

The Logic of Authority

Introduction. Someone has to be in charge. It only makes sense. While we may dream of a society where there are few laws, just imagine having no laws. Take away all speed limits, road rules, and laws dealing with lanes and directions. Where will that get us? Without rules, authority, and the ability to back it up, society can't survive in any civilized fashion. Even Utopia had its rules that were punished when violated.

The same is true of other areas of life: school, business, and the home all require authority. Acting like no one's ever in charge isn't a situation anyone can tolerate for long. Questions like, "Isn't anyone in charge here?" or "Can I see your manager?" demonstrate there's an expectation that someone's in charge. And we often recognize that going "to the top" is the only way to get something done. Again, it only makes sense. And we know it does. No further proof is needed.

So you can see that authority has a logic to it. But we're here considering how morality and religion need the same logical appeal of authority.

I. Calling Jesus "Lord"

- A. If we don't recognize the need for authority in the religious realm, then we can easily become our own authority, acting like we're the ones in charge of how to serve and glorify God.
 - 1. We want to be Christians. We want to give God all the glory. We want to praise God with all our hearts. But we want to do it our way, defining religion by our own terms, expecting God to accept our "humble" service.
 - 2. After all, what kind of a God would refuse to accept the praise of those who so lovingly and whole-heartedly gave it? He's the passive audience isn't He? We get to perform however we wish and God will tell us how great we've done. That's what any parent will do for a little child just doing his best.
- B. Is this all a bit overstated? Perhaps, but in evaluating Matthew 7:21-23 we have to face the fact that calling Jesus "Lord" doesn't always work.
 - 1. What does work is the direct link between calling Jesus "Lord" and actually doing what He says.
 - 2. Those who do what He says from the heart are the ones who take His Lordship seriously. They're the ones who have built on the foundation of Jesus and His Lordship (Matthew 7:24-29). Jesus taught with authority.
 - 3. Since the Lordship of Jesus is all about His authority (Matthew 28:18), then accepting His Lordship necessarily entails submitting to His authority. How can it be any other way? It's not a choice between the heart and obedience. It's obedience with heart.

II. The Lordship of Jesus

- A. Something else about Matthew 7:21-23 screams authority: we all presumably want to enter the "kingdom" of heaven. When we see the word "kingdom," we know it's God's rule and authority as expressed through Christ and His church.

1. It is “of heaven” — entirely within God’s control and power. Since God is in charge of heaven, He isn’t obliged to accept just anyone who utters the words that pay lip service to Him.
 2. We have to take His authority seriously. Calling Jesus “Lord” and then minimizing His authority through our actions is hypocritical (Luke 6:46). Fight it if you wish, but Jesus and authority are forever linked. And accepting His Lordship means we accept that all religious authority belongs to Him and none to us: “None of self and all of Thee.”
- B. Suppose, though, that people wish to reject the idea of authority altogether. Then where exactly will they turn? Will we really believe that they’ll reject all authority? It’s not even possible.
1. The logic of authority is that there’s no escaping it. Authority is basic because no one can avoid it.
 2. Even if people try to avoid God’s authority, they’ll still rely on another source for the authority by which they do anything — their own or another’s.

III. What About People as Authority?

- A. If we reject God as the ultimate authority, then we’re left with people. Atheist Jean-Paul Sartre once said that without God, somebody has to invent values and it might as well be “me”.
1. Some sources of people as authority include parents (Matthew 10:37; Galatians 1:14), preachers (1 Timothy 6:3-4; 1 Peter 4:11), and human creeds (2 John 9; Revelation 22:18-19). But it’s easy for it to be “me” also because of my conscience (Proverbs 16:25; Acts 23:1) and feelings (Proverbs 28:26; Jeremiah 17:9).
 2. But do we really want people to be our ultimate source of authority? Yet this is the very choice Jesus put to the chief priests and elders of His day (Matthew 21:23-27).
 - a) They wanted to know by what authority Jesus did what He did. After all, Jesus was healing and teaching in the temple, paying no real regard to the position held by the chief priests. And of all things He had the audacity to turn the tables of the moneychangers over. Who does Jesus think He is? Where did He get the authority to act that way?
 - b) But Jesus “turned the tables” again, this time on their question. What was the authority for John’s baptism? What other options are there? If we reject God’s authority, then the only authority left is from men — fallible, selfish men. They knew they couldn’t answer the question without trapping themselves.
- B. So people want to reject God’s authority and only accept the authority of men. Here’s an interesting dilemma for them.
1. Suppose the response is, “The Bible is just a book from men.” The ones who argue this are now relying on their own opinions (authority) or someone else’s opinion (authority).
 2. For the sake of argument, let’s just say the Bible comes only from men, the same fundamental source that the skeptics have.

3. Then what makes the Bible's authority any less or worse than the authority relied upon by its doubters? If it's only from men, and the doubter's authority is only from men, then who's to say that either is better or worse? Why can't I use the Bible while they use other human authority? Why should they even care? And why should I care what they think?

IV. A Brief Analysis of Authority

- A. The Bible presents a "chain" of authority that has to be respected.
 1. Authority originates with God (James 1:17-18; Hebrews 1:1-2).
 2. Authority comes through Christ (Matthew 17:5; 28:18; John 12:47-48).
 3. Authority was delegated to the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13-14; 1 John 4:6).
 4. Authority is contained within the Bible (James 1:25; 2 Peter 1:3-4; Jude 3-5).
- B. Jesus showed us how to establish authority.
 1. Command — He would only do what the Father said (John 12:49-50).
 2. Approved example — He would follow the examples by God (John 5:19).
 3. Necessary inference — He used logical conclusions (John 7:21-24).
- C. General and specific authority.
 1. All authority is either general, which includes any thing, method or means of execution that comes within the class or order of the precept, example or thing commanded; or specific, which excludes every thing, method or means of execution in the same order or class which is not particularly specified in the precept, example or thing commanded. General authority includes and specific authority excludes.
 - a) Illustrations of general authority:
 - (1) Matthew 28:19 says "go." We can choose the means to go. We can walk, ride in a train or car, fly in an airplane, or sail on a ship. God didn't specify; therefore, we have a choice. No person has the right to bind a specific method.
 - (2) 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 any place which we rent. God didn't specify; therefore, we have a choice. No person has the right to bind a specific method.
 - b) Illustrations of specific authority:
 - (1) 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.
 - (2) The Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26, 29; Acts 20:7). 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 these matters and man can only do His will or rebel.
- D. Expedients.
 1. An expedient is simply an advantageous means or method that one may use to accomplish a goal. It signifies what's suitable for achieving certain ends. Webster defines an expedient as something "useful for effecting a desired

result; suited to the circumstances or the occasion; advantageous, convenient.”

2. In order for something to be an expedient, it must first be lawful (1 Corinthians 6:12). If something doesn't fall within the bounds of what God has authorized, then we have no right to practice it.
 - a) The Old Testament story of Uzzah illustrates this point well (2 Samuel 6:3-7). When the oxen stumbled, Uzzah surely thought it was expedient to reach out and steady the ark.
 - b) However, he tragically discovered that an act can't be an expedient if it's unlawful. God had strictly prohibited anyone from touching the ark of the covenant (Numbers 4:15).
3. There's several practices we could focus on, but time only allows one. Today certain denominations claim that it's expedient for them to ordain women preachers. Yet, this practice is inconsistent with New Testament teaching. In spite of the powerful influence that can be exerted by a woman, it's unlawful for her to teach in the public assembly (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12).

Conclusion. Authority is logical. It's self-evident. It's necessary. Why not accept that and then make sure that our source for authority is greater and better than we can provide all by ourselves?

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