

Authority

Authority is one of those words that usually creates an instant emotional reaction—in some folks, fear and distrust, in others safety and order.

Authority is a concept known to some degree by every responsible person. By most it is appreciated, for without it society would be chaotic. Others detest it, and refuse to live by it. The world's prisons are full of such rebels.

“Authority” is a major biblical theme. The most popular Greek word for “authority” is exousia (sometimes translated as “power”). This term, with a variety of usages, is found some 102 times in the New Testament.

Authority is attributed to God the Father; it is resident in His very nature. Authority alludes to Deity's right to command and enforce obedience.

Wayne Jackson: The Authority of Jesus
The Christian Courier

But the world is the product of the “age of enlightenment”, a.k.a. the “age of reason”. In this age, authority has been relegated to the individual where everyone's opinion, excluding those with moral convictions it seems, is to be accepted under the guise of “toleration”. The following were found via Wikipedia.

The **Age of Enlightenment** (or simply the **Enlightenment** or **Age of Reason**) is an era from the 1650s to the 1780s in which cultural and intellectual forces in Western Europe emphasized reason, analysis and individualism rather than traditional lines of authority. It was promoted by philosophers and local thinkers in urban coffeehouses, salons and masonic lodges. It challenged the authority of institutions that were deeply rooted in society, such as the Catholic Church; there was much talk of ways to reform society with toleration, science and skepticism.

Upon learning about enlightened views, some rulers met with intellectuals and tried to apply their reforms, such as allowing for toleration, or accepting multiple religions, in what became known as enlightened absolutism. Coinciding with the Age of Enlightenment was the Scientific Revolution, spearheaded by England's Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727).

For moderate Christians, this meant a return to simple Scripture. John Locke abandoned the corpus of theological commentary in favor of an "unprejudiced examination" of the Word of God alone. He determined the essence of Christianity to be a belief in Christ the redeemer and recommended avoiding more detailed debate.^[92] Thomas Jefferson in the *Jefferson Bible* went further; he dropped any passages dealing with miracles, visitations of angels, and the resurrection of Jesus after his death. He tried to extract the practical Christian moral code of the New Testament.^[93]

In a letter to a longtime friend, Charles Thomson, on January 9, 1816, Jefferson affirmed: "I, too, have made a wee-little book from the same materials, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus; it is a paradigm of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain order of time or subject".

Moses Mendelssohn advised affording no political weight to any organized religion, but instead recommended that each person follow what s/he found most convincing.^[96] A good religion based in instinctive morals and a belief in God should not theoretically need force to maintain order in its believers, and both Mendelssohn and Spinoza judged religion on its moral fruits, not the logic of its theology.^[97]

*To “not theoretically need force to maintain order” is another way of saying there’s no need for authority in anything believed. Thus according to Mendelssohn, the church would be just another charitable organization like the Red Cross and not what she is supposed to be, the blood bought body of believers who hold to the **absolute** truth found only in the word of God.*

A number of novel religious ideas developed with Enlightened faith, including Deism and talk of atheism. Deism, according to Thomas Paine, is the simple belief in God the Creator, with no reference to the Bible or any other miraculous source. Instead, the Deist relies solely on personal reason to guide his creed,^[98] which was eminently agreeable to many thinkers of the time.^[99]

Atheism was much discussed but there were few proponents. Wilson and Reill note that, "In fact, very few enlightened intellectuals, even when they were vocal critics of Christianity, were true atheists. Rather, they were critics of orthodox belief, wedded rather to skepticism, deism, vitalism, or perhaps pantheism (*Webster: the doctrine that all forces of the universe are God*)."^[100]

Some followed Pierre Bayle and argued that atheists could indeed be moral men.^[101] Many others like Voltaire held that without belief in a God who punishes evil, the moral order of society was undermined. That is, since atheists gave themselves to no Supreme Authority and no law, and had no fear of eternal consequences, they were far more likely to disrupt society.^[102] Bayle (1647–1706) observed that in his day, "prudent persons will always maintain an appearance of [religion]". He believed that even atheists could hold concepts of honor and go beyond their own self-interest to create and interact in society.^[103] Locke considered the consequences for mankind if there were no God and no divine law. The result would be moral anarchy. Every individual “could have no law but his own will, no end but himself. He would be a god to himself, and the satisfaction of his own will the sole measure and end of all his actions”.^[104]

Jer 10:23 I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

So with all this in mind, how has the “age of reason” affected the way we, as the New Testament church, interpret scripture according to **the** truth that the more ‘enlightened’ of society mock as being, what they term, ignorant? And if we **were** intimidated by such, would we not understand where we could possibly be “adding to” or taking “away from the words of the prophesy of this book” (*Rev 22:18-19*)? We need to always remember that whatever we do when it comes to doing things Biblically, our authority has to be God ordained and not from our own finite thinking which is based on human nature and secularism. And there are several areas where scriptures give specific authority on important subjects that the more “enlightened” in the church have gone beyond to alter what God has commanded. We need to take seriously how this new type of reasoning might affect our views when dealing with the following subjects. Most importantly...

