

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?

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?
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Where is the Will of God?

"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).

This passage makes it clear that God's will should be paramount to us. We want to be among

those who do the will of the Father in heaven. We want to be in that heavenly kingdom. The only way that we can know if we are pleasing Him is if He has somehow told us what pleases Him. We cannot just read His mind. We cannot presume to know what He wants. He has to tell us if we are to know what He thinks.

The beauty of this earth is amazing. The mountains, valleys, oceans, rivers, trees, flowers, and all that comes with it testify to an intelligent and benevolent Creator. The Psalmist declared: "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (19:1). God has revealed Himself in nature, and we are without excuse if we do not see this: "since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, that they are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). Paul stated that God "did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). Nature is a witness to God.

Yet nature alone does not answer the question, "Where is the will of God?" While we can see the witness of God through His creation, this is not the same issue as the revelation of His will. Knowing *that* God is, and that He is powerful, is not the same as knowing what He wants us to do. The fact is that we could go out to the mountains, sit at the breaking waters of the oceans, and spend hours marveling at the stars, but none of that will tell us His will for our lives. We cannot just "commune" with nature and expect to know what pleases God based upon some feeling we might get from looking at nature's beauty.

The will of God is in the mind of God. Through creation, God demonstrated His power and divine nature. We can gather from this that He is powerful, benevolent, and awesome, but we cannot know His will unless He communicates His mind to us. This is the purpose of His special revelation. This is the reason for Scripture.

Paul made this very point. Faith must rest not upon the wisdom of men, but upon the power of God (1 Cor 2:1-5). God's wisdom has the power to save, not man's. Yet the only way to know God's wisdom is through His special revelation: "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (v. 9). What God has prepared for those who love Him must be told, not assumed. For all the power displayed through creation, God's will did not enter the heart of man until God revealed it through His Spirit (vv. 10-14). No one knows the thoughts of God except His Spirit, and the Spirit revealed God's will "so that we may know the things freely given to us by God" (v. 12). Paul's point through this is that "we have the mind of Christ" because He has revealed His mind to us through what the Spirit has given.

God's will for us is found in the Scriptures, the revealed word of God. We encourage everyone to enjoy the creation of God. Smell the roses, marvel at the stars, and stand in awe of the mountains. However, to know God's will for your life, study the Scriptures and devote yourself to practicing what He desires. The Scriptures are profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. They are completely able to adequately equip us to do everything God wants (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Scriptures can build us up and prepare us for the inheritance that God will give to His faithful saints (Acts 20:32). Let the word be implanted in your heart, for it has the power to save (Jas. 1:21; Rom. 1:16).

Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of the Scriptures:, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you" (Col 3:16). This is God's will for us all.

Doy Moyer

Where is the Will of God? pdf

Tradition and God's Word

Mark 7 tells one of the more well-known accounts of Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees. The Pharisees and some scribes had seen Jesus' disciples eating with "impure" or unwashed hands. The tradition of the elders was that they were to wash their hands very carefully before eating, and then when they return from the market place they would not eat unless carefully cleaning themselves. Additionally, "there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots." So these Pharisees confronted Jesus about his disciples not doing this: "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" (v. 5)

Before considering Jesus' answer, let's note a few items. First, there is something good about

keeping yourself clean. Washing hands before you eat is good practice; there was nothing inherently wrong here, and most of us would promote this as healthy practice. Second, tradition, in itself, is not the problem. It is simply something that is passed down to others. Tradition is unavoidable in many ways. Coupled with being clean in this context, tradition can be noteworthy and good. It is something we might all like to pass down to our children. Third, notice that the appeal of the Pharisees is the tradition. They did not ask about the disciples breaking the Law of God.

The essence of Jesus' response is: first, He called these Pharisees hypocrites; second, He quoted Isaiah 29; third, He showed how they were placing their traditions above God's commandments.

Isaiah 29 comes in the middle of a context in which Isaiah is rebuking God's people for the sins of idolatry and apathy toward His covenant. The first chapter of Isaiah rebukes Israel for merely going through the motions without really desiring to please God. They were offering their sacrifices, but then they were going out and committing all kinds of evil. Ironically, Isaiah does tell the people to wash themselves and make themselves clean (Isa 1:16). However, his emphasis was not physical, spiritual: "Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight." This was the way they were to clean themselves, and it is a far more important kind of washing than we can ever do with the hands.

