

# Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 263

## AUTHORITY

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*For he taught them as one  
having authority.*

Matthew 7:29

### Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,  
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,  
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

# Free Grace Broadcaster

## AUTHORITY

# 263

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# OUR DESPERATE NEED OF AUTHORITY

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

**I**F I understand the modern religious situation at all, this whole question of authority is one of the most important problems confronting us. As such it demands our careful study. There is no doubt that things are as they are in the Christian church throughout the world today because we have lost our authority. We are faced by the fact that the masses of the people are outside the church. They are there, I suggest, because the church has in one way or another lost its authority. As a result, the people have ceased to listen or to pay any attention to its message. A great search for what has been lost characterizes many of the church's activities at this time. I believe that this fact is true of all sections of the church, including the evangelical section, which, as I shall try to show later, in common with others has been trying to produce a spurious,<sup>1</sup> artificial substitute.

Another reason for considering this subject is that various contemporary and fairly successful movements owe their success, I think, to their claim to authority. Without doubt, the secret of the power of the Roman Catholic Church lies in this fact: she claims to have authority, and people are ready to believe that she has it. This is true not merely of the poor, illiterate folk, but also of the intellectuals and sophisticated people who have struggled with the whole problem of life and of living and have failed to find satisfaction. They are ready in the end to capitulate<sup>2</sup> and to say, "Here is a great church that claims authority. This church has been going throughout the centuries. I cannot understand all she says; some things seem difficult. But, after all, she speaks with the authority of the centuries. Here is this great tradition. Who am I to stand against it?" And so, they capitulate and are prepared to believe all that is proclaimed by that church.

At the opposite extreme, I believe that the success of Pentecostalism, speaking generally, is to be attributed to the same cause. For within that movement there seems to be a note of certainty and assurance—a note of authority. The same thing is true of many cults whose success is to be

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<sup>1</sup> **spurious** – counterfeit; not genuine.

<sup>2</sup> **capitulate** – surrender.

attributed in much the same way to their claim to possess authority in some form or other.

Further, this whole question of the nature of authority is being raised, I think, acutely at the present time by movements such as the World Council of Churches<sup>3</sup> and the World Student Christian Federation.<sup>4</sup> The question is being asked everywhere, “Is there any final authority? Is there any objective source for this authority?” A similar question is, “Can truth be known? Can truth be defined? Can it be stated in a number of propositions?”

Now it seems to me that lying behind these questions is the suggestion that truth is so great and so marvelous that it cannot be defined and, therefore, that you cannot say definitely that this view is right and that is wrong. The result is that the average man feels that there is no such thing as “objective authority.” A certain author, writing about a year ago, made the following statement, “The real issue today is between truth and fundamentalism.” Observe the way in which he put it. Fundamentalism, according to that writer, cannot be true because it claims that truth can be reduced to a number of propositions.

Another learned man belonging to the same school of thought wrote a book in which he set out to deal with the fundamentals of the Christian faith and the whole source of our position. In the end, dismissing all suggestion that you can state or define truth in creeds and confessions of faith, he said that the situation is something like this. A man has been told that if only he climbs to the top of a certain mountain he will obtain a magnificent view. There, stretching before him, will be a wonderful and marvelous panorama. Very well, the man is anxious to see this. He begins to climb. He goes on and on. The sun sheds its clear rays upon him. He goes on in the blazing heat, and in spite of it. Eventually the ascent becomes so steep that he must get down on his hands and knees. As he scales certain crags, he has to hold on to little tufts of grass. But it is worth it. On he struggles, with hands and knees bleeding, but the quest keeps him going. And, at last, he arrives at the summit, and there, behold, is the grand panorama. What does he do about it? Does he try now to reduce that view, as it were, to propositions and to state it in theorems<sup>5</sup>? Impossible! The thing is too grand and too magnificent. He just stands with his eyes and mouth wide open, lost in stupendous wonder and amazement. He cannot go down again and write

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<sup>3</sup> **World Council of Churches** – apostate worldwide ecumenical organization.

<sup>4</sup> **World Student Christian Federation** – leftist youth and student arm of the global ecumenical movement.

<sup>5</sup> **theorems** – ideas accepted as provable truths.

out all he has seen and felt. He certainly cannot define it. That is impossible. Just as you cannot analyze the aroma of a rose, so you cannot reduce this great and glorious truth to a number of statements and propositions. In other words, it is something that can only be experienced, something you can feel. You might dance to it. You might sing to it. But you cannot state it in propositions. You cannot define it. You cannot reduce it to the form of a creed.

Now I suggest that, as Evangelicals, that is the major position that we must meet at this present time. There was a time when we were confronted by absolute denials. The position today is not that.

Instead, we are told that the truth is so marvelous that you cannot define it. One man may say this, and another may say that. We are asked to believe that they both are probably right. Everybody is right. There are many ways of getting to this summit. We must therefore welcome all approaches, and we must not say that a man has not the truth because he has not come to it our way. Such a school of thought claims that these are matters which, because of the very nature of truth itself, cannot be defined. Therefore, we cannot confidently speak of right and wrong.

Another reason that I would adduce for a study of the problem of authority in our day is connected with the desire for religious revival. Any study of church history, and particularly any study of the great periods of revival or reawakening, demonstrates above everything else just this one fact: that the Christian church during all such periods has spoken with authority. The great characteristic of all revivals has been the authority of the preacher. There seemed to be something new, extra, and irresistible in what he declared on behalf of God.

The final reason, I suggest to you, is that this subject of authority is indeed the great theme of the Bible itself. The Bible presents itself to us as an authoritative book.

With these thoughts in our minds, then, let us address ourselves to this subject.

From *Authority* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 7-10;  
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**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981):** Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



Authority: The right to bind the conscience in matters of faith and to command the will in matters of practice. This right belongs properly to God alone.

—Alan Cairns

# GOD'S ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY

Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)

*The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.—Psalm 103:19*

**G**OD is sovereign Lord and King and exerciseth a dominion over the whole world, both heaven and earth. This is so clear that nothing is more spoken of in Scripture. The very name *Lord* imports<sup>1</sup> it...He is frequently called “the Lord of hosts” because all the troops and armies of spiritual and corporeal<sup>2</sup> creatures are in His hands and at His service. This is one of His principal titles, and the angels are called “his hosts” (Psa 103:21), following the text—His camp and militia. But more plainly, in, God is presented upon His throne, encompassed with all the hosts of heaven standing on His right hand and on His left, which can be understood of no other than of the angels that wait for the commands of their sovereign (1Ki 22:19). [They] stand about, not to counsel Him but to receive His orders. The sun, moon, and stars are called His hosts (Deu 4:19), appointed by Him for the government of inferior things.

He hath an absolute authority over the greatest and the least creatures, over those that are most dreadful and those that are most beneficial, over the good angels that willingly obey Him, over the evil angels that seem most incapable of government; and as He is thus Lord of hosts, He is the “King of glory,” or a glorious king (Psa 24:10). You find Him called “a great King,” the “Most High” (Psa 92:1); [He is] the supreme Monarch, there being no dignity in heaven or earth but what is dim before Him and infinitely inferior to Him; yea, He hath the title of “*only* king” (1Ti 6:15). The title of royalty truly and properly only belongs to Him. You may see it described very magnificently by David at the freewill offering for the building of the temple: “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all” (1Ch 29:11-12). He hath a [superiority] of power or

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<sup>1</sup> **imports** – implies; expresses indirectly.

<sup>2</sup> **corporeal** – bodily.

authority above all. All earthly princes received their diadems from Him, yea, even those that will not acknowledge Him, and He hath a more absolute power over them than they can challenge over their meanest vassals. As God hath knowledge infinitely above our knowledge, so He hath a dominion incomprehensibly above any dominion of man; and by all the shadows drawn from the authority of one man over another, we can have but weak glimmerings of the authority and dominion of God.

**There is a threefold dominion of God:** 1. Natural, which is absolute over all creatures and is founded in the nature of God as Creator. 2. Spiritual or gracious, which is a dominion over His church as redeemed and founded in the covenant of grace. 3. A glorious kingdom at the winding up of all, wherein He shall reign over all, either in the glory of His mercy, as over the glorified saints, or in the glory of His justice in the condemned devils and men. The first dominion is founded in *nature*; the second, in *grace*; the third, in regard of the blessed, in *grace*, in regard of the damned, in *demerit* in them and *justice* in Him.

He is Lord of all things, and always in regard of propriety:<sup>3</sup> “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa 24:1). The earth with the riches and treasures in the bowels of it [and] the habitable world with everything that moves upon it are His. He hath the sole right, and what right soever any others have is derived from Him. In regard also of possession: “The most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:22), in respect of Whom, man is not the...possessor, but usufructuary<sup>4</sup> at the will of this grand Lord.

**We must know the difference between the might and power of God and His authority.** We commonly mean by the power of God, the strength of God, whereby He is able to effect all His purposes; by the authority of God, we mean the right He hath to act what He pleases. Omnipotence is His physical power, whereby He is able to do what He will; dominion is His moral power, whereby it is lawful for Him to do what He will. Among men, strength and authority are two distinct things. A subject may be a giant, and stronger than his prince, but he hath not the same authority as his prince. Worldly dominion may be seated, not in a brawny arm, but a sickly and infirm body, as knowledge and wisdom are distinguished. Knowledge respects the matter, being, and nature of a thing; wisdom respects the harmony, order, and actual usefulness of a thing; knowledge searcheth the nature of a thing, and wisdom employs that thing to its proper use. A man may have much knowledge and little wisdom, so a man may have much strength, and

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<sup>3</sup> **propriety** – right of possession.

<sup>4</sup> **usufructuary** – *Roman & Scots law*: person with the right to use another’s property.



little or no authority. A greater strength may be settled in the servant, but a greater authority resides in the master; strength is the natural vigor of a man. God hath an infinite strength, He hath a strength to bring to pass whatsoever He decrees; He acts without fainting and weakness (Isa 40:28) and impairs not His strength by the exercise of it. As God is Lord, He hath a right to enact; as He is almighty, He hath a power to execute. His strength is the executive power belonging to His dominion. In regard of His sovereignty, He hath a right to command all creatures; in regard of His almightiness, He hath power to make His commands be obeyed or to punish men for the violation of them. His power is that whereby He subdues all creatures under Him; His dominion is that whereby He hath a right to subdue all creatures under Him...

God hath interwoven the notion of His sovereignty in the nature and constitution of man in the noblest and most inward acts of his soul, in that faculty that is most necessary for him in his [living] in this world, either with God or man. It is stamped upon the conscience<sup>5</sup> of man, and flashes in his face in every act of self-judgment [that] conscience passes upon a man. Every reflection of conscience implies an obligation of man to some law written in his heart (Rom 2:15). This law cannot be without a legislator, nor this legislator without a sovereign dominion; these are but natural and easy consequences in the mind of man from every act of conscience. The indelible<sup>6</sup> authority of conscience in man, in the whole exercise of it, bears a respect to the sovereignty of God; clearly proclaims, not only a supreme being, but a supreme governor; and points man directly to it, so that a man may as soon deny his having such a reflecting principle within him, as deny God's dominion over him and, consequently, over the whole world of rational creatures.

From *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: James Nichol; James Nisbet and Co.; W. Robertson; G. Herbert, 1864-1866), 406-408; in the public domain.

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**Stephen Charnock (1628-1680):** English Puritan Presbyterian pastor, theologian, and author; born in St. Katherine Cree, London, England, UK.



All authority over rational creatures consists in commanding and directing. The duty of rational creatures, in compliance with that authority, consists in obeying. Where there is therefore a careless neglect of those means which convey the knowledge of God's will and our duty, there is an utter disowning of God as our sovereign and our rule.

—*Stephen Charnock*

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<sup>5</sup> See FGB 261, *Conscience*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>6</sup> **indelible** – permanent.

# THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Jeff Pollard

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God.—2 Timothy 3:16*

**T**HE divine authority of the Scriptures arises from God’s absolute authority over all creation.<sup>1</sup> He is the almighty Creator of all things: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen 1:1). As Creator, He owns all things: “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa 24:1). Since authority is the right to rule, the almighty Creator alone has the absolute authority to govern His universe as its sovereign King.<sup>2</sup> And the King declares His authority in the sixty-six books of the Bible. So, from Genesis to Revelation, God reveals His authority to families, churches, and magistrates through His Spirit-breathed Book.<sup>3</sup>

**The Bible is authoritative because God the Holy Spirit inspired it.** Paul wrote, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2Ti 3:16). For that reason, Thomas Watson said, “It is the library of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>4</sup> Charles Hodge said of that library, “The infallibility and divine authority of the Scriptures are due to the fact that they are the Word of God; and they are the Word of God because they were given by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>5</sup> The authority of Scripture, then, is God’s authority.<sup>6</sup> We may put it this way: What Scripture says, God says.

**The Authority of the Old Testament:** The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are God’s voice to His people. The following three things

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<sup>1</sup> The authority of Scripture is that property by which it demands faith and obedience to all its declarations...By virtue of the fact that Scripture is the Word of God and derives its authority from Him alone, its authority cannot be augmented or disparaged by Christians or the church...The authority of Scripture does not differ essentially from the authority of God Himself. (Robert D. Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 88-89)

<sup>2</sup> All ultimate authority rests in God. As Creator and Sustainer of the universe, He has the absolute right over all created beings and an all-embracing authority in heaven as on earth. This final and supreme authority gives Him the unlimited prerogative to command and enforce obedience, to unconditionally possess and absolutely govern all things at all times in all places of the universe. (J. Norval Goldenhuys, “Authority and the Bible” in Carl F. H. Henry, *Revelation and the Bible*, 371)

<sup>3</sup> See FGB 239, *God-breathed Scripture*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Christian Soldier, or Heaven Taken by Storm*, ed. Armstrong, 2<sup>nd</sup> American ed. (New York: Robert Moore, 1816), 27-28.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, 1872), 153.

<sup>6</sup> The authority of the Holy Scriptures and the authority of God are one and the same things although the one pertains to God and the other to Scripture.—*Johannes Andreas Quenstedt* (1617-1688)

affirm this: First, God speaks throughout the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit enlightened and empowered the prophets, who consistently proclaim, “Thus saith the LORD,” and “The word of the LORD came to me.” Furthermore, we read, “And God said,” as well as, “The LORD said.” God spoke those divine words to men and women such as Cain, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and all God’s prophets. And as Genesis through Malachi unfold, one book after another confirms God’s divine authority in Scripture with distinctive phrases: “the law of the LORD,” “the testimony of the LORD,” “the commandment(s) of the LORD,” “the book of the LORD,” “the statutes of the LORD,” and “the word of God.” With power and clarity, the Old Testament demonstrates the Spirit-breathed, authoritative voice of the Living God, especially in the term “my servants the prophets.”

Second, two classes of passages appeal “to the Old Testament text as *to God Himself speaking*.”<sup>7</sup> Warfield says that in the *first* class, “the Scriptures are spoken of *as if they were God*.”<sup>8</sup> For example: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8 *cf.* Gen 12:1-3). The point is simple: the Scriptures did not exist when God spoke to Abraham. God *Himself* covenanted with him. Warfield suggests that the authors of Scripture so habitually identified the text of Scripture with God “that it became natural to use the term ‘Scripture says,’ when what was really intended was ‘God, as recorded in Scripture, said.’”<sup>9</sup>

In the second class of passages, “God is spoken of *as if He were the Scriptures*.”<sup>10</sup> For example, Matthew’s Gospel records an exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees on the subject of marriage and divorce: “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?” (Mat 19:4-5 *cf.* Gen 2:24). When we compare Matthew 19:4-5 with Genesis 2:24, Jesus’ words, *he which made them...said*, are remarkable. God did not “directly” speak in that passage! Rather, Moses, God’s mouthpiece to Israel, is speaking of God’s institution of the first marriage and applying its principles to marriage in every age to come. Warfield suggests again, “In the two together, God and the Scriptures are brought into such [union] as to show...no

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<sup>7</sup> “It Says:” “Scripture Says:” “God Says” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 283-284.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

distinction was made between them.”<sup>11</sup> The words of Genesis 2:24 can be attributed to God only if the writers of the text were so accustomed to identifying the text with the words of God “that it had become natural to use the term ‘God says’ when what was really intended was ‘Scripture, the Word of God, says.’”<sup>12</sup>

Third, the New Testament affirms the authority of the Old: Jesus repeatedly said, “It is written,” in His authoritative preaching and teaching. The author of Hebrews said, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets” (Heb 1:1). Peter said, “The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (1Pe 1:21). And Paul said: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2Ti 3:16). Paul’s words *all scripture* point primarily to the Old Testament writings, although they are applicable to the New Testament writings that followed. By these three things, we are justified in saying of the Old Testament, “What Scripture says, God says.”

**The Authority of the New Testament:** Hodge asserts, “If God gave the Scriptures of the old economy by inspiration, much more were those writings that were penned under the dispensation of the Spirit.”<sup>13</sup> That unfolds as we read the New Testament. The Gospels speak repeatedly of Jesus and the events of His life with the words, “That it might be fulfilled.” And the apostles’ writings refer to Christ’s gospel of grace as “the word of God,” “the Word of the Lord,” “the word of Christ,” “the word,” and “the word of truth.” Moreover, by the Spirit’s inspiration, the apostolic writings proclaim Jesus, “God with us, the Christ, the Lord, the Savior, the Son of David, the Son of man, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Great High Priest, the only Mediator between God and men, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the King of kings, and Lord of lords!” And the twenty-seven books of the New Testament present Jesus and His church as fulfilling God’s covenant promises, prophecies, types, and shadows, which appear throughout the Old Testament. We may, therefore, rightfully consider the Old Testament as “God’s promises made” and the New Testament as “God’s promises fulfilled.”

Consider these examples: The Angel of the Lord said to Joseph, “She [*Mary*] shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

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<sup>11</sup> Warfield, 284.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Hodge, 161.

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Mat 1:21). Jesus Himself declared, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Mat 5:17). Following His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and said, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the [*Old Testament*] scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luk 24:44-47). That same day, Jesus had reproved two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luk 24:25-27). Jesus and His church fulfilled the Old Testament.

Following His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus made provision for the establishment and edification of His churches and the advancement of God’s Kingdom. Before His death, Jesus promised the Spirit’s inspiration of the apostles’ writings: “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (Joh 16:13). Jesus fulfilled that promise on the Day of Pentecost: the apostles were “filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Act 2:4). After Pentecost, the apostles said things such as, “When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1Th 2:13). So, guided by the Spirit, the apostles wrote down the soul-saving truths of Jesus’ person and work of redemption—the eternal Son of God’s miraculous virgin conception and incarnation, His perfectly holy life, His crucifixion for the sins of His people, His resurrection on the third day, and His ascension into the eternal regions of heaven! The Holy Spirit inspired and preserved those truths in the writings of New Testament. So, from Matthew to Revelation, the New Testament speaks with God’s absolute authority through Christ and His apostles.

**Special revelation is essential to the existence of Christianity.** Christ builds His churches on the absolute authority of God’s truth. We hear it from the lips of our Savior. Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father on behalf of His disciples: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (Joh 17:17). Every true church,

then, is necessarily “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Ti 3:15). And while God’s Word reveals great spiritual mysteries, holy laws, fulfilled and yet-to-be fulfilled prophecies, beautiful poetry, instructive letters, doctrinal teaching, apocalyptic visions, and more, its greatest revelation is the salvation of sinners by faith alone in the crucified and resurrected God-man Jesus Christ. That revelation calls us to believe on Christ for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. But, dear reader, to reject the Bible’s authoritative call is to damn one’s soul for eternity. Believe, O believe the revelation of Christ Jesus for your soul’s sake!

**The Holy Spirit testifies of Scripture’s authority.** A question remains: In a world that despises authority in general and the God of Scripture in particular, how can believers be sure of the authority of the Scriptures? The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 answers, “The authority of the Holy Scripture for which it ought to be believed dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church; but wholly upon God (Who is truth itself) the Author thereof...Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word.”<sup>14</sup> John Owen agreed: “The Spirit of God evidenceth the divine origin and authority of the Scripture by the power and authority that He puts forth in it and by it, over the minds and consciences of men, with its operation of divine effects thereon. This the apostle expressly affirms to be the reason and cause of faith.”<sup>15</sup>

**Finally, the Scriptures speak authoritatively to all of life.** “All Scripture...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2Ti 3:16). Thus, the 1689 Confession majestically declares: “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience.”<sup>16</sup> As our deranged and disordered culture descends into the depths of demonic rebellion, lawlessness, and perversion, it needs the infallible rule of saving knowledge in Christ! And with faith in and obedience to Christ, may His people everywhere order their families, churches, and governments according to God’s unchanging standard: the divine authority of Scripture.

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**Jeff Pollard:** an elder of Mount Zion Bible Church, Pensacola, FL, USA.



Cling to the divine authority of the Scriptures with a death grip!

—C. H. Spurgeon

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<sup>14</sup> The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, Chapter 1.4-5.

<sup>15</sup> John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. Goold, Vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 93.

<sup>16</sup> Confession 1689, Chapter 1.1, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

# JESUS CHRIST IS LORD OF ALL

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

**G**OD has revealed Himself to the Old Testament fathers in various ways. But, as evangelical Christians, we start with the great central fact of the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole Bible is really about *Him*. The Old Testament looks forward to Him. It tells us that Someone is coming. The promise seems vague, nebulous,<sup>1</sup> and indefinite at some points, clearer and more specific at others. But there it is. God is going to do something, and Someone will come. At last, the Voice will be heard. An Authority is going to speak. The Old Testament attitude is one of waiting on tiptoe, as it were. Then, of course, as soon as we come to the New Testament, we find it is full of Him.

At this point, to make all this practical, I want to emphasize that fact. When the apostle Paul (our great example in this matter of preaching, teaching, and evangelizing) went to Corinth, he reached a certain decision. Whatever his reason, Paul determined solemnly at Corinth “not to know anything among [them], save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1Co 2:2). This was a deliberate decision, reinforced by strong determination on his part. In other words, Paul decided that...he was not going to start with a preliminary philosophical argument and then gradually lead them on into the truth. No! He begins by proclaiming authoritatively the Lord Jesus Christ. And in Galatians 3:1, he uses an even stronger term: he reminds the Galatians that he “placarded” Christ crucified before them. He was like a billposter,<sup>2</sup> a man carrying a placard.<sup>3</sup> There also he *started* with Jesus Christ.

I have an increasing feeling that we must come back to this. I am not sure that apologetics<sup>4</sup> has not been the curse of evangelical Christianity for the last twenty to thirty years. I am not saying that apologetics is not necessary. But I am suggesting that, with a kind of worldly wisdom, we have been approaching the world on the grounds of apologetics instead of (with the apostle Paul) determining not to know anything “save Christ crucified” (see 1Co 2:2). We must become fools for Christ’s sake, says Paul. “If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (1Co 3:18).

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<sup>1</sup> **nebulous** – unclear; ill-defined.

<sup>2</sup> **billposter** – person who is employed to post advertisements to walls, fences, etc.

<sup>3</sup> **placard** – sign bearing a slogan or image, often used in public demonstration.

<sup>4</sup> **apologetics** – branch of theology concerned with the defense of the Christian faith.

We assert Him, we *proclaim* Him, we start with Him because He is the ultimate and the final Authority. We start with the fact of Jesus Christ because He is really at the center of the whole of our position, and the whole of our case rests upon Him...If we could but stand back and just look at the New Testament and the whole Bible with fresh eyes, I believe we would be rather amazed at the fact that the really big claim that is made in the whole of the New Testament is for the supreme authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. If what they say about Jesus Christ is not true, then they have nothing much at all to offer us.

