don't understand the Scriptures and you don't have any clue about the power of God. If there's ever anything you don't want Jesus to say about you I would put that pretty high on the list, right? I wouldn't want that to be said of me and I wouldn't want that to be said of any of you.

Every fall we try and kind of launch the fall ministry year by reminding ourselves of what is important to us as the body of Christ called Covenant and what it is that we value. We try to do that in a variety of ways and creative ways and this year we're kind of wrapping it in this idea of being people of the Book. And what we say we value above everything else around here is the glory of God. There isn't anything higher; there isn't anything greater; there isn't anything more important to us than the glory of God. We want to live all of life to the glory of God because God alone is worthy of that and He deserves all of that praise that we can attribute to him through our life and our words and our actions. We talk about the fact that if we're really going to give glory to God it will be because we're pursuing obedience. After all, God says in Corinthians - Paul says, "Whatever you do, whether you eat or you drink, do all to the glory of God." If you're going to obey you're going to have to be in a position of pursuing a growing obedience to God. I think if you're living for the glory of God and if you're growing in your walk with God you know what? You aren't going to be able to help but have a heart of compassion for the lost and the least.

So those are the things that we want to value and that's why we speak of small groups and community groups and being in settings where the Word is getting into your life and all of that because that's the only pathway to achieving these things that we believe are of great value and great importance. So we're doing it this fall, as I said in this series -three weeks long - of being people of the Book. And this morning we want to see that the Word of God is our final authority in all things of faith and practice because it alone defines what is true, what is right, and what's good.

Part of this, I'm just throwing out some fun facts are just facts about the Bible, right? Last week we noted the fact that the Bible was written over 1500 years by 40

different human authors. It is 66 books wrapped up in one and all of them amazingly speak in harmony together about the most important things of life. It's truly a miraculous book.

Second thing, the word Bible means book - *biblos, biblia*. The word Bible - where do we get the word Bible from? We don't get it out of the Bible because the Bible never called itself the Bible. We call it the Bible because it's the Book. It's the *biblia*, the *biblos* - that's okay, that's good. When the Bible wants to self-reference it talks about it being the writings or the Scriptures. We talk about it being the Book, about being the Bible.

And then lastly - and this really pertains to our lesson last week - 28 books of the Bible can be read in 20 minutes or less. So if you say to me, "I want to read the Bible, I want to be in the Word - I just don't know where to start, it seems overwhelming to me" listen to me - 42% of your Bible can be read in 20 minutes or less in terms of just books that you could pick. You could pick 28 books out of the 66 and you can read any of those 28 in 20 minutes or less. Now here's what I would suggest. Out of that four-five hours you spend on social media every day just carve out - okay, was that too much or was that not enough? You got 20 minutes, right? If you took 20 minutes you could read in one sitting at one time 28 different books of the Bible. Okay you say, "I'm a slow reader." Okay, well then make it 30 minutes, or make it a few less books. But that's just kind of a practical application. Now, you're not going to do that with Isaiah are you? You're not going to do that with the Psalms, but you can do it with a bunch of books.

So this Book is a book like no other book. That's just the bottom line - this is a Book like no other book. And we said last Sunday, the Bible says that it is true, it's right, and it's good. And you know what I say to you? I say to you on the basis of that self-revelation, because that's what we saw, we saw this was the self-revelation of God's Word; that God the Spirit says about the Bible that it is true, that it is right, and it is good. And if I can bring you something that 100% of the time is true, and is right, and is good; what would you do with that? I would say you better be building your life on it because there isn't anything else in the world that is going to be 100% true, 100% right, and 100% good. But the Bible is. And so, because of that I want to say to you this morning the Bible alone is our final authority.

I'm going to start off this morning and do something a little bit different but I think it's important to kind of set the stage for what we want to do in the second half by way of how we want to bring Biblical evidence to back up that statement that the Bible is in fact our final authority. And what I want to do to start off is to say this to you - the Bible is in tension with the culture. Okay, now that's like a news revelation isn't it? The Bible is in tension with the culture and we could very easily say there's nothing new here, we can move along. Because in reality, even though we probably sense it more acutely today than maybe 5 years ago, or 10 years ago, or 20 years ago and we feel like, "man you are right, the Bible is in tension with our culture and our world like I've never experienced in my lifetime."

