



The Voice Of Truth

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The Authority of Jesus Christ

By Gary C. Kerr

"And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29).

"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:19).

Brethren have come to understand down through the years that Bible authority, or a lack of it, is at the root of most every religious question. As Christians, we understand that the Bible is our only authority in religion. We challenge those we believe to be in error to produce Bible authority for their practice. However, what do we mean by "Bible authority"?

"Authority" (exousia) is "the power of rule or government (the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed)" (Thayer, 225). Concerning the word "authority," we also find this: "As regards the church, this derives its authority from Christ. Believers receive their right as such from him (Jn. 1:12; Rev. 22:14). The Lord gives the apostles their authority (2 Cor. 10:8); hence they must use it responsibly (cf. Mk. 13:34; 1 Cor. 9:4ff)" (Kittel, TDNT, Abridged in One Volume 239). Thus, by claiming to have "all authority," Jesus was claiming the right to rule; the right to command and expect our submission and obedience. When we talk about "Bible authority," we are really talking about the authority of Christ.

Did Jesus Come to Have All Authority?

Based on the definition of the word, the authority that Jesus claimed was absolute, that which belonged to God alone. Christ received this authority from the Father, and the Father confirmed it by raising him from the dead (Eph. 1:20-23).

The authority of Jesus was different from that of the prophets, or the scribes. They were restricted to a "thus saith the Lord." Christ's teaching was authoritative because he said it. This is a part of what amazed the listeners at the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout he said, "You have heard that it was said," and contrasted that with "But I say to you." It is not surprising then to find the officers who had been sent to arrest Jesus returning empty-handed and saying, "No man ever spoke like this man!" (John 7:46)

Therefore, we need to acknowledge the authority of Jesus Christ in everything that pertains to our lives as Christians. Paul admonished the saints at Colosse, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (3:17). To do something "in the name of Jesus is to do it by his authority. And, since Jesus claimed "all authority," there is none left for men.

We Must Recognize the Authority of Christ

Concerning the Plan of Salvation

The "authority" of man admits to many ways to come to God. In fact, since "all roads lead to Heaven" (according to man's reasoning), any way that you choose to come to God would be allowable. However, if we accept the authority of Christ, we will recognize that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Christ taught that to be saved, we must "believe and be baptized" (Mark 16:16). If we truly respect the authority of Christ, we will not tamper with his will in this matter.

We Must Recognize the Authority of Christ

In Our Everyday Lives as Christians

Paul said that when we were baptized, we arose from the water to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). He goes on in that same chapter to describe our new relationship to Christ as one of a bond servant or a slave (vv. 18-22). That means that we have agreed to submit ourselves totally to the authority of Christ. A slave is not free to make his own decisions regarding how he conducts himself in his daily life. The authority of the world says that immodest clothing is acceptable, especially under certain circumstances. If we accept the authority of Christ, we will obey his will regarding the kind of clothes we wear (1 Tim. 2:9-10). The world says that it is all right to cheat, or to be dishonest from time to time. The authority of Christ says, "having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles" (1 Pet. 2:12). The world says that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle. The authority of Christ still calls it "uncleanness," "vile passion," and "shameful" (Rom. 1:24-27). The world says

that you may divorce your mate for any reason. The authority of Christ says, "whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and who-ever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9). As we live our lives from day to day as Christians, possessions of Christ, we must always remember that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

We Must Recognize the Authority of Christ

In the Work and Worship of the Local Church

Most denominations abandoned the authority of Christ concerning the church a long time ago. Men decided that we could change the worship, alter the work, and completely revamp the organization of the church to suit our own wants and needs. Faithful Christians have always opposed this departure as a violation of the authority of Christ and rightly so. Thus, it is distressing to find brethren, those who profess to have respect for the authority of Christ, altering the work and worship of the church in the same way.

The Authority of Christ Provides

For the Organization of the Local Church

The largest working body or organization that we read about in Christ's word is the local church. It is to have its own elders and deacons (cf. Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1). The New Testament knows nothing of synods, councils, or popes exercising authority over the local church. The authority of Christ does not authorize the elders of one local church to oversee the work of another local church (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-2). Nor does the New Testament permit women to serve as elders in local churches. According to men, this may be politically correct, but it is a violation of the authority of Christ.

By the Authority of Christ

The Local Church Offers Worship

That worship includes partaking of the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26); giving of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:12; 9:6-7); singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16); teaching (Acts 2:47); and prayer (Acts 2:42; 12:5; Eph. 6:18). The Lord's supper consists of unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (Matt. 26:26-29), and we observe it each first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

The authority of man says that we may change this worship by adding to or taking away from the things prescribed by Jesus. We can add playing on musical instruments to the singing; we can take the Lord's supper on any day of the week, and substitute other elements in place of the ones authorized by Christ; "passing the hat" on any day the church assembles; we can raise money for the work of the church by conducting fairs, rummage sales, and other social activities; and on and on it goes. If we really respect the authority of Christ, we will offer only the worship that he as required in his word.

The Authority of Christ Dictates

The Work of the Local Church

According to man, the work of the church is to meet the social and recreational needs of people. However, if we respect the authority of

Christ, we will understand that the work of the church involves something entirely different. Christ's authority decrees that the church preach the gospel (2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:14-18; 1 Thess. 1:8). Christ also instructs the church through his word to provide for its own needy (Acts 4:34-35; 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 5:16). Christ has taught his church to edify itself (Eph. 4:11-16). This is all that the authority of Christ allows for in the work of the local church. To change this in any way, either by adding to it or taking away from it, is to show contempt for the authority of Christ through his word.

Conclusion

Christ claimed all authority. We are taught to do every-thing in the name of (i.e., by the authority of) Christ. Do you submit to the authority of Christ on the plan of salvation? In your daily lives as Christians? In the worship and work of the local church? Those who respect and obey the authority of Christ are promised every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Remember the admonition of James, when he said, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." To fail or refuse to submit to the authority of Christ in all things will cost us our souls in eternity. Are you willing to pay that price?

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Against Grumblers

John White

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As I reread the account of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, I was impressed again with how fiercely God responded to grumbling. Paul too, warns Christians to learn a lesson from the wrath that fell on Israelites who grumbled: "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (1 Cor. 10:10). Why such strong condemnation?

Grumbling denies God's ability to provide. Pressed against the shore of the Red Sea with the Egyptians closing in, many Israelites grumbled against Moses. Forgetting what they had witnessed of God's power against Pharaoh, they lost their courage and lashed out at the most convenient target.

Grumbling may be an attempt to intimidate. In Exodus 16, the Israelites grumbled, pressing Moses to return them to Egypt rather than proceed into the wilderness.

Grumblers debilitate God's leaders. In Number 11, the Israelites pushed Moses to the point that he wanted God to take his life. Many church members view grumbling as normal church behavior. There is a need to point out the harm grumbling may inflict upon individuals and upon the church.

Complaining replaces prayer. Prayer, not grumbling, is the way God intends to change things.

Grumblers earn a bad reputation. In a church that values community, agitators will find themselves ostracized.

Grumbling seduces people away from Jesus' model for handling conflict. An issue that could be put to rest quickly through one-on-one conversation (as Jesus taught in Matt. 18:15-17) can be kept alive indefinitely by grumblers.

Grumbling weakens a congregation's confidence in its leaders. While grumbling too often comes naturally to us, it is unhealthy to believe negative, unfounded reports about others — to presume guilt rather than innocence. Healthy churches, like emotionally healthy individuals, will assume the best rather than the worst.

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