Biblical Authority

We've seen where one of the founders of this great nation removed certain passages from his Bible and pasted them into a small collection he termed the "Philosophy of Jesus". Such "enlightened" ideas have probably existed since the Bible was first canonized. There's this "pick and choose" mentality as to which passages apply to today's world of the "new age" movement (*that began in the 1970s*) where there's "an emphasis on self-spirituality and the authority of the self" (*Wikipedia- New Age*). It is sad to note how secularism has invaded the church and has begun to have an effect on where she receives her authority. Obviously, such authority doesn't come from Christ.

Joh 3:31 He Who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He Who comes from Heaven is above all.

One area where Biblical authority that has taken a back seat to the more 'contemporary' ideas of certain brethren in the church is...

Church Government

It seems a subject that gets most twisted is in the way members of many congregations view "who's in charge" when there's no plurality of men who qualify to serve as Biblically appointed elders. The "Diotrephes syndrome" so often becomes the norm in such cases but it needs to be noted that the Diotrephes of 3 Jn did not respect the authority of the apostle who received his apostleship from Christ Himself.

Luk 6:13 And when day came, He called His disciples and chose from them twelve, whom He named apostles: 14 Simon, whom He named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, 15 and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, 16 and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Anyone who assumes roles they are not qualified to have, no matter what title is given over whatever area, violates Biblical authority and assumes the position of a type of Diotrephes by not adhering to the doctrines of Christ.

1Ti 6:3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

How then are we to govern the local church when she has no eldership to "shepherd the flock of God that is among [them], exercising oversight" (*1 Pet 5:2*).

Leadership

We understand and follow the principles of command, approved example and necessary inferences when making decisions necessary to following the Bible "in spirit and in truth" (*Jn 4:24*). Without an eldership the men of the local congregation are given the authority, through the expedience of "business meetings", to make decisions on things such as handling financial matters, etc.. These meetings are to be conducted and run by the men of the local, autonomous

church, autonomy meaning self-rule, where those of other congregations are to have no input except in the case of obvious apostasy. The women of the church can have their own meetings but the authority of Biblically leading the congregation belongs to the men.

1Ti 2:12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to **exercise authority over** a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve;

The apostle forbids the woman to occupy a role in which she wields authority over the man. The Christian woman is thus not permitted to function in a capacity in which she makes church decisions that the man is expected to follow.

As a concluding point, it must be noted that Paul's instructions in this narrative are based upon truths that are anchored in the creation context (Gen. 1-3); they are not culturally oriented, therefore, as some allege. The restriction is applicable to the modern church.

...the church's business, in matters of human judgment, and in the absence of qualified elders, should be administered by the men of the church. The mature men should gently and considerately guide the procedure.

Wayne Jackson: How Should Church Business Be Conducted without Elders?*

The Christian Courier

With this in mind, the church, being governed by a body of faithful men, is not, without qualified elders to oversee the daily operations, to entitle certain men with oversight over specific areas of church governance. Decisions in evangelism, education, financial and other areas, are to be discussed with judgments made by those men in attendance in the business meetings. No one individual is to oversee any of these areas if not qualified as a deacon, even **if** under the oversight of an eldership. And to label a man as "committee chairman" only usurps the authority given in scripture by re-naming the title of deacon when the brother is not qualified. With this in mind, in business meetings, as in everything, we are instructed where...

1Co 14:40 ... all things should be done decently and in order.

Another area where there's obviously a lack of following the authority from above is in the...

Family

An article in The Washington Post by Christopher Ingraham stated "*The Baby Boom generation was responsible for the extraordinary rise in marital instability after 1970.*" Which was when the "new age" mentality began.

President James A. Garfield once said: "The sanctity of marriage and the family relation make the corner-stone of our American society and civilization." A number of current conditions clearly suggest that that "corner-stone" is crumbling.

We are told by experts that more than five million Americans are "living together" without the benefit of legitimate marital commitment.

Add to this the fact that divorce has become a national disgrace. Older folks can easily remember when a divorced person was not a viable political candidate. Now, divorce does not raise an eyebrow. Not only is society out of control in terms of the divorce evil, the

church is virtually to that point as well. In recent years weird theories, one after another, have surfaced, the design of which is to justify those who have un-scripturally divorced their mates and then remarried. Prominent names have been associated with these views. It is this writer's conviction that the biblical teaching on this topic—namely that a divorce and potential remarriage is allowed only to the innocent victim in a marriage breached by fornication (cf. Matthew 5:32; 19:9)—is now a minority view among believers.

Wayne Jackson: America-A Nation Out of Control
The Christian Courier

Mat 19:8 He (*Jesus*) said to them (*the Pharisees*), "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

How can we even think of raising a generation where none is touched in some way by one sort of family dysfunction or another. If this nation continues to go in such a rapid pace toward the disrespect of Biblical authority in family matters, following Garfield's statement, we will suffer the same fate of the Roman Empire. That said, how much authority are we to entrust in our government?

