Definition- Random House Webster's College: “the power to determine or settle issues; the right to respect or acceptance of one’s word”
+Swear affidavit to tell the truth. Later change story, say ‘Now, this is the real truth.’

+Microsoft, “We are not trying for a Monopoly on Internet Service.” Don’t say that if you use their product to create Web pages, they won’t work correctly on Netscape, only on Microsoft’s Internet Explorer. 2002- no comment necessary re. Enron, etc.

+Major television preacher preaches that divorce is not compatible with being in ministry. Until his wife leaves him. Still maintains ministry.

    OR Mass suicide under the influence of a charismatic religious leader.
Two sides of the issue

- Individualism
- Pluralism
Individualism

- William Temple: “The individualistic Christian is one who says ‘I believe in one holy, infallible Church, of which I regret to say that at the present time I am the only member.’”
- Ultimate, sole authority = me
- Problems?

+ (Leadership IV/1 [1983]111
+Locus of authority- “I am it”. Reflected in theology [above] and management style- “It’s my way or the highway.”
+Problems? - abuse: higher the fundamentalism/strongly patriarchal view of father is sole decision maker in family, higher the rate of sexual abuse.
[Show Morven’s brochure]Israel’s problem- Israel alone are God’s chosen-nationalistic chauvinism. “God, bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more. Amen.”

Flip- side: Politically correct/postmodern society- +Pluralism: Many different people, many different beliefs.
+ Everybody own locus/source of authority. Turns Temple on his head: Everybody is Pope.

+ "In those days Israel had no king, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." Anarchy

+ Problems? Ezekiel 12:2: “Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.”

Laissez-faire leads to profligacy/promiscuity: no boundaries, ‘No rules, just right.” Other sexual disfunctions than abuse.

Both individualism and pluralism would be okay if we were able to stop with Genesis 2; but unfortunately we have Genesis 3.
Real Life

- Branch Davidians/ATF - authoritarian
- Christian young people’s chat line - living together

+Waco - authoritarian on the side of the Branch Davidians. Laissez faire - no controls on the part of the ATF folks.

+Emily - Christian chat room. Really no concept of anything questionable.
What This Means

- Society (including churches) are asking questions
- Leaders (including in churches) have not addressed the issues

Even in postmodern era, what’s right for you might not be right for me- still asking questions of authority. What can I found my life on: Ohio State art building- postmodern, no right angle corners, various levels, textures, eclectic. One saw ii: “I bet they didn’t build the foundation that way!”

Stanley Fish and crowd who say text’s meaning lies completely in the reader- no fixed meaning, “it’s yours to make of it what you want.” How do they view their annual University contracts?
+What models do we give? “No new taxes” “I never inhaled.” “Trust me bombs bring peace.”
Other Options?

- External locus of authority
- Secular options?
- Problems?

+ State-: Problems- others are as selfish/self-seeking as we are. If “I” can’t be adequate authority, how can a collection of “I’s” be any better.

What would be best = something completely external without own self-interest as deciding factor.
Theological Answers

- DWB- authority lies in Scripture interpreted through the illumination of the Holy Spirit within the believing community
  - External revelation
  - Inner witness
  - Experience
  - Tradition

God-Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Revelation relates to Word of God:
Prov 29:18 (NIV): 18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.

Still risky from our perspective/experience of other relationships:
Who is God/ how does he work? Is he really without immediate self-interest?
Additionally, is he interested in us enough to want to deliver, and is he powerful/effective enough to deliver?

1. “Scholastic theology”- systematic theological claims for God’s being and power.
2. Inner witness of HS- Anabaptist perspective (McKim 38) For either individual/community (also Anabaptist) [R.H. Tawney- The man who seeks God in isolation from his fellows is likely to find, not God, but the Devil, who will bear an embarrassing resemblance to himself.]
3. Experience- step out in faith and see God at work
4. Tradition- community of past as well as present.

Sounds a lot like the Wesleyan quadrilateral!
Next Steps

- Small group discussion: Your own position regarding biblical authority and interpretation
- Reflect on the value of this exercise in your understanding of yourself, and of others with different positions from within your group.

Read Carder statement