

## Authority

There are a number of biblical statements which presuppose authority and from which authority is implied. Believers are to be one and of one mind (Jn. 17: 21, I Cor. 1: 10). We are to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thes. 5: 21). Those who teach are commanded to "speak as the oracles of God" (I Pet. 4: 11). God must be worshipped in truth and the truth liberates from the bondage of sin (Jn. 4: 24, 8: 32). In each instance, authority is necessarily involved. For example, how can Christians be of one mind, prove all things, speak as oracles, and worship God in truth, if there is no norm or authority. Also, authority implies a standard or means by which we determine what is authorized.

One common noun translated authority in the Greek New Testament is *exousia*. W. E. Vine comments thus on the etymology and progression of *exousia*: "For the meaning of leave or permission, or liberty of doing as one pleases, it passed to that of the ability or strength with which one is endued, then to that of the power of authority, the right to exercise power...or the power of rule or government, the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others..." (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words).

**Authority, a basic and fundamental subject.** Jesus was asked, "...By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" (Matt. 21: 23.) The fact Jesus did not resent this question is illustrative of its legitimacy. In fact, Jesus then asked them, "The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men?" (vs. 25.) Of course, the matter hindering these particular Jews was not authority, as such, but their dishonesty (vss. 23-27, often real problem today). In this text we are not only introduced to the basic nature of authority, but also the concept of "from heaven, or of men?" (vs. 25, more later.)

**Authority, as considered in this material, primarily addresses the matter of ability and one in whom such ability resides.** Inherent in authority is the idea of ability. If I told you I grant you permission to enter into the gold vaults at Fort Knox, your authority would be worthless - I do not have the requisite power or ability to grant you such permission. The Jewish Sanhedrin asked the apostles, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (Acts 4: 7.) "Power" (*dunamei*) and "name" (*onomati*) involve ability (Greek from which we derive the word dynamite) and authorization. To act in one's name is to act with one's authorization. Peter and John did not innately possess this ability or right to teach and perform miracles. Notice their answer: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (vs. 12). Beloved, we need to appreciate the exclusivity of this name (authorization) "none other name" and "must be saved."

**Jesus is the one in whom authority resides.** The single efficacious name is Jesus. We know this because Jesus is the immediate reference (vss. 10, 11). Jesus asked, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Lk. 6: 46.) Jesus also said, "All power (*exousia*, dm) is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28: 18). Jesus has power (authority) to forgive sin (Matt. 9: 6), he was declared to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1: 4), he is presently sitting at the right hand of power (Matt. 26: 64), and he shall return in power (Matt. 24: 30). Ultimate regality belongs to Jesus as "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (I Tim. 6: 15).

Please appreciate Jesus' statement, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Man defines the totality of authority as being legislative, judicial, and executive. Jesus possesses all three: He is the lawgiver (Acts 3: 22, 23), judge (2 Cor. 5: 10), and the executor (Matt. 28: 18, 19).

**The means of exercising or articulating authority to man.** We have seen Jesus' consummate authority, but how does he express or reveal his will to man? Beloved, Jesus' teaching is the means (2 Jn. 9-11, Lk. 6: 46, Matt. 7: 21-29). When Jesus finished presenting what we call the sermon on the mount, "...the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority..." (Matt. 7: 28, 29). The word shall judge us in the last day (Jn. 12: 48, see "The Bible," button on home page). All of the common objections today regarding authority and the word being authority such as, "an appeal to authority is legalism," "we are under grace, not authority," "God is a God of love," "none are perfect," "emphasis on God, not the word" are simply evasive maneuvers in an effort to make denying Jesus' authority look good!

**How we establish authority in religious matters.** As we have seen, God's word is the standard or expression of Jesus' authority. Remember Jesus question, "the baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men?" (Matt. 21: 25.) All look to some source for their authority. It may be the Pope, preacher, their creeds, parents, majority rule, or their feelings. As long as people recognize these as the standard instead of Jesus and his word, they can not be right and there can be no real unity among professed believers.