**The Witness of the Gospels:** Let me remind you briefly of the case that is presented in the New Testament for this grand assertion of the final and supreme authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is interesting to notice how the New Testament asserts the fact at the very beginning of all its statements. It does so at the very outset of the Gospels. Take Matthew 1:23. This is going to happen, we are told, in order that the statement may be verified that said, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." There it is, at the start, in the very introduction to the Gospel. In the same way, the angel appearing to Mary and making his announcement to her makes this staggering statement about this "holy thing" (Luk 1:35), the child that was to be born to her: "And of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luk 1:33)—the universal, the everlasting Lord. Then, you remember, the angel speaking to the shepherds said: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luk 2:11)...

These Gospels were written with a definite and deliberate objective in view. They were not just written as records or as mere collections of facts...They all present the Lord Jesus Christ as the *Lord*, as this final Authority.

The message of John the Baptist was essentially the same. There he stands by himself after preaching and baptizing the people at the Jordan and overhears the murmuring of the crowd. They are talking to one another, and they say, "Surely this must be the Christ. We have never heard preaching like this before. When you looked into his face, did you not sense his authority? This must be the Messiah that we have been expecting." But John turns upon them with scorn and says, "I am not the Christ...I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable" (Joh 1:20;



Luke 3:16-17). You see the assertion! “I am not the Christ; I am not the one with authority. I am the preparation. I am the forerunner, the herald. He is the authority. He is yet to come.” The whole point again is to assert the authority of our Lord. How careful these Gospels are to put that claim repeatedly forward!

Then there is something else that they emphasize, something that is of the very essence of this whole matter of authority. It is their report of what happened at the baptism of our Lord. There He submits to baptism by John. He seems to be a man like everybody else, a sinner after all; for He needs to be baptized even as others. But there He is, just coming out of the water, when the Holy Spirit descends upon Him as a dove. Still more important is that Voice, a voice of authentication that came from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17). There is the important emphasis on His authority again. At the Mount of Transfiguration similar language is used, but there is a most significant and important addition. Again the Voice came from the excellent glory, and it said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Mat 17:5). In other words, “This is the one to listen to. You are waiting for a word. You are waiting for an answer to your questions. You are seeking a solution to your problems. You have been consulting the philosophers; you have been listening; and you have been asking, ‘Where can we have final authority?’ Here is the answer from heaven, from God: ‘Hear *Him*.’” Again, you see, marking Him out, holding Him before us as the last Word, the ultimate Authority, the One to Whom we are to submit, to Whom we are to listen.

Now, I have chosen these incidents because they are some of the most crucial events that are recorded in the Gospels. We must not regard them merely as happenings in the earthly life of our blessed Lord. They are that. But they are recorded in such a form so that this particular point should emerge—His unique, final authority. Everything in the Gospels seems to be isolating Him and focusing attention upon Him, including even the Voice from heaven itself.

**Our Lord’s own claims:** Coming still more directly to the Lord Himself, you will find certain other important features. Take, for instance, His teaching. How careful He was always to speak of “my Father, and your Father” (Joh 20:17). He does not say, “Our Father.” He says, “My Father.” He teaches His disciples to pray, “Our Father,” but He never includes Himself with them. He always takes pains to emphasize this difference, that He is the Son of man. He is man, and yet He is not only man. In Matthew 11:27 too, we have that great statement that is so definite and specific: “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither

knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” That is a most exclusive claim and a very important one for us always to bear in mind. Again, He says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Joh 14:6). “I am the light of the world” (Joh 8:12)...Then notice, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, the way in which He deliberately sets Himself up as the authoritative Teacher. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time...But *I* say unto you” (Mat 5:21-22). Here is one who has not been to the schools. He was not a Pharisee. People said, “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” (Joh 7:15). He does not hesitate. He stands up and He declares, “*I*,” with authority.

We need to remember that it is this characteristic personal emphasis that brings Him into contrast with the prophets. Those Old Testament prophets were mighty men. They were great personalities entirely apart from their being used by God and anointed by the Holy Spirit. But there is not one of them who ever used this “*I*.” They all say, “Thus saith the Lord.” But the Lord Jesus Christ does not put it like that. He says, “*I* say unto you” (Mat 5:20). At once He is differentiating between Himself and all others. “Now is the time for final authority,” He seems to be saying. He emphasizes this fact constantly in the Sermon on the Mount. He does not contrast His teaching only with the traditions of the fathers, the expert teachings of the Pharisees and the doctors of the Law. He does not hesitate even to interpret God’s Law, given through Moses to the children of Israel, in an authoritative manner. He even goes beyond that. No longer is it “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” (Mat 5:38), as had been ordained at that point. It is now, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you” (Mat 5:44). When He concludes that great sermon, He does so by uttering one of the most staggering and astounding things that He ever said. “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock...Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand” (Mat 7:24, 26). There, you see, His whole emphasis is upon “these sayings of *mine*.” Here is His claim to final authority. And if it is possible to add to such a statement, He did so when He said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but *my* words shall not pass away” (Mat 24:35). There is nothing beyond that.

**Our Lord’s actions and direct assertions:** Further, let us look at His works. Examine the miracles. What were they meant to accomplish? They were, of course, acts of kindness, but that was not their primary object. John constantly emphasizes in his Gospel that they were *signs*. They were deliberate signs that He gave to assert and to attest His own

Person and His own authority. They were intended to authenticate the fact that He was the promised Messiah. Since there is such a lot of loose sentimental teaching about this matter at the present time, let us never forget that the primary object of the miracles was simply to attest the Person of our Lord—to assert His authority and to establish that He was indeed the Son of God. He Himself claims that in many instances.

Then take another rather remarkable incident. Jesus is walking along one day, and He sees a man called Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom. He does not hesitate to confront that man in the middle of transacting his business and say, “Follow *me*” (Mat 9:9). And Matthew rose, left everything, and went after Jesus. He goes to the children of Zebedee and says the same thing. They too leave their boats, fishing nets, father, and everything else. Here is One Who does not hesitate to speak in a kind of totalitarian manner when He commands them, “Follow *me*.” And they went, and they followed Him. That is the gospel in action. That is evangelism. That is how the church comes into being. That is the way in which the work of God is carried on.

But He went even beyond that! He does not hesitate to claim that He has power to forgive sin. And He got into much trouble for claiming it. “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” said the people (Luk 5:21). But He *does* forgive sins. He asserts that He possesses the authority and power, and He is going to prove it. So, He tells the man, “Take up thy bed, and walk,” as a sign that He has power to forgive sins also (Joh 5:8). All this is purely a matter of authority. So often when we ministers preach through the Gospels, we take these things and turn them into parables, accompanied by nice, soothing little messages. But we are really missing the point. We should be preaching the Lord Jesus Christ and asserting His authority...

I have selected these instances to show you that the whole of the New Testament is clearly designed to convince us of the authority of Jesus Christ. If He is not who He claims to be, there is no need to listen to Him. If He is, then we are bound to listen to Him and to do whatever He may tell us to do. My own happiness is not the criterion. If He allows me to go on being ill or in trouble—whatever He says, I will answer, “Yes, Lord.” I will do so because He is the Lord. He is the Authority.

Indeed, even His enemies recognized it clearly. They saw that He claimed to be God. See, for example, John 10:33. All seemed to recognize it, and His stumbling, fumbling disciples *themselves* eventually confessed it. Peter made the great statement at Caesarea Philippi: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mat 16:16). On another occasion our Lord, upon seeing people leaving the congregation, turned to

the disciples and said, “Will ye also go away?” Peter answered, again perhaps not knowing fully what he said: “To whom shall we go?” Where else is there an authority? “Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Joh 6:66-69). In other words, the apostles recognized, “There is no one else. You are the last, the final Authority.”

**His death, resurrection, and ascension:** Despite all this, He was crucified in apparent weakness, He died and was buried in a grave. It is at this point that His authority shines forth most gloriously and boldly. He has conquered even death, and His rising from the grave is the ultimate proof of His authority. And so, we have the vital and important incident concerning Thomas. Doubting Thomas is told that He has risen, but he cannot believe it. It seems incredible, yet when he sees Him and is challenged to put his hand and his finger into the wounds, Thomas falls at His feet and says, “My Lord and my God” (Joh 20:24-28).

We must, however, go on even beyond the resurrection because we are told that these disciples, after they had listened to Him, saw Him ascend into heaven. We read, “And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luk 24:52). There is a tendency on the part of Evangelicals to undervalue the ascension. But it is in the Scriptures, and it is emphasized not only in the Gospels, but also in the Acts of the Apostles. The ascension is a vital part of the testimony to Christ’s authority.

“Christianity is Christ.” It is not a philosophy, indeed not even a religion. It is the good news that “God...hath visited and redeemed his people” (Luk 1:68), and that He has done so by sending His only begotten Son into this world to live and die and rise again. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” (Rev 1:11). In other words, He is the one Authority.

From *Authority* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 11-29;  
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**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981):** Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



The sum is, that our Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of His divine nature and His voluntary undertaking in our flesh to fulfil all righteousness for us, both as to obedience and satisfaction, is exalted in that nature wherein He suffered to be the sovereign Judge and Lord of all.—*John Newton*

# APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921)

**C**HRISTIANITY is often called a book-religion. It would be more exact to say that it is a religion that has a book. Its foundations are laid in apostles and prophets, upon which its courses are built up in the sanctified lives of men; *but Christ Jesus alone is its chief cornerstone.* He is its only basis; He, its only Head; and He alone has authority in His church. But He has chosen to found His church not directly by His own hands, speaking the word of God, say for instance, in thunder-tones from heaven; but through the instrumentality of a body of apostles, chosen and trained by Himself, endowed with gifts and graces from the Holy Ghost, and sent forth into the world as His authoritative agents for proclaiming a gospel that He placed within their lips and which is none the less His authoritative Word, that it is through them that He speaks it. It is because the apostles were Christ's representatives that what they did and said and wrote as such comes to us with divine authority. The authority of the Scriptures thus rests on the simple fact that God's authoritative agents in founding the church gave them as authoritative to the church that they founded. All the authority of the apostles stands behind the Scriptures, and all the authority of Christ behind the apostles. The Scriptures are simply the law code that the lawgivers of the church gave it.

If, then, the apostles were appointed by Christ to act for Him and in His name and authority in founding the church (and this no one can doubt); and if the apostles gave the Scriptures to the church in prosecution of this commission (and this admits of as little doubt), then the whole question of the authority of the Scriptures is determined. It will be observed that their authority does not rest exactly on apostolic authorship. The point is not that the apostles wrote these books (though most of the New Testament books were written by apostles), but that they imposed them on the church as authoritative expositions of its divinely appointed faith and practice. Still less does the authority of the Scriptures rest on the authority of the church. The church may bear witness to what she received from the apostles as law, but this is not giving authority to that law but humbly recognizing the authority that rightfully belongs to it, whether the church recognizes it or not. The puzzle that some people fall into here is something like mistaking the relative "authority" of the guidepost and the road; the guidepost may point us

to the right road, but it does not give its rightness to the road. It has not “determined” the road—it is the road that has “determined” the guidepost; and unless the road goes of itself to its destination, the guidepost has no power to determine its direction. So, the church does not “determine” the Scriptures but the Scriptures the church. Nor does it avail to say in opposition that the church existed before the Scriptures and therefore cannot depend on them. The point is, whether the Scriptures are a product of the church or rather of the authority that founded the church. The church certainly did not exist before the authority that Christ gave the apostles to found it, in virtue of which they have imposed the Scriptures on it as law.

Apostolicity thus determines the authority of Scripture; any book or body of books that were given to the church by the apostles as law must always remain of divine authority in the church. That the apostles thus gave the church the whole Old Testament, which they had themselves received from their fathers as God’s Word written, admits of no doubt and is not doubted. That they gradually added to this body of old law an additional body of new law is equally patent. In part, this is determined directly by their own extant testimony. Thus, Peter places Paul’s epistles beside the Scriptures of the Old Testament as equally with them law to Christians (2Pe 3:16); and thus Paul places Luke’s Gospel alongside of Deuteronomy (1Ti 5:18). Thus, too, all write with authority (1Co 14:37; 2Co 10:8; 2Th 2:15; 3:6-14)—with an authority that is above that of angels (Gal 1:7-8), and the immediate recognition of which is the test of the possession of the Holy Ghost (1Co 14:37; 2Th 3:6-14). In part, it is left to be determined indirectly from the testimony of the early church; it being no far cry from the undoubting universal acceptance of a book as authoritative by the church of the apostolic age, to the apostolic gift of it as authoritative to that church. But by one way or another, it is easily shown that all the books that now constitute our Bible and which Christians, from that day to this, have loyally treated as their divinely prescribed book of law, no more and no fewer, were thus imposed on the church as its divinely authoritative rule of faith and practice.

