

10. Why the Church Exists

Jesus Christ is head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18). This means that we need to be concerned with His will for what the church is supposed to be and why it exists. We have seen that “church” (ekklesia) refers to a group of people, whether universally, locally, or physically assembled. Now the question is, why does the church exist? Our primary concern here is to consider the reason for a local congregation. Why do local churches need to exist, and what is God’s work for them? What has God authorized with respect to a local congregation?

Evidence for the Local Group

Some have denied the importance of an organized local church, so let’s first consider the evidence for localized congregational activity. First is the fact that specific epistles are addressed to local congregations (1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; 8:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Rev. 2-3). These epistles would be read to the church when they assembled. Within the context of the local group, funds were collected (cf. Acts 5:1-6; 1 Cor. 16:1-3), and regular meetings occurred where they worshiped together and partook of the Lord’s Supper together (1 Cor. 11:17-34; 14; Acts 20:7). The local group is charged with particular action, or, in some cases, to refrain from particular action. For example, when it comes to the care of some widows, the church was not to be burdened (1 Tim. 5:16); rather, individuals needed to take care of their own (1 Tim. 5:3-4).

These passages, and more, can only make sense in the context of a local congregational organization. Contrasted with the universal body, which has no set organization, a local group will often have, with the saints in that place, “overseers and deacons” (Phil. 1:1). These overseers, or elders, are responsible to shepherd the group over which they have the charge (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3; Heb. 13:17). They are not universal shepherds, but only local.

These passages further show that God wants Christians involved in a local congregation. We need to avoid the extreme of thinking that the local church is unimportant and that only the individual matters. While the church is comprised of individuals, and individuals function within the group (Heb 10:24-25), the group as a whole unit is also a gift from God for the effective working of His will. At the same time, we need to be careful about confining Christianity to the “institution” so that the individual fails to work as God directs.

God wants local groups to exist, but why? What is it about local assemblies of Christians that make

them so valuable and desirable? First, a group that can band together to help each other in their service to God is going to make one stronger than if the individual tries to do it all alone. This purpose is expressed in the well-known passage: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:23-25). The stress here is not just assembling, but assembling for the purpose of encouraging each other so that when we leave the assembly we’ll be motivated to love and do good works. Encouragement is one significant reason why we need each other in a local group.

Scripture also shows that when local Christians band together in order to function as a local group, whether through the pooling of funds or assembling together (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:23), God has particular actions in mind for His people. Coming together “as a church” is an important concept.

In these cases, “church” refers to a specific group of believers who have banded together and agreed to work and function together in activities that God intended for that setting. As an analogy, think of a family, which is fitting given that God’s people are God’s household. A family can be dispersed, but still be a family. That family can also assemble and act as a family unit for specific ends. So it is with the church. The church is composed of individuals, but locally a church exists as a unit for particular purposes.

Groups or organizations often form for specific reasons. For example, a hospital may be built and staffed with doctors, nurses, and administration, and we recognize that the hospital organization does not exist as such in order to have political rallies or provide the world with donuts. Those who give to the hospital would likely be upset if they found that the money being donated was used for purposes other than what was intended. If individuals thought they were giving to an organization that was intended to feed hungry children and later found out the money was being spent to buy softball equipment, they would rightly have a problem with this misuse of funds. Why should this be any different when it comes to a local church?

The local church, as an organized group, exists for specific reasons, which is not to be confused with all other sorts of purposes and activities that can be handled in other venues and situations. For instance, the local church does not exist to provide secular education and hand out degrees. These things aren’t wrong in themselves, but it would be outside the scope of congregational purpose to provide these. The local church has a more specific and important work to do that

other organizations do not do. When we say that the local church should stay out of certain activities, we are not saying that Christians as individuals and families cannot provide for those activities. On the contrary, there is a difference between individual and congregational action. Recognizing that distinction is important. This is highlighted in 1 Timothy 5, where individuals are told to care for their own widows so that the church is not burdened (vs. 16).

The Actions of a Local Group

What are the specified actions that we find given to the local group who function “as a church” in Scripture? One primary function is that the local group participates in and supports the preaching of the gospel. For example, the church of the Thessalonians was commended because “the word of the Lord has sounded forth” from them (1 Thess. 1:7-8). The church at Philippi is commended because they, as a church, had fellowship with Paul in supporting him as he preached (Phil. 4:15-16). Since preachers have a right to make their living from the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14), and churches can help in the support of preachers, we find in this one of the main reasons for a local church to exist.

The local group functions further in the spiritual edification or building up of the saved. This is teaching that is intended to strengthen the faith and resolve of believers. Paul shows that saints are to be taught to serve. The fact that evangelists, pastors, and teachers are mentioned in this setting shows that there is a local church context for this (Eph. 4:11-16). When Paul addressed the Ephesian elders, he told them to watch over that local flock because savage wolves (false teachers) would come in and not spare them. Therefore, the word of God’s grace needed to be taught diligently among them (Acts 20:17-32). This is a reason why churches typically have Bible classes, wherein they can teach what is needed to those in differing stages of growth and understanding.

The local group works in helping to provide for saints who are in physical need. While it would be nice to be able to provide benevolence to the whole world, or even to a whole city, that kind of work is neither possible nor found within the pages of Scripture. In Scripture, where the local church organization is involved, benevolence was intended for needy saints (Acts 2:44-46; 4:33-35; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; 2 Cor. 9; Rom. 15:25-26; 1 Tim. 5:9-16). Yet even this was largely temporary. The group is responsible for taking care of its own first, then may also, if able, help saints elsewhere in need. Remember, we are speaking here of local church action, not what individual Christians may do from their own personal circumstances and

opportunities. Group activity is necessarily more limited than individual activity because of purpose and work (cf. Acts 5:4). This, again, is true of all purposeful organizations.

The local group also maintains local assemblies wherein the saints seek to worship and praise God together. While this is also part of the edification process, the point here is that God's people ought to gather together regularly in order to worship Him and care for the specified actions shown in God's will (cf. Acts 2:42). In this context will be found coming together as a church in order to participate together in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:18ff; Acts 20:7), thereby sharing in the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor. 10:16).

Conclusion

Understanding these basic principles concerning the church will help us in our further study of authority, especially as it relates to the work and mission God has given the church. Local churches need to focus on the spiritual nature of God's kingdom, and the spiritual mission of His people. Acting as a collective unit is important, as Scripture demonstrates. At the same time, Christians should discern between work that God has given the local group and what He expects from the individual and family.

Discussion Questions

1. What evidence do we have in Scripture that organized, local churches existed in the first century?
2. Why is the evidence for the local churches important? What does it show us?
3. Why is a local congregation so valuable to the spiritual well-being of the Christian?
4. Why is it important to recognize the local church, as such, exists as a purposeful organization for specific work?
5. How does a local group participate in the preaching of the gospel (e.g., Phil. 4:15-16)?
6. What is the purpose of edification and why is it so important to the work of a congregation?
7. What biblical grounds are there for a church to provide benevolent help to needy saints?

