

Sunday, May 1, 2022 am

CONCERNING FIRST PRINCIPLES

Understanding Authority

Today, I would like to remind us of a very basic Bible principle. This is something that everyone needs to understand. It is applied in life and when it is not appreciated or considered it often leads to chaos and problems. In the religious world, it is at the foundation of what we believe AND why we are so divided. The subject I want to address today is our need for authority.

I. What is authority?

- a. Defined: Authority can mean many different things.
 - i. It can mean the power to make and control something or someone.
 - ii. It can mean the power to rule or enforce as it is often used (e.g., A leader or a police officer has authority).
 - iii. It can mean the right to act in a given situation. IOW, it means permission.
- b. We see the need for authority all around us. In every area of life, we need authority.
 - i. You need authority to drive a vehicle – including a driver’s license, permission to be in the vehicle (either you own it or are given that permission), and other requirements (such as insurance, rules that govern your driving, etc.)
 - ii. You need authority to enter certain areas – restricted areas require authority to enter, and even free access areas come with rules (times, admission fees, possibly a dress code, etc.)
 - iii. A job often comes with authority – what you are permitted to do and NOT permitted.
 - iv. A police office has authority to enforce the law; a doctor has authority to treat you for illness, a pilot has authority to fly an airplane or boat (for most, not both because their authority is limited), etc.
- c. For someone to act with authority, at least 3 things are necessary:
 - i. Someone who has power to grant permission.
 - ii. The permission one is granted
 - iii. A standard by which one is granted permission. Without the standard, you do not have authority. Authority often comes with limitations – the standard dictates what you can and cannot do, e.g. you may have authority to drive a car, but you are only permitted to drive so fast, etc.
 - iv. This is also true in religion. Our faith involves all 3 of these elements. Consider the example of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2 &3)
 1. God had the power to grant to make and enact rules
 2. Adam and Eve were permitted to eat of almost every tree in the garden
 3. A standard was put in place – telling them what they could and could NOT do. They were limited as to what they could eat.

II. Why do we need authority?

- a. In general, we need authority because:
 - i. Without it there will be chaos – when there is no standard of authority, men do whatever they want. That inevitably leads to chaos. Even the most hardened atheist or philosopher has to admit this. Judges 17:6, 21:25 – no king, everyone did what was right in his own eyes (btw, there was a standard of authority, they just disregarded it – hence the chaos).
 - ii. Without authority there will be evil – do we need a standard of right and wrong? Again, whether one wants to admit it or not, we NEED to define what is good and evil. We

need to define what is right and what is wrong. This goes beyond simply avoiding chaos – this is about rules that EVERYONE needs to follow. 1 Timothy 1:8-9 – laws are made for the ungodly and sinners. While another lesson, God’s laws are good and make sense.

- iii. To get things done – often when there is not someone in charge, or directions – nothing gets done. And if someone is in charge, they have authority. Nehemiah was in charge and gave directions; The apostles were “in charge” and gave direction (though they were also in subjection to God) – cf. Galatians 1:11-12, 1 Corinthians 14:37, etc.
- iv. To establish order – why does authority prevent chaos? Because it establishes order. Genesis 1:1-2ff, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void (chaos to a degree). Then God started acting placing order in His creation – He created light, separated the seas from the land, established laws of reproduction (after its own kind), etc.

b. Spiritually, we need authority because:

- i. The nature of created man calls for it – we need rules to govern us morally and spiritually. If God did not give us a standard of authority, how would we know what is right and wrong? How would we know about salvation? How would we know who He is and how to please Him?
- ii. Because there are consequences if we do not follow God – Matthew 7:21-23, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, etc.
- iii. Without it man will create his own standard of what to do.
 - 1. Again, consider Judges 21:25 – everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
 - 2. Romans 1:20-23 – idolatry was a result of rejecting God’s authority. They were futile in thoughts, foolish in heart and action.
 - 3. It goes without saying that there are multitudes of divisions within religion. One source noted that some of the deepest divisions are the result of disagreement about authority. If you cannot agree on what the standard of authority is (including HOW to properly establish authority), division is almost inevitable. Just remember, we are typically NOT divided over what God’s word says, but what it does NOT say.

c. Spiritually, we need a standard of authority that will:

- i. Grant us fellowship with God – 1 John 1:3, 6-7
- ii. Promote the unity God demands – John 17:20-21, Philippians 3:16, etc.
- iii. Lead us to heaven – Matthew 7:21-23, 13-14; John 14:6

III. What does religious authority mean?

a. Colossians 3:17- do all in the name of the Lord, recognizing His rule and the permission He grants us in a given area. This verse summarizes what we mean, in ALL that we do, we must ask if it is authorized by God. To do this we must recognize God for who He is. Consider our triune God.

b. We acknowledge that God has all authority –

- i. God is sovereign – this means He has ultimate authority. He has the right and power (ability) to rule, govern, command and expect obedience (submission).
- ii. Because of who He is – He is GOD! He is all powerful, all seeing, all knowing and eternal (outside of the natural realm – Psalm 90:2).
- iii. He created the world and set it in order – Genesis 1:1, John 1:1, Hebrews 3:4, 11:3 - He created man, the laws of nature, etc.
- iv. He knows what is best for us. Jeremiah 10:23 – we cannot direct our own steps. He has the RIGHT to tell us what to do and how to do it. Much of our worldly chaos is a result of disregarding the authority of God, our Creator

