

632 Why Do We Need Authority?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

There's something inside all of us that just doesn't like being told what to do. We want Jesus as our Savior, but must He also be our Lord? Must we obey Him? Today we're asking the question, "Why Do We Need Authority?" Here in America from the time we were born, we have heard that we are free citizens. We take pride in our freedom and rights, but some people misunderstand the concept of freedom and believe that being free means that we are to have no moral or legal restraints at all. Nearly everyone seems to have this inborn resistance to the suggestion that we are accountable to anyone or anything. Christianity in America is often different from the Christianity of the Bible. American Christians feel that they ought to be in charge, to worship however they like, to make their own rules, to have their own religion. Does this please God?

Suppose you and I had a disagreement over the width of a room. You said that it was twelve feet wide, and I said that it was ten. We could talk about our estimates at length; but at some point we'd get a tape measure and find out just how wide the room is according to the tape measure. After that, there would be no guessing or dispute. A fixed standard is necessary to order in life. Life would be chaotic without fixed standards. Can you imagine traveling in heavy traffic with no laws, no white lines, no speed limits, and on either side of the road? It would be remarkable to arrive at any destination without an accident. The most powerful locomotive in the world is no good without railroad tracks. Its power comes through its confinement to the rails not in spite of it. What is true in our physical lives is also true in our spiritual and moral lives. We have to have a fixed standard or there will be chaos in the world. The more religions there are, the more confusion and division there is in this world. The only way there will ever be peace is for all men to hold to the same standards, and the only true standard is found in Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament.

The confession of every Christian is this: "Jesus is Lord." Saying that Jesus is Lord is more than admitting he created the universe; it means that we totally and unconditionally belong to Him. It means that as Lord He has total control of our lives and is able to make decisions affecting us. What He says is law; where He sends we are to go; and what He teaches, we are to believe. He is Lord. Many folks today have a hard time with this. We are used to a democracy, but the Lord Jesus is a King. The church is His kingdom; it is not a democracy. When I hear people going to a denominational convention or conference and voting about religious matters, it is clear they do not think of Jesus as a King. I suppose they think they are a Congress and Jesus is president. But the church Jesus established has no congress. The Lord is the only head of the church. Paul said of Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." There is only one King of kings and Lord of lords, and that is Jesus (Rev. 17:14).

The Bible uniformly places all authority in God. People possess authority only as the Lord gives it. Jeremiah talked about God's authority, even over human governments. The prophet Jeremiah gives the Lord's teaching in chapter 18:5-10: Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter *does*?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy *it*, if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak

concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant *it*; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it." People sometimes think that we can by our own might determine our destiny, but God is really the only One in charge. God treated Israel according to its spiritual commitment. If any nation today is in rebellion to God, God may very well destroy that nation.

God the Father gave all authority to His Son Jesus Christ. John the Baptist knew the power of Jesus and said in John 3:31-36, "He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has set his seal to *this*, that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Our souls do depend on whether or not we are willing to obey the Lord." Jesus said in Matthew 28:18-20, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." My friend, Jesus has all authority in every area of our lives. We must not forget that.

Some people believe in what is called "selective obedience." Selective obedience is when people obey what they choose to obey and do what they want when they disagree with the authority. Such people fool themselves into thinking they are obeying the Lord. If you obey the Lord only when you agree with Him, you aren't obeying the Lord but obeying your own judgment. Selective obedience really isn't obedience at all. You'll remember King Saul in 1 Samuel 15. God through Samuel told Saul, "Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." Saul did indeed strike Amalek, but "Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed." When Samuel found out what Saul did, he asked, "Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD?" Saul replied, "I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took *some* of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal." Saul fell weak to the desires of people rather than listening to the Lord.

Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being* king" (1 Sam. 15:22-23). It was only then that Saul realized that he had sinned against God. Obeying God is more important than making an offering. God wants your heart and your loyalty. Making a gift to God doesn't make up for disobeying His Word. Samuel said that rebellion is as the sin of divination.