Now it goes, of course, without saying, that the apostles were not given this supreme authority as legislators to the church without preparation for their high functions, without previous instruction in the mind of Christ, without safeguards thrown about them in the prosecution of their task, without the accompanying guidance of the Holy Spirit. And nothing is more noticeable in the writings that they have given the church than the claim that they pervasively make: in giving them, they are acting only as the agents of Christ; and those who wrote them, wrote in the Spirit of Christ. What Paul writes he represents to

be “the commandments of the Lord” (1Co 14:37), which he therefore transmits in the name of the Lord (2Th 3:6); and the gospel that Peter preached was proclaimed in the Holy Ghost (1Pe 1:12). Every Scripture of the Old Testament is inspired by God (2Ti 3:16), and the New Testament is equally Scripture with the Old (1Ti 5:18); all prophecy of Scripture came from men who spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost (2Pe 1:20); and Paul’s epistles differ from these older writings only in being “other”—that is, newer Scriptures of like kind (2Pe 3:16). When we consider the promises of supernatural guidance that Christ made to His apostles (Mat 10:19-20; Mar 8:11; Luk 21:14; Joh 14 and 16), in connection with their claim to speak with divine authority even when writing (1Co 14:37; 2Th 3:6), and their conjunction of their writings with the Old Testament Scriptures as equally divine with them, we cannot fail to perceive that the apostles claim to be attended in their work of giving law to God’s church by prevailing superintending grace from the Holy Spirit. This is what is called *inspiration*.<sup>1</sup> It does not set aside the human authorship of the books. But it also puts a divine authorship behind the human. It ascribes to the authors such an attending influence of the Spirit in the process of writing that the words they set down also become the words of God; and the resultant writing is made not merely the expression of Paul’s or John’s or Peter’s will for the churches, *but the expression of God’s will*. In receiving these books from the apostles as law, therefore, the church has always received them not only as books given by God’s agents, but as books so given by God through those agents that *every word of them is God’s Word*.

Let it be observed that the proof of the authority of the Scriptures does not rest on a previous proof of their inspiration. Even an uninspired law is law. But when inspiration has once been shown to be fact, it comes mightily to the reinforcement of their authority. God speaks to us now, in Scripture, not only mediately through<sup>2</sup> His representatives, but directly through the Scriptures themselves as His inspired Word. The Scriptures thus become the crystallization of God’s authoritative will. We will not say that Christianity might not have been founded, propagated,<sup>3</sup> and preserved without inspired writings, or even without any written embodiment of the authoritative apostolic teaching. Whichever Christ is known through whatever means, there is Christianity, and men may hear, believe, and be saved. But God has caused His grace to abound to us in that He not only published redemption through Christ

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<sup>1</sup> See FGB 239, *God-breathed Scripture*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>2</sup> **mediately through** – acting through the means of.

<sup>3</sup> **propagated** – spread from person to person.

in the world but gave this preachment<sup>4</sup> authoritative expression through the apostles; [He] fixed it with infallible trustworthiness in His inspired Word. Thus, in every age, God speaks directly to every Christian heart and gives us abounding safety to our feet and divine security to our souls. And thus, instead of a mere record of a revelation given in the past, we have the ever-living Word of God; instead of a mere tradition however guarded, we have what we have all learned to call in a unique sense “the Scriptures.”

From a short essay published in the *Westminster Teacher*, September 1889.

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**Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921):** Presbyterian professor of theology at Princeton Seminary; born near Lexington, KY, USA.



The apostles themselves have passed to their eternal reward, but we have their authoritative writings. In these writings, we still hear the apostles speaking with a power that was invested in them exclusively. No man today possesses the authority of, say, the Apostle Paul. Only such an one could write to the church of God at Corinth and say, “What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod [*a scepter of authority*], or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?” (1Co 4:21). The divine authority conferred upon Paul (and, of course, the same is true of all the other apostles) ended with his death... Writings given by inspiration through [*the apostles*] possess a permanent authority. “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2Pe 1:21). The words of the New Testament possess for the church of God today all the authority of faraway apostolic times.—*Arthur W. Pink*

Jesus marveled at the humility of the Roman centurion who said, “For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it” (Luke 7:8). While possessing authority to command others, he himself was under superior authority. In reading the New Testament, we must ever remember that while the apostles with authority commanded, charged, ordained, and willed, they were under the supreme authority of Christ. As the authority of the Roman centurion, an officer over one hundred men, was only the expression of the authority of his general, even so, divine authority expressed in the writings of these holy men is but the transmission through them of the absolute authority of the risen Christ and Lord, the supreme authority to be obeyed.—*Arthur W. Pink*

Paul says that Christians “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20). Now you and I are built upon that foundation. We do not regard as authoritative anything that has been said subsequent to the New Testament canon. Here is our foundation, and we do not accept any teaching of any church or of any tradition as being divinely inspired. This is the basis, and the church is to be built upon this teaching because of its unique authority.

—*David Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

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<sup>4</sup> **preachment** – act of preaching.



# LOCAL CHURCH AUTHORITY

Jean-Marc Berthoud

**I**T is in the weakness of the flesh (and through the power of the Holy Spirit) that power is exercised by those whom God has placed in His church to govern. It is in this weakness that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, deacons, elders, and other servants of God must exercise the ministry that the Holy Spirit has entrusted to them for the building up of the body of Christ, the church of the living God. This is why the apostle Peter, after receiving from Christ the order to feed His sheep, wrote: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre,<sup>1</sup> but of a ready mind;<sup>2</sup> Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1Pe 5:2-3).

When the apostle Paul addressed the Philippians, and particularly their spiritual leaders, he exhorted them to imitate the way the Lord Jesus Christ had exercised the power entrusted to Him by His Father in His earthly ministry: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phi 2:5-7).

This exhortation echoed the words of Jesus Himself Who said to His disciples, “For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth” (Luk 22:27).

We see, therefore, that a true pastor does not act toward the flock entrusted to him by the Great Shepherd of the sheep as does the civil power: by coercion,<sup>3</sup> by a domination marked by force. (We must remember that the physical force of the sword exercised by the magistrate is perfectly legitimate when applied in its proper order—that is, of course, if it remains under the yoke of God’s Law.) No, the servant of God acts as crucified with Jesus Christ, in complete weakness, through the power of the Holy Spirit—a divine power indeed, but not one that violently coerces or compels people. The true servant of God must constantly remember these words of the prophet Zechariah while living and revealing the true significance of his ministry: “Not by might, nor by

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<sup>1</sup> **filthy lucre** – money gained in a dishonest or dishonorable way.

<sup>2</sup> **of a ready mind** – eagerly.

<sup>3</sup> **coercion** – government by force, to suppress persons who oppose official policy.

power [will this work be accomplished], but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zec 4:6).

Therefore, the weaker the power of true spiritual leaders is (humanly speaking), so much more must believers be subject to this power and humbly obedient to it. Thus, the apostle Paul, aware that the exercise of his ministry was to be carried out in man’s weakness, said, “Death worketh in us, but life in you” (2Co 4:12).

Fully convinced that the only position faithful to Christ’s teaching is that of crucifixion, the apostle exhorts believers in this way: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17).

This power is even more powerful, being the power that the Father has given to the Son, acting through the Third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, as He labors in the weakness of men chosen by God for this task. The less this ministry possesses of human power, the less “political” force it holds, the more unwise it is for Christians placed beneath its authority to disobey it. For the church holds in earthen vessels the power of Christ to open or close the door of the kingdom of God and even to deliver hardened rebels to Satan.<sup>4</sup>

But it is also essential to clearly state: this obedience of Christians to the authority of the church must always be maintained according to the analogy of faith.<sup>5</sup> That is, the obedience of God’s children to the power that Christ has placed in His church must *never* be a blind, unconditional, purely mechanical obedience. Just as the shepherds must watch over the flock so that the sheep may walk in obedience to the truth, so also the members of the spiritual community must watch over the shepherds whom God has placed over them, *that they might verify that these leaders of the church also submit to the commands of Scripture*. Church members must watch over their shepherds just as Paul’s Jewish listeners did in the city of Berea: “They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Act 17:11).

We are not required to obey ecclesiastical orders contrary to the commands of God’s written revelation. For the Bible does not require us to submit to the human traditions of churches but to the Word of truth, to sacred Scripture, which is the true tradition of the apostles.

**Is the exercise of power in the local church monarchical, aristocratic,**

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<sup>4</sup> See FGB 222, *Church Discipline*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>5</sup> **analogy of faith** – method of biblical interpretation in which doctrine gleaned from clearer related Scriptures is used to interpret a particular passage (Rom 12:6).

**or democratic?** According to Holy Scripture, the exercise of power in the church is monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic *all at the same time*.

It is *monarchical* because the sole head of the church (possessing an absolutely sovereign power over it) is Jesus Christ Himself, God the Son made man. In this way, we must first affirm that the church is an institution with a theocentric,<sup>6</sup> theonomic,<sup>7</sup> and theocratic<sup>8</sup> character, and that the prerogative that governs the church is the prerogative of God, the very Word of God. The life of the church is nothing more than the obedience of believers, through the faith and power given to them by the Holy Spirit, to all the orders of their Head and Leader, their King Jesus Christ, which orders are contained in the Bible.

But we must immediately add that the earthly government of the church is of an *aristocratic* or *hierarchical* nature, for the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, appoints men specifically chosen and trained by Him and to whom He has delegated His authority to govern His house according to the commandments included for this explicit purpose in the Word of God. The ministers of God in the church are thus in no way instituted by popular election, by the democratic vote of all believers, but by God Himself.

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers” (1Co 12:28). “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1Ti 1:12). “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father)” (Gal 1:1).

These ministers, these servants of God, are chosen by God from among the “faithful,” the “made men” of the church, and have the task of governing it in such a way that it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who builds it up through His Spirit. They are instituted by God and not by the Christian “people” who, at most, only recognize their calling and confirm them in their charge. Nothing is more contrary to Scripture than to believe that the church should be ruled by the opinions and decisions of the majority of its members (as is the case with any liberal democratic society)—that is, independent or “free” from the constraints and limits of the Law of God.

But we must simultaneously add that the church is also a society of a *democratic* nature, a society of people capable of mutual edification, a community in which all are, in their own right, members of the body of Jesus Christ. Paul writes to the Christians at Rome that he desires to see

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<sup>6</sup> **theocentric** – God-centered.

<sup>7</sup> **theonomic** – God’s Word-centered.

<sup>8</sup> **theocratic** – God-governed.

them so that he might impart to them some spiritual gift that they might be strengthened (Rom 1:11). Such a concern to do good to the Christian people of the city of Rome was just and legitimate. For he whom Jesus Christ had established as the apostle of the nations had received from God the power to strengthen believers and to communicate to them the graces that God would see fit to grant them. But Paul catches himself, for he realizes that these believers can also be used by God for his own strengthening. This is why he immediately adds: “that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (Rom 1:12).

This faith of God’s people, writes Peter, is a faith just as precious and valuable as his own (2Pe 1:1). It is from this communion of all in one body, where every person has his own place, that democracy exists in the church in accordance with Scripture.

In Christ, through the Holy Spirit, in this community which is the body of Christ, this heavenly Jerusalem that we already live in by faith, all members are useful, all have their place, and none should be despised, set aside, or ignored. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26-28; see also Col 3:11; 1Co 12:13).

