

# 3. The Example of Jesus

For a time, the question many were asking is, “What would Jesus do?” This can be an important question, if we recognize what Jesus did, in fact, do.

How does the example of Jesus help us understand the importance of following God’s authority? “Your God reigns” is, again, one of the basic messages of the kingdom of God (Isa. 52:7). Christians need to know the foundation on which they are building their spiritual lives. This foundation is grounded in God Himself. Jesus is our king, and the Holy Spirit has given us an inspired message to follow. The message is more than just words on a printed page. The message—the word—is living and active, sharp and piercing, judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12). Jesus, as the Word (John 1:1), provides for us a living example to follow in His steps. If we will understand biblical authority, then we need to be dedicated to Jesus and His example.

## **Following the Example of Jesus**

In calling ourselves disciples of Christ, we are saying that we will follow Jesus. If the pattern of Jesus was to ensure His pleasing God in all things, then what should we do? Since Jesus is our example, then we need to ask a fundamental question: what was Jesus’ attitude toward Scripture? Should we not, as His disciples, seek to have the same attitude toward Scripture that He showed?

Jesus’ attitude is seen when, in His response to the temptations, He stated, “It is written...” (Luke 4; Matt. 4). In response to the first, he quoted from Deuteronomy 8: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Moses had recounted Israel’s time in the wilderness, where the test was whether or not they would keep God’s commandments. They failed, but Jesus succeeded. Note here that there is complete recognition on Jesus’ part that God’s word must be the determining factor in following God. Man lives on what God says. If we care about eternal life, we will care deeply about God’s word.

Further, Jesus taught, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). The situation prompted Peter to say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (vs. 68). Jesus saw that what was “written” as God’s word had the authority of God stamped on it. He viewed the Scriptures as having God’s authority. What Scripture says, God says. Do we follow Him in this attitude?

The next question is as important: what was Jesus’ attitude toward respecting God’s commands? That Jesus never sinned (Heb. 4:15-16; 2 Cor. 5:21) and never took the liberty to do whatever He wanted apart from the Father’s will speaks volumes. He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who

sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34). He also stated, “As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30). Since Jesus dedicated Himself completely to do God’s will, and never took on His own initiative apart from the Father’s will, then should we not seek to follow His example in this? If we are self-seeking, we are not following Christ. Breaching God’s authority is a result of not seeking His will before ours, and of taking our own initiative apart from what God has revealed. In doing this, we are not following the example of Jesus, and therefore are not acting as His disciples.

Jesus never distinguished between His authority and the authority of written Scripture. To follow Jesus is to listen to His word (see John 12:48; Heb. 1:1-3). What will true disciples of Christ seek to do (John 8:31)? What kind of attitude toward Scripture and God’s commands will they seek to have (1 Pet. 5:5; Jas. 4:6-8; Phil. 2:5)?

### **Whose Will am I Seeking?**

Everyone listens to some authority, whether self-generated or from others. Rejection of authority isn’t rejection of all authority whatsoever; it is trading one authority for another, and trading one pattern for another. This is why we need constant reminding that the essence of the gospel is to proclaim, “Your God reigns!” (Isa. 52:7) This is the foundation for the announcement of peace, good news of happiness, and salvation. Christ is King.

The kingdom is about God’s rule. It is about His will being done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). This is at the heart of authority. To say that we don’t need authority is to say that we don’t really need the rule of the King. To emphasize the kingdom is to emphasize that God rules and has all authority. We cannot preach the kingdom and not preach the rule of the King. Further, God’s authority and God’s will are inseparable. To say, “Not as I will, but as You will” (Matt. 26:39), is to bow to His authority. Again, if this was Jesus’ attitude on earth, how much more should it be ours—we who are not God and do not have any inherent authority on our own? If God’s will is important to us at all, then we want to know how He communicates that will to us.

Knowing God’s will is vital, particularly since our attitude should be to please God in all that we do. Read carefully the following passages with these two questions in mind: 1) What is the common idea in these passages?, and 2) How do these passages inform us about the kind of attitude we ought to have toward God’s will?

- “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work’” (John 4:34).
- “I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30).

- “And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (John 8:29).
- “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, ’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter” (Matt. 7:21).
- “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).
- “...and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8).
- “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Gal. 5:17).
- “Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him” (2 Cor. 5:9).
- “No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4).
- “So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects” (Col. 1:10).
- “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Col. 3:23-24).

Think again about the message of these passages, for they give us one of the keys to understanding authority issues. The question is simply this: am I wanting to do God’s will or my own? Authority issues are about attitudes. Are we trying to please ourselves or God? Are we enthroning ourselves as kings or do we submit to His rule as King? If I deny self, then it will never be about what I want, what feels good to me, what sounds good to me, or what satisfies me in the area of good works. It will be about what God wants as expressed by Him in His revelation. If that’s not what it’s about, then I haven’t denied myself. I have merely used God’s name as a rubber stamp upon my will.

When confronted with a question about authority and practice, is our reaction to think something like, “I would never accept that,” or “There’s no way I would believe that,” or “But it’s what I want to do anyway,” instead of asking, “What does the Lord desire?” If so, then we are showing that we think our will is more important than God’s. We must not decide practice and belief based on our desires. Instead, we must be ready to accept the Lord’s will, no matter how disagreeable or

different it may be from our will. Perhaps one of the reasons we struggle so much with God's authority is that we don't like to be told what to do. Even in admitting to God's authority, if we aren't careful, we may still be doing what we want under the guise of calling it God's will. Self-will can be quite deceptive that way. Yet God's authority is all-encompassing. We either accept it in humility, regardless of the consequences for our desires, or we forego it in favor of our desires. Commitment to Jesus Christ is, necessarily, a commitment to His authority wherein we seek His will and not our own.

## **Conclusion**

Are we seeking to follow the example of Jesus in His respect for Scripture? Are we seeking God's will or ours? When we answer these questions, we will know a great deal about our view of biblical discipleship. How are we doing in following the example and will of Jesus Christ?

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What does it mean to be disciples of Jesus?
2. How should discipleship be shown in our approach to Scripture?
3. How did Jesus respond to His temptations, and why is this important for understanding His view of Scripture?
4. How is the word of God tied to eternal life?
5. Why should we keep "Your God reigns" before us as we think about authority?
6. How does pleasing God contrast with being "in the flesh" in the cited passages?
7. In what ways are authority issues about attitudes?
8. Why do we sometimes struggle with authority?