Lesson 1 Scripture Tradition and Church Authority Study Notes

How Did We Get Here

These self contained notes explain the historical and theological issues in Lesson 1 and point to primary texts. Canon, inspiration, interpretation, tradition, and church authority are related questions but must not be collapsed into one another.

Slide 1 How Did We Get Here

Christian doctrine did not develop as a straight line from a verse to a creed. Believers read Scripture, answered new questions, borrowed and corrected intellectual tools, and made judgments in churches shaped by particular conflicts. History does not replace biblical judgment; it reveals the assumptions and interpretive decisions behind positions that can otherwise seem self evident.

Read or search *doctrine history authority interpretation*

Notes

Slide 2 How We Will Approach the Class

Our method has three movements: reconstruct a view in its setting, identify the authority structure behind it, and test it exegetically. Fair description must come before evaluation, but fair description does not require treating contradictory claims as equally true.

Read or search *historical context charitable representation biblical evaluation*

Notes

Slide 3 Course Outline

Lesson 1 is foundational because later disputes about Christ, salvation, sacraments, and the Church all depend partly on how disagreement is settled. The authority question is therefore not one topic among many; it is part of the method used in every topic.

Read or search *trace authority through later course topics*

Notes

Slide 4 Scripture Tradition and Church Authority

Scripture is the collection received as God's written Word. Tradition is transmitted teaching, worship, interpretation, and practice. Church authority is the responsibility of recognized teachers to guard and apply the faith. Every community uses all three. The dispute is whether a later authority can be irreformable alongside Scripture or always remains corrigible by Scripture.

Read or search *Scripture tradition Magisterium ministerial authority*

Notes

Slide 5 Three Questions for Lesson 1

Canon asks which writings are Scripture. Inspiration asks what God did in producing them. Authority asks what obedience they require and who may interpret them definitively. Agreement on the 27 New Testament books does not settle error, sufficiency, added revelation, or the Church's interpretive role.

Read or search *canon inspiration inerrancy sufficiency interpretation*

Notes

Slide 6 Irenaeus and Apostolic Teaching

Around AD 180 Irenaeus opposed Gnostic claims of secret apostolic knowledge. He appealed to a public message preached by the apostles, handed down in Scripture, and confessed in churches connected to them. Scripture, received teaching, and succession reinforce one another. Succession makes hidden innovations implausible; it is not presented as a guarantee that every officeholder is incapable of error.

Read or search *Irenaeus Against Heresies Book 3 chapters 1 to 4; rule of faith*

Notes

Slide 7 Athanasius and the Canon

Athanasius's Festal Letter 39 in AD 367 gives the earliest surviving list exactly matching the present 27 book New Testament. He distinguishes canonical books from works useful for instruction, showing that valued did not automatically mean Scripture. His list records a mature judgment emerging from worship, copying, controversy, and broad reception; it is not the moment one bishop created the canon.

Read or search *Athanasius Festal Letter 39 sections 5 to 7*

Notes

Slide 8 How Did We Get 27 Books

The canon emerged through distributed recognition, not one vote. Apostolic writings circulated in the first century; the four Gospels and much of Paul gained wide use early; a smaller group remained disputed. Persecution and rival canons made boundaries practical. Councils later confirmed a collection already broadly received. Recognition was historical and ecclesial, while the authority recognized was understood as divine.

Read or search *Muratorian Fragment Eusebius canon Hippo Carthage*

Notes

Slide 9 How Were Books Recognized

Churches weighed converging signs: apostolic connection, coherence with the received faith, widespread use, antiquity, and reading in worship. These were not a mechanical formula. Hebrews had uncertain authorship, Revelation met regional resistance, and First Clement and The Shepherd of Hermas were valued without entering the canon. Difficult cases reveal discernment rather than arbitrary selection.

Read or search *compare Hebrews Revelation 1 Clement Shepherd of Hermas*

Notes

Slide 10 From Recognition to the 27 Book Canon

Irenaeus defended a fourfold Gospel around AD 180. Eusebius later described recognized, disputed, and rejected books. Athanasius listed all 27 in 367; Hippo and Carthage affirmed substantially the same New Testament. The sequence matters: broad reception preceded conciliar confirmation, even though not every congregation always possessed an identical bound volume.

Read or search *Irenaeus c 180; Eusebius c 325; Athanasius 367; Hippo 393; Carthage 397*

Notes

Slide 11 What Are These Books

Canon identifies the books; bibliology asks what kind of books they are. Historic Christianity holds together full human authorship and divine authorship: writers use their own vocabulary, sources, genres, and personalities, yet God speaks through the result. Modern alternatives relocate authority to the experience behind the text, God's present use of it, or its witness to revelation rather than its words as written.