8. Overall, what have you learned about the importance of a local church and the Christian's relationship to one?

9. The Church of the Lord

As Creator and King, Jesus is also Head of His body, the church (Col. 1:15-18). As His body, we are to listen to the Head and respond accordingly. We have considered basic principles in understanding the way that God communicates His will. He communicates in the same way that we communicate with others: at the most basic level, He tells us what He wants, shows us what He wants, and implies what He expects us to get. Now we want to think about what God has revealed about His church. What is the church? Why is the local church important? What activities do we find in Scripture that God wants the local church to be involved in?

What the Church is Not

It's often helpful not only to positively state what the church is, but also, for clarity, to state what it is not. Since there is much misinformation regarding the church, let's start with what the church is not:

First the church is not the building. We know this, but we need to be careful with the way we express ourselves.

Second, the church is not a denomination. Many have the idea that belonging to a church necessarily means belonging to some denomination. This is false. Denominationalism finds no support in Scripture, and our plea is not to leave one denomination to join another, but to abandon all denominationalism and simply be part of Christ's body.

Third, the church is not a social club. While there are many social benefits to being able to spend time with other Christians in spiritual and even social settings, the church was not designed as a social organization meant to provide for all social and physical needs, take care of entertainment,

and make sure everyone is socially happy. Not even Jesus was concerned about fixing every social situation. For example, Luke 12:13-15 presents a situation where two brothers had a dispute over a family inheritance. Jesus could have easily solved the situation, but notice his reply: “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?” His purpose was not to fix all the social, political, or financial problems in society. Further, in John 6:26-27, Jesus had already fed the people, but He was not willing for that to be the premise upon which they would follow Him. They needed to move beyond the signs and the food to accept the teachings of Jesus. Many ended up walking away because of what Jesus said in John 6.

Fourth, the church is not a political conduit. Jesus brought together disciples who were on very different ends of a political spectrum: Simon, a zealot and Matthew, a tax collector. The local church does not exist in order to be a political machine aimed at promoting various political agendas. There should be no attempt in a local congregational setting to overthrow a government or become lobbyists for particular political campaigns. Scripture teaches Christians to submit to governing authorities (Rom. 13) and not to speak evil of those in charge, but to pray for them so that we lead a peaceful life (cf. Jude 8-9; 1 Tim. 2:1-4).

Following the example of Jesus and the early church, we see that the primary function of a local church is spiritual in nature, focused on helping people draw near to God. The drawing power of what we offer is the cross of Jesus (John 12:32). We need to make sure we don't undermine this by making physical agendas the primary function. None of this means that Christians should avoid their personal responsibilities to help those in need, take care of the sick, or feed the hungry (cf. Jas. 1:26-27; Gal. 6:10). It does mean that we need to keep a proper perspective about priorities.

The Meaning of “Church” (Ekklesia)

Put simply, the church is a group of people. In the context of God's people, it refers to those who are saved by the blood of Christ (cf. Acts 20:28). Many argue that the term *ekklesia*, usually translated “church,” was etymologically derived from *ek*, “out of,” and *klesis*, “a calling,” thus referring to those who are “called out.” However, “called out” is not the primary significance of the term in Scripture. We should not confuse etymology (origin of a word) with usage. The main idea of *ekklesia* is that of an “assembly,” “group,” or “Congregation.” For example, the term is used of the assembly of citizens who were gathered to discuss certain affairs of a potentially riotous mob (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). It is also used of Israel in the wilderness (Acts 7:38), showing that it is not limited to Christians in the New Testament. The term is not inherently religious.

Specifically, we find the term ekklesia used, when referring to Christians, with at least the following senses:

Universally, ekklesia refers to all of God's people without specifying a time or place (Matt. 16:18; Heb. 12:23). There is no specific locality for the assembly and no organization of the universal group. It is broad and general in scope. Whether living in the first century or twenty-first century, or whether living in Europe, Africa, or America, all of God's people are part of this general assembly. It is dependent upon one's individual relationship to God. God has given no organization or collective activity to this group. Action can only be taken individually as there is no universal function other than Christians being what they are supposed to be.

Locally, ekklesia refers to a specified group of believers who have banded together to carry out God's work in a particular community or city (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2). A local church is an organized, independent group of God's people with leaders (e.g., Phil. 1:1). It has no organizational ties to other independent groups, and it does not answer to other groups. In a plurality, "churches" refers to more than one local group rather than different denominations (Rom. 16:16; Gal. 1:2; cf. Rev. 1:4, 20 with 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Even when we aren't meeting at a particular moment, we are members of the group that meet in that location. We don't cease to be the local church when we depart from a physical assembly.

Locally, when the church is physically assembled together for specific action (e.g., to worship), then ekklesia applies to that gathered assembly (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:18; 14:19, 23). The church comes together in assemblies with the express purposes of carrying out God's will for the local group.

Jesus is the Head of His universal body (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23); He is also over all local groups (Rev 2-3). Individuals, not sub-groups, comprise the universal body (Rom 12:4-5) as well as local churches (Phil 1:1). Universally, there is one body that belongs to Christ (Eph. 4:4), whereas locally there are many groups in multiple locations. While there is no universal organization in which all local churches are under some earthly headquarters, there is local organization wherein a congregation acts independently to the glory of God with its own leadership (1 Pet 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17).

When did this church universally begin? The Lord promised He would build His church (Matt. 16:18). This is not to imply that God did not have a group of believers before Jesus (cf. Heb. 11-12), but that the new covenant would be in effect soon and the new company of believers

would be established in a new relationship under this new and better covenant (See Heb. 8:7-13). Christ uses the figure of a building structure to refer to His people under the new covenant. This should highlight the idea that God's people are His temple (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 3:9-17). After Christ died and rose again, and on the Day of Pentecost, the Lord was adding people to His body of believers (Acts 2:47). Locally, churches begin in different places and at different times.

Several figures are used to refer to God's people in the New Testament, such as "body" (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18), "household" (1 Tim. 3:15), and "temple" (1 Cor. 3:16). The church's relationship to the Lord is compared to a bride and her husband (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 21:2). These, and more, point to the type of relationship we have with God and each other in Christ. Yet God did not specify a single title for this body of believers. Descriptions are given which identify the church as belonging to God (Acts 20:28) and Christ (Rom. 16:16, where "churches of Christ" refers to several local groups); other descriptions refer to a specific locality ("church of God which is at Corinth," 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 2-3), or as being composed of Christians in a given location ("church of the Thessalonians," 1 Thess. 1:1). Hebrews 12:23 refers to the "church of the first-born ones" (plural), which shows the exalted position to which God elevates believers. All such phrases are descriptive. We need to be careful that we don't just single out one exclusive title, as this itself would be going beyond the authority presented in Scripture.

Conclusion

The church universally and churches locally all exist by the authority of God. There are many misconceptions about the church, so it is important to understand both what the church is and what it is not. Once we understand the various uses of "church" in Scripture, we will then be in a position to understand better why the church exists.

Discussion Questions

1. Why should we be careful about not confusing the church with the building in which the church meets?
2. Why should we learn not to think of the church as a denomination, a social club, or a political conduit?