We are all prophets, priests, and kings in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, Who blows where He chooses, works indiscriminately among people both through the most modest members of the body of Christ as well as through those whom God has established as pastors and teachers in His church. If the ministers of Jesus Christ must labor in the teaching and building up of the church of God, believers also have an indispensable role to play, for they must ensure that the teaching, edification, and government of the church are carried out according to the measure of faith (Rom 12:6) in the one truth, in accordance with the deposit given once for all to the saints in the Holy Scriptures.

At a time when the “teachers” of the church are all too frequently merely false teachers dispensing false and harmful doctrine, God often uses the faith of the humblest believer to keep His church alive and to defend it from error—the lies of the devil.

**Discipline within the church:** The exercise of this power in the church through the consistorial<sup>9</sup> authority of the elders can lead to acts of discipline that culminate in the exclusion of the hardened wrongdoer from

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<sup>9</sup> **consistorial** – pertaining to church government by a plurality of elders.

the fellowship of Christians in the hope that this spiritual and social isolation might lead him to reflection, questioning, and repentance. The power of the church cannot proceed beyond the exclusion of those who, through their actions or teaching, abandon the rule of faith and work toward the destruction of the Christian community. Scripture clearly teaches that, after various warnings given to the brother who professes the error or who behaves contrary to the teachings of the apostles, if he perseveres in his error or misbehavior, the believers who constitute the church must absolutely separate themselves from him. In fact, it is the unfaithful professing Christian who, by his persistence in his errors, himself breaks the bond of fellowship. The church merely recognizes this and acts in consequence. This separation from the unfaithful sheep is a sign of God's disapproval of the person who, while professing to be a Christian, perseveres in wrongdoing; it seeks to protect the flock from any contagion and in the end to work, as far as possible, toward the repentance and eventual restoration of the unruly brother. Separation, the isolation of one who is thus abandoned by all, should lead him to repentance, reparation, and reintegration into the people of God...

We must resolutely exclude the hardened sinner or heretic from the very bosom of the church of God. However, the retributive power of the church can proceed no further than this. To ask the civil power to deprive this sheep of its life, liberty, or property because of heresy or lasting immorality is in fact to usurp the place of Christ and to arrogate today the authority of the final judgment, a privilege that belongs exclusively to God. It is clear that this ecclesiastical discipline cannot destroy creational family ties either.

It was this disciplinary power in the church that Christ exercised when He drove the sellers and money changers out of the temple.

From *Authority in the Christian Life* (Monticello, FL:  
Psalm 78 Ministries, 2020), 89-97.

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**Jean-Marc Berthoud:** Swiss Reformed Baptist author and editor; born in 1939 in South Africa.



We cannot, without surrendering ourselves into the hands of fallible men, pretend that we owe unconditional obedience to the ministers of God in His church. The tradition of men, human regulations, and human structures are one thing, and the ordinance of God expressed in His infallible Word is another. We must judge our traditions, regulations, and our structuring of churches and works in the light of Scripture alone. Yet we must not allow our individual examination of biblical truth to become a pretext for refusing the authority of the ministers of the church and thus attempting to live according to the dictates of the flesh.—*Jean-Marc Berthoud*

# PASTORAL AUTHORITY

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.—Hebrews 13:17*

**T**O obey and submit to their spiritual leaders is what church members are here exhorted unto... To ignore those rulers or to rebel against their authority is to despise the One Who has appointed them.

It is abundantly clear from these words that in the days of the apostles there were two distinct classes among God's people, namely, the rulers and those that were ruled; and as this is not merely a historical statement but a specific exhortation, it is equally clear that the same is binding upon Christians throughout the entire course of this dispensation. This, of course, presupposes a settled church state among them, in which the distinctive duties of each class is here distinctly defined, according to the office of the one and the obligation of the other. The duties here prescribed contain a succinct summary of all that relates to church rule and order, for all that concerns its welfare is comprised in the due obedience of the church to its rulers and their due discharge of their office.

["Them that have the rule"] have received power from Christ to preside over His assemblies; to declare His will and execute His laws; to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all authority and longsuffering. They have no arbitrary power except what Christ has given them, yet within the limits He has prescribed, they are *rulers*, and it is the duty of their members to obey them. "It is of equal importance that the office-bearers in a church should not aspire to a higher degree of authority and should not be content with a lower degree of authority than that which their Master has assigned them; and that the members of a church should equally guard against basely submitting to a tyranny which Christ has never instituted and lawlessly rebelling against a government which He has appointed."<sup>1</sup>

John Owen declared that the twofold duty here enjoined with respect to the ecclesiastical leaders has respect unto the two parts of their office,

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<sup>1</sup> John Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews*, ed. D. Smith, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh; London: W. Oliphant & Co.; Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1862), 235.

namely, teaching and ruling: “obey their teaching and submit to their rule.” While it be true that their doctrine or preaching is to be obeyed—so far as it accords with the truth—and that their authority is to be yielded unto as it respects their ordering of the church’s life, yet we rather regard the two exhortations as having a *distributive* force, the second amplifying the first. The word *obey* in our text means an obedience that follows being persuaded: the mind is first carried along with the preacher so that it believes, and then the will acts... “And submit yourselves” seems to us to have reference unto the *spirit* in which they were to obey—obedience was not to be merely an outward act, but *prompted by submissive hearts*.

Thus, we take it that “obey them that have the rule over you” is not to be restricted to their teaching (as Owen defined it), but includes their ruling of the church as well; while the “submit yourselves” has a wider significance than yielding to their rule, referring to the spirit that was to regulate the whole of their obedience. As Calvin well expressed it, “He commands first obedience and then honor to be rendered to them. These two things are necessarily required, so that the people might have confidence in their pastors and reverence for them also. But it ought at the same time to be noticed that the apostle speaks only of those who faithfully performed their office; for they who have nothing but the title, nay, who use the title of pastors for the purpose of destroying the church, deserve but little reverence and still less confidence. And this also is what the apostle plainly sets forth when he says that they *watched* for their souls—a duty that is not performed but by those who are faithful rulers.”<sup>2</sup>

The duty here enjoined, then, may be summed up in: cultivate an obedient, compliant, and submissive spirit unto your pastors and church officers. To *obey* and *submit* denotes such a subjection as of inferiors to superiors. It is not a servile<sup>3</sup> subjection, but that reverent respect that God requires, a submission that issues from love and that has for its end the honoring of those to whom honor is due. It would therefore include the doing of everything in the power of the members that would make the lot of their rulers easier and lighter, and, of course, would take in providing for their temporal sustenance. Those rulers are appointed by God, standing in His immediate stead, so that the Lord Christ declared, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (Joh 13:20).

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<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, ed. J. Owen, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 352-353.

<sup>3</sup> **servile** – slave-like, groveling submission.

It scarcely needs pointing out that those words are *not* to be taken absolutely, any more than are “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers” (Rom 13:1) or “As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Eph 5:24). Each of these exhortations is qualified by others: the members of a gospel church are no more required to receive the pastor’s teaching when it be flagrantly opposed to Holy Writ, or to submit to any ruling of his that is manifestly dishonoring to Christ and injurious to His people, than they are to yield to a mandate of Nebuchadnezzar if he sets up an image to himself and commands all to fall down and worship it, or if an ungodly husband required from his wife anything contrary to the laws of nature. No, it is not a blind and implicit obedience that is here enjoined, for it would be quite contrary to the whole tenor of gospel obedience, which is “our *reasonable* service” (Rom 12:1). The subjection required by our text is only unto that *office* established by Christ Himself. If any usurp that office, and under cloak thereof do teach or enjoin things contrary to what Christ has instituted, *then no obedience unto them is required by this command*. But it is just at this point that most difficulty is experienced today. For many years past, large numbers of professing Christians have been demanding that the religious leaders should speak unto them “smooth things,” yea, prophesy unto them “deceits” (Isa 30:10), declining to listen unto what condemned their carnal and worldly lives and refusing to heed the holy requirements of God. In consequence, He has suffered their descendants to reap the evil sowings of their fathers, by largely withholding “pastors according to mine heart” (Jer 3:15), and allowing thousands of unregenerate men to occupy the modern pulpit. Instead of “obeying” and “submitting” to *them*, God requires His people to turn away from and have nothing to do with them.

The true servants of Christ are to be identified by the marks specified in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. They are men who are “apt to teach” (3:2) being qualified by the Spirit to open up the Scriptures and apply them to the consciences and lives of their hearers. They are “not greedy of filthy lucre” nor covetous (3:3), demanding a salary that would enable them to live above the level of their members and declining to serve if there were no pay attached to it. “Not a novice” (3:6) with little or no experience in the spiritual ups and downs of God’s tried people, but one who has himself tested and proved the reliability and sufficiency of what he recommends to his hearers. He must be a man who is “not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine,” but “a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate” (Ti 1:7-8), or otherwise he could not commend what he teaches by *his own example*. The servants of Christ, then, are endued with a



measure of the Spirit of their Master, and it is by *that* they are to be distinguished from the false.

To refuse obedience and submission unto such...is to despise a divine institution, for the office of the pastor is as much the Lord's own appointment as is the church itself or the gifts and graces of its individual members. It is true that men will and do abuse the good gifts of God, but if some pastors are arbitrary, are not some members unruly? If there be pride in the pulpit, is there none in the pew? Alas, in this Laodicean and communistic age, when it has become the fashion to "despise dominion and speak evil of dignities" (Jude 1:8) and when "the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable" (Isa 3:5), almost every individual considers himself qualified to judge and direct both civil and ecclesiastical rulers, to prescribe for both state and church, to scrutinize and criticize everything that is being done, and to say what ought to be done. May the Lord have mercy and subdue the turbulent ragings of pride.

"For they watch for your souls." This is adduced as a reason why we should show proper respect unto church rulers. "The word used is peculiar unto this place, and it denotes a watchfulness with the greatest care and diligence, and that not without trouble or danger; as Jacob kept and watched the flocks of Laban in the night."<sup>4</sup> The true under-shepherds of Christ have no selfish aims, but rather the spiritual and eternal good of those who are entrusted to their care. Many a minister of the gospel is often awake, burning midnight oil, while the members of his flock are asleep. Many a one can say, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you" (2Co 12:15). The ministerial office is no idler's one: it makes demands on heart, mind, and nervous energy, such as none other does.

Here, then, is a motive to move the members to be gladly subservient to their rulers. The more labor anyone undertakes for our sake and the more difficulty and danger he incurs for us, the greater are our obligations to him. Such is the office of bishops or elders; and the heavier the burden they bear, the more honor they deserve. Let, then, our gratitude be evidenced by giving them that which is their due. "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1Th 5:12-13). Let us also add that young men aspiring unto the ministerial office need to think twice about entering a calling that demands ceaseless self-sacrifice, unremitting toil, and a love for Christ and His people that alone

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<sup>4</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. W. H. Goold, Vol. 24, *Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), 465.

will sustain amid sore discouragements.

“They watch for your souls as they that must give account” supplies a further motive. They are placed in a position of trust, commissioned by the Lord to Whom they are immediately responsible. They often render an account to Him now, keeping up a constant intercourse with Him, spreading before Him the state and needs of His people, seeking supplies of grace. A full and final account must be rendered of their stewardship in the Day to come. Unspeakably solemn consideration is *that*, and this it is which actuates them, for they “watch for the souls of their church as those who must give account.” They bear in mind the awful warning of Ezekiel 33:5 and seek to heed the exhortation of 1 Timothy 4:16.

“That they may do it with joy, and not with grief.” Here is a further reason why church members should give to their rulers that which is due them. If on the one hand nothing is more encouraging to a pastor than for his people to be responsive and docile, it is equally true that nothing is more disheartening and saddening to him than to meet with opposition from those whose highest interests he is serving with all his might. Every Christian minister who is entitled to that designation, can, in his measure, say with the apostle, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3Jo 1:4).