Read or search *concursive inspiration dictation theory Barth Scripture as witness*

Notes

Slide 12 What Does Inspired Mean

Second Timothy 3 calls Scripture God breathed and connects its origin to its usefulness. Second Peter 1 says human speakers spoke from God as carried by the Spirit. Verbal inspiration extends to the words; plenary inspiration extends to all Scripture. Neither erases genre, approximation, ordinary grammar, or human agency.

Read or search *2 Timothy 3:16 to 17; 2 Peter 1:20 to 21*

Notes

Slide 13 Can Scripture Contain Error

Inerrancy says Scripture is true in all it affirms when read according to authorial intention and literary form. Infallibility stresses that it cannot fail in God's purpose. Before alleging error, ask whether a text quotes another speaker, uses poetry, rounds a number, arranges events topically, or describes appearance ordinarily. The doctrine does not guarantee perfect copies, translations, or interpreters.

Read or search *Chicago Statement; genre authorial intent autographs textual criticism*

Notes

Slide 14 Old Testament Canon Differences

Protestants normally receive 39 Old Testament books corresponding to the Hebrew Bible's contents. Catholics also receive the Deuterocanonical books defined at Trent. Orthodox collections are generally broader and vary somewhat. The Septuagint's early Christian use is central to Catholic and Orthodox arguments; Protestant arguments stress the Hebrew canon and ancient distinctions among books. All three receive the same 27 book New Testament.

Read or search *Hebrew Bible Septuagint Deuterocanon Apocrypha Orthodox canon*

Notes

Slide 15 Augustine on Philosophy and Truth

Augustine said the Catholic Church's authority moved him to receive the Gospel. In context, the Church publicly identifies, transmits, and commends the Gospel against Manichaean claims; it need not mean the Church creates its truth. He also said truths in pagan learning may be reclaimed for Christian use. Reason and church testimony assist the reader, but neither may contradict revelation.

Read or search *Augustine Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus 5; On Christian Doctrine 2.40*

Notes

Slide 16 Philosophy and Early Christian Theology

Early Christians inherited Greek intellectual vocabulary. Terms such as substance, nature, and person helped state biblical judgments precisely when controversy exposed ambiguity. Nicaea used nonbiblical vocabulary to protect the biblical confession of the Son's full deity. Yet a philosophical framework can become a gatekeeper that decides beforehand what Scripture may mean. The issue is whether concepts serve the text or govern it.

Read or search *Justin Martyr Cappadocians homoousios Christian Platonism*

Notes

Slide 17 The Authority Question Behind Philosophy

A conclusion may be explicit in a text, inferred from several texts, or constructed partly through philosophical reasoning. All may be true, but they do not carry authority identically. Creeds often claim to state good and necessary consequences rather than new revelation. Responsible theology shows its inferential steps and keeps its synthesis open to scriptural correction.

Read or search *good and necessary consequence theological inference*

Notes

Slide 18 Aquinas on Reason and Revelation

Aquinas held that some truths about God are available to natural reason, while mysteries such as the Trinity require revelation. Revelation is also needed because reason alone reaches truth slowly, unevenly, and with error. Sacred doctrine receives its principles from God; philosophy clarifies concepts, draws implications, and answers objections. Grace does not destroy nature, and revelation does not make reasoning unnecessary.

Read or search *Aquinas Summa Theologiae First Part question 1 articles 1 to 8*

Notes

Slide 19 The Reformation Divide

The dispute was not Bible versus Church. Reformers used creeds, teachers, and councils but denied that a post apostolic office or tradition was incapable of error. Rome taught that the apostolic deposit is transmitted in Scripture and Tradition and authentically interpreted by the Church. The practical question was where final appeal could be made when sources seemed to conflict.

Read or search *formal principle Reformation Scripture Tradition Magisterium*

Notes

Slide 20 Luther Scripture and Conscience

At Worms in 1521 Luther refused to recant unless convinced by Scripture and clear reason, noting that popes and councils had contradicted one another. His conscience was captive to God's Word. This was not isolated individualism: he translated, preached, retained creeds, and argued publicly. Councils were valuable when defending apostolic teaching but could not create new articles of faith.

Read or search *Luther Diet of Worms; On the Councils and the Church*

Notes

Slide 21 Calvin on Scripture and the Spirit

Calvin grounded Scripture's authority in God rather than the Church's decision. The Church recognizes the canon but does not confer divinity on it. Evidence, coherence, majesty, and church testimony confirm faith; the Spirit gives deepest assurance that Scripture is God's voice. This witness is tied to the text, not private revelation beyond it, because the Spirit does not contradict what he inspired.