3. What is meant by “universal church”? Where do we find this concept in Scripture? Is this a physically organized group?
 4. What is the main idea of ekklesia, and why is this important to understand?
 5. Why is it important to recognize that a local church operates independently of other local churches or organizations?
 6. Who comprises the universal body with Christ as the Head, and why is this an important understanding?
 7. What is the difference between the universal church and local churches in terms of when they began?
 8. Why should we be careful not to use only one designation for the church exclusively?
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8. Silence

God reigns. Because of this, His followers need to be concerned with teaching God’s will. “Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God” (1 Pet. 4:11a). Yet how are we to think with respect to what God didn’t say?

The question of how to treat the silence of Scripture has long been one of the more controversial issues in determining what is or is not authorized by God. Does silence authorize? Do we have authority to act when God has said nothing? There are two basic approaches to silence: 1) we can do anything not specifically forbidden in Scripture, or 2) silence is not permission and we should not do something that is not positively indicated in some way. How shall we approach the issue?

Interpreting “Silence” or the “Unspecified”?

We need to distinguish between something that is generally authorized, even though unspecified, and something for which there is actual silence. “Silent” and “unspecified” are not equal. For example, I can send my son to the store with the instructions to “get bread.” “Bread” is a category, so if nothing else is indicated to specify the kind of bread, then whatever fits the category of “bread” is permitted. That is different, however, from saying or indicating nothing (silence) about bread whatsoever. If something is stated in principle or in general terms, then whatever falls under that principle or generality is still within the context of what is spoken about. Not everything needs to be specified when a general principle is given that covers the specifics.

That said, silence is silence. It is nothing. It neither approves nor disapproves of anything in itself. However, we cannot quote an author on something he never said. This is a basic principle on which we normally operate. If we cite an author as approving something, we must be able to show where and how he spoke about it. Otherwise, we have misrepresented the author. When an author has said nothing about a subject, we have no warrant to say that he approves of the matter. An author “authorizes” by what he says, not by his silence, unless he has indicated otherwise. For example, singing is authorized in Ephesians 5:19. Those who want approval for mechanical instruments in worship will need to go elsewhere, for this passage says nothing about instruments.

If the author has not said anything about a subject, does that necessarily mean he disapproves? The only way to know this would be for the author to break his silence and indicate His will. How else could we know? Once he breaks his silence, this point is no longer at issue. However, imagine the author saying something like this: “I’m only approving of or promoting matters that I have spoken about. I do not approve of anything else. Do not presume so.” Then, when he is silent about something, what should we assume his feelings to be about it? We surely cannot assume that he approves of something he has not spoken about; in that case, based on what else he has told us, we need to assume he would not approve it. This leads to the next point:

Silence and the Problem of Presumption

Interpreting “silence” is easier when we see someone. We can see facial and bodily expressions, hear inflections in the way things are said, and be more aware of what a communicator might be trying to convey. A speaker can say something with a particular expression and we can more readily interpret what that means. In biblical interpretation, our challenge lies in the fact that we are reading a text without being able to see all the accompanying expressions that may or may not go with it. This lends itself to the problem of presumption and warrants a more careful

approach.

Presumption is assuming something to be true when we may not have adequate grounds for accepting it. Indeed, the evidence may be in the other direction, but because we think, "Scripture is silent on that specific matter," we believe we can act. Or we may think, "that's a gray area, so I can go ahead and do it." Instead of being sure what we are doing is right, we presume that it's okay. This is dangerous ground to be avoided.

Even if real silence didn't prohibit (as many argue), it surely doesn't authorize. Why do we feel that we can presume upon silence to act? The mind of God is known through what is revealed (1 Cor. 2:10-13). If God truly is silent about a matter, there would only be a couple of reasons why this would be so: 1) He intends to be silent. In this case, we do not have the mind of God on the matter, and we can either presume upon His mind, or refrain from such presumption. Given the principles of honoring God in Scripture, which is more appropriate? We know the answer. 2) He intended to say something about the issue, but failed or forgot. This is not an option because it would make God incompetent. If God truly is silent, then He intended to be silent and we ought to respect that.

When considering the question of silence, we ought to bear in mind these principles: First, study all that God has revealed about an issue. Consider relevant principles, statements, or examples that cover what we are trying to address. Only by knowing what God has revealed are we able to determine whether or not He is silent about something. Second, always keep in mind the need to honor God in what we think and do. Failure to honor Him has gotten more than a few people into serious trouble (e.g., Nabad and Abihu in Lev. 10:1-3, and Moses in Num. 20:9-13).

Fallacy, Principle, and Silence.

In logic, there is a fallacy known as the appeal to ignorance (*Ad Ignorantiam*): "The 'appeal to ignorance' consists in arguing that an idea must be true because we do not know that it is not. It is a fallacy because ignorance can never be a premise or reason. Premises must express knowledge-claims. Nothing logically follows from nothing, i.e., no-knowledge" (Kreeft 86). Using silence as a basis for God's authority is fallacious and presumptuous.

There are several principles that prohibit this type of fallacy and help us understand how God thinks about this.

“You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deut 4:2).

“Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it” (Deut. 12:32).

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).

“Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar” (Prov. 30:6).

“Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go” (Josh. 1:6-7; cf. Deut. 5:32; 17:11).

“When they say to you, ‘Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.” (Isa. 8:19-20).

“But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does” (Jas. 1:25).

“So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free’” (John 8:31-32).

“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other” (1 Cor. 4:6).

“Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18-19).

“Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls...” (Acts 15:24).

“If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing ...” (1 Tim. 6:3-4ff, vv. 20-21).

Examine the contexts. Some of the references have specific points to be made about them, but we are showing a basic principle throughout Scriptures found in various contexts (law, history, wisdom, prophets, gospels, and epistles). Do we recognize the principle? Do we get the idea that God thinks this principle is important? What might we gather from what we know? Are we being too careful, or not careful enough about our speculations and filling in of the gaps?

Conclusion

While the question of God's silence can be thorny, we need to start with how we understand silence in our normal communication. From there, we look at other principles that help us in our understanding of silence. In the case of God, we have very direct statements telling us what He thinks about our being presumptuous. Therefore, we must be very careful in our approach to any question on which God is silent.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the distinction between "silence" and "unspecified" important?
2. If an author says nothing about a topic, what should we assume about his position on the topic, and why?
3. Why is presumption a problem?
4. How do we know what God thinks about a particular matter?
5. If God is truly silent about a matter, what reasons might there be for this silence?
6. What is the "appeal to ignorance" fallacy and why is it significant for the issue of silence?
7. Given the passages listed, what should we conclude regarding God's attitude toward what He has not revealed?
8. How careful should we be in approaching questions involving silence, and why?

7. Examples

Since God reigns (Isa. 52:7), we are concerned with the examples God provides in His revelation. When we build something, we often look at patterns or models. We like to see examples of what something should look like. Examples give us a model or picture, showing us what God likes or doesn't like. In our efforts to be conformed to the image of Christ, we need to pay special attention to the Exemplar, Jesus Christ, and to what He authorizes through His chosen apostles (see 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17). While much can be said about the nature of examples, let's consider some basic principles and check our attitudes about examples.