But here's the news. The reality is God's people have lived this if they been walking faithfully with him, they've lived this since the beginning of time. The story of the Bible is how the Bible is in tension with the culture and that's why God has called us out from the culture. Because the Bible speaks to us in a way that the culture doesn't. The culture lies to us, the Bible speaks good to us; it speaks truth to us. The culture seems to corrupt us. The Bible wants to bring us what is good, and right, and pure, and righteous. That's why Paul says in Romans 12 "don't be conformed to the world but be transformed". How you can be transformed - can you think of any way? By the renewing of your mind, right? Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind and so that's what this book does.

So we live in this place of constant tension and that's why we're called to be set apart, that's why we're called to be sanctified. So how do we respond to this tension in the culture? Three things - three possible ways it seems to me we can in faith let the Scriptures push back against the culture. We can - you better underline the word faith - because it's going to take faith to let the Scripture push back against the culture. The culture, and I'm using that word in its broadest sense; I'm talking about the culture as the world, the flesh, and the devil speaking against and warring against us and against God and against his word. And you open this living and active Word from God and you open this Book up every day. If you are a morning person, you do it in the morning; if you're not a morning person you do it at noon or at night, but you open this Book every day and you say to God as you open this Book, "God, help me to see in faith how it is

that your truth pushes back against the culture.” Because it is my friend, this living and active word from God that the Holy Spirit of God uses to speak His truth into our life. That's what God uses. God uses the Bible by means of the Spirit of God to speak His truth into our life. Luther at that climactic moment when he had to pick between the church and between the Scripture, stood before the Council with his life on the line and he said, “My conscience is bound to the Word of God. There's nothing else I can do but obey it.” And that's what we do in faith when we push back against the culture.

Secondly, we can in unbelief reject the Scripture. In unbelief we can reject the Scripture. This might be the most intellectually honest thing we can do, that some people can do. But what I mean by that is rather than twisting the Scripture to get it to say what we want it to say, why not just be honest enough to say, “I don't want to believe that. I reject that. I don't accept that.” That's honest - it's foolish, but it's honest because only a fool would say the Word of God that is true, and right, and good isn't true, and right, and good enough for me. And so here it is really a matter of just unbelief.

The third way - this to me is the greatest concern today - is in concession we can adopt the changing interpretation while trying to hold on to what it is that we lay claim to with regard to our faith. Know what this is called? This is called the slippery slope. You know why it's called the slippery slope? Because it's really slippery when you get on that slope. And you try your best to come to the Word of God and the culture is pushing against you on all of these different fronts and is trying to conform you and get you thinking differently than what the Word of God says here to be thinking. And the heart of man, being what it is wants to concede and say something like this - we want to say that this is simply a concession at this point and we're going to hold on to everything else for all its worth. All you have to do is study church history and all you have to do is read any contemporary literature of what's going on in our world today and you know that there are people all over the slippery slope that are falling off of their faith.

What does this look like? That's what I want to zero in on for just a few more minutes. What does this look like when we adopt this this role of concession? When we say, “You know, I'm going to yield this at this point but I'm sure going to hold on to everything else.” What does that look like as we handle the Word of God? Well, let's give you some illustrations of what I think this looks like because ultimately in my mind

it's a matter of diminishing the authority of the Word of God in your life. It's a matter of diminishing the authority of the Word of God in your life. And it takes a lot of different forms. I'm just going to show you three that I think are very common and probably easy to put before you.

First of all, sometimes we just selectively pick verses that support our position. A real easy example, the one that I've referenced on more than one occasion is the whole health wealth prosperity gospel stuff. And the whole health wealth prosperity gospel stuff which says more than anything in the world God wants you healthy, and he wants you wealthy, and he wants you prosperous; and that generally means lots of money and you're going to show everybody that you've got it.

Those guys love to spend time in the Old Testament and they love to pull verses selectively out of the Old Testament which is, in my understanding, written to the people of God living in a covenant relationship with God in which God literally said to His people Israel, "I will in fact prosper you physically and materially if you walk in obedience to me." I don't read that in the New Testament living under the New Covenant. And so they spend a lot of time selectively pulling verses out of the Old Testament - a lot of verses about kingship, a lot of verses about land, and wealth, and riches, and all of that stuff make up basically their gospel.