In Isaiah 29, one of the phrases is this: "their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote" (v. 13). That is, the extent of their respect for God was, at best, learned tradition. That tradition was not in itself the Law. They appeared to care little for the Law itself, but were concerned about keeping a tradition in place even though it was not Law.

When Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites, He was noting how they were neglecting the commandments of God for the sake of their traditions. Now here they were chastising others for failing to keep a tradition while they themselves were guilty of the violation of God's commands. The beam in their eye was much larger than any speck in the eyes of the disciples of Jesus, who were not breaking God's Law on this occasion.

Traditions are a part of life. We really cannot do without them. To one degree or another, all that we know is passed down. Railing against tradition just because something is a tradition is rather naive. Even the commands of God are traditions handed down to us (2 Thess 2:15).

How we act about these traditions may be another matter. Again, we must distinguish between traditions that are commandments of God and traditions that are handed down otherwise. If we put man-made traditions on par with, or even over, God's word, then we are guilty of something

very insidious. This is the point made in Isaiah 29:15-16. By putting their own traditions on par with God's commands, they were essentially saying that they were God's equal. They were guilty of pulling God down to their level and acting as though He did not have sufficient understanding of what they needed. They were smarter than God. If we think that breaking our own human traditions is on par with breaking God's word, then we are guilty of bringing God down to our level. That's serious business for which we need to repent.

Jesus illustrated how they had disrespected God by showing their neglect of the command to honor father and mother. They were more concerned about washing their hands than they were about caring for their parents. Talk about upside down! Yet, if we are not careful, we can fall into the same trap. Human traditions change, but what we receive from God's word will never change. Let us be careful to make that distinction. Even more, let us always be careful to engage in God's will over our own.

Doy Moyer

Tradition and God's Word pdf

Whose Voice do we Follow?

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." (John 10:1-5)

In Scripture, listening to someone's voice is often equivalent to following what that person says as being authoritative. Adam got into trouble because he "listened to the voice" of Eve when she gave him the fruit (Gen 3:17). Moses was concerned that the people would not listen to his voice when he went to bring them out of Egypt (Exod 4:1). When Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh, Pharaoh's question was, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice...?" (Exod 5:2). Then when Israel crossed the sea, God told them, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the

Lord your God..." then they would not be plagued with diseases that came on Egypt (Exod 15:26). The idea of hearing and listening to the voice of another is found all throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. To listen to the voice of another means we are following what they say. Of course, there is no more authoritative voice than God's.

Everyone follows a "voice" of some kind. Everyone has a final point of reference for authority. We all listen to someone, whether it be just ourselves, another human authority, or God as revealed through His word. We're not talking about a psychological "hearing voices in my head" issue. Rather, we are talking about the ultimate "voice" of authority that people follow. Whose voice do we follow, and do we truly know the voice of our Lord?

Christians follow the "voice" of Jesus because "they know His voice." He is the final reference point of authority. No other voice can match His or carry His power. Christians understand that following after other "voices" is following after strangers and thieves who, if followed, will steal, kill, and destroy souls. Jesus came to give abundant life. He came with divine authority and purpose. He is the door to salvation; He is the good shepherd who gave His life for the sheep.

People will ask, as those in the text of John 10, "Why do you listen to Him?" Is He out of His mind? Is He demon-possessed? Neither. There are no more sober words than those expressed by Jesus. "I and the Father are one," He claimed (vs. 30). The people understood what He was claiming, so they picked up stones to throw at Him. Why? "For blasphemy, and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (vs. 33).

Jesus' authority is indeed divine, and the key to our acceptance of this is found in the text:

"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (vv. 17-18).

Jesus references not only His death, but also His resurrection. Note, in this, His authority over both death and life. Ultimately, the resurrection is what seals the authority issue. If He hadn't risen, the discussion would be over. Yet He was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection (Rom 1:4). The resurrection shouts the truth loud and clear that Jesus is the divine Son and needs to be heard.

This coincides well with what the Hebrews writer said: "Long ago, at many times and in many

ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” (Heb 1:1-3)

We are the sheep who have gone astray (Isa 53:6). If we listen to the voice of others, we die in that condition. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His own life to redeem the sheep, and only by listening to Him can we properly enter through the door (again, Him) and find our safety.

Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:37). Whose voice is your final reference point of authority? To whom are you listening?

Doy Moyer

The Greater Danger

Differences over the interpretations of texts among those who claim allegiance to Christ is a long-standing problem that continues. We often debate the meaning of texts and sometimes the differences are too great to bear. Unity is at stake, especially when the consequences of some differences do not favor fertile grounds for fellowship among believers.

Yet in our current cultural and religious climate, there is an even greater danger we face: whether or not we are free just to move beyond what we know the Scriptures teach because we do not see Scripture as authoritative any more.

People claiming to honor Scripture, seeking to know what it means and abiding by what Scripture teaches, often disagree on meaning. Yet they can share a common view that Scripture comes from God and needs to be respected and followed, whatever its intended meaning (which is what they are trying to flesh out). That starting point is vital, for if differences over a text will be resolved, those seeking resolution need at least to see that the text is authoritative (because it is God’s word) and needs to be understood and followed.

The greater danger, however, is that many no longer share the concern of following what the text actually teaches. They know what the text teaches, but that does not matter because their view is that the text, while fine for its time, is not equipped to handle our current age. Consequently, we need to move beyond what Scripture teaches and give primacy to our experiences and feelings.

Do we doubt that this is what is happening? As an illustration, consider this quote from Luke Timothy Johnson in defense of same-sex unions (in 2007). He admitted that such a position demands “intellectual honesty.” He also said, for himself, that he has “little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties.” He then wrote:

“I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us. By so doing, we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements condemning homosexuality—namely, that it is a vice freely chosen, a symptom of human corruption, and disobedience to God’s created order.” (*Homosexuality and the Church*, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality-church-0>)

The point I’m making here is not to debate whether or not Scripture teaches against homosexual practice. Even the author above agrees that this is clear. My point here stretches beyond that particular issue, and that is to see a view that Scripture is not finally authoritative at all. If it can be done with this particular issue, why can it not be done with virtually every issue? And that, I believe, is exactly what we are seeing today. Scripture just isn’t seen as authoritative.

The author recognized what Scripture plainly and clearly teaches. He had no doubts about that. However, the reason he takes the position he does is because of an appeal to “another authority,” which is “the weight of our experience...” In doing so, “we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements...” At least he is being honest about that.

Focus for a moment on those statements. There is an explicit rejection of Scripture replaced by an appeal to “another authority” that resides solely in “our” experiences and feelings. This is what I

want us to see here. This is the greater danger, for it is no longer about interpretations of biblical texts. Why do the interpretations of the texts matter at all if we are going to reject them explicitly anyway in favor of our own feelings and experiences? If they support what we already think, well and good. If they don't, then we just move beyond them in favor of our own authority. Scripture has little to no bearing then.

Once that door is opened, why do the experiences and feelings of one (or a group) take precedence over the feelings and experiences of others who disagree or experience things differently or in contradiction? Now who gets to decide what is right or wrong? Those in power? Where does that leave us?

We expect people of the world to reject explicitly the teaching of Scripture. That is no surprise. What is becoming increasingly more common, however, is that those who claim allegiance to Christ are doing the same thing. With this attitude, it does not matter what Scripture teaches. It only matters how we feel about it. Consequently, people think that we are free to move beyond the actual teachings of Scripture when our feelings and personal experiences are at stake.

This mentality is, indeed, the greater danger, for it is based upon the affirmation of self rather than the revealed will of God (cf. Matt 7:21-23). The plea to get back to Scripture is as vital now as it ever was.

Doy Moyer

What is an Inference?

In my experience, I have seen a number of times in discussions where the idea of using an inference is taken to task, particularly in discussions about authority. I have noted in some cases that calling something an "inference" comes across almost as a pejorative. It's as if to say, "that's just an inference," weakens the argument and makes it appear unworthy of much attention. Then there is the whole "we can't bind inferences" line, which indicates a misunderstanding of the nature of inference.

What is an inference? Simply put, an inference is a conclusion one draws from the available evidence. That's it. Inferences are a necessary part of the reasoning process, and everyone who reasons, bar none, uses inferences (i.e., draws conclusions). What else can one do? To disparage inferences is to cut up the very fabric of the reasoning process. Indeed, it may well be the most important part of reasoning, for without proper inference, there can be no application of what is being communicated. Inferences are such a vital part of communication that we don't even realize how common it is. In person, gestures, vocal indicators (e.g., which can indicate sarcasm), looks, eye-rolls, etc. are all part of a communication process by which implications and inferences are made all the time. In writing, we try to understand context, purpose, genre, style, etc. In all cases, we infer what the intended communication is supposed to be. There is no other way to do it.