Basics on Examples

Some ask, "When is an example binding?" That may be the wrong question to start with. Let's ask, "What is God intending to show us?" Instead of a list of "rules," let's think about these principles:

Without any indication from God (general or specific), we should not presume to know God's will. His silence is not an open invitation to do whatever we wish. A positive example shows that God approves of something; He is not silent. He has shown what He likes and we should try to follow it if possible. The fact that He has shown us something means that we may then act in that same way, insofar as we are able, with God's approval. However, if there is no further information given about that issue, then we should act based on what He has shown rather than what He has not shown. The question is, what does the example show us to do or not do?

Examples illustrate how we may act with God's approval, and those examples give us freedom to so act. For instance, God shows approval, through an example, of His disciples coming together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7). By following this example, we can know God is pleased. In this way, God shows us what He wants by giving examples of how to please Him. How do we know we are on the right track here? First, because the Lord tells us that we are to consider what the apostles show us through their examples (Phil. 3:17; 4:9). Second, if the apostles were acting upon the authority of God, then what they do by God's approval is significant. They spoke by God's authority, and we are told to listen to them as we would Christ

(John 13:20; John 16:13; Gal. 4:14; 1 Cor. 14:37).

We may not have all recorded statements of what God said, but when an action was done with God's approval through the apostles, then God already authorized it. They weren't just making things up as they go. When we imitate what we are shown, we know we are acting upon God's authority because positive examples illustrate actions that are permitted and desired by God.

Simplifying Examples

We are to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind (Mark 12:30). When we see examples of God's people doing what pleases Him, should we not desire to follow their examples? If we ask, "But is that example binding?" aren't we really asking, "Do we have to?" Wouldn't those who love God want to follow an example that God saw fit to show us? Let's ask instead, "What does this show us about what God desires?" By God's grace we have an example of something that He likes. The Scriptures aren't huge, so when an example shows God's approval, wouldn't those who love Him want to take special note? If we are able, and if our circumstances are comparable, wouldn't we want to follow what God, in His grace, found important enough to include in His message?

Which God-pleasing example would we not want to follow? Is there a specific case of His disciples acting with His approval that we would look at and say, "No, we don't want to do that"? If we are able, and our situation is comparable, should we look at something that pleases Him, argue it is not necessary, then ignore it? What should be our attitude toward such examples?

Are there details in examples that are not necessary? We recognize, in normal communication, that not every detail is as significant as another. For instance, if I show someone how I want a task to be accomplished on a computer, and in the process of this I sit in a chair with my feet crossed, am I necessarily suggesting that the person I am showing must sit in the chair in the same position, or is the intended example focused on the computer task? As in all communication, we need common sense as we infer significance and discern between the purpose of the example and the incidental details in the telling of the event.

In Acts 20, when the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread (the Lord's Supper), was the focus of this on their meeting in an upper room, or is the intended focus on their meeting to break bread? Where they met is incidental. What they met for is integral, and

we need to see that difference. We need common sense, keeping passages in context and recognizing the difference between an incidental of telling what happened and core issues that led to the disciples acting as they did in the first place. Are we capable of drawing reasonable conclusions about these? We do that in our normal communication. Are we not capable here?

God chose to include examples of His people acting for a reason. Those who love Him ought to look at those examples and, as much as within their abilities, and where the circumstances compare, follow them. Why ask, "Do I have to?" (i.e., "Is it binding?") When God has, in His wisdom, provided a look into the actions that He likes, those who love Him should want to do the same. That's a foundational starting point from which the particular examples can be examined. From there we can consider how comparable the examples are to our circumstances. If our circumstances are not very comparable (e.g., specific issues with miraculous gifts), then we may have little application to make of that specific case. No example can be followed when there is no comparable situation to which we can apply it. If it is comparable, then in what ways? What is the context of the example and how does it fit with our context? Is it an example of individual or group action? What is the core issue of the example? What are the incidentals? What shall we take away from it? How may we apply it? These are the types of questions we want to consider.

Acts 20:7 as an Example

The disciples gathered together on the first day of the week in order to "break bread." This shows both timing and purpose, and context implies more than just a common meal intended. Acts 2:42 shows that disciples "were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." This was not just an ordinary meal or secular gathering.

Elsewhere Paul refers to the Lord's Supper in this way: "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:16-17). Partaking of the "one bread" and "the bread which we break" refer to the sharing in the body of Christ in this special meal. We know that God desires for Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper, since the Lord commanded it (Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). Both biblically and historically, we know that disciples met on the first day of the week for this purpose. Paul and his company stayed seven days at Troas in order to do this (cf. also Acts 21:4; 28:14). That the first day of the week was the common meeting day is seen also in passages like 1 Corinthians 16:1-2,

where the instructions presuppose that they met on this day regularly. The first day of the week makes sense since it was both the day that Christ rose from the dead and the day of Pentecost on which the Holy Spirit came with power in order to usher in the new era of the church. Acts 2:42 implies that they began breaking bread in this way on that Pentecost, and continued regularly doing so. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

We see “first day of the week” significance in both what we are told and shown. We know nothing of other days that disciples met to partake of the Lord’s Supper because we have no other information given to us about it. Jesus gave instructions on the Passover, but He said He would later partake of it in His kingdom, which takes us again to the day of Pentecost. The only example we have when disciples came together to take the Lord’s Supper is on the first day of the week. This is what God shows us, and this is what the Christians, with God’s approval, did in the first century. Can we agree on this and practice it? Should we do more than that?

Conclusion

Examples are an important part of Scripture. Through them, God shows us what He likes or doesn’t like. If we are able, and if our circumstances are comparable, then we ought to follow these examples. Further, we ought to act based upon what we know from what we are told and shown, not on what we don’t know due to what God hasn’t revealed. Loving God, will we choose to act on what we see God showing us and teach others the same?

Discussion Questions

1. Why is a pattern significant when we want to know how to do something?
2. How do examples illustrate what God likes or doesn’t like?
3. Why is asking, “Is that example binding?” probably not the best question to ask as a starting point? What kind of attitude might that reveal?
4. How can we know that God is pleased when we follow particular examples in Scripture?
5. What should our starting attitude be as we consider any given example, and why?

6. Why is it important to consider whether the context of an example is comparable to our circumstances today?

7. Why is an example, like the one found in Acts 20:7, important to us now?

8. What indicators do we have that the first day of the week is a day God wants disciples meeting?

6. Implication and Inference

One of the more difficult issues in understanding communication, including authority, is that of inference. Some have become so disenchanted with the abuses of inference that they have just about given up on it as a reliable way to understand anything. This, however, is an over-reaction that is both unwarranted and impossible to bear out consistently. The reason is that inference is a necessary part of reasoning. No one can avoid inferences. The question is whether or not the inferences are warranted, legitimate, and reasonable. They must not be contrived or forced.