And I can tell you again one of the great values of expository preaching, in which at Covenant we just try to open up a book of the Bible and we go through the whole book just passage by passage, is that you just have to take whatever comes your way. And when it talks about Christ and the cross and suffering and having trouble in this world and not knowing what it is you're going to do from one day to the next and doesn't fit into the framework of prosperity gospel very well so they don't have to talk about those things. But if that were to happen here I have a whole bunch of people who if I just naturally slipped past a really hard passage might just come up and say, "Carlton, did you notice that you went by those six verses?" I'd say, "Really I did? Wow I didn't even know that." No, I wouldn't. So you can selectively just pick out verses can't you, and when you do that you diminish the authority of the Word of God over every area of life and over its message.

Secondly, we can just avoid certain topics altogether. And this is the other side of the coin. One, you go and you find the verses that you want, and the other, when you just avoid them altogether because they embarrass you. Or maybe it's because they disturb you. And so you don't want to read verses in the Bible about inequality. And you don't want to read verses in the Bible about injustice. And don't want to read verses in the Bible about caring for the poor, and the lost, and the least. In the context of what's going on in our country today maybe you avoid verses that might take you into the understanding of what the Bible teaches about every race being equal before God. That God says he's made all of us in his image. And maybe you don't want to go to Revelation 5 were every nation, and every ethnic group, and every color of skin is going to be standing before God and praising Him. Maybe you don't want to go to Acts 17 where Paul talks about the fact that we are all one. Or in Galatians 3 he said there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female. And so you just avoid altogether any uncomfortable or disturbing passage. That's a way that we just simply get around and we diminish the authority of the Word of God in our life.

But here's this last one. And this is the one to me that we see operating today probably more or at least as much as the other two, and to me this one is probably most troubling because of what I see happening within the evangelical church in regard to this. And that is Biblical passages are said to be now too confusing, too unclear - we just can't really know what they're saying for sure. And I want to speak to two areas in particular where this argument, and the argument goes like this - this is the way this argument is formulated: "If we can set aside those things that are disdainful and offensive to our culture maybe we would better be able to draw those people into the church. And so we're going to deal with those passages differently than the Orthodox historic interpretation and understanding has happened for hundreds of years throughout church history. And now we're just going to set those teachings aside because you know, after all when I look at those they are kind of confusing. And I'm not really clear what Jesus meant there, and I'm not sure what Paul meant there. And maybe there was something historical happening in that context that is different than today and so it really doesn't apply in the way that it seems to read."

Two areas where this is happening, and they put people in my mind on the slippery slope and there's all kinds of evidence to this fact. First, is the role of women in church. The role of women in church. At Covenant we don't ordain women to be elders. We don't ordain women to be teaching pastors; to exercise as Paul says, authority over men teaching in public settings the Word. Go back to what I said about that third group - that they are under enormous pressure to cave on certain social cultural issues that are pressing in upon us today. And one of them most certainly is this matter of what is the role of women in the church. Now we absolutely affirm that men and women are equal before God – absolute equality, not a question. May it never be suggested that we don't see it that way. We simply believe that as we read the Bible, that God has said that men are to take the role of spiritual leadership in the home and in the church and he has reserved for men alone the position of elder spiritual authority within the body of Christ. I'm going to say to you today that that is not only viewed as being archaic by our culture, it's viewed as being absolutely oppressive, in fact, dangerous.

Tim Keller who remember - people of the Book - that's where I took that language from, people of the Book for this little series. Tim Keller this last year was nominated by a committee that represented Princeton Seminary and he was going to be given the Abraham Kuyper Award for excellence in Reformed Theology. There isn't anybody that could've been a greater recipient of that award in my estimation than Tim Keller - totally deserving. When that news was made public the alumni of Princeton Seminary went bananas. They just literally flipped out, and the reason they flipped out is Tim Keller comes from a tradition of the Presbyterian church in which women are not ordained as elders. And if you would read the responses that were sent in by alumni, it is just unbelievable the response of push back. They didn't do the award, he came and spoke. It was totally different than they had envisioned but he did a very gracious thing in withdrawing his name and letting it go. One lady in particular wrote, and I shared this with the elders, she said, "As I am writing this letter my body is physically shaking." She was so disturbed by the fact that Princeton Seminary, which if you know anything about Princeton Seminary, liberal would probably be a word we would use. They don't believe in the final authority of the Word of God, they don't have a majority of faculty who believe Jesus is the son of God, they don't believe in the penal death of Christ on the

cross, and they don't believe in the need for conversion to be brought into faith through Christ. So this is the community that was represented and they just couldn't deal with it.