“For that is unprofitable for you” furnishes the final motive. For the members of a church to so conduct themselves as to be a constant source of grief unto their minister is to despise their own mercies. It not only prevents their receiving his instruction into their hearts, which results in their spiritual barrenness, but it also saps *his* vigor, quenches his zeal, causing him to proceed with a heavy heart instead of with cheerfulness. What is still more solemn and serious, the Lord Himself is highly displeased, and the tokens of His favor are withdrawn, for He is very sensitive of the mistreatment of His stewards.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952):** Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



Without [prayer], no man can or doth preach to them as he ought, nor perform any other duty of his pastoral office. From hence may any man take the best measure of the discharge of his duty towards his flock. He that doth constantly, diligently, fervently pray for them, will have a testimony in himself of his own sincerity.—*John Owen*

# PREACHING WITH AUTHORITY

John Owen (1616-1683)

*And I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.—Jeremiah 3:15*

**W**HAT I shall do is show you, in some instances, what is required unto this work of teaching or of feeding the congregation with knowledge and understanding in this duty of preaching the Word:

1. There is *spiritual wisdom* in understanding the mysteries of the gospel that we may be able to declare the whole counsel of God and the riches and treasures of the grace of Christ unto the souls of men. (Act 20:27; 1Co 2:1-4; Eph 3:7-9). Many in the church of God were, in those days of light, growing and thriving. They had a great insight into spiritual things and into the mysteries of the gospel. The apostle prays that they might all have it, “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:17-18).

Really it is no easy thing for ministers to instruct to such kind of duties. If there be not some degree of eminency in themselves, how shall we lead on such persons as these to perfection? We must labor ourselves to have a thorough knowledge of these mysteries or we shall be useless to a great part of the church. There is spiritual wisdom and understanding in the mysteries of the gospel required hereunto.

2. *Authority is required.* What is authority in a preaching ministry? It is a consequent of unction<sup>1</sup> and not of office. The scribes had an outward call to teach in the church, but they had no unction, no anointing that could evidence they had the Holy Ghost in His gifts and graces. Christ had no outward call, but He had an unction—He had a full unction of the Holy Ghost in His gifts and graces for the preaching of the gospel. Hereon there was a controversy about His authority. The scribes say unto Him, “By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?” (Mar 11:28). The Holy Ghost determines the matter: “He preached as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mat

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<sup>1</sup> **consequent of unction** – result of the Holy Spirit anointing with power.

7:29). They had the authority of office, but not of unction; Christ only had that. And preaching in the demonstration of the Spirit, which men quarrel so much about, is nothing less than the evidence in preaching of unction, in the communication of gifts and grace unto them for the discharge of their office. For it is a vain thing for men to assume and impersonate authority. So much evidence as they have of unction from God in gifts and grace, so much authority they have and no more in preaching. Let everyone, then, keep within his bounds.

**3. Another thing required hereunto is *experience* of the power of the things we preach to others.** I think, truly, *that no man preaches that sermon well to others that doth not first preach it to his own heart.* He who doth not feed on, digest, and thrive by what he prepares for his people may give them poison, as far as he knows; for unless he finds the power of it in his own heart, he cannot have any ground of confidence that it will have power in the hearts of others. It is an easier thing to bring our heads to preach than our hearts to preach. To bring our *heads* to preach is but to fill our minds and memories with some notions of truth, of our own or other men, and speak them out to give satisfaction to ourselves and others; this is very easy. But to bring our *hearts* to preach is to be transformed into the power of these truths; or to find the power of them, both before, in fashioning our minds and hearts, and in delivering of them that we may have benefit. [It is] to be acted with zeal for God and compassion to the souls of men. A man may preach every day in the week and not have his heart engaged once. This hath lost us powerful preaching in the world and set up instead of it quaint orations; for such men never seek after experience in their own hearts. So, it is come to pass that some men's preaching and some men's not preaching have lost us the power of what we call the ministry; that though there be twenty or thirty thousand in orders,<sup>2</sup> yet the nation perishes for lack of knowledge, is overwhelmed in all manner of sins, and [is] not delivered from them unto this day.

**4. Skill to divide the Word aright.** This skill to divide the Word aright is *practical wisdom* in considering the Word of God, to take out not only that which is substantial food for the souls of men, but what is meet<sup>3</sup> food for them to whom we preach. And that,

**5. Requires *knowledge* and consideration of the state of our flocks.** He who hath not the state of his flock continually in his eye and in his mind in his work of preaching fights uncertainly, as a man beating the air. If he doth not consider what is the state of his flock with reference to

<sup>2</sup> **in orders** – ordained.

<sup>3</sup> **meet** – suitable; proper.

temptations, in reference to their light or to their darkness, to their growth or to their decays, to their flourishing or to their withering, to the measure of their knowledge and attainments—he who doth not duly consider these things *never* preaches aright unto them.

**6. There is required, too, that we be acted by *zeal* for the glory of God and compassion to the souls of men.** Having spoken these few plain words, I may say, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2Co 2:16). There is required that *spiritual wisdom* that is necessary to understand the mysteries of the gospel, able to instruct and lead on to perfection the most grown in our congregations; that *authority* which proceeds from unction and is an evidence of an anointing with the graces and gifts of the Spirit, which alone gives authority in preaching; that *experience* which conforms our whole souls into every sermon we preach, so as to feel the truth in the power of it; that *skill* whereby to divide the Word aright, etc. Hence, we see we have great need to pray for ourselves and that you should pray for us. Pray for your ministers.

From *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, Vol. 9 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 454-456; in the public domain.

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**John Owen (1616-1683):** English Congregational pastor, author, and theologian; born in Stadhampton, Oxfordshire, UK.



There are far too many preachers today who act as though they are begging their hearers to do Christ and His cause a favor, who are so apologetic, fawning, and effeminate, they have forfeited the respect of real men. “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all *authority*. Let no man despise thee” (Ti 2:15). “The most effectual way for ministers to secure themselves from contempt is to keep close to the doctrine of Christ and imitate Him” (Matthew Henry), and He taught “as One having authority” (Mat 7:29).—*Arthur W. Pink*

It is a promise relating to the New Testament that God would give unto His church “pastors according to his own heart, which should feed them with knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:15). This is by teaching or preaching the Word, and no otherwise. This feeding is of the essence of the office of a pastor, as unto the exercise of it; so that he who doth not, or cannot, or will not feed the flock is no pastor, whatever outward call or work he may have in the church.—*John Owen*

Paul, the most famous of the apostles, desires in all his epistles “to be prayed for, that his mouth might be opened” (Eph 6:19), whereby he does signify that to deliver wholesome doctrine in spiritual manner for the glory of God and the good of His people is a great matter, and cannot by natural gifts be attained unto. And indeed

this is that teaching which saves the soul and affects the heart of him that belongs to God, which is the thing that every minister of God’s Word ought to labor for.—*William Perkins*

# FATHERLY AUTHORITY

Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

**T**HE principal thing requisite<sup>1</sup> to the right governing of families is the fitness of the governors<sup>2</sup> and the governed thereto...But if persons unfit for their relations have joined themselves together in a family, their first duty is to repent of their former sin and rashness, presently to turn to God, and seek after the fitness that is necessary to the right discharge of the duties of their several places. And in the governors of families, these three things are of greatest necessity hereunto: 1. Authority,<sup>3</sup> 2. Skill, 3. Holiness and readiness of will.

**I. GENERAL DIRECTION:** “Let governors maintain their authority in their families.” For if once that be lost and you are despised by those you should rule, your word will be of no effect with them. You do but ride without a bridle. Your power of governing is gone when your authority is lost. And here you must first understand the nature, use, and extent of your authority: for as your relations are different to your wife, your children, and your servants, so also is your authority. Your authority over your wife is but such as is necessary to the order of your family, the safe and prudent management of your affairs, and your comfortable cohabitation. The power of love and complicated interest must do more than magisterial commands. Your authority over your children is much greater; but only such as conjunct<sup>4</sup> with love is needful to their good education and felicity<sup>5</sup>...For the maintaining of this your authority, observe these following sub-directions.

**Direction 1:** “Let your family understand that your authority is of God, Who is the God of order, and that in obedience to Him, they are obliged to obey you.” There is no power but of God; and there is none that the intelligent creature can so much reverence as that which is of God. All bonds are easily broken and cast away (by the soul at least, if not by the body), which are not perceived to be divine. An enlightened conscience will say to ambitious usurpers, “God I know, and His Son Jesus I know, but who are ye?”

**Direction 2:** “The more of God appeareth upon you, in your

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<sup>1</sup> **requisite** – required.

<sup>2</sup> **governors** – heads of the household.

<sup>3</sup> **EDITOR’S NOTE:** This article deals only with the theme of authority.

<sup>4</sup> **conjunct** – joined.

<sup>5</sup> **felicity** – happiness.

knowledge, holiness, and unblamableness of life, the greater will your authority be in the eyes of all your inferiors<sup>6</sup> that fear God.” Sin will make you contemptible and vile; holiness, being the image of God, will make you honorable. In the eyes of the faithful, a “vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD” (Psa 15:4). “Righteousness exalteth a nation [*and a person*]; but sin is a reproach to any people” (Pro 14:34). Those that honor God, He will honor, and those that despise Him shall be lightly esteemed (1Sa 2:30). They that give up themselves to “vile affections” and conversations<sup>7</sup> will seem vile when they have made themselves so (Rom 1:26). Eli’s “sons made themselves vile” by their sin (1Sa 3:13). I know men should discern and honor a person placed in authority by God, though they are morally and naturally vile; but this is so hard that it is seldom well done. And God is so severe against proud offenders that He usually punisheth them by making them vile in the eyes of others; at least when they are dead and men dare freely speak of them, their names will rot (Pro 10:7). The instances of the greatest emperors in the world—Persian, Roman, and Turkish—do tell us that, if (by whoredom, drunkenness, gluttony, pride, and especially persecution) they will make themselves vile, God, by uncovering their nakedness, will permit them to become the shame and scorn of men. And shall a wicked master of a family think to maintain his authority over others while he rebelleth against the authority of God?

**Direction 3:** “Show not your natural weakness by passions or imprudent<sup>8</sup> words or deeds.” For if they think contemptuously of [you], a little thing will draw them further to despise your words. There is naturally in man so high an esteem of reason that men are hardly persuaded that they should rebel against reason to be governed (for order’s sake) by folly. They are very apt to think that rightest reason should bear rule. Therefore, any silly, weak expressions, or any inordinate passions, or any imprudent actions are very apt to make you contemptible in your inferiors’ eyes.

**Direction 4:** “Lose not your authority by a neglect of using it.” If you suffer children and servants but a little while to have the head, and to have, and say, and do what they will, your government will be but a name or image. A moderate course between a lordly rigor and a soft subjection or neglect of exercising the power of your place will best preserve you from your inferiors’ contempt.

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<sup>6</sup> **inferiors** – persons of lower rank than another of higher rank; Baxter is speaking of positions of authority and rank, not of one’s nature.

<sup>7</sup> **conversations** – behaviors.

<sup>8</sup> **imprudent** – not wise or cautious.

**Direction 5:** “Lose not your authority by too much familiarity.” If you make your children and servants your playfellows or equals, and talk to them and suffer them to talk to you as your companions...they will scarce ever endure to be governed by you but will scorn to be subject where they have once been as equal.

**II. GENERAL DIRECTION:** “Labor for prudence<sup>9</sup> and skillfulness in governing.” He that undertaketh to be a master of a family undertaketh to be their governor; it is no small sin or folly to undertake such a place as you are utterly unfit for when it is a matter of so great importance. You could discern this in a case that is not your own, as if a man undertook to be a schoolmaster who cannot read or write; or to be a physician, who knoweth neither diseases nor their remedies; or to be a pilot<sup>10</sup> who cannot tell how to do a pilot’s work; and why cannot you much more discern it in your own case?

**Direction 1:** “To get the skill of holy governing, it is needful that you be well studied in the Word of God.” Therefore, God commandeth kings themselves to read in the law all the days of their lives (Deu 17:19), and that it depart not out of their mouths, but that they meditate in it day and night (Jos 1:8). And all parents must be able to teach it to their children and talk of it both at home and abroad, lying down and rising up (Deu 6:7). All government of men is but subservient<sup>11</sup> to the government of God to promote obedience to His laws. And it is *necessary* that we *understand* the laws to which all laws and precepts must give place and subserve.