The definition of inference is: “in logic, derivation of conclusions from given information or premises by any acceptable form of reasoning. Inferences are commonly drawn (1) by deduction, which, by analyzing valid argument forms, draws out the conclusions implicit in their premises, (2) by induction, which argues from many instances to a general statement, (3) by probability, which passes from frequencies within a known domain to conclusions of stated likelihood, and (4) by statistical reasoning, which concludes that, on the average, a certain percentage of a set of entities will satisfy the stated conditions” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* online).

The communicator implies and the receiver infers. To imply is to indicate something without explicitly stating it. To infer is to get what is being implied. There are many things that affect how we infer something, but that we infer is a fact of reasoning. Richard Paul and Linda Elder state in their *Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking*, “All reasoning contains inferences or interpretations by which we draw conclusions and give meaning to data.”

No reasoning takes place without drawing conclusions (inferring) from implications. Statements and examples usually come with the expectation that we draw further conclusions (the statements and examples are the data that we must infer from and to which we give meaning). The point of reasoning and discerning is that we are capable of taking what is given whether implicitly or explicitly, then reasoning to proper conclusions.

Implications can be both powerful and binding.

Some ask, “Are inferences binding?” They are wondering if what we infer can be required. When the communicator (in this case, God) implies something, and He expects us to infer or interpret His implication properly (that is, we are to “get it”), then yes it can be a required conclusion. Think back to Acts 10 and God’s expectation that Peter infer properly that gentiles should not be considered unclean. That inference was required. Some implications are binding and some aren’t, and we need to pay attention to the context of the passage. In order to better understand the principle, let’s consider some examples demonstrating that every Christian believes in the binding power of an implication.

First, anyone who is a Christian today has accepted, by inference, that people of all places and times ought to be Christians. There is no direct statement telling us explicitly that 21st century Americans should be Christians. We infer that Christianity was intended to be taken beyond the boundaries of the first century time-frame. This inference is necessary. Otherwise, on what basis should anyone be a Christian today (see Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 17:30-31)?

Second, when we follow particular commands in Scripture, we do so because we have inferred that those commands are viable for those beyond the original audience. That these commands are required is evident, but if we believe we should be following particular commands that were given to the Roman, Corinthian, or Colossian Christians, then we do so on the basis of what is implied by Scripture and what we infer as readers. Are these inferences necessary? We believe so.

Some matters of right and wrong must be inferred. Paul ends his list of sins in Galatians 5:19-21 with “things like these.” How can we know what this means? The Hebrews writer speaks of the mature who can “discern good and evil” (Heb. 5:12-14). Discerning requires inferring from known principles.

Here is a case in point to help clarify how we believe that inferences are required. What is the

greatest commandment given? Jesus explicitly said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind (Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34). If we believe this is still the greatest commandment, then on what basis do we believe it? We ask this because it illustrates the power of an implication.

In context, Jesus was speaking about the Law and the Prophets. He said nothing explicitly about the New Covenant in this context. If the command is to be understood beyond the Hebrew Scriptures, then we are inferring its necessity beyond the original context.

Further, this command is not explicitly stated this way elsewhere in the New Testament. There are plenty of passages telling us to love one another. We know that we need to love God. However, where are we explicitly told elsewhere that loving God with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind is the *greatest* commandment? The only place that is found is in a passage that contextually is speaking of the Law and the Prophets. We infer the rest.

Even in the Hebrew Scriptures, where does it say that loving God with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind is the *greatest* of the commandments? The command is there (Deut. 6:4), but how were they to know it was the greatest? If they were expected to know it, then they knew it by what is implied. Some did get it. For example, the lawyer who asked Jesus about inheriting eternal life answered the question correctly (Luke 10:25-29). How did he know that inheriting eternal life was so connected to loving God with all the heart? That is not stated in Deuteronomy 6. Where does that passage say anything about “eternal life”? Yet, Jesus said that the lawyer answered his own question correctly. That must have been a pretty significant inference. Was it binding?

Do we believe in the power of an implication? If we are Christians, and we believe that loving God with all your heart is still the greatest commandment, then we believe in the power of implication. The question is not whether implications and inferences are part of our biblical understanding. They are vital for every reader. The question is whether we are inferring properly.

On Principle and Inference

A principle is a fundamental truth from which other laws or behaviors are derived. Upon understanding a principle, we recognize various applications that come from it. For example, based on the principle of treating others as we want to be treated (Matt. 7:12), we might infer that we should mow the lawn of a needy neighbor. The applications might be unstated and we must

infer the specifics. Principles are accepted and applied through the process of inferring from the data we are given. If we believe in principles, then we accept implications and inferences.

Inferences are taken to task by those who question whether or not they are adequate for understanding anything authoritative. They may then speak of principles guiding their behavior. In truth, there is no living by principle if inferences have no power, for proper applications will involve inferences. Otherwise, principles would be empty ideas with no real-world application. Here is the argument: 1) everyone uses applied principles; 2) applying principles requires inference; 3) therefore, everyone uses inference.

Many explicit precepts also require us to work through proper applications. For example, we are told, “love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:35-36). Yet how is all of this to be carried out? We can define love and mercy the way we wish (subjective and self-willed), or we can dig further into Scripture and see how God showed love and mercy. Then, we can see how to make applications in our own time. All of this requires inferring from then to now and from God’s actions to ours. Without inference, there is no modern application.

These are self-evident principles of authority. What God has told us, shown us, and implied are on every page. We cannot rightly say, “Only commands are binding,” for even then we will have crippled our abilities to make modern applications of those commands. If we cannot infer, then we cannot apply. We recognize that inferences can be unnecessary and lead to an abuse of a text. However, the fact that an abuse can take place does not invalidate the point. Rather, it drives home the need to be careful in drawing conclusions and making applications. The interpretation of Scripture needs to be attended by good reason and a great care for context. That is why this particular subject is important. If we care about principle, we’ll care about proper reasoning from the principle to the applications.

Conclusion

Implications and inferences are an integral part of the communication process. We are forced to use our minds to think things out and through. There are dangers, however, and we must be careful that we are using our reasoning process properly so that we are not forcing conclusions where they are not warranted. When warranted, however, the power of inferences is self-evident.

Let us learn to use them appropriately.

Discussion Questions

1. What are implications and inferences? How do we imply?
2. Why would we say that implications and inferences are a necessary part of the communication process?
3. How can implications from 2,000 years ago be binding today?
4. On what basis do we follow any command that is given in Scripture?
5. How does the command to love God with all the heart illustrate the binding power of an implication?
6. What is a principle, and what role do principles play in our understanding of Scripture?
7. Why would we argue that inferences are necessary for applying principles?
8. Why should we be cautious with the inferences we make?

5. Knowing What God Wants

God reigns (Isa. 52:7), and this means we need to be concerned about God's will. This also means that we must be concerned with *knowing what* God wants and *knowing how* God communicates His will. Remember that the Holy Spirit is the Revealer of God's mind (1 Cor. 2:13), so we must pay attention to what the Spirit has revealed. Here we are asking how basic communication works because this will inform us about how God communicates with us. What we are talking about here

is typical of all communication. If you want to communicate your will to someone, how will you do it? If God communicates His will to us, how does He do it? There is no magical formula here. However communication occurs is how anyone's will is made known, and God has communicated to us in the very same ways we would try to communicate to others, whether we are parents, workers, employers, and in all other avenues of life. All we are doing here is recognizing, in a logical and reasonable way, that God communicates His will to us in the same way. If we are going to understand God's authority, we should step back and consider how this happens.