The second area that we see this happening in our culture is of course to the redefinition of marriage. Biblical marriage is defined as being between a man and a woman. Our culture has come to a different understanding. And what do they do as they come to the Word of God, I'm talking about brothers and sisters in Christ who have adopted the position, "If we would just satisfy these viewpoints that are disdainful and offensive to our culture we would be a much more welcoming church." We want to be a welcoming church. And the church has failed miserably in reaching out in love and compassion to this element of our culture and our society. I would be the first to repent of that and say the church has failed in ministering to this group of people within our society.

But we've now arrived at the conclusion that these passages that speak about homosexuality and about marriage are just not that clear anymore. And they're confusing to us and there's historic reasons why we don't think they apply anymore. We know what the passages say I think, we just don't like what they say. It's not an overstatement to say that the very authority of the Word of God is at stake when we decide that we're going to come to Scripture and we're going to change what has been the historic orthodox interpretation and understanding of the Word of God for hundreds – nay, up to thousands of years and decide that no longer is it clear and now in the name of love and compassion we're going to change it and be more inclusive.

Listen, to be people of the Book requires that we submit to the authority of the Word of God whatever the cost. So let's look at what that means when we think in terms of the standard of the Word of God being what it claims to be. Christian Smith is a sociologist. He's written a book called *Souls in Transition*, which profiles the beliefs of young adults under the age of 25. He finds that most of them believe – listen to this, this is our generation, this is the world we're raising our students and our children in. He finds that most of them believe it is the choice of their beliefs that make them true. The choice is what defines what is true, not their truth that leads to their choice. He knows how even young adults who go to conservative churches and identify as Christians often refuse to believe Christian prohibitions against premarital sex and other Biblical

norms that conflict with their feelings and their intuition. Smith relates how he often interviewed people and asked them if their moral convictions, some of which were very strong, were mainly subjective feelings or true to reality. Again, this is an important statement. He found that most had difficulty even understanding what he was asking. They simply cannot believe in or sometimes even conceive of given objective truth.

Now I would suggest to you that what's behind all of this is the question: "by whose authority are you going to live your life?" You see, our culture is lying to us every day and saying, "Well of course you determine how you live your life by how you want to live your life - with what feels right to you by your own intuition." And the Bible says no, wait a minute. The Bible says this is the Word of God to us which is true, right, and good -100% of the time. Genesis 3 - what is Genesis 3? God gave Adam and Eve the command to have the whole garden before them, to enjoy all the blessings of life that God was giving to them. There it was, the whole thing. The one thing they weren't supposed to do, one thing they weren't supposed to do. And Satan, in the form of the serpent comes and says, "Did God really say that? Wow, that seems oppressive doesn't it? That seems really kind of authoritative and authoritarian on his part doesn't it? That he really wants you to not do that." And my friends, that question has been playing out all through the rest of human history. It plays out in my heart every day. Every day when I choose selfishly and I choose to sin, I'm answering the question by whose authority and I'm saying it's going to be by mine. I'm going to do what I want to do, irrespective of what God has said that I'm supposed to do.

So here, let me give you five reasons why the final authority in your life must in fact be the Word of God. And I don't know, maybe we aren't going get through all five of these, we will see. I want to have time for communion but I want to cover this as well. So we'll see where we go. First off, why is the Bible our final authority? And we're going to start at the most basic place, right? Because it alone was written by God. Hundreds of times we read, "thus saith the Lord." And that's not just the catchphrase, that's not just an introductory comment. "Thus saith the Lord," that's a claim of authorship by the Lord.

Turn to Psalm 119 again, remember this is kind of our benchmark where we've been spending our time. Psalm 119 is 176 verses, 169 of them talk about the Word of

God in some way. So it is the longest and it is the greatest of the Psalms about the Scriptures, about the Word of God. And what I want you to see is there are at least eight different words that are repeated all over the place through these 176 verses that talk about God being the author of the Bible. Because of this little prepositional phrase that is linked to these words that talk about, this is the *Word of God*, these are *your* commandments. So let me just share these with you. The Bible calls itself the Law, the Testimonies, the Precepts, the Statutes, the Commandments, the Judgments, the Ordinances, the Word, and the Ways.