Read or search *Calvin Institutes Book 1 chapters 7 to 9 and Book 4 chapter 9*

Notes

Slide 22 What Sola Scriptura Does and Does Not Mean

Sola Scriptura means Scripture alone is the final infallible rule. It does not mean no teachers, creeds, councils, language study, or tradition. Those authorities can be real while remaining ministerial and reformable. Solo scriptura instead makes isolated individual judgment effectively supreme. The Reformation principle requires a Church under the Word, not a reader without a church.

Read or search *sola Scriptura solo scriptura prima Scriptura ministerial authority*

Notes

Slide 23 Trent on Scripture and Tradition

Trent's Fourth Session in 1546 received the Gospel as preserved in written books and unwritten apostolic traditions, affirmed the broader Catholic canon, and gave the Vulgate an authoritative public role. Its target was not Scripture's authority but Scripture alone as the final infallible norm. Later Catholic teaching speaks of one deposit communicated through Scripture and Tradition and interpreted by the Magisterium.

Read or search *Council of Trent Fourth Session; Vulgate; canonical Scriptures*

Notes

Slide 24 Westminster and the Supreme Judge

Westminster says God's authority is the reason Scripture must be believed. Church testimony and Scripture's qualities may move and confirm, while full persuasion comes from the Spirit by and with the Word. Scripture contains all necessary for faith and life, expressly or by good and necessary consequence. Councils remain useful but fallible; the supreme judge is the Spirit speaking in Scripture.

Read or search *Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 1 sections 1 to 10*

Notes

Slide 25 Charnock on Divine Authority

Charnock develops the Protestant claim from God's character. If Scripture is God's speech, its authority is intrinsic, and its truthfulness follows from God's inability to deceive or be deceived. Church testimony identifies and commends the text but cannot make it true. Thus bibliology leads back to beliefs about God's truthfulness, providence, and use of human agents.

Read or search *Stephen Charnock Discourses on the Word divine authority*

Notes

Slide 26 Modern Case Studies

Latter day Saints accept the New Testament but add other standard works and continuing revelation. Jehovah's Witnesses accept the Protestant canon but read it through a distinctive translation and governing interpretive structure. One case changes the boundaries and continuity of revelation; the other foregrounds translation and institutional interpretation. "Believes the Bible" is therefore an incomplete description.

Read or search *official sources LDS standard works; Jehovah Witness New World Translation*

Notes

Slide 27 Where the Major Traditions Stand Today

Catholicism joins Scripture and Tradition in one deposit served by the Magisterium. Orthodoxy reads Scripture as the central written witness within Holy Tradition, worship, councils, and the Fathers. Historic Protestantism makes Scripture the final infallible norm while valuing subordinate traditions. Mainline approaches vary and may call Scripture a historically conditioned yet authoritative witness. The issue is the status and correctability of tradition.

Read or search *Dei Verbum 7 to 10; Catechism 74 to 100; Orthodox Holy Tradition*

Notes

Slide 28 Biblical Synthesis

Scripture is God breathed, enduring, and unable to be broken. The Church receives teachers and must guard the apostolic deposit. Yet teachers and traditions are tested by prior revelation: the Bereans examine preaching by Scripture, and Jesus condemns traditions that nullify God's command. A Protestant synthesis is therefore not Scripture without a Church, but a teaching Church whose real authority remains under the Word. Catholic and Orthodox readers affirm the same texts but locate protected interpretive authority differently.

Read or search *2 Timothy 3; Matthew 5; John 10; Acts 17; Mark 7; 1 Timothy 3; 2 Timothy 1*

Notes

Slide 29 Questions

Analyze any authority claim by asking five things: What is the source? Is it helpful, authoritative, or infallible? How is it identified and transmitted? Who interprets it in conflict? What can correct a mistaken interpretation? This grid avoids false choices. Church testimony can be necessary without creating Scripture's authority; the Spirit can assure without giving private doctrines; tradition can preserve truth without becoming new revelation; reason can infer without becoming the final norm.

Read or search *analysis grid source status transmission interpreter correction*

Notes

Slide 30 Homework

Read Westminster Confession chapter 1 as an argument. Mark how the canon is known, why Scripture has authority, what role the Church and evidence play, and how the Spirit assures. Then choose three passages supporting verbal and plenary inspiration or truthfulness. For each, state the contextual claim, the doctrinal conclusion, and one objection or limitation a careful interpreter should answer.

Read or search *Westminster Confession chapter 1; 2 Timothy 3; 2 Peter 1*

Notes