To show that this is not just some special Bible interpretation thing confined to a particular tradition, note how the Encyclopedia Britannica defines inference: "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."

The communicator implies and the receiver infers. To imply is to indicate something without explicitly stating it (e.g., "I sure wish someone would take out the garbage"). To infer is to get what is being implied, to conclude from the evidence what the communicator is indicating ("I'm thinking that means me"). 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* (which is not a work about the Bible), "All reasoning contains inferences or interpretations by which we draw conclusions and give meaning to data."

One might say, "Oh, but I'm talking about those pesky so-called 'necessary inferences' that aren't really necessary." I get it. Calling something necessary does not make it necessary, but that by itself does not mean that, therefore, inferences are somehow void. Everyone draws conclusions, whether necessary or not. I know that faulty conclusions can be reached. I know that people can abuse the process and make things say more than is warranted. But that doesn't mean we throw out all reasoning, which relies on drawing conclusions from the available information. No one can avoid this. The question is whether or not the inferences are warranted, legitimate, and reasonable. They must not be contrived or forced. If you think an inference (conclusion) is unwarranted, then show why, but don't disparage the reasoning process. You are inferring, too.

Can a conclusion be binding? Well, it's not the conclusion per se as if it stands alone, but the implication that stands behind what is being concluded. Is it really implied? If so, then we ought to conclude so. If the conclusion that is drawn is what God intends, then the conclusion simply represents what God is communicating as His will. I'm not saying this is always easy. Interpretation is sometimes tough. Still, if you think anyone today, including yourself, should be a Christian, then you accept that at least one conclusion (and what stands behind it) is binding on everyone else. How so? Well, did you read your specific name in Scripture that lead you to become a Christian? If not, how did you reach the conclusion that you, personally, ought to be a Christian? On what basis do you conclude that anything ought to be applied to you while others things do not apply? We cannot answer these without inferring from the available data.

Now if someone wants to argue about this, and say, for example, that the only thing we can "bind" are commands, then I will simply ask you: 1) how did you reach that conclusion? and 2) how do you know which commands are for you and which aren't?

All reasoning contains inferences. Let's learn to do it properly, cautiously, and with a view toward knowing and doing God's will.

Doy Moyer

It's Just Too Simple

Years ago I spent over 8 hours one day studying with a youth minister from an evangelical church. While there was much to agree on, there were many issues over which we disagreed. We discussed salvation, the church, worship, among other topics, and we did it with a spirit of friendliness. At the end of the day, he said, "I see what you are saying, and I can see what the Bible says. But what you are talking about is just too simple. There has to be more to it than that." With this, he dismissed the conclusions of the study. Years bring deeper perspective, and over the years I have been more impressed with this point of simplicity.

Perhaps it seems too simple for some, but is that a reason to reject it? Some have argued that there is no pattern for corporate worship in Scripture, that nothing has been revealed about what God really wants in worship. Therefore, we are pretty much free to do as we wish as long as we

don't violate something strictly prohibited. This assumes, not just that a little has been said, but that virtually nothing has been said about it, and therefore it is entirely up to us to decide how we like it.

What is revealed about worship in the New Testament is simple. It is not non-existent; it's just not complicated. It is not some elaborate, complex system, and this may tempt us to fill in blanks and add more to it. Like Naaman, dissatisfied with Elisha's charge to dip in the Jordan (2 Kings 5), we may want something greater. Surely that's what God wants, right? This is a problem for those who like more elaborate styles of worship (e.g., big production music shows). The fact of simplicity is difficult for some to swallow it seems, so they reject the uncomplicated in favor of more complex avenues. We may use that simplicity as an excuse to make worship conform to the way we really want it. Does it not seem that we find ourselves tending more to the complex things in our religious actions and services? Has it not always been this way?

That answer still rings in my ears after all these years: what the Bible actually says about it is just too simple; there has to be more to it. So we supply that "more," and we feel justified in doing so. We desire more pomp, more ceremony, more show, so we devise worship in ways that would make us happy. At some point we must ask, "Is this really about God or is it more about what I like?"