Government

God has always directed His people to obey whatever **form** of government they are to live under as long as that system of rules does **not** show disregard for His own precepts according to godliness.

Rom 13:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

We may not agree with certain aspects of the system of government we live under, or with some who are in control of it, but, according to this passage, we are advised to pay a portion of our total income into supporting its rule. Otherwise there would be chaos. Case in point was when Iraq was "liberated" from the tyrannical rule under Saddam Hussein. Their liberation triggered looting and other acts of lawlessness. Why? Because they no longer had "government" with its system of rules and consequences. And remember, Jesus paid taxes into the very government that would later hang Him on a cross. But there are also limits to where our support to government can go. For instance; God allows the system of communism under which China governs but cannot tolerate their laws when it comes to family as it regards aborting children for the sake of population control.

China's population control policy. The Chinese government has used several methods to control population growth. In 1979, China started the "one child per family policy" (Juali Li 563). This policy stated that citizens must obtain a birth certificate before the birth of their children. The citizens would be offered special benefits if they agreed to have only one child. Citizens who did have more than one child would either be taxed an amount up to fifty percent of their income, or punished by loss of employment or other benefits (Hilali 10). Furthermore, unplanned pregnancies or pregnancies without the proper authorization would need to be terminated (Hilali 9). In 1980, the birth-quota system was established to monitor population growth (Jiali Li 563).

Peterson

According to an unsourced article in the right-wing UK newspaper *The Daily Telegraph*, a quota of 20,000 abortions and sterilizations was set for Huaiji County in Guangdong Province in one year due to reported disregard of the one-child policy.

Wikipedia

The unborn, in God's eyes, are not to be considered expendable or fetal matter that can be cast aside like all other tissue surgically removed. The unborn are living souls of breathing, human beings.

Exo 21:22 "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. 23 **But** if there **is** harm, then you shall pay **life for life**, (*Emp. added*)

From this passage we find that taking the life of an unborn child is akin to murder. And of the "seven [things] that are an abomination to [God]" (*Pro 6:16-19*) "hands that shed innocent blood", in this case the unborn, is one of them.

The last area we need to look at, obviously there are many others, considers a subject that has been so misinterpreted and differs from one denomination to another, even when referring to the word of God which does not contradict itself. If the church is to be the "pre-denominational" church of Christ that she's supposed to be, she just needs to go to the source of all things authoritative on whatever. Especially when it comes to salvation and the eternal destiny of our souls.

Salvation

Joh 14:6 Jesus said to him, "**I** am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one** comes to the Father **except** through Me. (*Emp. added*)

Jesus' own words should be sufficient to understand what we need to do to obtain eternal life and to avoid an eternity in Hell. Of course the "enlightened" of society reject the "concept" of anything that has to do with an eternal punishment, labeling such teachings as ways to control the masses. They believe that **they** are their own authority and that, in their minds **if there is** such a thing as an eternal destiny, they will attain a greater reward through their own works of charity. The same warning Jesus used with the unbelieving Jews of His day applies to the multitudes in the denominations that exist today.

Joh 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, 40 yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life.

Most in Christendom, a term used to include all who claim Christ as their Lord whether in truth or not, believe they are saved and will teach differing doctrines they claim come from Biblical authority. But **is** it according to the authority of Christ Himself or from some self-proclaimed prophet or man taught doctrine?

Mat 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "**All** authority in Heaven and on earth has been **given to Me**. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name (*Gk.3686- authority*) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe **all that I have commanded** you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (*Emp. added*)

If Jesus said He has all authority, why do so many believe in the authority given to mere men and entrust their eternal souls to non-Biblical instructions on salvation? If the denominational world can't agree on something so simple as what the Bible instructs on how we are to be saved, how can **any** of them be right since "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (*1 Cor 14:33*)?

Joh 5:43 I have come in My Father's name (*Gk.3686- authority*), and you do not receive Me. If another comes in his own name (*Gk.3686*), you will receive him. 44 How can you believe (*Gk.4100- to entrust [one's spiritual well-being to Christ]*), when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

How can anyone believe they have salvation if they don't go to the source of all authority to find it? And the proof of His authority as being the Son of God was substantiated by the witness of three; the Spirit, water and blood. Not to mention testimony by the Father Himself.

1Jn 5:6 This is He Who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the One Who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. 9 If we receive the **testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater**, for this is the testimony of God that He has borne concerning His Son.

The Gnostics taught that Jesus was a man, and Christ, the Deity, came upon Him at baptism and left Him before the crucifixion. John says Jesus was the same both in the waters of baptism and at the shedding of blood in His death (Mat 3:13-17; Joh 19:31-35). The Spirit bore witness to Jesus' Deity by descending like a dove at His baptism (Joh 1:32-34).

The Father called Him Son at His baptism, transfiguration and resurrection.

Men accept the testimony of other men and should much more readily accept that of God.
Gary Hampton

Who's authority will you accept when your soul is at stake?

Mar 16:15 And [Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. 16 Whoever believes **and** is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (*Emp. added*)

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