Divination in ancient times was like reading tea leaves to tell the future; it was like magic and witchcraft, which carried the death penalty in Israel. Insubordination is an unwillingness to comply with God's commands and is as bad as iniquity or idolatry. Samuel painted disobedience to God as the worst thing Saul could have done. It is defiance of God's rule in his life. God never again blessed Saul as king after this. He could not trust Saul to be loyal and follow Him. When we rebel against God and defy His commandments, God will not idly stand by and let it go on and on. Jesus said clearly in John 12:48, "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day." Judgment will fall on those who reject the words of Jesus. We cannot suppose that we can live in rebellion on and on and still find salvation at the end.

All religious authority finds its source in the authority of the Father. That authority is given to the Son, revealed by the Holy Spirit, and given in and through the Bible to the church and to all. Every person, whether he believes it or not, whether he chooses it or not, is still accountable to God and to what is written in the Word. We are under God's authority through His Son as it is revealed in the Bible. We have no religious authority of our own. Our task is not to think up new ways to express our religion but to live in obedience to the will of God. Jesus did not dare to rebel against his Father or to start his own religion. Everything he did, he did at the Father's command. In John 8:28-32, Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." As he was saying these things, many believed in him. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." We too must not think we can develop our own religion, start our own churches, or do our own thing. If we wish to connect with God, we must open up our Bibles and start listening to what He says rather than to what we want.

When people don't want to believe and obey, they often deceive themselves. For centuries people believed that Aristotle was right when he said that the heavier an object, the faster it would fall to earth. Aristotle was regarded as the greatest thinker of all time, and surely he would not be wrong. Anyone, of course, could have taken two objects, one heavy and one light, and dropped them from a great height to see whether or not the heavier object landed first. But no one did until nearly 2,000 years after Aristotle's death. In 1589 Galileo summoned learned professors to the base of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Then he went to the top and pushed off a ten-pound and a one-pound weight. Both landed at the same instant. The power of belief was so strong, however, that the professors denied their eyesight. They continued to say Aristotle was right. Don't we lie to ourselves when we think that our way is as good as God's way? I am amazed that people can read something in the Bible and still do what they want to do and believe what they want to believe. People say that one church is as good as another, but the Bible never recognizes

many different churches. The Bible teaches there is but one church—the one Jesus purchased with his own blood. People say there is nothing wrong with baptizing infants by sprinkling, but the Bible never says anything about baptizing babies, and it never speaks of baptism as a sprinkling. People say there is nothing wrong with playing instruments of music in Christian worship, but there is not one shred of evidence in the New Testament that any Christian ever commanded the use of instruments or ever practiced it. I might add that early Christians unanimously opposed playing instruments in their worship. Some say that it makes no difference what you believe as long as you love Jesus. But how can you say you love Jesus but do not listen to him? After thirty-two years of marriage, I've learned that you can't learn to love someone without listening to her. Anytime a husband stops listening to his wife, there's trouble. How can we think the grace of God operates in our lives when we are even willing to listen to what God says? Many people want the unconditional grace and love of God, but they aren't willing to give God their total unconditional faith, love and obedience. What about you, my friend, are you willing to listen to the teaching of Jesus in everything, to observe all things He has commanded? Is Jesus your Lord and King?

Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24-27 with this important illustration: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." The situation here is not that the foolish man does nothing—he built a house, after all—but that he did not do what he was told. He did what he wanted to do and ignored the words of Jesus. The two houses probably looked very much alike, probably had all the same features, and probably were a blessing to those who lived there—until the storm arose. You can't practice Christianity any old way and still please God. The Lord expects you to obey His teaching, to follow His will. To become a Christian one must believe from his heart that Jesus is the Christ and confess that he is the Son of God, the Lord. He must also repent of every sin. If one changes his heart and actions about one sin but keeps practicing others, he hasn't really repented in the way Jesus asks. He asks that we give up every sin. Then with faith, love, and penitence one needs to be baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins. When one obeys the Lord, the Lord saves that person, washes him clean, and adds him to his church. Baptism is an immersion; that's what the word means. If you want to build your house upon a rock, be immersed. Sometimes Christians forsake the Lord, quit going to church, and quit living the Christian life. My friend, I hope you will consider your soul. You can't keep on ignoring God's will and hope that you will find his favor in the end. My friend, don't let anything or anyone keep you from obeying the Lord who loves you and wants to bless you forever. His grace is abundant if you'll serve Him.

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