

A Man Who Understood Authority

Introduction. In Luke 7:1-10, the centurion's servant was near death. He sent Jewish elders to Jesus to ask Him to save his servant. Jesus went, but the centurion sent his friends to Jesus, asking Him to just say the word and his servant would be healed. His recognition, understanding, and submission to Christ's authority allowed his servant to be healed.

Paul told us in Ephesians 3:3-5 that what he wrote we would be able to read and understand. The fundamental issue between the various religious groups is authority. In an appeal to be what the Lord commands us to be, we must rest upon authority. Too often, people say, "That's just your interpretation," but that is a lazy man's excuse for people who do not want to study their Bibles. We can know what God wants us to do. We are going to learn how to establish authority, and God tells us in several places and in several ways that we cannot modify anything He has told us to believe and do (Deuteronomy 5:32; Numbers 22:18; 24:13; Joshua 1:7; Proverbs 4:26-27; 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19).

I. ***The Rights Of Authority***

- A. "Authority" originally indicated the idea of leaving, permission, or liberty. It later meant the ability or strength with which one is endowed, then the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed (Luke 7:7-8; Matthew 28:18).
- B. Anyone with authority has certain rights.
 - 1. They have the right to rule (Psalm 2:6-7, 10-12; Ephesians 1:21-23).
 - 2. They have the right to bless (John 17:2; Romans 13:3-4).
 - 3. They have the right to judge (John 5:26-29; 19:10).
- C. Our faith must acknowledge Christ as having the right or power to rule, to bless, and to judge our submission to His will (John 8:23-24).

II. ***Submission To Authority***

- A. Not everyone is willing to yield to authority.
 - 1. In 2 Kings 5:11, Naaman was angry at the suggestion for his cure for leprosy.
 - 2. In 1 Samuel 15:13, Saul argued that he had obeyed, but he had not (vss. 22-23).
- B. Some willingly yield to authority.
 - 1. The centurion's humility as he recognized the authority of Jesus was essential for faith. He considered himself unworthy or insufficient.
 - 2. The blind man and Paul's simple trust in obeying Christ resulted in the blessings of faith (John 9:6-7; Acts 26:19).

- C. Our submission to authority allows us to receive the blessings of faith (Matthew 7:21).

III. **Sources Of False Authority**

- A. Parents (Matthew 10:37; Galatians 1:14).
- B. Conscience (Proverbs 16:25; Acts 23:1).
- C. Preachers (1 Timothy 6:3-4; 1 Peter 4:11).
- D. Feelings (Proverbs 28:26; Hosea 10:13).
- E. Human creeds (2 John 9; Revelation 22:18-19).

IV. **How To Establish Authority**

- A. Direct command -- a statement from God in the form of either a positive statement or a negative prohibition.
 - 1. Acts 17:30.
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 6:18.
 - 3. Colossians 3:9.
- B. Approved example -- the practice of the church in the New Testament under apostolic guidance and which the apostles had received from the Lord. It is a description of what someone did, teaching by "show" rather than "tell," and it is approved because the conduct meets God's approval. God must have intended to teach us by examples in view of the amount and variety of them.
 - 1. Acts 20:7.
 - 2. Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5.
 - 3. Acts 18:11; 19:10; 20:31.
- C. Necessary conclusion -- neither expressly stated nor specifically exemplified yet is necessarily implied by the clear import and meaning of the language used. Evidence is evaluated and a judgment or a conclusion is based on that evidence. The problem in using this approach is not whether necessary conclusions are valid, but does the implication exist to point us to an inference or unavoidable conclusion.
 - 1. Matthew 22:23-33, 41-46.
 - 2. Acts 8:35-36.
 - 3. Hebrews 7:1-10.
- D. An instance of scriptural problem solving is in Acts 15 where necessary conclusion (vss. 7-12), example (vss. 13-14), and command (vss. 27-28) were all used.

V. **Generic And Specific Authority**

- A. Authority is either generic ("characteristic of or relating to a class or group of things; not specific") or specific ("clearly defined or identified"). Sometimes both elements exist within the same command. Generic authority includes and specific authority excludes.

B. Generic authority includes the idea of expediency.

1. An expedient is "useful for effecting a desired result; suited to the circumstances or the occasion; advantageous, convenient."
2. God has not given man a blank check with "expedient" written on it, in spite of what many people think. If the Lord had given man the right to determine for himself what is right and wrong within the confines of his own "expediency," then God would have no control over him.
3. Therefore, there are several important characteristics of expedients.
 - a) The expedient must be lawful (1 Corinthians 6:12). The issue of authority must be settled before the question of expediency is raised.
 - b) The expedient cannot be specified in the Bible. Expediency involves the right of choice within the realm of what God has authorized.
 - c) The expedient must edify the church, not tear it down (1 Corinthians 10:23-24).
 - d) The expedient cannot offend the conscience (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).

C. Examples of generic and specific authority.

1. Generic authority.
 - a) Exodus 12:3 required a "lamb" but it did not specify the color of the lamb to be sacrificed.
 - b) Matthew 28:19 says "go." We are left with the means to go. God did not specify; therefore, we have a choice.
 - c) Hebrews 10:25 commands us to not forsake the assembly. Christians must assemble to be pleasing to God. However, we can choose to assemble in someone's home, this building, or in a rented location.
 - d) Ephesians 5:19 says "sing." We can sing using song books or we can sing by memory. We can all sing the same part or we can sing in harmony.
2. Specific authority.
 - a) God told Noah to build an ark of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14). Gopher wood excluded walnut, pine, ash, spruce, oak, and all other kinds of wood. When God specified gopher wood, no one had the right to add another kind.
 - b) Ephesians 5:19 says "sing." This excludes every other "kind" of music. Instrumental music is excluded by the fact that God specified "sing" and that does not include "playing" upon an instrument. No one has the right to grant a liberty which God's authority excludes.

- c) The Lord's supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23). The unleavened loaf and fruit of the vine excludes every other element. The first day of the week excludes every other day. God has made the choice with reference to these matters and man has no choice but to do the will of God or rebel.
 - d) Elders in every church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). God has specified the jurisdiction of elders. Whenever elders become overseers of anything else but the work of the flock "which is among you" or "among which the Holy Spirit made you overseers," they are without jurisdiction as elders.
- D. Many problems have plagued the church because brethren refused to respect generic and specific authority in God's word.
1. The liberal view says that in order for something to be wrong it must be specifically condemned. This fails to recognize that a specific command excludes and therefore condemns everything not specified.
 2. The anti-Bible class view says that in order for something to be right it must be specifically authorized. This ignores generic authority and hinders church growth.
 3. Both are wrong! One looses where God has not loosed and the other binds where God has not bound.
- E. Finally, within the consideration of generic authority, there is the matter of the silence of the scriptures. God restricts us to what He has revealed (Deuteronomy 29:29; 1 Peter 4:11). We cannot determine God's will by what He does not say (Leviticus 10:1-2; Numbers 20:11-12; Acts 15:5, 24; Hebrews 1:5, 13; 7:14).

Conclusion. In order for something to be authorized in the Bible there must be either command, example, or necessary conclusion. If the means of authority is generic then anything included within the scope of whatever authorized is permissible. But if God specified the kind or method of execution, then no substitute or addition is allowed. In these cases God has left man no choice but to respect His demands by obeying His word or rebelling against divine authority.