- v. He reigns – Isaiah 52:7, *How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”*
Psalm 47:8, *God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.* This is simply a reminder that God rules.
- vi. He has demonstrated His control. One of the prevalent revelations of the Bible is about how God is in control. He can do whatever He needs to do and prevent what He needs to prevent.
 - 1. One of the more powerful examples of this is fulfilled prophecy concerning Jesus – Galatians 4:4 speaks of God sending forth Jesus at the right time. He did everything He could to demonstrate His power to control all factors He needed to control to accomplish His will.
 - 2. Jeremiah 32:27, *“Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?”*
- vii. God has delegated authority – we find it throughout scripture – with governments, in the home, and even in the church.
- viii. Often man has a problem with God because he fails to recognize or accept His sovereignty.
- c. We acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and King –
 - i. **Acts 2:36** – as Peter concluded His sermon, He declared Jesus as Lord and Christ. By Christ, He was the promised Messiah. By Lord, He is declared to be our King. The New Testament is filled with passages declaring how Jesus is Lord. Such passages declare plainly He has authority, and we are to submit to Him.
 - ii. **Matthew 28:18-20** – as he was about to ascend it was declared in no uncertain terms. On note, the KJV uses the word *“all power is given unto Me...”* Here is an illustration of how the word “power” is associate with authority.
 - iii. There are so many passages that appeal to this – in the writing of Moses (Genesis 17:6, 49:10), promises to David concerning his throne (2 Samuel 7:12-13), throughout the prophets, in the life and teachings of Jesus (Matthew 2:2, 21:1-10, Mark 12:35-37, John 18:33-37, etc.); and emphasized in the preaching and writings of the apostles (Acts 2:36, Romans 13:14, 2 Corinthians 11:31, Philippians 2:11, etc.). Seated “at the right hand of God” is found some 11 times in the NKJV New Testament always describing Jesus. Note esp. Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 10:12, 12:2, 1 Peter 3:22 – Jesus is now *“at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”*
 - iv. Why does Jesus have this authority?
 - 1. He is God – with that comes inherited authority – John 1:1, Immanuel – God with us – Matthew 1:23.
 - 2. Authority was granted to Him by the Father – in heaven and on earth. Philippians 2:9-11.
 - 3. He demonstrated His authority when confronted – John 4:34 – my food is to do the will of My Father...; John 5:26-30, etc.
 - v. In becoming Christians, it is IMPERATIVE that we understand His Lordship.... What He tells us, we MUST accept! John 6:63, Jesus said, ... *The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*
- d. We acknowledge that Holy Spirit has all authority
 - i. The working of the Holy Spirit is by no means a simple subject. But we MUST understand that His work is authoritative. AS authoritative as God the Father and Son.
 - ii. He also IS God – Hebrews 9:14 which speaks of Him as “the eternal Spirit”; Gen. 1:2 – at creation; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 – God reveals Himself to us through His Spirit, etc.

- iii. The Bible is the product of His work –
 1. There are many areas we could focus on as to His working. But what I want to emphasize is how the Bible is the product of His work.
 2. John 16:7-11 – His work would be to convict the world
 3. John 14:26 – He would remind them; John 16:13 – guide you into all truth
 4. 1 Peter 1:22-23 – we obey the truth through the Spirit
 5. 2 Peter 1:20-21 – holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit
 6. 1 Corinthians 2:9-11 – we know God “through His Spirit”, he “knows the things God” in the same way a man knows the things of a man (himself).
 7. Ephesians 3:3-5 – God revealed “the mystery” by “the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.”
- iv. If the Bible is the product of the Holy Spirit, it is the work of God and must be respected as such. And if it is the word of God, CLEARLY it has authority that must be followed – 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Romans 1:16-17. It will be a source of judgment in the last day – Romans 2:16, John 12:48, Revelation 20:11-12, etc.
- v. AND if the Bible is the word of God, it is important that we strive to understand it properly.

IV. How do we establish authority?

- a. Time will not permit an exhaustive study of this today, but I simply mention HOW we establish authority here.
- b. We need an OBJECTIVE standard of authority – we need to respect the Bible AS the word of God – cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 – they were commended for receiving it as the word of God. If we view the Bible as subjective then it is NOT a reliable source of authority.
- c. In its most simple terms, we establish authority in 3 ways – by command (being told), example (by observing acceptable behavior), and by necessary deduction (we conclude when we put together all the facts – ACURATELY).

Conclusion. And thus, we can see the importance of authority. I conclude with this observation: When one obeys the gospel, not only do they believe and confess Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9-10), but they also repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Note Matthew 28:18-20 again where Jesus gave the “great commission” and noted we make disciples of (or teach) all nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” In this lesson we have made reference to the expression, “in the name of” which can mean, “by the authority of”. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in our salvation BUT know in this that we are responsible to acknowledge their authority as we have addressed in this lesson. In obeying the gospel, we acknowledge the authority of all 3. Will we “*observe all things commanded*”? Think about it!