**Direction 2:** “Understand well the different tempers of your inferiors and deal with them as they are and as they can bear; and [do not deal] with all alike.” Some are more intelligent and some more dull; some are of tender and some of hardened dispositions. Some will be best wrought upon by love and gentleness; and some have need of sharpness and severity. Prudence *must* fit your dealings to their dispositions.

**Direction 3:** “You must put much difference between their different faults and accordingly suit your reprehensions.<sup>12</sup>” Those must be most severely rebuked that have most willfulness and those that are faulty in matters of greatest weight. Some faults are so much through mere disability and unavoidable frailty of the flesh that there is but little of the will appearing in them. These must be more gently handled, as deserving more compassion than reproof. Some are habitual vices, and the

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<sup>9</sup> **prudence** – wisdom combined with caution.

<sup>10</sup> **pilot** – person who steers a ship.

<sup>11</sup> **subservient** – in submission to.

<sup>12</sup> **reprehensions** – rebukes and disapprovals.



whole nature is more desperately depraved than in others. These must have more than a particular correction. They must be held to such a course of life as may be most effectual to destroy and change those habits. And some there are upright at the heart and in the main and most momentous things are guilty but of some actual faults; and of these, some more seldom and some more frequent. If you do not prudently diversify your rebukes according to their faults, you will but harden them and miss of your ends:<sup>13</sup> for there is a family justice that must not be overthrown, unless you would overthrow your families, as there is a more public justice necessary to the public good.

**Direction 4:** “Be a good husband to your wife, a good father to your children, and a good master to your servants: let love have dominion in all your government, so that your inferiors may easily find that it is their interest to obey you.” For interest and self-love are the natural rulers of the world. And to make men perceive that it is for their own good and to engage self-love for you is the most effectual way to procure obedience or any good that they may see that the benefit is like to be their own. If you do them no good but are sour, discourteous, and close-handed<sup>14</sup> to them, few will be ruled by you.

**Direction 5:** “If you would be skillful in governing others, learn first exactly<sup>15</sup> to command yourselves.” Can you ever expect to have others more at your will and government than yourselves? Is he fit to rule his family in the fear of God and a holy life who is unholy and feareth not God Himself? Or is he fit to keep them from passion, drunkenness, gluttony, lust, or any way of sensuality who cannot keep himself from it? Will not inferiors despise such reproofs that are by yourselves contradicted in your lives? You know this is true of wicked preachers; is it not as true of other governors?

**III. GENERAL DIRECTION:** “You must be holy persons if you would be holy governors of your families.” Men’s actions follow the bent of their dispositions. They will *do* as they *are*. An enemy of God will not govern a family for God; nor an enemy of holiness (nor a stranger to it) set up a holy order in his house and in a holy manner manage his affairs. I know it is cheaper and easier to the flesh to call others to mortification<sup>16</sup> and holiness of life than to bring ourselves to it. Yet when it is not a bare command or wish that is necessary, but a course of holy and industrious

<sup>13</sup> **miss of your ends** – fail in your purpose.

<sup>14</sup> **close-handed** – stingy or grudging.

<sup>15</sup> **exactly** – precisely according to principle, justice, or right.

<sup>16</sup> **mortification** – putting sin to death by the power of the Holy Spirit and God’s Word; see FGB 201, *Mortification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

government, unholy persons (though some of them may go far) have not the ends and principles which such a work requireth.

**Direction 1:** “To this end, be sure that your own souls be entirely subjected to God, and that you more accurately obey His laws than you expect any inferior should obey your commands.” If you dare disobey God, why should they fear disobeying you? Can you more severely revenge disobedience or more bountifully reward obedience than God can do? Are you greater and better than God Himself is?

**Direction 2:** “Be sure that you lay up your treasure in heaven and make the enjoyment of God in glory to be the ultimate commanding end both of the affairs and government of your family and all things else with which you are entrusted.” Devote yourselves and all to God, and do all for Him. Do all as passengers to another world, whose business on earth is but to provide for heaven and promote their everlasting interest. If thus you are separated unto God, you are sanctified. Then you will separate all that you have to His use and service, and this, with His acceptance, will sanctify all.

**Direction 3:** “Maintain God’s authority in your family more carefully than your own.” Your own is but for His. More sharply rebuke or correct them that wrong and dishonor God than those that wrong and dishonor yourselves. Remember Eli’s sad example: make not a small matter of any of the sins, especially the great sins, of your children or servants. It is an odious thing to slight God’s cause and put up all with “It is not well done,” when you are fiercely passionate for the loss of some small commodity of your own. God’s honor must be greatest in your family, and His service must have the preeminence of yours. Sin against Him must be the most intolerable offence.

**Direction 4:** “Let spiritual love to your family be predominant, let your care be greatest for the saving of their souls, and let your compassion be greatest in their spiritual miseries.” Be first careful to provide them a portion in heaven and to save them from whatsoever would deprive them of it. Never prefer the transitory pelf<sup>17</sup> of earth before their everlasting riches. Never be so cumbered<sup>18</sup> about many things as to forget *that one thing is necessary*: but choose for yourselves and them the better part (Luk 10:42).

**Direction 5:** “Let your family be neither kept in idleness and flesh-pleasing nor yet overwhelmed with such a multitude of business that shall take up and distract their minds, diverting and unfitting them for

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<sup>17</sup> **transitory pelf** – possessions or money that does not last.

<sup>18</sup> **cumbered** – distracted.

holy things.” Where God layeth on you a necessity of excessive labors, it must patiently and cheerfully be undergone. But when you draw them unnecessarily on yourselves for the love of riches, you do but become the tempters and tormentors of yourselves and others, forgetting the terrible examples of them that have this way fallen off from Christ and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1Ti 6:10).

**Direction 6:** “As much as is possible, settle a constant order of all your businesses that every ordinary work may know its time, and confusion may not shut out godliness.” It is a great assistance in every calling to do all in a set and constant order. It maketh it easy. It removeth impediments and promoteth success. Distraction in your business causeth a distraction in your minds in holy duty. Some callings, I know, can hardly be cast into any order or method; but others may, if prudence and diligence be used. God’s service will thus be better done, and your work will be better done to the ease of your servants and quiet of your own minds. Foresight and skillfulness would save you abundance of labor and vexation.

From “A Christian Directory” in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, Vol. 4, (London: James Duncan, 1830), 90-94; in the public domain.

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**Richard Baxter (1615-1691):** English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and theologian; born in Rowton, Shropshire, England, UK.



It is indeed sad to see the almost universal disregard of this Fifth Commandment in our own day. It is one of the most arresting of the many “signs of the times.” Eighteen hundred years ago, it was foretold, “In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, *without natural affection*” (2Ti 3:1, 3). Unquestionably, the blame for most of this lies upon the parents, who have so neglected the moral and spiritual training of their children that (in themselves) they are worthy of neither respect nor honor. It is to be noted that the promise attached to the fulfillment of this commandment, as well as the command itself, is repeated in the New Testament (Eph 6:1, 3).—*Arthur W. Pink*

And verily, there is one spring and cause of the decay of Religion in our day, which we cannot but touch upon and earnestly urge a redress of; and that is the neglect of the worship of God in families by those to whom the charge and conduct of them is committed. May not the...omission of prayer and other duties of Religion in their families, together with the ill example of their loose conversation

[*behavior*], have inured [*hardened*] them first to a neglect,  
and then contempt, of all piety and Religion?

—*London Baptist Confession of Faith 1689*

# MAGISTERIAL AUTHORITY

James M. Renihan

**U**NDERSTANDING the connection between Christian liberty and the doctrine of the civil magistrate is indispensable, for without properly construing<sup>1</sup> the relationship, it may be possible to draw false and ungodly conclusions.

John Flavel expressed it well: “Liberty may be considered two ways, viz.,<sup>2</sup> 1) as civil; 2) as sacred. As to civil freedom or liberty...believers as to their civil capacity are not freed from the duties they owe to their superiors. Servants, though believers, are still to be subject to their ‘masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling’ (Eph 6:5). Nor [are they freed] from obedience to lawful magistrates whom we are to obey in the Lord (Rom 13:1, 4). Religion dissolves not the bonds of civil relations; nor is it to be used as an occasion to the flesh (1Pe 2:16). ’Tis not a carnal but a spiritual freedom Christ hath purchased for us.”<sup>3</sup>

The freedom Christ gives (21.1-3)<sup>4</sup> in no way undermines the divinely established order in the world. Christian believers owe obligations to lawfully appointed human authorities and must obey them. Though these words were first composed and published in the late 1640s by both Presbyterians and baptistic Congregationalists at a time when Parliament had gained the upper hand in its battles with the king, they were adopted by the baptized churches in 1677 in a very different historical moment, in the midst of a period of persecution. Even when the magistrate was to a large degree against them, they were careful to confess what the Scripture says about duties in this earthly realm. Caution should be used when reading this chapter [of the confession]. Like the main Scripture text on which it is based (Rom 13:1-4), it is not an exhaustive treatise about government and its role in society.

**The Purpose of the Civil Magistrate under God.** “God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under Him, over the people for His own glory, and the public good; and to this end hath armed them with the power of the Sword, for defense and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers.” (1689, 24.1)

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<sup>1</sup> **construing** – interpreting in a specified way.

<sup>2</sup> **viz.** – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

<sup>3</sup> John Flavel, *The Method of Grace* (London: Francis Tyton, 1681), 328.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 21, paragraphs 1 to 3 of the *London Baptist Confession of 1689*.

Like many other chapters, this begins with God. To speak of earthly matters, one must begin in heaven. The basis of the civil magistracy is found in the order established by God Himself. His Lordship is foundational to every facet of the exercise of earthly authority. All authority has its basis in God. In 2.2 we read of God that “he hath most sovereign dominion over all creatures.” The teaching about the magistrate is based in this doctrine. God alone is supreme and is king over all the world. Notice that it is not Christ as mediator designated as supreme Lord, but rather the Godhead. In 26.4, similar language is used of Christ the Mediator: in Him “is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner” the right to be “head of the church.” God’s two kingdoms must be differentiated. This chapter addresses matters in the earthly realm under the dominion of the triune God.

Since He is king, it must be asserted that *civil magistracy* is divinely *ordained*, a strong word used here specifically in conjunction with God’s sovereign rule (cf. 7.2, 8.1, 26.10, 29.1). This is clearly the doctrine of Romans 13, the proof text used in both the first and third paragraphs. Since it is placed into this scriptural context, when the apostles can write about the Roman empire in these terms, we are intended to understand that the teaching is universally applicable upon the earth. He is *king of all the world*. This is simply to say that the statement is not about explicitly Christian nations, but about all countries. God has established earthly rulers in all places for specific purposes. Not surprisingly, Dr. Owen<sup>5</sup> sets this out:

“All authority is originally in God, and there are two ways whereby He is pleased to exert it: First, By a delegation of authority unto some persons for some ends and purposes; which they being invested withal,<sup>6</sup> may command in their own names an observance of the things about which, by God’s appointment, their authority is to be exercised. Thus is it with kings and rulers of the earth. They are powers ordained of God, having authority given them by Him. And being invested with power, they give out their commands for the doing or performing of such or such things whereunto their authority doth extend. That they ought to be obeyed in things good and lawful doth not arise from the authority vested in themselves, but from the immediate command of God that in such things they ought to be obeyed. Hence obedience in general unto magistrates is a part of our moral and religious obedience unto God, as it respects His command, whatever the nature and object of it be. But

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<sup>5</sup> **John Owen** (1616-1683) – chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell and vice-chancellor of Oxford University; most of his life a minister in Congregational churches.

