

Does Authority Matter?

Introduction. Within the heart of every individual is the longing to decide his own way, to follow his own path (cp. Isaiah 53:6). Postmodern man believes he has the right to develop his own morals, to pursue his personally developed beliefs, and to be the captain of his soul.

Postmodern people often brush God aside and do not consider any authority higher than themselves. Postmodernists believe truth is manufactured by men rather than revealed by God. As a consequence, they see little reason to recognize God's authority over their lives or to feel moral obligations. Most assume they know the right way to go without any help from God. Yet the Bible teaches otherwise (Proverbs 14:12; cp. Jeremiah 10:23).

One does not easily convince humans of their need for God. Human pride, set in a culture of individualism and secular humanism, encourages people to believe they are the highest authority on every moral and spiritual subject. Their resistance to judging any matter as right or wrong reveals their rejection of any authority higher than their own. Many have turned their ears from listening to God, especially in those matters wherein they disagree with scripture.

One lure of idolatry came in the fact the idol commanded nothing and required nothing. An idol would never say to anyone, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee ..." (Luke 12:20). Idolatry allowed men to live without the restraints of moral and spiritual accountability. As a result, idolatrous people worshiped with unspeakably wicked acts of sexual immorality, drunkenness, and human sacrifice (Romans 1:21-23). They reveled in their abominations, forgot how to blush (Jeremiah 6:15), and even made their children pass through the fire (2 Kings 16:3).

I. The "Chain" Of God's Authority

- A. The Lord Jesus stated clearly that the Father had given Him all authority in Heaven and on Earth (Matthew 28:18). Because of His humble obedience He was exalted (Philippians 2:9-11).
- B. God expected the followers of Jesus to listen to Him, even above Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-5). The Lord must have preeminence in everything because the Father has put everything under His feet and gave Him as head over everything to the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23).
- C. Christ promised the apostles the Holy Spirit to help them (John 14:26; 16:12-13). The apostles and prophets who wrote the books of the New Testament spoke with the authority of God, since they were guided by the Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). Paul asserted the authority of what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:37. When the Lord speaks, He has ruled.

II. Authority Matters Because God Matters

- A. Someone objects at this point and says, "People are more important than rules." but this begs the question. Rules are important because people are important (Psalm 8:3-9), and the Lord loves people enough to give them rules for their good (Deuteronomy 6:24; 10:12-13).

- B. What God says in His sacred writings reveals His heart, His divine nature, and His will for our lives. God made His infinite wisdom and power known through making the Universe (Romans 1:20). We, too, are without excuse if we fail to acknowledge God or be thankful.
 - 1. The writers of the Old Testament used the phrase, "Thus saith the Lord" 415 times. This introductory formula finds many parallels among the writings of the kings of the Ancient Near East, when they were issuing edicts. These prophets spoke with the authority of the Almighty God.
 - 2. Moses prophesied of the coming prophet who would speak with such authority that the people would tremble as they did at Sinai and ask not to hear His voice (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).
- C. The oft-quoted passage from 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reminds us there is an eternal, inspired standard found in the word that teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains us. It can accomplish this only because it has inspired authority in our lives. If it teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains us, then we should humbly listen, penitently correct our thinking and behavior, and discipline ourselves to maintain its instruction. Paul thanked God for people who welcomed, approved, and accepted the word as an authoritative divine message (1 Thessalonians 2:13). We cannot call Jesus "Lord" if we are not willing to follow His rule (Luke 6:46).

III. The Perfect Example

- A. The Lord is the perfect example of respecting the authority of His Father and of scripture. Jesus argued that His identity as God's Son came from His subjection to the Father's will (John 4:34; 5:19, 30, 36; 8:26-29). The Lord did not speak on His own initiative but only revealed the will of His Father (John 12:49-50).
- B. Because He respected the Father's authority, Jesus did not presume to speak in the silence of God. He did not act freely on His own to do everything His way. He did not rely on His human wisdom but on what God revealed. He did not edit the Father's teaching to appeal to the culture in which He lived. He did not assume the Father was unaware of human needs and frailties. He stayed true to the message because He was totally devoted to the Father's will.
- C. Jesus recognized an authoritative standard even in times of temptation. When the devil tempted Him in the wilderness, the Lord appealed to the authority of the word by saying three times, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). If it stood written for Jesus, surely the written word stands as authoritative in our lives (Psalm 119:89). What the Lord and the apostles said in the first century stands forever.
- D. Likewise, the Holy Spirit did not speak on His own initiative but revealed only what He heard from the Father (John 16:12-13). The Holy Spirit was never in the business of rewriting the Father's instruction to accommodate culture or to further His own agenda.
- E. The postmodern mindset would like nothing better than to limit God's authority by using a cultural criteria. Some suppose they can set aside God's authoritative instructions simply because the message is old and originally written to another culture. They then feel confident in asserting that God's teaching is relevant and binding in some cultures but not others.

- F. They seem to forget God intended the Lord's message to be preached to all people in all places for all time (Matthew 28:29-10; Jude 3). God expected the whole world to conform to His will, not for His people to conform to the world (1 Peter 2:9; 4:1-5). They have bought into the error of the Arameans, who thought God was a god of the mountains but not a god of the valleys (1 Kings 20:26-28). The Lord God is not limited by space, time, culture, or attitudes. Jesus is the risen Lord of all flesh (John 17:2), whether people agree with Him or not (2 Timothy 2:13).

IV. Other Authorities?

- A. For some the word of God, even if settled in Heaven, remains unsettled on Earth. Old issues arise in the mind of a new generation. Some question whether the apocrypha should be included in scripture, while others look to the traditions found in the early church fathers for their beliefs and practices.
- B. Citing 2 Thessalonians 2:15, some argue that we should include the apocrypha and that the scriptures demand we follow some supposed oral traditions of the apostles later developed in the second century by the early church fathers.
1. Such "living traditions" include calling religious authorities "Father," imposing fasts, observing lent, and baptizing infants.
 2. These are teachings, to be sure, never found in scripture and in some cases contradicting plain teaching (Matthew 23:7-10).
- C. They believe what the church says is the true word of God, and the sacred scriptures is written mainly on the church's heart rather than in documents. This view emasculates scripture and denies its all-sufficiency. While the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15), the word of God is the truth (John 17:17). The attempt to assign human traditions developed in later centuries back into the apostolic age is presumptuous and dangerous (Psalm 19:13).
1. This view reminds one of the Pharisees who claimed Moses was the source of their oral traditions (Mark 7:6-8).
 2. The Lord regarded them as blind guides and warned them that they will be rooted up (Matthew 15:13).

Conclusion. Remember, your standard of authority matters because you matter to God. The creator of the Universe has given one standard and He expects us to follow it. Hold fast to it and you will be rewarded in the day of judgment.