What has God revealed about His will on corporate worship? Nothing elaborate or complex, but there is revelation on the matter. Has He revealed that He likes singing from the heart (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16)? That He likes His people to pray together (Acts 4:23ff)? For Christians to meet together regularly (Heb 10:23-25)? To partake of the Lord's Supper together? (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:18ff)? To teach, admonish, and encourage one another through His word? (Acts 20:32; Eph 4:11ff)? Of course, He wants all of this to be done from hearts that desire to please and glorify Him. Let's not confuse something that is relatively simple with it not being profound or deep. Sometimes the more profound ideas are the least complicated. We need to learn to think them through and appreciate how the Lord has asked us to serve Him.

Perhaps some may say that I'm just oversimplifying this whole matter. Perhaps. But how so? Where do we read of anything more elaborate or complicated in the New Testament? Where is the pomp and show? Again, it seems to me that the lack of such complexity is what gives rise to the idea that the New Testament says so little about worship. It doesn't need to say much, but it says enough to let us know what pleases God (Heb 11:6). I realize we have some liberties. I know the Bible does not specify every action in particular. But let's make sure that any action we take, especially in worship, is truly geared toward pleasing God His way and according to His word instead of using that simplicity as an excuse to do what we want. If God left it uncomplicated, isn't

that reason enough for us to leave it at that?

Even more, let's make sure we approach God with the proper spirit, and not just in our corporate worship. Micah captured this thought centuries ago (6:6-8):

With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Doy Moyer

Be Thankful for God's Authority

God is Creator. Because of Who He is, He has the inherent right to command and expect obedience. He has the right to tell us what to do, how to think, how to live, how to talk, and how to dress. Name it. God has the power to back it up. We, as His creatures have no right to kick back or demand answers from Him. Like it or not, we are under His authority. But now, why wouldn't we like it?

Rather than looking at this as some sort of drudgery, why not be thankful for God's authority? After all, if we wish to glorify God, we can only do so by recognizing the power that only belongs to

Him.

“Sing to the Lord, all the earth;
Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.
Tell of His glory among the nations,
His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
He also is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
But the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before Him,
Strength and joy are in His place.” (1 Chron. 16:23-27)

If we “seek the Lord and His strength” (vs. 11), then we are necessarily seeking Him in all His authority and power. Shall we love the Lord and despise His authority as if it is a burden to us? May it never be!

Here, then, are some reasons we can be thankful for God’s authority:

1. Because God’s authority means He is the Judge, not me, or you, or anyone else.

I don’t have to worry about untangling all the sticky questions about eternity. I don’t need to worry about pleasing other people, especially those in the world. I just need to concern myself with pleasing and glorifying Him based on what He has revealed (2 Cor. 5:8-9; John 12:48).

Consequently, we may say with Paul, “to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:3-4). In the final analysis, each of us as individuals will stand before God. What others think at that point will be irrelevant.

2. Because God’s authority is what gives power to grace. Grace means nothing unless it comes from one who has the power to give it. Sometimes grace is pitted against a stress on authority, but the two go together. It is true that authority can exist without grace, but it is not possible for real grace to exist without authority. Recall Jesus’ healing of the paralytic in Mark 2. When he saw the man’s faith, Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven. The people reacted by saying that only God could forgive sins, to which Jesus responded, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has

authority on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.’” (Mark 2:8-11) Without the authority inherent in Jesus, the man’s sins would have remained. God’s authority means that He can provide the grace needed to forgive sins. Without His authority, our sins would remain.

3. Because God’s authority means He has the power to fulfill His promises. People sometimes promise what they cannot give. Think of the empty promises given by fallible people who strive for political power, or the disappointment we feel when someone promised something without the ability to deliver. This will never happen with God. Because He has all authority, He has complete control over the promises that He has given, and He will not disappoint. Therefore, we may have the same faith as Paul when promised that the ship he was on would not lose anyone: “Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told” (Acts 27:25). Paul began his epistle to Titus with these reassuring words: “Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago” (Titus 1:1-2). Our trust in God’s promises is the reason we have hope as an anchor of our soul (Heb. 6:13-20). All of this is possible because of the authority of God.

God’s authority should never be seen as a burden. Rather, we have every reason to be thankful for who God is and the authority He possesses and shows. “O Lord God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You” (Psa. 89:8).

Doy Moyer