It's How Communication Works.

There are some basic premises in understanding how God communicates His will or authority. God communicates His will in the same ways we communicate our wills. By understanding how we fundamentally communicate, we will understand more about how God communicates.

People may buck against the idea of "establishing" authority from God, but the issue is simply how God communicates His will. When we know that, we've answered how His authority is made known. How is anyone's will communicated? If you are going to communicate what you want, how will you do it? This gets to the heart of the issue. Really, there are three basic ways to communicate something:

First, we tell others what we want. This is direct and can be an order or statement.

Second, we show others what we want and how to do it. Illustrations, examples, or models are part of this process.

Third, we imply what we expect others to get by what we say or show. This can even be done through gestures or silence, depending on the context. When people "get it," then they have inferred from the implication what we wanted them to get. For example, a principle might come from what we are told, and we may infer from the stated principle a proper application to our current situation.

Any attempt at communication will utilize at least one of these. Try to communicate without them! If others disagree just ask them to express that disagreement without telling, showing, or implying anything about it. Telling, showing, and implying are logically self-evident. No further proof is needed, as objections to this are self-defeating and logically incoherent.

Does this kind of communication come from God or man? Our abilities to think logically and communicate do come from God. He made us creatures with the need and ability to communicate, and this is just how it is done. To help us understand God's authority, then, we need to start with the logical premises and show that there is no way around how communication works. We are simply reminding people of the fundamental logic that underlies all communication, including God's.

The process of telling, showing, and implying is not itself a method of interpretation. Rather, it is a recognition of how we get the raw data that then is interpreted. In other words, we start with the facts: what did God say? What has been shown? Then we proceed to interpret these.

Tell, Show, and Imply in Action: Acts 10

We have argued that communication, in its most basic form, takes place through the process of telling, showing, and implying. No one can communicate without doing at least one of these in some form. This is what the communicator brings to the process. The receptor, on the other hand, takes what is told, shown, or implied and interprets that material. The receptor is asking, "What do these mean? How do they apply to my situation?"

Scripture gives multiple and varied examples of these forms of communication as they express God's will. We are going to focus here on how God communicated His will to Peter in Acts 10. As a Jew, Peter had grown up learning not to associate with gentiles (vs. 28). This is understandable, given that God was clear about His people not mixing with the pagan nations. All of this was about to change, and this change illustrates the process of telling, showing, and implying. It is also the way that Peter knew God's will about preaching to the gentiles.

First, God showed Peter a vision that was intended to teach something vital about God's intentions. Peter had gone up on a housetop to pray but fell into a trance in which he saw this vision of an object like a sheet lowered down by the four corners (vv. 9-16). In this sheet were four-footed animals, creatures, and birds. Then a voice told him to get up, kill these creatures, and eat. Peter refused, saying that he had never eaten anything unholy or unclean. The voice responded, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." This happened three times. Peter was shown something by God, and he recognized this, as he indicates in vs. 28: "God has shown me..."

Second, God directly told Peter to go with the gentiles who were coming to ask for him. After the vision, while Peter was contemplating what it meant, three men showed up looking for him. Before, Peter might have tried to avoid this circumstance. However, the Spirit told him, “get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself” (vs. 20). Peter was told to go, so he did.

Third, Peter inferred that he should not call any man common or unclean. Peter had to think about what that vision meant, coupled with the fact that God told him to go with those men to the gentiles. He figured it out, as his words to Cornelius demonstrate: “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me?”

Peter drew a required conclusion based on what he had been shown and told. The context helped to make it obvious. Yet there is nowhere in the text where God says, “The gentiles are now clean and you may preach to them.” Perhaps Peter could have reasoned that the vision was only about animals and food, not men. Nowhere in the vision is there anything about men. Perhaps he could have concluded that God wanted him to go with those men for some other reasons. Those gentiles were the ones who said that Cornelius wanted to hear a message from him. How did he know they weren't lying? How could he trust them? He had to trust what he was told, and he inferred that what God showed him was really about men.

Peter put all the pieces together. The vision showed him something about clean and unclean. The Spirit told him to go with them and that this was all from God. He trusted the Spirit and the context. When he arrived, he realized the implications of what he was told and shown. He was not to call any man common or unclean.

Through telling, showing, and implying, God communicated His will to Peter. “But wait a minute,” one might object. “The purpose of this passage isn't to explain how God communicates His authority.” No, God's purpose was to communicate something to Peter, who, in turn, would communicate the gospel to Cornelius and his family. This would then show that the gentiles were proper recipients of the gospel. All we are doing is paying attention to how this happened. We are seeing the ways in which God communicated His will to others. We are not creating a new form of interpretation; we are observing and making an application.

The situation in Acts 10 shows us that God values the entire communication process. He could have told Peter explicitly not to call any man unclean, without giving him a vision. He could have spelled it out completely for Peter. Instead, God chose to show him something, tell him something, and imply something that he expected Peter to understand by putting all the information together. God values the process that includes implication and inference. He values the ability He has given to us to reason things out and draw warranted conclusions. He wants his people to think through the implications of what is told and shown in the expression of His will. This is “tell, show, and imply” in action. If God valued that process, so should we.

Conclusion

The communication process is straightforward in principle. There are only so many ways to try to communicate, and these will always entail some form of telling, showing, and implying. There is just no other way to do it. Our argument is that God has communicated to us in these very ways. He tells us what He wants, shows us what He wants, and implies what He expects us to get. This is not some special method of interpretation, but rather a process by which we, as the receivers, recognize the data given to us by God.

Discussion Questions

1. How does communication work? Why would we say that “tell, show, and imply” are the primary ways?
2. How does understanding the fundamental communication process help us understand God’s authority?
3. How would you respond to the question, “Does the communication process come from God or man?” Why?
4. Why would we say that “tell, show, and imply” is not itself a method of interpretation? How does the process give us the raw data?
5. How did the vision given to Peter, in Acts 10, show him that he should not call any man common or unclean?

6. Why did the Spirit tell Peter to go without any misgivings? Why would Peter have had misgivings?

7. What relevant information did Peter have in order to infer what he did about preaching to the gentiles? What reasoning process would cause one to conclude what Peter did?

8. Why would we say that God valued the “tell, show, and imply” process? Why should we value the process?

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?

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?
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2. Christ the King

Why is the kingship of God so important to us? We began with this great passage:

“How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isa. 52:7).

(If you wish to consider more, please read also the following passages: Psalm 2; Psalm 110; Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 2:2; 21:1-10; 27:11-14; 28:18-20; John 18:33-37; Acts 2:29-36; 13:20-37; Colossians 1:13; 1 Timothy 1:16-17; Revelation 19:11-16).