"You establish authority in religious matters by presenting God's word," someone says. As we have intimated, that is precisely the case. While in Thessalonica, Paul "reasoned with them out of the scriptures" (Acts 17: 2). This is the meaning of the commandment, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..." (I Pet. 4: 11).

**The matter of express command, approved example, and necessary inference considered as the methods of establishing what is taught (authorized).** The act

(science) of systematically studying the scriptures is sometimes referred to as hermeneutics ("sacred hermeneutics is the science of interpreting the scriptures," Hermeneutics, by D. R. Duncan, Introduction). What do we discover when we examine the scriptures as far as the style, rationale, and methods used to arrive at truth?

**The express command.** When we determine that the considered language is a command, we have established authority, unless there is something resident in the immediate language, context, or remote context to show otherwise. "...Repent, and be baptized" is certainly a command (Acts 2: 38, see "Salvation," accessed by salvation button on the home page). Repentance and water baptism (applied to nonChristian) are not endemic or limited to the audience in Acts 2, but are shown to be universal (Acts 17: 30, 31, Mk. 16: 15, 16). I, therefore, have authority in teaching the necessity of repentance and baptism. When I teach that repentance and baptism are commanded of God, I am submitting to Jesus' Lordship and authority (cf. I Cor. 14: 37). When others respond to this teaching, they are acquiescing to Jesus' authority.

**Approved example.** "Approved" qualifies example. There are some examples in Holy Writ which are not universally binding. The veil of I Corinthians 11 and the associated teaching is applied to a particular custom and situation. The woman in general expresses headship in other ways (I Pet. 3: 1-6, I Tim. 2: 12 ff). To teach and bind the veil in general, then, would be binding an anachronism (taking a circumstance which was limited in its application, time, etc. and inserting it into a totally removed and inapplicable circumstance). The early Christians met regularly to break bread (Acts 2: 42, act of worship). The Christians at Troas met on the First Day (Lord's Day or our Sunday) to break bread (Acts 20: 7). Such an act and time was not accidental or spontaneous but rather deliberate and planned (vss. 1-6). From all we glean relative to the Lord's Supper (breaking of bread) from the context of Acts 20: 7, and the remote context, the act exemplified in Acts 20: 7 constituted a practice or common act. Since every week has a first day, Christians have authority for observing the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (for more of an examination of "every first day," compare Acts 20: 7 with Exodus 20: 8 - every week had a "Sabbath day" ).

**Necessary inference.** Please appreciate the fact that "inference" is also qualified. We are told that when Jesus was baptized he went up out of the water (Matt. 3: 16). We are not expressly told he ever went into the water. However, to come out of the water, he had to go into the water - hence the necessary inference. Jesus used the necessary inference in his teaching (Matt. 22: 32).

Not a few, even in the Lord's church, are now passed questioning the validity of necessary inference and approved example. They are now rejecting necessary inference and approved example as being reliable methods of establishing a thus saith

the Lord (such is the "new hermeneutics"). Some of these objections are already progressing to the point of also questioning and even denying express command. I realize we do not read the language "express command," "approved example," and "necessary inference," as such, in the scriptures. In teaching hermeneutics, I have often asked, "do you know of any better way to arrive at authority?" Some have attempted to substitute these methods, but to no avail (see express command, approved example, and necessary inference used in Acts 15 to arrive at the truth, vs. 19, 20; 9, 12; 8). I also have asked "do you know of any additional methods?" Suggestions have been offered but they either constitute a "submethod" or they are seriously flawed and impractical.

**Authority is absolutely necessary.** As we have seen, without recognizing Jesus' authority and his means of expressing his authority (his teaching, New Testament), we cannot be united and please God. Beloved, the scriptures are replete with one emphatic warning after another regarding the seriousness of being without authority. Jesus will tell religious people in the Day of Judgment to "depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7: 23). The Greek word translated iniquity means lawlessness (*anomia*, *a*, negative, *nomos*, law). To be without law is to be without authority. These people will be told to depart, notwithstanding their "many wonderful works" (vs. 22, see also Gal. 1: 6-9 and Rev. 22: 18, 19).

In conclusion, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...and whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3: 16, 17).