<sup>6</sup> **withal** – with.

the performance of particular actions, wherein by their determination our obedience exerts itself, being resolved into that authority which is vested in them, is not religious but civil obedience, any otherwise than as in respect of its general nature it relates to the command of God in general. No act, I say, that we perform, whereof this is the formal reason, that it is appointed and commanded by man, though that man be entrusted with power from God to appoint and require acts of that nature, is an act of religious obedience unto God in itself, because it relates not immediately to His divine authority requiring that act.”<sup>7</sup>

The distinctions here are important. Ultimately, our obedience to earthly rulers, while primarily focused on earthly commands, is submission to God (for the magistrates are *under Him*), even when the civil magistrate commands lawful things (i.e., according to the laws of that jurisdiction<sup>8</sup>) not explicitly stated in Scripture. That obedience, however, is civil and not religious. This was carefully phrased to deny the earthly ruler the right to dominion in religious matters. In the era of these confessions, the king, lords, and bishops often sought political control over the religious actions of the population. This was outside their rightful sphere and brought no obligation to God’s people. In all other matters, though, obedience to the civil magistrate was necessary.

Since they are appointed by God, the primary purpose of earthly rulers is to govern the common kingdom *for His own glory*. One might ask, how is it possible for an unbelieving magistrate, who does not know God and functions on his own behalf through his own wisdom, to act for God’s glory? Apparently, Paul saw no contradiction in this, nor did the confessors. Though unacknowledged, perhaps the words of 1 Timothy 2:2, a proof text cited in paragraph three, stand behind the idea. Paul urges prayer “for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” When the people of God are able to live in this way, God is glorified through their worship and sanctification. Richard Baxter seems to make this connection when he writes, “Pray hard for kings and magistrates. For if they be good, they are exceeding great blessings to the world. They will remember that their power is for God and the common good, and that to God they must give a strict account. They will take God’s Law for the only universal Law to the world, and conform their own as by-laws to it.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, Vol. 15 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 43.

<sup>8</sup> **jurisdiction** – territory over which the legal authority of a court extends.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Baxter, *How to Do Good to Many, or, The Publick Good is the Christian’s Life* (London: Rob. Gibs, 1682), 27.

**Magistrates are to function for the *public good*.** This is the second aim of their office. The word *public* refers to the populace. The magistrate rules on behalf of all people. He ought to ask, “What will benefit these people?” Baxter helps define how this phrase was understood in the dissenting churches.<sup>10</sup> They are to support that which is morally right and punish everything that is not. Because they are God’s representatives on earth, their actions mirror His. The punishments they mete out are types of the judgments that will come on sinners at the last day.

“[Magistrates] are appointed by God to govern men in a just sub-ordination to God’s government, and no otherwise. [They are] to promote obedience to God’s laws by theirs, and by their judgment and execution to give men a foretaste [of] what they may at last expect from God. And by their rewards and punishments to foretell men whom God will reward and punish; by their own examples to show the subjects how temperately, soberly, and godly He would have them live. Atheists can see and fear a magistrate, [but] fear not God because they know Him not.

“They that prefer those as the most worthy of honor whom God abhorreth for their wickedness, and hate and oppress those whom God will honor, do show themselves enemies to Him that giveth them all their power. And they that by countenance or practice do teach men to despise the fear of God and to make light of drunkenness, whoredom, lying, perjury,<sup>11</sup> and such like odious crimes, do in a sort blaspheme God Himself, as if He Who exalted them were a lover of sin and a hater of His own laws and service. There are few rulers that are unwilling of power or to be accounted great; and do they not know that it is a power to do good that God hath given them? And that obligation to do it is as essential to their office as authority? And that they who govern as the officers of God, and pretend to be liker [*sic*] Him in greatness than their subjects, must also be liker [*sic*] to Him in wisdom and goodness?

“Woe to that man who abuseth and oppresseth the just and faithful in the Name of God, and by pretence of authority from Him to do it. Woe to him that in God’s name and as by His authority countenanceth the wicked whom God abhorreth, and under Christ’s banner fighteth against Him. As Christ saith of the offensive, “It were good for that man if he had never been born” (Mar 14:21). “He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him”

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<sup>10</sup> **dissenting churches** – Protestants who could not conscientiously conform to the established religion of the reformed Church of England, especially after 1662, when the Dissenters comprised Independents (Congregationalists), Presbyterians, Baptists, and Quakers. (Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*: 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 844).

<sup>11</sup> **perjury** – lying under oath.

(Pro 24:24). “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD” (Pro 17:15).<sup>12</sup>

The magistrate who serves by divine appointment must be a “terror” (Rom 13:3) to those who promote evil and a helper to those who seek to obey God’s laws. That is why God gave government—for our benefit.

From *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: Baptist Symbolics, Vol. 2: An Exposition of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith* (Cape Coral: Founders Ministries, 2022), 449-453.

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Sir, we will always humbly reverence your majesty in public; but since we have this occasion to be with your majesty in private, and since you are brought in extreme danger both of your life and crown, and along with you the country and the church of God are like to go to wreck for not telling you the truth and giving you faithful counsel, we must discharge our duty or else be traitors both to Christ and you. Therefore, Sir, as diverse times before I have told you, so now again I must tell you, there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the head of this commonwealth; and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the church, whose subject James the Sixth is and of Whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member. Sir, those whom Christ has called and commanded to watch over His church have power and authority from Him to govern His spiritual kingdom both jointly and severally; the which no Christian king or prince should control and discharge, but fortify and assist. Otherwise, they are not faithful subjects of Christ and members of His church. We will yield to you your place and give you all due obedience; but again I say, you are not the Head of the church. You cannot give us the eternal life that we seek for even in this world, and you cannot deprive us of it. Permit us then freely to meet in the name of Christ and to attend to the interests of that church of which you are the chief member.—*Andrew Melville to King James VI*

“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom 13:1). This is a very comprehensive proposition. All authority is of God. No man has any rightful power over other men, which is not derived from God. All human power is delegated and ministerial. This is true of parents, of magistrates, and of church officers. This, however, is not all the passage means. It not only asserts that all government is derived from God, but that every magistrate is of God; that is, his authority is *jure divino* (by *divine law*)... We are to obey magistrates because they derive their authority from God. Not only is human government a divine institution, but the form in which that government exists, and the persons by whom its functions are exercised, are determined by His providence.

All magistrates of whatever grade are to be regarded  
as acting by divine appointment.

—*Charles Hodge*

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<sup>12</sup> Baxter, *How to Do Good*, 36.



# CHRIST'S AUTHORITY TO SAVE

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.—Matthew 8:8-9*

**I**T is not to our great Master's dishonor, but quite the opposite, that this centurion meant to say, "I recognize in thee also a man under authority." For this blessed Christ of ours had come into the world commissioned by God. He was not here merely in His private capacity as the Son of David, as the Son of Mary, or even as the Son of God; but He was here as the One Whom the Father had chosen, anointed, qualified, and sent to carry out a divine commission. This officer could see about the person of Christ the marks of His being commissioned by God. By some means, I know not how, he had arrived at this very safe and true conclusion: Jesus Christ was acting under the authority of the great God Who made heaven and earth; and he looked at Him, therefore, under that aspect, as duly authorized and commissioned for His work.

Now go a step further. He who is commissioned to perform any work is also *provided by the superior authority with the power to carry out that work*...So, this man seems to say to Christ, "I believe that Thou art provided with due assistance for the carrying out of all the purposes for which Thou hast come into the world. If I have an order to send," says he, "I say to my servant, 'Go,' and he goes. If I want another to come, I say, 'Come,' and he comes. If there is something to be done, I summon one of the men under my authority, and I say to him, 'Do this,' and he does it." He seems to say to the Savior, "Thou also, commissioned and appointed of the great God, must have had servants appointed to wait upon Thee. Thou art not sent to a warfare at Thine own charges. Thou art not left to do this work alone. There must be, somewhere about, though I perceive them not, soldiers under Thee, and servants under Thee, who wait to do Thy bidding." You catch that idea, do you not? The parallel is very clear, and I do not wonder that the Savior greatly admired the man's faith, which had enabled him to perceive this great truth...

The centurion went a little further and implied that, as Christ had the power to perform the divine will and had that power well in hand, *he believed He was willing to direct all that power to the one object of healing his servant*. I believe that many of you know that the Lord Jesus Christ is almighty. You do not doubt that fact, but the question is, "Is He almighty to save *you*?" You do not doubt that, if the Savior wills it, He can make your spirit whole, but you ask, "Will He will it?" Will He turn that power in our direction? It does not enter the centurion's head that there will be any difficulty in his case. "No," he seems to say, "King of kings, omnipotent Master and Lord, Thou canst at once direct an angel to fly to my servant, or Thou canst bid the disease quit my dwelling, or Thou canst speak to the palsy, and the palsy itself will be Thy servant and will fly away at once at Thy command. Thou hast only to put forth Thy power upon my servant, and he will at once be healed."

I want *you* to believe, dear hearts, that our Lord Jesus Christ, no longer here in the flesh but risen from the dead, is clothed with power equal to that which He had in the centurion's day; nay, that He is clothed with even greater power, for after His resurrection He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Mat 28:18). And then I want you to believe that He is prepared to turn all that power in your direction, so as to work for your deliverance from spiritual death, your rescue from the power of sin, your help in the way of providence, your guidance in the way of wisdom, or whatsoever out of ten thousand things may happen to be the need of this present moment. Oh, that He, Who gave such faith as this to the centurion at Capernaum, would give like precious faith to *many of you* that you also may glorify and bless His holy name!...

Dear friends, it seems to me that this little narrative should be used to urge us to *believe in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, even if He does not speedily come in the glory of the second advent*. I am frequently talking with Christian friends about these evil days in which we live, and of the mischief of the times in which our lot is cast. Certainly, it is not a very cheering subject, and generally I find that friends wind up with some such remark as this: "Well, the comfort is that the Lord Jesus Christ will come very soon. The defections in the professing church, the blasphemies of the world—are they not among the special tokens that the end is hastening on? When our Lord comes, then all these difficult problems will be solved, and all that grieves us will come to an end." Yes, yes, all that I fully believe, and I look upon the second glorious advent of our Lord Jesus Christ as the brightest hope of His Church. But, still, do you not think that a more practical and a more God-honoring faith would say, without putting aside the blessed hope of the second advent, "Yet

the Lord Jesus Christ can deal with the present evils of the church and of the world without actually coming into our midst.” He can say a word while yet remaining in the highest heavens amid the splendors of the sacred worship of the New Jerusalem. He can speak a word there and so effect His purpose here. Does not that truth seem to flow naturally out of the faith of this centurion? Our blessed Lord...there is no need that Thou shouldst literally touch the hills and make them smoke and that the glory of Thy divine presence should consume Thine adversaries. If it so pleaseth Thee, Thou canst do Thy bidding where Thou art, without disturbing this dispensation, without even working a miracle, allowing things to take their usual course, and yet accomplishing Thy supreme purposes...Now apply this subject a little more closely still.

**I wish that some poor soul would even now believe that the Lord Jesus Christ could save him at once with a single word...**The Lord Jesus Christ can save a man when he is in bed, when he is putting on his clothes, when he is walking the street, when he is at his business, or when he is not at his business but indulging in sin.

**Let the practical close of this evening’s meditation be that we believe in Jesus a great deal more than we have ever believed before.** If we have believed in Jesus, let us have still more confidence in Him...I think that what we have to do is *so to believe in Christ as to be His obedient servants*. If He says, “Go,” let us go. If He says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden” (Mat 11:28), let us come unto Him. If He says concerning any service, “Do this,” let us do it; and if, instead of bidding us do anything, He bids us believe Him, let us come and believe Him; for this will be our wisdom, this will be our happiness, this will be our heaven, to be the obedient servants of Him Who must be Ruler over all. God has decreed that this shall be His glory; He has set Him on His throne expecting till His foes be made His footstool. If you choose to be His enemies, you shall choose it to your own destruction; but if you will come and bow before Him and be His servants, you shall find that heaven and earth are waiting at His back to bless you!

From a sermon delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,  
on Lord’s Day evening, October 2, 1887.

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**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



Jesus, Who has all authority and power in heaven and in earth, vouchsafes  
to be your Shepherd. What then can you lack who are at  
His providing?—*John Newton*