Psalms 119 verse 1 - just pick up all of these different words and the prepositional phrase that ties into it – “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong but walk in His ways. You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes. Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes, do not utterly forsake me.” So on and on and on those opening eight verses talk about the Word of God as being authored by God. It's His to us. It echoes Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” It's profitable for us is that all of Scripture is given to us for profit. John Calvin said we owe to the Scriptures the same reverence which we owe to God because it has proceeded from Him alone.

Let's do one more. Because this Word is what Jesus believed in, it's what Jesus taught. Jesus taught that the Scriptures were the very words of God. What did Jesus believe and teach about the Bible? Well, in Matthew 5, we're going to get there in a couple weeks when we do the Sermon on the Mount, he said not one jot or one tittle will pass away. Heaven and earth may pass away, everything else may be gone, but when it comes to the Word of God not one jot or one tittle will pass away. You know what a jot and a tittle is? A jot is the smallest Hebrew letter in their alphabet and the tittle is the smallest part of the Hebrew letter. So the smallest letter which is like an apostrophe or a comma, and the smallest part of the letter are not going to pass away. Heaven and earth might, but not the Word of God. Matthew 19:5 Jesus said that in Genesis 2 –

listen, this is an interesting perspective, it really nails what Jesus thinks of the Word - because in Matthew 19 Jesus said God said a man shall leave his father and his mother and he'll cleave to his wife. Jesus said, "God said." Now you go to Genesis 2 and verse 24 you know what you find? You don't find the exact words "God said", you just have God saying a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. Jesus understood though, the writings of Moses inspired by the Holy Spirit as being one and the same as the words of God. So he could literally attribute what Moses wrote down inspired by the Holy Spirit as simply being this is what God said. God says that Jesus' authority and the authority of the Bible are one in the same. Jesus saw those as being together.

And here's what I want you to understand about that. We're not wiser than Jesus. We're not more compassionate than Jesus. I go back again to how we as the body of Christ have responded to various communities of people over the history of our country and over the history of the church. Whether it was racial issues and black people, and what did we do? We avoided verses or we found one that we thought supported our view. And in that way we simply minimized the need that we had to submit to the authority of the Word of God. And so we yielded to the pressure of the world and we said, "This group of people is not equal with us and so we have the right to treat them differently because they're just not really made in the image and likeness of God." So we did a great injustice and a great disservice to the Word of God and the people that God loves.

And so now we have within our world and within our country, we have a growing group, a very vocal group, of people from within the lesbian gay bisexual transgender group. And how is it that we're going to handle the Word of God in a way that's compassionate and loving and gracious and kind? And how is it that we're going to bring the truth of God to them in the form of the gospel that came to us? Staying true to the Word but representing Christ and the love of Christ. You see, that's where we have failed. Oftentimes we've held with great tenacity in some instances to what we believe has been the truth, but we've used the truth as a club against people who, just like us, need a Savior. Who just like us, have fallen short of the glory of God. And so when we think about Jesus and his compassion and his love we don't want to adopt a position of

Scripture; and the reason I'm taking a long way to get to this is we're hearing voices today within the church that say because we have failed we now need to extend love and we need to extend compassion to a group that in my mind needs more than ever to hear people sharing truth with them in love. It's not a loving thing to leave a segment of our culture and our society wrapped in the bondages of sin. That's not a loving thing to do. So we need to find how it is that we bring the truth of the Word and the love of Christ to a people who are all around us and do so in submission to the Word of God. We're not acting more compassionate than Jesus when we minimize the truth. We're not being more loving than Jesus when we change the meaning of Scripture because we don't want to offend anybody, we're doing in fact a great disservice.

We're going to jump ahead to my last point – what do we take away. We will come back and pick up these other ones next Sunday Lord willing, but what do we take away? And I'll repeat this again next week because this is crucial for us to understand the authority of the Word in our life. Let's not compromise the true things, the doctrines of Scripture, let's not compromise the true things to accommodate the hard things. The hard things are the cultural issues that are pressing in on us. And if we compromise on those hard things you know what, we're going to end up with the worst thing possible - you end up with an apostate church that doesn't have any good news to share with anybody. It's a wonderful statement in Isaiah 66, "Thus says the Lord: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be,' declares the Lord. 'But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my Word'." Let's pray.

Father God we want to be a people who are humble, we want to be a people who are contrite in spirit. Father, we want to be a people who are trembling at your Word which is true, which is right, and good. Lord give us the capacity to receive your truth, to welcome your truth into our lives, to embrace that truth. Father, then take that truth to the generation of people that you have placed in our lives to share the gospel of your grace, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.