

# 4. The Need for Authority

Since God reigns (Isa. 52:7), and because the Scriptures are the word of God, they are authoritative for what we are to believe and practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Man alone is incapable of being a trustworthy source of authority for others (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23). Only Scripture, as God's word, can fill the need as our source of faith and authority (Rom. 10:17; Jude 3; 1 Pet. 4:11; Heb. 4:12-13).

God, as Creator, has the right to tell us what to do and how to think (Gen. 1:1). Man has no right to ignore this. We are under God's authority because He reigns (Isa. 52:7). Jesus Christ, as the Creator, is in a position of full authority over us, and we must submit to His will (Matt. 28:18; John 1:1-5; Col. 1:15-18; Luke 6:46; John 12:48).

How does Scripture show us our deep need for God's rule in our lives? Scripture doesn't just tell us to be under God's authority, it shows us through the many examples and passages that speak to the need. Here we will consider a few of these examples and some significant lessons they teach us.

## **This Need For Authority Is Illustrated In The Old Testament.**

Examples, both good and bad, are given to us so that we may learn vital lessons about how to serve God. They are for our instruction and can provide hope (Rom. 15:4). They can also serve as warnings against taking an evil path and having to deal with undesirable consequences (1 Cor. 10:1-13). Several examples in the Old Testament show us that mankind needs to follow the authority of God. Consider the following illustrations of this need:

*Adam and Eve* (Gen. 3:1-6). Their problem was a failure to submit to God's authority. They listened to the lie that they did not need to submit to God's authority, but could establish their own (Gen. 3:5). They could decide for themselves what was right and wrong. They didn't need God telling them what to do. This is the lie of secular humanism and is still prominent today. It undermines the authority of God and makes light of His severity.

*Cain and Abel* (Gen. 4). Abel's sacrifice was accepted because he acted by faith. This means he listened to God and did what God said, since faith comes by hearing God's word (Heb. 11:4; Rom. 10:17). Abel's is an example that provides hope. Cain's sacrifice, on the other hand, was refused because he did not act by faith. He acted presumptuously and substituted his own will for God's.

*Nadab and Abihu* (Lev. 10:1-3). They offered up "strange fire" which the Lord "had not commanded them." God had told His priests what He wanted, and these priests substituted their

will for God's. Because of their insolence against God's authority, and their failure to honor Him, they were punished severely.

*Korah's rebellion* (Num. 16). God had chosen the family of Aaron to be priests. Korah questioned God's authority and presumed that he and others could also serve as priests, even though they were not told they could. They rebelled against God's appointed leader, Moses, and incurred the wrath of God. This would have been unnecessary had he listened to God in the first place (vv. 3, 9).

*Moses' failure* (Num. 20:1-13). While much of what Moses did provides a good example that gives hope, here Moses and Aaron rebelled against God's authority. God's assessment was that Moses did not believe Him or treat Him as holy. As a consequence, Moses was unable to enter the Promised Land.

*The New Cart* (1 Chron. 13:1-12; 15:12-15). God specified that the ark of the covenant was to be carried by the Levites, but they tried to move it by using a new cart. Perhaps they thought their way was more expedient. It appears that they had good intentions. Even if Uzza had good intentions in trying to keep the ark from falling, they still disobeyed God. They "did not seek Him according to the ordinance" (15:13). They failed to consult God on the matter and presumed their way would be fine. By doing this they violated the authority of God. Is it possible that we might do the same today?

*King Uzziah entering the temple* (2 Chron. 26:16-20). Burning incense was a good work, ordained by God. However, it was given to the priests. Uzziah tried to enter the temple to burn incense, and he sinned because of his pride. He was told, "it is not for you, Uzziah..." (vs. 18). Uzziah was acting upon his own authority, to which he was not entitled, even as king. God desires for things to be done His way. Should we also learn to be content with His ways?

More examples can be cited. We might think of Noah (Gen. 6), Saul (1 Sam. 15), and Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25-33). Can you think of more? What lessons do you take from these? What are we shown through these examples, and why are they there? All of this should help impress us with the need to listen to the authority of God. Through these illustrations, we are shown the need to do what God says and refrain from presumption (cf. Deut. 4:1-6; Prov. 30:6).

### **This Need For Authority Is Illustrated In The New Testament.**

The New Testament also shows the need to abide by God's authority. The Pharisees questioned Jesus (Matt. 21:23-27): "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" The question recognizes first, that there is a need for authority, and second, that the authority must come from One who has the power to grant it. If it comes from one who doesn't have such power, it is useless.

Jesus responded by pointing out that there are only two possible sources of authority: Heaven (i.e., God) or men. Now the only way that one can know whether or not something comes from God is by looking into His will. If it cannot be found in His will, then it is authored by men. What other choices are there? If we want to please God, then how important is it that we make sure that what we do is authored by God?

Remember Jesus' view of God's will and our need to follow. Think again about Matthew 7:21-23: "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. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" What is lawlessness? Are we okay simply because we attach the name of Jesus to something?

Many other passages demonstrate this need (Luke 6:46; John 8:31-32; 1 Cor. 4:6; Phil. 3:16; Eph. 6:1-6; Col. 3:17; 2 Thess. 2:7; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:11; 2 John 9-11; Rev. 22:18-19). Take time to read and study these. The New Testament shows that God will not approve substituting our own will for His.

Everyone listens to some authority. If we deny the need for God's, then we will look to ourselves or to others as authority. At some point, we have to ask that question, "How's that working for you?" There is no getting around it. Can we afford to reject the authority of God in favor of our own (Prov. 14:12; Matt. 15:9; Col. 2:20-22)? This is why we must continue to plead for teaching that is rooted in Scripture (cf. Isa. 8:20; 1 Pet. 4:11). Failure to recognize and submit to the authority of God will result in our own loss (Matt. 7:21-23).

## **Conclusion**

We know that good intentions do not make a wrong action right. We must consult God and His word about the proper ways in which we are to serve Him. Presumption and pride result in a rejection of the authority which God possesses. Instead, we must respect His authority by humble submission to His will as recorded in the Scriptures.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why are examples from the Old Testament important to us today?
2. How do each of the given examples from the Old Testament warn us against ignoring God's authority?

3. Besides the ones given, what are some other examples that you can think of? How do they show the need to listen to God's authority?
4. Discuss the account of Matthew 21:23-27. How does the question from the Pharisees illustrate the sources of authority? How does Jesus' response solidify the point?
5. What is Jesus' view of the will of God, according to Matthew 7:21-23? What should our attitude be about the will of God?
6. What is lawlessness and why is it so destructive in our relationship with God?
7. Collectively, what do the passages from this lesson show us with respect to how we should treat God's will?
8. How is it true that everyone listens to some authority, even when people deny God's authority?