

“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...” (1 Peter 4:11).

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LEARNING ABOUT AUTHORITY

by John Isaac Edwards

Every generation must be taught and re-taught authority in religion. Failure to understand and properly apply basic principles of Bible authority is the seedbed out of which the poisonous plants of religious error and division grow.

1) WHY STUDY AUTHORITY?

Because of conditions that exist where there is no recognition of authority. To better appreciate the need for such, just read and study the book of Judges. *“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes”* (Judg. 17:6; 21:25).

It is included in preaching Christ. Philip *“preached Christ”* to the people of Samaria (Acts 8:5). Preaching Christ includes preaching *“... the name of Jesus Christ...”* (Acts 8:12). That is, the power or authority of Christ (Acts 4:7).

It is the foundation for everything we teach and practice. Why do we teach baptism is necessary for salvation? Why do we not have a kitchen in the meeting house? Why do we observe the Lord’s supper every first day of the week? Why do we not sing with the accompaniment of mechanical instruments? Why

do we take up a collection each Sunday? Why do we not baptize babies? Though the topics may vary, authority is at the heart of every issue. *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...”* (Col. 3:17).

To keep truth in and error out. The church is *“the pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim. 3:15). We cannot afford to let the least bit of error in the church. *“...a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”* (Gal. 5:9). Error has a way of creeping in among the Lord’s people, and truth has a way of slipping out! We must constantly affirm the basic principles of Bible authority to keep the church pure in doctrine and practice.

To promote unity. Religious division is caused by lack of respect for the authority of Christ. *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Cor. 1:10). To be united, we must agree on a standard of authority. *“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”* (Amos 3:3).

2) WHAT IS AUTHORITY?

Authority defined: “The power to enforce laws, exact obedience, command, determine, or judge. One that is invested with this power...” (American Heritage Dictionary). “...the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to and obeyed...” (Thayer’s Lexicon). The concept of authority is illustrated by the centurion in Luke 7:8: *“For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.”*

3) BIBLICAL EXPRESSIONS OF AUTHORITY.

The word “authority” occurs 37 times in the King James Version. Matthew 21:23 is a good example. The chief priests and elders asked Jesus, *“By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?”* There are different words and phrases throughout the Scriptures that convey the concept of authority: “dominion” (Gen. 1:26), “reign” (Gen. 37:8), “power” (Acts 4:7), “servants to obey” (Rom. 6:16), “subject” (Rom. 13:1), “by the name of” (1 Cor. 1:10), “head” (1 Cor. 11:3),

“rule” (1 Cor. 15:24), “principlality” and “might” (Eph. 1:21), “submit” (Eph. 5:22), “Masters” (Col. 4:1), “over you” (1 Th. 5:12), “in the name of” (2 Th. 3:6), “lord” (1 Pet. 3:6), and the like.

4) SOME WHO HAVE AUTHORITY.

The Father. He “is above all” (Eph. 4:6). We are to “submit to” Him (Jas. 4:7).

Christ. The Father gave “all power” to His Son (Mt. 28:18; Eph. 1:15-23). The church is “subject unto Christ” (Eph. 5:24).

The apostles. Christ gave authority to His apostles (Mt. 18:18). The apostles were

“ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20). They spoke and wrote by His authority (2 Th. 3:12; 1 Cor. 14:37). Receiving an apostle is equal to receiving Christ (Mt. 10:40). To reject their word is to reject God (1 Th. 4:8).

The governing authorities.

The powers that be are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1-7). We are to “submit” to their “every ordinance” (1 Pet. 2:13-17).

Elders. The Lord has given elders “the rule over” the local church (Heb. 13:17). Christians are taught, “Obey them..., and submit yourselves...”

Parents. The fact that children are to “obey” their parents and “honour” their

father and mother shows God has given parents authority over their children (Eph. 6:1-3).

Masters. A servant is under the authority of his master (1 Pet. 2:18).

Husbands. A wife is to “submit to” her husband, “For the husband is the head of the wife...” (Eph. 5:22-23).

Some good passages to commit to memory:

Deuteronomy 4:2; Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Colossians 3:17; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2 John 9. May we learn about authority and make proper application of it throughout our lives and in the church.

**I Asked
'Why Doesn't
Somebody
Do Something'
Then Realized
I Was
Somebody**

**The “Go”
of the
Great Commission
Means...**

**G - Get FOR
O - Others → CHRIST**

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