The implications of kingship for questions of authority are significant. If Jesus is King, then He has the final say in what He wants and how He ought to be pleased. The point here is to get the idea of the kingship of Jesus firmly grounded in our thinking.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, God Promised a King.

The Old Testament narrative shows God’s concern with bringing about a king through the seed of Abraham (Gen. 17:6, 16), Judah (Gen. 49:10), and David (2 Sam. 7:12-13). The prophets also looked forward to a Davidic King who would rule over His people (Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5; 30:9; 33:15; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24; Dan. 7:13-14; Hos. 3:5; Zech. 6:11-13) and the Psalms point to the Messiah as the promised King (Psalm 2; 110).

The New Testament Scriptures show that Jesus fulfills the promise of the Messiah and King. Matthew emphasizes Jesus’ kingdom from His birth throughout (Matt. 2:2; 21:1-10; 27:11-14; 28:18-20), and the other gospel accounts agree (Mark 11:1-11; 12:35-37; 15:2; Luke 19:28-38; 23:1-5; John 18:33-37). In fact, kingdom emphasis in the gospels is directly related to Christ as the King (cf. Mark 1:14-15; Luke 17:20-21). Peter preached the kingship of Jesus on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36), and Paul later preached the same (Acts 13:22-39). The epistles carry on the teaching (Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:13; 3:24; 1 Tim. 1:16-17), and Revelation emphasizes Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords (19:11-16).

Jesus' Kingship Emphasizes His Authority.

We are not in a bilateral covenant with God where we are on equal terms with Him and get to have equal say in what we do. This is a unilateral covenant in which the Lord has complete and sole authority. Any and all permissions come from Him.

A king rules His kingdom. Dominion belongs to Him, and He is seated on the throne "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." All things are "in subjection under His feet," and He is "head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:20-23). There is no limit to His authority.

As King, Jesus is Head of the body and has total preeminence (see Col. 1:15-18). He completely rules over His Kingdom. As Lord, He is our Master, our Owner. As Creator, He has the right to tell us what to do. For example, His command to "go teach" is based upon the fact that He has this authority (Matt. 28:18-20).

Authority begins with one who has the right to speak and expect others to listen. It is grounded in the idea that there is someone rightfully in charge and to which others are amenable. In Scripture, we already know that God is the ultimate Authority because He is the Creator of all. Yet one of the great terms that captures the heart of the concept of authority is that of King. To help understand the significance of the kingship of Jesus, let's consider Psalm 2.

A Brief Look at Psalm 2.

Psalm 2 is one of David's royal psalms. Imagine, after having become king (and even prior), how many enemies he would have had. The nations, in an uproar, devising evil, take their stand together against God and His anointed king in order to cast off the fetters of the king's (and God's) rule. God answers back through His own laughter, scoffing, and anger, but His answer is this: "I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain" (vs. 6). God does not back off, but pushes forward His King who speaks on behalf of God.

God gave the decree: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You." This King is God's Son, and he would take the ends of the earth as His possession and rule with a rod of iron to shatter the nations like earthenware (vv 7-9). The warning has been given to the nations. They must respond

with proper respect and worship or they will be judged and smashed. “Kiss the Son,” they are told, or He will be angry and they will perish in their way (vv 10-12).

Notice how Psalm 2 picks up on the themes of Psalm 1. Psalm 1:1 and Psalm 2:12, nearly forming an *inclusio* (like bookends where a phrase is repeated for emphasis), speak of the blessed who come to God and take refuge in Him. The terms of 1:1 are repeated in Psalm 2, showing how the concept of the way of the wicked moves from individuals to a national level. The righteous man is the one who delights in God’s Law and who will then speak God’s decrees. Together, these two psalms show that the truly blessed are those who 1) submit to the rule of God, 2) love His word, and 3) refuse to take their stand with the wicked.

The implications should be plain enough: if we want to be blessed, we will submit to the rule of God. The rule or kingdom of God is paramount here. Two places in the New Testament will sufficiently demonstrate what Psalm 2 is talking about.

First, when Peter and John were threatened by the council, they went to their brethren and prayed (Acts 4:23-31). In the prayer, they referred back to Psalm 2:1-2. But now instead of applying the wicked mentality to the Gentiles, they apply it to the Jewish rulers who have rejected the rule of Jesus Christ. By rejecting Christ’s rule, they have rejected God’s rule; they have rejected the Kingdom of God. How ironic that Psalm 2 would come to be applied to the Jewish rulers who were supposed to be looking for the kingdom! They did indeed take their stand with wickedness in rejecting Jesus as King.

Second, Paul quotes from Psalm 2 in his sermon of Acts 13 (see vv. 32-39). The good news concerning God’s promise to Abraham is fulfilled in Jesus “in that He raised up Jesus, as it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’ As for the fact that He raised Him from the dead...” “Begotten” here is not a reference to the origin or birth of Jesus. Jesus was not created. Neither is it speaking of His birth through Mary. Rather, this is a royal description of God bringing out His King as a proclamation of the reign of the anointed One. This is God showing His King to the world as a testament to His power and sovereignty. What event did this with such power? Look again at what Paul said. Jesus was of the physical lineage of David, but “declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:3-4). Peter preached the same message, that Jesus was raised up and exalted to the right hand of God as both Lord and Christ (the anointed King, Acts 2:29-36).

God has made His love known through the death of Jesus (Rom. 5:8). God has made His rule known by raising Jesus from the dead. He had demonstrated His rule many times in other ways, but the resurrection is most powerful of all. Death is conquered through Jesus Christ! He reigns and rules over all the nations. And, as Psalm 2 indicates, the very ends of the earth (all people) are made aware of the rule of the Christ.

When we come face to face with the Kingship of Jesus, we are left with two options. We can go our own way, reject His rule, and be shattered in judgment, or we can “kiss the Son,” submit to His rule, and find God’s tremendous blessings.

Conclusion

There can be no submitting to Christ’s rule without recognizing His authority over all that we do. As King, Jesus is the ruler. He is loving and gracious, but He still has absolute authority and dominion. To speak of His authority, then, is to speak of the power and dominion that belongs to Him. He has the right to command and expect obedience. Our task is to listen, fear Him, and obey. He is, to be sure, a benevolent King, but He also means business when it comes to our doing His will.

Discussion Questions

1. In the presentation of the gospel message, how important is the proclamation, “Your God reigns!”?
2. Why is the kingship of Jesus a vital doctrine in understanding biblical authority?
3. How did the Hebrew Scriptures point to a promised Davidic King?
4. Compare Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:14-36 with Paul’s sermon in Acts 13:22-39 with respect to the kingship of Jesus. How did they proclaim His kingship? What do they both say is the proof of this kingship?
5. What does it mean to recognize that we are not in a bi-lateral covenant with God, but rather a unilateral covenant? Why is this an important recognition?

6. Consider again Ephesians 1:20-23 and Colossians 1:15-18 (and their contexts). What do these passages have in common relative to the authority of Jesus, and what does this mean for His people?

7. What does Psalm 2 show about those who reject the kingship of the Son?

8. Why is submitting to the Son so vital to receiving the blessings from God?

1. The Meaning of Authority

Why must we consider authority in religion? What does that even mean? How do you think about authority? In order to set the stage for understanding the importance of recognizing God's authority as we serve Him, let's start with this important passage:

"How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isa. 52:7).

This verse, quoted in Romans 10:15, contains one of the key messages of the gospel: God reigns! He is King. He is sovereign, and it is only through His exercise of sovereignty that we are saved. We, as His children of all people, should respect that Kingship. This is why authority matters: The Lord is king, and if we wish to take part in His salvation, we need to listen to Him. Authority, then, is grounded on at least these four pillars of truth:

First, God is the Creator (Gen. 1:1). As Creator, He has the right to tell us what to do and how to live.

Second, Jesus Christ is King (Acts 2:29-36). He sits on His throne and rules His kingdom. He is preeminent as the head over His body (Col. 1:18).

Third, the Holy Spirit is the Revealer of the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:10-13). The only way to know what God thinks is for Him to reveal His mind to us, and the Spirit has done this (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Fourth, mankind is God's creation, but is not in a position to be the authority (Jer. 10:23). People are flawed sinners who cannot be the final standard of truth. We need God.

Authority as Fundamental

Consider the warning for those who have left the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3): "Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah" (Jude 11).

What do these three situations share in common? At the heart of all three is an attitude that allows people to think that their way is better than God's, that their thoughts are higher than His, that their needs outweigh what God knows and plans for. These all paid the price for a spirit of rebellion against God's authority.

The way of Cain is a path to envy and hatred due to a failure to follow God's instructions by faith (Gen. 4).

The error of Balaam seeks to place worldly value and personal gain above God's will (Num. 22; cf. Num. 31:16; Deut. 23:4-5).

The rebellion of Korah was an effort to question the plan and order set in place by God for leading His people (Num. 16).

All sin is a rebellion against the nature and authority of God (1 John 3:4; Rom. 3:23). For example, Adam and Eve's sin in the garden was a result of distrusting God's authority in favor of their own (Gen. 3:5). They were listening to the wrong authority. Why would they, or anyone else, do this?

Do we need authority in our worship to God? Do we need God's permission to act on His behalf? Must we know that God approves of what we are doing? The answers may seem so obvious, but rebellion against the concept of authority is an old problem. History is filled with revolutions and rebellions against what is perceived as "bad authority." As Ramm wrote, "Protestation against authority is really against authority which is not authority in its own right, or authority which has

become officious or excessive” (16). People rebel because they think there is a better path to follow.

The question of authority has touched the entire religious world; it is not just a problem among a small group of believers. J.I. Packer, in his *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, noted, “The problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church ever faces. This is because Christianity is built on truth: that is to say, on the content of a divine revelation” (42). He argues the importance of having “the right criterion of truth, by which we may tell the word of God from human error.... We must expect to find error constantly assailing the truth; Christendom will always be a theological battlefield” (43). He writes that the “deepest cleavages in Christendom are doctrinal; and the deepest doctrinal cleavages are those which result from disagreement about authority. Radical divergences are only to be expected when there is no agreement as to the proper grounds for believing anything” (44). Problems over authority are not unique to only one body of people. All struggle with fundamental questions about the nature of authority.

First, authority is fundamental, as it lies at the heart of the most basic questions of doctrine and practice. Second, it is at the core of recognizing truth from error, as it concerns the source of truth itself. Third, it is a point of continual contention, as many divisions occur due to issues over authority. We must, therefore, reaffirm our faith and trust in God and His authority, seeking to teach future generations who will, in turn, face further issues relating to authority. The question of authority will never go away. What do you think happens when one generation ignores divine authority?

There is no getting around the fact that everyone follows someone’s authority. In the absence of God’s authority, we will make our own or follow another’s. If we care about God’s will, we will seek to minimize our own will, for we have no authority that can come from ourselves. “Not my will, but Yours be done” is the only justified attitude in the light of God’s sovereignty (cf. Luke 22:42).

We know that we cannot be righteous in ourselves (Rom. 3:10). If this is so, then does it not also follow that we cannot be authoritative in ourselves about righteous matters? Seeking to establish our own authority is no different in principle from seeking to establish our own righteousness. We are wholly dependent upon God for both salvation and authority.

What do we mean by “authority”?

“Authority” is a loaded word with several meanings, so we need to define it. Generally, authority is the power to make and enforce laws, to command, determine, judge, or exact obedience. In these lessons, we are focusing on two basic aspects of authority:

First is the one who has authority based upon a held position. For example, a police officer has authority to enforce the law in a special way because of the position. A Judge has the right to pronounce judgments consistent with law. A king has the right to rule. Can you think of other positions that come with a level of authority? This is the power people have because of special roles. The ultimate authority that God possesses is based upon His position as the Creator. He has inherent authority, and the Bible establishes this from the first verse (Gen. 1:1). Remember, “Your God reigns!”

Second is delegated authority or permission given to another by one who has the power to grant it. We might think of having a license to act because we have been granted that power by a greater authority. This is the warrant we have to act. We might have a license to drive or permission to enter a guarded facility. Our permission, our license, is our authority.

When we say that we have God’s authority, we are claiming that we have the permission from God to act. How that permission is discerned is an important study, but we start with the understanding that God is the ultimate source of authority. He determines the boundaries of permission. When we can safely know that God has permitted or authorized an action, then we can confidently say that we have the authority to do it.

Because of who God is (our Creator), any understanding of authority must flow from Him and His nature. He is our foundation. Included in this is Jesus Christ as Head and King, as well as His word, the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), as the standard of our faith and practice (John 12:48; 16:12-13).

Only God has the absolute right to rule, govern, command, and expect obedience. There is no deeper foundation, no one else on whom God must rely. He could rest upon none greater. He is the first and the last; there is no other God besides Him (Isa. 42:8). The position He occupies needs no further foundation.

God delegates all other authority. This includes the authority He gives to government (Rom. 13), to the home (Eph. 5), and to His church (Col. 1:18). No human individual or group of people has

inherent authority in any ultimate sense. They only have it in the sense that they have been given permission by God to act in whatever capacity they work. This is our beginning point.

Conclusion

We need to respect God's authority. Since "God reigns," His kingship should be a fundamental part of our understanding about who He is and why His authority is so important. Then we need to understand what lies at the heart of all sin. Sin is essentially displacing God's authority for our own or another's. Let's learn to think through the different aspects of authority and seek to understand why the differences are significant.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Isaiah 52:7 help us understand that God's authority is tied to the message of the gospel?
2. What attitudes did these men display, and why did their attitudes create so much trouble?
 - A. Cain (Gen. 4):
 - B. Korah (Num. 16):
 - C. Balaam (Num. 22; Num. 31:16; Deut. 23:4-5):
3. Why do people generally rebel against authority? Is such rebellion ever justified?
4. Why is authority so fundamental to the Christian?
5. Why will the question of authority still exist even though we try to deny God's authority?
6. Why is the difference between inherent and delegated authority important to discern?
7. When we say that we have authority to act, what kind of authority are we claiming, and why?

8. Why does God need no further foundation for authority other than Himself?